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Spatiotemporal Analysis of Social Media Data

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Synonyms

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Social media analysis; Spatiotemporal data mining; Spatiotemporal modeling

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Definition

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Social media provide a convenient platform for users to create and share content or to participate in online social activities. With the development of sensor technologies, it also generates large amount of spatiotemporal data, such as check-in records, user restaurant reviews, and geo-temporal tagged tweets. This entry specifically considers analyzing the spatiotemporal patterns in social media data. The problem involves identifying spatiotemporal correlations, building spatiotemporal models, and making predictions in space and time. Given that spatiotemporal observations have complex correlations, the major challenge of the problem is how to take into ac-

count the spatial and temporal correlations within the context of social media.

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Historical Background

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Spatiotemporal analysis for social media data is a relatively young area. Many efforts have been focused on geographical topic discovery, e.g., Mei et al. (2006), Yin et al. (2011), and Ahmed et al. (2013). These approaches correlate spatiotemporal context such as geotags and time stamps with topic modeling of social media contents. A related task is spatiotemporal density estimation. For example, the seminal work in Sakaki et al. (2010) estimates event-related Twitter posts for detecting earthquakes; Xu et al. (2012) recovers spatiotemporal event density of animal road killing from tweets. Another line of work extends collaborative filtering and incorporates spatial proximity and temporal components for better recommendation (Lu et al. 2009; Agarwal et al. 2010; Li et al. 2011). More recently, tensor learning have been examined to automatically infer the spatiotemporal dependence structures from social media data (Lin et al. 2009; Bahadori et al. 2014) .

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Scientific Fundamentals

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Analysis of spatiotemporal data in social media varies drastically according to specific predictive tasks. The following discussion describes a few

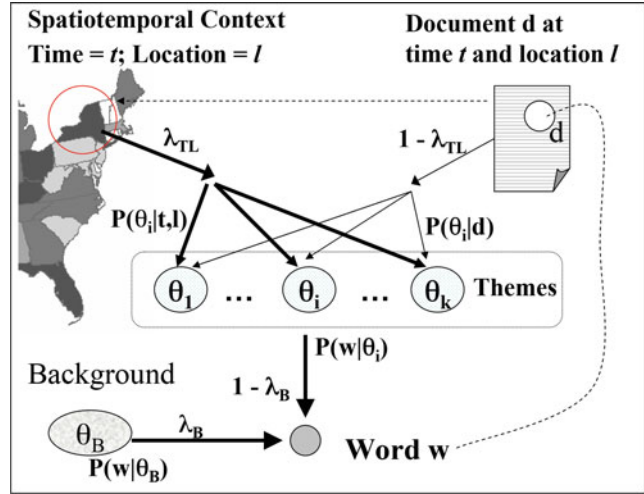
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Spatiotemporal Analysis of Social Media Data,

Fig. 1 Graphic model representation for spatiotemporal theme model (Mei et al. 2006)



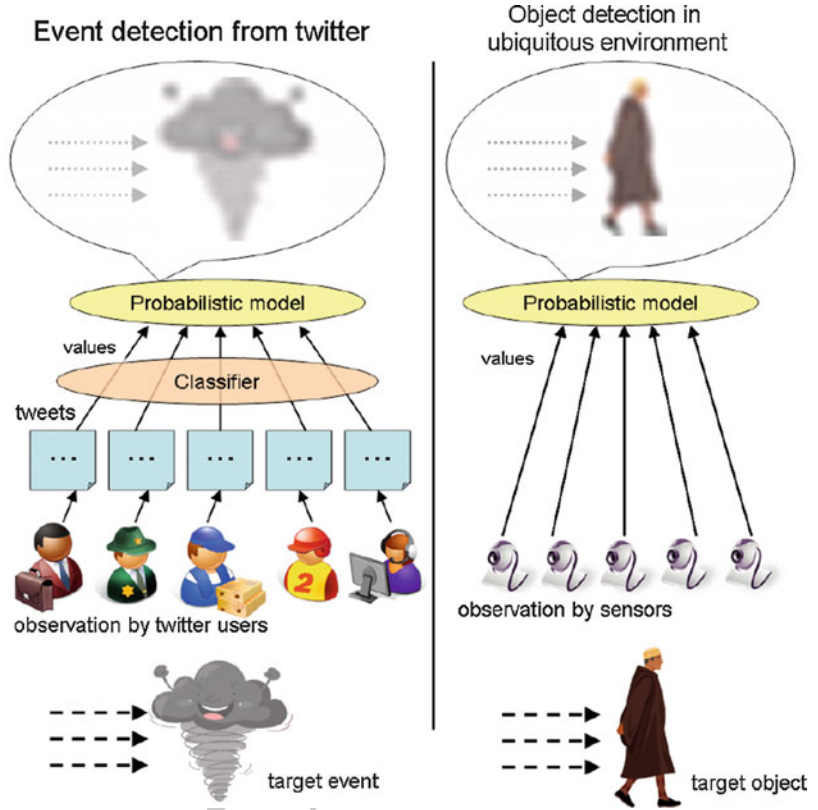
important spatiotemporal analysis techniques and representative algorithms in the field.

