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capability, like question answering, language translation, text classification, or search. It makes *each* of these more accurate, at a lower cost, with less data, and thus more accessible to a broader community. It opens the pathway from research to production.

We built a prototype, Textflix, that leverages transfer learning for sentiment analysis. Textflix performs positive or negative sentiment detection on movie reviews, which present a challenge to text processing systems because of the complex ways in which humans express their preferences. We added LIME, an interpretability technique, to provide insight into the model's predictions and used this mechanism to provide individual summaries of each movie. The entire product was

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built using a model trained on just 500 labeled examples. The modeling was implemented with off-the-shelf tools from AllenNLP and did not require writing any code. Everything was completed within an infrastructure budget of \$25.

Sentiment

While transfer learning is likely to be beneficial for almost any NLP application, some will benefit more than others.

Even though transfer learning can be implemented at low cost, we do not recommend using a sophisticated deep learning model for a 1% gain in accuracy. Some applications, like basic topic categorization, can be handled admirably by extremely simple statistical models (like Naive Bayes, which is essentially counting words). In such cases,

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sticking with the simple model works best.

But sentiment detection – the task of inferring how the writer or speaker feels – requires sophisticated tools. When humans convey their feelings, they may use sarcasm and irony. They might incorporate obscure pop culture references. They

might have mixed feelings, contradict themselves, or even change their minds by the time they've finished their thoughts! Without transfer learning, all of these difficult challenges would need to be solved by learning from a single, possibly small, dataset. Because of these difficulties, sentiment detection demonstrates very clearly the power of transfer learning.

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Textflix is built on the IMDB dataset, a popular open dataset commonly used for sentiment analysis. The dataset consists of 25,000 movie reviews from the users of the popular online movie database, although only 500 of those were used to build the model behind Textflix, as a demonstration of the power of transfer learning.

While sentiment analysis can be applied in many different domains, movie reviews are interesting because they present a diverse set of challenges. Many of the reviews are straightforward and simple, but some contain subtle clues as to the author's opinion. These subtleties are challenging for machine learning models – a model based on simple statistics will not work well. Because the reviews are written in rather plain English (no

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specialized dialects or slang), publicly available pretrained models (which were trained on generic English) will work well.

Models

The modeling process for Textflix was extremely simple. One of the great benefits of transfer learning is that it eliminates the need to invent complex new neural network architectures that uniquely solve a particular problem. Off-the-shelf transfer learning models already provide state-of-the-art accuracy, so the fewer changes we make, the better. After comparing several models, we ended up using the large version of the BERT model...

We experimented with several popular transfer learning models, and also compared their performance to simple but strong baseline methods.

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Although we built Textflx with a model trained on only 500 examples, for each model we explored its performance curve when training on more labeled examples. In the following sections we present these results and justify our modeling choices.

Baseline Models

Testing baseline methods is an important first step in the modeling process. Even if they are unlikely to yield a usable model, they are easy to implement, present a logical reference for comparing future models to, and are usually more interpretable than more sophisticated alternatives. In some cases, the simplicity and interpretability advantages they present may outweigh the decrease in accuracy in the results they produce. For our prototype, we explored

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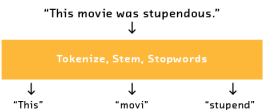
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two baselines: SVM with Naive Bayes features and word vectors.

NB-SVM

For text classification problems like sentiment analysis it makes sense to choose a simple model based on bag-of-words as the first baseline. In many text classification problems, like topic classification, these types of baseline models may even be the best choice. NB-SVM treats the text as a bag of words and

combines a Naive Bayes model (also a reasonable baseline) with a support vector machine. This model has been shown to produce strong linear baselines for text classification, and sentiment analysis in particular.



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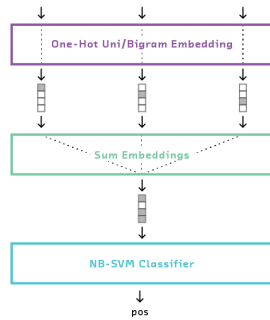
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Pipeline architecture for the NB-SVM model.

