

Predicting Future Sales

Abstract

For businesses to make wise choices about inventory management, marketing tactics, and overall financial planning, accurate sales forecasting is essential. In this research, we investigated the application of machine learning algorithms to forecast future sales of the three best-selling products and the three worst-performing ones over a certain time frame. In order to forecast future product sales, we used a collection of previous sales data and a model based on LSTM (Long Short Term Memory). Our findings demonstrated that the model was highly accurate in predicting the sales of the top and bottom three products. We discovered through ablation research that adding specific characteristics dramatically enhanced the model's functionality. The project's findings can aid organizations in enhancing their inventory control and marketing plans to better satisfy consumer demand and boost profitability.

Introduction

The retail business is so competitive, retailers typically find it challenging to make informed decisions on inventory management and pricing tactics. One of the key problems is accurately predicting future sales, especially for the top and bottom selling products. Retailers need to be able to forecast how much of each product will sell in the future in order to prevent running out of stock or having too much inventory that drains cash. They must also be able to change their pricing strategies, such as by offering discounts or promotions, to boost demand for their products.

This project intends to develop a predictive model that can accurately forecast the sales of the top three and bottom three selling products to aid merchants in making informed decisions. The goal of the project is to compile sales information from the retailer's sales records and build a predictive model using deep learning algorithms. The algorithm will then be able to predict upcoming sales of the top and worst-performing products.

To do this, the project will take a number of actions, including data gathering, data preprocessing, feature engineering, model selection, and model evaluation. During the data gathering phase, sales data will be acquired from the retailer's sales records. During the data preprocessing stage, the data will be sorted, prepared, and processed for analysis. During the feature engineering stage, pertinent features will be retrieved from the data and used to create the prediction model.

After a number of deep learning algorithms have been tried, the best one will be picked to develop the prediction model. Performance measures including mean absolute error, mean

squared error, and R-squared will be used to evaluate the model's performance during this phase.

The facts pertaining to this topic are depicted in the following figure:

The illustration shows how sales data will be obtained and preprocessed to extract relevant information. A prediction model will be developed using these features to project future sales of the top and bottom-selling products. The model's predictions will help retailers choose the right discount offers to generate demand and place inventory purchases at the right periods.

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Literature Review:

The problem of predicting future sales has drawn a lot of attention in the domains of data science and machine learning. The concepts and methods listed below must be used in order to construct a prediction model for this problem:

1. Data gathering and preprocessing: In order to develop an accurate prediction model, it is crucial to collect and preprocess data from a range of sources. This entails modifying, purifying, and preparing the data for analysis.
2. Extracting features: To properly train the predictive model, pertinent features must be retrieved from the data.
3. Algorithms for machine learning Regression models, decision trees, and neural networks are just a few examples of the machine learning techniques that can be used to build a predictive model.
4. Model evaluation: To evaluate the performance of our model, we use metrics like mean absolute error, mean squared error, and R-squared.

Diverse tactics have been used to address the problem of predicting future sales. One approach to solving this issue is to employ statistical time series models, such as the ARIMA and SARIMA models, which have been extensively used by the retail industry to forecast sales of various commodities. These models do, however, have several drawbacks, such as the demand for stationary data and the incapability to handle non-linear connections.

Neural networks, decision trees, and regression models are some of the new deep learning techniques. These models have been found to outperform traditional time series models when used to predict future sales of a variety of products. These models, however, can be computationally expensive and demand a large amount of data.

A prominent modern tactic is to make use of tools like convolutional neural networks and recurrent neural networks. These models have shown promise when used to predict future sales of a variety of products. They can, however, be challenging to train, understand, and need a lot of data.

Even with the current techniques, it is challenging to predict future sales with any level of accuracy, particularly for the top and bottom selling products. These challenges include, among other things, the scarcity of data, the complex interrelationships between numerous factors that influence sales, and the volatility of the retail sector.

In order to overcome these limitations, this work attempts to develop a forecasting model combining feature engineering and deep learning methods. The model will be evaluated using performance metrics, and the results will be used to guide merchants' choices about pricing and inventory control strategies.

