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 TravisTorrent 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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MSR ’17
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• How long may a CI build run to still be considered helpful?
• Does a broken build really negatively affect other developers’ productivity, as is often claimed?
• Two development models compete over how to use CI: Should developers consider a successful build their “holy grail”, or rather embrace breaking (and fixing) it often?
• Does a broken build lead to fewer outside contributions, in accordance with the “broken window” theory?
• Do multiple integration environments lead to fewer defects?

Only recently have researchers begun to discover Travis CI as a data source [4–7]. They have, however, not yet taken advantage of the endless possibilities that the combination of a streamlined, popular and tightly coupled CI environment (Travis CI), version control system (GIT) and collaboration platform (GitHub) provide, as collecting and aggregating this data in a single data set is logistically and algorithmically complex. By synthesizing all three data sources in one readily accessible data set of more than 1,000 projects, we hope to facilitate more holistic research on CI with TravisTorrent by giving researchers the opportunity to do “full-stack research” from an analysis of build logs to repositories.

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 Guice, Chef, RSpec, Checkstyle, ASCIIDoc tor, Ruby and Travis.

Data-set-as-a-service. TravisTorrent1 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.

1http://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 GHTorrent (prefixed gh_), 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 87a28201), 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.

TravisHarvester. We implemented TRAVISHARVESTER to aggregate detailed information about a project’s TRAVIS CI build history. It takes as input a GITHUB project name and gathers general statistics on each build in the project’s history in a CSV file. Associated with each build entry in the CSV are the SHA1 hash of the git commit, the branch and (if applicable) pull request on which the build was executed, the overall build status, the duration and starting time and the sub jobs that TRAVIS CI executed for the different specified environments (at least one job, possibly many for each build). TRAVISHARVESTER downloads the build logs for each build for all jobs and stores them alongside the CSV file.

To speed up the process of retrieving thousands of log files for each project, we parallelize our starter scripts for TRAVISHARVESTER with GNU PARALLEL.

B.2 Analysis of Build Logs.