In testing this model we generated both uni- and bigram features for the NB-SVM classifier, removed stopwords from the input, and used a

Snowball stemmer to normalize each word.

The performance of the NB-SVM was poor and unpredictable at low dataset sizes – it simply did not have enough observations to learn which words strongly correlated with positive or negative sentiment. However, at larger training set sizes (e.g., 10,000 examples), this baseline reached a useful accuracy

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reached a useful accuracy
of about 85% with very
little tuning.



NB-SVM is no better than
guessing at training set
sizes less than 200.

This performance curve
shows that even simple
bag-of-words models can
identify a large majority of
sentiment examples
correctly. And because the
NB-SVM model is simple
and fast to implement, it
would be easier to support
in a production use case
than some deep neural
network models.

Word Vectors

As we've seen, the NB-SVM model cannot be reasonably expected to perform well with small training datasets. Because it is a bag-of-words model, it has no a priori

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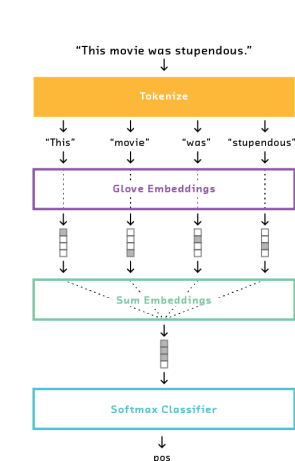
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it has no a priori knowledge of words and their associations and must learn everything from the training data. A model that leverages word vectors should do better in the small-data regime, since word vectors are a form of transfer learning. That is, the meaning of words is already captured in the pretrained word vectors, and is not affected by the small data size.

We used the following simple architecture for this model.



Pipeline architecture for

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THE WORD VECTORS MODEL.

The performance curve shows that the word vectors model generally follows the same trend as the NB-SVM baseline. (It is important to note that there is a lot of variance at each data point, which is not shown in the plot, so small differences should be taken lightly.)



Transferred word vectors suffer from the same problems as the NB-SVM model.

This result is, in some ways, surprising since word vectors are a form of transfer learning and should therefore be more resilient to limited data than the baseline NB-SVM model. It is likely that the word vectors model could be tuned to outperform NB-SVM at smaller

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training sizes by adjusting the hyperparameters and architecture. However, we purposely spent little time optimizing hyperparameters with any of the models. The hyperparameter optimization step is largely a heuristic process and can require deep expertise to guide the search – something we wanted to avoid.

Transfer Learning Models

With well-performing baselines established, we began to try out several of the publicly available transfer learning models. We experimented with ULMFiT using the Fast.AI library and found it to perform well, even with limited data. We performed language-model fine-tuning using 50,000 unlabeled examples for the ULMFiT

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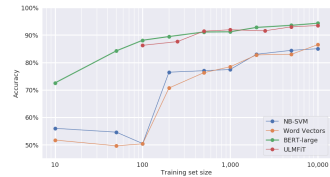
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model, and then performed supervised training at various dataset sizes. In addition to ULMFiT, we ran experiments for both the BERT-Base and BERT-Large models, using the AllenNLP library.



New transfer learning models can perform well even with fewer than 100 examples.

The best-performing models were the BERT-Large and ULMFiT models. While these models produced nearly equal results, we found that the BERT-Large model was easier to implement and experiment with. This is in part because no language model fine-tuning step was required with BERT-Large (target task fine-tuning, however, was

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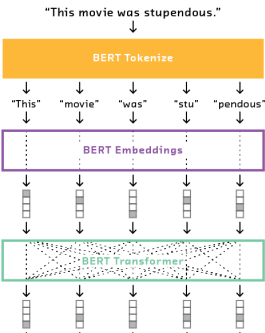
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tuning, however, was performed for each model), and in part because ULMFiT is trained via the Fast.AI library, which imposes development via

notebooks – something we find to be restrictive.

