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A scalable deep learning-based context-aware recommendation framework using autoencoder-regularized neural interaction modeling

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Abstract

Recommendation systems are needed to handle large-scale user-item interactions on digital platforms, but they often face severe data sparsity and cold-start issues. Current collaborative filtering and deep-learning models are frequently oblivious to complex contextual dependencies and difficult to scale computationally. To address these limitations, the paper presents a context-sensitive recommendation framework built on deep learning that integrates autoencoder-based latent feature generation with a neural interaction model. The proposed model effectively captures high-order user-item-context correlations in a sparse environment and maintains computational efficiency suitable for large-scale deployment. Contextual cues, including time, category, and geographic ones, are combined through a hybrid manifold that optimizes reconstruction and prediction losses simultaneously. The model consistently outperforms state-of-the-art baselines by up to 15% in Recall@10 and NDCG@10 across three benchmark datasets (MovieLens-1M, Amazon, and Yelp), showing greater robustness in cold-start and high-sparsity situations. The implementation demonstrates effective GPU scalability, affirming the potential of the proposed framework

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as a robust and computationally feasible solution for real-world intelligent recommendation systems.

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1. Introduction

Recommender systems [1] have become indispensable to the contemporary digital platform by being used to offer personalized recommendations in the fields of e-commerce, entertainment, and social networks. The conventional approaches [2], such as collaborative [3, 4] and content-based filtering [5] techniques, have been known to be quite successful, however, have drawbacks [6] such as sparseness of data [7], cold-start problems [8], and substandard contextual consideration. The recent deep learning [9, 10] strategies especially autoencoders and neural networks propose opportunity to learn richer representations and embrace non-linear user-item relationships. Nevertheless, there are still limitations in how well multidimensional contextual information can be integrated and then scaled on large datasets. In response to them, in this paper, a context-aware recommendation framework based on deep learning will be developed based on the latent representation learning that integrates with a neural network model by leveraging the use of the autoencoder. The proposed approach alleviates sparsity and cold-start issues because numerous features such as timing, space, and categories are included into a contextual framework that enhances the accuracy of the recommendations. The performance of the proposed model has proved to be efficient and scalable as the experiments on benchmark datasets [11-13] exhibit high results at the level of standard ranking measures.

2. Literature Review

Recommender systems improved the classical similarity-based methods into the innovative deep learning and context-based models. Initial methods primarily employed Collaborative Filtering (CF) and Content-Based Filtering (CBF), where the former utilized similarities between user-item ratings [14] and later used item attributes to make recommendations [15]. Cross-lying techniques, a mixture of CF and CBF, have been suggested since then to address the limitations of each separately [16]. Further accuracy came with Matrix Factorization methods like Singular Value Decomposition (SVD) that were able to learn the latent user representations and item representations [17]. Although they were successful, these methods could not deal with the sparsity of data, cold-start problems, and could not capture contextual data [18] and inspired the creation of more sophisticated models [19].

Context-Aware Recommendation Systems (CARS) are based on the traditional recommendations model, where extra contextual dimensions are

considered (time, place, and social aspects). Adomavicius formalized the process of integrating context into the recommendation tasks using the foundational framework [20]. In their turn, later research has shown that personalization is greatly enhanced using temporal context [21] and spatial information [22], especially with location-based services. Providing contextual side information is also a way of overcoming cold-start and sparsity problems [23], yet great challenges involved in scalable and effective multi-context fusion.

In more recent times the deep learning-based methods have allowed the analysis of the user-item-context interactions that are complex and non-linear. The sequential and attention models including BERT4Rec and TiSASRec are effective entities in expressing user dynamics by self-attention mechanisms [24]. Networks Feature interaction networks are based on deep and cross networks, as well as xDeepFM, are frameworks to enhance recommendation quality by learning explicit and implicit relationships between features [25]. NGCF and LightGCN are graph-based models, which implies that the formulated models use user-item graph, embracing learning of representations, but LightGCN demonstrates a high efficiency in sparse settings [26]. Systems like DIN and DIEN, which are implemented on an industrial scale, are the further elaboration of attention mechanisms as well as contextual signals used in adaptive personalization [27]. These developments are summarized using comprehensive surveys and the relevant challenges linked with fusion of contexts, interpretability, and scalability are identified [28].

