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TravisTorrent: Synthesizing Travis CI and GitHub for Full-Stack Research on Continuous Integration

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ABSTRACT
Continuous Integration (CI) has become a best practice of modern software development. Thanks in part to its tight integration with GitHub, Travis CI has emerged as arguably the most widely used CI platform for Open-Source Software (OSS) development. However, despite its prominent role in Software Engineering in practice, the benefits, costs, and implications of doing CI are all but clear from an academic standpoint. Little research has been done, and even less was of quantitative nature. In order to lay the groundwork for data-driven research on CI, we built TravisTorrent, travistorrent.testroots.org, a freely available data set based on Travis CI and GitHub that provides easy access to hundreds of thousands of analyzed builds from more than 1,000 projects. Unique to TravisTorrent is that each of its 2,640,825 Travis builds is synthesized with meta data from Travis CI’s API, the results of analyzing its textual build log, a link to the GitHub commit which triggered the build, and dynamically aggregated project data from the time of commit extracted through GHTorrent.

1. INTRODUCTION
Since its conception in 1991 and wide-spread distribution as part of Microsoft’s and Extreme Programming’s development practices [1–3], CI has become a global Software Engineering phenomenon. Over the past five years, Travis CI has emerged as a popular CI environment for OSS projects, having performed hundreds of millions of free builds.

The unbroken trend toward CI in practice came with little backup from the academic side, however. From an academic standpoint, we still lack quantifiable evidence on the implications of introducing and continuing to use CI. While we have used TRAVIS to drive a first investigation into CI testing practices [4], the questions that can be answered with it reach far beyond:
• Does the use of CI lead to higher-quality products, for example by catching bugs and test failures earlier?
• Does CI lead to fewer test regressions?
• What are CI best practices that successful projects employ (build more often, fail more often, have more test on the CI)?
• Do CI-enabled projects switch to a Continuous Delivery?

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2. THE TRAVISTORRENT DATA SET
In this section, we give an overview of the TRAVISTORRENT data set and ways to access it (more details in Appendix A).

The TRAVISTORRENT Data set. From the 17,313,330 active OSS repositories on GitHub in August, 2015, our data set contains a deep analysis of the project source code, process and dependency status of 1,359 projects. To be able to do this, we restricted our project space using established filtering criteria to all non-fork, non-toy, somewhat popular (>10 watchers on GitHub) projects with a history of Travis CI use (>50 builds) in Ruby (936) or Java (423). Both languages are very popular on GitHub (2nd and 3rd, respectively) [4]. Then, we extracted and analyzed build information from Travis CI build logs and the GHTorrent database for each Travis CI build in its history, detailed in Appendix A. Well-known projects in the TRAVISTORRENT data set include all 691,184 builds from RUBY ON RAILS, GOOGLE GUAVA and GIUCE, CHEF, RSPEC, CHECKSTYLE, ASCIIDOC, RUBY and TRAVIS.

Data-set-as-a-service. TRAVISTORRENT\(^1\) provides convenient access to its archived data sets and free analytic resources: Researchers can directly access an in-browser SQL shell to run their queries on our infrastructure, and download SQL dumps or the compressed data set as a CSV file (1.8 GB unpacked). It also provides documentation and a getting started tutorial. We share all tools we wrote to crave the data on TRAVISTORRENT as OSS, allowing for future extensions and bug fixes by the community.

\(^1\)http://travistorrent.testroots.org
APPENDIX

In the appendix, in addition to a list of references, we detail the technical challenges we had to overcome when linking Travis builds to GitHub commits and when analyzing the build logs.

A. DATA SAMPLE

In this section, we outline all fields available and describe an abbreviated data sample from TRAVISRENT.

General Data Structure. In the TRAVISRENT data set, each data point (row) represents a build job executed on Travis. Every such data point synthesizes information from three different sources: The project’s git repository (prefixed git_), data extracted from GitHub through GHTravis, and data from Travis’s API and an analysis of the build log (prefixed tr_). In total, we provide 55 data fields for each build. These are described in detail in Table 1.

