

Opinion-Ontologies

Short and Sharp

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Abstract: Opinion-Ontology is a short and sharp tweetable recommendation conceptualization which can be actually sent in a message. But, one should ask in which sense is this a true ontology? On the one hand, it does not represent the common vocabulary or the shared meanings of a domain, as it is subjective. On the other hand, it does contain a semantic structure, which in spite of being subjective enables making inferences and taking rational decisions in practical situations. These are demonstrated by case studies with several examples of booking a table in a restaurant or a room in a hotel in previously unvisited places. The proposed characteristics of opinion-ontologies – efficient information transmission and integration with similar opinion-ontologies without expanding their sizes – can be and we actually intend to implement in a software system, to enable testing in practice, the whole approach.

1 INTRODUCTION

In view of the rapid changes in the personal way of decision making, caused by:

- *Web usage* – for booking hotels and flights, scheduling meetings in restaurants, etc. in previously unvisited places;
- *Fast messages* – in SMS format, in tweets, smartphone applications or location-based social networks;

the booking individual is increasingly relying upon personal opinions and recommendations. Therefore new methods to evaluate reliability of opinions and recommendations are needed.

This work proposes a way to increase reliability while keeping the overall semantic information – the basis of judgment evaluation – contained in a limited size.

Opinion-ontologies are short information pieces that can be transmitted by fast messages and integrated with previous messages, without increasing overall size. This is possible, and distinguishes them from free-form messages, due to their structured semantic content.

1.1 Related Work

Opinion and ontologies have been dealt from different perspectives. Chang et al. (Chang,

2005) deal with reputation ontologies. They refer among other things to “Trustworthiness of Opinion Ontology”. Li and Du (Li, 2011) investigate ontology-based opinion leader identification for marketing in online social blogs.

Cambria et al. (Cambria, 2010) describe a public semantic resource for Opinion Mining, called SenticNet. Sentic Computing enables analysis of even very short documents – say one sentence.

Opinion-ontologies are a recent example of short flexible ontologies for specific purposes. Previous examples involved micro-ontologies – discussed in (Biagioli, 1997), nano-ontologies – discussed in the context of misbehaviour (Exman, 2013), – and pluggable ontologies – discussed in the context of non-concepts (Exman, 2012).

The concept of tweetable events and/or abstracts appears in several contexts in the literature. For instance, Kiciman (Kiciman, 2012) refers to events that are interesting and tweetable. People have thought about tweetable abstracts of scientific papers as a means to force information compaction.

In a more general vein, there are works dealing with the interplay of semantics and communication, in particular for touristic services. See e.g. the bibliography at the STI web site (STI, 2014).

Akbar et al. (Akbar, 2014) deal with semantic-aware rules for online communication, among others with social networks such as Twitter. Toma et al. (Toma, November 2013) aim at scalable multi-

channel communication by means of semantic technologies.

Toma et al. (Toma, 2014) refer to touristic services with semantic annotations, using relevant concepts mapped to types in schema.org (schema.org, 2014). Toma et al. (Toma, June 2013) specifically refer to the booking problem in the tourism domain.

1.2 Paper Organization

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows. Opinion-ontologies are first given a motivation in section 2; syntactic, semantic and operational properties of opinion-ontologies are described in section 3; merging and inference operations on opinion-ontologies are considered in section 4; case studies are presented in section 5; the paper is concluded with a discussion in section 6.

2 OPINION-ONTOLOGIES MOTIVATED

The motivation behind opinion-ontologies is twofold: to obtain condensed information and be able to evaluate their reliability. Compact information should be usable to make fast decisions.

2.1 Introductory Example: A Restaurant Review

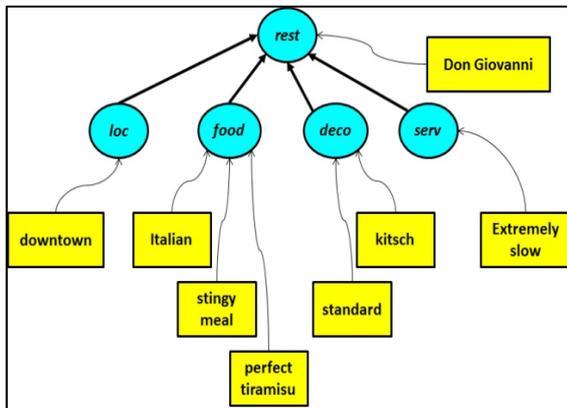


Figure 1: Schematic graphical representation of an opinion ontology (*opon*) about a restaurant – Ellipses (in blue) are classes, each of them linked by an association to the main *opon* class *rest* (standing for restaurant). Rectangles (in yellow) are property names, linked by a thin arrow to the respective class.

