Spectral gap-based deterministic tensor completion

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***Abstract*—Tensor completion is a core machine learning algorithm used in recommender systems and other domains with missing data. While the matrix case is well-understood, theoretical results for tensor problems are limited, particularly when the sampling patterns are deterministic. Here we bound the generalization error of the solutions of two tensor completion methods, Poisson loss and atomic norm minimization, providing tighter bounds in terms of the target tensor rank. If the ground-truth tensor is order t with CP-rank r, the dependence on r is improved from $r^{2(t-1)(t^2-t-1)}$ in [16] to $r^{2(t-1)(3t-5)}$. The error in our bounds is deterministically controlled by the spectral gap of the sampling sparsity pattern. We also prove several new properties for the atomic tensor norm, reducing the rank dependence from r^{3t-3} in [14] to r^{3t-5} under random sampling schemes. A limitation is that atomic norm minimization, while theoretically interesting, leads to inefficient algorithms. However, numerical experiments illustrate the dependence of the reconstruction error on the spectral gap for the practical max-quasinorm, ridge penalty, and Poisson loss minimization algorithms. This view through the spectral gap is a promising window for further study of tensor algorithms.**

I. Introduction

In many situations, incomplete data measurements are the rule due to data corruption, impracticality, or impossibility of filling in all information that is desired. Tensor completion is a general technique used to fill in missing multivariate data using assumptions of prior structure. It is the natural generalization of matrix completion, made famous as a winning solution to the Netflix prize [2]: A system to recommend films to users was built by filling in a low-rank matrix of scores for each pair of movies by users.

In tensor completion, we seek to fully or partially recover the entries of an unknown order t tensor (i.e., a multidimensional $n \times \cdots \times n$ array with $t \geq 2$ indices) T given some limited set of observations $\{T_e\}_{e \in E}$. The ground truth is assumed to have CP-rank r [20]. Mathematical analysis of such methods often assumes that the observed entries in the tensor $E \subseteq [n]^t$ are random, and the best known polynomial-time algorithms require $\tilde{O}(n^{t/2})$ sample complexity for an order t tensor [19], [22], [25], [6], [24]. On the other hand, a number of papers have studied deterministic sampling for matrix completion [17], [4], [3], [5], [10], [12]. For tensors, only a few recent results have studied error bounds in the deterministic setting. [9, Theorem 3.1] gave a general bound for non-uniform Frobenius norm error for any deterministic sampling pattern with an NP-hard algorithm. However, the dependence on rank in the bound is not specified. An HOSVD method was also analyzed in [9] for low Tucker rank tensor completion.

Closest to the work we present here, [16] found bounds for minimizing a quasinorm penalized problem [14] in terms a *spectral gap*. For regular graphs where each vertex has the same degree, *smaller second eigenvalue corresponds to larger spectral gap*. Viewing the sampling pattern as the adjacency tensor of a t-uniform hypergraph H constructed from a regular graph G, they showed that the second eigenvalue of G could be used to control the reconstruction error. Expander graphs, which have the smallest possible second eigenvalue/largest spectral gap, are thus optimal for that theory. In addition, using the definition of the second eigenvalue for the

adjacency tensor of a hypergraph [13], they showed that the for any t-uniform hypergraph (not necessarily regular) as a sampling pattern, its second eigenvalue could also be used to control the reconstruction error, but with a larger sample complexity bound.

Our main contribution is a collection of theoretical results suggesting that the spectral gap influences the quality of reconstruction. We first show how the rank dependence of previous generalization bounds [16] can be tightened if the optimization is done with a different atomic norm penalty. Several properties of this atomic norm are proven, improving upon the results in [14] where the atomic norm was introduced. We also extend the analysis of tensor count data with a Poisson likelihood model [21] to deterministic observations. Finally, we present numerical experiments to showcase how a larger spectral gap leads to less error. These results together provide strong evidence that the spectral gap of the observation mask is important for controlling the error of tensor completion. Our notation and some basic definitions are given in App. A.

