An intelligent system for personalized conference event recommendation and scheduling

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An Intelligent System for Personalized Conference Event Recommendation and Scheduling

Aldy GUNAWAN and Hoong Chuin LAU and Pradeep VARAKANTHAM and Wenjie WANG

Abstract.
Many conference mobile apps today lack the intelligent feature to automatically generates optimal schedules based on delegates’ preferences. This entails two major challenges: (a) identifying preferences of users; and (b) given the preferences, generates a schedule that optimizes his preferences. In this paper, we specifically focus on academic conferences, where users are prompted to input their preferred keywords. Our key contribution is an integrated conference scheduling agent that automatically recognizes user preferences based on keywords, provides a list of recommended talks and optimizes user schedule based on these preferences.

To demonstrate the utility of our integrated conference scheduling agent, we first demonstrated the app in the International Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems (AAMAS 2015) and conducted a survey to collect some data, which are used to verify the results presented in this paper. It is able to provide well calibrated results with respect to precision, accuracy and recall. We also tested the app in the 2015 WI-IAT International Conference (Singapore) and collected some feedbacks. The app will be demonstrated and deployed in AAMAS 2016, Singapore.

1 Introduction

In a large conference setting where talks are presented in parallel sessions across multiple days, it is challenging for a conference attendee to generate a plan of talks to attend that optimize his/her preferences. Furthermore, this adds to the cognitive challenge if the conference venue is large, where one may need to consider time to travel between talks. To reduce this cognitive load, we aim to provide an integrated conference scheduling agent that not only identifies user preferences (based on keywords) but also generates a schedule of talks to attend at different times of the conferences while considering the user preferences. We are specifically interested in academic conferences where data associated with users is easily available.

Both the individual problems (understanding user preferences and optimizing schedule accounting for preferences) have received significant interest in existing work. The first thread of related research is with respect to learning user preferences given papers has been studied extensively in the machine learning community. Statistical topic modeling has become a popular method for analyzing large sets of text collections by representing high dimensional data in a low dimensional subspace [20]. The topic model is built using MALLET, which is introduced by Andrew McCallum and his team in 2002 [10]. MALLET is able to navigate large bodies of information by finding clusters of keywords that frequently appear together, called topics.

The second thread of related work is with respect to optimizing preferences given constraints on scheduling talks. This problem is related to a single resource scheduling problem with the objective of maximizing the profitability of the resulting schedule under fixed processing times [19].

Our key contribution is in providing an integrated solution for both these problems and demonstrate utility on a real conference scheduling problem. Specifically, we first employ MALLET to identify the topics of interest for a given conference, by considering papers from that conference. We then identify preferences of a given user for the topics of interest at the conference by getting the user’s preferred keywords. Finally, using the preferences, we provide an optimization model for generating a preference optimized schedule for the user.

For easy interaction with the users, our agent is built as an application for mobile, namely PRESS. So, we are able to take change requests on the generated schedule and immediately provide an updated schedule. To demonstrate utility for conference attendees, we first demonstrated PRESS in the International Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems (AAMAS 2015) with 6 parallel sessions and conducted a survey to collect some data, which are used to verify the results presented in this paper. We show that the papers generated in the schedules for the users have high values of precision, accuracy and recall. We then tested PRESS in the 2015 WI-IAT International Conference, which was held in Singapore from 6 - 9 December 2015. Some feedbacks especially related to the client-facing android mobile app have been collected. By considering the survey result and collected feedbacks from both conferences, we further improve the app. Finally, PRESS will be demonstrated and deployed in AAMAS 2016 which would be held from 9 - 13 May 2016 in Singapore [7].

2 Related Work

Resnick and Varian [14] describe a recommender systems as follows: In a typical recommender system people provide recommendations as inputs, which the system then aggregates and directs to appropriate recipients. In some cases the primary transformation is in the aggregation; in others the system’s value lies in its ability to make good matches between the recommenders and those seeking recommendations.

Adomavicius and Tuzhilin [1] provide a survey of the state-of-the-art and possible extensions of the recommender system. Burke et al. [4] describe two basic principles of a recommender system: a) it is personalized to optimize the experience of one user, and b) it is intended to help the user choose among discrete options. Recommender systems have been developed in various domains of appli-
cations, such as LIBRA [11] (book recommender), INTIMATE [9] (movie recommender) and FOAFing the music [5] (music recommender). For more details about the characteristics of those examples, we refer to the original papers.

