

Visual News: Benchmark and Challenges in News Image Captioning

Anonymous NAACL-HLT 2021 submission

Abstract

We propose Visual News Captioner, an entity-aware model for the task of news image captioning. We also introduce Visual News, a large-scale benchmark consisting of more than one million news images along with associated news articles, image captions, author information, and other metadata. Unlike the standard image captioning task, news images depict situations where people, locations, and events are of paramount importance. Our proposed method is able to effectively combine visual and textual features to generate captions with richer information such as events and entities. More specifically, built upon the Transformer architecture, our model is further equipped with novel multi-modal feature fusion techniques and attention mechanisms, which are designed to encourage more accurate generations for named entities. Our method achieves state-of-the-art results on both the GoodNews and Visual News datasets while having significantly fewer parameters than competing methods. Our larger and more diverse Visual News dataset further highlights the remaining challenges in captioning news images.

1 Introduction

Image captioning is a language and vision task that has received considerable attention and where important progress has been made in recent years (Vinyals et al., 2015; Fang et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2018b; Anderson et al., 2018). This field has been fueled by recent advances in both visual representation learning and text generation, and also by the availability of image-text parallel corpora such as the Common Objects in Context (COCO) Captions dataset (Chen et al., 2015).

While COCO contains enough images to train reasonably good captioning models, it was collected so that objects depicted in the images are biased toward a limited set of everyday objects. Moreover, while it provides high-quality human

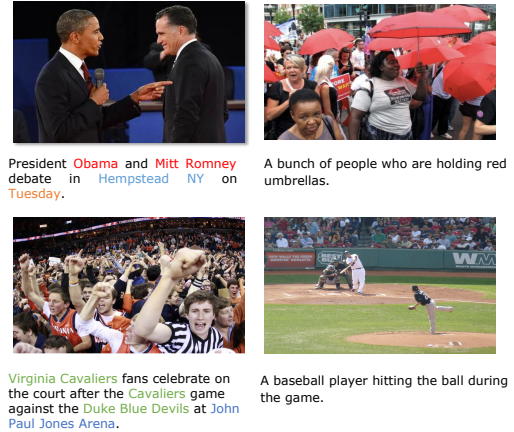


Figure 1: Examples from our Visual News dataset (left) and COCO (Chen et al., 2015) (right). Visual News provides more informative captions with name entities, whereas COCO contains more generic captions.

annotated captions, these captions were written so that they are descriptive rather than interpretative, and referents to objects are generic rather than specific. For example, a caption such as “A bunch of people who are holding red umbrellas.” properly describes the image at some level to the right in Figure 1, but it fails to capture the higher level situation that is taking place in this picture i.e. “why are people gathering with red umbrellas and what role do they play?” This type of language is typical in describing events in news text. While a lot of work has been done on news text corpora such as the influential Wall Street Journal Corpus (Paul and Baker, 1992), there have been considerably less resources of such news text in the language and vision domain.

In this paper we introduce Visual News, a dataset and benchmark containing more than one million publicly available news images paired with both captions and news article text collected from a diverse set of topics and news sources in English (The Guardian, BBC, USA TODAY, and The Washington Post). By leveraging this dataset, we focus on the task of News Image Captioning, which aims

at generating captions from both input images and corresponding news articles. We further propose Visual News Captioner, a model that generates captions by attending to both individual word tokens and named entities in an input news article text, and localized visual features.

News image captions are typically more complex than pure image captions and thus make them harder to generate. News captions describe the contents of images at a higher degree of specificity and as such contain many named entities referring to specific people, places, and organizations. Such named entities convey key information regarding the events presented in the images, and conversely events are often used to predict what types of entities are involved. e.g. if the news article mentions a baseball game then a picture might involve a baseball player or a coach, conversely if the image contains someone wearing baseball gear, it might imply that a game of baseball is taking place. As such, our Visual News Captioner model jointly uses spatial-level visual feature attention and word-level textual feature attention.