We trained the BERT-Large model without making any custom modifications and defined the entire experiment in a JSON configuration file in the AllenNLP style. We trained on a single GPU for 20 epochs, using an Adam optimizer, and used gradual unfreezing for fine-tuning the layers of the model.



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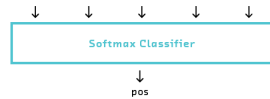
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Pipeline architecture for
the BERT-large model

Overall, we did very little
tuning of the model’s
hyperparameters. This
limited tuning requirement
is one of the greatest
benefits of transfer
learning: the out-of-the-
box performance is
already very good, and

eking out a further 1-2% of
accuracy has diminishing
returns and would require
expensive-to-acquire
knowledge of the model
architecture.

The final BERT model
provides accuracy roughly
equivalent to the state-of-

the-art model, using just
500 labeled examples for
training.

Interpretability

A part of using transfer

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A cost of using transfer learning is the less interpretable, black box nature of neural network models. The ability to detect sentiment is undeniably useful, but the ability to explain those predictions is significantly more powerful. With interpretability, we can not only classify the user's sentiment but point to specific evidence to support that classification. We found the addition of

interpretability to the model's predictions to be surprisingly useful. Here we will discuss our approach and some of the benefits.

Classification: positive - 82.3% certainty
by consequential_countdown · 143 days ago
So, you wanna be a rock star? See this movie. You don't like rock, you say? Or you're REALLY into heavy metal? Then put on your favorite album and dream yourself away, this movie has nothing to offer. Rarely have I ever seen a movie being able to portray the dream of being in a rock band as good as this. I had long hair during the late 1980's and early nineties, and I have played guitar for the last 15 years or so. Did I like Rock Star? Oh yes. The music is good, not great, the actors are good, and believable, even Jennifer Aniston plays her part to perfection. And Mark Wahlberg is perfect as the wannabe rock singer. So you know what you're going to get. A movie about dreams coming true, being stepped on, and finally figuring out what life is really about. It's a good solid seven out of ten, no more, no less.

Classification: positive - 82.3% certainty
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Predicting sentiment is useful, but pointing readers to specific evidence that the model

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relies on allows the
reader to trust the
prediction.

Modified LIME for Sequences

We used the technique of
Local Interpretable Model-
agnostic Explanations

(LIME) to add
interpretability. LIME can
be applied to almost any
type of model, but here we
will consider its application
to text data. Put simply,
LIME is a way to
understand how different
parts of an input affect the
output of a model. This is
accomplished, essentially,
by turning the dials of the
input and observing the
effect on the output.

Consider a model that
classifies news headlines
as “clickbait” or “not
clickbait.” The model
could identify individual
words as more or less
clickbaity, depending on
how they affect the output.

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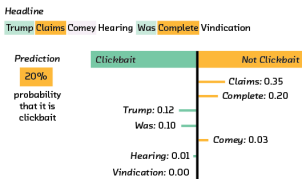
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If removing a word from the input generally makes the model predict clickbait, then that word contributes to the model's clickbait classification for that particular input.



LIME identifies words that contribute to positive or negative classification.

This method makes sense

for models that process the input as a bag of words, but what about for models like BERT that process the input as a sequence? These models don't view an input as simply a collection of isolated words; they are capable of picking out statements, sentences, or thoughts. Further, removing words from the input as a method to understand the model's

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predictions makes the
input incoherent.

Trump [redacted] Comey [redacted] was complete [redacted]
[redacted] Comey hearing [redacted] vindication.
[redacted] claims Comey hearing [redacted]
Trump claims [redacted] hearing was [redacted]

LIME defaults to masking
words, which produces a
type of incoherent
language that sequence
models like BERT were not
trained on.

What works well for a bag-
of-words model seems
unnatural for a sequence
model. One could imagine
that BERT works instead
by treating input text as
compositions of whole
sentences, rather than
compositions of words
(although this is a
simplification). In this
case, it makes more
sense to apply LIME at
the sentence level.
Removing sentences may
still produce incoherent
text, but if thoughts are
relatively confined to
sentences then this may

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some useful things. For example, we can visualize the overall sentiment of a particular film. This allows users to quickly gauge popular movies and could be used as a tool for recommending the best movies.

