EECS4414 Project Progress Report: Analysis of Annual Global Trade through Information Networks

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

Global Trade, Link Prediction, Network Evolution, Trends, Emerging Markets, Market Community Detection

1 INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

The analysis of global trade has been an essential part of the development and maintenance of economies around the world. Through recessions, war, global catastrophes, sanctions, etc., the global trade network can give interesting and insightful information not only at a historical level, but when looking towards the future of the world economy. This information is valuable, and no doubt being analyzed by economists to determine trends in world trade. This trade network from a high level may not seem as complex and interesting as some networks with higher node counts, however the relationships between nodes are incredibly complex, and even small changes to the topology of the graph could have huge implications when it comes to the overall structure of the network.

This development has interesting implications when looking from the perspective of information networks that trade has developed. At a country by country basis, the trade of goods forms a strongly connected, directed graph with edge weights representing the annual amount of goods sold by one country to another. An example of what this graph may look like after it has been developed throughout this project is shown in Figure 1. The graph itself may not seem grandiose or groundbreaking when graphs of millions of nodes are being analyzed in the social networks that have emerged over the past fifteen years. However, the network itself is still an incredibly interesting one in that it has been evolving for centuries (albeit the data is not readily available or accurate for years before the emergence of computers). Also, the number of interesting graph algorithms that can be applied to this network is not limited by the number of nodes in the network.

In this project, there are many interesting analyses that can be performed on the network itself. There are many properties of this graph that can be analyzed. These include (but are not limited to): link prediction, community detection, time-series analysis, as well as topological analysis to see if the global trade network follows a certain already well-known model.

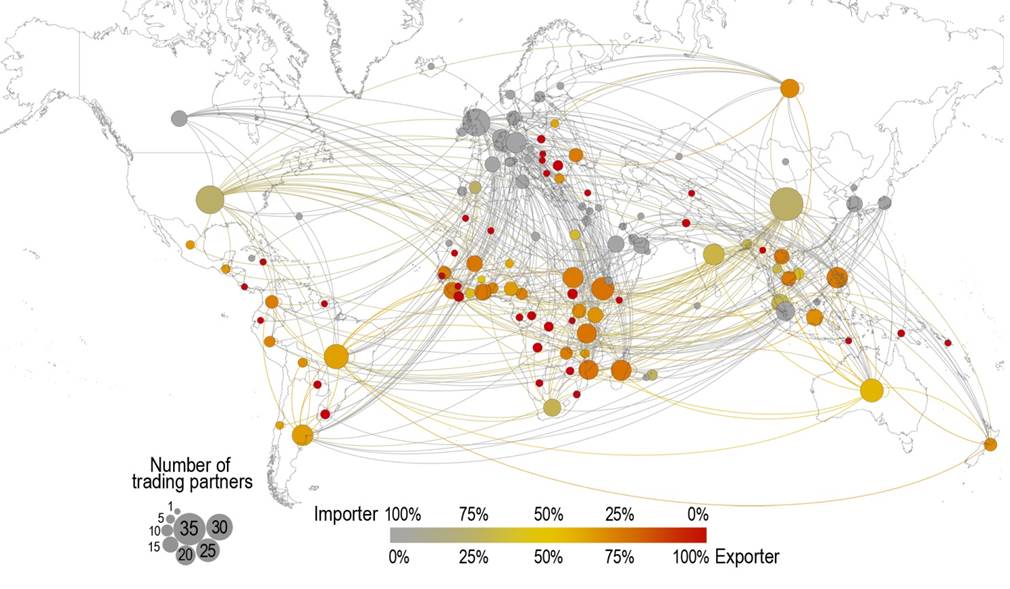


Figure 1: What the global trade network could look like after the development of the graph.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Graph Representation

The idea behind representing the data on global trade as an information would be to have each node representing a country. An edge would be between two countries if those countries trade with each other as discovered through the data we collect (see section 3.1 for further information on this data). That is, if node A has an edge connecting to node B, countries A and B are trade partners in some way. The graph ideally will be directed with edge weights applied to each edge. Node A has a directed edge E to node B with weight W if country A has exported a dollar amount of goods equivalent to W in dollars to country B in that year. Another idea would be to have the net total amount traded between the two countries A and B and have an undirected edge between the two, but this method would be less descriptive.

In this project, there was a total of 195 officially recognized countries that were represented in the graph. Out of those 195 countries, five countries were not represented on the WITS website that was used to retrieve the data for this project (see section 3.1 for details). These countries were: Democratic Republic of Congo, Liechtenstein, Monaco, North Korea, Serbia and Timor-Leste. For purposes of consistency with respect to the data, it was decided not to go to another data source in order to get the export data for these countries, and instead they were excluded from the graph as nodes.