More specifically, we adapt the existing Transformer (Vaswani et al., 2017) to news image datasets by integrating several critical components. To effectively attend to important named entities in news articles, we apply Attention on Attention technique on attention layers and introduce a new position encoding method to model the relative position relationships of words. We also propose a novel Visual Selective Layer to learn joint multi-modal embeddings. To avoid missing rare named entities, we build our decoder upon the pointer-generator model. News captions also contain a significant amount of words falling either in the long tail of the distribution, or resulting in out-of-vocabulary words at test time. In order to alleviate this, we introduce a tag cleaning post-processing step to further improve our model.

Previous works (Lu et al., 2018a; Biten et al., 2019) have attempted news image captioning by adopting a two-stage pipeline. They first replace all specific named entities with entity type tags to create templates and train a model to generate template captions with fillable placeholders. Then, these methods search in the input news articles for entities to fill placeholders. Such approach reduces the vocabulary size and eases the burden on the template generator network. However, our extensive experiments suggest that template-based

approaches might also prevent these models from leveraging contextual clues from the named entities themselves in their first stage.

Our main contributions can be summarized as:

- We introduce Visual News, the largest and most diverse news image captioning dataset and study to date, consisting of more than one million images with news articles, image captions, author information, and other metadata.
- We propose Visual News Captioner, a captioning method for news images, showing superior results on the GoodNews (Biten et al., 2019) and Visual News datasets with much fewer parameters than competing methods.
- We benchmarked both template-based and end-to-end captioning methods on two large scale news image datasets, revealing the challenges in the task of news image captioning.

Visual News text corpora, public links to download images, and further code and data to reproduce our experiments is publicly available.¹

2 Related Work

Image captioning has gained increased attention, with remarkable results in recent benchmarks. A popular paradigm (Vinyals et al., 2015; Karpathy and Fei-Fei, 2015; Donahue et al., 2015) uses a convolutional neural network as the image encoder and generates captions using a recurrent neural network (RNN) as the decoder. The seminal work of Xu et al. (2015) proposed to attend to different image patches at different time steps and Lu et al. (2017) improved this attention mechanism by adding an option to sometimes not to attend to any image regions. Other extensions include attending to semantic concept proposals (You et al., 2016), imposing local representations at the object level (Li et al., 2017) and a bottom-up and top-down attention mechanism to combine object and other salient image regions (Anderson et al., 2018).

News image captioning is one of the most challenging task because captions contain many named entities. Prior work has attempted this task by drawing contextual information from the accompanying articles. Tariq and Foroosh (2016) select the most representative sentence from the article; Ramisa et al. (2017) encode news articles using pre-trained word embeddings and concatenate them with CNN visual features to feed into an LSTM (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997); Lu et al. (2018a) propose

¹We will release the link upon acceptance.

	GoodNews	NYTimes800k	Visual News (ours)				
			Guardian	BBC	USA	Wash.	Total
Number of images	462,642	792,971	602,572	198,186	151,090	128,747	1,080,595
Number of articles	257,033	444,914	421,842	97,429	39,997	64,096	623,364
Avg. Article Length	451	974	787	630	700	978	773
Avg. Caption Length	18	18	22.5	14.2	21.5	17.1	18.8
% of Sentences w/ NE	0.97	0.96	0.89	0.85	0.95	0.92	0.91
% of Words is NE	0.27	0.26	0.18	0.17	0.22	0.33	0.22
Nouns	0.16	0.16	0.20	0.22	0.17	0.2	0.19
Verbs	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.12	0.08	0.09	0.09
Pronouns	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Proper nouns	0.23	0.22	0.24	0.18	0.32	0.28	0.26
Adjectives	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.06

Table 1: Statistics of news image datasets. "% of Sentences w/ NE" denotes the percentage of sentences containing named entities. "% of Words is NE" denotes the percentage of words that are used in named entities.

