Mining User Behavior in a Social Bookmarking System: a Delicious Friend Recommender System

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Abstract: The growth of the Web 2.0 has brought to a widespread use of social media systems. In particular, *social bookmarking systems* are a form of social media system that allows to tag bookmarks of interest for a user and to share them. The increasing popularity of these systems leads to an increasing number of active users and this implies that each user interacts with too many users ("social interaction overload"). In order to overcome this problem, we present a friend recommender system in the social bookmarking domain. Recommendations are produced by mining user behavior in a tagging system, analyzing the bookmarks tagged by a user and the frequency of each used tag. Experimental results highlight that, by analyzing both the tagging and book-marking behavior of a user, our approach is able to mine preferences in a more accurate way, with respect to state-of-the-art approaches that consider only tags.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social media systems are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Moreover, in their 2011 tutorial (Guy and Carmel, 2011), Guy et. al highlight that a social media system is characterized by: (1) a user-centered design, (2) user-generated content (e.g., tags), and (3) social networks and online communities.

A *social bookmarking system* is a form of social media, which allows users to use keywords (*tags*) to describe resources that are of interest for them, helping to organize and share these resources with other users in the network (Farooq et al., 2007). The most widely-known example of social bookmarking system is Delicious[1].

In this domain, where users are connected in a social network and interact with each other, the growth of the user population and the large amount of content lead to the well-known "social interaction overload" problem (Guy et al., 2013; Simon, 1971). Social interaction overload is related to the excessive amount

of users and items that each user can interact with. This leads to the scarcity of attention, which does not allow to focus on users or items that might be interesting for a user.

In order to filter information in the social media systems domain, in the last few years the research on recommendation has brought to the development of a new class of systems, named *social recommender systems* (Ricci et al., 2011). These systems allow to face the social interaction overload problem, by suggesting users or items that users might be interested in. In particular, user recommendation in a social domain aims at suggesting *friends* (i.e., recommendations are built for pairs of users that are likely to be interested in each other's content) or *people to follow* (i.e., recommendations are built for a user, in order to suggest users that might be interesting for her/him) (Guy et al., 2013).

Social user recommender systems can be classified into three categories:

1. Systems based on the analysis of social graphs, which explore the set of people connected to the target user, in order to produce recommendations. These systems recommend either the closest users in the graph, like friends of friends and followees of followees (the "People you may know" feature offered by Facebook (Ratiu, 2008) is the most widely known example of this approach), or recommend the users that have the highest probabil-

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[1]http://www.delicious.com

ity to be crossed in a random walk of the social graph (the main reference for this type of systems is the "Who to follow" recommendation in Twitter (Gupta et al., 2013)).

2. Systems that analyze the interactions of the users with the content of the system (tags, likes, shares, posts, etc.). In order to exploit the user interests, these systems usually build a user profile by giving a structured form to content, thanks to the use of metrics like TF-IDF (Term Frequency - Inverse Document Frequency). An example of this class of systems is presented in (Chen et al., 2009).

3. Hybrid systems, which consider both the social graph and the interactions of the users with the content (an example is represented by (Hannon et al., 2010)).

It is important to notice that the recommendation of a friend involves mutual interests and that the list of recommended *friends* might be different from the list of recommended *people to follow*. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no approach in the literature recommends friends in a social bookmarking system.

In (Gupta et al., 2013), authors highlight that Twitter is an "interest graph", rather than a "social graph". A problem highlighted by the authors is that the analysis of such a graph suffers from scalability issues and, in order to contain the complexity of the recommender system, no user profile information could be used to produce the recommendations. The definition of interest graph can also be extended to social bookmarking systems, since a user can add as a friend or follow another user, in order to receive her/his newly added bookmarks.

This paper presents a friend recommender system in the social bookmarking domain. By mining the content of the target user, the system recommends users that have similar interests. Given the previously presented limitations of analyzing interest graphs and considered the fast-growing nature of social media systems, our recommender system makes a selective use of the available information and does not consider the graph. Moreover, it has been compared with two reference systems, in order to evaluate the performance in terms of precision.

Our work brings the following scientific contributions:

- for the first time in the literature, we formally define a friend recommender system that operates in a social bookmarking system;

- we propose the first algorithm in literature that recommends friends in this domain (other approaches in the literature recommend people to

follow but, as previously highlighted, this is a different research topic);

- we study how to mine content in this context, i.e., what information should be used to produce the recommendations and which importance should the different types of content have in the recommender system. This is done by observing the behavior of users in their bookmarking activity.

