

# *PanTop*: Pandemic Topic Detection and Monitoring system

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**Abstract**—Diverse efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic have continued throughout the past two years. Governments have announced plans for unprecedentedly rapid vaccine development, quarantine measures, and economic revitalization. They contribute to a more effective pandemic response by determining the precise opinions of individuals regarding these mitigation measures. In this paper, we propose a deep learning-based topic monitoring and storyline extraction system for COVID-19 that is capable of analyzing public sentiment and pandemic trends. The proposed method is able to retrieve Twitter data related to COVID-19 and conduct spatiotemporal analysis. In addition to spatiotemporal data mining, the system implements a sentiment analysis on Twitter users. Furthermore, a deep learning component of the system provides monitoring and modeling capabilities for topics based on the most advanced natural language processing models. The proposed system includes a user-interactive visualization component that provides audience monitoring and analytical toolboxes. Case studies found in abundance in our proposed system can justify empirical analysis. Ultimately, we believe that our proposed system accurately reflects how public sentiments change over time and locations, along with specific pandemic topics.

**Index Terms**—social media analysis, topic modeling, storyline generation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rampaging COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected emotion and everyone’s daily life in the past two years. The general public’s emotions went through a roller coaster-like up-and-downs: shocked by the deadly known disease, overwhelmed by misinformation, upset by the mitigation policies, and regaining confidence with the development of vaccines. Ubiquitous user-input content on social media and online services have generated a tremendous amount of information that can reflect the users’ emotion and opinion towards social events. With the abundance of the generated social media data during the pandemic, more users intend to express their emotions and opinions about COVID-19-related social events, such as the mitigation policies or the invention of the vaccines. Such dramatic social media data increase provides great research opportunities in social media mining and natural language processing.

Spatiotemporal sentiment analysis is one of the target research areas in social media analysis for COVID-19. In the case of pandemics, spatiotemporal sentiment analysis provides a reference for the development of epidemic mitigation measures and evaluation techniques. In the context of sentiment

analysis, some previous studies accomplished success by using the machine learning technique. For instance, previous work [1] used a deep learning-based sentiment analyzer to collect and curate the COVID-19 dataset. Attention mechanisms were applied to characterize the word-level interactions within a local and global context to capture the semantic meaning of words. Among other logical approaches, Chakraborty et al. [2] propose the implementation of fuzzy logic for taming the fuzziness of sentiments. However, the existing works in social media sentiment analysis lack the consideration of spatial and temporal factors. Our proposed system provides both spatial and temporal aspects of sentiment analysis under the topic of COVID-19.

Topic detection and modeling are the second focus of our proposed system. Topic detection is an important part of addressing the said problem to separate points of interest among many candidates. Several noble studies have been conducted in the last few decades to mine the most appropriate topic associated with a text phrase. A topic graph-based approach was proposed by Batool et al. [3] where a topic graph from vectorized Twitter data was proposed with term frequency as a heuristic and social relationship between the virtual users. Other work [4] proposed a time-dependent burst detection technique that focuses on two and three-word data acceleration as a spread tendency to make early detection based on the keywords. Abd-Alrazaq et al. [5] used Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) for topic modeling on English twitter data. Gencoglu et al. [6] used a large Twitter dataset to analyze semantic topic clusters using Language Agnostic BERT Sentence Embeddings (LaBSE). We combine the advantages of LDA and neural network models to develop a transformative model for topic discovery and monitoring components in the system.

The storyline generation problem was first studied by Kumar et al. [7] as a generic redescription mining technique, by which a series of redescription between the given disjoint and dissimilar object sets and corresponding subsets are discovered. Storytelling is an efficient way to solve the issue of information overload. By extracting critical and connected entities, the original document is structurally summarized. Current works contain two categories: Textual Storytelling [7]–[12] and Visual Storytelling [13]–[15]. A storyline generation component is deployed in the proposed system. The storyline

generation is capable of summarizing the highlighted COVID-19-related events with social media data, and a visualization component is also developed to demonstrate the comparisons between the official releases of the mitigation events and the identified topic events from social media.