	Guardian	BBC	USA	Wash.
Guardian	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.7
BBC	1.9	1.6	1.7	0.7
USA	1.3	1.2	3.7	2.7
Wash.	1.2	1.2	2.0	2.5

Table 2: CIDEr scores of the same captioning model on different train (row) and test (columns) splits. News images and captions from different agencies have different characters, leading to a performance decrease when training set and test set are not from the same agency.

a template-based method in order to reduce the vocabulary size and then later retrieves named entities from auxiliary data; Biten et al. (2019) also adopt a template-based method but extract named entities by attending to sentences from the associated articles. Zhao et al. (2019) also tries to generate more informative image captions by integrating external knowledge. Tran et al. (2020) proposes a transformer method to generate captions for images embedded in news articles in an end-to-end manner. In this work, we propose a novel Transformer based model to enable more efficient end-to-end news image captioning.

3 The Visual News Dataset

Visual News comprises news articles, images, captions, and other metadata from four news agencies: The Guardian, BBC, USA Today, and The Washington Post. To maintain quality, we first filter out images for which the height or width is less than 180 pixels. We then keep examples with a caption length between 5 and 31 words. We further discard images without any associated articles. In this way, we ensure that each image has a corresponding caption and substantial news article text. Figure 2

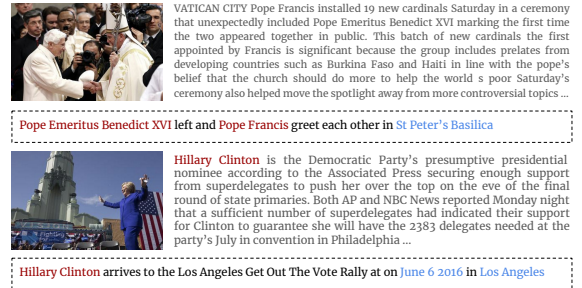


Figure 2: Examples of images from Visual News dataset and the associated articles and captions. Named entities carrying important information are highlighted.

shows some examples from Visual News. Although only images, captions and articles are used in our experiments, Visual News provides other metadata, such as article title, author and geo-location.

We summarize the difference between Visual News and other popular news image datasets in Table 1. Compared to other recent news captioning datasets, such as GoodNews (Biten et al., 2019) and NYTimes800k (Tran et al., 2020), Visual News has two advantages. First, Visual News has the largest amount of images and articles. It contains over 1 million images and more than 600,000 articles. Second, Visual News is more diverse, since it contains articles from four news agencies. For example, the average length of captions from the BBC is only 14.2 while for The Guardian it is 22.5. To further demonstrate the diversity in Visual News we train a Show and Tell (Vinyals et al., 2015) captioning model on 100,000 examples from certain agency and test it on 10,000 examples from other agencies. We report CIDEr scores in Table 2. A model trained on USA Today achieves 3.7² on the USA

²CIDEr scores are low since we directly use a baseline captioning method which is not designed for news images.