Lops et al. [8] describe two main paradigms of recommender systems. Content-based recommender systems generate recommended items based on items that have been liked by a user in the past, whereas Collaborative recommendation systems try to recommend items from other users whose preferences are similar to those of the user and recommend items they have liked. In this paper, we concentrate purely on content-based recommendation since our collected data is from a small community of users. There are different methods have been used in content-based recommendation, such as Naive Bayes, K-Nearest Neighbor Regression, Regularized Linear Regression and Latent Dirichlet Allocation.

LDA is a fully generative probabilistic topic model. In the recommender systems, probabilistic topic models play an important role in order to capture latent topical information from a large collection of data [12]. The basic underlying idea of probabilistic topic models is documents are mixtures of topics, where a topic is a cluster of words that frequently occur together [16]. By using contextual clues, topic models connect words with similar meanings and distinguish between uses of words with multiple meanings.

MALLET provides an option to use a previously generated inference file as an inference tool [10]. It uses a generative model, namely Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). LDA uses a hierarchical Bayesian network that represents the generative model of a set of documents. Each document is produced by selecting a distribution over topics, and then generating each keyword at random from a topic chosen by using the selected distribution. [20] implement different methods for topic inference, such as Gibbs sampling and SparseLDA in the MALLET toolkit on streaming two different sets of documents, 13 years of full papers published in the NIPS conference and a set of journal article abstracts from Pubmed. Other applications of MALLET are in analyzing a set of personal emails [18] and a set of ratings collected on Amazon Mechanical Turk [6]. Sampson [15] introduces “preference-based” conference scheduling (PCBS) problem. Instead of looking at the conference scheduling problem as a classical scheduling problem, the problem is treated from the customer point of view with the main objective is related to a customer-satisfaction. Other works related to the conference scheduling problem can be referred to [13, 17].

Bhardwaj et al. [3] introduce COBI as the most recent web-based, visual scheduling interface in planning a large-scale conference. COBI engages the community to play an active role in the planning process. A process that collects input from attendees and considers them as preferences and constraints in the planning process. To the best of our knowledge, no existing work incorporates the optimization mathematical model in the process of providing the recommendation papers.

3 The Proposed Approach

The overall architecture of PRESS is depicted in Figure 1. PRESS consists of four main components: Native android application (Front-End), Back-end Engine, Optimization Engine and Text Analyzer.

In the following, we provide the formal definition and formulation of the problem in the context of a large academic conference. We further explain the MALLET implementation in Text Analyzer component and two different proposed algorithms in the Optimization Engine component.

3.1 Problem Formulation

A conference consists of a set of main sessions where each main session is scheduled on one particular time period (e.g. from 9:00 - 10:00 am). In most large conferences, each main session is divided into a set of parallel sessions. We assume that each parallel session is scheduled in a particular room. Figure 2 shows an example of a conference setting on a particular day.

Let P be a set of papers that will be presented during a conference. Each parallel session consists of a number of talks. In order to generate a schedule that possibly contains talks across sessions, we divide each time period into multiple number of time slots (e.g. every 15 minutes). Each time slot will have one talk and only one paper i ∈ P would be presented in that time slot for that session. We also assume that each paper will only be presented once throughout the conference. See Figure 3 for an illustration.

We implement MALLET to generate a set of topics T from P. Each topic j ∈ T contains a set of keywords W^j that is likely to appear together in topic j [16]. We assume that |W^j| = |W^1| (∀j ∈ T).

Some methodological issues faced when using MALLET, such as how to determine the values of |T| and |W^1|, affects the quality of the outputs. At the moment, the best way to determine the values of |T| and |W^1| is to run multiple analyses with different values of both and comparing the results that seem to fit "best" [2].

In summary, MALLET generates two different outputs (Figures 4 and 5) that would be kept in the database and used as inputs for the optimization engine:

- M_{|T| × |W^1|} = [w^j_k], where w^j_k represents keyword k of topic j (∀j ∈ T, k ∈ W^j).
- U_{|P| × |T|} = [u_{i,j}] where u_{i,j} represents the utility score of paper i related to topic j (∀i ∈ P, j ∈ T).

Let W^2 be the set of keywords stated on paper i ∈ P. As mentioned in Section 1, we consider both keywords generated by MALLET and from papers directly and both would be kept in the database.

3.2 MALLET Implementation

The Text Analyzer component consists of two sub-components: the PDFMINER tool and the MALLET topic model package. Take note that both sub-components: PDFMiner and MALLET, are run offline and generated results would be kept in the database. PDFMiner (https://pypi.python.org/pypi/pdfminer/) is a tool for extracting information from PDF documents. This sub-component is responsible for converting a collection of documents (eg. pdf files) into text files and then tagging the part of speech of words in these text files.