II. Theoretical results

A. Tensor atomic norm properties

In order to connect the expansion properties of the sampling pattern hypergraph to the error of the algorithms, we will work with sign tensors. A sign tensor S has all entries equal to $+1$ or -1, i.e. $S \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \{\pm 1\}^{n_i}$. The **sign rank** of a sign tensor S is defined as

$$\operatorname{rank}_{\pm}(S) = \inf \left\{ r \;\middle|\; S = \sum_{i=1}^{r} s_i^{(1)} \circ \cdots \circ s_i^{(t)} \right\}, \tag{II.1}$$

where $s_i^{(j)} \in \{\pm 1\}^{n_i}, i \in [r], j \in [t]$. We define the **atomic norm** for a tensor T as

$$\|T\|_{\pm} = \inf \left\{ \sum_{i=1}^{r} |\alpha_i| \;\middle|\; T = \sum_{i=1}^{r} \alpha_i S_i \right\}, \tag{II.2}$$

where $\alpha_i \in \mathbb{R}$, $S_i \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \{\pm 1\}^{n_i}, i \in [r]$. This is called *tensor atomic-M norm* in [14]. In (II.2), the "atoms" are simple sign tensors.

Note that the set of all rank-1 sign tensors forms a basis for $\bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^n$, so this decomposition into rank-1 sign tensors is always possible; furthermore, this is a norm for tensors and matrices [14], [17], and it is commonly used in compressed sensing and matrix completion [8], [11]. The following results give several useful properties of the tensor atomic norm, which will be used in our tensor completion analysis (proofs in Apps. B and C, respectively):

Theorem II.1. *Let $T \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^{n_i}$ and $S \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^{m_i}$. The following atomic norm properties hold:*

1) $\|T_{I_1,\ldots,I_t}\|_{\pm} \leq \|T\|_{\pm}$ *for any subsets* $I_i \subseteq [n_i]$.
2) $\|T \otimes S\|_{\pm} \leq \|T\|_{\pm} \|S\|_{\pm}$.
3) $\|T * S\|_{\pm} \leq \|T \otimes S\|_{\pm}$, *where* $T, S \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^{n_i}$.
4) $\|T * T\|_{\pm} \leq \|T\|_{\pm}^2$.

Lemma II.2. *Let $u_i \in \mathbb{R}^{n_i}$ with $\|u_i\|_\infty \leq 1$ for $i \in [t]$ and rank-1 $T = u_1 \circ u_2 \circ \cdots \circ u_t$. Then $\|T\|_{\pm} \leq 1$.*

We also need to compare the atomic norm of a tensor T and its CP-rank to obtain rank-dependent bounds. The following Theorem improves the rank dependence in [14, Theorem 7] by a factor of r (proof in App. D):

Theorem II.3. *Let $T \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^{n_i}$ and $\operatorname{rank}(T) = r$. Then*

$$|T|_\infty \leq \|T\|_{\pm} \leq K_G \sqrt{r^{3t-5}} |T|_\infty, \tag{II.3}$$

where $K_G \leq 1.783$ is Grothendieck's constant over $\mathbb{R}$.

In contrast, for the max-quasinorm (see App. A), it was shown in [16] that

$$|T|_\infty \leq \|T\|_{\max} \leq \sqrt{r^{t^2-t-1}}\; |T|_\infty.$$

Since $3t - 5 \leq t^2 - t - 1$ for all integers $t \geq 2$, atomic norm-based analysis and optimization will yield a better rank dependence in the generalization error bound.

While the main focus of this paper is on deterministic sampling patterns, we note that Theorem II.3 can be used to improve upon results in the literature that consider random sampling schemes. In [14], the authors introduce the atomic norm to show that $O\left(nr^{3t-3}\right)$ entries chosen randomly are sufficient to provide an accurate approximation of a rank r tensor in $\bigotimes_{i=1}^{t} \mathbb{R}^n$. Using our main result, Theorem 8 in [14] can be applied with $R = K_G \sqrt{r^{3t-5}} |T|_\infty$ to reduce the sampling complexity to $O\left(nr^{3t-5}\right)$. To the best of our knowledge, the results here provide the best sampling complexity to date for tensors of general order under random and deterministic sampling patterns.

B. Deterministic tensor completion

Equipped with the properties of the atomic norm proved in Theorem II.1, we give an improved generalization error bound for deterministic tensor completion (proof in App. E):

Theorem II.4. *Given a hypercubic tensor T of order t, reveal its entries according to a t-uniform t-partite hypergraph $H = (V, E)$ with $V = V_1 \cup \cdots \cup V_t$, $|V_1| =$*

$\cdots = |V_t| = n$, *and second eigenvalue* $\lambda_2(H)$. *Let* $\hat{T}$ *satisfy*

$$\hat{T} = \arg\min_{T'} \|T'\|_{\pm} \quad \textit{such that} \quad T'_e = T_e \quad \textit{for all} \quad e \in E.$$

Then the following bound holds:

$$\frac{1}{n^t}\|\hat{T} - T\|_F^2 \leq \frac{2^{t+2} n^{t/2} \lambda_2(H)}{|E|} \|T\|_{\pm}^2, \tag{II.4}$$

where $\lambda_2(H) = \left\| T_H - \frac{|E|}{n^t} J \right\|$, J *is the all-ones tensor, and* T_H *is the adjacency tensor of* H *such that* $T_{i_1,\ldots,i_t} = \mathbf{1}\{(i_1,\ldots,i_t) \in E\}$.