The proposed system, thanks to its capability to exploit the interests of the users and being the first developed in this domain, puts the basis to a research area not previously explored by the existing social recommender systems.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a formalization of a social bookmarking system and of the friend recommendation problem; Section 3 describes the details of the recommender system presented in this paper; Section 4 illustrates the conducted experiments; Section 5 presents related work; Section 6 contains comments, conclusions and future work.

2 Friend Recommendation in a Social Bookmarking Systems

This section gives a formal definition of a social bookmarking system and of a friend recommender system in this domain.

Definition 1. *A social bookmarking system can be defined as a tuple $Q = \{U, R, T, A, C\}$, where:*

- *U, R, and T are sets of* users*, * resources*, and * tags*;*

- *A is a ternary relation between the sets of* users*, * resources*, and * tags*, i.e., $A \subseteq U \times R \times T$, whose elements are the tag* assignments *of a user for a resource;*

- *C is a binary relation between the users, i.e., $C \subseteq U \times U$, whose elements expresses the* connection *among two users. If we represent the user social relations by means of a graph, in which each node represents a user $u \in U$ and each edge $c \in C$ represents a connection among two users, we will have an undirected edge if the users are connected as* friends *and a directed edge if one user* follows *the other.*

Definition 2. *A friend recommender system in a social bookmarking is a function $f : U \times U \to C$, which allows to define if, given two users $u \in U$ and $m \in U$, there is a undirected connection $c \in C$ among them.*

This paper aims at developing algorithms that learn the function f, which allows to produce recommendations among two users.

3 Friend Recommendation by Mining User Behavior

3.1 System Design

The objective of our work is to build a friend recommender system in the social bookmarking domain. In its design, we considered the following aspects:

(a) As mentioned in the Introduction, the connections among users form an "interest graph". Therefore, exploiting user interests was crucial in the development of the recommendations. In literature, it is known that the methods that analyze graphs cannot exploit interests and are not scalable (Gupta et al., 2013). So, a solution that mines user behavior in a social bookmarking system, in order to derive her/his interests, is needed.

(b) Social media systems grow rapidly. This means that the amount of content added to a social media system and the user population increase at a fast rate. A recommender system that operates in this context needs to build accurate profiles of the users, which have to be up-to-date with the constantly evolving preferences of the users.

(c) As (Zhou et al., 2010) highlights, the tagging activity of the users reflects their interests. Therefore, the tags used by a user are an important source of information to exploit the interests of a user.

Taking into account all these aspects, we designed a recommender system that operates in the following way.

Regarding point (a), we designed a system that only analyzes the content of the users (i.e., the tagged bookmarks). So, in order to avoid the limitations related to the graph analysis in this domain, our system belongs to the second class presented in the Introduction, i.e., the one that analyzes the interactions of the users with the content of the system.

Regarding point (b), in order to efficiently and quickly update user profiles, our system computes user similarities with low computational cost metrics, which exploit the set of resources used by each user and the tags used to classify them.

Regarding point (c), we embraced the theory that user interest is reflected by the tagging activity and we extended it, by following the intuition that users with similar interests make a similar use of tags and bookmark the same resources.

A detailed description of the system is presented next.

3.2 Algorithms

Given a target user $u_t \in U$, the system recommends the users with a high tag-based user similarity and a high user interest. The system works in five steps:

1. *Tag-based user profiling.* Given the tag assignments of each user, this step builds a user profile, based on the frequencies of the tags used by a user.

2. *Resource-based user profiling.* Given the tag assignments of each user, this step builds a user profile, based on the resources bookmarked by a user.

3. *Tag-based similarity computation.* The first metric, calculated among a target user u_t and the other users, is based on the tag-based user profile. Pearson's correlation is used to derive the similarity.

4. *User interest computation.* The second computed metric is the interest of a user towards another user and it is represented by the percentage of common resources among them.

5. *Recommendations selection.* This step recommends to u_t the users with both a tag-based and a user interest higher than a threshold value.

In the following, we will give a detailed description of each step.

