

# How Far Can Client-Only Solutions Go for Mobile Browser Speed?

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## ABSTRACT

Mobile browser is known to be slow because of the bottleneck in resource loading. Client-only solutions to improve resource loading are attractive because they are immediately deployable, scalable, and secure. We present the first publicly known treatment of client-only solutions to understand how much they can improve mobile browser speed without infrastructure support. Leveraging an unprecedented set of web usage data collected from 24 iPhone users continuously over one year, we examine the three fundamental, orthogonal approaches a client-only solution can take: caching, prefetching, and speculative loading. Speculative loading, as is firstly proposed and studied in this work, predicts and speculatively loads the subresources needed to open a webpage once its URL is given. We show that while caching and prefetching are highly limited for mobile browsing, speculative loading can be significantly more effective. Empirically, we show that client-only solutions can improve the browser speed by about 1.4 second on average for websites visited by the 24 iPhone users. We also report the design, realization, and evaluation of speculative loading in a WebKit-based browser called *Tempo*. On average, *Tempo* can reduce browser delay by 1 second (~20%).

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.4.3 [Communications Applications]: Information Browsers

**General Terms:** Human Factors, Performance

**Keywords:** Mobile Devices, Web, Browser

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Web browser is one of the most important applications on mobile devices including smartphones and tablets. It is known to be slow, taking many seconds to open a webpage. The long delay harms mobile user experience and eventually discourages web-based business. For example, Google will lose up to 20% traffic with 500 ms extra delay and Amazon will lose 1% sales with 100 ms extra delay [10].

As shown by our previous work [28], the key to improve mobile browser is to speed up resource loading, the process that fetches the resources required to open a webpage. Many effective solutions toward this end require infrastructure support, e.g., thin-client approaches [9, 11, 18, 23], session-level techniques [21], prefetching [2, 3, 5, 19] and SPDY, a new protocol [25]. They are limited in one or more of the following ways. First, solutions requiring web server support are difficult to deploy and may not work for legacy websites. The adoption of a new protocol like SPDY [25] will take a long time, if it ever happens. Second, infrastructure support depends on server or proxy capabilities and do not scale up very well with the number of clients. For example,

the failure of Amazon Web Services' cloud-computing infrastructure [17] took many websites down. Finally, solutions based on proxy support violate end-to-end security, which is crucial to secure websites.

Not surprisingly, solutions that do not rely on infrastructure support, or *client-only* solutions, are particularly attractive because they are immediately deployable, scalable, and secure. While client-only solutions are likely to be less effective than those leveraging infrastructure supports, it has been an open question how effective client-only solutions can be for mobile browsers. The challenge to answering this question has been the lack of data regarding the browsing behavior of mobile users.

The technical goal of this work is to answer the title question, with the help of an unprecedented dataset of web browsing data continuously collected from 24 iPhone users over one year, or LiveLab traces [22]. In achieving our goal, we make four contributions. Firstly, we study browsing behavior of mobile users and the webpages visited by them. We find that subresources needed for rendering a webpage can be much more predictable than which webpage a user will visit because subresources have much higher revisit rate and a lot of them are shared by webpages from the same site.

Secondly, we quantitatively evaluate two popular client-only approaches: *caching* and *prefetching*. *Caching* seeks to store frequently used web resources locally, but we find that it has very limited effectiveness based on the LiveLab traces: 60% of the requested resources are either expired or not in the cache. *Web prefetching* [3, 5, 19], seeks to predict which webpage is likely to be visited by the user, and then fetches all the resources needed to render the page beforehand. While web prefetching with infrastructure support [3, 5, 19], is known to be effective by aggregating many users' behavior, we find that, on mobile devices, client-only prefetching is ineffective or even harmful because webpages visited by mobile users are less predictable: over 75% of the visits in the LiveLab traces are to webpages visited for only once.

Thirdly, we propose and study a new, orthogonal client-only approach: speculative loading. Given a web URL, speculative loading leverages concurrent connections available to modern browsers and loads subresources that are likely to be needed, in parallel with loading the main HTML file. To determine which subresources to load, the browser maps out how a website organizes resources based on the browsing history. We implement speculative loading in a WebKit-based browser called *Tempo* and evaluate it on real smartphones with 3G network. Evaluation shows that, on average, *Tempo* can improve browser speed by 1 second (~20%) with low data usage overhead. This will not only make web browsing noticeably faster but also may increase traffic to Google by up to 40% and increase Amazon sales by up to 10% according to [10].

Finally, because caching, prefetching, and speculative loading represent the three fundamental approaches that a client can improve resource loading in mobile browser, our findings enable us

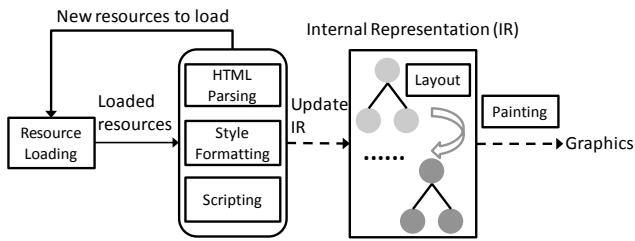


Figure 1: The procedure of opening a webpage

to answer the title question empirically: the upper bound of browser delay reduction from client-only solutions is about 1.4 second on average for the websites visited by the LiveLab iPhone users. The client-only solutions are limited for four reasons: (i) a large portion of web resources are either not in the cache or their cached copies quickly expire; (ii) mobile browsing behaviors are not very predictable; (iii) a client cannot completely predict what resources are needed for a webpage based on the user’s browsing history; (iv) the request-response model of HTTP [1] requires at least one request for each resource needed, which magnifies the impact of the relatively long RTT of cellular networks. While 1.4 second is nontrivial, to make mobile browser instantly fast, infrastructure support is still necessary.

What Tempo achieves is very close to the upper bound. Tempo can also be combined with infrastructure support in order to provide the client knowledge of the server resources. For example, Tempo can help SPDY [25] to solve the race condition problem.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces background and related work. Section 3 provides results from our characterization of mobile browsing and webpages. Section 4 investigates the three fundamental approaches available to client-only solutions. It provides an empirical analysis of the upper bound of improvement made possible by client-only solutions. Section 5 presents the design and implementation of Tempo. Section 6 offers the results from lab-based and field-based evaluations of Tempo. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

We first provide an overview about how a mobile browser works using WebKit-based browsers. As illustrated by Figure 1, the procedure of opening a page involves six major operations that can be dynamically scheduled and concurrently executed. *Resource loading* fetches a resource given its URL, either from the remote web server or local cache. *HTML Parsing* (or *Parsing*), *Style Formatting* (or *Style*) and *Scripting* process HTML documents, style constraints, e.g., Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and JavaScript, respectively, and attach results to the internal representation (IR). *Layout* computes and updates the screen locations based on the recently updated IR. *Painting* employs the IR to generate the final graphical representation of the webpage. It is important to note that these six operations do not form a simple pipeline in opening a page.