2.2 Link Prediction

Building recommendation engines has been studied extensively in different fields. Common methods involved link prediction on heterogeneous graphs. Also, [7] attempts to improve this method, include supervised random walk, where the algorithm assumes the network is homogeneous, and hence the random walk has no constraints. Additionally, link prediction can also be looked through information diffusion. This principle could be applied in trade relationships, where the propagation of the information is the trade itself. Meaning, does the trading patterns of country A affect country B and the countries spanning from B in the trade network.

2.3 Community Detection

Finding communities in any graph is not a simple task, and the WTW network is no different. Although detecting communities using algorithms such as the Girvan–Newman algorithm is very helpful, trying to infer meaning from those findings and knowing when one has sufficiently subdivided a network into communities is not an exact science. Nonetheless, studies have been done specifically on the WTW to find the communities that inevitably exist due to trade deals, geographical location, sanctions, etc. [6]. Barigozzi et al. have performed an interesting analysis on 14 commodities, and the communities that arise due to these commodities in the WTW [6].

In practice, the Girvan-Newman in its simplest form did not provide the most interesting results, with the communities detected being similar to that of a randomly generated graph. Communities of size one would be detected, with a larger central community being the rest of the graph. The single country communities that were being detected were the countries that were not as developed as other countries and were not trading with as many countries as those in the central community. An example of a country in this situation was South Sudan. Of course, the Girvan-Newman algorithm can be tweaked in order to provide different edge removal criterion, such as heaviest edge or higher edge weights representing stronger ties instead of weaker ties between nodes. However, this did not improve the result and resulted in similar outputs for the communities detected.

This result makes sense logically. Since the WTW is similar in topological properties as that of a randomly generated G(n,p) graph with a higher p value. This randomly generated graph has a high global and local clustering coefficient, just like the WTW, and each node has a high degree. This means that communities detected would not be the most informative as there is no community pattern being developed compared to a more methodically structured network. Keep in mind so far only total export amount has been used to create the graph analyzed in this study. In later iterations of this project, community detection may be performed on the graph formed from the data collected for different commodities in order to see the major communities in areas such as minerals and agriculture.

2.4 Time-Series Analysis

Trade relationships and their evolution over time is an important aspect of the WTW in understanding how the network came to be in its current state. Fagiolo et al. do an incredibly in-depth analysis of the evolution of the WTW from 1981 to 2000 which uncovered numerous interesting facts about network itself [2]. They uncovered that certain many countries have weak trade links, while there seems to be a core structure of rich countries that are more highly connected to other countries in the network. This goes back to the idea of community detection presented in 2.3. For this project, a more recent analysis of the WTW would be interesting in light of recent economic events (specifically the financial crisis of 2008), and how the WTW adapted and evolved in response to these events.

An important model relating to the evolution of the WTW is the fitness network model discussed by Garlaschelli and Loffredo [5]. This model states that each node in the network has an inherent competitive factor called the nodes’ fitness. This measure is related to the idea of “the rich get richer” in that nodes that have a higher fitness tend to attract stronger links at the expense of other nodes. The exact math behind this method will be left for when the data is actually collected, however this could potentially be a very interesting factor in looking at the annual network evolution of the WTW.

2.5 Topological Analysis

Topology analysis is a quintessential part of any graph analysis, and the topology of the WTW is no different. The structure of the WTW will be verified through the analysis of the data set discussed in 3.1, however many researchers have discovered that some well-known properties of the WTW are that it seems to follow the power-law distribution, has a high clustering coefficient, and follows the small-world network model [1, 3]. Another interesting phenomenon found in these networks in the past has been the correlation between GDP per capita, and the centrality of these nodes in the WTW network [1]. It has been revealed that countries with higher GDP per capita tend to have a more central position in the network and have more trade relationships (edges) in the network than lower GDP countries.

2.5.1 Node Degree Distribution

Most of the nodes in the graph have a high node degree, meaning that they have trade relations with many countries around the world. Since the graph is directed, both the in degree and the out degree of the graph can be analyzed. The out-degree distribution is shown in Figure 2 and shows than many of the countries have many trading partners. There are also many countries that have a relatively low amount of trading partners compared to countries such as Canada and the United States.

The in-degree distribution seems to be much more uniform than the out-degree. The disparity between countries when comparing the number of countries they import from is far less than the disparity seen in the out-degree distribution, representing how many countries they are exporting to. This could be due to several factors. Many developing countries may not have the trade relations with many larger, more established first world countries

3 EVALUATION

3.1 Data Set

The data set uncovered for the purposes of this project comes from the World Bank and is managed by the World Integrated Trade Solution or WITS [4]. WITS allows users to retrieve data on a country by country basis, and filtering on a number of aspects. The data for most countries dates back to 1989, which will suffice for the purpose of our study considering we will be more interested in a recent analysis of the WTW. WITS also allows for filtering on certain product categories such as fuels, chemicals, plastics, etc. to allow for a more in depth analysis if necessary. relationships (edges) in the network than lower GDP countries.

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