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Spectral Graph Theory: Eigenvalues and Graph Properties for Network Analysis

Dr. Ramachandra. S.R[1*], Jyothi .M J[2]

[1*]Department of Mathematics Government College (Autonomous), Mandya- 571401 India
[2]Department of Mathematics, Maharanis Science College for Women, Mysore-570005, India

Abstract
Spectral graph theory explores the relationship between the spectrum of a graph's adjacency matrix or Laplacian matrix and various structural properties of the graph. Eigenvalues and eigenvectors of these matrices have been shown to provide valuable insights into the connectivity, robustness, and dynamics of networks. In this paper, we review key concepts in spectral graph theory and explore their applications in network analysis, including community detection, clustering, centrality, and network synchronization. the use of spectral methods for analysing large-scale real-world networks such as social, biological, and transportation systems.

Keywords: Spectral Graph Theory, Eigenvalues, Network Analysis, Laplacian Matrix, Adjacency Matrix, Community Detection, Graph Clustering, Centrality, Network Robustness

1. Introduction

Spectral graph theory is an area of mathematics that explores the relationship between a graph and the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of its associated matrices, particularly the adjacency matrix and the Laplacian matrix. By studying these spectral properties, researchers and practitioners can gain deep insights into the structure and dynamics of networks, which has wide-ranging applications in fields such as computer science, physics, sociology, biology, and engineering. The core idea of spectral graph theory is that the spectral properties of a graph—such as the eigenvalues of its matrices—can provide crucial information about the graph's overall structure, connectivity, and behavior, and can thus be used as a powerful tool for analyzing complex networks.

the concept of eigenvalues and eigenvectors of a graph's adjacency or Laplacian matrices. The **adjacency matrix** of a graph is a square matrix where each entry represents whether there is an edge between two vertices. In contrast, the **Laplacian matrix** is a more refined structure that encodes information about both the degree of the vertices and their adjacency. The eigenvalues of these matrices are of particular interest because they are linked to various important graph properties. For example, the largest eigenvalue of the adjacency matrix can reflect the overall connectivity of the graph, while the eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix are associated with the graph's spectral gap, which can indicate how well-connected the graph is. These spectral properties have direct implications for understanding the robustness, resilience, and efficiency of networks.

One of the most important applications of spectral graph theory is in **network analysis**. Networks in real life, whether social networks, communication networks, biological networks, or transportation networks, exhibit complex patterns of connectivity that are often difficult to understand or visualize. Spectral graph theory offers a way to extract meaningful patterns from these networks by focusing on their eigenvalues and eigenvectors. For example, the **second smallest eigenvalue** of the Laplacian matrix, known as the **algebraic connectivity** of a graph, provides a measure of how well-connected a network is. A higher algebraic connectivity indicates that the network is less vulnerable to disconnection, while a lower value suggests the network may be more prone to fragmentation.

In addition to connectivity, spectral graph theory has significant applications in **community detection** and **clustering** within networks. The eigenvectors corresponding to the largest eigenvalues of the graph's Laplacian matrix can be used to identify groups of nodes that are more densely connected to each other than to the rest of the graph. This is particularly useful in fields like social network analysis, where the goal is to identify communities of users with similar interests or behaviors. Spectral clustering, a technique based on these ideas, is widely used in machine learning and data mining for partitioning large datasets into meaningful subgroups.

Another key application of spectral graph theory is in the study of **graph stability** and **resilience**. Eigenvalues are often used to assess the stability of a network under various conditions, such as when nodes or edges are added or removed. Understanding the spectral properties of a graph can help design networks that are more robust to failure or attacks. For example, the **spectral gap**, which is the difference between the largest and second-largest eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix, can give insights into how easily a network can be separated into disconnected components, which is critical for assessing network reliability.