A browser usually needs multiple resources to open a webpage. A *resource* is an individual unit of content or code, usually uniquely identified by a web URL. The *main resource* is the first resource requested by the browser, usually an HTML document. After parsing the main resource, the browser may discover and load more resources that format, manipulate or provide additional content to the webpage. These later discovered resources, called *sub-resources*, usually correspond to CSS, JavaScript and picture files.

## 2.1 Why are Mobile Browsers Slow?

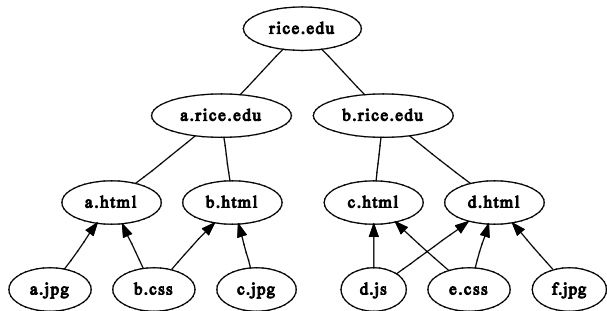
Browsers are well-known to be slow on mobile devices, taking many seconds to open a page, especially when using a cellular network. While prior work [13, 24, 30] suggests that several compute-intensive operations (*Style*, *Layout* and *Scripting*) should be the focus of optimizations for browsers on PC, we recently showed [28] that the bottleneck of mobile browser performance is actually in *resource loading* due to long round trip time (RTT) and the large number of round trips. The RTT of typical 3G network is around 200 ms [8], much longer than that of Ethernet network, and improves in a much slower pace than bandwidth. Moreover, resource loading in existing browsers is not fully parallel, resulting in a large number of round trips. Especially, sub-resources can only be discovered and requested after the main resource is downloaded and parsed. If redirection occurs, the process will be much longer. On mobile devices, loading the main resource can contribute more than 50% of the browser delay. On average, getting the first data packet of the main resource takes 2 seconds under 3G network. If the main resource contains JavaScripts, the parsing of the main resource file can be further delayed, resulting in even longer time to discover subresources. Moreover, the dependencies between the resources will further serialize the resource loading operations [12].

In this work, we calculate the *browser delay* as follows: the starting point is when the user hits the “GO” button of the browser or clicks a URL to open a webpage. The end point is when the browser completely presents the requested webpage to the user, i.e. the browser’s page loading progress bar indicates 100%. Such latency covers the time spent in all operations involved in opening a page, and can be unambiguously measured by keeping timestamps in the browser code. Though modern browsers utilize incremental rendering to display partially downloaded webpage to users, we do not consider partially opening time as the metric because it is subjective how partial is enough to conclude that the webpage is opened.

## 2.2 Related Work

Many have studied ways to improve browser speed, in particular resource loading. While only very few have specifically targeted mobile browsers, we discuss related work in terms of their approaches. Most proposals require infrastructure support, either from the web server or a proxy, e.g., thin-client approaches [9, 11, 18, 23] and session-level techniques [21]. Web prefetching with infrastructure support is also widely studied [2, 3, 5, 19], and is shown to be effective in real world [6, 7, 16, 26]. In a spirit similar to prefetching, *Crom* [14] speculatively runs JavaScript event handlers, prefetches the web data and pre-upload local files, also with server help. A recent protocol proposal, *SPDY* [25], improves the web performance by providing multiplexed streams, request prioritization, HTTP header compression, server push and server hint. It does so by adding a session layer atop of SSL and requires changes on both client and server. Though the approaches discussed above are effective, they are hard to deploy, are subject to the ability of the servers, cannot provide end-to-end security or has limited client JavaScript support.

Client-only solutions are attractive because they can be immediately deployed and work with existing web content. The authors of [13, 24, 30] sought to improve the client speed of compute-intensive operations in browser. As we showed in [28], their solutions will lead to negligible improvement in mobile browser speed. Existing client-solutions targeted at resource loading employ one or both of the following two approaches. *Browser caching* [20] is the most widely used client approach. As we will show



**Figure 2: Resource graph of the simplified Rice University website. The arrows correspond to the dependency relationship between the webpage node and subresource node, i.e. the subresources can only be discovered after the main resource of the webpage is parsed**

in Section 4.1, caching is not effective for mobile browsers because of the long RTT and the large percentage of revalidations [27]. Web prefetching can also be implemented without server support. However, as we will show in Section 4.2, client-only prefetching introduces considerable waste of data usage with limited performance improvement because of the low prediction accuracy, which confirms previous observations on PCs [15].

### 2.3 LiveLab: Web Usage by 24 iPhone Users

Our work leverages web usage data collected from LiveLab [22], an unprecedented study of 24 iPhone 3GS users from February 2010 to February 2011. The 24 participants were recruited to have balanced gender, major, socioeconomic status to represent the Rice University undergraduate population. All participants had unlimited data plans and were required to use the outfitted iPhones as his or her primary device. Almost all aspects of iPhone usage and context were collected by in-device, *in situ* programmable, logging software. The web usage data used in this work contains user ids, timestamps and URLs of webpages visited. The top 10 visited websites by each LiveLab user account for the majority (81%) of the user’s webpage visits. Out of the top 10 of all 24 users, there are 94 websites, which will be used as benchmark websites in this study. The LiveLab web usage data provide us a unique opportunity to understand mobile web browsing.

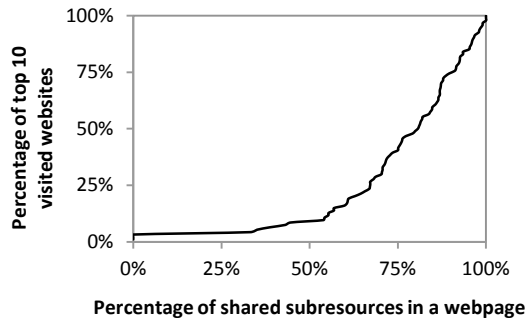
The 24 participants obviously cannot represent the general mobile user population. However, they do provide us an important window into the latter. More importantly, most of our findings are not tied to the special demography of the 24 participants and we believe most, if not all, conclusions drawn in this paper regarding mobile browser performance should be applicable to a large fraction of the general population.