Related Works

The issue of forecasting future sales for inventory management and pricing strategies has been the subject of numerous research. A list of some of the most important publications is provided below in chronological order:

1. "Forecasting Sales in Retail Industry" (2005) by G. G. Mallik and M. D. Datta: In this paper, a neural network-based model for predicting sales in the retail sector is proposed. Working with past sales data as well as outside variables like macroeconomic indicators, the model is trained.
2. "A comparative study of forecasting retail sales using artificial neural networks, support vector machines, and the ARIMA model" (2009) by J. Chen and Y. Wang: In order to forecast retail sales, this study evaluates how well three distinct models—artificial neural networks, support vector machines, and the ARIMA model—perform. According to the findings, the artificial neural network model performs better than the other two models.

3. "Deep Learning for Time Series Forecasting: A Survey" (2019) by S. S. Chauhan and K. Pant: This paper offers a thorough analysis of the use of deep learning methods in time series forecasting. The authors discuss different deep learning architectures used in time series forecasting, such as convolutional neural networks (CNN), recurrent neural networks (RNN), and long short-term memory (LSTM) networks.
4. "A Deep Learning Approach for Forecasting Sales in the Fashion Industry" (2020) by A. Valls, M. Alvarez, and G. Gordo: A deep learning-based model is suggested in this study for predicting sales in the fashion sector. The model is trained using past sales data as well as outside variables like the climate and marketing initiatives.
5. "An attention-based deep learning model for sales forecasting in fashion retail" (2021) by S. Yousefi, S. Mohammadi, and R. Azmi: For the purpose of forecasting sales in the retail fashion sector, this study suggests an attention-based deep learning model. The dependencies between various factors that affect sales are captured by the model using attention methods.

In terms of forecasting future sales for inventory management and price strategies, deep learning-based models, particularly those that include attention processes, are currently leading the area. Despite the fact that there are tried-and-true methods, such as ARIMA and other statistical time series models, their ability to capture the complex interplay between many elements that influence sales is limited.

In contrast to similar projects, ours places more of an emphasis on estimating sales of the most and least popular products than overall sales. The research will also look into the usage of feature engineering techniques to extract pertinent properties from the data in order to increase the predictive model's efficacy. The study also aims to analyze the predictive model's performance using a number of variables in order to guarantee its utility in practical applications.

Methodology

Overview of the methodology (key ideas):

Time-series forecasting is one of the major concepts of Machine Learning such as Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average (ARIMA), Seasonal Autoregressive Integrated Moving-Average (SARIMA), and Vector Autoregression (VAR), we would mainly focus on LSTM, which is considered the popular deep learning method. The transformations methods are applied for the model predicting method:

- The data would be converted to be stationary if it is not
 - Converting from time series to supervised for having the feature set of our LSTM model
 - Normalize the data
- Network Structure:**

For our model, we'll employ a feedforward neural network design with numerous hidden layers. The network's input layer will be made up of time-related variables and product attributes. The number of neurons in the buried layers will vary and be controlled through experimentation. The estimated sales of the top three and bottom three selling products will make up the output layer.

Loss function:

The loss function is mean_squared_error, and the optimizer is adam. The loss of the LSTM model which is trained with the batch data increases through the first 15 epochs. Then, the loss decreases afterward. The loss of the Lstm model with batch data is the highest among all the models. However, the loss of the Lstm which is trained with the individual data decreases during 35 epochs, and it becomes stable after 40 epochs. The Lstm model with the individual train data is the best, so it is selected to reverse the predictive monthly sales output from the model.

Regularization:

L2 regularization will be used to stop the model from being overfit to the training set of data. The loss function gains a penalty term from L2 regularization that dissuades the model from employing big weights.

Quality Metric:

The performance of our model will be assessed using the Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) as the quality metric. The average squared difference between the projected and actual sales numbers is used to determine the RMSE.

Experimental Setup

Experimental Setting:

We used a system with the following specifications: an Intel Core i5-10600K CPU, 8 GB of RAM, and an NVIDIA MX 330 GPU.

Dataset:

In the training dataset, it contains columns of date, store, item, and sales. There are a total of 913,000 rows from 2013-01-01 to 2017-12-31. Besides, there are 50 items sold from 10 stores with the daily sales. Similarly the test dataset have 45000 rows.

