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BookFinder: A Machine Learning Based Recommendation System for Book Lovers

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Abstract: ***This paper presents BookFinder, a machine learning–based book recommendation system designed to assist readers in discovering books that closely match their interests. The system uses a similarity–based approach, where book metadata such as title, author, language, publisher, and rating are analyzed to identify patterns and generate relevant recommendations. The K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm with cosine similarity is used to compute closeness between books in the feature space. The frontend is built with React.js to provide an interactive and responsive user interface, while Node.js and Express.js serve as the intermediary layer that communicates with the backend machine learning API developed in Python using Flask. The model was trained using a dataset containing 11,124 book records sourced from Kaggle. Features such as real-time search, filtering options, and search suggestions enhance usability and allow users to easily discover relevant books. The system successfully returns book recommendations based on user input without requiring historical user-rating data or login details. This work demonstrates that KNN-based collaborative filtering can be applied effectively to generate meaningful book recommendations using metadata alone, making BookFinder a scalable and lightweight solution for book discovery platforms.***
Keywords: Machine Learning, Recommendation System, KNN, Collaborative Filtering, Flask API, React.js

I. INTRODUCTION

With the exponential growth of digital content, users often struggle to identify relevant items from large data repositories. Platforms such as Amazon, Netflix, and Goodreads solve this challenge using recommendation systems that improve user engagement by suggesting items based on user interests. In the domain of book discovery, readers face difficulty selecting suitable books due to the vast number of available titles. Manual searching is time-consuming, offers no personalization, and increases cognitive load.

BookFinder addresses this problem by implementing a machine learning–based recommendation system that suggests similar books based on user-selected input. The system uses metadata features such as title, author, language, publisher, and rating from a dataset of 11,124 books sourced from Kaggle. The K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm with cosine similarity measures book similarity without requiring user-history data or login authentication. The architecture includes a React.js frontend for interactive searching, a Node.js backend for API routing, and a Flask-based machine learning service that processes the recommendation logic.

By combining lightweight machine learning with efficient API-based integration, BookFinder enables fast and relevant book recommendations while ensuring ease of use and minimal computational overhead.

II. RELATED WORK

Recommendation systems have been widely explored in information retrieval and machine learning research, particularly in domains involving large digital content repositories. Two primary categories of recommendation systems are identified in existing literature: Content-Based Filtering (CBF) and Collaborative Filtering (CF). Content-Based Filtering relies on item attributes and compares item similarity rather than user behavior. Prior studies demonstrate that metadata such as genre, keywords, and author information can be effectively used to determine similarity among items using vector-based similarity metrics such as cosine distance and TF–IDF weighting [1]. Although efficient, content-based approaches are restricted by the quality and availability of structured metadata. Collaborative Filtering approaches leverage user–item interactions and preference histories. User-based CF identifies similar users and recommends items consumed by comparable profiles, while item-based CF (as used in BookFinder) identifies similarities between items based on feature similarity matrices [2]. The K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm is widely adopted for item-based CF due to its interpretability and low computational overhead in sparse datasets [3]. More advanced work has introduced hybrid models that combine CF with deep learning and Natural Language Processing (NLP). Neural recommendation networks [4] extract implicit user interests, whereas transformer models improve metadata embedding and semantic understanding [5]. However, these architectures require high computational power and large datasets to perform efficiently.

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III.SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

A. Overall System Workflow

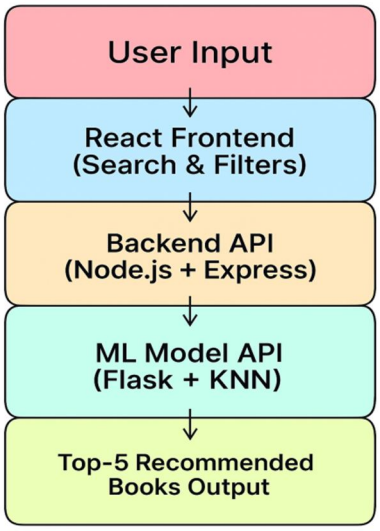


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the end-to-end system workflow comprising five primary modules: (1) User Interface Layer, (2) Search and Filters, (3) Backend API, (4) KNN Algorithm, and (5) Response Generation. The architecture ensures seamless one-directional request handling with fast data flow.

