

# Leveraging Social Network Data to Alleviate Cold-Start Problem in Recommender Systems

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**Abstract**-Now-a-days, the gap between e-commerce and social networking became progressively diminished. Several e-commerce websites and mobile applications support the mechanism of social login wherever users will sign in the websites using their social network identities like their Facebook or Twitter accounts. Users can also post their newly purchased products on microblogs with links to the e-commerce product web pages. In this paper, we represent a novel solution for cross-site cold-start product recommendation, which aims to recommend products from e-commerce websites to users at social networking sites in “cold-start” situations, a problem which has rarely been explored before. A noteworthy issue is how to leverage knowledge extracted from social networking sites for cross-site cold-start product recommendation. In particular, we proposed the solution for cold-start recommendation by linking the users to social networking sites and e-commerce websites i.e. customers who have social network identities and have purchased on e-commerce websites as a bridge to map users social networking features into another feature representation which can be easier for a product recommendation. Here we propose to learn by using recurrent neural networks both user’s and product’s feature representations called user embedding and product embedding from the data collected from e-commerce website and then apply a modified gradient boosting trees method to transform user’s social networking features into user embeddings. Once obtained, then we will develop a feature-based matrix factorization approach which will use the user and product features for the cold-start product recommendation. Experimental results show that our approach effectively works and gives the best-recommended results in cold start situations.

**Keywords:**e-commerce, product recommender, product demographic, micro-blogs, Cold-Start, Recommendation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today’s world is becoming fully automatic through Internet. Internet provides the most needed information. The access to Internet creates large amount of data day by day. E-commerce websites such as eBay features many of the characteristics of social networks, including real-time status updates and interactions between its buyers and

sellers. Some e-commerce websites also support the mechanism of social login, which allows new users to sign in with their existing login information from social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter or Google+. Both Facebook and Twitter which has introduced a new feature last year had attracted more buyers which allowed more number of users to buy products directly from their websites by clicking a “buy” button to purchase items based on some adverts or other posts. In China, the e-commerce company ALIBABA has made a strategic investment in SINA WEIBO where ALIBABA product adverts can be directly delivered to SINA WEIBO users. With the new trend of conducting e-commerce activities on social networking sites- the reviews, leveraging product adopter information, extracted from e-commerce and profile details of social networking sites used for the development of the cold start product recommendation systems. In this, Recommendation plays a important role in many fields and has attracted a lot of research interest. For example, Netflix has released an interesting fact that about 75% of its subscribers watch are from recommendations. In a recommender system such as Netflix and Amazon, eBay, Flipkart, users can browse items and choose those items they are interested in, the advertisement also plays a major role were in the system also recommend the product to the users. Then the items that the system thought as a best one will be the best match of preference to the product recommendation. Afterward, the user may provide feedback (such as rating, usually represented as a score between, for example, 1 and 5, also the reviews make a huge decision in the product purchase) on how the user thinks about an item after she/he has experienced the item. One important task for the recommendation engine is to understand users’ personalized preferences from their historic rating behaviours. In this paper, we study an interesting problem of recommending products from e-commerce websites to users at social networking sites who do not have historical purchase records, i.e., in “cold-start” situations. We called it cross-site cold-start product recommendation. Most studies only focus on constructing solutions within certain e-commerce websites and mainly utilise user’s historical transaction records. To the best of our knowledge, cross-site cold-start product recommendation has been rarely studied before. Another



challenging task is how to improve the recommendation accuracy for the new (or rarely rated) items and the new (or inactive) users. Comparing to the popular items, for the newly released ones and the old items that are rarely rated by users, it is difficult for the standard recommendation approaches such as collaborative filtering approach to provide high-quality recommendations. In our problem setting here, only the users' social networking information is available and it is a challenging task to transform the social networking information into latent user features which can be effectively used for product recommendation. To address this threat, we represent to use the linked users across social networking sites and e-commerce websites (users who have social networking accounts and have made purchases on e-commerce websites) as a bridge to map users' social networking features to latent features for product recommendation. In specific, we represent learning both users' and products' feature representations (called user embeddings and product embeddings, respectively) from data collected from e-commerce websites using recurrent neural networks and then apply a modified gradient boosting trees method to transform users' social networking features into user embeddings. We then develop a feature-based matrix factorization approach which can leverage the learnt user embeddings for cold-start product recommendation. We built our dataset from the largest Chinese microblogging service SINA WEIBO2 and the largest Chinese B2C e-commerce website JINGDONG3, containing a total of 20,638 linked users. The experimental results on the dataset have shown the feasibility and the effectiveness of our proposed framework.

