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DOI

[10.1145/3336191.3371884](https://doi.org/10.1145/3336191.3371884)

Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

WSDM '20

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Ren, P., Ren, Z., Sun, F., He, X., Yin, D., & de Rijke, M. (2020). NLP4REC: The WSDM 2020 Workshop on Natural Language Processing for Recommendations. In *WSDM '20: proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining : February 3-7, 2020, Houston, TX, USA* (pp. 907-908). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3336191.3371884>

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NLP4REC: The WSDM 2020 Workshop on Natural Language Processing for Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Natural language processing is becoming more and more important in recommender systems. This half day workshop explores challenges and potential research directions in Recommender Systems (RSs) combining Natural Language Processing (NLP). The focus will be on stimulating discussions around how to combine natural language processing technologies with recommendation. We welcome theoretical, experimental, and methodological studies that leverage NLP technologies to advance recommender systems, as well as emphasize the applicability in practical applications. The workshop aims to bring together a diverse set of researchers and practitioners interested in investigating the interaction between NLP and RSs to develop more intelligent RSs.

website: <https://wsdm2020-nlp4rec.github.io>

1 MOTIVATION AND FIT FOR WSDM

Studied for decades, recommender systems (RSs) attempt to identify the most relevant piece of information solely based on an implicitly expressed information need reflected in user-item interaction behaviors. Most studies focus on optimizing the recommendation or ranking criteria, assuming that people are more likely to trust sources ranked higher in recommendation results. However, achieving higher recommendation performance is far from meeting user satisfaction. There are many other fundamental issues, such as explainability, privacy. Recently, there are an increasing number of studies trying to address these issues by combining Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies with RSs, e.g., addressing recommendation explainability with knowledge graph reasoning and review generation [7].

The motivation of this workshop is to bring together a diverse set of researchers and practitioners who are interested in exploring fundamental issues in RSs, and/or emphasizing the applicability in practical applications (e.g., e-commerce) by leveraging the most recent advances in NLP. We see a large space for discussion and future research in the development of more intelligent RSs.

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WSDM '20, February 3–7, 2020, Houston, Texas, USA

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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-5940-5/19/02.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3289600.3291375>

Given the current ubiquitous use of a variety of RSs, they have been and still are hot research topics in information retrieval or data mining related communities. As one of the premier conferences on web-inspired research involving search and data mining, the WSDM community has the responsibility to care about the broader impact and implications of RSs that we research and the systems that we build in academia and industry.

2 THEME AND PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

RecSys, SIGIR and WSDM all featured the workshops on recommender systems, i.e., KaRS¹, RECOVER², EARS³, CARS-BDA⁴. These workshops focus on either recommender systems only or the interdisciplinary researches with a particular task of natural language processing.

NLP4REC 2020 will be a forum for discussion about the challenges in applying NLP technologies to real recommendation applications as well as the theory behind the them. The purpose of this workshop is to establish a bridge for communication between industrial researchers and academic researchers, and provide an opportunity for people to exchange ideas, and discuss the future directions. The themes of focus for the workshop include but not limited to the applications of NLP technologies in the following recommendation scenarios.

Knowledge-aware Recommendation. In most cases, RSs usually suffer from the sparsity of user-item interactions and the cold start problem. Recent studies indicate that an effective way to alleviate these limitations is to incorporate side informations, e.g., user profiles, item profiles. Knowledge graphs are ubiquitous in reality to represent the side informations and their relationships, e.g., social networks, medication networks, e-commerce networks. Deep learning architectures on graph-structured data have achieved remarkable performance in many NLP tasks [10]. This wave of research has also aroused great interest among researches in RSs [1]. **Explainable Recommendation.** Explainable recommendation aims to improve the transparency, persuasiveness of RSs by providing explanations to users or developers, which helps them to understand why certain items are recommended [9]. Much progress has

¹<https://recsys.acm.org/recsys18/kars/>

²<https://recsys.acm.org/recsys18/recover/>

³<http://www.sigir.org/sigir2019/program/workshops/ears/>

⁴<http://wise-conferences.org/CARS-BDA/CARS-BDA.html>

been made to promote recommendation explainability by paying attention to certain user/item attributes [8]. More intelligent RSs should be able to generate natural language explanations [2]. However, there is still a long way to go towards this goal.