## 3. MOBILE WEB BROWSING CHARACTERISTICS

To study the effectiveness of client-only solutions for mobile browsers, we characterize visited websites in the LiveLab traces and study browsing behaviors of mobile users.

### 3.1 Characteristics of Websites

Since resource loading is the key to browser performance, it gains insight for improvement to examine how a webpage needs many resources and how webpages from a website may share resources. Toward this end, we represent each website, its subdomains, webpages, and subresources with a graph, called *resource graph*. Figure 2 shows an example of the resource graph for the simplified



**Figure 3: Cumulative distribution function for the average percentage of shared subresources in a webpage, i.e. subresources that are also needed by other webpages in the same website, for 94 websites from each LiveLab user’s top 10 visited websites.**

Rice University website. A resource graph has four types of nodes: *website node*, *subdomain node*, *webpage node* and *subresource node*. *Website node* is represented by the top two level domain names of the website. *Subdomain node* is a subdomain of the website. *Webpage* and *subresource nodes* are the real resources in the website and can be addressed by their URLs. The webpages mainly correspond to HTML files and the subresources mainly correspond to JavaScript, CSS, and image files.

The arrows between nodes in a resource graph denote the dependency relationship between a webpage node and the corresponding subresource node. That is, the subresources can only be discovered after the main resource is parsed. Most of the dependencies occur between the webpage node and its subresource nodes. After executing some JavaScript and CSS files, the browser may discover and request new subresources. With a complete resource graph of a website, we know which subresources are needed to open a webpage of the website.

While each website has its own complete resource graph, a user usually can only see part of it, depending on which webpages the user visited. We download the homepages of each LiveLab user’s top 10 visited websites together with their linked webpages, and then construct a partial resource graph for each website. Though a constructed resource graph is partial, we manually verify that it represents the resource structure of the corresponding website. We have the following two observations.

First, *webpages from the same website often share a large portion of resources*. In a resource graph, those shared resources are the subresource nodes with multiple outgoing arrows pointing to multiple webpage nodes. Figure 3 shows the cumulative distribution function for the average percentage of shared subresources in a webpage, i.e. subresources that are also needed by other webpages in the same website, for top 10 visited websites. On average, 76% of the resources in one webpage are shared by at least one other webpage from the same website. This observation provides a key opportunity to improve the speed of opening a new webpage. After a user visits a website for enough times and the resource graph is constructed, the browser can potentially predict the majority of the subresources needed for a new webpage visit, and thus speculatively load them (Section 5.2).

Second, *the structure of a resource graph can change over time*. New nodes can be added into the resource graph. A typical example is a news website, which has changing content all the time. In addition, resource graphs of different websites change in different frequencies. For each LiveLab user’s top 10 visited websites (in

total 94 websites), 24 websites add new webpage nodes every a few hours or in even shorter periods (fast changing); 13 websites add new webpage nodes daily; and 57 websites are stable and no new webpage nodes are added over a long period of time. Among the fast changing websites, 4% of the webpage nodes and 10% of the subresource nodes are replaced by new ones every hour. Among the unchanged webpage nodes in fast changing websites, 26% of them have new subresource nodes, in which 11% of those subresource nodes are replaced with new ones. This observation challenges solutions that leverage the resource graph, because temporal changes of a website’s resource graph are hard to be captured by the client timely. However, our speculative mobile browser design, Tempo, can deal with the temporal changes well and reduce the browser delay by 1 second (Section 6).

### 3.2 Mobile User Browsing Behavior

Understanding the browsing behaviors of mobile users helps us to study the effectiveness of client-only solutions and better design Tempo. We have four interesting findings. First, *for a given mobile user, the total number of frequently visited websites is usually small*. The user’s top 10 visited websites account for 81% of his/her total webpage visits. Therefore, it is reasonable to focus on the resource loading optimization for the webpages that belong to the top 10 visited websites.

Second, *across different users, the web usage is diverse*. Approximately three (both average and median) of the users’ top 10 websites were shared by the all-users-combined top 10 list. Therefore, resource loading optimization should target different sets of websites for different users, which can be easily achieved by client-only solutions.

Third, *the majority of the webpage visits are new visits*. On average, 75% of the webpages visited are new visits. The high new webpage visit rate is one of the reasons that client-only web prefetching has poor performance on mobile browsers (Section 4.2).

Fourth, *though users tend to visit new webpages, the browser is likely to request a similar set of subresources*. On average, only 35% of the subresources requested are new subresources. The reason is that webpages in the same website share subresources, as discussed in Section 3.1. Therefore, subresources can be much more predictable than webpages. This is the key reason that Tempo outperforms client-only web prefetching.

## 4. EFFECTIVENESS OF CLIENT ONLY APPROACHES

Driven by findings presented above, we next examine three orthogonal client-only approaches that speed up resource loading. With *caching*, browser saves the subresources of previously visited webpages locally and reduces the resource loading time if the same subresources are requested again. *Web Prefetching* predicts which webpage a user is likely to visit and downloads its resources beforehand; it minimizes the resource loading time if the user does visit a prefetched page. We show both caching and prefetching are limited for mobile browsers, and show how a new, orthogonal approach, called *speculative loading*, can be much more effective. We reported the early results of our study on browser caching in a workshop paper [27].

### 4.1 Caching

Caching is a well-known approach to fight I/O bottlenecks. A browser stores frequently used web resources locally to save RTT and bandwidth. But resources with “no-store” in the cache-control header field cannot be stored in the browser cache.

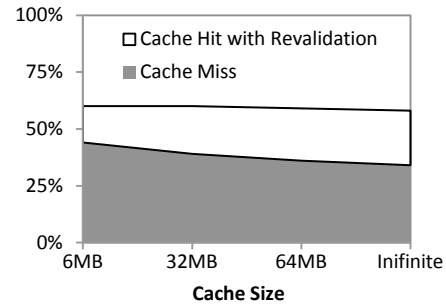


Figure 4: Cache simulation results for the webpages from all websites in the LiveLab traces

A cached resource can have two states: fresh or expired. The browser can return a fresh resource in response to the request without contacting the server. The browser needs to revalidate an expired resource with the origin server to see if the resource is still usable. If it is usable, the server will not send back the entire resource file. Resources with “no-cache” in the cache-control header field can be actually cached but they immediately expire. Both HTTP and HTTPS resources can be cached but their expiration time is indicated in their headers by the server.

