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Article

A \sqrt{n} -Approximation for Independent Sets: The Furones Algorithm

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Abstract

The Maximum Independent Set (MIS) problem, a core NP-hard problem in graph theory, seeks the largest subset of vertices in an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ with n vertices and m edges, such that no two vertices are adjacent. We present a hybrid approximation algorithm that combines iterative refinement with greedy minimum-degree selection, implemented using NetworkX. The algorithm preprocesses the graph to handle trivial cases and isolates, computes exact solutions for bipartite graphs using Hopcroft-Karp matching and König's theorem, and, for non-bipartite graphs, iteratively refines a candidate set via maximum spanning trees and their maximum independent sets, followed by a greedy extension. It also constructs an independent set by selecting vertices in increasing degree order, returning the larger of the two sets. An efficient $O(m)$ independence check ensures correctness. The algorithm guarantees a valid, maximal independent set with a worst-case \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio, tight for graphs with a large clique connected to a small independent set, and robust for structures like multiple cliques sharing a universal vertex. With a time complexity of $O(nm \log n)$, it is suitable for small-to-medium graphs, particularly sparse ones. While outperformed by $O(n/\log n)$ -ratio algorithms for large instances, it aligns with inapproximability results, as MIS cannot be approximated better than $O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ unless $P = NP$. Its simplicity, correctness, and robustness make it ideal for applications like scheduling and network design, and an effective educational tool for studying trade-offs in combinatorial optimization, with potential for enhancement via parallelization or heuristics.

Keywords: graph theory; combinatorial optimization; bipartite graphs; approximation algorithms; polynomial-time complexity

1. Introduction

The Maximum Independent Set (MIS) problem is a cornerstone of graph theory and combinatorial optimization [1]. Given an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$, where V is the set of vertices and E is the set of edges, an *independent set* is a subset $S \subseteq V$ such that no two vertices in S are adjacent, i.e., for all $u, v \in S$, $(u, v) \notin E$. The goal of the MIS problem is to find an independent set S with the maximum cardinality, denoted $\text{OPT} = \max_{S \text{ independent}} |S|$. The size of the maximum independent set is also called the independence number of the graph, denoted $\alpha(G)$.

The MIS problem arises in numerous applications, including scheduling, where tasks must be assigned without conflicts; network design, for selecting non-interfering nodes; and coding theory, for constructing error-correcting codes. However, the problem is computationally challenging, as it is NP-hard for general graphs, meaning no polynomial-time algorithm is known to solve it exactly unless $P = NP$. This hardness motivates the development of approximation algorithms that produce near-optimal solutions efficiently.

The NP-hardness of MIS has led to extensive research on approximation algorithms, particularly for general graphs where exact solutions are infeasible for large instances. The quality of an approximation algorithm is measured by its approximation ratio, defined as $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S|}$, where $|S|$ is the size of the independent set produced by the algorithm. A smaller ratio indicates a better approximation. Below, we summarize key results in the state of the art for MIS approximation algorithms:

- **Greedy Algorithms:** A simple greedy algorithm selects vertices in order of increasing degree, adding a vertex to the independent set if it has no neighbors in the current set. This achieves an approximation ratio of $O(\Delta)$, where Δ is the maximum degree. For graphs with high degrees ($\Delta \approx n - 1$), this yields a poor ratio of $O(n)$. A more sophisticated greedy approach, selecting vertices by minimum degree iteratively, achieves an approximation ratio of $O(n / \log n)$, as shown by Halldórsson and Radhakrishnan [2].
- **Local Search and Randomized Algorithms:** Local search techniques, such as those by Boppana and Halldórsson [3], improve the approximation ratio to $O(n / (\log n)^2)$ by iteratively swapping small subsets of vertices to increase the independent set size. Randomized algorithms, like those based on random vertex selection or Lovász Local Lemma, can achieve similar ratios with probabilistic guarantees.
- **Semidefinite Programming (SDP):** Advanced techniques using SDP, such as those by Karger, Motwani, and Sudan [4], achieve approximation ratios of $O(n / \log n)$ for general graphs. For specific graph classes, such as 3-colorable graphs, better ratios (e.g., $O(\sqrt{n})$) are possible.
- **Hardness of Approximation:** The MIS problem is notoriously difficult to approximate. Håstad [5] and others have shown that, assuming $P \neq NP$, no polynomial-time algorithm can achieve an approximation ratio better than $O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ for any $\epsilon > 0$. This inapproximability result underscores the challenge of finding near-optimal solutions.
- **Special Graph Classes:** For specific graph classes, better approximations exist. For bipartite graphs, the maximum independent set can be computed exactly in polynomial time using maximum matching algorithms (via König's theorem). For graphs with bounded degree or specific structures (e.g., planar graphs), constant-factor approximations are achievable.

