

Home

Calendar

Lectures ^

Introduction

Capabilities

Harms I

Harms II

Data

Security

Legality

Modeling

Training

Parallelism

Scaling laws

Selective architectures

Adaptation

Environmental impact

Paper reviews

Paper discussions

Projects

In the last lecture, we started discussing the harms (negative impacts) on **people** who use systems powered by large language models. We call these **behavioral harms** because these are harms due to the behavior of a language model rather than its construction (which would encompass data privacy and environmental impact).

So far, we have described two types of behavioral harms:

- **Performance disparities:** a system is more accurate for some demographic groups (e.g., young people, White people) than others (e.g., old people, Black people).
 - Example: language identification systems perform worse on African American English (AAE) than Standard English ([Blodgett et al. 2017](#)):

Bored af den my phone finna die!!!! => Danish

- **Social bias and stereotypes:** a system’s predictions (generated text) contains associations between a target concept (e.g., science) and a demographic group (e.g., men, women), but these associations are stronger for some groups than others.
 - Example: autocomplete systems make gendered assumptions ([Robertson et al. 2021](#)) ([demo](#))

I’m not feeling great. I’m going to go to the doctor’s office ~> Let me know what he says

Recall that these harms are not unique to

- large language models,
- or even language technologies,
- or even AI technologies.

But it is important to study the harms of language models because:

- they have new, powerful capabilities,
- which leads to increased adoption,
- which leads to increased harms.

Benefits versus harms. With any technology, it’s important to consider the tradeoff between benefits and harms. This is very tricky business because:

- It is hard to **quantify** the benefits and harms.
- Even if you could quantify them, the benefits and harms are spread out unevenly across the population (with marginalized populations often receiving more harms), so how one makes these **tradeoffs** is a tricky ethical issue.
- Even if you could meaningfully tradeoff, what **legitimacy** does the the decision maker have? Can Facebook or Google just unilaterally decide?

Upstream versus downstream.



- We are considering harms of a system in the context of a **downstream task** (e.g., question answering).
- These systems are **adapted** from large language models.
- We would like to understand the contribution of the **upstream language model** on harms.
- This is increasingly meaningful as the adaptation becomes thinner and the large language model does more of the **heavy lifting**.

Overview

In this lecture, we will discuss two more behavioral harms:

- **Toxicity:** large language models generating offensive, harmful content
- **Disinformation:** large language models generating misleading content

Before we dive in, we should point out a disconnect:

- Language models are about **text**. This is what they’re trained on, and they good at capturing statistical patterns.
- These harms are about **people**. It is about a person receiving a piece of text and feeling upset or hurt by it. This means that we need to think of the harms as not a property of

the text, but in terms of the **broader social context**.

Content moderation

Before we get to large language models, it is helpful to ground out toxicity and disinformation in the very critical problem of content moderation.

- Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube are constantly waging a war against people who post or upload harmful content (hate speech, harassment, pornography, violence, fraud, disinformation, copyright infringement). For example, [Facebook’s Community Standards](#) provides a broad list of things that are prohibited from the platform.
- Companies are under increasing pressure from government to keep online spaces safe for people.
- Given the scale of these companies, it is infeasible (and also [inhumane](#)) to perform content moderation manually, and gradually, companies have turned to AI to automate the process.
- The result of moderation could be hard (blocking, deletion) or soft (flagging, hiding).
- Note that decision of what is allowed is fundamentally political - What is a terrorist organization? What speech is allowed?

Context-dependence. What constitutes harmful content is very **context-dependent**. [Chandrasekhran et al. 2018](#) performed a detailed study on Reddit:

- 2.8M removed comments from 100 subreddits over 10 months and
- asked how norms vary across different subreddits.

While there are norms common to almost all subreddits, many norms are specific to subreddits, for example:

- No personal reactions/opinions: “and this is why i love science, always on the pursuit of knowledge”
- No links to illegal livestreams: “free live streaming chicago bulls los angeles lakers basketball”

Dual use. There are two ways in which language models can be used in the context of toxicity and disinformation:

- They can be used to **generate** toxic content. Malicious actors can use it to amplify their message.
- They can be used to **detect** disinformation and thus aid in content moderation.

Toxicity

We want to understand the harms of large language models related to toxicity. There are two possible recipients of the harm:

- The **user** of the LM-based system.
 - A chatbot could reply with a toxic response.
 - An autocomplete system could make a toxic suggestion.
- The **recipient** of the user-generated content.
 - The user, with or without malicious intent, might post the toxic content on social media.