A working browser cache is a mixture of fresh and expired resources. Because a large portion of mobile web resources either cannot be cached or have a short expiration time, caching brings little benefit to mobile browsing. Usually, by revalidating expired resources with the server, the browser avoids re-fetching resources if local copies are still usable. However, revalidation cannot hide the extra network RTT, and RTT is the most important factor to mobile browser delay [28]. As a result, latencies in revalidations make caching ineffective for mobile browsers.

We experimentally show how excessive revalidations outweigh the benefit of caching, with the LiveLab traces [22]. Firstly, we download all the resources of the webpages with header information. We simulate the cache behavior of the mobile browser by replaying each user’s browsing history using the file and HTTP header information of each resource. We repeat the simulation with four cache sizes: 6 MB, 32 MB, 64 MB and infinite. Note that Android Gingerbread browser’s default cache size is 6 MB. We have to exclude about 32% of the webpage visits, including visits to pages that no longer exist (39%) and to HTTPS webpages (61%) that require user login. Excluding HTTPS webpages does not bias the results much because most of their resources’ expiration time is not different from their HTTP counterparts.

As shown in Figure 4, our simulation results show that 60% of resource requests incur network activities with a 6 MB cache. Network activity is required when a requested resource is not in the cache (cache miss). It may also be required even if the resource is in the cache: when a resource being requested is cached but expired, the browser still has to contact the server to revalidate it. For the top 10 websites of each user, the effectiveness of caching is even lower: 70% of resource requests incur network activities, and half of the activities are due to revalidations.

Note that increasing the cache size will not help much. Figure 4 shows that the small size (6 MB) of current browser cache incurs only 10% more cache misses than an infinite cache. And 58% of resource requests still incur network activities with an infinite size cache, which is close to the percentage with 6 MB cache size (60%). Therefore, a larger cache will not bring much benefit.

In summary, our results show that the benefit of caching is marginal because it can do little in loading resources whose cached copies ex-

**Table 1: Upper bound of the browser delay reduction from speculative loading under different cache states (in ms)**

Sites	Fresh Cache			Expired Cache				Empty Cache			
	Legacy	Speculate	Reduction	Legacy	Speculate	Reduction		Legacy	Speculate	Reduction	
ESPN	4557	4557	0 0%	6702	4622	2080 31%		7143	4622	2521 35%	
CNN	2382	2382	0 0%	4869	2884	1985 41%		6300	4315	1985 32%	
Google	2162	2131	31 1%	3363	2131	1232 37%		3661	2223	1438 39%	
Yahoo! Mail	3199	3199	0 0%	4333	3199	1134 26%		4341	3199	1142 26%	
Weather	3645	3608	37 1%	6294	3608	2686 43%		6349	3608	2741 43%	
Craigslist	1926	1920	6 0%	3034	1920	1114 37%		3103	1920	1183 38%	
Neopets Games	3605	3605	0 0%	11505	9002	2503 22%		11843	9340	2503 21%	
Varsity Tutors	3313	3313	0 0%	8410	6596	1814 22%		9219	7405	1814 20%	
Ride METRO	3826	3826	0 0%	8266	5560	2706 33%		8774	6068	2706 31%	
Rice Registrar	3351	3351	0 0%	5865	3541	2324 40%		6427	3541	2886 45%	
<b>Average</b>	<b>3197</b>	<b>3189</b>	<b>7 0%</b>	<b>6264</b>	<b>4306</b>	<b>1958 33%</b>		<b>6716</b>	<b>4624</b>	<b>2092 33%</b>	

pire quickly: revalidation saves bandwidth usage in this case, but cannot hide network RTT, which is the most important factor to mobile browsers' performance [28].

## 4.2 Web Prefetching

We believe that client-only web prefetching [3, 5, 19] is harmful to mobile web browsing, because it results in significant additional data usage with very little improvement. Web prefetching predicts the webpages that will be visited by the user and downloads their resources beforehand. When the user actually visits a predicted webpage, its resources are already available locally. Most solutions of web prefetching are intended for PC browsers and involve infrastructure support to aggregate behaviors of many users. We showed that on mobile devices, client-only web prefetching is ineffective because web prefetching cannot predict URLs that have never been visited before; on average, 75% of the webpages visited are new visits, as shown in Section 3.2.

To quantitatively demonstrate this ineffectiveness, we evaluate client-only web prefetching using the LiveLab traces. We simulate the web prefetching algorithm presented in [3], called *most-popular*. It uses the popularity ranking of user's past requests to predict future requests. We also borrow the metrics, *hit ratio* and *usefulness*, from [3]. The *hit ratio* is defined as the number of webpages that are predicted and also actually requested to the number of predicted webpages. It represents the accuracy of the prediction. High hit ratio means low unnecessary data usage. The *usefulness* is defined as the number of webpages that are predicted and also actually requested to the number of actually requested webpages. It represents the coverage of the prediction. High usefulness means high average speedup.

With one month training period, the hit ratio is 16% and the usefulness is 1% on average among 24 iPhone users. Such low hit ratio and usefulness lead to considerable unnecessary data usage yet very limited speed improvement. With a very generous assumption that the prefetched content is cached and will not expire before actual visit, the upper bound of the browser delay reduction from the most-popular web prefetching algorithm is 1%. And the unnecessary data usage accounts for 84% of the total prefetched data.

One may think that prefetched subresources for one webpage may help in loading other webpages from the same website because subresources are shared by webpages from the same website as shown in Section 3.1. Unfortunately, this is usually not the case because many resources are either not in the cache or their cached copies expire quickly, as shown in Section 4.1. In contrast, speculative loading solves this problem by loading the resources only *after* the user requests a webpage's URL.

## 4.3 Speculative Loading

Seeing the failures of caching and prefetching, we propose a third, orthogonal approach called *speculative loading* that loads subre-

sources for a webpage along with the main resource file *after* a user provides the web URL.

Essentially, speculative loading predicts which subresources to load based on a resource graph of the website constructed using knowledge of the website collected from the past. It leverages the multiple concurrent connections available to modern browsers, e.g. 4 for Android Gingerbread, to concurrently load subresources along with the main resource. Speculative loading will be more beneficial with more concurrent connections because it can then load more subresources speculatively. Unlike caching, speculative loading will revalidate expired resources and load evicted resources concurrently while loading the main resource, thus keeping most subresources fresh in the cache when the browser actually requests them. Unlike web prefetching, speculative loading predicts which resources a webpage may need, instead of which webpage the user may visit.