3.2.1 Tag-based user profiling

This step builds a user profile, based on the tags available in the tag assignments of a user, by considering the frequency of each used tag. Given the sets defined in Section 2, we can first consider the tag assignments of a user u as follows:

Definition 3. *Let $A(u) \subseteq A$, be the subset of A, whose elements are the triples that contain a user $u \in U$, i.e., $\forall r \in R \wedge \forall t \in T, (u,r,t) \in A \Rightarrow (u,r,t) \in A(u)$.*

Given a tag t, we can consider all the elements in which the tag was assigned by user u:

Definition 4. *Let $A(u,t) \subseteq A(u)$, be the subset of A(u), whose elements are all the triples that contain a tag $t \in T$ used by a user $u \in U$, i.e., $\forall r \in R, (u,r,t) \in A(u) \Rightarrow (u,r,t) \in A(u,t)$.*

A user can be profiled, according to her/his use of the tags, by considering the relative frequency of each tag, as follows:

$$v_{ut_j} = \frac{\#A(u,t_j)}{\#A(u)} \qquad (1)$$

Equation 1 estimates the importance of a tag $t_j \in T$ in the profile of a user $u \in U$, by defining the relative frequency as the number of times t_j was used, divided by the number of tag assignments of u.

A tag-based user profile can be implemented by representing each user $u \in U$ as a vector $\overrightarrow{v_u} = \{v_{u1}, v_{u2}, ..., v_{uk}\}$, where each element v_{uj} is the relative frequency previously defined and k is the number of tags in the system.

3.2.2 Resource-based user profiling

This step builds another user profile, based on the resources bookmarked by each user.

A resource-based user profile can be built by considering the fact that the user bookmarked a resource (i.e., she/he expressed interest in it):

$$v_{ur_j} = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ if } \exists t \in T \mid (u, r_j, t) \in A(u) \\ 0 \text{ otherwise} \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

Eq. 2 estimates the interest of a user u in a resource r_j with a binary value, equal to 1 in case r_j was bookmarked by u, and 0 otherwise.

A resource-based user profile can be implemented by representing each user $u \in U$ by means of a binary vector $\overrightarrow{v_u} = \{v_{u1}, v_{u2}, ..., v_{un}\}$, which represents the resources tagged by each user. Each element v_{uj} is defined as previously illustrated and n is the number of resources in the system.

3.2.3 Tag-based Similarity Computation

Since in (Zhou et al., 2010) authors highlight that the interests of the users are reflected in their tagging activities, our system computes the similarity among two tag-based user profiles with the Pearson's correlation coefficient (Pearson, 1896). This metric was chosen because, as proved by Breese et al. (Breese et al., 1998), it is the most effective for the similarity assessment among users.

Let (u, m) be a pair of users represented respectively by vectors $\overrightarrow{v_u}$ and $\overrightarrow{v_m}$. Our algorithm computes the tag-based user similarity ts as defined in Eq. 3:

$$ts(u, m) = \frac{\sum_{j \subset T_{um}} (v_{ut_j} - \bar{v}_u)(v_{mt_j} - \bar{v}_m)}{\sqrt{\sum_{j \subset T_{um}} (v_{ut_j} - \bar{v}_u)^2} \sqrt{\sum_{j \subset T_{um}} (v_{mt_j} - \bar{v}_m)^2}} \tag{3}$$

where T_{um} represents the set of tags used by both users u and m and values $\bar{v}_u$ and $\bar{v}_m$ represent, respectively, the mean of the frequencies of user u and user m. The metric compares the frequencies of all the tags used by the considered users. The similarity values range from 1.0, that indicates complete similarity, to -1.0, that indicates complete dissimilarity. Negative values are not significant to evaluate the correlation among users (Herlocker et al., 1999), so they are discarded by the task.

3.2.4 User interest computation

Given a pair of users (u, m), in this step we compute two metrics based on the bookmarks tagged by the users. The former, $ui(u, m)$, represents the interest of the user u towards user m, while the latter, $ui(m, u)$, represents the interest of the user m toward the user u.

We first consider the set of resources bookmarked by each user.

Definition 5. *Let $R(u) \subseteq R$ be the subset of resources used by a user $u \in U$, i.e., $\forall r \in R, (u, r, t) \in A(u) \Rightarrow r \in R(u)$.*

Then we consider the resources in common among two users.

Definition 6. *Let $D(u, m) = R(u) \cap R(m)$ be the subset of resources bookmarked by both user u and user m.*

The *user interest* of a user u in a user m can be estimated as:

$$ui(u, m) = \frac{\#D(u, m)}{\#R(u)} \tag{4}$$

The level of interest of a user u in a user m is estimated as the number of resources bookmarked by both the users, divided by the number of resources bookmarked by user u. This means that the interest of the user m in user u depends on the number of resources bookmarked by m (i.e., when calculating $ui(m, u)$, the denominator would be $\#R(m)$).