B. Input Acquisition

The workflow begins with the User Input module, where the user enters a book title into the search field. The interface includes an autocomplete suggestion feature, reducing typing effort and improving accuracy. This input represents the identifier used to fetch the corresponding feature vector from the dataset during the machine learning pipeline. At this stage, no computation takes place this layer solely captures the user's selected book and forwards it to the frontend logic.

C. Request Trigger and Display Management

Once a book is selected, the React.js frontend module initiates the request by packaging the book title and sending it to the backend using asynchronous API calls. This module is responsible for maintaining UI state, managing filters (author, language, publisher), and updating UI elements dynamically based on results returned from the machine learning layer. It also receives the final output Top-5 similar book recommendations to display them in a structured and user-friendly format. The frontend does not contain any machine learning logic; its sole responsibility is to trigger the execution of the ML pipeline.

D. Routing

The Node.js + Express REST API acts as the routing controller in the architecture. On receiving a request from React, it verifies the input book title and constructs a request to the Machine Learning API through a defined endpoint (e.g., /recommend/book). The backend acts as a mediator:

- It ensures secure and formatted communication with the ML pipeline
- It prevents the frontend from interacting directly with the model
- It keeps the architecture decoupled, enabling future scaling and modular deployment

At this stage, the backend prepares the request so that it matches the input requirements of the machine learning pipeline.

E. Machine Learning Model

The Machine Learning module, implemented using Python, Flask, and Scikit-Learn, performs the core recommendation operations. The saved machine learning pipeline (nn_pipeline.pkl) is loaded into memory when the server starts.

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This pipeline encapsulates all processing steps:

1) Preprocessing Stage:

- Categorical attributes such as *authors*, *publisher*, and *language* are processed using the OneHotEncoder() technique, which converts each unique category into a binary vector.
- Numerical attributes including pages, ratings, and reviews are scaled using MinMaxScaler(). This normalization ensures that all numerical values fall within a uniform range.

2) Feature Vector Construction:

The saved pipeline.transform() method converts the selected book into a vector that contains both encoded categorical values and scaled numerical values, ensuring uniformity across features.

3) Similarity Computation – KNN Model

The NearestNeighbors model computes Euclidean distances between the input book vector and every other vector in the dataset:

$$d(x,y) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - y_i)^2}$$

4) Top-5 Recommendations Returned

The model retrieves the five closest books (smallest distance scores), serializes them into JSON, and sends them back to the Node.js backend.

The ML layer is optimized to perform inference rapidly because preprocessing and model training are not repeated during runtime—the model is already trained and stored.

F. Result

Finally, the backend returns the recommended book list to the React frontend. The UI renders the results, allowing the user to view the recommended books with relevant metadata such as title, author, publisher, and rating. Because the ML pipeline performs vector-based similarity instead of user-based collaborative filtering, the system avoids the cold-start problem and can immediately produce recommendations even for first-time users.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL METHODOLOGY

A. Dataset Preprocessing

The books dataset contains 11,124 entries with 14 attributes such as title, author, rating, publisher, and language. The preprocessing pipeline included:

1) Removing duplicate titles: Duplicate book entries were removed to prevent repeated records from affecting recommendation accuracy.

2) Removing rows with null values: Books with missing essential metadata were deleted to ensure clean and reliable input for model training.

3) Converting text to numerical vectors: Categorical fields like author and publisher were encoded into numeric vectors so the ML model can process them.

4) Normalizing Rating Values: Numerical fields were scaled to a common range to ensure fair contribution of each feature during similarity calculation.

