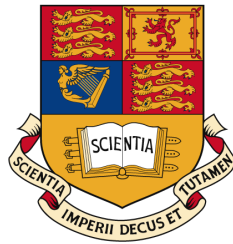


# Understanding Revolution 2.0 - Mining the Arab Spring Social Network Data



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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
*MEng Information Systems Engineering*

2012

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving parents.

## Acknowledgements

And I would like to acknowledge ...

# Abstract

TODO: WRITE ABSTRACT

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In this chapter, we will explain the problem we aim to tackle in this project and what are its challenges. By breaking the problem down into smaller problems we will explain the steps we need to undertake in order to find the solution and the difficulties we expect to encounter in our endeavour.

### 1.1 Motivation

Social media have literally changed our lives in the recent years. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and many more not only offer their users a way to connect and communicate with their friends, colleagues and family but they have been used as a way to trigger and sustain revolutions and protests. Shirky in [20] argues that social media have the power to sustain political uprisings while others believe that the power of social media is overrated [14]. Nevertheless, there have been several examples of people using social media to oust dictators and protest against regimes. This is exactly what happened during the Iranian elections in 2009 and Egypt's uprising in the beginning of 2011. During these events people used social media and especially Twitter, to report news during protests and influence others to participate. The events that took place during the Egyptian uprising engendered an unprecedented flow of information and ideas on Twitter. People who were watching their Twitter timelines could literally see the events unfolding before their own eyes. One wonders what would

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have happened if someone collected all this information and tried to make sense of them. What if we could be able to detect events and describe them as they are happening? These are the questions this project sets out to answer, not in a science fiction way but following a structured and scientific methodology. We have collected social media data from Egypt's uprising and we have tried to describe what happened. Using this case study as a starting point we developed a generic framework for detecting and describing events as they unfold. In the last few years a growing community of researchers started using Twitter to conduct research on social networks and data mining. Recently, Lotan et al.[13] attempted to investigate the events that took place during the Egyptian revolution by collecting and analysing a large amount of tweets. They have identified different types of users (media organizations, bloggers, activists) in the dataset and they studied how each type was influencing the other by looking at the information flow between them. Another research project studied the information dissemination during the Iranian elections and offered important insight into the dynamics of information propagation that are special to Twitter [23]. Other studies have investigated event detection and summarisation during the Egyptian revolution as well as the different type of actors participating in the diffusion of news through Twitter. Mining and analysing Twitter data is not an easy task and research has revealed numerous challenges for researchers. The biggest challenge is the enormous amount of data flowing on Twitter every second requiring careful filtering in order to block unwanted tweets such as updates on someone's life or spam tweets. Additionally, an intrinsic problem of analysing on-line data is that they are not always related to real world occurrences. For example, Twitter specific memes such as #musicmonday(users tweet their music preferences) or #followfriday(someone suggesting to other users someone else to follow) produce a massive amount of tweets during a certain time interval but they do not correspond in real life events. Therefore, the motivation behind this project is firstly to overcome these difficulties and also contribute to the research community by providing robust and accurate tools for automatically describe and detect events from social media content.

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## 1.2 Objectives

In this section we present our main objectives for this project by breaking down the main problems into smaller sub-problems. We believe that this breakdown will help us develop a robust framework for solving the problem by identifying the individual difficulties of each sub-problem.

### 1.2.1 Event detection

The main objective of this project is to develop a framework for event detection. We have collected over 100,000 tweets related to the revolution and our aim is to sift through them and identify the main events that took place. Below we present the formal definition of this problem along with the necessary definitions.

A **real-world event** identifies something non-trivial happening at a certain time and at a certain place  $\tau$ . We describe a real-world event to be a set of attributes describing that event such as keywords, geographic location, time of occurrence and the social actors (Twitter users) involved in it. It is possible to have incomplete or no information at all for an event therefore our system should take into consideration these possibilities.

A **tweet** is defined as a tuple  $(a, c, H, d, F_T)$  where  $a$  is the screen name of the author,  $c$  is the textual content,  $H$  is the set of hashtags associated with the tweet,  $d$  is the timestamp and  $F_T$  is the feature vector. The feature vector contains a set of attributes associated with the tweet such as the number of times this tweet has been retweeted, whether or not this tweet is a @-reply, the set of URLs and/or named entities if any.

A **tweet stream** is defined as  $(t_1, t_2, t_3, \dots, t_N)$  where  $N$  is the number of tweets in the stream,  $t_i$  is a tweet and  $d_{t_i} < d_{t_{i+1}}$  (i.e.  $t_i$  has occurred prior to  $t_{i+1}$ ).