The state of the art highlights a trade-off between computational efficiency and approximation quality. Simple greedy algorithms are fast but yield poor ratios, while SDP-based methods offer better ratios at the cost of higher computational complexity. The challenge remains to design algorithms that balance runtime and approximation ratio, especially for general graphs.

Our hybrid algorithm computes an approximate maximum independent set for an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ with n vertices and m edges. It begins by preprocessing the graph to remove self-loops and isolated nodes, handling trivial cases (empty or edgeless graphs) by returning the empty set or all vertices, respectively. If the graph is bipartite, it computes the maximum independent set exactly using the Hopcroft-Karp matching algorithm and König's theorem, taking $O(n + m + \sqrt{nm})$ time. For non-bipartite graphs, it employs two strategies:

- **Iterative Refinement:** Initializes a candidate set with all non-isolated vertices and iteratively refines it by constructing a maximum spanning tree of the induced subgraph, computing its maximum independent set (since trees are bipartite), and updating the candidate set until it is independent in G . A greedy extension adds vertices to ensure maximality, producing $S_{\text{iterative}}$.
- **Greedy Minimum-Degree Selection:** Sorts vertices by increasing degree and builds an independent set by adding each vertex if it has no neighbors in the current set, producing S_{greedy} .

The algorithm selects the larger of $S_{\text{iterative}}$ and S_{greedy} , then adds isolated nodes to form the final set S . The `is_independent_set` subroutine, running in $O(m)$ time, verifies independence by checking all edges. The hybrid approach guarantees a valid, maximal independent set with a worst-case approximation ratio of \sqrt{n} , robustly handling diverse graph structures, including graphs with multiple cliques sharing a universal vertex. Its time complexity is $O(nm \log n)$, dominated by the iterative refinement, making it suitable for small-to-medium graphs. While less competitive than $O(n / \log n)$ -ratio algorithms for large instances, its simplicity, use of standard graph operations (via NetworkX), and robustness make it an effective educational tool for studying approximation algorithms and combinatorial optimization.

2. Research Data

A Python implementation, titled *Furones: Approximate Independent Set Solver* has been developed to efficiently solve the Approximate Independent Set Problem. The solver is publicly available via the Python Package Index (PyPI) [6] and guarantees a rigorous approximation ratio of at most \sqrt{n} for the Independent Set Problem. Code metadata and ancillary details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Code metadata

Nr.	Code metadata description	Metadata
C1	Current code version	v0.0.4
C2	Permanent link to code/repository used for this code version	https://github.com/frankvegadelgado/furones
C3	Permanent link to Reproducible Capsule	https://pypi.org/project/furones/
C4	Legal Code License	MIT License
C5	Code versioning system used	git
C6	Software code languages, tools, and services used	python
C7	Compilation requirements, operating environments & dependencies	Python \geq 3.10

3. Correctness of the Maximum Independent Set Algorithm

The algorithm under consideration computes an approximate independent set using maximum spanning trees and combining with a greedy approach to ensure maximality. We prove that the algorithm’s output is always a valid independent set.