<p><i>Gilmore Girls</i> 2000-2007 44 min 19 PG A dramedy centering around the relationship between a transgressing single mother and her teen daughter living in Stars Hollow, Connecticut.</p> <p>27 reviews 34 positive (88%)</p>	<p><i>All G.I. Individual</i> 2002 88 min R All G.I. unwittingly becomes a pawn in the Chavich's plot to overthrow the Prime Minister of Great Britain. However, All is emboldened by the notion as a voice of the youth, making the PM and his government more popular th...</p> <p>27 reviews 12 positive (44%)</p>	<p><i>Unconditional Love</i> 2002 124 min PG-13 After her husband unexpectedly leaves her, Grace Bradley (Kathy Bates) spontaneously travels to Great Britain to attend the funeral of Victor Fox, a singer she adored. There, she meets the ...</p> <p>27 reviews 25 positive (92%)</p>
<p><i>G.I. Brother: When Did Thou?</i> 2000 107 min PG-13 In the deep south during the 1930s, three escaped convicts search for hidden treasure while a relentless lawman pursues them.</p> <p>15 reviews 21 positive (80%)</p>	<p><i>Blade</i> 1998 129 min R A half-vampire, half-mortal man becomes a protector of the mortal race, while slaying and vampires.</p> <p>14 reviews 23 positive (85%)</p>	<p><i>Armored</i> 2006 88 min PG-13 A newbie guard for an armored truck company is coerced by his volatile coworkers to steal a truck containing \$42 million. But a winkle in their supposedly foolproof plan divides the group, leading to a potentially deadly ...</p> <p>14 reviews 3 positive (14%)</p>

The Textflix dashboard makes it easy to find popular and unpopular movies.

Users can drill down to a particular title and read a sampling of its positive and negative reviews. But model predictions are rarely blindly accepted. Users who want to verify that the model is doing something sensible may opt to skim the reviews, looking for evidence of the model's predictions. This introduces a significant

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cognitive burden – reviews are long, but the sentiment may be expressed in just one sentence. The following review, where most of the text is simply summarizing the plot, is a good example.

classification: positive - 74.6% certainty

by surrogate_tractor · 345 days ago

The movie *exotica* is about a futuristic video game on a "god" system that is almost like virtual reality. The only copy of the video game is damaged when an assassination attempt is made on the designer (Jennifer Jason Leigh). Unless it can be repaired, the many years and 38 million dollars spent on the development will all go to waste. The only way to repair the game however, is to actually go in the game with the only person she feels she can trust(Jude Law). This movie was pretty good, but doesn't really pick up until very late in the film. The best thing about this film were the twists toward the end. Definitely worth seeing. 7/10

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Top: The model classifies this review as positive, but with no supporting evidence. Bottom: The model explains its

positive classification by highlighting a single sentence, which should be enough to convince users to trust the prediction. View the review at [on Textflix](#)

Without interpretability, a user may need to skim each and every review for evidence supporting the model's predictions. But using LIME, we can automatically point to

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specific evidence that the model relies on to make its predictions. In this case, users can immediately see why the model has made a prediction and trust that it is correct.

Interpretability
as a
Summarization
Tool

Interpretability tools that can point to specific evidence in the input to explain model predictions

actually offer a new product opportunity. Specifically, we found that using LIME to identify highly polarized sentences allowed us to construct high-level summaries of each movie's reviews.