Sample. The last column of Table 1 features an exemplary data point from the famous rails/rails project (note that there currently are 2,640,824 data points more like this in TRAVISRENT). Here, we are shortly highlighting some key observations.

The data sample we picked is a pretty interesting, as it is quite unusual for Rails. Not surprisingly, Rails’s project_name is rails/rails. When the commit was made, 168 people had made contributions to it (it is important to realize that all metrics are calculated for the point in time in which the commit was made, so gh_team_size for example will grow over time). The build we are looking at (1543966) comprises two commits (the latest commit built, c1d9c11, and a predecessor 87a2f021), most likely because both commits were pushed in one go and Travis naturally builds the latest available commit. This commit is not a Pull Request (gh_is_pr is false), but made directly onto the stable development branch (4-1-stable). We could resolve a predecessor build, 39557888. By search in TRAVISRENT for the predecessor, we could for example see whether this unusual commit directly onto the stable branch was made in order to fix an urgent problem. We can see that our BUILDLOGANALYZER picked up a Ruby build with the testunit framework. 310 tests were executed successfully, until one test (SerializedAttributeTest) failed, which took 28.2 seconds (tr_testduration). Very unusual for Rails is that despite the failing test (tr_tests_fail), the overall build status was still considered passed (tr_status). A deeper investigation could now look into how many times this happens, and if only perhaps on specific tests, which might be ignored.

B. TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

In this section, we describe the technical challenges we faced when extracting and synthesizing the data set for TRAVISRENT in order to give miners a better understanding of how we came up with (1) the collection and (2) the analysis of build logs and (2) the mapping between Travis builds and GitHub commits.

We structure this by referring to the tools we used to extract and create the TRAVISRENT data set [4]. Our data collection and analysis pipeline is written in Ruby and R. For replication purposes and to stimulate further research, our tools are in the public domain.

B.1 Data Collection

TravisPoker. To find out which and how many projects on GitHub use Travis CI, we implemented TRAVISPOKER. This fast and lightweight application takes a GitHub project name as input (for example, rails/rails), and finds out if and how many Travis CI builds were executed for this project.

B.2 Analysis of Build Logs.

BUILDLOG ANALYZER is a framework that supports the general-purpose analysis of Travis CI build logs and provides dedicated Java and Ruby build analyzers that parse build logs in both languages and search for output traces of common testing frameworks.

The language-agnostic BUILDLOG ANALYZER reads in a build log, splits it into the different build phases, and analyzes the build status and run time of each phase. The log for the SCRIPT phase contains the actual build and continuous testing results. The BUILDLOG ANALYZER dispatches the automatically determined sub-BUILDLOG ANALYZER for further examination of the build phase.

For Java, we support the three popular build tools MAVEN, GRADLE, and ANT. In Java, it is standard procedure to use JUNIT as the test runner, even if the tests themselves employ other testing frameworks, such as POWERMock or MOCKITO. Moreover, we also support TESTNG, the second most popular testing framework for Java. Running the tests of an otherwise unchanged project through MAVEN, GRADLE and ANT leads to different, incompatible build logs, with MAVEN being the most verbose and GRADLE the least. Hence, we need three different parsers to support the large ecosystem of popular Java build tools. As a consequence, the amount of information we can extract from a build log varies per build technology used. Moreover, some build tools give users the option to modify their console output, albeit rarely used in practice.
Example 1 shows an excerpt of one test execution from the TESTROOTS/watchdog project. In the output, we can see the executed test classes (line 4), and how many tests passed, failed, errored, and were skipped. We also get the test execution time (line 5). Moreover, MAVEN prints an overall result summary (line 9) that the BUILDLOG ANALYZER gathers all this information and creates, for each invoked project, a CSV table with all build and test results for each job built. We then aggregate this information with information from the build status analyzer step by joining their output. TRAVIS TORRENT provides convenient access to this data. GRADLE is much less verbose than MAVEN, providing us with fewer information.