### 4.3.1 Upper Bound of Improvement

The key to the effectiveness of speculative loading is *subresource prediction*. By assuming 100% hit ratio and 100% usefulness for subresource prediction, we are able to derive the upper bound of the browser delay reduction from speculative loading. We will show in Section 6 that the performance of speculative loading is close to this upper bound in practice. Here we examine the browser delays for the homepages of top visited websites from LiveLab traces under three different cache states: fresh, expire, and empty. With a fresh cache, if a requested resource is cached, the browser will use the cached copy without any network activity. With an expired cache, if a requested cache is cached, the browser still needs to revalidate it with the server. With an empty cache, the browser needs to load every resource file from the server.

Table 1 shows the upper bound of the browser delay reduction. We measure the browser delays of legacy loading with an empty cache on Samsung Galaxy S II in 3G network provided by U.S. wireless carrier AT&T. Then we simulate the browser delays in other columns by applying what-if analysis as described in [28]. In summary, what-if analysis tries to derive the overall performance gain if a browser operation is accelerated. To accurately predict the impact of accelerating all instances of any operation, we scale the execution time of each instance of such an operation. All operation instances depending on it will thus be executed earlier, resulting shorter browser delay.

We have four observations. (i) The average browser delay reductions are 33% (~2 seconds) for an expired or an empty cache. The reduction comes from the time waiting for the main resource to discover the subresources. (ii) There is nearly no reduction for a fresh cache because all the subresources are available locally already. There is no advantage of discovering and loading subresources speculatively. (iii) The average browser delay of Tempo under an expired and an empty cache is close to that of Legacy

under a fresh cache. This is because speculative loading essentially keeps most subresources fresh in the cache when the browser requests them, which solves the limitation of caching discussed in Section 4.1. (iv) The upper bound of browser delay reduction by speculative loading for a realistic cache can be estimated to be around 1.4 seconds (22%), because when a webpage from top10 visited websites is visited, 70% of its subresources needed by a webpage are either expired or not in the cache, as shown in Section 4.1.

### 4.3.2 Predicting Server vs. Predicting User

Speculative loading shows more promise than web prefetching. The upper bound of the browser delay reduction from speculative loading (22%) is one order of magnitude larger than the upper bound of reduction from web prefetching (1%). Moreover, by applying the design discussed in Section 5, speculative loading will incur a much lower overhead of wireless data usage with 65% hit ratio as will be evaluated in Section 6, comparing to 16% hit ratio for web prefetching.

There is a fundamental reason that speculative loading can be much more effective than web prefetching: *predicting server behavior is much easier than predicting user behavior*. Speculative loading predicts the subresources needed by a webpage, which is server behavior prediction. Web prefetching predicts the next visited webpage by the user, which is user behavior prediction. Server behavior prediction can achieve high accuracy because webpages in the same website share subresources, as discussed in Section 3.1. On the contrary, user behavior prediction is limited because 75% of the visited webpages are new visits, as presented in Section 3.2. To predict server structure, the browser needs to map the resource graph of each website on the mobile device and we will discuss the detailed design in Section 5.

## 4.4 Upper Bound for Client-Only Solutions

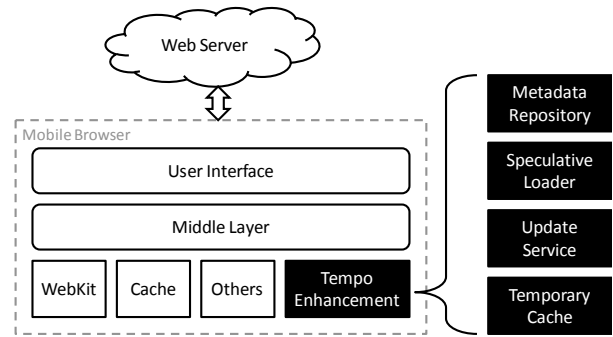
Existing two client-only approaches are limited because of two reasons. First, a large portion of mobile web resources are either not in the cache or their cached copies quickly expire, which makes caching ineffective. Second, mobile browsing behaviors are not very predictable, which makes client-only web prefetching harmful. Our proposed approach, speculative loading, addresses those two limitations by speculatively revalidating expired resources and loading evicted resources, and by predicting server behavior instead of predicting user behavior.

Speculative loading has reached the upper bound of improvement for client-only solutions, i.e. 1.4 seconds as shown by us empirically. The reason is that the request-response model of HTTP protocol [1] requires at least one request for each resource needed and the loading procedure is already fully parallel with speculative loading. In practice, it is difficult to completely predict what resources are needed for a webpage based on its user’s browsing history. Our speculative mobile browser design, Tempo, can reduce the browser delay by 1 second, as will be evaluated in Section 6.2, a result close to the upper bound.

According to our previous work [28], better hardware can also speed up resource loading by providing faster OS services and network stack. The browser speedup from hardware improvement is orthogonal to the upper bound of improvement achieved by the client-only approaches discussed above.

## 5. TEMPO: A SPECULATIVE MOBILE BROWSER

We now describe *Tempo*, our mobile browser design that seeks to realize the potential of speculative loading. As illustrated in Fig-



**Figure 5: Tempo, a speculative mobile browser. Black components are new additions to the existing mobile browser.**

ure 5, Tempo is realized by adding a module under the middle layer in Android Gingerbread browser. The middle layer connects the WebKit browser engine [29] and the network service provided by the mobile device. It also bridges the browser user interface and WebKit, and manages caches, cookies and plug-ins.

Tempo has four components. *Metadata repository* stores each website’s resource graph, in particular the dependency information, to make speculative loading possible. *Speculative loader* predicts the needed subresources based on the information provided by metadata repository and loads the predicted subresources speculatively for every webpage visit. *Update service* updates *metadata repository* with the new resource information after a webpage is open and trims the stale nodes in *metadata repository*. The last component is *temporary cache*, which stores the resources that cannot be stored in the cache temporarily (those with “no-store” in cache-control header). We will discuss the details of each component as follows.

### 5.1 Metadata Repository

Metadata repository is a key-value store, as shown in Figure 6. The key is the website and the value is the website’s resource graph, which is discussed in Section 3.1. Each node in the resource graph has several fields, e.g. type, URL, last visit time, children, parents, and number of visits. The actual content is not stored in the resource graph.

Our design of metadata repository has two advantages. Firstly, it relates the resources in each website in the corresponding resource graph. When visits occur, the browser knows which subresources are needed even before downloading the main resource file. This makes speculative loading possible. In contrast, caching provides no relation information among the cached resources. Secondly, metadata repository only takes several hundred KB of storage on the mobile device because each node in the resource graph is represented by the URL instead of the actual content.

Metadata repository is stored in the flash storage of mobile devices. It will be loaded into the memory when the browser is started and will be saved to the flash storage after each webpage is open. So accessing the repository will not affect the browser delay.