The above result is for any t-uniform, t-partite hypergraphs, and the error bound depends on the second eigenvalue of their adjacency tensors. Concentration for the second eigenvalue of adjacency tensors for random hypergraphs was considered in [13], [26].

Computing $\lambda_2(H)$ is costly since the tensor spectral norm is NP-hard [18]. However, we can "lift" a graph into a hypergraph in a way that gives a bound in terms of graph eigenvalues. Let $G = (V(G), E(G))$ be a connected d-regular graph on n vertices with the second largest eigenvalue (in absolute value) $\lambda \in (0, d)$. The following construction of a t-partite, t-uniform, d^{t-1}-regular hypergraph $H = (V, E)$ from G was given in [16]. See Fig 1 for an illustration of the "edge lifting" operation from a regular graph to a regular hypergraph graph when $t = 3$ and $d = 4$.

Definition II.5 (Edge lifting for regular hypergraphs)**.** Let $V = V_1 \cup V_2 \cup \cdots \cup V_t$ be the disjoint union of t vertex sets such that $|V_1| = \cdots = |V_t| = n$. The hyperedges of H correspond to all walks of length $t-1$ in G: $(v_1, \ldots, v_t)$ is a hyperedge in H if and only if $(i_1, \ldots, i_t)$ is a walk of length $t-1$ in G.

Theorem II.6. *Given a hypercubic tensor* T *of order* t*, reveal its entries according to a* t*-partite,* t*-uniform,* d^{t-1}*-regular hypergraph* $H = (V, E)$ *lifted from a* d*-regular graph* G *of size* n *with second eigenvalue (in absolute value)* $\lambda \in (0, d)$*. Then solving*

$$\hat{T} = \arg\min_{T'} \|T'\|_{\pm} \quad \textit{such that} \quad T'_e = T_e \quad \textit{for all} \quad e \in E \tag{II.5}$$

will result in the following mean squared error bound:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{n^t}\|\hat{T} - T\|_F^2 &\leq 2^t(2t-3)\frac{\lambda}{d}\|T\|_{\pm}^2 \\ &\leq 2^t(2t-3)\frac{\lambda}{d} K_G^2 r^{3t-5} |T|_{\infty}^2. \end{aligned} \tag{II.6}$$

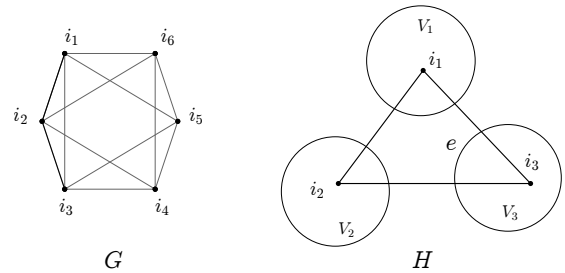

Fig. 1. Lifting a graph G into a hypergraph H when $t = 3$: We depict a 4-connected ring base graph G on the left and a single edge in the hypergraph H on the right. (i_1, i_2, i_3) forms an hyperedge e in H if and only if (i_1, i_2, i_3) is a walk in G.

Theorem II.6 is proven in App. F. Suppose we lift an expander graph G with $\lambda = O(\sqrt{d})$ and $t, |T|_\infty = O(1)$. In order to have the right hand side of (II.6) bounded by ε, we need to take

$$|E| = O\left(\frac{n r^{2(t-1)(3t-5)}}{\varepsilon^{2(t-1)}}\right) \tag{II.7}$$

many samples. The sample complexity in [16] is $O\left(\frac{n r^{2(t-1)(t^2-t-1)}}{\varepsilon^{2(t-1)}}\right)$. Optimizing the atomic norm instead of the max-quasinorm yields a better bound, although it requires costly integer programming.