In this paper, we present the Pandemic Topic Detection and Monitoring system (PanTop), which is capable of 1) collecting and retrieving social media data on COVID-19-related topics, 2) detecting hidden trends of topics from social media posts, and 3) generating and visualizing storylines for the extracted COVID-19-related topics. This paper is structured as follows: Section II discusses the architecture of the PanTop system; Section III illustrates the experiment and data of the system; Section IV demonstrates the case studies revealed by the PanTop system; in section V, we conclude our discoveries from the proposed PanTop system.

## II. METHOD AND DATA

From a holistic view of research method (Figure 1), it consists several relational parts of the dataset import, dataset Processing, and machine model training for topic clustering

In dataset import process, since the dataset is un-hydrated, we needed to “hydrate” the data by building a process that will fetch the tweet content by querying with the Tweet ID. After hydrating, the data are saved in a local storage, and by using Tweets API the data are completed to be analyzed and stored in the Elasticsearch server. In dataset processing step,

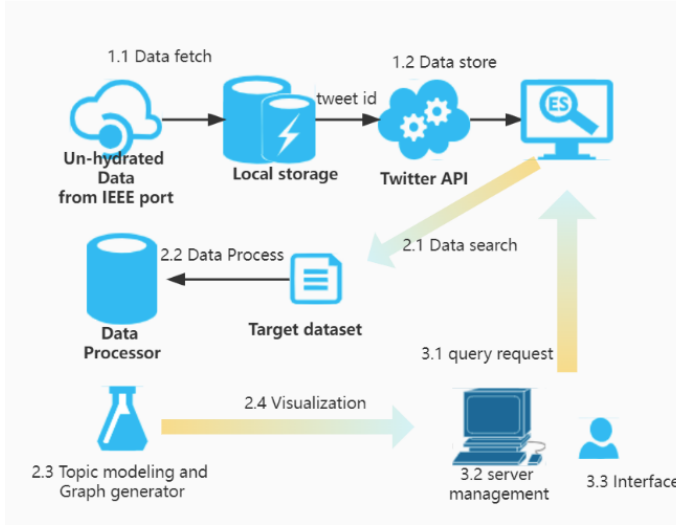


Fig. 1. System structure

after importing data into Elasticsearch server in batches, we choose a research scope and we get the target dataset from Elasticsearch. By doing spatial query and filtering task, the target dataset can be visualized into a map. Furthermore, after processing the data by using techniques such as the regex filtering, tokenization and tagging, and removing stop words, it is possible to apply a topic clustering model to get topics.

### A. Tweet Data Collection and Processing

1) *Tweet Data Collection process*: The dataset we used is CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) GEO-TAGGED TWEETS DATASET from IEEE DataPort. Due to the tweets spreading policy. We can't access the completed tweets content directly. Thus. We use a transfer program named Twarc to batch fetch tweets in the dataset. Twarc is a python package that used to export tweets automatically. The main principle is that Twarc will make use of the registration information from twitter developer platform and get the permission from Twitter. Then Twitter can monitor the whole process of getting tweets. This way is completely legal and doesn't violate the privacy protocols set by Twitter. But it also cause some issues. If the tweets account is banned or the permission has been changed, we can't access the content anymore. Normally Twitter doesn't send any warning message but change the content of tweets to a prompt message. So some filtering process is necessary to ensure that the data set is not contaminated with irrelevant information.

We collect data from March 2020 to March 2022. These data comes form hundreds of single CSV files, Since they are stored by date. So a batch process is necessary to import from these files. After that we store all of these data to Elasticsearch, in order to facilitate subsequent steps to call. After delete all the irrelevant information or the missing information data. The whole memory size up to 142Mi. The number of useful pieces of information reaches 388,719. However, the geographical distribution of this tweets is very uneven. So we try to select states with large sample sizes as research subjects.