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

### 1] Opportunity model for e-commerce recommendation: Right product; right time

**Author:-J. Wang and Y. Zhang**

**Description:**Most of existing e-commerce suggester systems aim to recommend the proper product to a user, supported whether or not the user is probably going to buy or sort of a product. On the opposite hand, the effectiveness of recommendations conjointly depends on the time of the advice. Allow us to take a user World Health Organizations simply purchased a laptop computer as an example. She might purchase a replacement battery in a pair of years (assuming that the laptop computer's original battery typically fails to figure around that time) and get a brand new laptop in another a pair of years. During this case, it's not a decent plan to suggest a brand new laptop computer or a replacement battery right when the user

purchased the new laptop computer. It may hurt the user's satisfaction of the recommender system if she receives a doubtless right product recommendation at the incorrect time. We have a tendency to argue that a system mustn't solely suggest the foremost relevant item, however conjointly suggest at the proper time.

### 2] Retail sales prediction and item recommendations using customer demographics at store level

**Author:-M. Giering**

**Description:**This paper outlines a retail sales prediction and products recommendation system that was enforced for a sequence of retail stores. The relative importance of client demographic characteristics for accurately modeling the sales of every client kind square measure derived and enforced within the model. Knowledge consisted of daily sales data for 600 products at the shop level, broken out over a collection of non-overlapping client varieties. A recommender system was designed supported a quick on-line skinny Singular worth Decomposition. It's shown that modelling knowledge at a finer level of detail by clump across client varieties and demographics yields improved performance compared to one mixture model designed for the complete dataset. Details of the system implementation square measure represented and sensible problems that arise in such real-world applications square measure mentioned.

### 3] Amazon.com recommendations: Item-to-item collaborative filtering

**Author:-G. Linden, B. Smith, and J. York**

**Description:**Recommendation algorithms are a unit best glorious for his or her use on e-commerce internet sites, wherever they use input a couple of customer's interests to come up with an inventory of suggested things. Several applications use solely the things that customers purchase and expressly rate to represent their interests, however they'll additionally use alternative attributes, together with things viewed, demographic information, subject interests, and favourite artists. At Amazon.com, we tend to use recommendation algorithms to change the web store for every client. The shop radically changes supported client interests, showing programming titles to an engineer and baby toys to a replacement mother. There are unit 3 common approaches to resolution the advice problem: ancient cooperative filtering, cluster models, and search-based strategies. Here, we tend to compare these strategies



with our algorithmic program, that we tend to decision item-to-item cooperative filtering.

#### 4) The new demographics and market fragmentation

**Author:-V. A. Zeithaml**

**Description:**The underlying premise of this text is that dynamic demographics can result in a breakage of the mass markets for grocery product and supermarkets. A field study investigated the relationships between five demographic factors—sex, feminine operating standing, age, income, and matrimonial status—and a large vary of variables related to preparation for and execution of food market looking. Results indicate that the demographic teams dissent in important ways that from the standard food market shopper. Discussion centres on the ways in which dynamic demographics and family roles might have an effect on retailers and makers of grocery product.

#### 5. We know what you want to buy: a demographic-based system for product recommendation on microblogs

**Author:- W. X. Zhao, Y. Guo, Y. He, H. Jiang, Y. Wu, and X. Li**

**Description:**Product recommender systems square measure usually deployed by e-commerce websites to boost user expertise and increase sales. However, recommendation is proscribed by the merchandise data hosted in those e-commerce sites and is barely triggered once users square measure playing e-commerce activities. During this paper, we tend to develop a completely unique product recommender system known as breed, a merchandiser Intelligence recommender System, that detects users' purchase intents from their microblogs in close to time period and makes product recommendation supported matching the users' demographic data extracted from their public profiles with product demographics learned from microblogs and on-line reviews. Breed distinguishes itself from ancient product recommender systems within the following aspects:

1) breed was developed supported a microblogging service platform. As such, it's not restricted by the knowledge obtainable in any specific e-commerce web site. Additionally, breed is in a position to trace users' purchase intents in close to time period and build recommendations consequently.