### 5.2 Speculative Loader

Speculative loader takes the webpage’s URL as the input right after the user enters or clicks the URL of that webpage, retrieves the corresponding resource graph from the metadata repository, predicts the subresources needed for that webpage based on the resource graph, and loads those subresources speculatively if they are not in the cache or expired. It not only handles webpage revi-

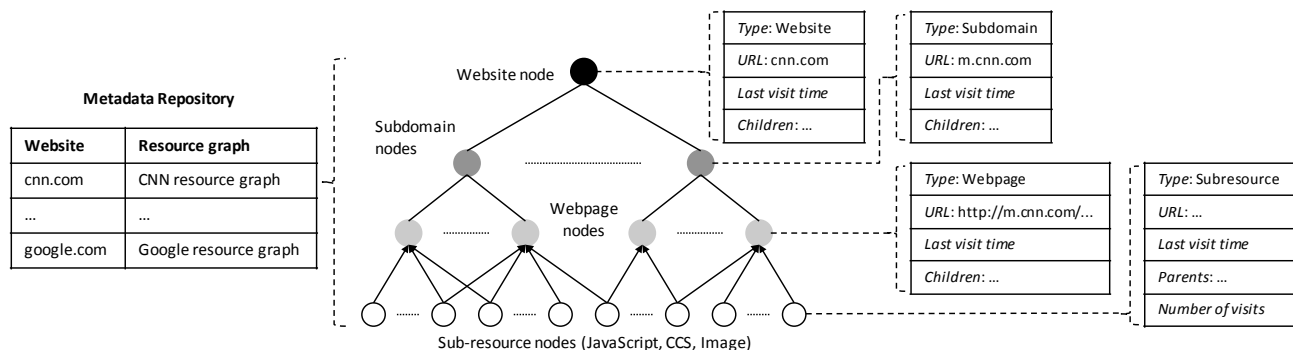


Figure 6: Metadata repository, a key-value store where keys are websites and values are websites' resource graphs

sits but also handles new webpage visits. Note that speculative loading for new webpage visits is very important and cannot be ignored for mobile browsers, because a large portion of webpage visits are new visits as discussed in Section 3.1. In contrast, web prefetching relies on past history and cannot benefit new visits. That's one of the reasons that web prefetching has poor performance on mobile devices.

The detailed subresource prediction algorithm is illustrated in Figure 7. If the webpage visit is a revisit, speculative loader can find the corresponding webpage node in the resource graph and thus all its child subresource nodes are the subresources the webpage needs. If the webpage visit is a new visit, no corresponding webpage node is stored in the resource graph yet. Speculative loader predicts the subresources' URLs according to the shared subresource nodes because subresources are heavily shared across multiple pages of the same website, as discussed in Section 3.1.

To maximize the prediction accuracy and coverage, speculative loader judiciously prioritizes the candidate subresources by sorting them according to their number of parents (large to small), file types (JS to CSS to image), number of visits (large to small) and URL length (short to long), as indicated by the function `Sort()` in Figure 7. If it is webpage new visit, speculative loader only chooses the ones with high priority as the predicted subresources, i.e. the subresource nodes that are shared by more webpage nodes). JavaScript and CSS files have higher priority than images because they may further request subresources and scripting may block later executions. Long URLs have higher chance to contain session dependent string, which make the URLs useless next time. So long URLs have low priority.

To reduce the unnecessary data usage, speculative loader loads the predicted subresources adaptively. When the number of predicted resources is more than the number of allowed concurrent connections, the resources with higher priority will be requested immediately and other resources will be put into a waiting queue. If main resource file is downloaded and parsed before the waiting resources are actually requested, the waiting queue will be updated with the actually needed resources, reducing unnecessary data usage from prediction misses.

### 5.3 Update Service

Update service constructs and modifies resource graphs in the metadata repository. There are two major operations performed on the nodes in the resource graph: *update* and *trim*. *Update* operation adds a node if the node does not exist in the resource graph or updates the information stored in the node if the node exists in the

```

Input: webpage URL
Output: predicted subresources' URLs
SubresourcePrediction(url) :
  candidates = [] // subresources
  webpage_node = get_webpage_node(url)
  if webpage_node != NULL: // webpage revisit
    candidates = children_of_webpage_node
    sorted_candidates = Sort(candidates)
    return sorted_candidates
  else: // webpage new visit
    subdomain_node = get_subdomain_node(url)
    if subdomain_node != NULL:
      candidates = subres_nodes_of_the_subdomain
    else:
      candidates = subres_nodes_of_the_website
    sorted_candidates = Sort(candidates)
    num_predicted = avg_num_of_webpage_children
    return sorted_candidates[0:num_predicted]

```

Figure 7: Pseudo Code of Subresource Prediction

resource graph already. *Trim* operation removes the nodes that are not visited for more than one month from the resource graph.

After a webpage is open, update service *updates* the webpage nodes, its subresource nodes, the corresponding subdomain node and the website node in the resource graph. Some webpages dynamically request subresources after a webpage is open, e.g. by using AJAX. Update service can also capture those requests and update the subresource nodes accordingly. Every day, update service *trims* resource graph and remove the stale nodes, whose last visit time is older than a month. *Trimming* resource graph keeps the user viewed website resource graph structure up-to-date and limits the storage overhead of a metadata repository.

### 5.4 Temporary Cache

The purpose of the temporary cache is to store the resources that have "no-store" in their cache-control header field temporarily. Those files should not be stored in the cache. When speculative loader loads predicted resources, resources with "no-store" in their cache-control header field will be saved to the temporary cache and other resources will be saved to the normal cache. Later when the browser engine actually requests the speculatively loaded resources, it will get them either from the normal cache or the temporary cache. After the webpage is open, all the resources in the temporary cache will be deleted. The resources saved in the temporary cache can be encrypted to avoid any possible security vulnerability.

## 6. EVALUATION

We evaluate the Tempo design through a trace-based simulation, lab experiments and a field trial. The evaluation shows that the subresource prediction has both high accuracy and high coverage, resulting in 1 second (~20%) of browser delay reduction with low overhead.

### 6.1 Subresource Prediction Performance

We firstly evaluate how good the subresource prediction is and how long Tempo needs to learn to make good predictions, based on the LiveLab traces. We employ two metrics: *hit ratio* and *usefulness*. As mentioned in Section 4.2, *hit ratio* represents the accuracy of the prediction and *usefulness* represents the coverage of the prediction.