In most cases, information has no structure, some preprocessing steps are required to convert unstructured information and extract structured relevant information. The Illinois Chunker (https://cogcomp.cs.illinois.edu/page/software_view/Chunker) is used to identify the semantically related words by assigning different tags. For example, in the noun words "reinforcement learning", the word "reinforcement" is identified as the beginning word of a noun phrase and therefore tagged with B-NP (begins a noun phrase), however, the following word "learning" is identified inside the same noun phrase as "reinforcement" and therefore tagged with I-NP (inside a noun phrase). Likewise, other types of phrases such as a verb phrase will be tagged...
The second sub-component, the MALLET topic model package [10], is used to extract a set of topics and the highest frequent words for each topic from the text documents and output the statistics of each extracted topic for each text document. MALLET allows us to filter a standard list of English stop-words from documents before processing. Unfortunately, we cannot edit the contents of this list without modifying code and recompiling. In order to rule out some trivial words, we create an extra-word file containing those trivial words.

Figure 4 shows the screenshot of the MALLET output. There are 11 topics generated with 5 keywords for each topic. The topics that compose each document including the statistics of each topic can be seen in Figure 5. For example, PAPER 1 has topic 10 as its principal topic, at about 82.1%; topic 15 at 25.8% and so on. The topic model also suggests a connection among documents that might not at first have suspected. PAPERS 1, 2, 3 and 4 have topic 10 as their principal topic.

3.3 Proposed Algorithms

Given a set of keywords $K$ that the user is interested in and the results of MALLET tools, we calculate the personalized utility score for each talk and generate a list of recommended talks.

**Personalization Algorithm**

We present the personalization algorithm for providing a list of recommended talks, as shown in Algorithm 1. The objective is to calculate $\tilde{u}_{ij}$, the modified utility score of paper $i$ related to topic $j$ in $T$, with respect to the set of keywords $K$ given by the user.

We first compare the number of keywords $|K|$ which are matched with a set of keywords $W_j$ of topic $j$, represented as $\text{Tot}_j$ ($\forall j \in T$).

For each paper $i$, the utility score $u_{ij}$ is multiplied by $\text{Tot}_j$ in order to get the value of $\tilde{u}_{ij}$. Finally, we calculate the total personalized utility score of paper $i$, $\text{TotU}_i = \sum_{j \in T} \tilde{u}_{ij}$ ($\forall i \in P$) (LINES 1 - 18).

The next step is to compare $K$ with the keywords from paper $i$, $W_i^j$ ($\forall i \in P$). If a match exists, the value of $\text{TotU}_i$ will added by one for each matched keyword (LINES 19 - 27). For each user, all papers would be sorted in descending order with respect to the values of $\text{TotU}_i$ (LINES 28 - 29). The recommendation is given from the top $x\%$ of papers. This is a naive way in order to provide a list of recommended talks without considering possible conflicts.

The user will then select or remove some talks from the list. Those selected talks would be in the “must-go” and “must-skipped” lists, respectively. PRESS continues to call the recommendation algorithm.

**Figure 1:** System Architecture of PRESS

**Figure 2:** Example of conference setting

**Figure 3:** Example of papers presented in a particular time period with B-VP (begins a verb phrase) and I-VP (inside a noun phrase), respectively.

**Figure 4:** Screenshot of MALLET output

**Figure 5:** Screenshot of topic composition
Algorithm 1 Personalization Algorithm

1: for $h = 1$ to $|K|$ do
2:   for $j = 1$ to $|T|$ do
3:     $Tot_j = 0$
4:   for $k = 1$ to $|W^1|$ do
5:     if $(h^{th}$ keyword from the user is matched with $k^{th}$ keyword of topic $j$) then
6:       $Tot_j += 1$
7:   end if
8: end for
9: end for
10: end for
11: for $i = 1$ to $|P|$ do
12:   for $j = 1$ to $|T|$ do
13:     $\Bar{u}_{ij} = Tot_j \times u_{ij}$
14: end for
15: end for
16: for $h = 1$ to $|K|$ do
17:   for $i = 1$ to $|P|$ do
18:     for $k = 1$ to $|W^2|$ do
19:       if $(h^{th}$ keyword from the user is matched with $k^{th}$ keyword of paper $i$) then
20:         $Tot_i += 1$
21:       end if
22: end for
23: end for
24: end for
25: end for
26: end for
27: end for
28: Rank all papers based on TotU values in the descending order
29: return the top $x\%$ of papers

in order to provide the final schedule that maximizes the total personalized utility score and ensures there is no conflicts among talks.