2) In breed, product recommendation is framed as a learning to rank drawback. Users' characteristics extracted from their public profiles in microblogs and products' demographics learned from each on-line product reviews and microblogs square measure fed into learning to rank algorithms for product recommendation.

### 3. METHOD OF DATA EXTRACTION

#### EXTRACTING AND REPRESENTING MICROBLOGGING ATTRIBUTES

Our solution to microblogging feature learning consists of three steps: Prepare a list of potentially useful microblogging attributes and construct the microblogging feature vector  $a_u$  for each linked user ; Generate distributed feature representations  $v_u$  using the information from all the users  $U$  on the e-commerce website through deep learning; Learn the mapping function,  $f(a_u) \rightarrow v_u$ , which transforms the microblogging attribute information  $a_u$  into the distributed feature representations  $v_u$  in the second step. It utilizes the feature representation pairs  $\{a_u, v_u\}$  of all the linked users  $u \in U^L$  as training data.

#### MICROBLOGGING FEATURE SELECTION

In this section, we study how to extract rich user information from microblogs to construct  $a_u$  for a microblogging user. We consider four groups of attributes.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC ATTRIBUTES

A demographic profile (often shortened as “a demographic”) of a user such as sex, age and education can be used by e-commerce companies to provide better personalized services. We extract users' demographic attributes from their public profiles on SINA WEIBO. Demographic attributes have been shown to be very important in marketing, especially in product adoption for consumers. Following our previous study, we identify six major demographic attributes: gender, age, marital status, education, career and interests.

#### TEXT ATTRIBUTES

Recent studies have revealed that microblogs contain rich commercial intents of users. Also, users' microblogs often reflect their opinions and interests towards certain topics. As such, we expect a potential correlation between text attributes and users' purchase preferences. We perform Chinese word segmentation and stop word removal before extracting two types of text attributes below. Topic distributions. Seroussi et al. proposed to extract topics

from user-generated text using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model for recommendation tasks. Follow the same idea, we first aggregate all the microblogs by a user into a document, and then run the standard LDA to obtain the topic distributions for each user. The benefits of topics distributions over keywords are twofold. First, the number of topics is usually set to 50-200 in practice, which largely reduces the number of dimensions to work with. Second, topic models generate condensed and meaningful semantic units, which are easier to interpret and understand than keywords. Word embeddings. Standard topic models assume individual words are exchangeable, which is essentially the same as the bag-of-words model assumption. Word representations or embeddings learned to use neural language models help address the problem of traditional bag-of-words approaches which fail to capture words' contextual semantics. In word embeddings, each dimension represents a latent feature of the word and semantically similar words are close in the latent space. We employ the Skip-gram model implemented by the tool word2vec4 to learn distributed representations of words. Finally, we average the word vectors of all the tokens in a user's published document as the user's embedding vector.

### NETWORK ATTRIBUTES

In the online social media space, it is often observed that users connected with each other (e.g., through following links) are likely to share similar interests. As such, we can parse out latent user groups by the users' following patterns assuming that users in the same group share similar purchase preferences. Latent group preference. Since it is infeasible to consider all users on WEIBO and only keeping the top users with the most followers would potentially miss interesting information, we propose to use topic models to learn latent groups of following users [10]. We treat a following user as a token and aggregate all the following of a user as an individual document. In this way, we can extract latent user groups sharing similar interests (called "following topics"), and we represent each user as a preference distribution over these latent groups

TABLE 1  
Categorization of the Microblogging Features

Categories	Features
Demographic Attributes	Gender (2), Age (6), Marital status (10), Education (7), Career (9), Interests (6)
Text Attributes	Topic distributions (50), Word embeddings (50)
Network Attributes	Latent group preference (50)
Temporal Attributes	Daily activity distribution (24), Weekly activity distribution (7)

*The number of feature dimensions are shown in parentheses.*

### TEMPORAL ATTRIBUTES

Temporal activity patterns are also considered since they reflect the living habits and lifestyles of the microblogging users to some extent. As such, there might exist correlations between temporal activities patterns and users' purchase preferences. Temporal activity distributions. We consider two types of temporal activity distributions, namely daily activity distributions and weekly activity distributions. The daily activity distribution of a user is characterized by a distribution of 24 ratios, and the  $i$ th ratio indicates the average proportion of tweets published within the  $i$ th hour of a day by the user; similarly weekly activity distribution of a user is characterized by a distribution of seven ratios, and the  $i$ th ratio indicates the average proportion of tweets published within the  $i$ th day of a week by the user. We summarize all types of features in above table.