Spatiotemporal Topic Modeling Topic modeling is a powerful tool for semantic analysis in texts. Given a collection of social media content as well as the time and location information of the content, spatiotemporal topic modeling builds statistical models to discover the abstract “topics” from the social media content. Popular topic models include latent semantic analysis (LSA), probabilistic latent semantic indexing (PLSI), and latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) (Blei et al. 2003). Spatiotemporal topic models leverage the spatiotemporal information to summarize the time-varying and location-aware topics in an unsupervised fashion. For example, *spatiotemporal theme model* is proposed in Mei et al. (2006) to discover the geographical topics. Given a finite set of time stamps $\{t_1, t_2, \dots, t_{|T|}\}$ and locations $\{l_1, l_2, \dots, l_{|L|}\}$, document collection $C = \{(d_1, \bar{t}_1, \bar{l}_1), (d_2, \bar{t}_2, \bar{l}_2), \dots, (d_n, \bar{t}_n, \bar{l}_n)\}$, where d_i is the i -th document at time \bar{t}_i at location \bar{l}_i , $\bar{t}_i \in \{t_1, t_2, \dots, t_{|T|}\}$ and $\bar{l}_i \in \{l_1, l_2, \dots, l_{|L|}\}$. Figure 1 depicts the proposed spatiotemporal theme model. Specifically, the model defines a **theme** in a text collection C as a probabilistic distribution of words characterizing a semantically coherent topic or subtopic, represented with θ . It treats the time stamp and location as separate variables

and assumes that the words at location $l \in L$ and time $t \in T$ are generated as a mixture model of background theme θ_B and global themes $\{\theta_i\}$ with $i \in \{1, \dots, k\}$. The model defines the probability of a word w as $p(w) = \lambda_B p(w | \theta_B) + (1 - \lambda_B) \sum_{j=1}^k p(w, \theta_j | d, t, l)$, where λ_B is the probability of choosing θ_B . The global theme θ_i is a mixture of document factor and spatiotemporal factor, $\theta_i = (1 - \lambda_{TL})p(\theta_i | d) + \lambda_{TL}p(\theta_i | t, l)$, where λ_{TL} is a parameter to indicate the probability of using the spatiotemporal context to choose a theme. The parameters in the model are estimated by expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm. Yin et al. (2011) further extends the probabilistic model by taking into account the spatial proximity. It assumes that the geography can be divided into N regions. Within each region, the location l_d follows a multivariate Gaussian distribution; thus, words that are geographically close are more likely to be clustered into the same topic. Though many attempts have been made to model the geographical topics, the difficulties in defining locations and capturing the heterogeneity of geographical context still exist. In Mei et al. (2006), locations are prespecified (city) and assumed to be independently identical to each other. In Yin et al. (2011), regions are defined as large grid cells. It is expected that geographical discretization should adapt to regional population as well as the amount of

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Spatiotemporal Analysis of Social Media Data, Fig. 2 Correspondence between event detection from Twitter and object detection in an ubiquitous environment (Sakaki et al. 2010)



116 social media content. Another concern is that
 117 LDA-type models are less effective for modeling
 118 short documents, such as tweets, since they
 119 highly rely on co-occurrences of words (Yan
 120 et al. 2013).