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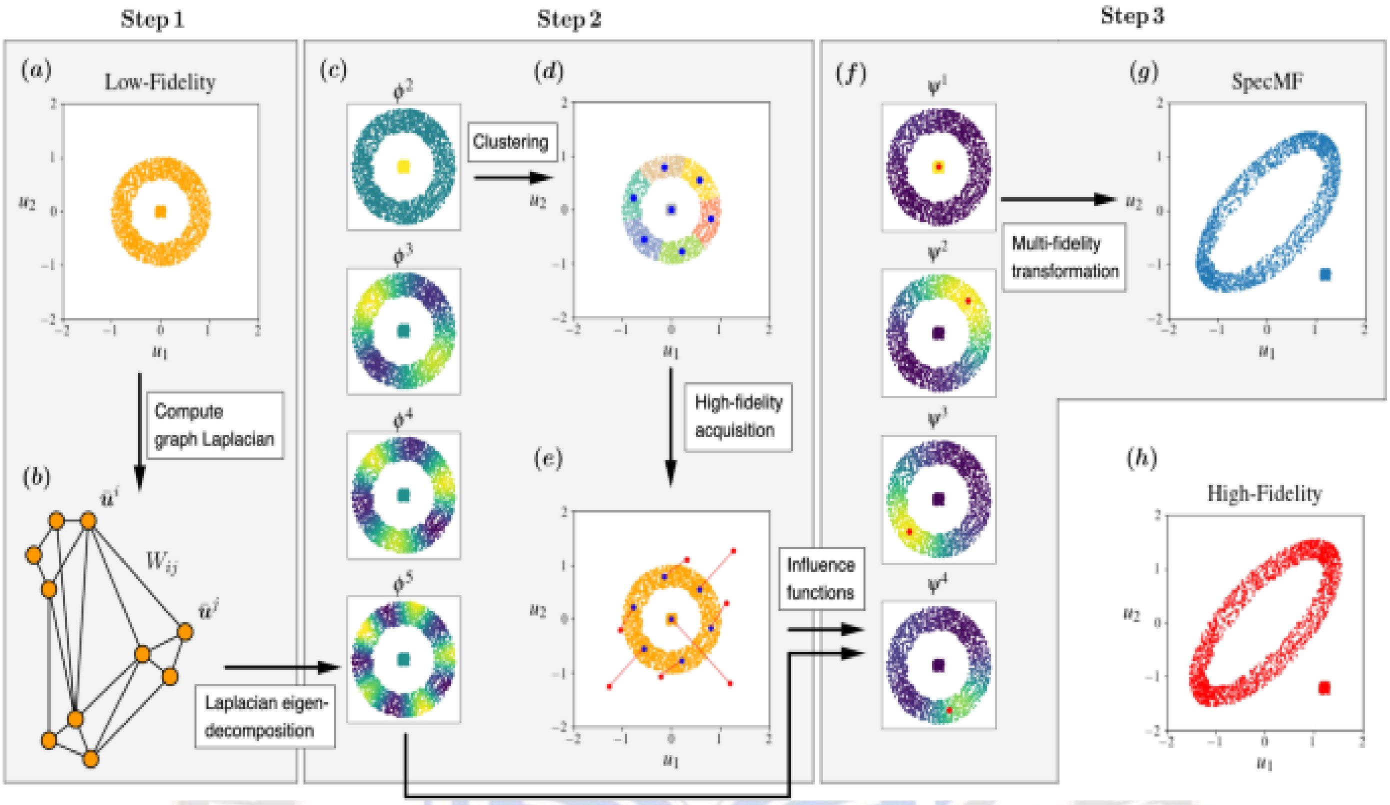

Fig -1 The workflow for the spectral multi-fidelity (SpecMF) method applied to a sample problem is as follows: (a) Start by generating low-fidelity data. (b) Use this low-fidelity data to compute a graph Laplacian. (c) Perform an eigen-decomposition of the graph Laplacian. (d) Apply spectral clustering to the low-fidelity data and identify the data points nearest to the cluster centroids. (e) Collect high-fidelity data only for these identified points. (f) Solve a convex minimization problem to determine an influence function for each point that has a corresponding high-fidelity counterpart, based on the low-lying eigenfunctions of the graph Laplacian. (g) Use these influence functions to construct a multi-fidelity approximation of the data set. (h) Finally, compare this multi-fidelity approximation to the corresponding high-fidelity data set for evaluation.

2. Spectral Graph Theory: Fundamental Concepts

Spectral graph theory is a powerful mathematical framework that relates the structure of a graph to the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of matrices associated with the graph. These matrices, particularly the adjacency matrix and the Laplacian matrix, serve as central tools for analyzing the properties of graphs.