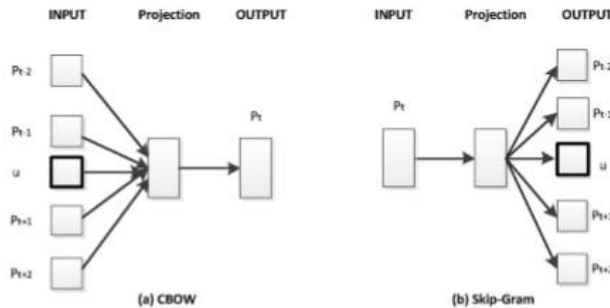
### DISTRIBUTED REPRESENTATION LEARNING WITH RECURRENT NEURAL NETWORKS

We use recently proposed methods in learning word embeddings using recurrent neural networks to learn user embeddings or distributed representation of user. We first discuss how to learn product embeddings and in the later part the word embeddings. There are two simple recurrent neural architectures to train product embeddings, the Continuous Bag-Of-Words model (CBOW) and the Skip-gram model [1]. The major difference between these two architectures is in the direction of prediction: CBOW predicts the current product using the surrounding context, while Skip-gram predicts the context with the current product. In our evaluations, the context is defined as a window of size 4 surrounding a target product which contains two products purchased before and two after. With product embeddings, if we can learn user embeddings in a similar way, then we can explore the related representations of a user and products for product recommendation. The purchase history of a user is like a



“sentence” having of a sequence of product IDs as word tokens. A user ID is placed at the beginning of each sentence, and both user IDs and product IDs are treated as word tokens in the learning process. During training, for each sentence, the sliding context window will always include the first word (i.e., user ID) in the sentence. In this way, a user ID is essentially always associated with a set of her purchase records (of 4 products at a time). Advantages:

Gain customer information like what they are, what they like, etc. which can transform our business. Increase brand awareness i.e. targets more people to our e-commerce. Run customer targeted ads with real time results. Generate valuable leads i.e. transform ad viewer to a customer. Increase website traffic and search ranking. Find out information about how competitor is performing and change ourselves according to that. Share content faster and easier.



Two architectures to learn both product and user embeddings. Here  $u$  denote a user ID. The major difference between para2vec and word2vec lies in the incorporation of userID as additional context

**FUNCTIONAL MATRIX FACTORISATION**

Now we consider constructing the interview process for cold-start collaborative filtering. Assume that a new user registers at the recommendation system and nothing is known about her. To capture the preferences of the user, the system initiates several interview questions to query the responses from the user. Based on the responses, the system constructs a profile for the user and provides recommendations accordingly. In the plain matrix factorization model described in Section 3.1, the user profile  $u_i$  is estimated by optimizing the  $\ell_2$  loss on the history ratings  $r_{ij}$ . This model does not directly apply to cold-start settings because no rating is observed for the new user prior to the interview process. To build user profiles adaptively according to the user’s responses in the course of the interview process, we propose to

parameterize the user profile  $u_i$  in such a way that the profile  $u_i$  is tied to user  $i$ ’s responses in the form of a function, thus the name functional matrix factorization (FMF). More precisely, assume there is  $P$  possible interview questions. We assume that an answer to a question takes value in the finite set  $\{0,1, \text{Unknown}\}$ , representing “Dislike”, “Like” and “Unknown”, respectively. Furthermore, let  $a_i$  denote the  $P$  dimensional vector representing the answers of user  $i$  to the  $P$  questions. And we tie the profile to the answers by assuming  $u_i = T(a_i)$ , where  $T$  is a function that maps the responses  $a_i$  to the user profile  $u_i \in \mathbb{R}^k$ . To make recommendations for user  $i$ , we simply use  $r_{ij} = v_j^T T(a_i)$ . Our goal is to learn both  $T$  and  $v_j$  from the observed ratings  $K$ . To this end, substituting  $u_i = T(a_i)$  into the low-rank matrix factorization model, we have the following optimization problem:

$$T, V = \underset{T \in \mathcal{H}, V}{\operatorname{argmin}} \sum_{(i,j) \in O} (r_{ij} - v_j^T T(a_i))^2 + \lambda \|V\|^2, \quad (1)$$

where  $V = (v_1, \dots, v_M)$  is the matrix of all item profiles,  $\mathcal{H}$  is the space from which the function  $T(a)$  is selected and the second term is the regularization term. Several issues need to be addressed in order to construct the interview process by the above functional matrix factorization. First, the number of all possible interview questions can be quite large (e.g. up to millions of items in movie recommendation); yet a user is only patient enough to answer a few interview questions. Second, the interview process should be adaptive to user’s responses, in other words, a follow-up question should be selected based on the user’s responses to the previous questions. Therefore, the selection process should be efficient to generate interview questions in real time after the function  $T(a)$  is constructed. In addition, since we allow a user to choose “Unknown” to the interview questions, we need to deal with such missing values as well. Following prior works of [8,20], we use a ternary decision tree to represent  $T(a)$ . Specifically, each node of the decision tree corresponds to an interview question and has three child nodes. When the user answers the interview question, the user is directed to one of its three child nodes according to her answer. As a result, each user follows a path from the root node to a leaf node during the interview process. A user profile is estimated at each leaf node based on the users’ responses, i.e.,  $T(a)$ . The number of interview questions presented to any user is bounded by the depth of the decision tree, generally a small number determined by the system. Also, non-responses to a question can be handled easily in the

decision tree with the introduction of a “Unknown” branch.

## 4. RELATED WORK

### A. OSN System Construction Module

In the first module, we develop the Online Social Networking (OSN) system module. We build up the system with the feature of Online Social Networking. Where, this module is used for new user registrations and after registrations the users can login with their authentication. Where after the existing users can send messages to privately and publicly, options are built. Users can also share post with others. The user can able to search the other user profiles and public posts.

In this module users can also accept and send friend requests. With all the basic feature of Online Social Networking System modules is build up in the initial module, to prove and evaluate our system features. Given an e-commerce website, with a set of its users, a set of products and purchase record matrix, each entry of which is a binary value indicating whether has purchased product. Each user is associated with a set of purchased products with the purchase timestamps. Furthermore, a small subset of users can be linked to their microblogging accounts (or other social network accounts).

### B. Microblogging Feature Selection

In this module, we develop the Microblogging Feature Selection. Prepare a list of potentially useful microblogging attributes and construct the microblogging feature vector for each linked user. Generate distributed feature representations using the information from all the users on the e-commerce website through deep learning. Learn the mapping function, which transforms the microblogging attribute information into the distributed feature representations in the second step. It utilises the feature representation pairs of all the linked users as training data. A demographic profile (often shortened as “a demographic”) of a user such as sex, age and education can be used by e-commerce companies to provide better personalised services. We extract users’ demographic attributes from their public profiles. Demographic attributes have been shown to be very important in marketing, especially in product adoption for consumers.

### C. Learning Product Embedding

In the previous module, we develop the feature selection, but it is not straightforward to establish connections between users and products. Intuitively, users and products should be represented in the same feature space so that a user is closer to the products that he/she has purchased compared to those he/she has not. Inspired by the recently proposed methods in learning word embeddings, we propose to learn user embeddings or distributed representation of user in a similar way. Given a set of symbol sequences, a fixed-length vector representation for each symbol can be learned in a latent space by exploiting the context information among symbols, in which “similar” symbols will be mapped to nearby positions. If we treat each product ID as a word token, and convert the historical purchase records of a user into a timestamped sequence, we can then use the same methods to learn product embeddings. Unlike matrix factorization, the order of historical purchases from a user can be naturally captured.