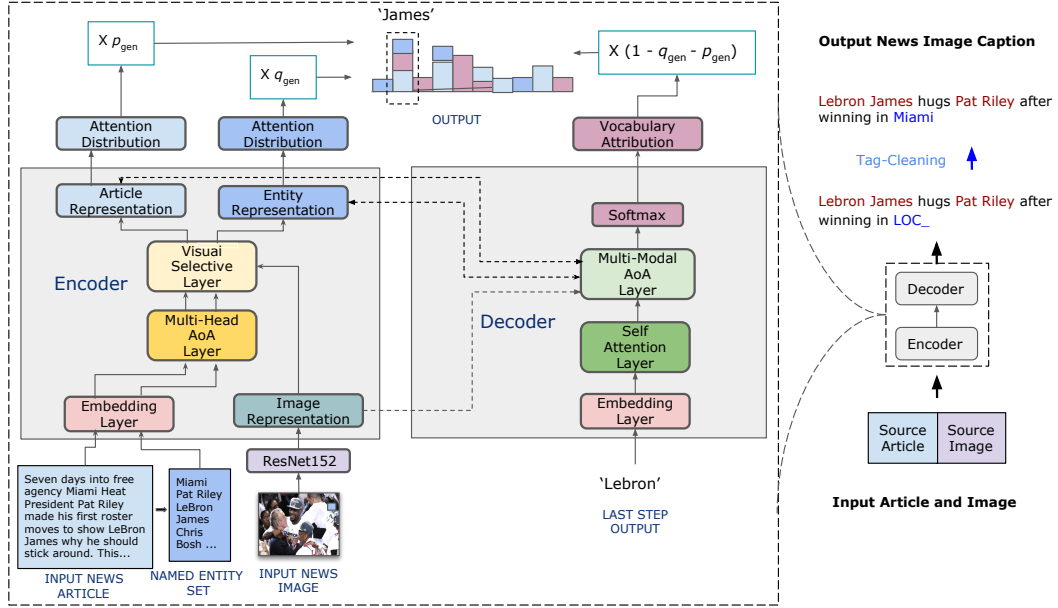


Figure 3: Overview of our model. Left: Details of the the encoder and decoder; Right: The workflow of our model. The input news article and news image are fed into the encoder-decoder system. The blue arrow denotes Tag-Cleaning step, which is a post-processing step to further improves the result during testing. Multi-Head AoA Layer means our Multi-Head Attention on Attention Layer. Multi-Modal AoA Layer means our Multi-Modal Attention on Attention Layer. Self Attention Layer denotes our Masked Multi-Head Attention on Attention Layer.

Today test set but only 0.6 on The Guardian test set. This gap indicates that Visual News is more diverse and also more challenging.

4 Methodology

Figure 3 presents an overview of Visual News Captioner. We first introduce the image encoder and the text encoder. We then explain the decoder in 4.3. To solve the out-of-vocabulary issue, we propose Tag-Cleaning in 4.4.

4.1 Image Encoder

We use a ResNet152 (He et al., 2016) pretrained on ImageNet (Deng et al., 2009) to extract visual features. The output of the convolutional layer before the final pooling layer gives us a set of vectors corresponding to different patches in the image. Specifically, we obtain features $V = \{v_1, \dots, v_K\}$, $v_i \in \mathbb{R}^D$ from every image I , where $K = 49$ and $D = 2048$. With these features, we can selectively attend to different regions at different time steps.

4.2 Text Encoder

As the length of the associated article could be very long, we focus on the first 300 tokens in each article following (See et al., 2017). We also used the spaCy (Honnibal and Montani, 2017) named entity recognizer to extract named entities from news

articles inspired by (Li et al., 2018). We encode the first 300 tokens and the extracted named entities using the same encoder. Given the input text $T = \{t_1, \dots, t_L\}$ where t_i denotes the i -th token in the text and L is the text length, we use following layers to obtain textual features:

Word Embedding and Position Embedding. For each token t_i , we first obtain word embedding $w_i \in \mathbb{R}^H$ and positional embedding $p_i \in \mathbb{R}^H$ through two embedding layers, H is the hidden state size and is set to 512. To better model the relative position relationships, we further feed position embeddings into a LSTM (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997) to get the updated position embedding $p_i^l \in \mathbb{R}^H$. We then add up p_i^l and w_i to obtain the final input embedding w_i' .

$$p_i^l = \text{LSTM}(p_i) \quad (1)$$

$$w_i' = w_i + p_i^l \quad (2)$$

Multi-Head Attention on Attention Layer. The Multi-Head Attention Layer (Vaswani et al., 2017) operates on three sets of vectors: queries Q , keys K and values V , and takes a weighted sum of value vectors according to a similarity distribution between Q and K . In our implementation, for each query w_i' , K and Q are all input embeddings T' . In addition, we have the "Attention on Attention"

(AoA) module (Huang et al., 2019) to assist the generation of attended information:

$$v_{att} = \text{MHAtt}(w'_i, T', T') \quad (3a)$$

$$g_{att} = \sigma(W_g[v_{att}; T']) \quad (3b)$$

$$v'_{att} = W_a[v_{att}; T'] \quad (3c)$$

$$\tilde{w}_i = g_{att} \odot v'_{att} \quad (3d)$$

where \odot represents the element-wise multiplication operation and σ is the sigmoid function. W_g and W_a are trainable parameters.