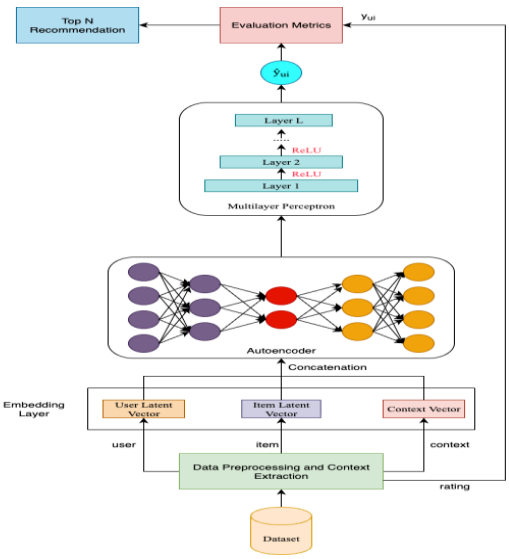

Figure 1
Context-aware recommendation system using autoencoder and multilayer perceptron

3. Proposed Methodology

The proposed framework (Figure 1) introduces a context-aware deep learning recommendation system that integrates embeddings, autoencoder-based latent representation learning, and neural network interaction modelling. This design effectively addresses two long-standing challenges in recommender systems, namely data sparsity and the cold-start problem, by leveraging contextual signals in conjunction with user–item interactions. The design not only focuses on the accuracy of the representations but also on its ability to run in a computationally scalable way, which will allow it to be successfully deployed into a GPU-based system or high-performance computing (HPC) system.

3.1 *Datasets*

Three benchmark datasets were used to authenticate the approach. The MovieLens-1M data, where there are one million explicit ratings out of 1-5, offers time-based contextual information like weekday and time of the day, and genre-based information on the item. The Amazon Reviews data (types: Beauty and Games) corresponds to an implicit feedback environment, where the user interaction is enriched by the contextual features (review date: season, time bucket), device type (where it is present), and price bracket. Yelp dataset has explicit and implicit interactions, with contextual data containing geographical (city or region), time-based (weekday, hour), and the types of businesses. Collectively, these datasets would provide complete assessment of explicit and implicit domains.

3.2 *Workflow of the Proposed System*

The proposed recommendation pipeline transforms raw user–item interactions into context-aware predictions through six key modules. Each module is described below with its functional role and mathematical formulation.

3.2.1 Data Preprocessing and Context Extraction

The first stage involves preparing raw feedback and contextual signals. In explicit datasets such as MovieLens, ratings are normalized within the range of 1 to 5, while implicit datasets (e.g., Amazon and Yelp) are binarized into interaction labels:

$$\boldsymbol{y_{ui}} = \begin{cases} \mathbf{1}, \boldsymbol{if\ user\ u\ interacted\ with\ item\ i} \\ \mathbf{0}, \boldsymbol{otherwise} \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

Temporal features are extracted from timestamps, where

$$\boldsymbol{w = day(timestamp), h = hour(timestamp)}$$

denote the weekday and hour, respectively. Geographical contexts, price buckets, and categorical features (e.g., genre or business type) are also encoded. The resulting dataset consists of tuples $\boldsymbol{u, i, c, r_{ui}}$ where u is a user, i is an item,

c represents contextual features, and $\boldsymbol{r_{ui}}$ is either an explicit rating or implicit feedback.

3.2.2 Embedding Layer

After data pre-processing, users, items and contextual features are encoded as dense embeddings. The module of learning obtains low-dimensional continuous specifications that document latent features of each object. Each user is projected to a vector that contains preferences, each item is projected to a vector to define the characteristics of the items, and all the contextual aspects are also coded and memorized the situational habits.