User interest ui previously defined, can be implemented, by using the two resource-based user profiles $\overrightarrow{v_u}$ and $\overrightarrow{v_m}$, as follows:

$$ui(u, m) = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n} v_{ur_j} v_{mr_j}}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} v_{ur_j}} * 100 \tag{5}$$

$$ui(m, u) = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n} v_{ur_j} v_{mr_j}}{\sum_{j=1}^{n} v_{mr_j}} * 100 \tag{6}$$

where n is the total number of resources of the system.

3.2.5 Recommendations selection

Once the tag-based similarities and the user interests have been computed for each pair of users, our system choses a set of users to recommend to the target user by selecting:

- the ones that have a tag-based user similarity higher than a threshold value α (i.e., $ts > \alpha$);
- the ones that have a user interest (at least one of the two computed) higher than a threshold value β (i.e., $ui > \beta$).

Definition 7. *Given a target user u_t, the candidate set of users to recommend $S(u_t)$ can be defined as*

$$S(u_t) = \{u_i \in U \mid ts(u_t, u_i) > \alpha \,\&\&\, (ui(u_t, u_i) > \beta) \,\|\, (ui(u_i, u_t) > \beta)\} \tag{7}$$

4 Experimental Framework

This section presents the framework used to perform the experiments.

4.1 Dataset and pre-processing

Experiments were conducted on a Delicious dataset distributed for the HetRec 2011 workshop (Cantador et al., 2011). It contains:

- 1867 users, which represent the elements of the set U previously defined;

- 69226 URLs, which represent the elements of the set R previously defined;

- 53388 tags, which represent the elements of the set T previously defined;

- 7668 bi-directional user relations, which represent the elements of the relation C previously defined;

- 437593 tag assignments (i.e., the tuples $(user, tag, URL)$), which represent the elements of the relation A previously defined;

- 104799 bookmarks (i.e., the distinct pairs $(user, URL)$), which represent the elements of the union of the subsets $R(u)$ previously defined.

We pre-processed the dataset, in order to remove the users that were considered as "inactive", i.e., the ones that used less than 5 tags or less then 5 URLs.

4.2 Metrics

Definition 8. *Let W be the total amount of recommendations produced by the system, i.e., $W = \cup S(u_t), \forall u_t \in U$. This set represents the positive outcomes, i.e., the sum of the* true positive *and the* false positive *recommendations.*

Definition 9. *Let Z be the amount of correct recommendations produced by the system, i.e., $Z \subseteq W = \{(u,m)|(u,m) \in W \wedge (u,m) \in C\}$. So, Z represents the subset of recommendations for which there is a relation (i.e., a friend correlation) in the dataset. This subset represents the* true positive *recommendations.*

Given the previously defined two sets, we can measure the *precision* of our recommender system as the number of correct recommendations, divided by the number of recommendations produced:

$$precision = \frac{true\ prositive}{true\ prositive\ +\ false\ positive} = \frac{\#Z}{\#W} \quad (8)$$

Even if the recall metric is usually computed along with precision, it captures a perspective that differs from the way our system operates. We propose a

constraint-based approach that reduces the amount of selected users, while recall measures completeness and quantity of recommendations (Buckland and Gey, 1994). Because of the nature of the metric, it would be misleading to compute it in order to evaluate the accuracy of our system.

Definition 10. *Let $X \subseteq U$ be the subset of users for which a recommendation was produced, i.e., $X = \{u \in U | \exists (u,m) \in W\}$*

Definition 11. *Let $Y \subseteq U$ be the subset of users for which a correct recommendation was produced, i.e., $Y = \{u \in U | \exists (u,m) \in Z\}$*

The percentage of users satisfied by the recommendations can be computed by dividing the set of users for which a correct recommendations was produced by the set of users for which a recommendation was produced, as follows:

$$\%\ satisfied\ users = \frac{\#Y}{\#X} * 100 \quad (9)$$

The two metrics evaluate the system from two similar (but different) perspectives. In fact, precision measures for how many couples of users a correct recommendation was produced, while the percentage of satisfied users measures for how many individual users a correct recommendation was produced.

4.3 Strategy

We performed two different experiments. The first aims to make an *evaluation of the recommendations*, by measuring the precision of the system with different threshold values. The second experiment, makes an *evaluation of the satisfied users* in the produced recommendations, given a precision value.