Often there are in newspapers columns dedicated to restaurant reviewing and ranking. Summarizing one such specific column about an Italian style restaurant

could look as in the next opinion-ontology (from now on abbreviated as *opon*):

“*opon* #28: *rest* Don Giovanni *loc* downtown *food* Italian, stingy meal, perfect tiramisu *déco* kitsch, standard *serv* extremely slow.”

This opinion-ontology conveys the opinion about a restaurant named “Don Giovanni”. The restaurant is located in downtown. It specializes in Italian food. In general the meal is stingy, but the tiramisu is perfect. The restaurant decoration is kitsch with standard furniture. This *opon* does not explain whether kitsch is intentional or just a derogatory judgment. The service is extremely slow.

A schematic graphical representation of the same opinion ontology is seen in Fig. 1.

2.2 Sharp Recommendations

The current usage of recommendation web-sites has several disadvantages:

- *Long texts* – one must read a considerable amount of text in order to get an overall, frequently vague, idea about the review;
- *Low keyword density* – one needs to manually search to eventually extract a too small amount of important keywords;
- *Bias and irrelevance* – opinions often focus on arbitrary or low probability events, such as the specific direction or smaller size of a particular room in a big hotel.

In contrast, short opinion ontologies intend to enable rapid winnowing of the undesirable features listed above and to provide a sharp view of the expressed opinion.

2.3 Rational Decisions in Short Time

Opinion ontologies can be used as a direct source of information to make fast rational decisions, as *opons* are sharp and short.

For instance, positive reasons for booking a table at Don Giovanni’s (by *opon* #28, above Fig.1) would be a special love for Tiramisu and indifference to kitsch. Reasons for not booking a table could be the stingy meal and being in a hurry.

Opinion ontologies can be the input to reasoning systems, which by comparison to a domain ontology or by means of rule-based inference, could for instance conclude that “white tablecloth and napkins” imply a more expensive bill.

Finally, one could integrate off-line various opinion ontologies into a single one, in order to make later on inferences in a shorter time.

3 OPINION ONTOLOGY PROPERTIES

We here propose opinion ontologies having some specific syntactic characteristics.

The opinion ontology is supposed to be purely textual – without any graphical elements or colors. The opinion ontology is always initiated by an “*opon*” term and terminated by a full stop. In between there are only words and separators (comma or semicolon).

An opinion ontology consists of two kinds of terms: *class terms*, of at most four letters (marked by italic-bold, here in red for the online digital reader convenience) and free-text words. Class terms are not reserved words of a language. They rather could be explained in a glossary and systematically used within an application.

An opinion-ontology has as a *size parameter* an upper bound to the allowed number of characters (letters, numbers, signs) used.

Next we point out semantic and operational characteristics of opinion-ontologies.

3.1 Sharp

Our proposed opinion-ontologies are intended to be sharp information conveyors due to a few features:

- *Absence of stopwords* – there is no need to filter low information content words;
- *Absence of sentence structure* – there is no need to follow standard natural language grammar, leading to parsimonious expression;
- *Imposed opon structure* – the linearized tree structure facilitates reading and fast updating of the opinion-ontology.

Once people get used to the *opon* structure, their manipulation by humans will be increasingly efficient. Of course, opinion-ontologies are easily amenable to computerized manipulation.

3.2 Tweetable

By tweetable we mean a quite small and strict upper-bound to the number of characters in the opinion-ontology.

We do not mean the specific 140 character limit of the Twitter social network.

The above referred upper-bound is a parameter to be assigned in specific applications.

The reasons for the “*tweetable*” upper bound are both practical – say the actual usage of tweeter by an added URL – and deeper semantic arguments.

If one is forced to perform off-line compaction analysis, before sending an opinion-ontology, one gains information and semantic density. One thus transmits more interesting information.

3.3 Subjective

In contrast to a typical domain ontology that is assumed to represent the *common* vocabulary and *shared* meanings of the domain, an opinion-ontology is clearly subjective.

It is not necessarily subjective in an individual sense. It could represent some group or a large section of public consensus, but still subjective and even being opinionated.

An opinion-ontology is an ontology, not due to the overall domain agreement, but due to its selective semantic character.

4 MERGING AND INFERENCE OPERATIONS

Merging and inference are two central operations on opinion-ontologies. Their importance stems from two fundamental principles:

- a. *Size Conservation* – independently of the number of merged opinion-ontologies, the outcome should be a standard *opon* with the same syntactic and operational properties as the original merged *opons*, e.g. same size parameter;
- b. *Semantic Equivalence* – an inference operation on a set of *opons* should obtain a semantically equivalent outcome *opon*.

Merging of Opinion-Ontologies

We now give a sample of merging rules for *opons*. First, numerical simplification rules are given:

- a. *Reinforcement* – when a few recommendations state the same opinion, use a numerical weight to express it, say *4 means that the opinion appeared four times in the merged *opons*;
- b. *Contradictions* – in case of opposing opinions use positive and negative weights, e.g. *-5 *3 (five negations and 3 affirmations);
- c. *Excess Words* – discard the less surprising (less informative) words within the excess words of the merging *opons*.