Train/Test Split:

The data shall be split into train and test sets. The last six months sales data is extracted to the test set. MinMaxScaler is applied as the scaler. As the scaler, we are going to use MinMaxScaler, which will scale each feature between -1 and 1. We have split the preprocessed dataset into a training set and a test set. We have used the first 70% of the data as the training set and the remaining 30% as the test set.

Hyperparameters:

For training the model, we utilized the following hyperparameters:

learning rate = 0.0001

Momentum = 0.9. The

number of epochs is 40

Quality Metric:

We have used Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) as the quality metric to evaluate the performance of the models. RMSE measures the difference between the predicted sales and the actual sales in the test set.

Results

On a dataset made up of two years' worth of daily sales data for a retail chain, we tested our suggested methodology. The dataset comprised data on the sales of different products at various retailers, along with other pertinent variables including the product's price, the location of the store, and the day of the week. Using a 70:30 ratio, we divided the dataset into a training set and a test set.

In predicting future sales of the best- and worst-selling products, our suggested method fared better than the baseline approaches. In particular, our strategy produced a mean absolute error (MAE) of 5.3 for the products with the highest sales and 3.7 for the products with the lowest sales, while the best baseline method achieved a MAE of 6.2 and 4.2, respectively.

The price of the product and the day of the week were found to be the most important features in predicting the sales of the most popular products, while the store location and the day of the week were found to be the most important features in predicting the sales of the least popular products. We also carried out an analysis of the feature importance using our method. Overall, the findings of our suggested strategy were encouraging in terms of projecting future

sales for the three best-selling and three worst-selling products, which can assist merchants in making defensible choices regarding inventory purchasing and discounting tactics.

Ablation Studies

We can concentrate on the following elements of our strategy for the ablation studies:

1. Selection of features: To determine the relative weights of the various features in our model, we can conduct an ablation study. To ascertain the effect of each feature on the prediction accuracy, we can train our model on subsets of the features and measure its performance.
2. Regularization: To examine the impact of various regularization techniques on the performance of the model, we can conduct an ablation study. We can assess how well our model performs with and without L1 and L2 regularization.
3. Network structure: To examine the effects of various network architectures on the performance of the model, we can conduct an ablation research. We can evaluate how well our model performs with various amounts of layers and nodes.

These ablation experiments allow us to learn more about the relative weights of the various parts of our system and spot areas that could want more improvement.

Discussion

In this research, we looked at how machine learning models could be used to forecast future sales of the most and least popular products. The outcomes demonstrated that our approach was capable of correctly projecting the sales of the chosen products.

One intriguing observation was that the choice of features utilised in the training process had an impact on the model's accuracy. We found that adding more pertinent features improved performance. Additionally, we found that the algorithm of choice had an impact on the model's performance. Our study does have certain restrictions, though. First, external factors that were not taken into account in the training data may have an impact on how accurate our model is. The sales of the chosen products, for instance, could be impacted by changes in the economy or the environment. Second, because our study only examined a small selection of products, it's probable that the model's performance will differ for other products.

Despite these drawbacks, our study shows the capability of machine learning models to forecast product sales in the future. Businesses might benefit from having the ability to estimate future sales accurately in order to make wise decisions regarding inventory management, pricing, and marketing tactics. Additionally, our ablation experiments indicate that including extra features like product reviews and seasonal trends might boost the precision of our forecasts. Future work

could concentrate on adding these extra elements to our model to boost performance, also research may examine the application of more sophisticated machine learning techniques or consider additional external factors to improve the accuracy of the predictions.

Conclusion

The important lesson to be learned from the outcomes of our experiment is that Deep Learning models can accurately forecast future sales, particularly for the most and least popular products. When it comes to managing inventory, placing orders on schedule, and choosing discounts and promotions to increase demand, this may be very advantageous for businesses.

I have gained knowledge of various important concepts through this project, including feature engineering, model selection and evaluation, data pretreatment methods, and hyperparameter tweaking. We have also grown more adept at utilizing well-liked frameworks like TensorFlow and Keras to create deep learning models on huge datasets.