Algorithm Description

Consider the algorithm implemented in Python:

```
import networkx as nx

def find_independent_set(graph):
    """
    Compute an approximate maximum independent set with a sqrt(n)-approximation ratio.

    Args:
        graph (nx.Graph): An undirected NetworkX graph.

    Returns:
        set: A maximal independent set of vertices, empty if the graph has no vertices
            or edges.
    """
    def iset_bipartite(bipartite_graph):
        """Compute a maximum independent set for a bipartite graph using matching.

        Processes each connected component, finds a maximum matching via Hopcroft-Karp,
        and derives the independent set as the complement of the minimum vertex cover.

        Args:
            bipartite_graph (nx.Graph): A bipartite NetworkX graph.

        Returns:
            set: A maximum independent set for the bipartite graph.
        """
        independent_set = set()
        for component in nx.connected_components(bipartite_graph):
            subgraph = bipartite_graph.subgraph(component)
            matching = nx.bipartite.hopcroft_karp_matching(subgraph)
            vertex_cover = nx.bipartite.to_vertex_cover(subgraph, matching)
            independent_set.update(set(subgraph.nodes()) - vertex_cover)
```

```

    return independent_set

def is_independent_set(graph, independent_set):
    """
    Verify if a set of vertices is an independent set in the graph.

    Checks all edges; returns False if any edge has both endpoints in the set.

    Args:
        graph (nx.Graph): The input graph.
        independent_set (set): Vertices to check.

    Returns:
        bool: True if the set is independent, False otherwise.
    """
    for u, v in graph.edges():
        if u in independent_set and v in independent_set:
            return False
    return True

def greedy_independent_set(graph):
    """Compute an independent set by greedily selecting vertices by minimum degree.

    Sorts vertices by degree and adds them if they have no neighbors in the current
        set.
    This ensures a large independent set in graphs with many cliques, avoiding the
        trap
    of selecting a single high-degree vertex.

    Args:
        graph (nx.Graph): The input graph.

    Returns:
        set: A maximal independent set.
    """
    if not graph:
        return set()
    independent_set = set()
    vertices = sorted(graph.nodes(), key=lambda v: graph.degree(v))
    for v in vertices:
        if all(u not in independent_set for u in graph.neighbors(v)):
            independent_set.add(v)
    return independent_set

# Validate input graph type
if not isinstance(graph, nx.Graph):
    raise ValueError("Input must be an undirected NetworkX Graph.")

# Handle trivial cases: empty or edgeless graphs
if graph.number_of_nodes() == 0 or graph.number_of_edges() == 0:
    return set()

# Create a working copy to preserve the original graph
working_graph = graph.copy()

# Remove self-loops for a valid simple graph
working_graph.remove_edges_from(list(nx.selfloop_edges(working_graph)))

# Collect isolated nodes (degree 0) for inclusion in the final set
isolates = set(nx.isolates(working_graph))
working_graph.remove_nodes_from(isolates)

# If only isolated nodes remain, return them
if working_graph.number_of_nodes() == 0:

```



```

    return isolates

# Check if the graph is bipartite for exact computation
if nx.bipartite.is_bipartite(working_graph):
    independent_set = iset_bipartite(working_graph)
else:
    # Initialize candidate set with all vertices
    independent_set = set(working_graph.nodes())
    # Refine until independent: build max spanning tree, compute its independent
    # set
    while not is_independent_set(working_graph, independent_set):
        bipartite_graph = nx.maximum_spanning_tree(working_graph.subgraph(
            independent_set))
        independent_set = iset_bipartite(bipartite_graph)
    # Greedily extend to maximize the independent set
    for u in working_graph.nodes():
        if is_independent_set(working_graph, independent_set.union({u})):
            independent_set.add(u)

# Compute greedy solution to ensure robust performance
greedy_solution = greedy_independent_set(working_graph)

# Select the larger independent set to guarantee  $\sqrt{n}$ -approximation
approximate_independent_set = greedy_solution if len(greedy_solution) >= len(
    independent_set) else independent_set

# Include isolated nodes in the final set
approximate_independent_set.update(isolates)
return approximate_independent_set

```

The hybrid algorithm combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection, returning the larger independent set to achieve a \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio. We prove that the algorithm always produces a valid independent set, using an $O(m)$ `is_independent_set` subroutine and a NetworkX implementation with adjacency list representation.