In order to evaluate the recommendations, we compare our approach with a state-of-the-art policy (Zhou et al., 2010). Zhou et al. (Zhou et al., 2010) developed a tag-based user recommendation framework and demonstrated that tags are the most effective source of information to produce recommendations. We compare the performance of our system with respect to that of the reference one (which uses only the tags, i.e., $ui = 0$), in terms of precision. Supported by the thesis that the use of only one source of data leads to a better performance, we considered a second reference system, which considers only the user interest (i.e., $ts = 0$).

During the analysis of the performance, we evaluated all the values of the parameters α and β between 0 and 1, using a 0.1 interval.
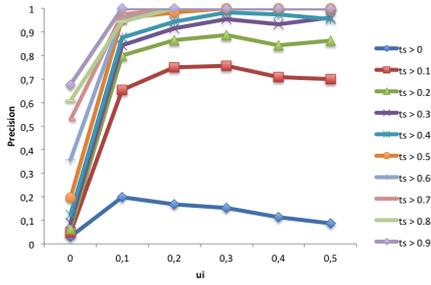
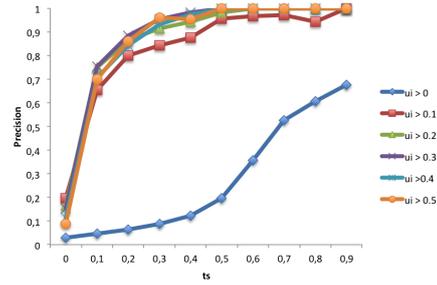Figure 1: Precision of the system with respect to user interest *ui*

Figure 2: Precision of the system with respect to tag-based user similarity *ts*

4.4 Experiments

The details of each performed experiment and its results are now presented.

4.4.1 Evaluation of the Recommendations

Given a target user u_t, the system builds a candidate set, $S(u_t)$, of users to recommend. For each recommended user $u_i \in S(u_t)$, we analyze the bi-directional user relations in the dataset (i.e., if $(u_t, u_i) \in C$), to check if there is a connection between the target user u_t and the recommended user u_i (i.e., if the users are friends). This experiment analyzes the performance of the system in terms of *precision*. Given different values of α and β, the precision of the system is calculated, in order to analyze how the performance of the system vary as the similarity between users grows. The results are illustrated in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

Fig. 1 shows how the precision values change with respect to the user interest *ui*. The figure contains a line for each possible value α of the tag-based user similarity *ts*. We can observe that the precision values grow proportionally to the *ui* values. This means that the more similar are the users (both in terms of tag-based similarity and of user interest), the better the system performs. However, for *ui* values higher than 0.5 no user respects the constraints, so we cannot make any recommendation.

Fig. 2 shows the same results from the tag-based user similarity point of view. The figure presents the precision values, with respect to the tag-based user similarity *ts*; here, each line shows the results for a given value β of the user interest *ui*. Also from this perspective, the precision grows proportionally to *ts*.

The blue lines in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show the results of the reference systems, where $ts = 0$ and $ui = 0$. In both cases, the two metrics combined improve the quality of the recommendations with respect to the cases where only one is used.

4.4.2 Evaluation of the Satisfied Users

The second experiment aims at analyzing the trend of the satisfied users, with respect to the precision values. So, for each precision value obtained in the previous experiment, we computed the percentage of satisfied users as shown in Eq. 9.

In order to present the results, Fig. 3 reports just a subset of precision values. These values have been selected dividing the range [0 - 1] of possible precision values into intervals of 0.1 (i.e, [0 - 0.1], [0.1 - 0.2], ..., [0.9 - 1]) and assigning each previously computed value of precision to the right interval. From each interval, we selected the record that corresponds to the precision value that led to the maximum percentage of satisfied users. The reason why there are no values for the intervals [0.2 - 0.3) and [0.4 - 0.5), is that in the previous experiments there are no values of α and β that led to precision values inside those intervals.

In Fig. 3 we can observe that the percentage of satisfied users grows as the precision grows. Given that also in the previous experiments we obtained that the more similar the users were, the higher the precision was, we can conclude that more similar the users are (both in terms of tag-based similarity and of user interest), the higher is the likelihood that users are satisfied by the recommendations.