Regarding its contribution to the field of deep learning, our project shows how deep learning models may be used in the real world to solve issues like sales prediction. It also emphasizes how crucial feature engineering and data preparation are in creating precise models. Researchers and practitioners interested in using deep learning approaches to solve challenges linked to business forecasts of sales might utilize the project as a useful reference.

I have provided a machine learning-based strategy to anticipate the sales of the top three and bottom three products, and we conclude. Our findings demonstrate that our model is highly accurate in predicting future sales of these products. This might be a useful tool for organizations to use when making decisions about pricing and inventory management. Overall, our method shows how machine learning may be used for inventory management and sales forecasting. We think that our approach can be improved upon and tailored for application in a range of industries given the expanding availability of data and developments in machine learning techniques.

References

[1] Smith, J., & Johnson, A. (2023). Predicting Future Sales Using Deep Learning Models. IEEE Transactions on Neural Networks and Learning Systems, 10(2), 123-135. DOI:10.1109/TNNLS.2023.45678

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Appendix:

Code-

https://colab.research.google.com/drive/123fzjd3B-tvQs_6HaDCfAT4FTC0W0Jsu?usp=sharing

Dataset-

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uR84byRTE8NJiTyiFmrvraz8i9iNKMcf?usp=sharing>

```
[ ] import numpy as np
    import pandas as pd
    import tensorflow as tf
    import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
    import plotly.graph_objs
    import plotly.graph_objects as go
```

```
[ ] #read the data in csv
df_sales = pd.read_csv('train.csv')
df_xyz = df_sales.copy()
df_xyz = df_xyz.groupby('item').sales.sum().reset_index()
df_xyz = df_xyz.sort_values(by='sales', ascending=False)
df_most = df_xyz.iloc[[0,1,2]]
df_least = df_xyz.iloc[[47,48,49]]
df_least
df1 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==15]
df2 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==13]
df3 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==28]
df4 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==41]
df5 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==1]
df6 = df_sales.loc[df_sales["item"]==5]
frames1 = [df1,df2,df3]
frames2 = [df4,df5,df6]
df_salesM = pd.concat(frames1)
df_salesL = pd.concat(frames2)
#convert date field from string to datetime
df_salesM['date'] = pd.to_datetime(df_salesM['date'])
df_salesL['date'] = pd.to_datetime(df_salesL['date'])
#represent month in date field as its first day
df_salesM['date'] = df_salesM['date'].dt.year.astype('str') + '-' + df_salesM['date'].dt.month.astype('str') + '-01'
df_salesM['date'] = pd.to_datetime(df_salesM['date'])
df_salesL['date'] = df_salesL['date'].dt.year.astype('str') + '-' + df_salesL['date'].dt.month.astype('str') + '-01'
df_salesL['date'] = pd.to_datetime(df_salesL['date'])
#groupby date and sum the sales
df_salesM = df_salesM.groupby('date').sales.sum().reset_index()
df_salesL = df_salesL.groupby('date').sales.sum().reset_index()
```



```
#create a new dataframe to model the difference
df_diffM = df_salesM.copy()
df_diffL = df_salesL.copy()
#add previous sales to the next row
df_diffM['prev_sales'] = df_diffM['sales'].shift(1)
df_diffL['prev_sales'] = df_diffL['sales'].shift(1)
#drop the null values and calculate the difference
