INTRODUCTION

“We are social offline, we are social online,” proclaimed the General Chair John Breslin in his opening speech for the 6th International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM) organized in Dublin, Ireland, in June 2012. This phrase aptly describes the 6th installment of a growing conference, held in the Trinity Biomedical Sciences Institute that focuses on how social media and weblogs are connected to our everyday experiences, both online and offline. The conference, organized by the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI), presented a unique opportunity for researchers and practitioners from various disciplines including computer science, communication and media, linguistics, marketing, and social sciences to share research findings, applied insights, and challenging questions about the past, present, and the future of social media. What follows is a review of this four-day conference. First, a conference overview is provided. Then, a more detailed account of specific events and sessions that were held during the conference is presented.

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The growing interest in the ICWSM is evidenced by not only a consistent increase in number of papers submitted and but also the increase in number of registered participants. The ICWSM’12 received 232 full paper submissions. Only 20% of these submissions were accepted as full papers. An additional 67 submissions were accepted for poster sessions. The accepted papers, including full papers, poster papers, and demos, came from 24 different countries. The conference had 330 registered participants.

In a time when a considerable number of conferences increase the number of simultaneous sessions to accommodate more presentations, the organizational committee of the ICWSM conference made a very welcome decision to keep the conference as a single-track conference, with no simultaneous sessions for
paper presentations (there were simultaneous sessions for workshops and tutorials).

The first day of the conference had a number of workshops and tutorials that will be described briefly later. In the next three days of the conference, the program contained a mix of keynote speeches, oral presentation sessions (with 15-20 minute long presentations per paper), lightning sessions (with one minute long presentations followed by poster sessions), industry panels, posters, and demo sessions.

WORKSHOPS AND TUTORIALS

In the first day of the conference, a number of tutorials provided an ample opportunity for participants to get acquainted with approaches in various disciplines. The tutorials focused on issues related to the extraction of information from social media, analysis of large social network data, analysis and visualization of connections between social networks, and mining of sentiments from user-generated content.

Also in the first day, four workshops were held:

1. Workshop on Social Media Visualization: This workshop provided examples on different techniques that are used to visualize data from social media such as Instagram (Hochman & Shwartz, 2012), Flickr (Ushizima, Manovich, Margolis, & Douglas, 2012), and Twitter (Kim & DiSalvo, 2012; Rios & Lin, 2012). Also, the presentation by Salway, Diakopoulos, & Elgesem (2012) provided a summary of a novel technique that integrates analysis of key statements (rather than the more frequently used keywords) with the visualization of data from blog networks;

2. Workshop on Real-Time Analysis and Mining of Social Streams: The presentations in this workshop focused on a variety of data mining and natural language processing applications that can be used to process, sort, and classify (e.g., a real-time tool that assesses content credibility and quality from informality levels) texts from social media (Mosquera & Moreda, 2012; Preotiuc-Pietro, Samangoei, Cohn, Gibbins, & Niranjan, 2012), and utilize real-time monitoring not only to identify critical situations but also to take proactive measures to respond to a situation in real-time, e.g., establish relationships with consumers to engage in real-time marketing communications (Riemer, Stojaovic, & Stojaovic, 2012);

3. The Potential of Social Media Tools and Data for Journalists in the News Media Industry: This workshop focused on the utilization of social media for finding user generated content, news gathering, and filtering or classifying information (in terms of relevance, accuracy, etc.);

4. When the City Meets the Citizen Workshop: The focus of this workshop was how cities can utilize streams of user-generated information to monitor critical events, e.g., emergencies (Glasgow, Ebaugh, & Fink, 2012), get a better understanding of citizens, increase community awareness, and enhance citizen engagement and mobilization (Kleinfeld, Bassbouss, Alvertis, & Gionis, 2012).

KEYNOTES

The first keynote (June 5th) of the ICWSM was by Andre Tomkins of Google. In his presentation Tomkins (2012) traced back the existence of social networks to 50 million years ago and discussed their gradual evolution from "broadcasting" oriented social networks to person-to-person social networks (circa 10 million years ago). He claimed the same trajectory will be the case for contemporary social media as well. Accordingly, although broadcasting has been the dominant form of communication in early social media (e.g., tweeting about emotions, status updates), in the long run we will increasingly use social networks for task-oriented purposes. In many respects, Tomkins’ comments seem to underline Google’s strategy
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