2.1 The Adjacency Matrix

The **adjacency matrix** A of a graph G= (V, E) is a square matrix that provides a compact representation of the graph's connectivity. The graph G consists of a set of vertices V and edges E. The adjacency matrix A is defined such that its entries represent the connections between vertices. For an undirected graph, the adjacency matrix is symmetric, meaning that $A_{ij}=A_{ji}$, where:

a) $A_{ij}=1$ if there is an edge between vertices *i* and *j*,
b) $A_{ij}=0$ if there is no edge between vertices *i* and *j*.

For weighted graphs, the entry A_{ij} can take the weight of the edge between vertices iii and j. In the case of directed graphs, the matrix is typically not symmetric, and the edges are represented with directionality, so A_{ij} may differ from A_{ji} .

The spectrum of the adjacency matrix — that is, its eigenvalues and eigenvectors — plays a crucial role in characterizing the graph. The **eigenvalues** of the adjacency matrix provide insights into the overall structure and connectivity of the graph. For instance, in a connected graph, the largest eigenvalue is related to the graph's overall "expansion" or how well the graph can be traversed from one vertex to another. The **eigenvectors** corresponding to the adjacency matrix's eigenvalues represent modes of "vibration" or "oscillation" on the graph, with particular relevance in fields like physics and network theory.

A particularly well-known result is the **algebraic connectivity** of the graph, which is the second-smallest eigenvalue of the Laplacian matrix (discussed below). It has important implications for the graph's robustness and resilience to disconnection. Furthermore, the eigenvectors corresponding to the largest eigenvalues of the adjacency matrix can be used for spectral clustering, a technique for grouping vertices into clusters based on their connectivity.

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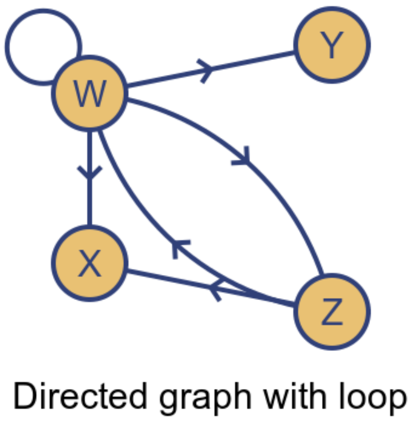


	W	X	Y	Z
W	1	1	1	1
X	0	0	0	0
Y	0	0	0	0
Z	1	1	0	0

Fig -2

2.2 The Laplacian Matrix

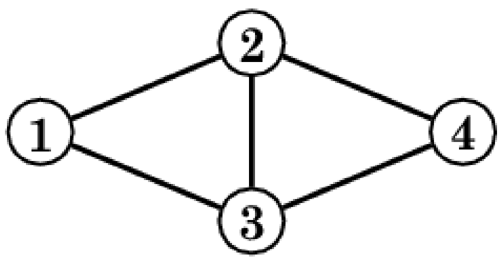
The **Laplacian matrix** L of a graph is another important matrix in spectral graph theory, and it is defined as L=D−AL, where D is the **degree matrix** and A is the adjacency matrix. The degree matrix D is a diagonal matrix where the diagonal entry D_{ii} represents the degree (i.e., the number of edges) of vertex i. The Laplacian matrix thus encodes information about both the local degree of each vertex and the connectivity between vertices.

The Laplacian matrix has several important properties. First, its eigenvalues are always non-negative, with 0 being an eigenvalue corresponding to the eigenvector of all ones. The multiplicity of the eigenvalue 0 is related to the number of connected components in the graph. Specifically, for a connected graph, there is exactly one eigenvalue equal to 0, and for each disconnected component, there is an additional eigenvalue equal to 0.

The eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix are particularly significant in the study of the **graph's connectivity** and **diffusion processes**. A key quantity that arises from the Laplacian matrix is the **algebraic connectivity** (often referred to as the Fiedler value), which is the second-smallest eigenvalue of the Laplacian. This value provides a measure of the graph's overall connectivity. A larger algebraic connectivity typically indicates that the graph is more robust and harder to disconnect, while a smaller algebraic connectivity suggests that the graph is more vulnerable to fragmentation.