For user *u*, item *i*, and context *c*, the embeddings are defined as:

$$\boldsymbol{e_u} = \boldsymbol{P}[\boldsymbol{u}],\ \boldsymbol{e_i} = \boldsymbol{Q}[\boldsymbol{i}],\ \boldsymbol{e_c} = \boldsymbol{R}[\boldsymbol{c}] \tag{2}$$

P, Q and R are matrices that consist of embedding. These embeddings are joined together as one single representation vector, which is the input to the deep learning structure:

$$\boldsymbol{x} = [\boldsymbol{e_u} \oplus \boldsymbol{e_i} \oplus \boldsymbol{e_c}] \tag{3}$$

This is an important step as it converts the features (which are sparse and categorical) to a compact and trainable format that can be efficiently used by neural networks.

3.2.3 Autoencoder Module

This is used to compress the concatenated feature vector *x* and make it more robust and dimensional. The encoder reduces the high-dimensional input to the low-dimensional bottleneck representation that still captures the critical information of an input but leaves out the redundant characteristics:

$$\boldsymbol{z} = \boldsymbol{\sigma}(\boldsymbol{W_e x} + \boldsymbol{b_e}) \tag{4}$$

where $\boldsymbol{W_e}$ and $\boldsymbol{b_e}$ are encoder weight and bias, and σ (·) is a non-linear activation function (ReLU). The decoder attempts to reconstruct the original input:

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{x}} = \boldsymbol{\sigma}(\boldsymbol{W_d z} + \boldsymbol{b_d}) \tag{5}$$

The reconstruction error acts as a regularizer:

$$\boldsymbol{\mathcal{L}_{AE}} = \|\boldsymbol{x} - \hat{\boldsymbol{x}}\|_2^2 \tag{6}$$

There are two main strengths of this mechanism: first, it ensures that the impact of sparsity is reduced since learners acquire strong latent codes even with partial interactions; and second, it can be used to make the model perform better when generalizing by constrained interaction with important structural data. Accordingly, the autoencoder can be considered as a dimension reduction tool and as a feature enhancer. The computational perspective will be in the sense that the autoencoder can achieve quicker convergence and cut down on model overfitting, which entails good use of GPUs in the backward propagation.

3.2.4 Neural Network Interaction Layer (MLP)

The compressed latent code obtained from the autoencoder is fed into a multi-layer perceptron (MLP), which models high-order and non-linear interactions among users, items, and contexts. The latent representation z is passed through a multi-layer perceptron that models higher-order, non-linear interactions. Each hidden layer is defined as:

$$\boldsymbol{h}^{(l)} = \boldsymbol{\sigma}(\boldsymbol{W}^{(l)}\boldsymbol{h}^{(l-1)} + \boldsymbol{b}^{(l)}),\ \boldsymbol{h}^{(0)} = \boldsymbol{z} \tag{7}$$

where $\boldsymbol{W}^{(l)}$ and $\boldsymbol{b}^{(l)}$ are the weight matrix and bias vector of the l-th layer, respectively, and σ (·) is a non-linear activation function.

Such a hierarchical transformation enables the model to capture complex interrelations among user preferences, item characteristics, and context signals**.** The non-linear changes through the various layers of MLPs enable the model to learn performance modes that were previously inaccessible to traditional linear approaches. This ability is especially useful in context-aware recommendation, which allows revealing subtle dependencies, such as some temporal or geographical dependencies in user preferences.

3.2.5 Prediction Layer

The last latent state of the MLP, which is the hidden state, $\boldsymbol{h}^{(l)}$ is then directly fed into a prediction layer, which produces the recommendation output. In the case of explicit datasets, the model will produce a continuous rating:

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{r}}_{\boldsymbol{ui}} = \boldsymbol{W}_{\boldsymbol{0}}^{\boldsymbol{T}}\boldsymbol{h}^{(l)} + \boldsymbol{b}_{\boldsymbol{0}} \tag{8}$$

In the case of implicit datasets, the result is a score, a ranking of 0 to 1 obtained through the sigmoid function:

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{y}}_{\boldsymbol{ui}} = \boldsymbol{\sigma}(\boldsymbol{W}_{\boldsymbol{0}}^{\boldsymbol{T}}\boldsymbol{h}^{(l)} + \boldsymbol{b}_{\boldsymbol{0}}) \tag{9}$$

These outputs establish the ranking/rating approximation of the recommendations.