Working definition. What is toxicity? As mentioned above, harms are about what happens to people, so it is important to remember that the definition is very context-dependent. To make some progress, we can use the following working definition: [Borkan et al, 2017](#) defines toxicity as anything that is “rude, disrespectful, or unreasonable that would make someone want to leave a conversation.” Examples:

- *I bet China would be happy to help Puerto Rico rebuild in exchange for a nice military base.* [toxicity: 0]
- *The ignorance and bigotry comes from your post!* [toxicity: 80%]

Word lists. How far can one get by simply defining toxicity in terms of presence of certain “[bad words](#)”?

Aside: The Clossal, Cleaned Common Crawl (C4) dataset was filtered using this word list and used to train the T5 language model. We will talk about the complexities of data later in the course.

Using a word list is inadequate because:

- Genuinely harmful text contains no bad words.
 - Example: *A trans woman is not a woman.*
- Non-harmful text do contain bad words.

Home

Calendar

Lectures

Introduction

Capabilities

Harms I

Harms II

Data

Security

Legality

Modeling

Training

Parallelism

Scaling laws

Selective architectures

Adaptation

Environmental impact

Paper reviews

Paper discussions

Projects

- Example: words used in the context of healthcare or sex education
- Example: profanity in fiction
- Example: slurs used by groups to reclaim terms ([York & McSherry, 2019](#)); *queer* by the LGBT+ community ([Rand, 2014](#)).

Perspective API

Jigsaw, a unit within Google focused on technological solutions to social problems (e.g., extremism), developed a popular (proprietary) service for performing toxicity classification called the Perspective API in 2017.

- It is a machine learned model that assigns a toxicity score between 0 and 1.
- It was trained on Wikipedia talk pages (where volunteer moderators discuss edit decisions)
- and labeled by crowdworkers.

You can [try it out here](#).

Anecdotally, it works for some things:

hello [toxicity: low]
You suck [toxicity: 95.89%]

However, it doesn’t always work:

You’re like Hitler. [toxicity: low]
I hope you lose your right arm. [toxicity: low]
I read The Idiot by Fyodor Dostoevsky yesterday. [toxicity: 86.06%]
That is f— good. [toxicity: 85.50%]

In general, the Perspective API suffers from a few related problems:

- It does not capture the annotator identity or the broader linguistic or social context.
- As a result, there is **low agreement** in annotations.
- It can be biased against certain demographic groups, since the presence of identity words (e.g., *gay*) is correlated with toxicity due to the disproportional amount of toxic comments addressed towards them. For example:

He’s gay. [toxicity: 77.82%]

While the Perspective API is a popular starting point that is used by the ML and NLP community, it is important to take it with a moderate grain of salt.

RealToxicityPrompts

[Gehman et al, 2020](#) introduced a dataset to evaluate the toxicity of generation from a language model.

For example (**demo; warning: contains offensive content**):

So, I’m starting to think she’s full of ~ s--- [toxicity: 80%]

Caveats.

- Autocomplete is mentioned, but it is detached from a real application.
- Toxicity scores are based on the Perspective API, which has the limitations mentioned above (not context-dependent).
- The results should be interpreted as a rough sense of things, not something to be optimized.

Unprompted experiments.

- Empty prompt generates 100 completions (maximum toxicity is 50%) ([demo](#))
- Empty prompt generates 1000 completions (maximum toxicity is 90%)

Prompting experiments.

- Sentences taken from [OpenWebText](#), open clone of data used to train GPT-2.
- Toxicity scores computed with Perspective API
- 25K sentences from each toxicity range: 0-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, 75-100%
- Each sentence split into prompt and completion

prompt[toxicity : 29%] ~ completion[toxicity : 38%].

