Detecting User Interests on Twitter via Seed Set Expansion

Amit Goyal, Praveen Bommannavar, Stuart Anderson, Alek Kolcz, Kurt Smith
Social Networks
User Interests Modeling

- **Question:** Which users are interested in what topics?

- **Several use-cases:**
  - Recommendations
  - Search
  - Consumer insights
    - What kind of users are interested in which topics?
    - How many users are interested in each topic?
    - Which topics are popular in a specific country?
    - What are the growth trends among users interested in various topics?
    - Which topics are growing/shrinking, in terms of active user counts?
    - How do various events impact growth trends in various topic populations?
Challenges

- Text processing?
  - Difficult to scale to international markets.
  - Tweets are short (140 characters).
  - Sparsity in data — several users tweet rarely.

In this work, we propose a text independent graph-based approach to user interest modeling.
Our Approach

- We distinguish b/w influencers and others.
  - Known-For topics for influencers
    - E.g. Justin Bieber is Known-For Pop Music
    - An influencer is someone who has >= 10K followers
  - Interested-In topics for everyone

- Manually labeled accounts (~55K)
  - Via Twitter Lists
  - Via Social Graph

- Seed Set
  - Known-For
  - Influencers
- Everyone
  - Interested-In
Learning Known-For Labels

- **Twitter Lists**
  - On Twitter, a user can create her own lists, or follow the lists created by other users.
  - E.g. A user would put Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber in a list to have a filtered timeline for Pop Music.
  - Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, George Bush may be in another “Government & Politics” list.
- From Seed Set of 55K labeled accounts to influencers.
  - 336K influencers — 6x.
  - Only for influencers (users with >= 10K followers)
  - One Known-For label for an influencer.
Learning Interested-In Labels

Via social graph — from influencers to everyone.

- Can be several Interested-In labels for a user.
- Sum of interest scores for a user = 1.

\[
\text{Interest_score}(\text{Emily, Music}) : 0.33 \\
\text{Interest_score}(\text{Emily, News}) : 0.67
\]
Further Improvements

- Issue of overfitting:
  - In cases when a user follows only one influencer.

- Issue of limited coverage:
  - This method provides us the coverage of 78%.

- Solution:
  - 2-hop random walk instead of 1-hop.
  - Performed for users who are
    - not covered in the 1-hop random walk.
    - may lie in overfitting case.

- Coverage increases to 88%.
Evaluation: Coverage

![Histogram of Max interest score and Fraction of users]
Evaluation: User interest surveys

We'd love your help
Give us insight into your Twitter experience by taking a minute to answer a few questions.

Take the survey
Evaluation: User interest surveys

I would like to see tweets about this topic

Basketball
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't understand this topic
Evaluation: Precision

![Precision vs Score Range Chart](image)
Case Study: IPL Cricket Season

Increase in interest in Cricket in India

Dates

Summary

- Mine user interests via seed set expansion
  - First use lists to expand known for labels
  - Then use follow graph to infer interests

- Several wins over purely text based methods
  - Avoid inherent difficulties in language specific methods and internationalization
  - Learn about users even if they don’t engage with tweets much

- Evaluation & case study
  - High coverage (88% worldwide) at a reasonable precision (> 80%)
    - Can be used with several other signals to achieve higher precision, if desired
  - Consumer insights - IPL Cricket
    - How much do events affect expression of interests on Twitter?