SOTorrent: Reconstructing and Analyzing the Evolution of Stack Overflow Posts

Sebastian Baltes, Lorik Dumani, Christoph Treude, and Stephan Diehl. 2018.

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What is the Problem Being Solved Here?

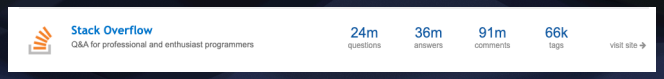
The evolution of Stack Overflow posts over time.

- How do Stack Overflow posts evolve? (RQ1)
- Which posts get edited? (RQ2)
- and What is the temporal relationship between edits and comments? (RQ3).

What is the Problem Being Solved Here?

Cont'd

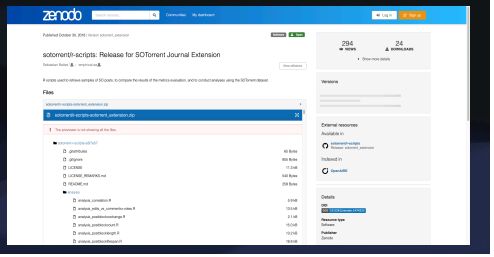
- Current StackOverflow data dumps provide limited insights into version histories at a granular level.
- Hinders researchers' and practitioners' ability to study the quality and maintainability of knowledge shared on StackOverflow.



What is the New Idea They Are Proposing?

To Answer the RQs & Key Features of SoTorrent

- 1. Fine-grained Version History Reconstruction: block level.
- 2. Linking SO Posts to External Resources
- 3. Insights into SO Post Evolution
- 4. Dataset Availability and Tools



Positive Points 👍

- 1. Comprehensive Dataset: Post and block level evolution.
- 2. Actionable Insights: For improving SO's usability and moderation practices.

Positive Points 👍

Cont'd

- 3. Robust Methodology: The best-performing metric is selected based on the **Matthews Correlation Coefficient (MCC)**, which is a more balanced measure than standard precision-recall. Key finding is 47.9% of comments occur before an edit, suggesting that comments often trigger post changes.

$$MCC = \frac{(TP \times TN) - (FP \times FN)}{\sqrt{(TP + FP)(TP + FN)(TN + FP)(TN + FN)}}$$

Methodologies

Three-stages Evaluation

Stage	Purpose	Why It's Needed
1. Individual Metric Testing	Evaluates each of the 134 similarity metrics independently to establish a baseline.	Ensures only effective metrics move forward, reducing computational overhead.
2. Threshold Refinement	Refines similarity thresholds to optimize performance and reduce false matches.	Prevents arbitrary cutoffs and improves precision in text/code block matching.
3. Metric Combination	Combines the best-performing text and code metrics to maximize overall accuracy.	Creates a balanced solution, leveraging strengths of multiple metrics for robust results.

Table 1: Three-Stage Evaluation Process in SOTorrent

Methodologies

Five Categories of Similarity Metrics

Category	Examples	Strengths
Edit-Based	Levenshtein, Damerau-Levenshtein, Longest Common Subsequence	Captures character-level differences; useful for minor text/code changes.
Set-Based	Jaccard n-Gram, Dice Coefficient, Overlap	Good for measuring word/phrase similarity; useful for text comparison.
Profile-Based	Cosine Similarity (Token Frequency, Normalized TF)	Considers token frequency and weight; improves semantic similarity detection.
Fingerprint-Based	Winnowing (Plagiarism Detection), Hashing Techniques	Highly scalable; commonly used for plagiarism detection and large-scale comparisons.
Equality-Based	Exact String Matching (Baseline)	Fastest but lacks flexibility; only detects exact matches.

Table 2: Five Categories of Similarity Metrics in SOTorrent

Negative Points 👎

- 1. Lack of a Clear Thematic Structure (For the Related Work section)

Negative Points 👎

Cont'd

- 2. Minimal Discussion of Limitations in Prior Work
- 3. Limited Coverage of Long-Term Evolution Trends: the impact of edits on the quality or relevance of posts?
- 4. Technical Details vs User Experience.

Future Work

- 1. Studying Code Snippet Quality and Maintenance:
  - Future research could use SOTorrent to identify patterns in how code snippets evolve, focusing on metrics like security, readability, or maintainability.
- 2. Cross-Platform Analysis:
  - Researchers could explore how knowledge flows between SO and GitHub, identifying factors that influence the adoption of SO code in open-source projects and how it affects project outcomes.

4/5

Rating

Discussion Points

- 1. How can SOTorrent be used to improve SO's moderation and recommendation systems, such as identifying posts most likely to need edits or updates?
- 2. How can we determine whether **post edits actually improve content**, rather than just making superficial changes?
- 3. Are there ethical concerns in tracking and analyzing developer interactions across different platforms?

Thank you!