Visual Selective Layer. One limitation of previous works (Tran et al., 2020; Biten et al., 2019) is that they separately encode the image and article, ignoring the connection between them during encoding. In order to generate representations which can capture contextual information from both images and articles, we propose a novel Visual Selective Layer which updates textual embeddings with a visual information gate:

$$\bar{T} = \text{AvgPool}(\tilde{T}) \quad (4)$$

$$g_v = \tanh(W_v(\text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}(\bar{T}, V, V)) \quad (5)$$

$$w_i^* = g_v \odot \tilde{w}_i \quad (6)$$

$$w_i^a = \text{LayerNorm}(w_i^* + \text{FFN}(w_i^*)) \quad (7)$$

where $\text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}$ corresponds to Eq 3. To obtain fixed-length article representations, we apply the average pooling operation to get \bar{T} , which can be used as the query to attend to different regions of the image. FFN is a two-layer feed-forward network with ReLU as the activation function. w_i^a is the final output embedding from the text encoder. For the sake of simplicity, in the following text, we use $A = \{a_1, \dots, a_L\}$, $a_i \in \mathbb{R}^H$ to represent the final embeddings (w_i^a) of article tokens, where H is the embedding size and L is the article length. Similarly, $E = \{e_1, \dots, e_M\}$, $e_i \in \mathbb{R}^H$ represent the final embeddings of extracted named entities, where M is the number of named entities.

4.3 Decoder

Our decoder generates the next token conditioned on previously generated tokens and contextual information. We propose Masked Multi-Head Attention on Attention Layer to flexibly attend to the previous tokens and Multi-Modal Attention on Attention Layer to fuse contextual information. We first use the encoder to obtain embeddings of ground truth captions $X = \{x_0, \dots, x_N\}$, $x_i \in \mathbb{R}^H$, where N is the caption length and H is the embedding

size. Instead of using the Masked Multi-Head Attention Layer in (Tran et al., 2020) to collect the information from past tokens, we use the more efficient Masked Multi-Head Attention on Attention Layer. At the time step t , the output embedding x_t^a is used as the query to attend over the context information:

$$x_t^a = \text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}^{\text{Masked}}(x_t, X, X) \quad (8)$$

Multi-Modal Attention on Attention Layer. Our Multi-Modal AoA Layer contains three context sources: images \tilde{V} , articles A and name entity sets E . We use a linear layer to resize features in V into \tilde{V} , where $\tilde{v} \in \mathbb{R}^{512}$. In each step, x_t^a is the query that attends over them separately:

$$V'_t = \text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}(x_t^a, \tilde{V}, \tilde{V}) \quad (9)$$

$$A'_t = \text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}(x_t^a, A, A) \quad (10)$$

$$E'_t = \text{MHAtt}_{\text{AoA}}(x_t^a, E, E) \quad (11)$$

We combine the attended image feature V'_t , the attended article feature A'_t and the attended named entity feature E'_t , and feed them into a residual connection, layer normalization and a two-layer feed-forward layer FFN.

$$C_t = V'_t + A'_t + E'_t \quad (12)$$

$$x'_t = \text{LayerNorm}(x_t^a + C_t) \quad (13)$$

$$x_t^* = \text{LayerNorm}(x'_t + \text{FFN}(x'_t)) \quad (14)$$

$$P_{s_t} = \text{softmax}(x_t^*) \quad (15)$$

The final output P_{s_t} will be used to predict token s_t in the Multi-Head Pointer-Generator Module.

Multi-Head Pointer-Generator Module. For the purpose of obtaining more related named entities from the associated article and the extracted named entity set, we adapt the pointer-generator (See et al., 2017). Our pointer-generator contains two sources: the article and named entity set. We first generate a^V and a^E over the source article tokens and extracted named entities by averaging the attention distributions from the multiple heads of the Multi-Modal Attention on Attention layer in the last decoder layer. Next, p_{gen} and q_{gen} are calculated as two soft switches to choose between generating a word from the vocabulary distribution P_{s_t} , or copying words from the attention distribution a^V or a^E :

$$p_{gen} = \sigma(W_p([x_t; A_t; \tilde{V}_t])) \quad (16)$$

$$q_{gen} = \sigma(W_q([x_t; E_t; \tilde{V}_t])) \quad (17)$$

where A_i , V_i and E_i are attended context vector. W_p and W_q are learnable parameters. σ is the sigmoid function. $P_{s_i}^*$ provides us with the final distribution to predict the next word.

