An Analytic and Probabilistic Approach to the Problem of Matroid Representibility

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Abstract

We introduce various quantities that can be defined for an arbitrary matroid, and show that certain conditions on these quantities imply that a matroid is not representable over $\mathbb{F}_q$. Mostly, for a matroid of rank $r$, we examine the proportion of size-$(r - k)$ subsets that are dependent, and give bounds, in terms of the cardinality of the matroid and $q$ a prime power, for this proportion, below which the matroid is not representable over $\mathbb{F}_q$. We also explore connections between the defined quantities and demonstrate that they can be used to prove that random matrices have high proportions of subsets of columns independent.

1 Introduction of Quantities

By a subset of a matrix we will mean a subset of its columns, and by its size we will mean the total number of columns it has. We will say a matroid is $q$-representable if it has a matrix representation over $\mathbb{F}_q$.

1.1 A Generalization of Uniformity

First, we generalize a basic definition.

Definition 1. A matroid $M$ of rank $r$ is said to be uniform if every size-$r$ subset of $M$ is independent.

Definition 2. We define the $k$-dependence of a matroid of rank $r$ as the proportion of its size-$(r - k)$ subsets that are dependent. When a matrix has $k$-dependence $0$, we call it $k$-independent, otherwise we call it $k$-dependent. For a matroid $M$, we will denote rank by $r(M)$, cardinality by $s(M)$, and $k$-dependence by $d(M, k)$.

Note that, by these definitions, a matroid $M$ is uniform if $d(M, 0) = 0$, i.e., if it is 0-independent.

1.2 Optimal Representable Matrices

It is natural to try to optimize some property of a matroid given given certain constraints, especially $q$-representability. We use the following symbols to denote optimal achievable quantities:

Definition 3.
• By \( \text{Ind}_q(r,k,d) \), we mean the largest \( s \) such that there exists some full-rank \( r \times s \) matrix \( M \) over \( \mathbb{F}_q \) with \( k \)-dependence \( \leq d \). Equivalently, it is the size of the largest \( q \)-representable rank-\( r \) matroid with \( k \)-dependence \( \leq d \).

• By \( D_q(r,k,s) \), we mean the smallest \( d \) such that there exists some full-rank \( r \times s \) matrix \( M \) over \( \mathbb{F}_q \) with \( k \)-dependence \( \leq d \). Equivalently, it is the smallest \( k \)-dependence of any \( q \)-representable rank-\( r \) matroid of size \( s \).

These quantities prove useful because we can use them to say the following:

Lemma 1. Let \( M \) be a matroid. If, for some \( k \),

- If \( \text{Ind}_q(r(M),k,d(M,k)) \leq s(M) \) or
- If \( D_q(r(M),k,s(M)) \leq d(M,k) \) for some \( k \),

then \( M \) is not \( q \)-representable.

2 Equivalences of Bounds

An equivalence between bounds on \( \text{Ind} \) and on \( D \) exist due to the following:

Lemma 2. As a function of \( s \), \( D_q(r,k,s) \) is non-decreasing.

Proof. Let \( M \) be a minimally \( k \)-dependent \( q \)-representable matroid of size \( s \). That is, because we are dealing with finite sets and infima are always achievable,

\[
d(M) = D_q(r(M),k,s(M)).
\]

Then, for every matroid \( M' \) obtained by deletion of one element from \( M \),

\[
d(M') \geq D_q(r(M'),k,s(M')) = D_q(r(M) - 1, k, s(M) - 1).
\]

Thus, because each size-(\( n \) \(- \) \( k \)) subset is counted an equal number of times in the measurement of the \( d(M') \),

\[
D_q(r(M),k,s(M)) \geq D_q(r(M) - 1, k, s(M) - 1).
\]

The equivalence between bounds can be stated thus:

Lemma 3. • If, for some \( q, r, k, d \), \( \text{Ind}_q(r,k,d) < s \), then, for any \( s' \geq s \), it holds that

\[
D_q(r,k,s') > d.
\]

• If, for some \( q, r, k, s \), \( D_q(r,k,s) > d \), then, for any \( d' \leq d \), it holds that

\[
\text{Ind}_q(r,k,d') < s.
\]

3 Explicit Bounds

We give various explicit bounds on \( \text{Ind} \) and \( D \), on whichever of the two the explanation of the bound is simplest. In each case, the equivalent statement on the other function is implied.

Theorem 1. \( \text{Ind}_q(r,k,0) \leq q^{k+1}(r-k-1) \)
Proof. Suppose some matroid $M$ is representable $q$-representable. Then some $r(M) \times s(M)$ matrix $M'$ over $\mathbb{F}_q$ can be constructed with all size-$(n - k)$ subsets independent.