Next, rules are related to semantic characteristics:

- d. *Different terminologies* – choose the most frequent term among the different ones;
- e. *Ambiguities* – disambiguate terms using *opons* before they are merged;

5 CASE STUDIES

5.1 Restaurant Recommendation

Here we report the following experiment. We looked at a restaurant recommendation web-site. The recommendations were of free text with a typical 50 words length and about 5 keywords categorization.

We took a small sample of these recommendations and condensed them into the opinion-ontology format, as follows:

“*opon #31: rest* The Steak House *loc* neighborhood *food* meat, grill *déco* classical wood furniture, Retro touches *serv* meticulous.”

“*opon #34: rest* The Coffee Network *loc* crossroads *food* take away, coffee house, breakfast *déco* standard *serv* efficient.”

“*opon #39: rest* Le Bistro *loc* downtown *food* French, gourmet, chef *déco* dim room *serv* culinarian trip.”

“*opon #42: rest* Post-Modern *loc* Museum of Art *food* chef, meat, pasta, vegetarian *déco* post-modern *serv*.”

We made a series of worthwhile observations from this sample. Some of them are:

- a- *Semantic content* – there is an obvious semantic character to these *opons*, which may be used for making inferences; they are not just dry facts on eating meals;
- b- *Connotations* – classical wood furniture, Retro touches and take-away do have implications about food and quality;
- c- *Branding names* – chosen for branding, e.g. Post-Modern in the Museum of Art, but induce expectations on food and enable inferences about quality and price;
- d- *Incompleteness* – classes may lack property instances, say the last *opon serv*; but these may be completed later on.

5.2 Hotel Recommendation

Hotel recommendations – e.g. those in web-sites

offering travel advice – have more complex characteristics than restaurant recommendations. Essentially one could have a quite similar structure as:

“*opon #52: hotl* The Hotel *loc* near metro stop, so-so location *room* air condition, clean *amen* sauna, wi-fi unreliable *serv* friendly, pricey.”

In this example the hotel name is “The Hotel”, it is conveniently located near a metro station, the neighbourhood is not very recommendable, the room has air conditioning and it is clean. The amenities include sauna, and an unreliable wi-fi. The service is friendly, but overall pricey.

This example shows that the language is quite fuzzy, leaving a lot of margin for interpretation. For instance:, it is not precise about the distance to the metro station; so-so location is probably negative, but may be acceptable for a given budget.

Summarizing, the loosely structured information may still be quite challenging.

6 DISCUSSION

This paper proposed opinion-ontologies, short, sharp, tweetable opinions loosely structured as a small ontology tree.

The motivation for opinion-ontologies is both: efficiency of information transmission and deeper concerns with high density of important information.

The case studies reveal some interesting observations. The restaurant booking case study, shows clearly that opinion mining and understanding is inherently not syntactically based upon presence of positive words like “nice” or negative words as “nasty” – agreeing with (Cambria, 2010).

Opinions are subtly expressed through sophisticated expressions such as “Retro touches”, eminently context dependent.

6.1 Are Opinion-Ontologies Real Subjective Ontologies?

We are asking here two different but related questions:

1. Are *opons* real ontologies?
2. Are *opons* subjective ontologies?

In order to answer the first question we cite the ontology definition by Gruber (Gruber, 1993): an ontology is a specification of a representational vocabulary for a shared domain of discourse. The important points seem to be the “specification of a

representational vocabulary” and the “shared” aspect.

An *opon* satisfies both important points mentioned above. It is a specification, it has a representational vocabulary – although a limited partial one for a given domain – and it is “shared” among people expressing and receiving the recommendation.

The second question may be more controversial. One may claim that an *opon* is just a set of instances of clearly non-subjective domain ontology. But we wish to provide two arguments against this viewpoint. First, the fact that the domain ontology is not subjective does not necessarily imply that the *opon* also is non-subjective, because the essence of subjectivity is its dependence on interpretation. Second, the logic of *opons* is most probably non-monotonic. For instance, ‘classical furniture implies quality food’ is sometimes true, sometimes not.

6.2 Future Work

The next stage of this work is to implement, and test the whole approach and run extensively a system with the capabilities proposed here:

- *Compacting free text* – into short and sharp opinion-ontologies;
- *Merging opons* – i.e. given two or more opinion-ontologies, to merge their information into a new unique one without expanding the *opon* sizes;
- *Making inferences from opons* – by using rules such as a restaurant with “white tablecloth and napkins” is more expensive than another one in which tables are without tablecloth.

6.3 Main Contribution

The main contribution of this work is the concept and detailed characterization of opinion-ontologies, for efficient transmission and manipulation of recommendations.

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