12: Social Networks

Machine Learning and Real-world Data (MLRD)

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Where have we got to?

- You have now encountered two applications of ML and real-world data:
  - Sentiment classification
  - Sequence learning for biological applications
- We will now move to the third topic: Social Networks.
- You will be given a network consisting of users and links between them.
- You will visualise this network and then write code to determine some simple statistics of the network.
- In subsequent sessions, we will use network properties in a classic ML task: clustering.

Social networks

- Examples:
  - Facebook-style networks:
    - Nodes: people;
    - Links: “friend”, messages
  - Twitter-style networks:
    - Nodes: Entities/people
    - Links: “follows”, “retweets”
    - Also: research citations
- Operations on such networks
  - Which role does a node play in this network?
  - Is there a substructure in the network?
    $\leftarrow$neighbourhood areas/cliques

Some reasons to analyse social networks

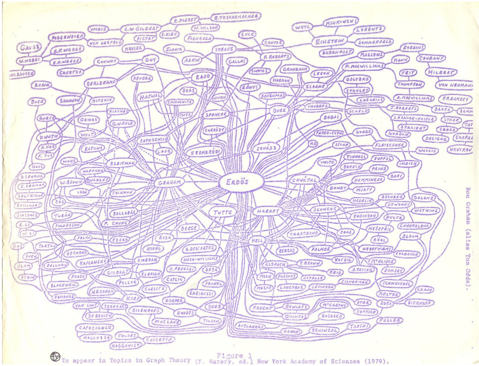
- Academic investigation of human behaviour (sociology, economics etc)
- Disease transmission in epidemics
- Modelling information flow: e.g., who sees a picture, reads a piece of (fake)
- Identifying well-connected individuals and links between subcommunities
  - novelty/origin
  - targeted advertising . . .
- Lots of applications in conjunction with other approaches: e.g., sentiment analysis of tweets plus network analysis.

Diameter and average distance of a network

- Networks are modelled as graphs: undirected and unweighted here.
- distance is the length of shortest path between two nodes.
- diameter of a graph: maximum distance between any pair of nodes.

Erdös Number

Steps in a path between a researcher and the mathematician, Paul Erdös, counting co-authorship of papers as links.



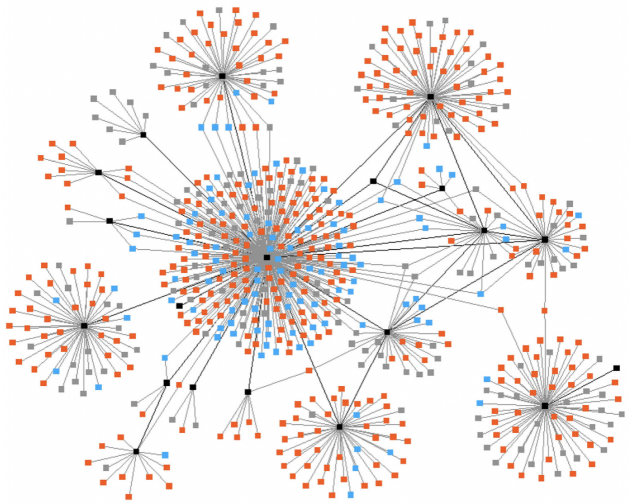
http://oakland.edu/enp/

Degree of a node

- The degree of a node is the number of neighbours a node has in the graph.
- For instance: Erdös had 509 coauthors, so is represented as a node of degree 509.
- The distribution of node degrees may be very skewed. e.g.:
  - American Mathematical Society data from 2004: `http://oakland.edu/enp/`
  - mean degree is 3.36
  - about 20% have degree 0 (i.e., no co-authored papers)
  - only five mathematicians had more than 200 collaborators, none beside Erdös had more than 270

Small world Phenomenon

- Natural networks often have the Small World property.
- A small world network is one in which most nodes are not neighbours of each other, but the neighbours of any given node are likely to be neighbours of each other
- In other words, they have closely clustered regions, connected only by a few links between them.
- Most nodes can be reached from each other by a small number of hops.



Six Degrees of Separation

- But how many hops?
  - 'Chain-links': short story by Karinthy (1929): any two individuals in the world could be connected via at most 5 personal acquaintances.
  - Milgram (1967) attempted to verify experimentally (partial success)
  - Non-obvious that the links can be found by humans: decentralized search.

Some important concepts for social networks

See Easley and Kleinberg (2010, Chapter 3) for full discussion:

- giant component: a connected component containing most of the nodes in a graph.
- weak ties: socially distant ties, infrequent interaction (acquaintances) vs. strong links: close friends and family.
- The links that keep giant components together are often only weak ties.
- bridge: an edge that connects two components which would otherwise be unconnected.
- local bridge: an edge joining two nodes that have no other neighbours in common. Cutting a local bridge increases the length of the shortest path between the nodes.

Triadic closure and clustering coefficient

Easley and Kleinberg (2010, p48–50)

- triadic closure: if A knows B and A knows C, relatively likely B and C will (get to) know each other.
- The global clustering coefficient is a measure of the amount of triadic closure in a network.
- It is the number of closed triads over the total number of triads (both open and closed).
- Clustering coefficient of a node A is the probability that two randomly selected neighbours of A are also neighbours of each other.

Random networks (Easley and Kleinberg, Ch 20)

- Is the small world phenomenon surprising?
- Very, if we assume random links overall.
- Not, if we create clusters with high triadic closure and long weak ties.
- Watts and Strogatz: randomly generated graph with high triadic closure at close range, plus a few long random links.

Today's data

- Facebook data: combined friends list data from 10 users (ego-networks).
- Originally used for experiments in discovering social circles: e.g., family, school friends, university friends, CS department friends (contained completely in university friends).
- from SNAP `http://snap.stanford.edu/data/egonets-Facebook.html`
- Also available today for the starred tick: two collaboration networks (also from SNAP).

Your task today

Task 10:

- Investigate the network using `gephi`
  - Visualize the network with `gephi`
  - Find network diameter
  - Visualize node degrees
  - Visualize betweenness centrality (discussed on Friday)
- Coding:
  - Find the degree of each node.
  - Determine the diameter of the network using a breadth-first all-pairs shortest path (APSP) algorithm.
    (More complex approaches in Algorithms course, but note there are no weights or negative edges here.)
  - Verify against `gephi`'s numbers.