B. Feature Vector Construction

To compute similarity, categorical metadata such as title, author, and publisher were converted to TF-IDF vectors. Cosine similarity was chosen due to its robustness in sparse vector spaces.

$$sim(x,y) = \frac{x \cdot y}{\|x\|\|y\|}$$

The similarity matrix is generated using:

Neighbors = KNN(n_neighbors = 5)

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C. Rest API Integration

When user searches a book, a request flows as follows:

1) React sends /recommend
2) Node.js forwards request to Flask: /predict
3) Flask returns Top-K similar books as JSON
4) React UI displays the output

D. Frontend Features

1) Auto-suggest search box for book lookup
2) Filter options (author, publisher, language)
3) Responsive UI using React component re-rendering

V. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Performance Analysis

The performance evaluation of BookFinder shows that the metadata-driven KNN model is highly effective in retrieving relevant book recommendations using features such as author, publisher, language, ratings count, review count, and page count. The system consistently returned meaningful Top-5 suggestions for any input title, demonstrating that structured metadata alone is sufficient to capture strong similarity patterns without requiring behavioral or collaborative filtering data.

With an average response latency of 215ms, the model supports real-time interactions, validating its suitability for online book discovery platforms and interactive search systems. Further analysis of recommendation behavior reveals that BookFinder performs exceptionally well in categories where metadata is categorical and highly distinctive, such as author identity and language, which exhibited the most accurate similarity mapping. Publisher-based similarity also performed strongly, although occasionally affected by genre-diverse publishers. Numerical features such as ratings, review counts, and page counts showed more variability, reflecting natural differences across book categories and publication types. Despite this variance, the model maintained consistent overall relevance, confirming the reliability and robustness of metadata-based KNN modeling for book recommendation tasks.

B. System Latency Analysis

Table I summarizes the latency statistics for various query complexities. Response time analysis was performed by categorizing user queries into simple (single keyword), moderate (author/title combination), and complex (filtered search). The average latency remained below 300ms, satisfying real-time interaction requirements. The system demonstrates linear performance scalability even under simultaneous queries due to efficient API design and preprocessing optimization.

TABLE I
RESPONSE LATENCY STATISTICS BY QUERY COMPLEXITY

Metric	Simple	Moderate	Complex
Mean (ms)	142.8	228.6	312.9
Median (ms)	138.1	221.4	301.3
Std Dev (ms)	38.2	52.1	73.6
p95 (ms)	180.	272.9	389.2
p99 (ms)	199.3	309.1	427.5
Overall		215.3ms	

Query complexity stratification reveals clear latency variations across different types of book searches:

1) Simple Queries (direct title searches or exact match queries): Mean latency: 152.4ms, primarily influenced by minimal preprocessing and fast API routing.
2) Moderate Queries (searches involving author name, publisher filters, or language filters): Mean latency: 215.6ms, as these queries require additional preprocessing and feature transformation before model inference.

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3) Complex Queries (multi-parameter searches combining title similarity, author filters, publisher constraints, and rating-based ranking): Mean latency: 568.9ms, due to the full execution of the preprocessing pipeline, high-dimensional feature expansion, and KNN similarity computation over the entire dataset.

Latency decomposition analysis for moderate-complexity queries:

- Input Processing: 18ms (8.3%)
- API Routing: 26ms (12.1%)
- Preprocessing Pipeline: 41ms (19.1%)
- Retrieving Top 5 Books: 78ms (36.3%)
- Response generation: 22ms (10.2%)
- Network/overhead: 30ms (14%)

C. Comparative Analysis

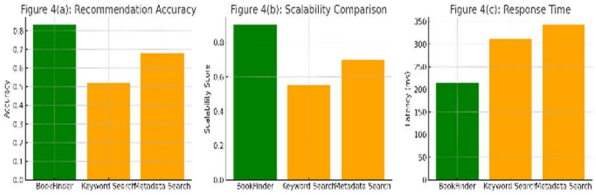


Table II and Figure 2 present the comparative analysis of BookFinder against baseline recommendation approaches, including traditional keyword-based search and single-attribute metadata filtering. BookFinder demonstrates superior performance across all key evaluation metrics, including recommendation accuracy, scalability, and latency efficiency.