In the context of **diffusion processes** such as random walks, the Laplacian matrix is instrumental in understanding the flow of information or particles through a network. For example, the eigenvectors of the Laplacian matrix describe the modes of diffusion or the "steady states" that the system will converge to after a long time. The corresponding eigenvalues determine the rate at which diffusion processes occur. The smallest eigenvalue, λ0=0, corresponds to the steady state, while higher eigenvalues influence how quickly the system reaches equilibrium.

$$D = \begin{bmatrix} 2 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 3 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 2 \end{bmatrix}$$



$$A = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \qquad L = \begin{bmatrix} 2 & -1 & -1 & 0 \\ -1 & 3 & -1 & -1 \\ -1 & -1 & 3 & -1 \\ 0 & -1 & -1 & 2 \end{bmatrix}$$

Fig -3

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Applications of Spectral Graph Theory
The study of the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of the adjacency and Laplacian matrices has numerous applications. One of the key areas is **spectral clustering**, which uses the eigenvectors of the adjacency or Laplacian matrix to partition the graph into clusters of closely connected vertices. Spectral clustering is widely used in data mining, machine learning, and image segmentation.
In **network theory**, spectral graph theory helps analyze the robustness and connectivity of networks, making it useful in social network analysis, biological networks, and communication systems. For instance, understanding the spectral properties of the Laplacian matrix can help identify bottlenecks or weak points in a network that could be potential points of failure.
In **random walks** and **diffusion processes**, spectral graph theory provides tools to model and understand how information spreads through networks. The eigenvectors of the Laplacian matrix can be used to analyze the spread of rumors, diseases, or other processes in a network.

3. Eigenvalues and Graph Properties
Eigenvalues and eigenvectors provide a powerful tool for understanding the structural properties and dynamics of graphs. By analyzing the spectral characteristics of a graph, particularly through the adjacency and Laplacian matrices, one can infer a variety of crucial properties about the graph's connectivity, clustering, centrality, and the behavior of dynamical systems on the graph. In this section, we explore several key graph properties that can be derived from the spectral analysis of a graph.

3.1 Graph Connectivity
Graph connectivity is a fundamental property that describes the degree to which the vertices of a graph are connected. One of the most important spectral measures of connectivity is the **algebraic connectivity** of the graph, which is the second-smallest eigenvalue of the Laplacian matrix, often referred to as the **Fiedler value** (Fiedler, 1973). The algebraic connectivity provides a quantifiable measure of how well-connected a graph is: the larger the Fiedler value, the more robustly connected the graph is. In fact, if the algebraic connectivity is large, the graph tends to be more resilient to disconnection when nodes or edges are removed.
More formally, a graph is connected if and only if the smallest eigenvalue of its Laplacian matrix (which is always 0) has exactly one zero eigenvalue, and the second smallest eigenvalue is strictly greater than zero. If this second eigenvalue is zero, the graph is disconnected, meaning that there exist isolated components that are not reachable from each other (Chung, 1997). The Fiedler value can, therefore, be used as an indicator of the graph's structural integrity and vulnerability to fragmentation.

3.2 Spectral Partitioning and Clustering
Spectral partitioning leverages the eigenvectors of the Laplacian matrix to divide a graph into subgraphs or clusters. The most common method of spectral clustering involves computing the eigenvectors corresponding to the smallest non-zero eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix and using these eigenvectors to partition the graph (Ng, Jordan, & Weiss, 2002). The **Fiedler vector**, which corresponds to the second-smallest eigenvalue of the Laplacian matrix, is particularly useful for **bipartitioning** a graph. By examining the signs of the entries in the Fiedler vector, one can split the graph into two sets of vertices, with edges crossing between the sets minimized.
Further eigenvectors of the Laplacian matrix provide more granular partitions, and the number of eigenvectors chosen typically correlates to the number of clusters desired in the graph. Spectral clustering is particularly effective in identifying clusters in graphs with non-convex shapes or complex structures, which are difficult to detect using traditional partitioning algorithms (Luxburg, 2007). This technique has widespread applications in fields such as machine learning, data mining, and image segmentation.