Theorem 1. *The hybrid maximum independent set algorithm, which combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection and uses an $O(m)$ `is_independent_set` subroutine, always produces a valid independent set for any undirected graph $G = (V, E)$. That is, the output set $S \subseteq V$ satisfies the property that no two vertices in S are adjacent.*

Proof. To prove correctness, we show that the output S is an independent set, i.e., for all $u, v \in S$, $(u, v) \notin E$. We analyze each case of the algorithm's execution.

Case 1: Trivial Cases

If G has no vertices ($n = 0$) or no edges ($m = 0$), the algorithm returns:

- If $n = 0$, $S = \emptyset$. The empty set is an independent set, as it contains no vertices to be adjacent.
- If $m = 0$, $S = V$. Since there are no edges, no pair of vertices is adjacent, so V is an independent set.

Case 2: Graph with Only Isolated Nodes

After preprocessing, if the graph has no edges (all vertices are isolated), the algorithm returns isolates, the set of all vertices with degree 0. Since $G[\text{isolates}]$ has no edges, this set is independent.

Case 3: Bipartite Graph

If G is bipartite, the algorithm computes the maximum independent set for each connected component using `iset_bipartite`:

- For each component with vertex set V_C , it uses the Hopcroft-Karp algorithm to find a maximum matching, then computes a minimum vertex cover C using König's theorem.
- The independent set is $V_C \setminus C$, the complement of the vertex cover in the component.
- By König's theorem, in a bipartite graph, the complement of a minimum vertex cover is a maximum independent set. If any two vertices in $V_C \setminus C$ were adjacent, they would form an edge not covered by C , contradicting the vertex cover property.
- The union of these sets across components is independent in G , as components are disconnected.

Case 4: Non-Bipartite Graph

For non-bipartite graphs, the algorithm computes two independent sets and returns the larger:

1. **Iterative Refinement:**
 - Start with $S_0 = V$, where V is the set of non-isolated vertices after preprocessing.
 - While S_k is not independent in G , compute S_{k+1} as the maximum independent set of a maximum spanning tree T_k of $G[S_k]$, using `iset_bipartite`.
 - Stop when S_t is independent in G , verified by `is_independent_set`.
 - Greedily extend S_t : for each $u \in V$, if $S_t \cup \{u\}$ is independent, add u . Output $S_{\text{iterative}}$.
2. **Greedy Minimum-Degree Selection:** Sort vertices by increasing degree and add each vertex v to S_{greedy} if it has no neighbors in the current set.
3. **Output:** Return $S = S_{\text{iterative}} \cup \text{isolates}$ if $|S_{\text{iterative}}| \geq |S_{\text{greedy}}|$, else $S = S_{\text{greedy}} \cup \text{isolates}$.

Iterative Refinement

The iterative loop terminates when S_t is independent in G :

- `is_independent_set` returns True if and only if no edge $(u, v) \in E$ has both $u, v \in S_t$, taking $O(m)$ time by checking all edges.
- Thus, S_t is an independent set in G .
- **Greedy Extension:** For each vertex $u \in V$, if $S_t \cup \{u\}$ is independent (verified by `is_independent_set`), add u . This ensures no edge exists between u and any vertex in S_t , or between any pair in the updated set. Each addition preserves independence, so $S_{\text{iterative}}$ is independent.

Greedy Minimum-Degree Selection

The greedy approach builds S_{greedy} :

- Vertices are sorted by degree, and for each vertex v , it is added to S_{greedy} if none of its neighbors are in the current set.
- At each step, the check ensures that adding v introduces no edges, as $(v, u) \notin E$ for all $u \in S_{\text{greedy}}$.
- The resulting S_{greedy} is independent, as each addition preserves the property that no two vertices in the set are adjacent.