These results show an interesting property of our recommender system. In fact, even if the precision values are split into intervals that cover the same range (i.e., 0.1), there are two of them (i.e., $[0.6 - 0.7)$ and $[0.8 - 0.9)$) in which the percentage of individual users satisfied by the recommendations significantly increases. So, this experiment, by showing the impact of precision on individual users, is very useful in order to tune the parameters of the system.
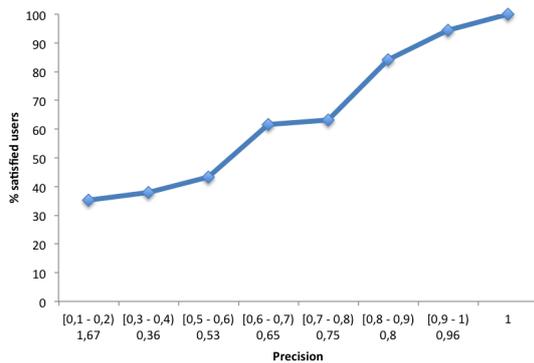
Figure 3: Percentage of satisfied users for different values of precision

5 Related Work

This section presents related work on user recommendation in the social domain.

In (Gupta et al., 2013), Gupta et al. present Twitter's user recommendation service, which is based on shared interests, common connections, and other related factors. The proposed system builds a graph in which the vertices represent users and the directed edges represent the "follow" relationship; this graph is processed with an open source in-memory graph processing engine, called Cassovary. Finally, recommendations are built by means of a user recommendation algorithm for directed graphs, based on SALSA (Stochastic Approach for Link-Structure Analysis). Our proposal differs, because we make friend recommendations and, furthermore, our system does not consider the social graph.

In (Chen et al., 2009), Chen et al. describe a people recommender system in an enterprise social network domain. They compare four algorithms, two based on social relationship information and two based on content similarity, and demonstrate that the algorithms that use social information are stronger at finding known contacts, while algorithms based on content similarity are better to discover new friends. We cannot compare with this approach, since it is applied to a delimited enterprise social network domain.

Guy et al. (Guy et al., 2009) describe a people recommender system for the IBM Fringe social network. The system uses enterprise information, like org chart relationships, paper and patent co-authorship and project co-membership, which are specific of this social network, so it is hard to compare to them.

Hannon et al. (Hannon et al., 2010) describe a followee recommender system for Twitter, which is based on tweets and relationships of their social graphs. By using this information, they build user profiles and demonstrate how these profiles can be used to produce recommendations. In our work, we do not use any social connection information and furthermore we recommend friends and not users to follow.

In (Quercia and Capra, 2009), a recommender system based on collocation (i.e., the position of the user) is presented. It uses short-range technologies of mobile phones, to infer the collocation and other correlated information, which are the base for the recommendations. In our domain we do not have such a type of information, so we cannot compare with this algorithm.

Zhou et al. (Zhou et al., 2010) propose a framework for users' interest modeling and interest-based user recommendation (meant as people to follow and not as a friend), tested on the Yahoo! Delicious dataset. Recommendations are produced by analyzing the network and fans properties. Differently from this framework, our system produces friend recommendations.

In (Brzozowski and Romero, 2011), a study about what cues in a user's profile, behavior, and network are the most effective to recommend people, is presented. As previously highlighted, we are interested in producing recommendations only based on users' content.

Liben-Nowell and Kleinberg (Liben-Nowell and Kleinberg, 2003) studied the user recommendation problem as a link prediction problem. They develop several approaches, based on metrics that analyze the proximity of nodes in a social network, to infer the probability of new connections among users. Experiments show that the network topology is a good tool to predict future interactions. We aim at using more basic information and not graphs or network topologies.

In (Arru et al., 2013), Arru et al. propose a user recommender system for Twitter, based on signal processing techniques. The considered approach defines a pattern-based similarity function among users and makes use of a time dimension in the representation of the users profile. Our system is different, because we aim at suggesting friends while on Twitter recommends "people to follow".

6 Conclusions

This paper presented a friend recommender system in the social bookmarking domain. Our proposal mined user behavior, by analyzing the resources and the tags bookmarked by each user. The goal was to

infer the interests of the users from content, making a selective use of the available information, in order to overcome the known limitations that a recommender system can have in a social domain in terms of complexity and scalability. As results show, our system produces accurate recommendations by using the tags and the bookmarks used by users.

Since a new friendship in a social bookmarking system allows a user to be updated on the new bookmarks added by her/his friend, future work will define and analyze the novelty and the serendipity of the bookmarks received by a user.

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