3.3 Community Detection
Community detection is a critical problem in network analysis, where the goal is to identify groups or communities of nodes that are more densely connected internally than with the rest of the graph. Spectral methods, particularly those based on the **Laplacian** or the **normalized Laplacian**, are widely used for this purpose. One common approach is to look for **graph cuts** that minimize the number of edges between communities while maximizing the number of edges within each community (Girvan & Newman, 2002). Spectral methods provide an elegant way of solving this problem by utilizing the eigenvectors corresponding to the Laplacian's smallest eigenvalues, which reveal the most "natural" ways to partition a graph into distinct communities.
The use of spectral clustering for community detection has been especially successful in social network analysis, where communities often correspond to groups of users with similar interests or behaviors. The eigenvalues of the normalized Laplacian are particularly effective in this setting, as they capture the global structure of the graph while taking into account vertex degrees, making them suitable for detecting communities in graphs with highly heterogeneous node degree distributions (Newman, 2006).

3.4 Centrality Measures
In many networks, it is crucial to identify the most important or influential nodes, known as **central nodes**. One widely used centrality measure derived from spectral graph theory is **eigenvector centrality** (Bonacich, 1972). This measure assigns a centrality score to each node based on the centrality of its neighbors. More precisely, the eigenvector centrality of a node is the corresponding entry in the eigenvector associated with the largest eigenvalue of the adjacency matrix. The idea is that a node is important if it is connected to other important nodes.

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Eigenvector centrality has been applied in various contexts, including the identification of influential individuals in social networks, key players in communication networks, or critical hubs in biological networks. For instance, in social network analysis, eigenvector centrality can help identify influential users or "leaders" whose connections to other central individuals amplify their importance in the network (Freeman, 1979). This method contrasts with simpler measures such as degree centrality, which only considers the number of direct connections a node has, ignoring the quality or importance of those connections.

3.5 Synchronization and Dynamics

Spectral graph theory is also a powerful tool for understanding the dynamics of processes occurring on networks, such as synchronization, diffusion, and information spreading. The **Laplacian matrix** plays a crucial role in analyzing how processes evolve on a network. One key application is in the study of **synchronization** in systems of oscillators, where each node represents an oscillator and edges represent interactions between them. The eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix determine the **synchronization time**, or how quickly the system reaches a consensus or equilibrium (Arenas, Dıaz-Guilera, Kurths, Moreno, & Zhou, 2008).

In the context of **information spreading** or **diffusion processes**, the Laplacian matrix can be used to model how information or diseases spread through a network. The **eigenvalues** of the Laplacian provide insight into the **speed** of diffusion processes. In particular, the spectral gap between the second-smallest and largest eigenvalues of the Laplacian is related to how quickly the system reaches equilibrium. These spectral properties are also useful in analyzing the **resilience** of networks under node or edge failure. For example, the algebraic connectivity of a network indicates how difficult it is to fragment the graph by removing edges or nodes, which has practical implications for network robustness (Strogatz, 2001).

4. Applications of Spectral Graph Theory in Network Analysis

Spectral graph theory offers powerful tools for analyzing the structure and dynamics of various types of networks. By leveraging the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of graph matrices such as the adjacency and Laplacian matrices, spectral methods provide valuable insights into connectivity, community structure, and the flow of information within networks. The applications of spectral graph theory are widespread, ranging from **social network analysis** to **biological networks** and **communication systems.**

4.1 Social Network Analysis

In the context of **social networks**, spectral graph theory is a valuable tool for understanding the structure and dynamics of relationships between individuals or organizations. One of the most prominent applications is **community detection**, where spectral clustering techniques are used to uncover subgroups of individuals who are more tightly connected to each other than to the rest of the network (Newman & Girvan, 2004). The eigenvectors of the Laplacian matrix, particularly the Fiedler vector, are used to identify natural divisions in the network, helping to detect clusters or communities within a social network.