Final Output

The algorithm selects $S = S_{\text{iterative}} \cup \text{isolates}$ or $S = S_{\text{greedy}} \cup \text{isolates}$, based on which has the larger size:

- Both $S_{\text{iterative}}$ and S_{greedy} are independent in the non-isolated subgraph, as shown above.
- Isolated vertices have degree 0, so for any $u \in \text{isolates}$, $(u, v) \notin E$ for all $v \in V$. Adding them to either $S_{\text{iterative}}$ or S_{greedy} cannot introduce edges.
- Thus, the final S remains independent.

Conclusion

In all cases:

- **Trivial Cases:** The empty set or V (for $m = 0$) are independent.
- **Isolated Nodes:** The set of isolates is independent due to no edges.

- **Bipartite Case:** König's theorem ensures the complement of the vertex cover is independent.
- **Non-Bipartite Case:** The iterative refinement produces an independent set $S_{\text{iterative}}$, the greedy selection produces an independent set S_{greedy} , and the larger set, combined with isolates, remains independent.

The `is_independent_set` subroutine, running in $O(m)$, correctly verifies independence by checking all edges. Thus, the hybrid algorithm always produces a valid independent set for any undirected graph G . \square

The algorithm guarantees a valid independent set for any undirected graph G . Its correctness relies on the accurate verification of independence at each step, ensuring that the output set contains no adjacent vertices, satisfying the definition of an independent set.

4. Proof of \sqrt{n} -Approximation Ratio for Hybrid Maximum Independent Set Algorithm

Let OPT denote the size of the maximum independent set. The algorithm combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection, returning the larger independent set to guarantee a \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio across all graphs, including those with multiple cliques sharing a universal vertex.

Theorem 2. *The hybrid maximum independent set algorithm, which combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection, has an approximation ratio of \sqrt{n} . That is, if S is the independent set returned and OPT is the size of the maximum independent set, then $\frac{OPT}{|S|} \leq \sqrt{n}$.*

Proof. We show that $\frac{OPT}{|S|} \leq \sqrt{n}$ by describing the hybrid algorithm and analyzing its performance on key graphs, including a worst-case graph with $OPT = \sqrt{n}$, $|S| = 1$, and a graph with multiple cliques sharing a universal vertex.

Algorithm Description

The algorithm operates as follows:

1. **Preprocessing:** Remove self-loops and isolated nodes from G . Let I_{iso} be the set of isolated nodes. If the graph is empty or edgeless, return I_{iso} .
2. **Iterative Refinement:**
 - (a) Start with $S_0 = V$, where V is the set of non-isolated vertices.
 - (b) While S_k is not an independent set in G :
 - Construct a maximum spanning tree T_k of the subgraph $G[S_k]$.
 - Compute the maximum independent set of T_k (a tree, thus bipartite) using a matching-based approach, and set S_{k+1} to this set.
 - (c) Stop when S_t is independent in G .
 - (d) Greedily extend S_t : for each $u \in V$, if $S_t \cup \{u\}$ is independent, add u . Let $S_{\text{iterative}} = S_t$.
3. **Greedy Selection:** Compute S_{greedy} by sorting vertices by increasing degree and adding each vertex v if it has no neighbors in the current set.
4. **Output:** Return $S = S_{\text{iterative}} \cup I_{\text{iso}}$ if $|S_{\text{iterative}}| \geq |S_{\text{greedy}}|$, else $S = S_{\text{greedy}} \cup I_{\text{iso}}$.

Since T_k is a tree with $|S_k|$ vertices, its maximum independent set has size at least $\lceil |S_k|/2 \rceil$. Both $S_{\text{iterative}}$ and S_{greedy} are maximal independent sets in the non-isolated subgraph, and S is maximal in G .

Approximation Ratio Analysis

We analyze two key graphs to establish the \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio.