20 positive review highlights
Nothing really unpredictable in this movie, but a solid flick in all respects, by eleven_obscently 2 days ago · Overall a really good movie with great performances from all the cast as well as the two leads, Mark Wahlberg and Jennifer Aniston, by vaulted_sensency 6 days ago · Like a diamond, this movie shines, by ebberedred more 11 days ago · I watched this movie the other night, and I have to admit, it was quite possibly the best film of this generation, by pliable_trauma 24 days ago · show all

6 negative review highlights
From the title charge of Metal God to the 'sleaz' middle of the road 'Rock Star' to the lame soundtrack, this movie plays out badly, by discentful, before 1 days ago · Bad music and I am a reformed eighth metal guy, so I would be vulnerable to some good stuff, by freelance_proximity 30 days ago · There's way too much (boring) music in this standard formula-packed excuse for a movie and should be avoided for it at all cost, by essential_prospective 60 days ago · But if you want to listen to good music I suggest spend the time looking at some concert recording with Bon Jovi, or Mötley Crüe, it'll be more quality time, by registering_clothing 133 days ago · show all

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By scoring each sentence as positive or negative, interpretability tools enable summarizations of sentiment for each movie.

These summaries give a reader a broad picture of others' sentiment toward the movie, without them having to scroll through each of the individual reviews. Without interpretability, we could only show users entire reviews, which are burdensome to read. We find interpretability is an essential component of building interesting data products.

Successes and Failures

Transfer learning using BERT yielded impressive results, especially considering the limited training data. It was a clear and significant improvement over the alternatives. But like any model BERT has its

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model, BERT has its limitations. In this section we examine some of the concrete successes and failures of the prototype model.

BERT Identifies Mixed Feelings

classification: positive - 94.1% certainty
by defaced_trauma · 61 days ago
Not the film to see if you want to be intellectually stimulated. If you want to have a lot of fun at the theater, however, this is the one. Lots of snappy banter and some really cheesy banters too. Mos Def and Seth Green are very funny as the comic relief. Exciting and creative beats and chase scenes, Mark Wahlberg and Charlize Theron(wow)are appealing leads. And Donald Sutherland!

Interpretability at the sentence level shows how the model balances opposing sentiments within reviews. View the review [on Textflix](#)

There are many reviews in the dataset that would classify as “easy” in the sense that they communicate clear sentiment using words that are positive or negative. The final deployed BERT model, unsurprisingly, handles these cases well. The passage above demonstrates some of this plain language, but is

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interesting in that it has individual sentences that communicate opposing sentiments. With the added interpretability mechanism, it is possible to not only show the model's overall prediction for the sentiment of the review but also its predictions for some of the individual parts. This helps draw attention to reviews that are mixed, where a single sentiment score does not necessarily tell the entire story.

BERT Handles Subtle Language and Negation Well

"But Valley Girl is one of the few romance films I could sit through."

— A review for *Valley Girl*

This review text is relatively subtle. It does

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not contain any explicitly positive or negative words, yet it is fairly obvious to a human that it conveys a positive sentiment.



Top: BERT correctly predicts positive sentiment despite the indirect language. Bottom: NB-SVM incorrectly predicts negative sentiment. Neutral words like “romance” and “sit” are associated with positive or negative feelings.

The BERT model produces the correct

prediction, even if it is not clear how it infers this.

The baseline NB-SVM model, on the other hand, must invoke simple rules which fail in this case.

Using word-level LIME, we can see that the baseline model associates neutral words like “romance” and “sit” with

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positive or negative
sentiment, even though
these words on their own
do not convey sentiment.

As a test of BERT's
understanding, we can
experiment with negating
the entire phrase and
observing the new
prediction.



Top: BERT correctly flips
its prediction when the
“not” modifier is used to
negate the positive
statement. Bottom: NB-SVM
does not recognize “not”
as a negative word, and
does not change its
prediction.

Indeed, BERT now
predicts a negative
sentiment. The baseline
model, however, can only
rely on each word as a
small piece of evidence.
Even though it sees “not”
as carrying negative
sentiment value, the
prediction overall is still
positive.

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There are cases where BERT fails, though, even with simple negation.

Although LIME is a useful tool, it's not a catch-all.

There is still quite some mystery in terms of how BERT works and when it will fail.

Sentiment Can Be Unclear

“In any event, a very, very fun, but fairly bad, movie.”