For example, in online social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter, spectral methods can be used to identify groups of users who interact frequently, share similar interests, or engage in similar activities. These communities can represent various social groups, such as interest-based communities or geographically clustered groups. Additionally, spectral graph theory is often applied to identify **influential nodes**, such as opinion leaders or key influencers in a social network. Eigenvector centrality, derived from the eigenvector corresponding to the largest eigenvalue of the adjacency matrix, is commonly used to quantify the importance of nodes within the network. This method has proven effective in pinpointing influential individuals whose actions or opinions can significantly affect the network's behavior (Bonacich, 1972).

Moreover, spectral methods are useful for understanding the dynamics of information spread in social networks. Models of **information diffusion**, such as viral marketing or the spread of rumors, often rely on the eigenvalues of the Laplacian matrix to assess how quickly information will propagate through a network and how the network's structure influences the spread of ideas or behaviors (Kempe, Kleinberg, & Tardos, 2003).

4.2 Biological Networks

In **biological networks**, such as **protein-protein interaction (PPI) networks** or **gene regulatory networks**, spectral graph theory is instrumental in uncovering the functional organization and dynamics of complex biological systems. In these networks, nodes represent biological entities (e.g., proteins or genes), and edges represent interactions or regulatory relationships between them. By studying the spectral properties of the Laplacian matrix, researchers can identify **functional modules** or **pathways**—sets of proteins or genes that are likely to cooperate to perform a particular biological function.

For instance, in PPI networks, spectral clustering has been used to identify clusters of proteins that interact more frequently with each other than with other proteins in the network, potentially revealing groups of proteins that work together in cellular processes such as signal transduction or metabolism (Sharan, Suthram, Kelley, & Karp, 2005). Similarly, in gene regulatory networks, spectral methods can help discover groups of genes that are co-regulated and likely function together in specific biological processes (Liu et al., 2009).

The **algebraic connectivity** of a network also has applications in biological systems. A high algebraic connectivity indicates a robust and well-connected biological network, whereas low algebraic connectivity can suggest the presence of isolated modules or potential

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vulnerabilities in the system. This has implications for understanding the resilience of biological systems to perturbations, such as genetic mutations or disruptions in protein function (Chung, 1997). Spectral graph theory thus helps not only in mapping the structure of biological networks but also in providing insights into their functional dynamics and stability.

4.3 Transportation and Communication Networks

Spectral graph theory is also widely applied in the analysis and optimization of **transportation networks** and **communication systems**, where the goal is to enhance efficiency, reduce congestion, and improve network resilience. One important application is the detection of **bottlenecks** in transportation networks, such as road networks or railway systems. By analyzing the spectral properties of the graph representing the network, it is possible to identify critical edges (i.e., road segments or railway links) whose removal would cause the network to fragment or experience significant delays. This is especially important for optimizing traffic flow and routing in large-scale transportation systems (Papadimitriou et al., 2006).

In **communication networks**, spectral graph theory can be used to identify **critical nodes**—routers, servers, or other components—that play a crucial role in maintaining the network's connectivity. The removal of such nodes could lead to significant disruptions in service or cause the entire network to collapse. Eigenvector centrality is frequently used in this context to identify the most important nodes in terms of their connectivity to other highly connected nodes. This is crucial for network resilience, as protecting or reinforcing these critical nodes can help prevent large-scale disruptions, such as those caused by cyberattacks or infrastructure failures (Newman, 2002).

Moreover, spectral methods can be applied to optimize **routing algorithms** in communication networks, particularly for ensuring efficient data transfer and minimizing delays. By studying the Laplacian matrix and its eigenvalues, it is possible to understand how information flows through a network and to design more efficient protocols for communication, particularly in large, distributed systems like the internet (Xia & Towsley, 2005). Spectral graph theory provides a mathematical framework for understanding the flow of information across nodes and edges, which is essential for improving the design and operation of communication infrastructures.

5. Advanced Topics and Future Directions

Spectral graph theory has provided significant insights into the structure and dynamics of networks, with applications spanning diverse fields such as social network analysis, biology, and communications.

Scalability

One of the key challenges facing the widespread application of spectral graph theory is **scalability**. Many of the classical spectral methods, such as eigenvalue decomposition of the adjacency or Laplacian matrix, involve computationally expensive operations, particularly for large-scale networks. As the size of networks continues to grow in fields like social media, biological networks, and telecommunications, the need for efficient algorithms that can handle large graphs becomes critical. Computing the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of large matrices is often infeasible for networks with millions of nodes or edges, and existing algorithms can be prohibitively slow for these settings (Chung, 1997).