2) *Tweet Data structure*: The original data contains tweets ID and sentiment score calculated by database publisher Figure 2. We use tweets ID to request twitter API in batch and get completed information, including content, UTC time, geographic location. All of these information are fully imported into the server after splicing with sentiment score. In this process, we will transfer the longitude and latitude to the geometry, then we can apply some spatial operator to handle them. Time format is another point in this way, we transfer all the time appearing in our project to UTC format. Then all filtering of time will be consistent.

C1	C2
1240728065983959040	0.13636363636363635
1240728187136610306	0
1240728221986906113	-0.006249999999999999
1240728361556750338	0.275
1240728639358017536	0
1240728647524323338	-0.13787878787878788
1240728942664794112	0

Fig. 2. Tweet dataset structure

3) *Tweet Data Pre-processing Method*: The pre-processing process includes regex filtering, tokenization and tagging,

removal of stop words (Figure 3). Regex filtering process used to delete some proper noun or URL. We can also delete all the hashtag or the emojis. Normal phrase or locations can also be a optional. Basically, we will set different filtering rules according to the task goals and model requirements.

Tokenization and tag are important to our project. We use nltk package to process the sentence in the tweets and decompose the content into single words. Then we can filter for parts of speech and get more reasonable results. The

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[('i', 'NN'), ('m', 'VBP'), ('at', 'IN'), ('superior', 'JJ'), ('court', 'NN'), ('corona', 'NN'), ('branch', 'NN'), ('in', 'IN'), ('corona', 'NN'), ('ca', 'MD')]

[('joyeux', 'NN'), ('anniversary', 'JJ'), ('-', ':'), ('happy', 'JJ'), ('birt', 'NN'), ('hday', 'NN'), ('@', 'NNP'), ('titaylea', 'NN'), ('have', 'VBP'), ('fun', 'VBN'), ('and', 'CC'), ('enjoy', 'VB'), ('your', 'PRP$'), ('day', 'NN'), ('!', 'P'), ('we', 'PRP'), ('love', 'VBP'), ('you', 'PRP'), ('.', 'P'), ('@', 'VBN'), ('sebsalcedo', 'JJ'), ('#', '#'), ('birthday', 'JJ'), ('#', '#'), ('bday', 'JJ'), ('#', '#'), ('joyeuxanniversaire', 'NN'), ('#', '#'), ('happy birthday', 'JJ'), ('#', '#'), ('friends', 'NNS'), ('#', '#'), ('bfff', 'NNS'), ('#', '#'), ('friendship', 'NN'), ('@', 'NNP'), ('corona', 'NN'), ('.', 'P'), ('california', 'NN')]
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Fig. 3. Tokenization and tag

purpose of removal of stopwords is to avoid distractions from common words on the topic. The nltk package provide a library of stopwords and we can set our own list of common words based on the theme. It's an important step to get good performance of machine learning models and we can adjust it to fit the current strategy we used. It's a part of fine turning.

### B. Topic Clustering

For topic clustering, first we collected the data from Elasticsearch server by filtering using spatial queries. The data had text, geo-tag and tweet ID as data columns. Since the text contained lots of unwanted strings or characters, we needed to clean the data.

Some tweet contains hypertext URL such as:

[https://t.co/{tweet\\_id}](https://t.co/{tweet_id})

and some other URLs as shown in (Figure 4):

We needed to filter these unnecessary texts from the actual twitter data using some regular expression operator and cleaning the part that corresponds to those specific terms. We also needed to remove all the punctuation marks so that it drops the redundant and recurring feature that don't contribute to the clustering.

Example of these regular expression technique is shown in the (Figure ??):

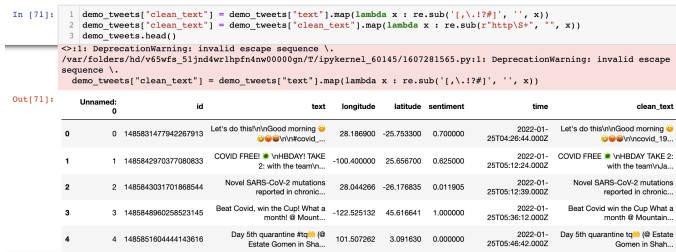


Fig. 4. Right-most column showing cleaned text with Regex

In the (Figure ??), the circle size of the term clusters visualize the frequency of the terms appearing in the documents.