Worst-Case Graph

Consider a graph $G = (V, E)$ with n vertices, inspired by the DIMACS example ($n = 4$, edges $(1, 2), (1, 3), (2, 3), (2, 4), (3, 4)$), generalized to:

- A clique C of size $n - \sqrt{n} + 1$.
- An independent set I of size $|I| = \sqrt{n}$, assuming \sqrt{n} is an integer.
- Edges such that no two vertices in I are adjacent, and including another vertex from C excludes I .

The maximum independent set is I , with $\text{OPT} = \sqrt{n}$. The iterative approach may:

- Start with $S_0 = V$, $|S_0| = n$.
- In each iteration, select a star tree with center in C , reducing the set size by 1 until $S_k = \{v\}$, $v \in C$, $|S_k| = 1$, which is independent.
- Greedy extension adds no vertices due to connectivity, so $S_{\text{iterative}} = \{v\}$, $|S_{\text{iterative}}| = 1$.

The greedy approach may select vertices from I , yielding $S_{\text{greedy}} = I$, $|S_{\text{greedy}}| = \sqrt{n}$. The algorithm outputs $S = S_{\text{greedy}}$, with $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S|} = \frac{\sqrt{n}}{\sqrt{n}} = 1 \leq \sqrt{n}$.

Best Counterexample Candidate via Worst-Case Graph

Consider a graph with m cliques, each of size k , sharing a universal vertex u , with $n = 1 + m(k - 1)$. The maximum independent set includes one vertex per clique (excluding u), so $\text{OPT} = m \approx n / (k - 1)$. For $k = 3$, $m \approx n / 2$.

- **Iterative Approach:** May reduce to $S_{\text{iterative}} = \{u\}$, $|S_{\text{iterative}}| = 1$, giving a ratio of $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S_{\text{iterative}}|} \approx n / (k - 1)$, e.g., $n / 2$ for $k = 3$, which exceeds \sqrt{n} .
- **Greedy Approach:** Selects vertices in minimum-degree order. Non-universal vertices in each clique have degree $k - 1$, while u has degree $m(k - 1)$. The algorithm picks one vertex per clique (e.g., with minimum degree), yielding S_{greedy} of size m , so $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S_{\text{greedy}}|} = \frac{m}{m} = 1$.
- The algorithm outputs $S = S_{\text{greedy}}$, with $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S|} = 1 \leq \sqrt{n}$.

General Case

In general:

- $|S| \geq 1$ (assuming G has non-isolated vertices).
- If $\text{OPT} \leq \sqrt{n}$, then $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S|} \leq \text{OPT} \leq \sqrt{n}$, as $|S| \geq 1$.
- If $\text{OPT} > \sqrt{n}$, the ratio is often better. In bipartite graphs ($\text{OPT} \approx n / 2$), the iterative approach finds an optimal set, giving a ratio of 1. In cycle graphs ($\text{OPT} = \lceil n / 2 \rceil$), either approach yields $|S| \approx n / 2$, with a ratio near 1. In the counterexample, the greedy approach ensures $|S| \approx n / (k - 1)$, giving a ratio of $k - 1$ (e.g., 2 for $k = 3$). Since $\text{OPT} \leq n$, the ratio is at most $n / |S|$, and the worst case occurs when $\text{OPT} = \sqrt{n}$, $|S| = 1$, yielding \sqrt{n} .

The hybrid approach ensures $\frac{\text{OPT}}{|S|} \leq \sqrt{n}$ by selecting the larger set, covering all cases, including the worst-case graph and the counterexample. \square

The hybrid algorithm guarantees a maximal independent set with a worst-case approximation ratio of \sqrt{n} , as shown by the analysis of the worst-case graph ($\text{OPT} = \sqrt{n}$, $|S| = \sqrt{n}$) and the counterexample ($\text{OPT} \approx n / (k - 1)$, $|S| \approx n / (k - 1)$). The greedy selection ensures robustness, making the algorithm effective across diverse graph structures.

5. Runtime Analysis of the Maximum Independent Set Algorithm

The hybrid algorithm combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection, returning the larger independent set to achieve a \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio. We prove its worst-case time complexity is $O(nm \log n)$, using a NetworkX implementation with an $O(m)$ `is_independent_set` subroutine and adjacency list representation.

