

Fake news: an algorithmic perspective on fact-checking

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Abstract

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1 Introduction

The ability to broadcast information on a large scale has been in the hands of large publishing organizations in the pre-Internet era, but nowadays everyone can share news via social media [5]. This introduces risks on validity and authenticity of news, as social media and digital platforms can speed up the spread of falsehoods without much effort from the author [1].

As a matter of fact, 63% of adults in the United States prefer to read their news on the Internet. Young adults take the lead: 76% of adults between the ages 18 and 49 get their primary news consumption via the web, compared to just 43% for adults of 50 years and older [8]. As time passes by, social media is slowly becoming the primary source of news for more and more people.

The main danger of this development is that human perception is often skewed with regards to objectivity of facts. Naïve realism let consumers of news believe that their perception is right, while other's perceptions are uninformed. Furthermore, confirmation bias results in consumers preferring information that confirms beliefs they already have [11]. This makes consumers vulnerable for the spread of misinformation or fake news.

According to the European Commission, "*disinformation - or fake news - consists of verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm*" [1]. The answer to the problem of fake news as of recently has been to manually fact-check statements on validity, but, as Shu et al. underlines, one of the downsides to this approach is that fake news typically relates to newly emerging, time-critical events. This means the real news may not be fully verified by proper knowledge bases due to a lack of contradicting claims [11]. An automated approach would both help in solving the problem of human subjectivity and the speed at which false information is spread in the current news spreading landscape.

Natural language processing has been in rapid development over the past years. With the releases of OpenAI's GPT-2 model in February of this year and Google's BERT in the autumn of 2018, state-of-the-art pre-trained textual embedding techniques have shown promising results on various classification tasks [10][4]. Although fake news classification has been attempted before [13][6], performance has been rather low. However, these new pre-trained textual embeddings have not yet been used in the fight against disinformation.

This thesis is focussed on the following research question: *what is the performance of combinations of pre-trained embedding techniques with machine learning algorithms when classifying fake news?* This main question will be answered through the results of the following subquestions:

RQ1 Which way of pooling vectors to a fixed length works best for classifying fake news?

RQ2 At what padding sequence length do neural networks hold the highest accuracy when classifying fake news?

RQ3 How well do neural network classification architectures classify fake news compared to non-neural classification algorithms?

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83 2 Related Work

84 2.1 RQ1

85 Fake news as a term only caught public attention starting from the end of 2016,
86 during the Presidential Elections of the United States [12].

87 2.2 RQ2

88 In the last couple of years, using transfer learning for natural language processing
89 has given promisable results. The following sentence embeddings will be used
90 to detect fake news:

- 91 • Bag of Words as a baseline for performance of non-pretrained embeddings;
- 92 • Facebook’s InerSent [2];
- 93 • ELMo from the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence [9];
- 94 • OpenAI’s GPT-2 [10];
- 95 • Transformer-XL [3];
- 96 • Microsoft’s MT-DNN [7];
- 97 • and Google’s BERT [4].

98 2.3 RQ3

99 Aligned with the original research on this dataset by Wang [13], the following
100 machine learning algorithms will be used to test the applicability of the abovementioned
101 embedding techniques:

- 102 • SVMs;
- 103 • Logistic regression;
- 104 • Bi-LSTMs;
- 105 • CNNs.

106 3 Methodology

107 3.1 Description of the data

108 3.2 Data charts

109 3.3 Methods

110 3.3.1 RQ1

111 3.3.2 RQ2

112 4 Evaluation

113 Evaluation.

114 5 Conclusions

115 Conclusions.

116 5.1 Acknowledgements

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