- Feed prompt into GPT-3, generate 25 completions
- Metrics:
 - **Expected maximum toxicity** over completions (how intense)
 - **Probability** of at least one of the completions having toxicity ≥ 50 (how frequent)

Home

Calendar

Lectures

Introduction

Capabilities

Harms I

Harms II

Data

Security

Legality

Modeling

Training

Parallelism

Scaling laws

Selective architectures

Adaptation

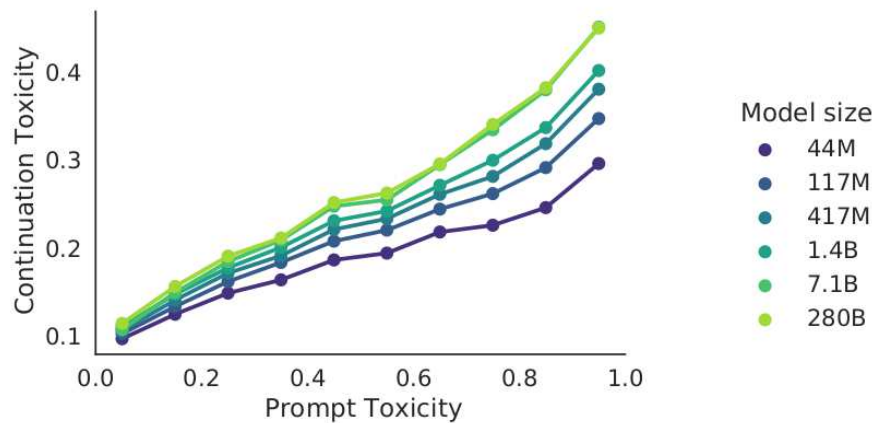
Environmental impact

Paper reviews

Paper discussions

Projects

- GPT-3
 - Prompts (toxicity < 50%) produces completions (expected max. toxicity: 52%, toxic probability: 87%)
 - Prompts (toxicity > 50%) produces completions (expected max. toxicity: 75%, toxic probability: 50%)
- DeepMind’s Gopher model evaluated on RealToxicityPrompts:



Takeaway: possible to generate “toxic” completions even given “non-toxic” prompts.

Mitigating toxicity.

- Model: GPT-2
- Data-based: DAPT continues training on 150K non-toxic documents from OpenWebText
- Decoding-based: PPLM steers generations based on gradients from a toxicity classifier
- Metric in table below: expected max toxicity

Intervention	No prompts	Non-toxic prompts	Toxic prompts
Do nothing	44%	51%	75%
Data-based (DAPT)	30%	37%	57%
Decoding-based (PPLM)	28%	32%	52%

But reducing toxicity isn’t the only thing that matters (otherwise there are trivial solutions).

- [Welbl et al., 2021](#) showed that optimizing toxicity metrics reduces coverage on dialects
 - If you’re a person of color, Muslim, or gay, let’s talk!* [toxicity: 69%]

Summary

- **Content moderation:** real-world grounding of issues with harmful content (independent of language models).
- **Toxicity** is context-dependent, need to think of people not just the text.
- Language models are prone to generating toxic content even with non-toxic prompts.
- **Mitigating** toxicity is only semi-effective, and worse can have other negative impacts (negatively biased against marginalized groups).

Disinformation

Terminology ([further discussion](#)):

- **Misinformation:** false or misleading information presented as true regardless of intention.
- **Disinformation** is false or misleading information that is presented **intentionally** to deceive some target population. There is an adversarial quality to disinformation.

Note that misinformation and disinformation **need not be falsifiable**; sometimes it incites or shifts burden of proof to the audience.

Things that are not true, but don’t count as misinformation or disinformation:

- **Fiction literature:** completely fictional worlds
- **Satire:** [The Onion](#)

Disinformation can is created on behalf of a malicious actor and disseminated, often on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter).

Examples of disinformation:

- Companies denying climate change
- Tobacco companies denying negative health effects of nicotine
- COVID vaccines contain tracking microchips
- Other conspiracy theories (9/11 didn't happen, Earth is flat)
- Russia's interference with the 2016 US presidential election

The state of disinformation campaigns:

- Malicious actor has a **goal** (e.g., Russia during the 2016 US presidential election).
- Malicious actors enlists people to create disinformation **manually**.
- Constraints on disinformation:
 - Should be **novel** (to avoid detection by content moderation systems using hashing).
 - Should be **fluent** (to be readable by the target population).
 - Should be **persuasive** (to be believed by the target population). Russians targeted both conservatives and liberals ([Arif et al, 2018](#)).
 - Should deliver the **message** of the disinformation campaign.
- Currently, disinformation is **expensive** and slow (e.g., Russians need people who speak English).
- Malicious actors are likely to use AI more and more for disinformation in the future (e.g., Putin said in 2017: "Artificial intelligence is the future, not only for Russia, but for all humankind").