Recommendation Algorithm

In the recommendation algorithm, we introduce a mathematical model to formulate the scheduling problem. The time slots of talks are taken into consideration in this model. The mathematical programming model is solved by the commercial solver CPLEX Optimization Studio 12.6.1.

The scheduling problem is defined as follows. We define MUST and SKIP as "must-go" and "must-skip" lists, respectively. Let assume the conference is held within a set of days $D$. Each day $d \in D$ is divided into a set of time slots $S_d$. Each time slot $s \in S_d$ on day $d \in D$ consists of a set of parallel sessions $N_{ds}$. A talk would be held in one parallel session at each time slot.

The decision variable $X_{dsn}$ is a binary variable. Its value equals to 1 if a talk in parallel session $n$ on day $d$ at time slot $s$ is selected.

Maximize $\sum_{d \in D} \sum_{s \in S_d} \sum_{n \in N_{ds}} \Bar{u}_{dsn} \times X_{dsn}$ \hspace{1cm} (1)

The objective function (1) is to maximize the total personalized utility score of selected talks. Let $\Bar{u}_{dsn}$ is the utility score of the talk in parallel session $n \in N_{ds}$ on day $d \in D$ at time slot $s \in S_d$. The utility scores are collected from $TotU_p (p \in P)$ values with respect to the time slot. For example, if paper $p_{11}$ is presented on Day 1, time slot 1 and parallel session 1, the value the talk $\Bar{u}_{111} = TotU_{p_{11}}$.

$$\sum_{k \in N_{ds}} X_{dsn} \leq 1 \hspace{0.5cm} \forall d \in D, s \in S_d$$ \hspace{1cm} (2)

Equation (2) ensures that at each time slot, only one talk is attended.

$$X_{dsn} = 1 \hspace{0.5cm} \forall (d, s, n) \in MUST$$ \hspace{1cm} (3)

Equation (3) ensures that talks in the "must-go" list, MUST, are attended.

$$X_{dsn} = 0 \hspace{0.5cm} \forall (d, s, n) \in SKIP$$ \hspace{1cm} (4)

Equation (4) enforces that talks are in the "must-skip" list, SKIP, would not be attended since they are out of the user interest.

$$\sum_{d \in D} \sum_{s \in S_d} \sum_{n \in N_{ds}} X_{dsn} \leq M \hspace{0.5cm} \forall d \in D, s \in S_d, n \in N_{ds}$$ \hspace{1cm} (5)

Equation (5) guarantees that only talks with non-zero personalized utility scores would be selected. Let $M$ be a very large number.

4 Architecture and System Design

Figure 1 illustrates the various individual components and their interactions. All communications among main components are implemented by using RESTful web service published on one of Singapore University Management servers, called ZETA server.

Android Application (Front-end Engine)
This is a client-facing android mobile app that allows a user to enter preferred keywords, view recommended talks, select preferred talks (indicated as "must-go"), remove non-preferred talks (indicated as "must-skip") and view the final schedule. This component serves as an interface for the user to construct the user profile. All information provided by the user will be sent to the back-end engine.

Back-end Engine
This component is responsible for coordinating and delegating tasks between the front-end and the optimization engines. The back-end engine is also responsible for storing and retrieving all information related to the conference in the database, including keywords from papers and text analyzer outputs.

First, it collects the user-profile from the front-end engine and pass it to the optimization engine. The optimization engine will call the personalization algorithm in order to generate a list of recommended talks. This list would be passed back to the front-end engine so the user can indicate and select his preferred talks ("must-go") and remove some non-preferred talks ("must-skip").

The back-end then consolidates "must-go" and "must-skip" lists together with other information from database, such as conference schedule, and passed to the optimization engine. The recommendation algorithm will be called in order to generate the final schedule. At the end, the back-end engine pass back the final schedule to the front-end engine and display it to the user.

Optimization Engine
The optimization engine consists of two algorithms: personalization and recommendation algorithms. As described in Section 3, this component interacts with the back-end engine in order to generate the list of recommended papers and the final schedule.

5 Experimental Results

5.1 User Study Details
PRESS was first demonstrated during the International Conference on Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems (AAMAS-15) which was held from 4 - 8 May 2015 in Istanbul, Turkey. The
conference consists of 6 main sessions. Each main session is labelled by an alphabet which represents a particular time period, e.g. main session B is held on Wednesday (6 May 2015) from 11.00 - 12.30. Each main session is further divided into 5 different parallel sessions, numbered from 1 - 5. Each talk is given a predetermined time slot (e.g. 15 minutes). In total, there are 166 talks. Each parallel session is related to one of particular research area/topic, such as Game Theory, Applications and others. The detailed schedule, including the information about the papers, can be found in http://www.aamas2015.com/en/program.asp.