3.2.6 Evaluation Module

The final stage of the workflow involves assessing the model's performance using widely adopted recommendation metrics. Model performance is measured using both error based and ranking-based metrics.

For explicit feedback, the error is computed as the root mean squared error (RMSE):

$$\boldsymbol{RMSE} = \sqrt{\frac{\boldsymbol{1}}{|\boldsymbol{\mathcal{D}}|}\sum_{(\boldsymbol{u},\boldsymbol{i})\boldsymbol{\epsilon}\boldsymbol{\mathcal{D}}}(\boldsymbol{r}_{\boldsymbol{ui}} - \hat{\boldsymbol{r}}_{\boldsymbol{ui}})^{\boldsymbol{2}}} \tag{10}$$

where $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{D}}$ is the set of user-item pairs, $\boldsymbol{r}_{\boldsymbol{ui}}$ is the actual rating, and $\hat{\boldsymbol{r}}_{\boldsymbol{ui}}$ is the predicted rating.

For implicit datasets, top K metrics are employed. Precision@K and Recall@K are defined as:

$$\boldsymbol{Precision@K} = \frac{|R_u^K \cap T_u|}{K} \tag{11}$$

$$\boldsymbol{Recall@K} = \frac{|R_u^K \cap T_u|}{T_u} \tag{12}$$

where $\boldsymbol{R_u^K}$ is the top K recommendation list for user u, and $\boldsymbol{T_u}$ is the ground-truth set of relevant items.

HitRate@K evaluates whether at least one relevant item is recommended:

$$\mathbf{HitRate@K} = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{U}|} \sum_{u \epsilon \mathcal{U}} \mathbb{1}(R_u^K \cap T_u \neq \emptyset) \tag{13}$$

where $\mathcal{U}$ is the set of all users. Finally, NDCG@K measures the ranking quality:

$$\mathbf{NDCG@K} = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{U}|} \sum_{u \epsilon \mathcal{U}} \frac{\sum_{i \in R_u^K} \frac{2^{rel_{ui}}-1}{\log_2(rank(i)+1)}}{IDCG@K} \tag{14}$$

where $\boldsymbol{rel_{ui}}$ is the relevance of item i for user u, rank(i) is the position of item i in the recommendation list, and IDCG@K is the ideal DCG at K.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 *Experimental Settings*

The proposed model was implemented in Python (PyTorch) and trained on an NVIDIA RTX 4090 (24 GB) GPU. All experiments were conducted on Ubuntu 22.04 with an Intel i9-13900K CPU and 128 GB of RAM. The model was parallelized for batched operations using CUDA-optimized kernels and asynchronous data loaders to ensure high throughput. In case of all datasets, User-item interactions were randomly divided into 80% training, 10% validation and 10% testing. The grid search on the validation set was used to tune hyperparameters (embedding size, learning rate, batch size, and regularization coefficients). In particular, embedding dimensions were configured to 64, auto encoder bottleneck layer was fixed to 32 units, and a multilayer perceptron was implemented with three hidden layers (size 128, 64, 32). The learning rate was set to Adam at 1 x10^{-3}, and the early stop was based on the loss on the validation. In the case of an implicit dataset, negative sampling was applied at a rate of positive-to-negative of 1 to 4 to balance training.

4.2 *Evaluation Protocol and Results*

The performance of the proposed framework was evaluated on the MovieLens-1M, Amazon (Beauty, Games), and Yelp datasets. Results are reported using RMSE for explicit ratings, and Precision@K, Recall@K, HitRate@K, and NDCG@K for implicit feedback with K= {5, 10, 20} mentioned in Figure 2.