III. Poisson Tensor Regression

We may also use the atomic norm properties to obtain error bounds in the case of noisy tensor completion. In this scenario, we seek to estimate a parametric tensor T from noisy, incomplete observations so that T is never observed directly. We specifically consider the Poisson tensor completion problem [21], where we observe count data $X \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^t \mathbb{N}_+^{n_i}$ obeying

$$X_e \sim \text{Poisson}(T_e) \quad \text{for all} \quad e \in E, \tag{III.1}$$

where $T \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^t [\beta, \alpha]^{n_i}$ specifies the range of possible Poisson parameters (with $0 < \beta \leq \alpha$). Given X_e for $e \in E$, we approximate T via a Poisson maximum likelihood estimator

$$\hat{T} = \arg\max_{Z \in S_r(\beta,\alpha)} \sum_{e \in E} X_e \log(Z_e) - Z_e \tag{III.2}$$

where our parametric tensor search space is

$$S_r(\beta, \alpha) = \left\{ Z \in \bigotimes_{i=1}^t [\beta, \alpha]^{n_i} \mid \text{rank}(Z) \leq r \right\}.$$

This leads to our main result for the Poisson regression (proof in App. G):

Theorem III.1. *Let the hypercubical parameter tensor T and observations X be generated as above, with entries revealed according to a t-uniform, t-partite hypergraph $H = (V, E)$ with $V = V_1 \cup \cdots \cup V_t$, $|V_1| = \cdots = |V_t| = n$, and second eigenvalue $\lambda_2(H)$. Then with probability exceeding $1 - \frac{2}{|E|}$, there exists an absolute constant $C > 0$ such that $\hat{T}$ satisfies:*

$$\frac{1}{n^t}\|\hat{T} - T\|_F^2 \leq \frac{C\alpha^3 t^{3/2}\sqrt{nr^{3t-5}}\log_2(n)}{\beta\sqrt{|E|}} + \frac{2^{t+2}n^{t/2}\lambda_2(H)K_G^2\alpha^2 r^{3t-5}}{|E|}. \quad \text{(III.3)}$$

Furthermore, if the entries are revealed according to a t-partite, t-uniform, d^{t-1}-regular hypergraph $H = (V, E)$ constructed from a d-regular graph G of size n with second eigenvalue (in absolute value) $\lambda \in (0, d)$, then with probability exceeding $1 - \frac{2}{nd^{t-1}}$,

$$\frac{1}{n^t}\|\hat{T} - T\|_F^2 \leq \frac{C\alpha^3 t^{3/2}\sqrt{r^{3t-5}}\log_2(n)}{\beta\sqrt{d^{t-1}}} + \alpha^2 2^t(2t-3)\frac{\lambda}{d}K_G^2 r^{3t-5}. \quad \text{(III.4)}$$

If all r, t, α, β are independent of n, and we take an expander graph with $\lambda = O(\sqrt{d})$, (III.4) says if nd^{t-1} is $\omega(n\log^2 n)$, then the generalization error goes to 0 as $n \to \infty$. Fixing t, α, β, the sample size is $O\left(\frac{nr^{2(t-1)(3t-5)}}{\varepsilon^{2(t-1)}} + \frac{nr^{3t-5}\log^2(n)}{\varepsilon}\right)$ for an ε-approximation. The result is no longer deterministic due to the random nature of the observed counts X, but not the observation mask. We roughly obtain the same sampling complexity as in Theorem II.6 with an extra $O\left(\frac{nr^{3t-5}\log^2(n)}{\varepsilon}\right)$ term.

We end this section by noting that the derived noisy tensor completion error bounds (III.3) and (III.4) are dependent on the Poisson parameter bounds β, α. Such dependence is typical in the literature under random sampling schemes [7], [21]. Theoretical results therein exhibit analogous dependence on the distributional parameter space, with numerical experiments that further validate this dependence as β and α are varied.

IV. Numerical Experiments

We now present some numerical experiments that explore our derived error bounds in practice. The goal of this section is to showcase how the accuracy of estimators $\hat{T}$ depends on the spectral gap of the associated hypergraph or "lifted" regular graph that specifies the sampled tensor entries. To do so, we will generate subsets of revealed tensor entries E in different manners that vary the second eigenvalue of the associated adjacency tensor or lifted graph. The following experiments keep the cardinality $|E|$ fixed so that only the distribution of the sampled entries contributes to the behavior of the reconstruction errors.

We tested the max-quasinorm minimization algorithm of [16] with graph lifting for a graph with $d = 15$ and random target tensor with $n = 100$, $t = 3$, and $r = 3$. To vary the eigenvalue $\lambda_2(G)$, we start by creating a d-connected ring graph (see Figure 1). We then perform a number of random edge swaps where we randomly select two edges and switch their endpoints, which preserves the regularity of the graph. This is the classical switch Markov chain for generating random regular graphs [15]. As the number of swaps increases, λ_2 decreases until it stabilizes at approximately $2\sqrt{d-1}$. We vary the number of swaps between 0 and 600 to give as wide of a λ_2 range as possible. This graph is then lifted into a hypergraph/tensor mask of observed entries.