$$P_{s_t}^* = p_{gen}a^V + q_{gen}a^E + (1 - p_{gen} - q_{gen})P_{s_t} \quad (18)$$

Finally, our loss can be computed as the sum of the negative log likelihood of the target word at each time step:

$$Loss = - \sum_{t=1}^N \log P_{s_t}^* \quad (19)$$

4.4 Tag-Cleaning

To solve out-of-vocabulary (*OOV*) problem, we replace *OOV* named entities with named entity tags instead of using a single “UNK” token, e.g. if “John Paul Jones Arena” is a *OOV* named entity, we replace it with “LOC_”, which represents location entities. During testing, if the model predicts entity tags, we further replace those tags with specific named entities. More specifically, we select a named entity with the same entity category and the highest frequency from the named entity set.

5 Experiments

In this section, we first introduce details of implementation. Then baselines and competing methods will be discussed. Lastly we present comprehensive experiment results on both GoodNewsdataset and our Visual News dataset.

5.1 Implementation Details

Datasets. We conduct experiments on two large scale news image datasets: GoodNews (Biten et al., 2019) and Visual News. For GoodNews, we follow the same splits introduced in Biten et al. (2019), which consists of 424,000 training, 18,000 validation and 23,000 test samples. For Visual News, we randomly sample 100,000 images from each news agency, leading to a training set of 400,000 samples. Similarly, we get a 40,000 validation set and a 40,000 test set, both evenly sampled from four news agencies.

Throughout our experiments, we first resize images into 256×256 , and randomly crop patches with size 224×224 as input. To preprocess captions and articles, we remove noisy HTML labels, brackets, non-ASCII characters and some special

tokens. We use spaCy’s named entity recognizer (Honnibal and Montani, 2017) to recognize named entities in both captions and articles.

Model Training. We set the embedding size H to 512. For dropout layers, we set the dropout rate as 0.1. Models are optimized using Adam (Kingma and Ba, 2015) optimizer with a warming up learning rate set to 0.0005. We use a batch size of 64 and stop training when the CIDEr (Vedantam et al., 2015) score on dev set is not improving for 20 epochs. Since we replace *OOV* named entities with tags, we add 18 named entity tags provided by spaCy into our vocabulary, including “PERSON_”, “LOC_”, “ORG_”, “EVENT_”, etc.

Evaluation Metrics. Following previous literature, we evaluate the models’ performance on two categories of metrics. To measure the overall similarity between generated captions and ground truth, we report BLEU-4 (Papineni et al., 2002), METEOR (Denkowski and Lavie, 2014), ROUGE (Ganesan, 2018) and CIDEr (Vedantam et al., 2015) scores. Among these scores, CIDEr is the most suitable one for measuring news captioning since it down-weighs stop words and focuses more on uncommon words through a TF-IDF weighting mechanism. On the other hand, to evaluate models ability to predict named entities, we compute the exact match precision and recall scores for named entities following Biten et al. (2019).

5.2 Competing Methods and Model Variants

We compare our proposed Visual News Captioner with various baselines and competing methods.

TextRank (Barrios et al., 2016) is a graph-based extractive summarization algorithm. This baseline only takes the associated articles as input.

Show Attend Tell (Xu et al., 2015) tries to attend to certain image patches during caption generation. This baseline only takes images as input.

Pooled Embeddings and **Tough-to-beat** (Arora et al., 2017) are two template-based models proposed in Biten et al. (2019)³. They try to encode articles at the sentence level and attend to certain sentence at different time steps. *Pooled Embeddings* method computes sentence representations by averaging word embeddings and adopts context insertion in the second stage. *Tough-to-beat* obtains sentence representations from the tough-to-

³Named as Avg+CtxIns and TBB+AttIns in the original paper.