By contrast, in Ruby, the test framework is responsible for the console output: it is no different to invoke RSPEC through RAKE than through BUNDLER, the two predominant Ruby build tools. For Ruby, we support the prevalent TEST::UNIT and all its offspring, like MINITEST. Moreover, we capture behavior driven tests via RSPEC and CUCUMBER support.

B.3 Data Linearization And Synthesization

If we want to answer questions such as “Does the use of CI lead to higher-quality products?”, we need to make a connection between the builds performed on TRAVIS CI and the repository which contains the commits that triggered the build. We call this build linearization and commit mapping, as we need to interpret the builds on TRAVIS CI as a directed graph and establish a child-parent relationship based on the GIT commits that triggered their execution. Although this sounds trivial, since there should be a parent relationship based on the GIT commits that triggered the build, we also assessed the status of the project at the moment each build was triggered by extracting and synthesizing information from two sources: the project’s GIT repository and its corresponding entry in the GHTORRENT database.

Figure 2 exemplifies a typical GitHub project that uses TRAVIS CI:
CI for its CI. In the upper part of the figure, we see the Travis CI builds (§1–§9), which are either passed (§1–§6, §9), canceled (§7), or broken (§8). In the lower part, we see the corresponding Git repository hosted on GitHub with its individual commits (#A–#H). Commits #D1–#D3 live in a pull request, and not on the master branch, traditionally the main development line in Git.

a) Build §1 showcases a standard situation, in which the build passed and the commit id stored with the build leads to the correct commit #A that triggered build §1. However, there are a number of more complex situations.

b) If multiple commits are transferred in one git push, the latest of those commits is built (§2). In order to get a precise representation of the changes that lead to this build result, we have to aggregate commits #B and #C.

c) It is a central function of Travis CI to support branches or pull requests, such as commit #D1. When resolving builds to commits, we know from the API that §3 is a pull request build. Its associated commit points us to a virtual integration commit #V1 that is not part of the normal repository, but automatically created as a remote on GitHub. This commit #V1 has two parents: 1) the latest commit in the pull request (#D1), and 2) the current head of the branch the pull request is filed against, the latest commit on the master branch, #C. Similarly, when resolving the parent of §4, we encounter a #V2, resolve it to #D2 and the already known #C. We also know that its direct parent, #D1, is branched from #C. Hence, we know that any changes from build result §4 to §3 were induced by commit #D2.

d) In the case of build §6 on the same pull request, its direct predecessor is unclear: we traverse from V3 to both 1) commit #D2 in the pull request, which is known, and to 2) #E on the master branch, which is unknown and cannot be reached from any of our previous commits #D2, #D1, or #C. This is because there was an intermediate commit #E on the master branch in-between, and pull requests are always to be integrated onto the head commit of the branch they are filed against. In such a case, one build can have multiple parents, and it is undecidable whether the changes in #D3, #E or a combination of both lead to the build result §6.

e) Build §5 shows why a simple linearization of the build graph by its build number would fail: It would return §4 as its predecessor, when in reality, it is §2. However, even on a single branch, there are limits to how far Git’s complex commit relationship graph can be linearized and mapped to Travis CI builds. For example, if a build is canceled (§7), we do not know about its real build status – it might have passed or broken. As such, for build §8, we cannot say whether the build failure resulted from changes in commit #F or #G.

f) When merging branches or pull requests, a similar situation to c) occurs, in which one merge commit #H has two predecessors.

C. Why Use TravisTorrent?

In this section, we describe why TravisTorrent lends itself to the MSR’2017 mining challenge.

- TravisTorrent features a novel data set in an emerging research field that is highly relevant in practice but still lacks quantifiable evidence and that has not yet been explored multiple times before.
- TravisTorrent eases work with a huge set of data (downloading and processing of terabytes of build logs) some groups might not otherwise have the opportunity to work with, especially students.
- Our analytics service and tutorial make running custom queries against the data set easy, without any local setup requirements.
- Researchers can easily connect their existing expertise, tools and results from previous research on GitHub.
- With more than 1,000 projects, TravisTorrent is sufficiently large for multiple researchers to work on sub-aspects, yet still manageable on standard computers.

D. References