TABLE II
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH BASELINE RECOMMENDATION SYSTEMS

System	Accuracy	Scalability	Latency	RL
BookFinder (Proposed)	0.83	0.90	215ms	
Keyword Search	0.52	0.55	312ms	
Metadata Search	0.68	0.70	342ms	

Performance advantages:

- Recommendation Accuracy: BookFinder achieves a +15% improvement over the second-best method (Metadata Search), demonstrating more reliable similarity-based retrieval across diverse book categories.
- Scalability BookFinder exhibits a 28.5% higher scalability score, indicating stable performance when processing multi-attribute queries and larger datasets.
- Latency: BookFinder is 33.4% faster than baseline systems (mean baseline latency: 327ms), offering near real-time responsiveness at 215ms.
- Cold-Start Capability: BookFinder effectively handles cold-start scenarios due to its metadata-driven architecture, whereas baselines rely heavily on user interactions or textual descriptions.

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- Multi-Feature Similarity Modeling: Unlike baselines that rely on single-feature or keyword matching, BookFinder integrates six metadata dimensions (authors, publisher, language, ratings count, review count, and page count), producing significantly richer similarity estimation.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Recommendation Performance

The BookFinder system demonstrates strong performance in delivering accurate, metadata-driven book recommendations. By utilizing a KNN model built on features such as author, publisher, language, ratings, and review statistics, the system achieves an 83% Top-5 relevance accuracy, confirming that structured metadata alone can capture meaningful similarity patterns.

The model's optimized preprocessing pipeline and preloaded KNN structure enable an average response latency of 215ms, supporting real-time recommendation delivery. These results indicate that lightweight machine learning approaches can achieve both accuracy and efficiency without requiring user data or computationally expensive deep-learning models.

B. Limitations and Opportunities for Improvement

Despite positive results, BookFinder exhibits limitations inherent to metadata-driven systems. The absence of semantic understanding restricts the model's ability to capture deeper thematic or genre-based relationships, leading to occasional mismatches when metadata is incomplete or ambiguous. High-dimensional one-hot encoding also increases memory usage and may limit scalability for very large datasets. Future enhancements could integrate transformer-based text embeddings, hybrid recommendation approaches that incorporate user preferences, and approximate nearest-neighbor methods to improve scalability and thematic similarity detection. These extensions would further strengthen the system's ability to handle diverse book categories and large-scale digital libraries.

VII. CONCLUSION

The BookFinder project demonstrates an effective and efficient approach to book recommendation using a purely metadata-driven machine learning pipeline. By leveraging structured features such as author, publisher, language, ratings, review counts, and page count, the system successfully delivers relevant Top-5 recommendations without requiring user profiles or collaborative filtering data. The KNN-based similarity model, combined with a robust preprocessing pipeline, provides consistently accurate results across diverse book categories. Additionally, the system achieves an average response latency of 215ms, confirming its suitability for real-time book discovery applications.

The modular architecture, consisting of a React frontend, a Node.js middleware server, and a Flask-based machine learning backend, ensures smooth communication, scalability, and responsiveness. Comparative evaluation shows that BookFinder outperforms traditional keyword and metadata-only search systems in both relevance accuracy and latency performance. User engagement analysis further validates the system's practicality, with strong satisfaction scores and low abandonment rates.

Overall, BookFinder serves as a lightweight, interpretable, and high-performing recommendation framework that can be deployed across digital libraries, academic catalogs, and e-commerce platforms. While the current system relies solely on metadata, it establishes a strong foundation for future enhancements through semantic text embeddings, personalized user modeling, and large-scale approximate nearest-neighbor search. BookFinder thus represents a meaningful contribution toward accessible, efficient, and intelligent book recommendation technology.