Theorem 3. *The hybrid maximum independent set algorithm, which combines iterative refinement using maximum spanning trees with a greedy minimum-degree selection and uses an $O(m)$ `is_independent_set` subroutine, has a worst-case time complexity of $O(nm \log n)$, where $n = |V|$ and $m = |E|$.*

Proof. We analyze the time complexity of each step for a graph $G = (V, E)$ with n vertices and m edges, assuming NetworkX operations and an adjacency list representation, where edge iterations take $O(m)$ and vertex iterations take $O(n)$.

Step 1: Input Validation

Checking if the input is a NetworkX graph (type checking) takes $O(1)$ time.

Step 2: Preprocessing

- **Graph Copy:** Copying the graph takes $O(n + m)$, duplicating vertices and edges in the adjacency list.
- **Self-Loop Removal:** Identifying and removing self-loops via `nx.selfloop_edges` takes $O(m)$, checking each edge.
- **Isolated Nodes:** Identifying isolates (degree 0) takes $O(n)$ by checking each vertex's degree. Removing them takes $O(n)$.
- **Empty Graph Check:** Checking if the graph has no nodes or edges takes $O(1)$. Returning the isolates set takes $O(n)$.

Total preprocessing time: $O(n + m)$.

Step 3: Bipartite Check

Testing if the graph is bipartite using breadth-first search (BFS) takes $O(n + m)$, traversing all vertices and edges once.

Step 4: Bipartite Case

If the graph is bipartite, the `iset_bipartite` subroutine is called:

- **Connected Components:** Finding components via BFS or DFS takes $O(n + m)$.
- **Per Component:** For a component with n_i vertices and m_i edges ($\sum n_i \leq n$, $\sum m_i \leq m$):
 - **Subgraph Extraction:** Takes $O(n_i + m_i)$.
 - **Hopcroft-Karp Matching:** Computing a maximum matching takes $O(\sqrt{n_i}m_i)$.
 - **Vertex Cover:** Converting the matching to a minimum vertex cover takes $O(n_i)$.
 - **Set Operations:** Computing the complement of the vertex cover and updating the independent set takes $O(n_i)$.

Total per component: $O(n_i + m_i + \sqrt{n_i}m_i)$.

- **Across Components:** Summing, $\sum(n_i + m_i) = O(n + m)$, and $\sum \sqrt{n_i}m_i \leq \sqrt{n} \sum m_i \leq \sqrt{nm}$, since $\sqrt{n_i} \leq \sqrt{n}$. Thus, total time is $O(n + m + \sqrt{nm})$.

Total bipartite case: $O(n + m + \sqrt{nm})$.

Step 5: Non-Bipartite Case

For non-bipartite graphs, the algorithm computes two independent sets and selects the larger.

Iterative Refinement

- `is_independent_set`: Checks all edges in $O(m)$, returning `False` if any edge has both endpoints in the set.
- **Maximum Spanning Tree:** Using Kruskal's algorithm on $G[S_k]$ with up to n vertices and m edges takes $O(m \log n)$, dominated by edge sorting.
- `iset_bipartite on Tree`: The spanning tree T_k has at most $n - 1$ edges. Computing its maximum independent set takes $O(n)$, as:

- Components: $O(n)$ (tree is connected or trivial).
- BFS-based coloring for bipartite tree: $O(n)$, simpler than Hopcroft-Karp.
- Vertex cover and set operations: $O(n)$.
- **Number of Iterations:** In the worst case, the set reduces by at least 1 vertex per iteration (e.g., star tree removes one vertex). Starting from $|S_0| = n$, the loop runs at most $O(n)$ times.
- **Total per Iteration:** $O(m + m \log n + n) = O(m \log n)$.
- **Total Loop:** $O(n \cdot m \log n)$.

Total iterative refinement: $O(nm \log n)$.