Figure 8 shows the weekly and monthly hit ratio and usefulness of subresource prediction, respectively. We can see that the first week’s hit ratio (50%) and usefulness (56%) are already much higher than web prefetching shown in Section 4.2. The highest hit ratio (65%) and usefulness (73%) are reached in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month. Interestingly, they drop slightly at week 4, 5, 12 and month 4, 5, largely when the LiveLab users visited a different set of websites around holidays and school breaks. Tempo takes time to construct the resource graph for the new websites.

### 6.2 Lab Experiments

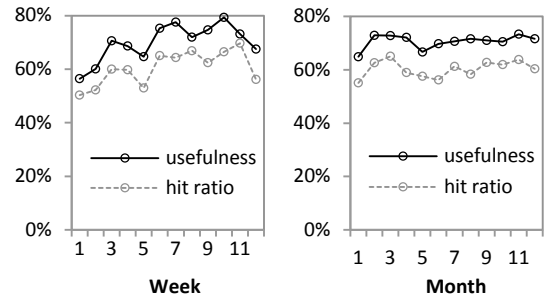
We now evaluate how the subresource prediction performance is translated into browser delay reduction through lab-based experiments. For the experiments, we port Tempo to Samsung Galaxy S II smartphone that runs Android Gingerbread [4]. Though the benefit of Tempo is demonstrated by Samsung Galaxy S II, Tempo can work on any other mobile devices that support concurrent connections. The code of Tempo is instrumented to record webpage delay efficiently. All experiments use 3G network provided by AT&T, a major U.S. carrier, in our lab on Rice campus, where 3G signal strength is strong.

#### 6.2.1 Revisits

Firstly, we show that Tempo can reduce browser delays of webpage revisits to very close to the upper bound presented in Section 4.3. We use the homepages of the websites from Table 1 in the experiment. We firstly open the URLs in the browser once to warm up the cache and construct the resource graph. Then we open the URLs one by one for five times and calculate the average browser delay. Even though all the webpage visits are revisits in the experiment and we have minimized the time interval between revisits, there can still be cache misses due to the dynamic and/or session dependent content in the web. Subresource prediction cannot predict all the subresources needed, either. On average, the hit ratio is 65% and the usefulness is 72%, which are close to the prediction accuracy and coverage evaluated in Section 6.1.

We compare the browser delays between legacy loading and Tempo with three different cache states, similar to what used in Section 4.3, i.e. fresh, expired, and empty. The browser is modified to always revalidate the resources stored in the cache under an expired cache and clears the cache before each webpage visit under an empty cache.

Table 2 shows the browser delays of webpage revisits under different cache states with the WebKit browser without speculative loading (*Legacy*) and Tempo. With a fresh cache, the browser delays of Legacy and Tempo are close because most of the subresources are available locally. With an expired cache, Tempo reduces 25% (1445 ms) of browser delay on average. Tempo also reduces 24% (1464 ms) of browser delay under an empty cache. Since 70% of the re-



**Figure 8: Hit ratio and usefulness of subresource prediction for the first 12 weeks (Left) and the entire year (Right). Each data point is the average value across 24 LiveLab users**

quested resources of a webpage from top 10 visited websites are either expired or not in the cache, as mentioned in Section 4.1, we estimate tempo can reduce the browser delay by around 1 second or 20% with a realistic cache. This 1 second browser delay reduction is also confirmed by our field trial, which will be discussed in the next section.

The browser delay reduction for each website mainly comes from the time waiting for the main resource to discover the subresources. Thus the content richness of the webpage, measured by the number of subresources, and the webpage type, i.e. mobile or non-mobile, do not affect browser delay reduction: most of the reductions in Table 2 are close, i.e. ~1.4 second. The time spent to download and parse the main resource affects the discovery time of subresources and there are two main factors: (i) main resource redirection delays the download of main resource, e.g. the case for Weather website; (ii) JavaScript execution can delay main resource parsing, e.g. Varsity Tutors website. Since Tempo eliminates the resource dependencies, it can provide more browser delay reduction for websites that have previous two limiting factors.

The browser delay reduction of Tempo is very close to the upper bound presented in Section 4.3. Under an expired or an empty cache, Tempo can reduce around 1.4 second, which is 70% of the upper bound (reduce 2 seconds) we can get. For a realistic cache, Tempo can reduce around 1 second, which is 71% of the upper bound with a realistic cache (around 1.4 second). By achieving its design goal, Tempo essentially keeps most subresources fresh in the cache when the browser requests them. Table 2 shows that the average browser delay of Tempo under an expired and an empty cache (4597 ms and 5222 ms) is only 3% and 17% larger than that of Legacy under a fresh cache (4446 ms), which is the ideal case. Tempo does overcome the limitation of caching.

#### 6.2.2 New Visits

Tempo can also greatly reduce the browser delay for new webpage visits, which account for 75% of the total webpage visits in LiveLab traces. In the experiment, we use the websites in Table 1. We firstly open the homepage of the website in the browser once to warm up the cache and construct the resource graph. Then we navigate to five other webpages in the same website and then calculate the average browser delay. The browser delay for the homepage is not counted. Even though new webpages are used, and thus the subresources needed by the webpage will be different, subresource prediction can still predict some of the subresources needed from the shared subresource nodes. On average, the hit ratio is 50% and the usefulness is 67%, which is only slightly lower than the prediction accuracy and coverage evaluated in the previous section.



**Table 2: Browser delay reduction from speculative loading for webpage *revisits* under different cache states (in ms)**

Sites	Fresh Cache				Expired Cache				Empty Cache			
	Legacy	Tempo	Reduction		Legacy	Tempo	Reduction		Legacy	Tempo	Reduction	
ESPN	3491	3602	-111	-3%	6748	5372	1376	20%	7031	5322	1709	24%
CNN	4873	4507	366	8%	5992	4274	1718	29%	6346	5307	1039	16%
Google	2407	2842	-435	-18%	3411	3073	338	10%	3932	3257	675	17%
Yahoo! Mail	3239	3472	-233	-7%	5083	3265	1818	36%	5083	3442	1641	32%
Weather	5055	4559	496	10%	6109	3835	2274	37%	7167	4716	2451	34%
Craigslist	3123	2400	723	23%	3648	2089	1559	43%	3677	2470	1207	33%
Neopets Games	9041	9076	-35	0%	10639	9280	1359	13%	10660	10220	440	4%
Varsity Tutors	5969	5384	585	10%	8516	6677	1839	22%	9987	7914	2073	21%
Ride METRO	4220	3801	419	10%	6109	4620	1489	24%	6945	5488	1457	21%
Rice Registrar	3046	3609	-563	-18%	4169	3489	680	16%	6027	4084	1943	32%
<b>Average</b>	<b>4446</b>	<b>4325</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>6042</b>	<b>4597</b>	<b>1445</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>6686</b>	<b>5222</b>	<b>1464</b>	<b>24%</b>