– A positive review for *See No Evil*

“Average adventure movie that took a serious story and ‘Hollywoodised’ it... The screenplay was average. The charm of Connery made up for his wrong Arabic

accent and all the scenes with President T. Roosevelt were masterpiece takes.”

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– A positive review for
The Wind and the Lion

“The storyline is okay
at best, and the acting
is surprisingly alright,
but after awhile it’s
gets to be a little
much. But, still it’s fun,
quirky, strange, and
original.”

– A positive review for
*Don’t Look in the
Basement*

Each of these examples is
from an instance where
the BERT model made an
incorrect prediction. Each
of them is surprising, even
to humans, in some way.
That is, they each express
a statement of sentiment
that is opposite of the
rating the reviewer gave.
This underscores the fact
that sentiment analysis is
not really a binary task –
in reality, humans may like
some things and dislike
others, which makes it
somewhat nonsensical to
distill their feelings into a

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single positive or negative classification. In some cases where the model gets it wrong, a human might also.

One encouraging aspect of these cases is that the BERT model is often quite uncertain in its predictions. Models will inevitably make errors, but the ability to provide a reliable measure of uncertainty makes it easier to use and trust their outputs.

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classification: positive - 95.3% certainty
by rared_persona - 281 days ago
There comes a time in every big name actor's career when they get sloppy and accept projects that they wouldn't have touched with a 1000 ft pole in their golden days. Remember "Taxi Driver"? ~~That was a fine film~~. I can hardly believe that the De Niro of "Showtime" is the same actor. I would rather watch "Time Chasers" twice than see this film again. If anyone offers to take you to see "Showtime" or gives you free passes, or whatever, run away as fast and far as you can.

A review for *Showtime* where the model is confused by a positive reference to another film.

This is a review for the film *Showtime*, a comedic cop film featuring Robert

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De Niro and Eddie
Murphy. The review is
quite negative, but
features a mention of a
separate movie - *Taxi
Driver* - which the

reviewer remarks is a “fine
film.” The BERT model
does not recognize that
this positive sentiment is
actually attached to a
different entity and should
therefore be disregarded.

While BERT has been
shown to be effective at
the task of entity
recognition, the fine-tuned
model here was never
explicitly taught to do this.
In fact, since the model
only has access to the
review itself, it really has
no way to know that *Taxi
Driver* is not the subject of
this review. However,
even if the model were
given the movie title
associated with each
review, it is unlikely that it
would learn such
nuances. This is because
it would not have nearly

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enough examples in its small training set for it to be able to learn this special case. Even including more examples might not be sufficient – instead, the training objective might need to be changed to explicitly ask the model to pick out

entities and assign each of them a sentiment score.

This is an interesting example because it shows that even though transfer learning models may have the skills to perform particular tasks, they only

invoke those skills if it is important for prediction accuracy during training. Transfer learning models are powerful, but they still fall far short of human intuition.

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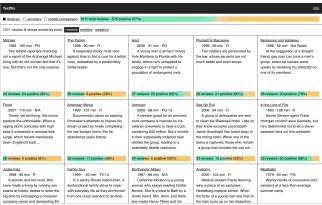
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The final Textflix design.

We make prototypes to spark our clients' imaginations about how emerging technologies could be applied to their own business problems. Besides being functional, this means our prototypes need to tell a good story. In this section we'll discuss the design and storytelling decisions that went into Textflix.

Visualizing the Classification

Once we decided to focus on sentiment analysis and use the IMDB review dataset, the fundamental unit of the prototype was clear: the text of a movie review and the model's classification of that review as positive or

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negative. Presenting just those elements makes for a functional tech demo, but also a dry one.

The first step we took towards making things more interesting *and* understandable was to apply the LIME interpretability technique at the sentence level. Using LIME, we show the user which sentences were driving the classification. This makes the classification feel much more dynamic. You can visualize (a simplified

version of) the model's examination process.