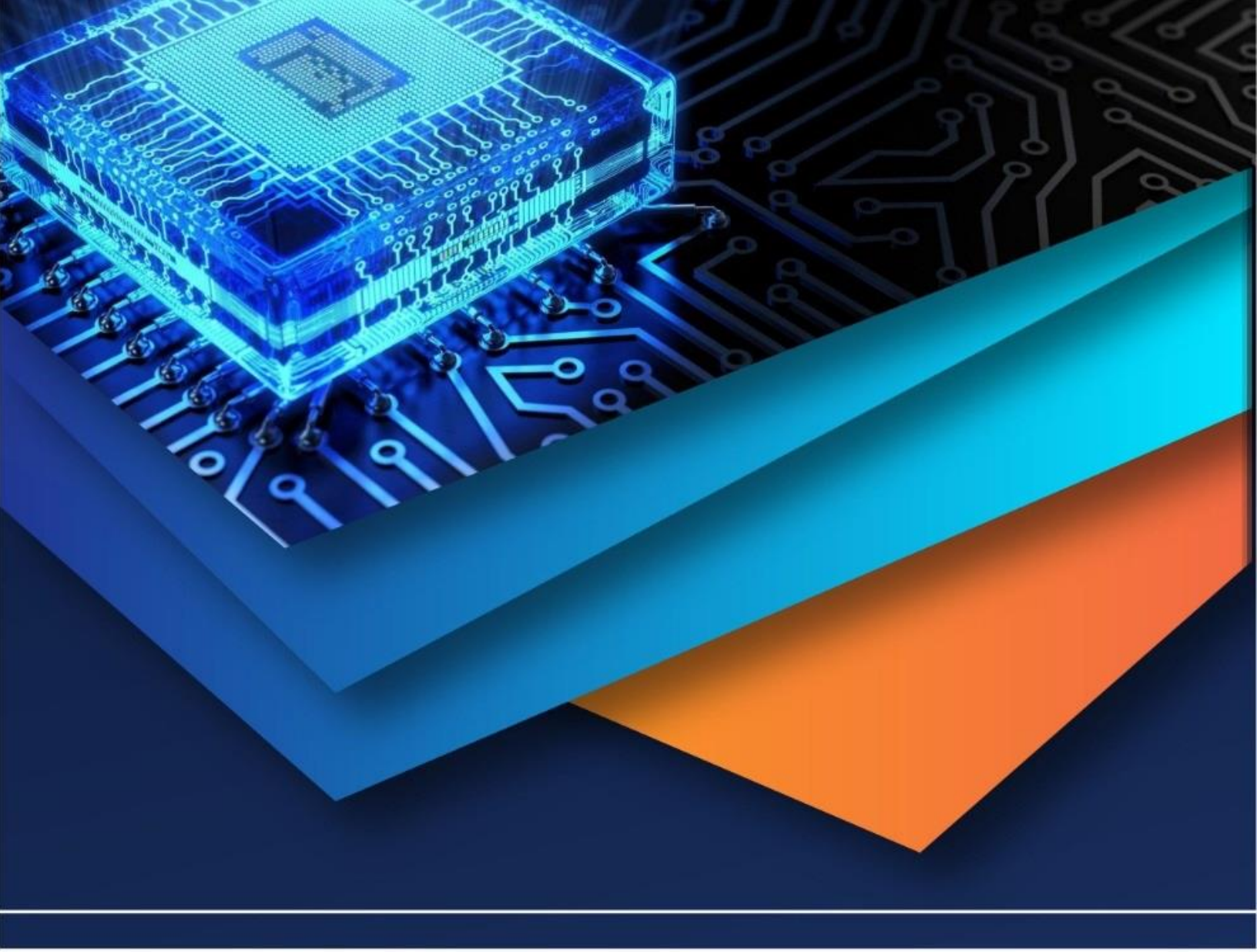
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