Conversational Recommendation. One of the key aspects in RSs is how to capture user interests precisely. Instead of relying merely on mining user interests from previous user-item interaction behaviors, conversational recommendation provides an alternative strategy through conducting conversations with the users directly [6]. It is an interesting setting for the scientific exploration of both conversation and recommendation modeling.

Sequential Recommendation. Sequential recommendation is an effective paradigm to capture the dynamics of RSs by modeling the user-item interactions as a sequence. Owing to the shared sequential characteristics with natural languages, many NLP technologies or mechanisms have been successfully applied to model various scenarios in sequential recommendations [3–5].

3 LIST OF ORGANIZERS

- Dr. Pengjie Ren is postdoctoral researcher at the Information and Language Processing Systems (ILPS) group, University of Amsterdam. His current research is focused on recommender systems and conversational agents. He has published more than 30 research papers in conferences and journals including SIGIR, WWW, EMNLP, AAAI, TOIS, TKDE, etc. He serves as a program committee member of several top-tier venues (such as SIGIR, WWW, AAAI, WSDM) and the regular reviewer for journals including TOIS, TKDE, TKDD, etc.
- Prof. Dr. Zhaochun Ren is working as a professor at Shandong University. Prior to this, he worked as a senior research manager at JD.com and a research associate in University College London. Zhaochun got his PhD from University of Amsterdam, supervised by Prof. Dr. Maarten de Rijke. Zhaochun is interested in information retrieval, social media mining and content analysis in e-commerce.
- Dr. Fei Sun is a research scientist in Search & Recommendation Group at Alibaba. Prior to joining Alibaba, he obtained Ph.D. (2013) from Institute of Computing Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences supervised by Prof. Jiafeng Guo and Prof. Jun Xu. His current research is focused on text representation learning and neural models for recommender systems. He has published about 20 research papers in top conferences including SIGIR, ACL, WWW, KDD, EMNLP, AAAI, IJCAI. He also serves as a program committee member of several top-tier venues (such as SIGIR, ACL, AAAI, CIKM, and EMNLP).
- Prof. Dr. Xiangnan He is a professor with the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC). He received his Ph.D. in Computer Science from National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2016. His research interests span information retrieval, data mining, and multi-media analytics. He has over 60 publications appeared in several top conferences such as SIGIR, WWW, KDD, and MM, and journals including TKDE and TOIS. His work on recommender systems has received the Best Paper Award Honourable Mention in WWW 2018 and ACM SIGIR 2016. Moreover, he has served as the PC chair of CCIS 2019, area chair of MM 2019 and CIKM 2019, and PC member for several top conferences including SIGIR, WWW, KDD etc., and the regular reviewer for journals including TKDE, TOIS, TMM, etc.
- Dr. Dawei Yin is a senior Director of Research at JD.com. He is managing the recommendation engineering team, building the unified recommender system of JD.com, one of the largest online retailers in China. He also founded JD.com Data Science Lab, leading the science efforts for recommendation, search, metrics and knowledge graph, etc.
- Prof. Dr. Maarten de Rijke is a University Professor of Artificial Intelligence and Information Retrieval at the University of Amsterdam. He works on different types of technology that connect people to information, both its algorithmic underpinnings, its uses in domains ranging from news and retail to security and well-being and its broader implications. Maarten is a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the founding director of the national Innovation Center for Artificial Intelligence. He has previously helped to organize various conferences (CLEF, ECIR, ICTIR, SIGIR, WSDM) and workshops (at CIKM, ECIR, SIGIR, WWW).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is supported by Ahold Delhaize, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU), the Innovation Center for Artificial Intelligence (ICAI), the Natural Science Foundation of China (61672324, 61672322, 61972234, 61902219, 6197237), the Natural Science Foundation of Shandong province (2016ZRE27468), the Tencent AI Lab Rhino-Bird Focused Research Program (JR201932), and the Fundamental Research Funds of Shandong University. All content represents the opinion of the authors, which is not necessarily shared or endorsed by their respective employers and/or sponsors.

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