

Applications of Geospatial Data in Digital Communication

William Svoboda

Advisor: Michael Freedman

Department of Computer Science, Princeton University

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Abstract

Visual learning presents an opportunity to more effectively teach computer science fundamentals. However, existing solutions are unable to both facilitate user interaction and focus on implementation. This paper describes an assignment and programming framework for teaching graph traversal algorithms. Visualization tools are contextualized as a way to improve the learning experience, and an evaluation of the project with real students is discussed.

1 Introduction

With roughly 4.5 billion users worldwide [1], the scale of social media is testament to the importance of digital communication today. At the same time, humans are social animals. It is here in the physical world that we spend most of our time and have our closest interactions with each other. While 99% of users access social media through mobile devices [1], our interaction with these services is often still independent of the physical space around us.

Previous work [2] also suggests that digital interaction does not necessarily correspond to an improved social experience. This is especially interesting in light of the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic and the move towards remote work. Research [3, 4] points to a reliance on digital communication and social media as increasing social isolation.

There is much potential, however, in exploring the intersection between digital communication and physical space. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—among the largest social media platforms [1]—now incorporate geospatial data into their products. Other platforms, like Yik Yak, even place location at the core of the user experience [5].

The goal of this paper is to explore how geospatial data affects our perception of digital communication. My hypothesis was that tying interaction to physical proximity using would increase user engagement. To this end, I present a novel communication app that gates the sending and receiving of messages to the user’s location.

2 Background

2.1 Geospatial Data

Geospatial data is data that is related in some way to a specific geographic position. Such data typically combines location information in the form of coordinates, attribute information about the object or event in question, and temporal

information connected to the time this data existed [6]. In this way, geospatial data is able to connect digital information to a very real sense of time and place.

One of the principal uses of geospatial data is in geospatial analysis, empowered through geographic information systems (GIS) and related tools. Geospatial analysis can improve data visualization by providing additional context to traditional data analysis. Of particular relevance to this topic is the flexibility of geospatial data. While originally used in, geology, epidemiology, and the life sciences, geospatial data can be applied to areas as diverse as defense and social science [6].

2.2 Proximity Principle

In social psychology, the proximity principal relates the tendency to form social relationships with the physical distance between people. The phenomenon was first observed by Newcomb [7] and also explored by Festinger *et al.* [8]. Marmaros and Sacerdote [9] surveyed students and recent graduates at Dartmouth College, and found that physical proximity was more influential than any other factor in determining the level of social interaction between people.

3 Related Work

4 Approach

5 Implementation

6 Evaluation

7 Conclusions and Future Work

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