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

For Java, we support the three popular build tools MAVEN, GRA- DLE, 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.
Table 1: Description of TRAVIS TORRENT's data fields and one sample data point from RAILS/RAILS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>row</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>1543966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_commit</td>
<td>Unique identifier for a build job in Travis/Torrent.</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>4.1.1-stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_merged_with</td>
<td>If this commit sits on a Pull Request (gh_pr.pr true), the SHA1 of the commit that merged said pull request</td>
<td>List of Strings</td>
<td>87a2f2198212a2aa...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_traces</td>
<td>Branch git_trace was committed on</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_commits</td>
<td>Preceding commits that were not built (e.g., transferred in one push...) this build comprises</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_num_commits</td>
<td>Number of commits in git_commits to rare efficient splitting</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>git_num_committers</td>
<td>Number of people who committed to this project</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_project_name</td>
<td>Project name on GitHub (in format user/repository)</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>ruby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_timer</td>
<td>Whether this build was triggered as part of a pull request on GitHub</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_lang</td>
<td>Dominant repository language, according to GitHub</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>2014-04-18 20:12:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_first_commit_created_at</td>
<td>Push time of first commit in git_commits to GitHub</td>
<td>ISO Date</td>
<td>2014-04-18 20:12:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_team_size</td>
<td>Size of the team contributing to this project</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_num_issue_comments</td>
<td>If git commits linked to an issue on GitHub, the number of comments on that issue</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_num_commit_comments</td>
<td>The number of comments on git_commit on GitHub</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_num_pr_comments</td>
<td>If gh_pr is true, the number of comments on this pull request on GitHub</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_err_churn</td>
<td>The churn of git_commit, i.e. how much production code changed in the commit, based on lines</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_free_churn</td>
<td>The churn of git_commit, i.e. how much test code changed in the commit, based on lines</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_files_added</td>
<td>Number of files added in git_commit (this is generally correlated with the churn)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_files_deleted</td>
<td>Number of files deleted in git_commit (this is generally correlated with the churn)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_files_modified</td>
<td>Number of files modified in git_commit (this is generally correlated with the churn)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_tests_added</td>
<td>How many test cases were added in git_commit (e.g., for Java, this is the number of #Test annotations)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_tests_deleted</td>
<td>How many tests were deleted in git_commit (e.g., for Java, this is the number of #Test annotations)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_tests</td>
<td>How many tests were deleted in git_commit (e.g., for Java, this is the number of #Test annotations)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_num_files</td>
<td>Number of remaining files which are neither production code nor documentation</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_commits_on_files_touched</td>
<td>Number of commits that touched (added/deleted/modified) the files in git_commit previously</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>53421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_zincl</td>
<td>Number of executable production source lines of code, in the mirror repository</td>
<td>Double</td>
<td>2419.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_test_lines_per_kloc</td>
<td>Test density. Number of lines in test cases per 1000 gh_kloc</td>
<td>Double</td>
<td>168.3342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_test_cases_per_kloc</td>
<td>Test density. Number of test cases per 1000 gh_kloc</td>
<td>Double</td>
<td>553.0145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_asserts_cases_per_kloc</td>
<td>Assert density. Number of assertions per 1000 gh_kloc</td>
<td>Boolean</td>
<td>true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_by_core_team_member</td>
<td>Whether this commit was authored by a core team member</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_description_complexity</td>
<td>Whether this commit was authored by a core team member</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>232989954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gh_pull_request</td>
<td>Pull request number on GitHub</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>232989954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_build_id</td>
<td>Unique build ID on Travis</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_status</td>
<td>Build status (pass, fail, errored, cancelled)</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_duration</td>
<td>Overall duration of the build</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_started_at</td>
<td>Start of the build process</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_jobs</td>
<td>Which Travis jobs executed this build (number of integration environments)</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_build_number</td>
<td>Build number in the project</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_job_id</td>
<td>This build id's one of tr_jobs</td>
<td>Integer</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_lang</td>
<td>Language of the build, as recognized by BUILDOLOGANALYZER</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr_setup_time</td>
<td>Setup time for the Travis build to start</td>
<td>String</td>
<td>232989981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| tr_analyzer                     | Build log analyzer that took over (ruby, java-ant, java-maven, java-gradle) | List of Strings | 232989955 ...
| tr_frameworks                   | Test frameworks that tr_analyzer recognizes and invokes (unit, e2e, cucumber,...) | Integer    | 310    |
| tr_tests.ok                     | Test frameworks that tr_analyzer recognizes and invokes (unit, e2e, cucumber,...) | Integer    | 310    |
| tr_tests.fail                   | Test frameworks that tr_analyzer recognizes and invokes (unit, e2e, cucumber,...) | Integer    | 311    |
| tr_tests_run                    | All tests run                                                             | Integer    | 311    |
| tr_tests_skipped                | All tests skipped                                                         | Integer    | 311    |
| tr_tests_failed                 | All tests that failed in this build                                       | Integer    | 311    |
| tr_test_duration                | Time it took to run the tests                                            | Double (in seconds) | 28.2 |
| tr_pureBuildDuration            | Time it took to run the tests (without Travis scheduling and provisioning the build) | Double (in seconds) | 28.2 |
| tr_tests_satisfied              | Whether tests ran in this build                                          | Boolean    | true   |
| tr_tests_failed                 | Whether tests failed in this build                                        | Boolean    | true   |
| tr_prev_build                   | How many jobs does this build have (length of tr_jobs)                    | Integer    | 30     |
| tr_ci_latency                   | Latency induced by Travis (scheduling, build pick-up,...)                  | String     | 99557888 |
| tr_ci_latency                   | Latency induced by Travis (scheduling, build pick-up,...)                  | Integer    | 1408   |

Example 1: Standard output from MAVEN regarding tests

```
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 off springs, 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 1:1 relationship uses to triage its prior findings. Line 11 shows the overall test execution result. Our 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.

Figure 2 exemplifies a typical GITHUB project that uses TRAVIS
CI for its CI. In the upper part (i), we see the TRAVIS CI builds ($1$-
§9), which are either passed ($1$-§6, §9), canceled ($7$), or broken
§8). In the lower part (ii), 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, tra-
ditionally 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 (ii),
only 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 (iii), 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 (iv). 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 built 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-off 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 (v), 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 undesirable 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 prede-
cessor, when in reality, it is §2 (v). However, even on a single
branch, there are limits to how far GIT’s complex commit relation-
ship 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 (vi), 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 re-
search field that is highly relevant in practice but still lacks quan-
tifiable evidence and that has not yet been explored multiple times
before.

• TRAVISTORRENT eases work with a huge set of data (download-
and processing of terabytes of build logs) some groups might
not otherwise have the opportunity to work with, especially stu-
dents.

• 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
managable on standard computers.

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