We treat the columns of $M'$ as vectors in $\mathbb{F}_q^r$, and assume that none of them are the zero vector.

Observe that at most $r - k - 1$ columns of $M'$ can lie within a $(r - k - 1)$-plane. This implies that the proportion between $(r - k - 1)$ and the number of points in an $(r - k - 1)$-plane bounds the proportion of the total number of vectors in $\mathbb{F}_q^r$ that are represented as columns in $M'$.

Explicitly, this proportion is

$$\frac{r-k-1}{q^{r-k-1}}$$

out of $q^r$ vectors in the space. Thus, the total number of columns is bounded by

$$q^{r-k-1} = q^{k+1}(r-k-1).$$

Theorem 2. For some integer $n$, $D_q(r, k, n \frac{n-1}{n-1})$ is minimized by the matrix $M$ consisting of $n$ copies of each unique nonzero vector in $\mathbb{F}_q^r$ up to scaling.

That is, the matrix consists of exactly $n$ representatives of each point in the projective space.

Proof. Let $M$ as above. The claim is clearly true for $k = n - 2$, in which case $M$ is the only vector of the required size that is $(n - 2)$-dependent. We proceed inductively. Let $M$ as above, $\vec{v} \in M$. We can view $M$ as a multiset of points in the projective space $\mathbb{P}^{r-1}$. Let $\mathbb{P}^{r-2}$ be some hyperplane in $\mathbb{P}^{r-1}$. Then a set $S$ including one copy of $\vec{v}$ is independent if and only if the projection of $S \setminus \{\vec{v}\}$ from $\vec{v}$ onto $\mathbb{P}^{r-2}$ is independent. A set containing two copies of $\vec{v}$ is dependent. Thus, removing all copies of $\vec{v}$ from $M$, we can count the number of independent size-$(n-k)$ sets containing $\vec{v}$ by counting the number of independent size-$(n-k)$ points of the projection of the remaining members of $M$ onto $\mathbb{P}^{r-2}$ as above. If $M$ contains one column for each vector in $\mathbb{F}_q^r$, then exactly $q+1$ vectors will be projected to each point in the hyperplane. The $(k-1)$-dependence for that arrangement of vectors in the hyperplane, by the inductive hypothesis, is optimal.

4 Random Matrices

Defining two more quantities, this approach can be used to prove that, with very high probability, a very high proportion of the subsets of a certain size of a random matrix are independent.

By “random matrix,” we mean a matrix whose columns are randomly chosen nonzero vectors.

Definition 4. Let $\text{Ind}_q(r, k, d, p)$ be the largest $s$, or $D_q(r, k, s, d, p)$ the smallest $d$, or $P_q(r, k, d, s) \leq d$.

Lemma 4. Denote the probability that $(r-k)$ nonzero vectors chosen randomly from $\mathbb{F}_q^r$ are independent by $\pi_{q,r,k}$. Then,

$$\pi_{q,r,k} = \prod_{i=0}^{r-k} \frac{q^r-q^i}{q^r-1}.$$

Proof. Each term of the product divides the number of points outside an $i$-plane by the number of nonzero points in the space. This is the probability that, given that we have already picked $i$ independent vectors, that the next one we pick will lie outside the span of those $i$.

Theorem 3.

$$D_q(r, k, s) \leq 1 - \pi_{q,r,k}.$$
Proof. Take a certain choice of \((r - k)\) distinct integers between 1 and \(r\). These correspond to a single size-\((r - k)\) subset of a matrix of size \(s\). Then, the proportion of this particular subset of all size-\(s\) matrices that are independent is equivalently \(\pi_{q,r,k}\). Since this proportion is equal for any choice of subset, we have that the proportion of all size-\((r - k)\) subsets of all matrices of size \(s\) is \(\pi_{q,r,k}\). Thus, some matrix achieves this proportion.

\begin{corollary}
1 - \(\pi_{q,r,k}\) is the mean \(k\)-dependence of all \(r \times s\) matrices without zero columns.
\end{corollary}

Because \(\pi_{q,r,k}\) is in general very close to one, viewing \(p\) as a proportion of the set of all \(r \times s\) matrices, we can get bounds on \(D_q(r, k, s, p)\). Specifically,

\begin{theorem}
For any \(q, r, k, s, p\),
\[
D_q(r, k, s, p) \leq \frac{1 - \pi_{q,d,k}}{p}.
\]
\end{theorem}

\begin{corollary}
For any \(q, r, k, s, d\),
\[
P_q(r, k, s, d) \leq \frac{1 - \pi_{q,d,k}}{d}.
\]
Note that these quantities do not depend on \(s\).

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