### C. Spatial Data Mining and Visualization

1) *Data Mining Method*: First, we import all data into Elasticsearch server. Then we get to use different type of query instructions to request data on demands. In order to narrow down the scope of our research range, we build two methods and well-package them, which are query by time and query by location. Regionally-targeted requests are often broken down by state. So we use two key steps to accomplish the filtering to the data. First, get the minimum circumscribed rectangle of the state to search. Next, filter out all points outside the boundary by spatial operations.

2) *Visualization Method*: We use matplotlib to generate the map automatically. At the same time, we distinguish different types of points and areas by marking the map with different colors. Depending on the focus, we'll display a national map or a state map.

## III. EXPERIMENTS

We apply our research method experimentally on a large spatial-temporal dataset collected from IEEE dataport. By comparing the result with real events in Coronanet which records government responses to coronavirus, we evaluate the plausibility of the method. The result shows several points of interest in a specific time period and the details within each topic.

### A. Dataset Description and Experiment Setup

#### Dataset:

The dataset we used is CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) GEO-TAGGED TWEETS DATASET form IEEE DataPort. Due to the tweets spreading policy. We can't access the completed tweets directly. Thus. We use a transfer program named Twarc to batch fetch every tweet in the dataset. Twarc is a python package that is used to export tweets automatically. The main principle is that Twarc will make use of the registration information from twitter developer platform and get the permission from Twitter. Then Twitter can monitor the whole process of getting tweets. This way is completely legal and doesn't violate the privacy protocols set by Twitter. But it also causes some issues. If the tweets account is banned or the permission has been changed, we can't access the content anymore. Normally Twitter doesn't send any warning message but changes the content of tweets to a prompt message. So some filtering process is necessary to ensure that the data set is not contaminated with irrelevant information.

#### Metrics:

We use silhouette factor to evaluate the performance of clustering. For storyline generation, we based on rationality of the time series and topic keywords.

#### Topic mining:

To evaluate the quality of generated topics, we focus on both the content of the topic itself and the distribution of the topic.