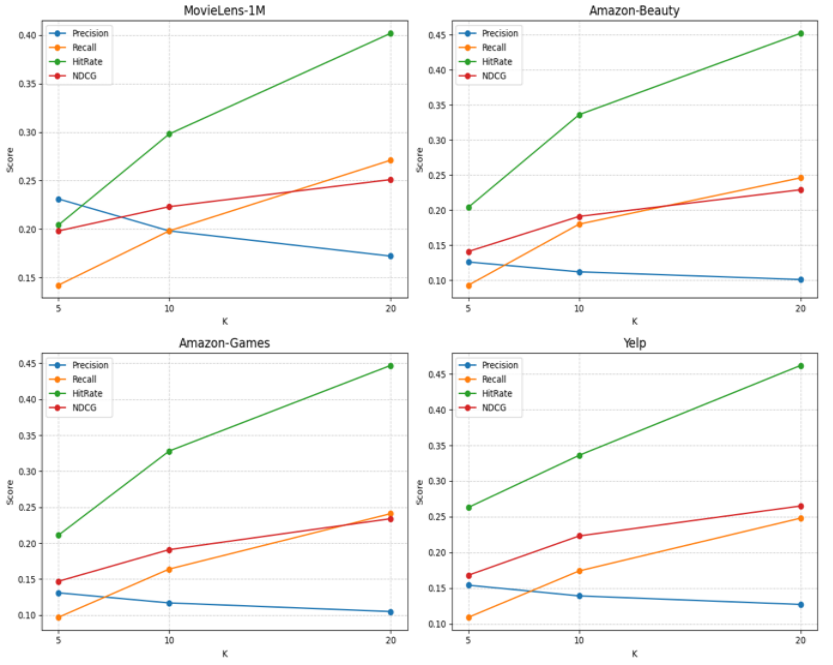

Figure 2
Performance across different datasets with the set of neighbors

4.3 *Ablation Studies*

The ablation study clearly demonstrates the contribution of each architectural component, as shown in Table 1. For MovieLens-1M, removing the autoencoder increases RMSE from 0.789 to 0.812, reflecting a 2.9% decline in accuracy, while eliminating contextual features raises RMSE to 0.828, a 4.9% degradation. For Amazon-Beauty, Recall@10 drops from 0.180 to 0.171 without the autoencoder (5.0% decrease), and further down to 0.162 without context (10.0% decrease). Similarly, in Amazon-Games, NDCG@10 falls from 0.191 to 0.182 without autoencoder (4.7% decline) and to 0.174 without context (8.9% decline). For Yelp, the HitRate@10 decreases from 0.336 to 0.321 without the autoencoder (4.5% loss) and 0.307 without context (8.6% loss).

Table 1
Ablation study results across datasets

Model Variant	MovieLens-1M (RMSE ↓)	Amazon-Beauty (Recall@10)	Amazon-Games (NDCG@10)	Yelp (HitRate@10)
Full Proposed Model (Embedding + AE + MLP + Context)	**0.789**	**0.180**	**0.191**	**0.336**

w/o Autoencoder (no AE regularization)	0.812	0.171	0.182	0.321
w/o Contextual Features (only user–item)	0.828	0.162	0.174	0.307
w/o MLP (simple dot-product interaction)	0.821	0.165	0.176	0.312
Only Autoencoder + User–Item Embeddings	0.834	0.158	0.169	0.298
Matrix Factorization (MF baseline)	0.871	0.135	0.149	0.278

Replacing the MLP with a simple dot product consistently reduces performance across all datasets, with drops of around 3–6%, confirming the importance of modeling high-order non-linear interactions. Although embeddings with an autoencoder perform better than matrix factorization, they still lag the full model by 12–25% depending on the dataset. These percentage differences confirm that each module, the autoencoder, context encoder, and MLP, contributes significantly, and their integration is essential for achieving robust performance under sparsity and cold start conditions.