Model	Solve OOV	BLEU-4	METEOR	ROUGE	CIDEr	P	R
TextRank (Barrios et al., 2016)	✗	1.7	7.5	11.6	9.5	1.7	5.1
Show Attend Tell (Xu et al., 2015)	✗	0.7	4.1	11.9	12.2	—	—
Tough-to-beat (Biten et al., 2019)	✗	0.8	4.2	11.8	12.8	9.1	7.8
Pooled Embeddings (Biten et al., 2019)	✗	0.8	4.3	12.1	12.7	8.2	7.2
Transform and Tell (Tran et al., 2020)	BPE	6.0	—	21.4	53.8	22.2	18.7
Our Transformer	✗	5.2	7.9	19.5	48.4	20.8	17.5
Our Transformer+EG	✗	5.4	7.9	19.7	49.9	21.9	18.4
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer	✗	5.5	8.0	20.1	51.1	22.4	18.7
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VG	✗	5.7	8.1	20.2	52.5	22.4	18.8
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VG+PE	✗	6.0	8.2	20.5	53.7	22.5	18.9
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VG+PE+TC Tag-Cleaning		6.1	8.3	20.9	55.4	22.9	19.3

Table 3: News image captioning results (%) on GoodNews dataset. EG means adding the named entity set as another text source guiding the generation of captions. Pointer means pointer-generator module. VS means the Visual Selective Layer. PE means adding our Position Embedding. TC means the Tag-Cleaning step.

Model	Solve OOV	BLEU-4	METEOR	ROUGE	CIDEr	P	R
TextRank (Barrios et al., 2016)	✗	2.1	8.0	12.0	8.4	4.1	6.1
Tough-to-beat (Biten et al., 2019)	✗	1.7	4.6	13.2	12.4	4.9	4.8
Pooled Embeddings (Biten et al., 2019)	✗	2.1	5.2	13.5	13.2	5.3	5.3
Our Transformer	✗	4.9	7.7	16.8	45.6	18.5	16.1
Our Transformer+EG	✗	5.0	7.9	17.4	46.8	19.2	16.7
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer	✗	5.1	8.0	17.7	48.0	19.3	17.0
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VS	✗	5.1	8.1	17.8	48.6	19.4	17.1
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VS+PE	✗	5.2	8.2	17.8	49.2	19.4	17.2
Our Transformer+EG+Pointer+VS+PE+TC Tag-Cleaning		5.3	8.2	17.9	50.5	19.7	17.6

Table 4: News image captioning results (%) on our Visual News dataset.

Model	Number of Parameters
Transform and Tell (Tran et al., 2020)	200M
Visual News Captioner	93M
Visual News Captioner (w/o PE)	89M
Visual News Captioner (w/o Pointer)	91M
Visual News Captioner (w/o EG)	91M

Table 5: We compare the number of training parameters of our model variants and the model from Transform and Tell (Tran et al., 2020). Note that our proposed Visual NewsCaptioner is much more lightweight.

dict named entities more accurately. VS (Visual Selective Layer) tries to strengthen the connection between the image and text. PE (Position Embedding) provides the trainable positional embeddings added to the word embeddings. Pointer stands for the updated multi-head pointer-generator module. To overcome the limitation of a fixed-size vocabulary, we examine TC, the Tag-Cleaning operation handling *OOV* problem.

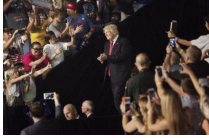
5.3 Results and Discussion

Table 3 and Table 4 summarize our quantitative results on the GoodNews and Visual News datasets respectively. On GoodNews, our Visual News Captioner outperforms the state-of-the-art methods on 5 out of 6 metrics and reaches a comparably good performance in ROUGE score. On our Visual News dataset, our model outperforms baseline methods by a large margin, from 13.5 to 50.5 in CIDEr score. In addition, as revealed by Table 5, our final model outperforms *Transform and Tell(transformer)* with much fewer parameters so that our training time is only a half of the model used in Tran et al. (2020). This demonstrates that our proposed model is able to generate better cap-

beat method introduced in Arora et al. (2017) and uses sentence level attention weights (Biten et al., 2019) to insert named entities.