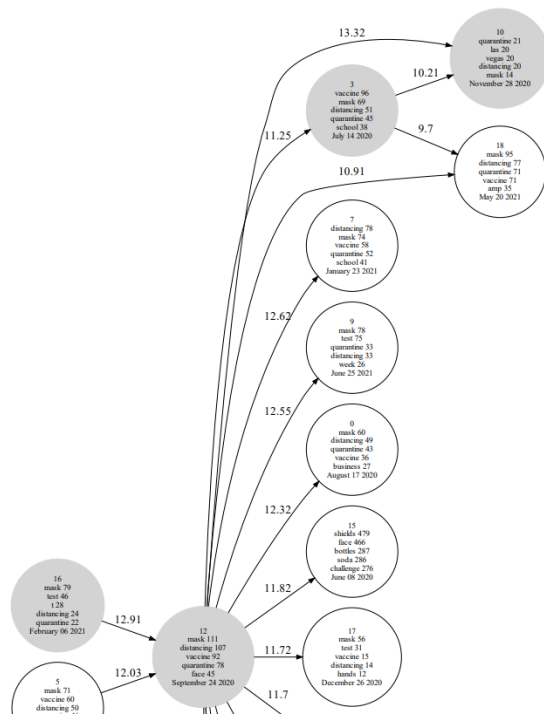


Fig. 8. slice of storyline for LDA-BERT

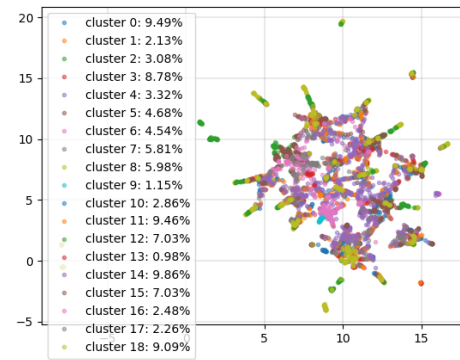


Fig. 9. 2d derivation for LDA

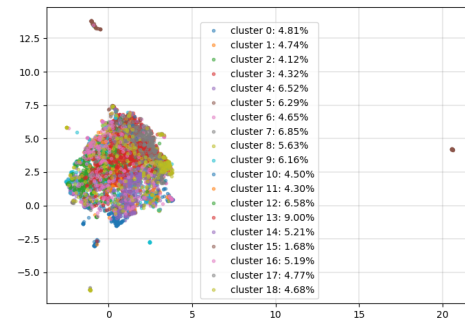


Fig. 10. 2d derivation for BERT

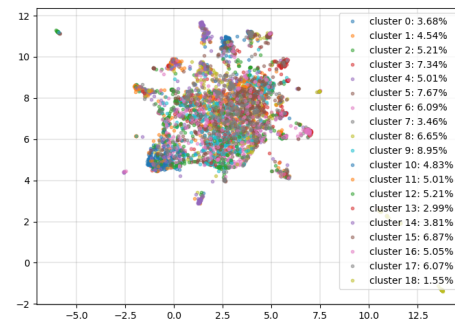


Fig. 11. 2d derivation for LDA-BERT

data and return visualized result of distribution of such data. With machine learning-based binary classification, the spatio-temporal data now can have sentiment information as well, therefore it is possible to visualize the trend of people's opinion by regions and time. This model has potential to be developed as an API automatically return visualized map of distribution of sentiments on some issues. This may contribute the government decision maker to refer to public opinion on a specific issue they are interested in.

Visualization of the spatial feature flow as the temporal data progresses is an integral part of data warehousing and data mining techniques. Spatial data mining requires specific trend recognition in order to make successful conclusive argument which is visualized using the visualization technique. In this project, we have used Geo Pandas to visualize our spatial data using designated spatial operator. In our future studies, we would like to make the model propose the trends in spatial data flow in maps which can be visualized using the similar libraries.