Figure 2 shows the results from these experiments. We observe a significant positive correlation between generalization error and λ_2, increasing nonlinearly for the larger values of the eigenvalue. To check if this pattern persisted when limiting to lower λ_2 values, we removed the points with large λ_2 values that were dominating the plot. We can see there still is a positive correlation when the points are removed, providing further evidence that λ_2 is a determinant of generalization error. Further details and similar plots for two additional square loss algorithms, as well as regression reports, are included in App. H and the supplemental files.

We also experimented with the Poisson regression algorithm [21]. In this case, we did not use graph lifting but came up with a procedure to generate mask tensors with varying $\lambda_2(H)$ by starting from a grid-like mask and randomly shuffling entries. The tensor eigenvalue $\lambda_2(H)$ was estimated by a rank-1 fit to $(T_H - \frac{|E|}{n^t}J)$. We again saw a strong correlation between λ_2 and error. Further details and plots of results are shown in App. I.

V. Conclusion

We provided an improved analysis of deterministic tensor completion based on the spectral gap of expander graphs in [16] and applied the results for Poisson tensor regression. Our new numerical experiments support the dependence of generalization error on the spectral gap. Our main contribution also improves upon previous results that consider random sampling schemes, providing the best sampling complexity to date for general order tensor completion problems in terms of the CP-rank.

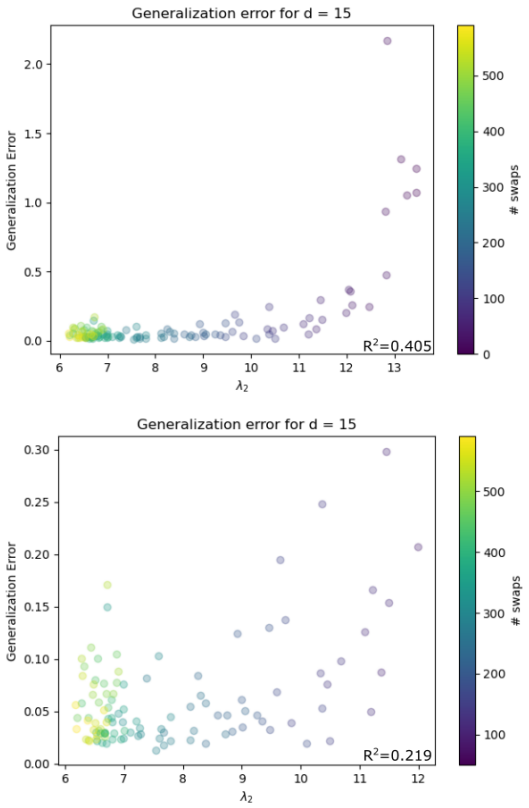

Fig. 2. Numerical experiments show that reconstruction error correlates with $\lambda_2(G)$ using the max-quasinorm minimization method and graph lifting. This graph has $d = 15$ and $n = 100$, and the tensor order $t = 3$, for 2.25% of the entries sampled. Above: The full range of graph eigenvalues by varying edge swaps from 0 to 600. Below: Linear fits show significant positive correlation even when points with $\lambda_2 > 12$ are removed. Coefficients of determination R^2 for linear fits of error versus λ_2 are included.

It would be interesting to see if our analysis can be extended for deterministic non-uniform low CP-rank tensor completion following the line of work [12], [9]. However, more properties of the tensor atomic or max-quasinorm are needed. In particular, in the matrix case, we have the following relation between the max-norm and operator norm: $\|A * B\| \leq \|A\|_{\max}\|B\|$ for any two $n \times n$ matrices A, B, which is crucial in the proof of [12, Theorem 15] and [9, Theorem B.1]. Generalizing this inequality for these tensor factorization norms is an interesting question for future work.

Our work also contains some limitations. First, we did not study the computational complexity of our optimization algorithms, although we expect them to be NP-hard [1]. Directly minimizing the atomic norm as in Theorem II.4 requires integer programming and is not efficient in practice. Finally, while many numerical results show a good correlation with λ_2, there is significant unexplained variance at a given gap and across algorithms. Like many results, these theoretical bounds are not tight enough to quantitatively predict performance, and they are far from the parameter counting lower-bound of $O(nrt)$ for the CP decomposition.

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