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CSCI 270

6 May 2022

Pasta, Pizza, Person. An analysis of digital presence.

Social media has become a massive industry over the course of the past decade. With companies like Facebook, founded in 2004, and twitter, in 2006 quickly becoming industrial titans in their own regard, it is hard to compare their success in economic factors to other industries. Though most major social media corporations have been founded in the U.S. it has nonetheless become a worldwide phenomenon. Social medias prosperous growth can be attributed to one key factor, its price. Anyone with an internet connection and a cell phone can create a social media account. The number of iPhone users has grown swiftly to 1 billion since the launch of the product in 2007. Thus it is no surprise that this unbridled growth of social media continues. It costs no money for the user to create an account. The user typically pays in another way, in information. The company which develops said social media app does not need to charge users because they get paid by other companies to place advertisements on the app. This is typically a mutually beneficial relationship because the social media app can give the advertising company information on its users, and in turn that company can use personalized and advanced marketing tactics. The normal person does not care that they are being subjected to this because they are not losing anything tangible. Some have voiced their concerns for more regulations on the amount of data that social media companies can be allowed to collect. It is still a serious issue being debated today. There are very few people outside of these companies that know exactly what the company knows about its users, or how much they give to advertisers. But certainly everyone who uses social media is aware, that this is happening, it will become a problem, and very little is being done to stop it.

On a much more lighthearted note social media enhances the internets’ ability to connect people across the world. It allows for underrepresented individuals to easily find communities, and for new forms of media and entertainment to be shared. It is certainly not all bad, after all there is a reason people keep going back to it while being aware of what was stated before. Given this it is sometimes fun to see what one can deduce about a person given only their social media account. After all it may be one of the only ways for some individuals have the chance to connect during their lives. Given a person’s social media account is it possible to determine their best friend. Given a particularly special social media account, might you be able to deduce more about that person. Let’s say for example that someone you know was a connoisseur of a particularly popular form of pie. If they posted about this particular pie on a consistent basis might you be able to determine their favorite flavor of pie? Let’s see by attempting such an analysis on a local chef at Hendrix college, Eric the Pizza Guy.

The data collected for this analysis is of course from a social media account on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/eric\_thepizzaguy/). There is a python library named Instaloader that can be easily used to fetch the images, text, and much of the metadata associated with an Instagram account. To get all posts from a single account is fairly simple: Graphical user interface, text

Description automatically generatedIn total there were 1108 posts collected, and a total of 4,432 files. For each post there are four associated files that Instaloader retrieves. 1 image/video, 1 text document which contains the users text associated with the post, 1 JSON file containing metadata such as number of likes or comments, and 1 JSON.xz file. The files are each labeled after the time of the post in the form, YYYY-DD-MM\_HH-MM-SS\_UTC. In total this dataset takes up a grand total of 405 MB.

The majority of this project relies on OpenCV. OpenCV is written in C++ but has APIs in Java, Python, and MATLAB. It is an open source computer vision library that was developed by Intel in 1999. Since then it has been updated by the technology company Willow Garage. The library contains a number of different applications and tools that serve purposes ranging from machine learning libraries to facial detection systems. OpenCV serves innumerable purposes, but for this project the main components used were the Haar Cascade Classifier object detection method. This method uses a collection of weak features to train a cascade classifier to detect an object. A Haar like feature is some aspect of a digital image that can be used in object recognition. The cascade classifier is some preset module that is trained on these Haar-like features using a set of positive images and negative images. Since these features individually do not carry much weight, it takes a large number of samples to train a classifier. To put it simply the when the cascade classifier is called applied to an image it checks different locations in the image and retrieves a value for the pixel intensities in that region. It compares this with other regions and this way cascade classifier can determine which sections contain the feature it is looking for. This method was developed by Paul Viola and Michael Jones in their 2001 paper “Rapid Object Detection using a boosted cascade of simple features.”

All code and tools necessary to replicate this project can be found at:

<https://github.com/KadenFranklin/pizza_pasta>

References

<https://www.instagram.com/eric_thepizzaguy/?hl=en>

<https://instaloader.github.io/as-module.html>

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