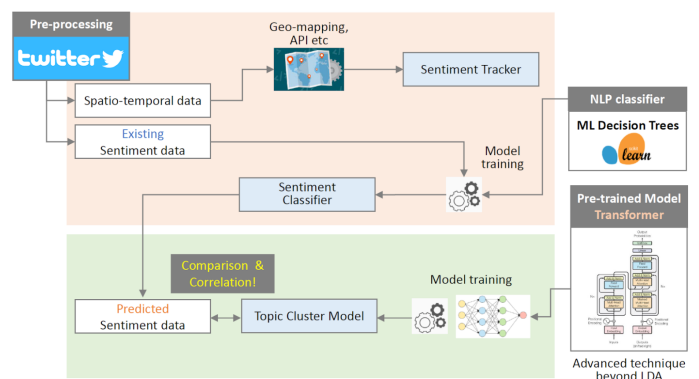


Fig. 14. Future plan



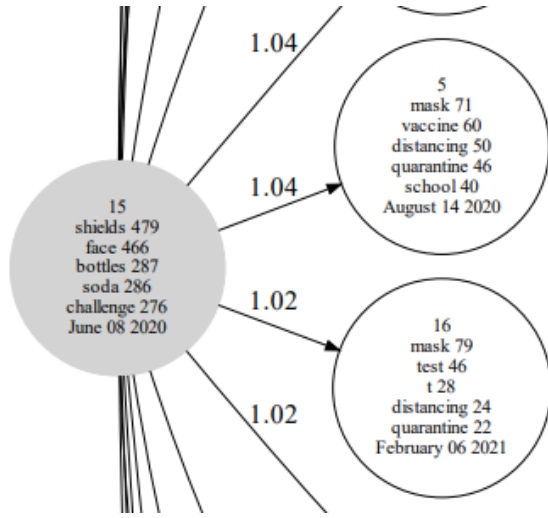


Fig. 12. slice of storyline for lda

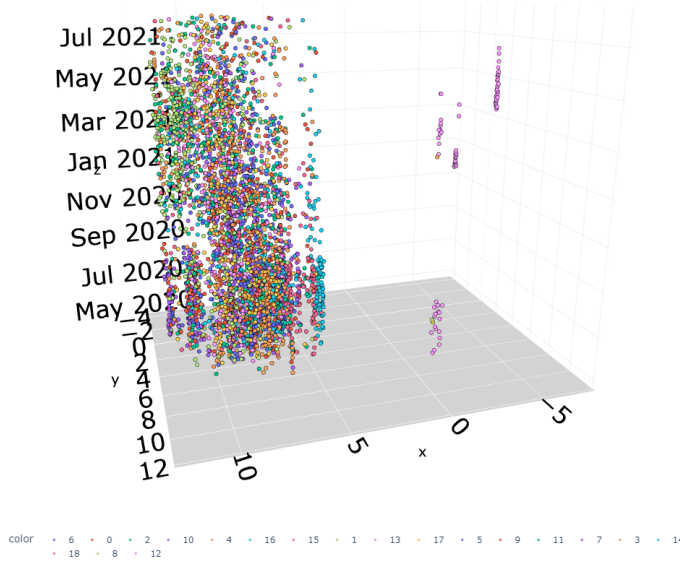


Fig. 13. 3D distribution graph

However it still has a long way to go in that it is too simple for disclosing some deeply meaningful implications. At present, since our model just provides the spatio-temporal view of the public opinion about an issue, it lacks further analysis about what specific topics are to be drawn from this. To dig into this issue, we will do detailed topic clustering task to classify how many different sub topics can be drawn from the overall topic of Covid-19 outbreak. Our topic for twitter dataset are filtered by the topic pandemic. However this is too simple. Therefore in the longer run, we should proceed to sub-topic clustering to get detailed areas under the single main topic. For example, they might be either government's specific policy about the pandemic or public opinion about

some vaccine company's business guideline, and etc.

In this project, we have chosen a static method for topic clustering which is Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). Although this is static and an old method compared to the modern deep learning approaches, our result shows its relevancy in this domain is still present. The current research that are going on, a lot of the authors are using LDA to get a primary insight in the dataset that they compare with their model as a baseline. In the coming days, our research will focus on the modern approaches using deep learning to make compact and deployable topic clustering model.

One promising candidate for the model is the Transformer. This is a greatly applied model architecture in Natural Language Processing now, which is based on the core technology called the *attention mechanism*. Our team believe this should be an appropriate alternative current LDA to do the detailed topic clustering task (Figure ??).

## V. CONCLUSION

In this project, our team carried out a machine learning-based spatial modeling of sentiment towards the pandemic. A rationale for this research comes from the increased interest on analyzing a lot of issues related to pandemic by using machine learning in academia. We have been pursued to combine the ML and Deep Neural Network (DNN) with our spatial-data mining technology so that this study contributes to the field by producing deeper implications.

As a dataset for sentiment analysis the importance of Twitter dataset can not be overstated. In recent days of DNN era, the public opinion expressed in twitter became a valuable resource for numerous tasks including such sentiment prediction. We paid attention on the applicability of DNN on the Twitter dataset for the pandemic issue. By using some applications such as Twarc and Elasticsearch we collected and stored such related dataset into our own repository, and spatial datamining task such as querying is followed. By doing such spatial query and filtering task, the target dataset could be visualized into a map. Furthermore, we develop a sentiment classifier by adopting the decision tree in Machine Learning. This module analyzes people's opinion in tweeter data and classifies it into positive or negative, by getting trained with pre-built sentiment score.

However, there are still another important task remained to achieve our team's final goal. Since our current model simply mine the spatio-temporal dataset and show how people's opinion is distributed differently by regions and time, it requires to do further research to draw deeper implications for contributing academia. Therefore, we plan to build a sub-topic clustering module using Transformer and compare its result with our predicted sentiment score. With adopting such a new NLP model architecture, it is expected to track a distribution of public opinion on detailed issues, e.g., government policy on social distancing, vaccine supply, etc., so that the study can have practical implication to decision makers.

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