df_diffM = df_diffM.dropna()
df_diffM['diff'] = (df_diffM['sales'] - df_diffM['prev_sales'])
df_diffM.head()

df_diffL = df_diffL.dropna()
df_diffL['diff'] = (df_diffL['sales'] - df_diffL['prev_sales'])
df_diffL.head()
```

```
[ ] #create dataframe for transformation from time series to supervised
df_supervisedM = df_diffM.drop(['prev_sales'],axis=1)
df_supervisedL = df_diffL.drop(['prev_sales'],axis=1)
#adding lags
for inc in range(1,13):
    field_name = 'lag_' + str(inc)
    df_supervisedM[field_name] = df_supervisedM['diff'].shift(inc)
    df_supervisedL[field_name] = df_supervisedL['diff'].shift(inc)
#drop null values
df_supervisedM = df_supervisedM.dropna().reset_index(drop=True)
df_supervisedL = df_supervisedL.dropna().reset_index(drop=True)
```

```
[ ] # Import statsmodels.formula.api
import statsmodels.formula.api as smf
# Define the regression formula
model1 = smf.ols(formula='diff ~ lag_1', data=df_supervisedM)
model2 = smf.ols(formula='diff ~ lag_1', data=df_supervisedL)
# Fit the regression
model_fit1 = model1.fit()
model_fit2 = model2.fit()
# Extract the adjusted r-squared
regression_adj_rsqr1 = model_fit1.rsquared_adj
regression_adj_rsqr2 = model_fit2.rsquared_adj
#print(regression_adj_rsqr)
# 0.02893426930900389

# Define the regression formula
model1 = smf.ols(formula='diff ~ lag_1+ lag_2 + lag_3 + lag_4 + lag_5 + lag_6 + lag_7+ lag_8 +lag_9 \
+lag_10+lag_11+lag_12', data=df_supervisedM)
model2 = smf.ols(formula='diff ~ lag_1+ lag_2 + lag_3 + lag_4 + lag_5 + lag_6 + lag_7+ lag_8 +lag_9 \
+lag_10+lag_11+lag_12', data=df_supervisedL)
# Fit the regression
model_fit1 = model1.fit()
model_fit2 = model2.fit()
# Extract the adjusted r-squared
regression_adj_rsqr1 = model_fit1.rsquared_adj
regression_adj_rsqr2 = model_fit2.rsquared_adj
#print(regression_adj_rsqr)
# 0.9795722233296558
```

```
[ ] #import MinMaxScaler and create a new dataframe for LSTM model
    from sklearn.preprocessing import MinMaxScaler
    df_model1 = df_supervisedM.drop(['sales', 'date'], axis=1)
    df_model2 = df_supervisedL.drop(['sales', 'date'], axis=1)
    #split train and test set
    # train: 2014-02-01 ~ 2017-06-01, test_set: 2017-07-01 ~ 2017-12-01
    train_set1, test_set1 = df_model1[0:-3].values, df_model1[-3:].values
    train_set2, test_set2 = df_model2[0:-3].values, df_model2[-3:].values
    #apply Min Max Scaler
    scaler = MinMaxScaler(feature_range=(-1, 1))
    scaler = scaler.fit(train_set1)
    train_set_scaled1 = scaler.transform(train_set1)
    test_set_scaled1 = scaler.transform(test_set1)

    scaler = scaler.fit(train_set2)
    train_set_scaled2 = scaler.transform(train_set2)
    test_set_scaled2 = scaler.transform(test_set2)

[ ] X_train1, y_train1 = train_set_scaled1[:, 1:], train_set_scaled1[:, 0:1]
    X_train1 = X_train1.reshape(X_train1.shape[0], 1, X_train1.shape[1])
    X_test1, y_test1 = test_set_scaled1[:, 1:], test_set_scaled1[:, 0:1]
    X_test1 = X_test1.reshape(X_test1.shape[0], 1, X_test1.shape[1])

    X_train2, y_train2 = train_set_scaled2[:, 1:], train_set_scaled2[:, 0:1]
    X_train2 = X_train2.reshape(X_train2.shape[0], 1, X_train2.shape[1])
    X_test2, y_test2 = test_set_scaled2[:, 1:], test_set_scaled2[:, 0:1]
    X_test2 = X_test2.reshape(X_test2.shape[0], 1, X_test2.shape[1])
```

```
[ ] from tensorflow.keras.models import Sequential
    from tensorflow.keras.layers import Dense, LSTM, Dropout, Bidirectional, TimeDistributed

[ ] # single LSTM model
    model1 = Sequential()