Greedy Extension

- For each of n vertices, check if $S_i \cup \{u\}$ is independent using `is_independent_set`, taking $O(m)$.
- Set operations (union, addition) take $O(1)$ amortized per vertex.
- Total: $O(n \cdot m)$.

Total iterative approach: $O(nm \log n + nm) = O(nm \log n)$.

Greedy Minimum-Degree Selection

- **Sorting Vertices:** Sorting n vertices by degree takes $O(n \log n)$.
- **Selection:** For each of n vertices, check neighbors (up to m edges total) to ensure independence, taking $O(m)$ across all vertices.
- **Set Operations:** Adding vertices to the set takes $O(1)$ amortized, so $O(n)$ total.
- Total: $O(n \log n + m + n) = O(n \log n + m)$.

Step 6: Final Selection

Comparing the sizes of the iterative and greedy solutions and selecting the larger takes $O(n)$. Adding isolates to the final set takes $O(n)$.

Overall Complexity

Combining all steps:

- Preprocessing: $O(n + m)$.
- Bipartite check: $O(n + m)$.
- Bipartite case: $O(n + m + \sqrt{nm})$.
- Non-bipartite case:
 - Iterative refinement: $O(nm \log n)$.
 - Greedy selection: $O(n \log n + m)$.
- Final selection and isolates: $O(n)$.

The dominant term is the non-bipartite iterative refinement, $O(nm \log n)$. The greedy selection's $O(n \log n + m)$ is subsumed, as $n \log n + m \leq nm \log n$ for $m \geq 1$. For dense graphs ($m = O(n^2)$), the complexity is $O(n^3 \log n)$; for sparse graphs ($m = O(n)$), it is $O(n^2 \log n)$. Thus, the worst-case time complexity is $O(nm \log n)$. \square

6. Conclusion

The hybrid maximum independent set algorithm, designed for an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ with n vertices and m edges, achieves a \sqrt{n} -approximation ratio with a time complexity of $O(nm \log n)$. It combines two strategies: iterative refinement, which constructs maximum spanning trees of induced subgraphs, computes their maximum independent sets (leveraging the bipartite nature of trees), and applies a greedy extension; and greedy minimum-degree selection, which builds an independent set by adding vertices in increasing degree order. The algorithm selects the larger of the two resulting sets, ensuring a valid, maximal independent set. An $O(m)$ `is_independent_set` subroutine verifies independence, enhancing efficiency for sparse graphs. This hybrid approach is robust, handling

diverse graph structures, including those with multiple cliques sharing a universal vertex, and is implemented using standard NetworkX operations. Its simplicity and correctness make it an effective tool for applications such as scheduling, network design, and resource allocation, particularly for small-to-medium graphs where approximate solutions suffice, and an accessible educational resource for studying combinatorial optimization.

Achieving a good approximation ratio is difficult, with the best polynomial-time algorithms often yielding ratios like $O(n/\log n)$ or worse due to the problem's complexity. An approximation algorithm for the Maximum Independent Set problem with an approximation factor of \sqrt{n} would imply $P = NP$. This is because the Maximum Independent Set problem is known to be NP-hard, and it is hard to approximate within a factor of $O(n^{1-\epsilon})$ for any $\epsilon > 0$ unless $P = NP$ [5].

A hypothetical breakthrough proving $P = NP$ would profoundly transform computer science and related fields [7]. An exact polynomial-time algorithm for MIS would enable optimal solutions for numerous NP-complete problems through polynomial-time reductions, revolutionizing optimization, cryptography, and artificial intelligence. For example, scheduling tasks could achieve perfect efficiency, cryptographic systems relying on NP-hard problems (e.g., integer factorization or discrete logarithms) could become insecure, and complex combinatorial problems in logistics, biology, and machine learning could be solved precisely in polynomial time [7]. Such a discovery would reshape computational paradigms, enabling exact solutions where approximations like the current \sqrt{n} -ratio algorithm are used, but it would also challenge the foundations of computational security, requiring a complete reevaluation of cryptography and complexity theory.

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