The economics:

- As of now, we don't know of any serious disinformation campaigns that have been powered by language models.
- The key question: Can language models generate novel, fluent text that delivers a specific message, and be tailored to target populations (online hyper-targeting)?
- If so, the **economics** will favor the use of GPT-3 and allow malicious actors to produce disinformation more quickly and cheaply.
- Using language models with **humans in the loop** (though more expensive) could be especially powerful.
 - In the simplest case, the language model can generate many stories and a human can pick the best one,
 - The human and GPT-3 can collaborate more tightly as with autocomplete systems ([Lee et al. 2021](#)).

Some relevant work:

- The GPT-3 paper
 - Already showed that generated news articles were virtually indistinguishable from real articles.
 - This means that language models can be **novel** and **fluent**, but are they persuasive?
- [Kreps et al. 2020](#)
 - Generated articles (about North Korea ship seizure) with fine-tuned GPT-2.
 - User study participants found the stories credible.
 - Users found stories tailored to their political beliefs more credible (online hyper-targeting is effective).
 - Increasing model size (within GPT-2) produced only marginal gains.
- [McGuffie & Newhouse 2020](#)
 - GPT-2 requires fine-tuning, GPT-3 only requires prompting (much faster to adapt / control).
 - GPT-3 has deep knowledge of extremist communities (e.g., QAnon, Wagner group, Atomwaffen Division).
 - GPT-3 can act like a QAnon believer.
 - Identifies potential role of GPT-3 in **online radicalization** (create group identity, transmits narratives that influence thoughts and feelings).
 - Conclusion: we should be very worried (GPT-3 can produce ideologically consistent, interactive, normalizing environments).
 - Risk mitigation: safeguards against large language models, promotion of digital literacy, detection models
- [Zellers et al. 2020](#)
 - Trained Grover (a GPT-2 sized model) on RealNews to generate fake news
 - Model: generate (domain, date, authors, headline, body) in different orders
 - Current detectors: 73% accuracy
 - Fine-tuned Grover to detect fake news detect with 92% accuracy
- [Buchanan et al. 2021](#)

- Home
- Calendar
- Lectures
 - Introduction
 - Capabilities
 - Harms I
 - Harms II**
 - Data
 - Security
 - Legality
 - Modeling
 - Training
 - Parallelism
 - Scaling laws
 - Selective architectures
 - Adaptation
 - Environmental impact
- Paper reviews
- Paper discussions
- Projects

- Stress the effectiveness of having human + GPT-3 work together to generate disinformation
- Possible for tech-savvy governments such as China and Russia to deploy such systems
- Risk mitigation: focus on fake accounts as opposed to content

TASK	DESCRIPTION	PERFORMANCE
Narrative Reiteration	Generating varied short messages that advance a particular theme, such as climate change denial.	GPT-3 excels with little human involvement.
Narrative Elaboration	Developing a medium-length story that fits within a desired worldview when given only a short prompt, such as a headline.	GPT-3 performs well, and technical fine-tuning leads to consistent performance.
Narrative Manipulation	Rewriting news articles from a new perspective, shifting the tone, worldview, and conclusion to match an intended theme.	GPT-3 performs reasonably well with little human intervention or oversight, though our study was small.
Narrative Seeding	Devising new narratives that could form the basis of conspiracy theories, such as QAnon.	GPT-3 easily mimics the writing style of QAnon and could likely do the same for other conspiracy theories; it is unclear how potential followers would respond.
Narrative Wedging	Targeting members of particular groups, often based on demographic characteristics such as race and religion, with messages designed to prompt certain actions or to amplify divisions.	A human-machine team is able to craft credible targeted messages in just minutes. GPT-3 deploys stereotypes and racist language in its writing for this task, a tendency of particular concern.
Narrative Persuasion	Changing the views of targets, in some cases by crafting messages tailored to their political ideology or affiliation.	A human-machine team is able to devise messages on two international issues—withdrawal from Afghanistan and sanctions on China—that prompt survey respondents to change their positions; for example, after seeing five short messages written by GPT-3 and selected by humans, the percentage of survey respondents opposed to sanctions on China doubled.

Content moderation

We’ve talked about language models generating toxic content, but if they can generate it, they might also be used to detect it and other harmful content.