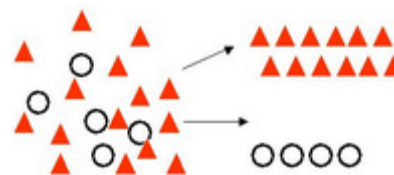
### D. CART and MART Algorithm

#### CART (Classification and Regression Tree)

Decision Trees are commonly used in data mining with the objective of creating a model that predicts the value of a target (or dependent variable) based on the values of several input (or independent variables). In today's post, we discuss the CART decision tree methodology. The CART or Classification & Regression Trees methodology was introduced in 1984 by [Leo Breiman](#), [Jerome Friedman](#), [Richard Olshen](#) and [Charles Stone](#) as an umbrella term to refer to the following types of decision trees:

**Classification Trees:** where the target variable is categorical and the tree is used to identify the "class" within which a target variable would likely fall into.

#### Classification



**Regression Trees:** where the target variable is continuous and tree is used to predict its value.

## Regression



The CART algorithm is structured as a sequence of questions, the answers to which determine what the next question, if any should be. The result of these questions is a tree like structure where the ends are terminal nodes at which point there are no more questions.

### MART(Multiple Additive Regression Tree)

MART is an implementation of the gradient boosting methods for predictive data mining (Classification and Regression)

#### Algorithm:

**Input:** a random output variable ‘y’, a set of random input variables  $x = \{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$ , a training sample  $\{y_i, x_i\}_{i=1}^N$  of known  $(y, x)$  - values

1.  $F_0(\mathbf{x}) = \arg \min_{\rho} \sum_{i=1}^N L(y_i, \rho)$
2. For  $m = 1$  to  $M$  do:
3.  $\tilde{y}_i = -\left[\frac{\partial L(y_i, F(\mathbf{x}_i))}{\partial F(\mathbf{x}_i)}\right]_{F(\mathbf{x})=F_{m-1}(\mathbf{x})}$ ,  $i = 1, N$
4.  $\mathbf{a}_m = \arg \min_{\mathbf{a}, \beta} \sum_{i=1}^N [\tilde{y}_i - \beta h(\mathbf{x}_i; \mathbf{a})]^2$
5.  $\rho_m = \arg \min_{\rho} \sum_{i=1}^N L(y_i, F_{m-1}(\mathbf{x}_i) + \rho h(\mathbf{x}_i; \mathbf{a}_m))$
6.  $F_m(\mathbf{x}) = F_{m-1}(\mathbf{x}) + \rho_m h(\mathbf{x}; \mathbf{a}_m)$

**Output:**  $F_M(\mathbf{x})$

### E. Similarity Computation

In this module, we are applying cosine similarity for identifying similarity between users and items. Cosine similarity is a measure of similarity between two vectors of an inner product space that measures the cosine of the angle between them. Cosine similarity is particularly used in positive space, where the outcome is neatly bounded in  $[0, 1]$ .

### F. Cold-Start Product Recommendation

We used a local host based e-commerce dataset, which contains some user transaction records. Each transaction record consists of a user ID, a product ID and the purchase timestamp. Products are recommended to a user who is new to e-commerce website and linked to social networking

website based on the micro-blogging features such as his interests, occupation of that user.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we've studied a unique hassle, cross site cold-start product recommendation, i.e., recommending products from e-commerce websites to microblogging customers without historical buy facts. Our essential idea is that at the e-trade websites, users and merchandise may be represented inside the identical latent characteristic area via characteristic getting to know with the recurrent neural networks. Our main idea is that on the e-commerce websites, users and products can be represented in the same latent feature space through feature learning with the recurrent neural networks. Using a set of linked users across both e-commerce websites and social networking sites as a bridge, we can learn feature mapping functions using a modified gradient boosting tree method, which maps users' attributes extracted from social networking sites onto feature representations learned from e-commerce websites. The mapped user features can be effectively incorporated into a feature-based matrix factorization approach for cold start product recommendation. We have constructed a large dataset from WEIBO and JINGDONG. The results show that our proposed framework is indeed effective in addressing the cross-site cold-start product recommendation problem. We believe that our study will have profound impact on both research and industry communities. Currently, only a simple neural network architecture has been employed for user and product embeddings learning. We will also consider improving the current feature mapping method through ideas in transferring learning [30].

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