Transform and Tell (Tran et al., 2020) is the transformer-based attention model, which uses a pretrained RoBERTa (Liu et al., 2019) model as the article encoder and a transformer as the decoder. It uses byte-pair encoding (BPE) to represent out-of-vocabulary named entities.

Visual News Captioner is our proposed model, which is based on transformer (Vaswani et al., 2017). Our transformer adopts Multi-Head Attention on Attention (AoA). EG (Entity-Guide) adds named entities as another text source to help pre-



Ground Truth:
 republican presidential candidate **donald trump** enters **germain arena** to a packed house on **monday**
Visual News Captioner:
donald trump supporters cheer as republiaan presidential candidate **donald trump** speaks in **germain arena**
Pooled Embeddings:
 obama and his wife obama celebrate during the recent weeks EVENT_



Ground Truth:
virginia cavaliers fans celebrate on the court after the cavaliers game against the **duke blue devils** at **john paul jones arena**
Visual News Captioner:
virginia cavaliers forward anthony gill celebrates with fans after the game against the **duke blue devils** at **john paul jones arena**
Pooled Embeddings:
 krzyzewski fans celebrate after the krzyzewski win over north carolina in the semifinals



Ground Truth:
 president **obama** delivered his annual state of the union address on **tuesday** in **washington**
Visual News Captioner:
 president **obama** delivers the state of the union address on **tuesday** jan 20
Pooled Embeddings:
 waldman speaks during a the white house news conference on year in **washington**



Ground Truth:
sidney crosby celebrated his goal in the second period that seemed to deflate sweden
Visual News Captioner:
sidney crosby of canada celebrating a goal in the men's gold medal game
Pooled Embeddings:
crosby of canada after scoring the winning goal in the second period

Figure 4: Examples of captions generated by different models on two datasets. First three are from Visual News and the last one is from GoodNews. Correct named entities entities are highlighted in bold. Our Visual News Captioner is able to predict the named entities more accurately and completely than the competing method.

tions in a more efficient way.

Our Entity-Guide (EG) brings improvement in both datasets, demonstrating the named entity set indeed contains key information guiding the generation of news captions. In addition, our Position Embedding (PE) also shows its effectiveness by providing additional positional information to the token embedding. Pointer-generator mechanism builds a stronger connection between the final distribution of the predicted tokens and the Multi-Modal AoA Layer. More importantly, our Visual Selective Layer (VS) improves the caption generation results by providing extra visual context to text features.

Furthermore, our Tag-Cleaning (TC) method is able to effectively retrieve uncommon named entities and thus improves the CIDEr score by 1.7% and 1.3% respectively on the GoodNews and Visual News datasets. We present qualitative results of different models on both datasets in Figure 4. Our model shows the ability to generate high quality captions with more accurate named entities.

We also observe that our models and *Transform and Tell* methods achieve best performances are directly trained on raw captions rather than following a two-stage template-based manner. Although template-based methods normally handle a much smaller vocabulary, these methods also suffer from losing rich contextual information brought by un-

common named entities.

The overall performance on the GoodNews dataset is better compared to the results on Visual News. We conclude that this is because our Visual News dataset is a more challenging in terms of diversity. Our Visual News is collected from multiple news agencies, thus, covers more topics and has more diverse language styles.

6 Conclusion and Future Work

In this paper, we study the task of news image captioning. First, we construct Visual News, the largest news image captioning dataset consisting of over one million images with accompanying articles, captions and other metadata. Furthermore, we propose Visual News Captioner, an Entity-Aware captioning method leveraging both visual and textual information. We validate the effectiveness of our method on Visual News and another large-scale benchmark dataset through extensive experiments. Visual News Captioner outperforms state-of-the-art methods across multiple metrics with fewer parameters. Besides, our Visual News dataset can also potentially be adopted for other NLP tasks, such as abstractive text summarization and information extraction. We hope this work paves the way for more future study in news image captioning as well as other related research areas.

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