Chapter XI

The GALILEI Platform: Social Browsing to Build Communities of Interests and Share Relevant Information and Expertise

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Abstract

For a few years, social software has appeared on the Internet to challenge the problem of handling the mass of information available. In this chapter, we present the GALILEI platform using social browsing to build communities of interests where relevant information and expertise are shared. The users are described in terms of profiles, with each profile corresponding to one specific area of interest. While browsing, users’ profiles are computed on the basis of both the content of the consulted documents and the relevance assessments from the profiles. These profiles are then grouped into communities, which allows documents of interest to be shared among members of a same community and experts to be identified.
Introduction

Today, the amount of information available on the Internet and on companies’ intranets has soared, making the search for relevant information a crucial problem. Most people use specific methods (a given query on a search engine, a specific portal, a set of bookmarks, etc.) to find relevant documents. Due to the lack of time and the limited number of such methods, only a small part of the existing relevant information is found. Social software (Macintosh, 1985), such as del.icio.us, has emerged as one of the solutions to tackle the problem of the mass of information. Social software is based on the idea that individuals are part of several networks of human relationships where human knowledge can be shared. The emergence of virtual communities on the Internet (Rheingold, 2000), and of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) in organizations, has shown that these social networks are powerful tools to share information across organisational and geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, to identify who must collaborate with whom and on which topic is still an essential issue in the development of these social networks.

To solve the problem of identifying the composition of these social networks, the GALILEI platform was developed (Francq, 2003) to implement an approach based on social browsing. The main purpose of this approach is to understand the users’ interests as precisely as possible, and to group them accordingly. Since users may have multiple interests, the approach associates a profile for each particular field of interest of a user. The platform computes a description for each profile based on relevance assessments on documents and content analysis. These profile descriptions are then clustered on the basis of their descriptions: similar profiles are grouped together in order to define a number of communities of interests. Once these communities have been defined, relevant information is exchanged among the different communities.

Figure 1. Schema of the approach

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