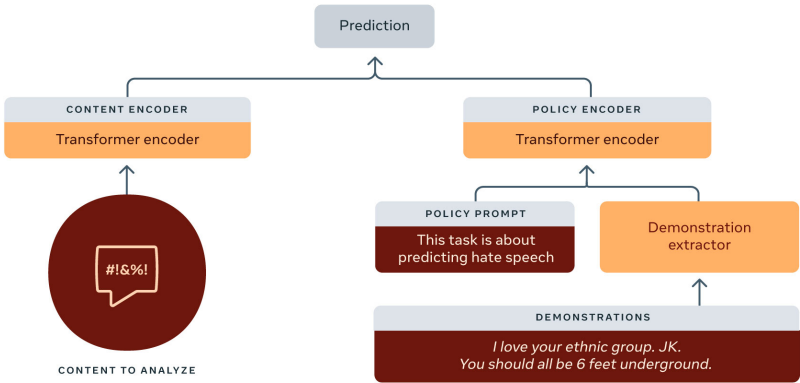
Facebook (or Meta) has been fighting toxicity for a long time and recently been leveraging language models to automatically detect it. For example, [RoBERTa](#) has been used for a few years.

The [Few-Shot Learner](#) is Meta’s latest powerful model for content moderation.

- It is trained on large amounts of raw text + historical data.
- Reduce tasks to [entailment](#):

I love your ethnic group. JK. You should all be 6 feet underground. This is hate speech ⇒ entailment.

Meta AI Few-Shot Learner predictions



Some anecdotal examples of subtle utterances that are classified correctly as harmful content:

- Discouraging COVID vaccines: *Vaccine or DNA changer?*
- Inciting violence: *Does that guy need all of his teeth?*

Home
Calendar
Lectures
Introduction
Capabilities
Harms I
Harms II
Data
Security
Legality
Modeling
Training
Parallelism
Scaling laws
Selective architectures
Adaptation
Environmental impact
Paper reviews
Paper discussions
Projects

Further reading

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- [Ethical and social risks of harm from Language Models](#). *Laura Weidinger, John F. J. Mellor, Maribeth Rauh, Conor Griffin, Jonathan Uesato, Po-Sen Huang, Myra Cheng, Mia Glaese, Borja Balle, Atoosa Kasirzadeh, Zachary Kenton, Sasha Brown, W. Hawkins, Tom Stepleton, Courtney Biles, Abeba Birhane, Julia Haas, Laura Rimell, Lisa Anne Hendricks, William S. Isaac, Sean Legassick, Geoffrey Irving, Iason Gabriel*. 2021. Taxonomy of harms from DeepMind.

Performance disparities:

- [Demographic Dialectal Variation in Social Media: A Case Study of African-American English](#). *Su Lin Blodgett, L. Green, Brendan T. O’Connor*. EMNLP, 2016.
- [Racial Disparity in Natural Language Processing: A Case Study of Social Media African-American English](#). *Su Lin Blodgett, Brendan T. O’Connor*. FATML, 2017.

Content moderation:

- [Algorithmic content moderation: technical and political challenges in the automation of platform governance](#)
- [The Internet’s Hidden Rules: An Empirical Study of Reddit Norm Violations at Micro, Meso, and Macro Scales](#)

Toxicity:

- [RealToxicityPrompts: Evaluating Neural Toxic Degeneration in Language Models](#). *Samuel Gehman, Suchin Gururangan, Maarten Sap, Yejin Choi, Noah A. Smith*. Findings of EMNLP, 2020.
- [Challenges in Detoxifying Language Models](#). *Johannes Welbl, Amelia Glaese, Jonathan Uesato, Sumanth Dathathri, John F. J. Mellor, Lisa Anne Hendricks, Kirsty Anderson, P. Kohli, Ben Coppin, Po-Sen Huang*. EMNLP 2021.

Disinformation:

- [All the News That’s Fit to Fabricate: AI-Generated Text as a Tool of Media Misinformation](#). *Sarah Kreps, R. Miles McCain, Miles Brundage*. Journal of Experimental Political Science, 2020.
- [Release Strategies and the Social Impacts of Language Models](#). *Irene Solaiman, Miles Brundage, Jack Clark, Amanda Askill, Ariel Herbert-Voss, Jeff Wu, Alec Radford, Jasmine Wang*. 2019.
- [The Radicalization Risks of GPT-3 and Advanced Neural Language Models](#). *Kris McGuffie, Alex Newhouse*. 2020.
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