Developing the Story

The second thing we did was develop a story about why these reviews needed to be analyzed. On the dataset side, we grouped reviews under the movie or show they were

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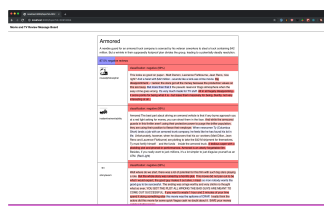
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or show they were reviewing, and selected the groups with the most reviews. Grouping reviews made it possible to build the prototype as an imaginary movie/show review site.

The IMDB dataset, by design, covers a wide range of movies and shows, so sorting by the most reviewed gave us a rather eccentric list of entertainments. Part of the storytelling challenge of these prototypes is explaining dataset limitations like this one in a non-disruptive way.



An earlier version of the prototype presented the reviews as part of an entertainment message board.

Originally, we thought about imagining the

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reviews as part of a message board, which would help explain both the range of topics and the text-only nature of the reviews (movie review sites often have a mechanism for directly inputting user ratings, while message board posts are typically limited

to a text box). Later we realized we didn't have to be so specific to provide a plausible explanation for why the selection was so varied. Anyone who subscribes to a streaming service has seen the odd range of movies and TV shows that can result from behind-the-scenes license negotiations. We decided our make-believe service would be called Textflix, and that its weird selection was just a result of the licenses available.

Adding Drama to Analysis

Once we had our idea for

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Once we had our idea for a fictional streaming site in place, we began working on showing the value sentiment analysis could bring to the site. Here again we had to balance the design of a real product with the need for storytelling and a little bit of drama. We decided that you would be able to turn the sentiment analysis on and off in the prototype (in

a real product there'd be no reason for the off option). This would help us emphasize, by contrast, the capabilities text analysis gives you. Without analysis, you must read each review, one-by-one, to get an idea of the overall sentiment of the reviews. With analysis you can see the general opinion at a glance. Analysis makes sentiment computable and sortable, allowing you to answer questions like "what is the most liked movie?" (an indie drama called *What*

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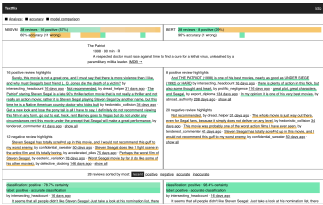
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Alice Found in this case).

The minimal design of the prototype emphasizes the new powers analysis gives you. With analysis off you're faced with long blocks of text and no color. With it on, you get green and orange sentiment indicators, underlines, and review highlights.

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A movie page with the accuracy and model comparison options turned on. These options would not be appropriate for a consumer-facing product, but we included them for their explanatory power.

With analysis on, Textflax shows the capabilities that text analysis can bring to a product. We included

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two further analysis options to give people a closer look at the algorithm. These would not be included in a consumer-facing product, but we put them in the prototype for their explanatory power. The first option is “accuracy.” It shows how well the model’s classifications matched the review’s original labels. With accuracy on you can see the model’s overall performance as well as find reviews where the model got things wrong. This feature is obviously useful but it is only available because we are working with an example dataset that is fully labeled, something unlikely to happen in real life (if your real life dataset is fully labeled you don’t need a model to classify it). The accuracy feature in the prototype, then, is a peek behind the curtain. It wouldn’t be possible in a

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real product, but in Textflix, seeing the errors helps build your intuition about the model's performance and where it might tend to get things wrong or right.

The second feature is “model comparison.”

When activated, this feature opens a split-screen view, where our transfer-learning trained model is on the right, and NB-SVM, our baseline model, is on the left. Seeing their classifications side-by-side gives you a concrete idea of the gains made through transfer learning. You can compare the accuracy of both approaches and see reviews where they disagree. In a final consumer-facing product, you'd want to only expose the best model (though checking it against a baseline during development is still very much recommended).

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There were more options we could have added, but we wanted this prototype to be clearly focused on a core set of ideas. Most importantly, we wanted to show the kinds of capabilities that text analysis could open up for a product. Then we wanted to provide a view into the model's accuracy and show it in the context of a less advanced approach. We hope the final product will be both inspirational and informative for people working on similar projects.