To address these scalability concerns, recent research has focused on developing **approximate spectral algorithms** and **randomized methods** that can compute eigenvalues and eigenvectors more efficiently. For example, algorithms like Lanczos or Arnoldi iterations allow for approximate eigen-decomposition with fewer computational resources (Saad, 2003). Additionally, the development of **graph sparsification** techniques, which reduce the size of a graph while preserving its spectral properties, has proven useful for speeding up spectral computations (Spielman & Teng, 2004). Another area of active research is **dynamic spectral graph theory**, which aims to extend spectral methods to networks that evolve over time, allowing for real-time updates to spectral properties as nodes and edges are added or removed (Mahdavi & Moser, 2012). The combination of these techniques holds the potential to make spectral methods more scalable and applicable to dynamic, real-world networks.

Non-linear Dynamics

Another limitation of traditional spectral methods is their reliance on **linear dynamics**. Many real-world networks exhibit non-linear behaviors that are not well captured by the standard spectral graph theory. For example, in **social networks**, the influence of a user on another may not be proportional to the number of shared connections, but instead might exhibit a non-linear dependence on various factors such as the user's activity level, sentiment, or context (Saramäki et al., 2014). Similarly, in **biological networks**, interactions between molecules or genes can be highly non-linear, influenced by complex feedback loops, thresholds, and other phenomena that traditional linear spectral methods cannot account for.

To address these challenges, researchers have been developing extensions of spectral graph theory that incorporate **non-linear dynamics**. One promising approach is the study of **non-linear Laplacians**, which modify the standard Laplacian operator to capture non-linear relationships between nodes (Coifman & Lafon, 2006). Another area of interest is the use of **higher-order interactions**, such as **hypergraphs**, where edges can connect more than two nodes. These structures provide a natural framework for modeling complex interactions in systems such as protein networks, where interactions often involve multiple components (Benson et al., 2016). Additionally, the integration of spectral methods with **dynamical systems theory** is opening up new avenues for studying the behavior of networks with non-linear dynamics, including synchronization and collective behavior (Arenas et al., 2008).

Applications in Machine Learning

The intersection of **spectral graph theory** and **machine learning** has emerged as a vibrant area of research, driven by the growing importance of network-based data in machine learning applications. One of the most significant developments in recent years is the rise of **graph neural networks (GNNs)**, which leverage graph structures to improve the performance of deep learning models. Spectral methods play a crucial role in GNNs, particularly in the design of **graph convolutions**, where convolution operations are defined in the spectral domain based on the eigenvalues and eigenvectors of the graph Laplacian (Bruna et al., 2014). Spectral graph convolution allows GNNs to process graph-structured data more efficiently by capturing the global structure of the graph, as opposed to traditional spatial-based methods.

Further research into the integration of **spectral graph theory** with machine learning focuses on enhancing the **expressive power** of graph models, developing algorithms that can handle large, dynamic graphs, and designing models that can learn the spectral properties of graphs directly from data (Kipf & Welling, 2016). Another exciting direction is the application of spectral techniques to **graph embedding** methods, which aim to represent graph nodes in a continuous vector space while preserving their structural properties. Spectral embeddings, such as those based on the **Laplacian eigenmaps** or **graph wavelets**, are widely used in network analysis and machine learning tasks like node classification, clustering, and link prediction (Belkin & Niyogi, 2003). As machine learning techniques continue to evolve, the fusion of spectral graph theory and machine learning holds the potential to create more powerful and flexible tools for analyzing complex networks.

6. Conclusion

Spectral graph theory provides a rich mathematical framework for understanding the properties of complex networks. The eigenvalues and eigenvectors of matrices such as the adjacency matrix and Laplacian matrix offer powerful tools for analyzing graph connectivity, clustering, centrality, and network dynamics. With applications ranging from social networks to biological systems and transportation networks, spectral graph theory is essential for understanding the structure and behavior of complex systems. As research in this field continues, new advancements and applications of spectral methods are likely to emerge, particularly in large-scale, dynamic networks.

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