121 **Spatiotemporal Density Estimation** Spa-
 122 tiotemporal density estimation treats the social
 123 media posts as discrete spatiotemporal events and
 124 takes them as inputs. It models the occurrence of
 125 those events in observed locations and predicts
 126 the event occurrence at unknown spatiotemporal
 127 point as outputs. For example, Sakaki et al.
 128 (2010) builds a real-time system to detect the
 129 center and the event trajectory of an earthquake
 130 shake. The system makes the analogy to sensing
 131 in ubiquitous environment, i.e., treating users as
 132 “social sensors” and tweets as sensory values, as
 133 shown in Fig. 2. For each tweet, the algorithm
 134 first conducts semantic analysis to classify
 135 whether the tweets are related to an event or
 136 not. Then it generates binary “sensor readings”

of the user for those tweets. It computes the
 event occurrence probability with respect to the
 sensor readings to account for the reliability
 of social sensors. Assuming that the number
 of sensors at time t is n , the probability of
 event occurrence is $1 - p_f^n$ where p_f is the
 false-positive ratio of a sensor (user). With a
 collection of spatiotemporal events, the system
 applies Kalman filter to predict the event location.
 In their setting, each location is treated as a
 hidden state $z_t = (d_{xt}, d_{yt})^t$ with longitude
 and latitude values. Each event corresponds to
 a sensory measurement x_t . The Kalman filter
 operates recursively on sensory measurements
 to produce an estimate of the event location.
 Another work by Xu et al. (2013) develops
 a spatiotemporal signal recovery framework
 called Socioscope to model the event occurrence
 distribution. The framework considers binning
 the events where each bin is a spatiotemporal
 point, such as “California, day 1.” Denoting x_i
 as the event count in bin i , Socioscope uses

159 Poisson distribution for each bin and tries to
160 recover the intensity f_i in the Poisson model.
161 The authors address two challenges, i.e., human
162 population bias by normalizing the occurrence
163 with population intensity z_i and noisy data by
164 imposing a stochastic transition. By adding the
165 graph Laplacian L , Socioscope essentially solves
166 the following penalized optimization problem:

$$167 \quad \min_{f \in \mathbb{R}^n} - \sum_{i=1}^m (x_i \log h_i - h_i) + \lambda \Omega(f; L),$$

168 where h_i is the Poisson parameter after normal-
169 ization and transition and Ω denotes the graph
170 regularizer over L .

171 Research studies have shown that fewer than
172 0.42 % of the tweets are associated with geo-
173 graphical tags (Cheng et al. 2010), leading to
174 extreme location sparsity. The highly skewed dis-
175 tribution of spatiotemporal events demonstrates
176 that the Gaussian assumption in Kalman filter
177 is inappropriate for spatiotemporal density esti-
178 mation. Xu et al. (2013) employs Poisson point
179 process estimation. However, it concatenates the
180 spatial dimension with the temporal dimension
181 and regards them as bins. This approach in-
182 evitably loses the natural ordering of temporal
183 dimension and fails to capture the evolution of
184 spatiotemporal events.

185 **Spatiotemporal Collaborative Filtering** Clas-
186 sic collaborative filtering takes a subset of user
187 ratings as input and predicts the rating values
188 for the missing entries. It works by factorizing
189 a rating matrix \mathbf{R} of user over item, into two
190 components \mathbf{P} and \mathbf{Q} , where the rows in \mathbf{P} are the
191 user factors and rows in \mathbf{Q} are the item factors.
192 Spatiotemporal collaborative filtering considers
193 the case when the users' ratings vary across
194 space and time. Lu et al. (2009) investigates the
195 problem of collaboration filtering with additional
196 spatiotemporal information. In their setting, each
197 user has a vector of ratings over time. In addi-
198 tion to the actual rating, extra side information,
199 such as items' feedback and users' demographic
200 profiles, is also available. The spatial component
201 of the proposed model utilizes the side infor-