In order to verify the effectiveness of PRESS, a user survey was conducted at AAMAS-15. We collected 45 respondents from the AAMAS-15 participants. Each respondent was asked to specify his/her preference keywords together with the list of talks he/she would be interested to attend. This collection of surveys serve as the ground truth and would be used for analysis purpose.

5.2 System Components

We also tested the app in the 2015 WI-IAT International Conference. Some feedbacks especially related to the client-facing android mobile app (e.g. the design of a sign-up page, the layout and so on) have been collected.

We include some final screenshots for the Android app. The opening screen requests the user either to sign in or to register (Figure 6(a)). The registration is required for the first times (Figure 6(b)). The user also needs to agree with the terms and conditions of the app (Figure 6(c)). Figure 6(d) summarizes the profile of the registered user.

Figure 7(a) shows the screen for the user to input the preferred keywords. Once the arrow button on the right top corner is clicked, the list of recommended talks which are generated by the personalization algorithm (Algorithm 1) would be displayed. The user then select and remove some talks. Those would be treated as "must-go" and "must-skip" lists, as shown in Figure 7(b). The details of one particular talk can also be displayed (Figure 7(c)). All those information would be sent back to the back-end engine and the recommendation algorithm would be called. Finally, the final schedule for each day would be displayed, as seen in Figure 7(d).

5.3 Insights

After demonstrating PRESS for the first trial and conducting the survey at the AAMAS-15, we analyze the goodness of PRESS in recommending the list of talks. Out of 14 research areas, the top three most selected areas are Application, Game Theory and Learning which cover up to 42%.

Due to a short time taken for each survey, we assume that a user will not be able to exhaustively select all preferred talks. Hence, based on a set of selected talks, we include an additional set of selected talks which have high correlation values with those talks. All those talks are considered as the talks selected by a user as well. The higher the correlation value is, the more similar two papers are in terms of topics including keywords generated. The correlation between two talks is calculated using the Cosine Coefficient formula:

\[ \cos(i, i') = \frac{\sum_{j \in T} u_{ij} u_{i'j}}{\sqrt{\sum_{j \in T} u_{ij}^2} \sqrt{\sum_{j \in T} u_{i'j}^2}} \quad \forall (i, i') \in P \]  

We evaluate the performance of PRESS by comparing three statistical measures: accuracy, precision and recall rates. The accuracy is the proportion of true results (true positives and true negatives) among the total number of cases examined. Precision (positive predictive value) is the fraction of relevant cases that are relevant, while recall (sensitivity) is the fraction of relevant cases that are retrieved. Precision can be seen as a measure of quality, whereas recall is a measure of quantity.

By setting the numbers of user-selected papers from the ground truth and recommended papers generated by PRESS to a cut-off of top 10% × 166 talks which equals to 16 talks with the highest total personalized utility scores and a cut-off correlation value (e.g. 0.75), our experimental results show that the accuracy, precision and recall rates of PRESS are 92.02%, 58.61% and 58.61%, respectively. Other results with different cut-off correlation values can also be seen in Table 1.

We conclude that the higher the cut-off correlation value, the lower the values of measures are. It is intuitive correct since the selected talks by the user during the survey would be fewer. If we do not include talks with high correlation values, the three measures are much lower since the users are not aware with similar talks.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Correlation value</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Precision</th>
<th>Recall</th>
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<td>58.61%</td>
<td>58.61%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Accuracy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Conclusion

We introduce a personalized event scheduling recommender system, PRESS, for a large conference setting. PRESS is an android mobile app that gathers personalized information from a user and recommends talks to be attended. Although there is a bunch of recommender systems in different domains, so far as we are concerned that PRESS is the first android app that incorporates an optimization model for generating a feasible schedule.

We demonstrated PRESS at AAMAS-15 in Istanbul, Turkey. The generated predictions by PRESS is compared against the ground truth. We observe that PRESS achieves reasonable accuracy, precision and recall rates. Some feedbacks have also been collected during the 2015 WI-IAT conference. We will deploy PRESS during AAMAS-16 in Singapore from 9 - 13 May 2016. More ground-truth results will be collected and included in due course.

The current version of PRESS uses the direct keyword matching among keywords generated by MALLET and provided by the user. We will consider more advanced techniques which allow going beyond the direct keyword matching. We also consider other scenarios that may occur. Some talks may be scheduled in more than one timeslot so the attendee has to decide which timeslot is best to attend that talk. This may link to the capacity constraint of rooms which is currently negligible. Finally, we are in the process of developing the web-based and the iOS versions of PRESS.

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