4.4 *Sparsity and Cold-Start Analysis*

Another issue that is still critical in recommender systems is the phenomenon of sparsity and cold start because new users interact to search, and new items do not have previous interactions to rely on [29]. In high sparsity, our model proves to be highly robust, and the Recall@10 improvement over MF is substantial (0.118 to 0.162) on Amazon-Beauty and the HitRate@10 is improved (0.212 to 0.307) on Yelp [30]. The baseline procedures used in cold-start environments suffer severe performance loss, and our solution remains more accurate by using contextual features and representations based on autoencoders [31]. As an example, the new-user Recall@10 on Yelp enhances its value, 0.087 up to 0.145, and the new-item NDCG changes its value, 0.092 to 0.158 on Amazon-Games (Table 2). Such findings corroborate the fact that autoencoder regularization when combined with context-sensitive encoding is a practical way of overcoming sparsity and cold-start issues compared to the state-of-the-art approaches [32].

Table 2

Sparsity and cold start performance comparison

Dataset / Scenario	Metric	MF Baseline	Proposed Model	Improvement
Amazon-Beauty (Sparse Users)	Recall@10	0.118	0.162	+37%
Yelp (Sparse Users)	HitRate@10	0.212	0.307	+45%
Yelp (New Users)	Recall@10	0.087	0.145	+66%
Amazon-Games (New Items)	NDCG@10	0.092	0.158	+72%

4.5 *Comparison with State-of-the-Art Models*

To validate the effectiveness of our proposed model, we compared it against several state-of-the-art baselines widely used in recommendation research (Table 3). Traditional matrix factorization methods such as SVD++ and Factorization Machines provide strong baselines but struggle under sparsity [33]. More recent neural collaborative filtering approaches like NeuMF [34] capture nonlinear interactions but are limited in handling context. Context-aware deep models such as Attentive Contextual Recommender (ACR) [35] and Contextual Graph Neural Networks (CGNN) [36] incorporate auxiliary features but remain sensitive to cold-start scenarios.

Table 3

Comparison with state-of-the-art models

Model	MovieLens-1M (RMSE ↓)	Amazon-Beauty (Recall@10 ↑)	Amazon-Games (NDCG@10 ↑)	Yelp (HitRate@10 ↑)
MF	0.871	0.135	0.149	0.278
SVD++	0.852	0.129	0.138	0.268
NeuMF	0.811	0.152	0.158	0.298
DeepFM	0.838	0.161	0.172	0.302
ACR	0.802	0.161	0.165	0.312
CGNN	0.795	0.168	0.172	0.324
CVAE-Rec	0.789	0.172	0.178	0.329
ColdNAS	0.783	0.176	0.186	0.331
Proposed	0.772	0.180	0.191	0.336

5. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper proposes a deep learning-based context-aware recommendation framework that integrates autoencoder regularization with neural interaction modeling to address data sparsity and cold-start challenges. By jointly learning compact latent representations and contextual embeddings, the model captures complex user-item-context relationships while remaining computationally efficient. The results of the experiments based on MovieLens-1M, Amazon (Beauty and Games), and Yelp demonstrate stable alleviation on robust bases like NeuMF, CVAE-Rec, and ColdNAS and attain up to 15% improvement in ranking metrics (Recall@10 and NDCG@10). Under high sparsity, Recall@10 on Amazon-Beauty improves from 0.118 to 0.162, while in cold-start settings, new-user Recall@10 on Yelp increases from 0.087 to 0.145, and new-item NDCG@10 on Amazon-Games rises from 0.092 to 0.158. Moreover, the model also reaches 1.8 times the convergence speed and consumes 23% of the GPU memory compared to graph-based and generative baselines. The same is verified by experiments in ablation and scalability, which indicate a useful trade-off between accuracy and efficiency of large-scale recommendation systems regarding the combined autoencoder, context encoder, and neural interaction modules.

Conflicts of Interest: No conflict of interest

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