**Table 3: Browser delay reduction from speculative loading for *new* webpage visits under different cache states (in ms)**

Sites	Fresh Cache				Expired Cache				Empty Cache			
	Legacy	Tempo	Reduction		Legacy	Tempo	Reduction		Legacy	Tempo	Reduction	
ESPN	3152	2587	565	18%	3163	2788	375	12%	6162	4205	1957	32%
CNN	2994	3328	-334	-11%	3519	2438	1081	31%	7091	6054	1037	15%
Google	2982	2295	687	23%	2376	2492	-116	-5%	4638	2945	1693	37%
Yahoo! Mail	5222	5282	-60	-1%	4472	3162	1310	29%	5572	5047	525	9%
Weather	5180	3763	1417	27%	3757	2682	1075	29%	5357	5244	113	2%
Craigslist	1203	1210	-7	-1%	2624	1848	776	30%	5163	3463	1700	33%
Neopets	10105	9795	310	3%	7326	7038	288	4%	6914	6623	291	4%
Varsity Tutors	7126	8013	-887	-12%	10598	7437	3161	30%	14921	12674	2247	15%
Ride METRO	2759	3460	-701	-25%	3352	2602	750	22%	6829	6171	658	10%
Rice Registrar	3929	3708	221	6%	4570	3672	898	20%	6506	5534	972	15%
<b>Average</b>	<b>4465</b>	<b>4344</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4576</b>	<b>3616</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>6915</b>	<b>5796</b>	<b>1119</b>	<b>17%</b>

With similar cache states, we compare the browser delays between Legacy and Tempo. Table 3 shows the browser delays of new visits to webpages of different websites. Under a fresh cache, Legacy and Tempo exhibit similar browser delay. Under an expired and an empty cache, on average, Tempo incurs 20% (960 ms) and 17% (1119 ms) less browser delay than the Legacy, respectively. Notice that the browser delay of Tempo under an expired cache (3616 ms) is even 19% smaller than that of Legacy under a fresh cache (4465 ms). The reasons are that Tempo can effectively revalidate the expired subresources, warm up the TCP connection and thus download new subresources much faster.

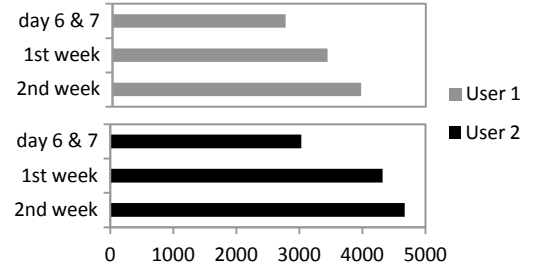
### 6.3 Field Trial

We also conduct a field trial to study the performance of Tempo browser. In the field trial, two Samsung Galaxy S II smartphones are used by two participants. Both smartphones are running Android Gingerbread [4] with Tempo browser and using the 3G network provided by U.S. wireless carrier AT&T. The field trial lasted for two weeks for each participant. The cache was cleared before the field trial and was never cleared during the field trial. Speculative loading was enabled in the first week starting with a cold cache, but disabled in the second week. So the benefit we attribute to speculative loading is unlikely from the caching effect.

The results are shown in Figure 9. The average browser delay of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week is 433 ms longer than that of the 1<sup>st</sup> week and 1424 ms longer than that of day 6 & 7, the last two days in the 1<sup>st</sup> week. The results show that once Tempo has warmed up the cache and constructed resource graphs, it outperforms Legacy by over one second. This is consistent with our findings from the lab experiments described in Section 6.2. The results also indicate that Tempo is effective with just several days' training.

### 6.4 Overhead

Tempo incurs very low overhead of three types: performance, wireless data usage, and storage usage. Tempo incurs performance



**Figure 9: Average browser delays (ms) in different periods of the field trial. Speculative loading is enabled in the 1<sup>st</sup> week and disabled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week**

overhead when a predicted subresource is not actually needed. In this case, loading the predicted subresource will occupy a TCP connection, making actually needed subresources wait for available connections. We have minimized this overhead by prioritizing the predicted subresources and loading them adaptively, as discussed in Section 5.2. From the experiments presented above, it is also clear that the benefit from Tempo outweighs the overhead.

Tempo incurs data usage overhead when a predicted subresource is not actually needed. A higher hit ratio leads to lower data usage overhead, as discussed in Section 4.2. Resource prediction in Tempo achieves a hit ratio as high as 65%, as presented in Section 6.1, which is four times as much as that of web prefetching (16%). Though 35% of the predicted subresources are not actually needed by the current webpage, the resulting data usage overhead is usually even lower because of three reasons: (i) the predicted subresources are loaded adaptively, which minimizes the data usage overhead; (ii) the predicted subresources are widely shared by different webpages of the same website, effectively amortizing the overhead over multiple webpages; (iii) the predicted subre-

sources are visited before and they are likely to be still in the cache, resulting in little network traffic for expired resource or even none for fresh resource. We find the data usage overhead in the field trial to be as low as 0.7 MB per week.

Tempo incurs storage usage overhead by constructing and storing metadata repository on the mobile device, which requires additional flash storage space. However, the additional storage is small because metadata repository does not contain actual resource content, as discussed in Section 5.1. For each of the 24 LiveLab users, one year's metadata repository takes only 165 KB on average and 576 KB at most, which is negligible in view of what is available to mobile devices.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Of solutions for browser speed improvement, client-only ones are immediately deployable, scalable, and secure. It has been well known that client-only solutions are not as effective in improving speed as ones with infrastructure support. Leveraging an unprecedented mobile web usage data set, our work provides the first comprehensive treatment regarding the effectiveness of client-only solutions.

We demonstrate the ineffectiveness of browser caching and client-only web prefetching on mobile browsers. Caching is not effective because of the large portion of the resources that are either not in the cache or their cached copies quickly expire. Client-only web prefetching is harmful because it results in significant additional wireless data usage with little performance improvement.

In order to address the limitations of the previous two approaches, we propose speculative loading, a client-only approach that predicts the subresources of a webpage given its URL and then speculatively loads the predicted subresources. Our implementation of speculative loading, Tempo, can reduce browser delay by 1 second (~20%) under 3G network.

Finally, we empirically show that the upper bound of browser delay reduction for client-only solutions is 1.4 second with today's typical 3G network. Our result suggests that it is imperative to involve the infrastructure in further improving mobile browser performance.

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