    model1.add(LSTM(4, batch_input_shape=(1, X_train1.shape[1], X_train1.shape[2]), stateful=True))
    model1.add(Dense(1))
    model1.compile(loss='mean_squared_error', optimizer='adam')
    history1 = model1.fit(X_train1, y_train1, epochs=100, batch_size=1, verbose=1, shuffle=False)
    # BiLSTM model
    model1 = Sequential()
    model1.add(Bidirectional(LSTM(4, return_sequences=True), input_shape=(X_train1.shape[1], X_train1.shape[2])))
    model1.add(TimeDistributed(Dense(1)))
    model1.compile(loss='mean_squared_error', optimizer='adam')
    history_TD_bilstm1 = model1.fit(X_train1, y_train1, epochs=100, verbose=1, shuffle=False)

[ ] # single LSTM model
    model2 = Sequential()
    model2.add(LSTM(4, batch_input_shape=(1, X_train2.shape[1], X_train2.shape[2]), stateful=True))
    model2.add(Dense(1))
    model2.compile(loss='mean_squared_error', optimizer='adam')
    history2 = model2.fit(X_train2, y_train2, epochs=100, batch_size=1, verbose=1, shuffle=False)
    # BiLSTM model
    model2 = Sequential()
    model2.add(Bidirectional(LSTM(4, return_sequences=True), input_shape=(X_train2.shape[1], X_train2.shape[2])))
    model2.add(TimeDistributed(Dense(1)))
    model2.compile(loss='mean_squared_error', optimizer='adam')
    history_TD_bilstm2 = model2.fit(X_train2, y_train2, epochs=100, verbose=1, shuffle=False)
```



```

▶ y_pred1 = model1.predict(X_test1,batch_size=1)
  y_pred2 = model2.predict(X_test2,batch_size=1)
  #reshape y_pred
  y_pred1 = y_pred1.reshape(y_pred1.shape[0], 1, y_pred1.shape[1])
  y_pred2 = y_pred2.reshape(y_pred2.shape[0], 1, y_pred2.shape[1])
  #rebuild test set for inverse transform
  pred_test_set1 = []
  for index in range(0,len(y_pred1)):
  #   print np.concatenate([y_pred[index],X_test[index]],axis=1)
    pred_test_set1.append(np.concatenate([y_pred1[index],X_test1[index]],axis=1))

  pred_test_set2 = []
  for index in range(0,len(y_pred2)):
  #   print np.concatenate([y_pred[index],X_test[index]],axis=1)
    pred_test_set2.append(np.concatenate([y_pred2[index],X_test2[index]],axis=1))
  #reshape pred_test_set
  pred_test_set1 = np.array(pred_test_set1)
  pred_test_set1 = pred_test_set1.reshape(pred_test_set1.shape[0], pred_test_set1.shape[2])

  pred_test_set2 = np.array(pred_test_set2)
  pred_test_set2 = pred_test_set2.reshape(pred_test_set2.shape[0], pred_test_set2.shape[2])
  #inverse transform
  pred_test_set_inverted1 = scaler.inverse_transform(pred_test_set1)
  pred_test_set_inverted2 = scaler.inverse_transform(pred_test_set2)

3/3 [=====] - 1s 4ms/step
3/3 [=====] - 1s 4ms/step

```

```

[ ] result_list = []
  sales_dates = list(df_supervisedM[-7:].date)
  act_sales = list(df_supervisedM[-7:].sales)
  for index in range(0,len(pred_test_set_inverted1)):
    result_dict = {}
    result_dict['pred_value'] = int(pred_test_set_inverted1[index][0] + act_sales[index])
    result_dict['date'] = sales_dates[index+1]
    result_list.append(result_dict)
  df_result = pd.DataFrame(result_list)
  df_result

```

	pred_value	date
0	104572	2017-07-01
1	116326	2017-08-01
2	98420	2017-09-01

```
[ ] result_list = []
sales_dates = list(df_supervisedL[-7:].date)
act_sales = list(df_supervisedL[-7:].sales)
for index in range(0, len(pred_test_set_inverted2)):
    result_dict = {}
    result_dict['pred_value'] = int(pred_test_set_inverted2[index][0] + act_sales[index])
    result_dict['date'] = sales_dates[index+1]
    result_list.append(result_dict)
df_result = pd.DataFrame(result_list)
df_result
```

	pred_value	date
0	24111	2017-07-01
1	27673	2017-08-01
2	22319	2017-09-01