202 mation. The algorithm imposes graph Laplacian
203 prior to user factors \mathbf{P} and item factors \mathbf{Q} . The
204 graph Laplacian matrices are constructed from
205 item similarity matrix and user similarity matrix
206 to regularize the spatial proximity. Hence, the
207 MAP estimate of the latent factors is equivalent
208 to minimizing

$$\|\mathbf{B} \circ (\mathbf{R} - \mathbf{P}\mathbf{Q})\|_F^2 + \lambda(\|\mathbf{P}\|_F^2 + \|\mathbf{Q}\|_F^2) \\ + \alpha(\text{tr}(\mathbf{P}^T \Delta_p \mathbf{P})) + \text{tr}(\mathbf{Q}^T \Delta_q \mathbf{Q})$$

209 where \mathbf{B} indicates the location of observed rating
210 \mathbf{R} , with one as observed and zero otherwise. Δ is
211 the graph Laplacian constructed from similarity
212 matrix \mathbf{W} as $\Delta = \mathbf{D} - \mathbf{W}$. For temporal modeling,
213 the algorithm assumes the user factors follow a
214 random walk driven by the Gaussian noise, i.e.,
215 $\mathbf{p}_t^{(u)} = \mathbf{p}_{t-1}^{(u)} + \mathbf{w}_t^{(u)}$ and $\mathbf{r}_t^{(u)} = \mathbf{H}_t^{(u)} \mathbf{p}_t^{(u)} + \mathbf{v}_t^{(u)}$,
216 where \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{r} correspond to the column vectors
217 of matrix \mathbf{R}, \mathbf{P} and \mathbf{w} and \mathbf{v} are the Gaussian noise.
218 Parameter estimation of spatiotemporal collabo-
219 rative filtering follows the standard Kalman filter
220 update. To avoid the expensive matrix inversion
221 at the Kalman filter updating step, mean field
222 approximation is used to estimate the variance
223 matrix given new observations, denoted as $\Sigma_{t|t}$.

224 Spatiotemporal collaborative filtering extends
225 matrix factorization to include spatiotemporal
226 features, which mitigates the cold start issue.
227 However, the number of latent factors in matrix
228 factorization needs to be decided by hand tuning.
229 Automatic parameter tuning scheme such as
230 Bayesian optimization (Snoek et al. 2012) could
231 be a possible solution. As an alternative for the
232 full singular value decomposition step, fast low-
233 rank matrix approximation techniques such as
234 sampling (Deshpande and Vempala 2006) can
235 also be applied.

236 **Spatiotemporal Analysis via Tensor Learning**
237 Spatiotemporal data has complex dependencies
238 between locations and time. Tensor, a multi-
239 dimensional array, provides a convenient way
240 to capture interdependencies along multiple
241 directions. Therefore, it is natural to represent
242 the multivariate spatiotemporal data as tensors.
243 Using tensor as a tool to analyze spatiotemporal

data has seen applications in image coding and brain topography modeling; see Kolda and Bader (2009) for a detailed review. Spatiotemporal analysis via tensor learning aims to capture the spatiotemporal correlations by casting the data as tensors and presenting a unified framework for many spatiotemporal analysis tasks. In particular, Bahadori et al. (2014) studies two key tasks in spatiotemporal analysis, namely, cokriging, which is to estimate the measurements in unknown locations, and forecasting, which is to predict the future value of known locations. They propose to use a 3-mode tensor to represent the spatiotemporal data. $\mathcal{X} \in \mathbb{R}^{P \times T \times M}$ denotes the observations in P locations in T time stamps for M variables. For cokriging task, the algorithm assumes the data tensor \mathcal{X} to be low rank. For forecasting task, the algorithm models the spatiotemporal process using vector autoregressive (VAR) model and imposes low-rank structures on the model tensor. Tensor mode- n rank is used as the low-rank constraint, $\sum_{n=1}^3 \text{rank}(\mathcal{W}_{(n)}) \leq \rho$, where $\mathcal{W}_{(n)}$ denotes the tensor unfolding at mode n . The low-rank structure captures the spatial clustering effect, temporal periodicity, and commonality among variables. The entry applies the framework to climate data sets, Yelp reviews, and Foursquare check-in data set. It demonstrates that low-rank tensor learning cannot only significantly improve the performance of forecasting and cokriging (5–10 %) but also drastically reduce the computational costs (by at least 300 %).

Generalization from traditional matrix learning to tensor learning is nontrivial due to different mathematical properties of matrix and tensor. Many problems become NP-hard, such as the best rank- K approximation of a tensor. Furthermore, the computational bottleneck of high-dimensional tensors can be restrictive for large-scale data. A natural solution for scaling up machine learning algorithms can be parallelism. However, the complex spatiotemporal correlation and the inherent structure of tensor itself pose significant challenges to parallelism. Parallel factor analysis in low-rank tensor learning has been investigated in signal processing liter-

ature (Sidiropoulos et al. 2000); filling the gap between mathematical formulations and practical spatiotemporal applications is needed.

Key Applications

Spatiotemporal analysis techniques can be used in many application domains in social media data. Below, we briefly discuss some of the major applications.

Event Detection Spatiotemporal topic modeling can be applied to discover the trending topics (Munro et al. 2011), highlight events (Weng and Lee 2011), and automatically identify the events from photo tags (Rattenbury et al. 2007) in social media. Viral topics or bursts in social media event occurrence provide hints on potential anomalous events and lead to the development of many real-world systems, for example, alerting earthquake shakes (Sakaki et al. 2010), detecting abrupt crime or preplanned social event (Chae et al. 2012), and flu monitoring (Singh et al. 2010).

Signal Recovery Signal recovery extracts ground truth observations from noisy, incomplete social media data. For example, Mazumder et al. (2013) analyzes the political tweets in Indonesia to recover the degree of radical activities. Xu et al. (2013) recovers the wildlife surveillance statistics from animal road-killing tweets. Sengstock et al. (2013) studies the spatiotemporal context of tweets and recovers the actual geography of certain landmarks.

Network Inference The spatiotemporal dependency between social media and human mobility can be used to infer the relation among people. Bahadori et al. (2013) learns the spatiotemporal dependency of tweets and earthquake event thus infers mutual influence graph among the users. Cho et al. (2011) combines periodic short-range movements with travel due to the social network structure. The spatiotemporal co-occurrence of the social media users also has been used to associate the users with each other and cluster them into different groups (Lauw et al. 2005;

Crandall et al. (2010). Wang et al. (2013) models the spatiotemporal dependence of the congress roll call data and uses the inferred voting network to predict all votes of new legislation.

Recommendation Spatiotemporal contextual recommendation has contributed to social media content personalization and ads targeting. At the same time, combining social media information improves the accuracy and customer satisfactory of recommendation service. Various applications include recommending movies and news (Lu et al. 2009), point of interests (Lian et al. 2014), photo tags (Sigurbjörnsson and Van Zwol 2008), posted tweets (Liu et al.), and mobile apps (Karatzoglou et al. 2012).

Object Matching and User Localization Object matching refers to matching two entities in the database. Examples include matching user posts to the restaurants (Dalvi et al. 2012). Spatial information available in the social media or inferring the user location via text of their posts can greatly enhance accuracy of the object matching task (Dalvi et al. 2012). It shows that the possibility of friendship increases as users become geographically closer to each other; thus, social network friendship can be used to locate users beyond the resolution of their IP address (Backstrom et al. 2010). The authors in Cheng et al. (2010) show that analysis of tweet contents can also reveal the geographical location of a user.

Future Directions

Spatiotemporal analysis of social media data has attracted significant amount of attention in the community, resulting in a plethora of innovative methodologies and novel applications. However, to a large extent, the problem remains elusive, and there is still a dire need for the future research to take into consideration various open questions in spatiotemporal data analysis. For example, how to handle the extremely sparse observations in social media data? How to extract the information without violating users' privacy? How to naturally integrate social media contents with

spatiotemporal side information closely? How to address the fundamental models?

For spatiotemporal analysis, which has a large literature in statistics and earth science, the definition of locations and the specification of spatiotemporal dependence might lead to significant different model performance. In parallel, considering the amount of social media content generated every day, it appears crucial to develop scalable algorithms that can learn spatiotemporal dependence structures efficiently and effectively. Indeed, spatiotemporal analysis of social media should account for the heterogeneity of population across regions and noisy observations. It should also reflect the underlying physical patterns of human mobility. Bayesian approach provides a potential solution to incorporate these domain knowledge into the model. However, the tuning of the prior hyper-parameters can be tedious. Then, in order to systematically compare the performance of different analytical results, benchmark evaluation metric would have to be developed to enable rigorous evaluation of different methodologies.

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