A **topic** is defined as  $\{t_i | t_i \in T \wedge |A| \geq U \wedge F_P \wedge \forall t_i, t_j. t_i \text{ is similar to } t_j \text{ with respect to this topic}\}$  where  $T$  is the tweet stream,  $A$  is the set of unique authors related to the topic and  $U$  is the minimum number of actors needed to be involved in the

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topic.  $F_P$  is a feature vector containing attributes of the topic such as time, geographical location and keywords. The similarity of a tweet with respect to a topic is based on the tweet feature vector  $F_T$  as well as the textual content of the tweet.

Given a tweet stream  $T$  our aim is to partition it into a set of distinct topics  $P = \{p_1, p_2, p_3, \dots, p_{N_p}\}$  where  $N_p$  is the number of detected topics. Then based on the feature vector  $F_p$  we can associate each of the topics with one or more events.

### 1.2.2 Event summarisation

When an event has been detected it would be interesting to be able to describe what happened by extracting a description in the form explained below. Therefore, we wanted to develop the framework for generating automatic summaries for an event. The formal definition of the event summarisation problem is given below.

Given a topic or topics associated with an event as described above, we aim to extract an **event label** which serves as a description for this event.

An event label is defined as a set of descriptors  $D = \{d_i | i \in \{1, 2, \dots, N\} \wedge |D| = X\}$  where  $N$  is the number of tweets associated with this event and a descriptor  $d_i$  is a tuple  $(c_i, d_i, H_i, s_i)$  where  $c_i$  is the content of tweet  $t_i$ ,  $d_i$  the timestamp of tweet  $t_i$ ,  $H_i$  is the set of hashtags associated with tweet  $t_i$  and  $s_i$  is the score of tweet  $t_i$  calculated by the summarization algorithm. Only the  $X$  highest scored tweets will appear in the event label.

The score is calculated based on several criteria such as quality, relevance and usefulness of a tweet. Quality refers to the textual quality of the tweet i.e. low quality tweets contain slang and short hand notation. Relevance is how well a tweet reflects information related to the associated event and usefulness is how well the tweet informs a human about the event.

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### 1.2.3 Actor classification

In order to further understand the structure of a detected event we wish to identify the different types of users that are involved in the information dissemination on Twitter. Varying from media organisations and activists to normal individuals, these people were the people who ignited, documented and sustained the revolution. We aim to develop a tool for automatic classification of the users into different categories.

An **actor** is defined as  $\{a, fr, fl, T, F\}$  where  $a$  is the actor's username,  $fr$  and  $fl$  are the sets of actor's followers and followees respectively,  $T$  is the set of tweets which belong to this actor and  $F$  is the feature vector. The feature vector contains the activity features of the actor such as the total number of tweets, the fraction of retweets among all the tweets from a user, the fraction of @-replies directed to other users and the fraction of tweets containing a URL.

An **actor label** is defined as  $l_a \in \{c_1, c_2, c_3, \dots, c_N\}$  where  $a$  is an actor,  $N$  is the number of existing classes and  $c_i$  is an actor type such as blogger, activist and media organisation. Given a training set of actors and their corresponding actor labels  $\{(a_1, l_{a_1}), (a_2, l_{a_2}), \dots, (a_N, l_{a_N})\}$  our aim is to find a mapping  $l_a = f(a)$  which can predict the associated actor label  $l_a$  for an actor  $a$ . The prediction will be based on the feature vector  $F$  and the other attributes associated with an actor such as the sets of followers and followees.

## 1.3 Contributions

In the process of developing the solutions for the problems described above we have come across several challenges as well as some opportunities. We have tried to tackle all the difficulties and also exploit the opportunities we were given. Our efforts have led to several contributions and the following list summarises the main contributions of this project:

- The solution of the event detection and summarisation problems led to the development of a data mining toolset which consists of several sub-

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components. These components vary from data acquisition tools to clustering algorithms and text processing tools. These individual components can act independently to solve smaller tasks but most importantly they can be combined to solve the problems posed by this project.

- In order to be able to develop our solution we have conducted an extensive literature survey about event detection, event summarisation and Twitter user classification. Our research was focused on these three areas in the context of social media and more specifically on Twitter content. The emergence of social networks has sparked the interest of the research community and numerous solutions have been proposed over the last few years. We have gathered the most prominent solutions in the literature and we have commented on their applicability and feasibility in our project.
- The core component of our solution for the event detection problem is text clustering. The challenging aspect of our work is that we had to deal with social media content which offers some advantages but at the same time it poses significant challenges. After implementing several clustering algorithms we have conducted a thorough evaluation study to assess their individual performance in several aspects that are unique to social media documents. Additionally, the event summarisation and user classification components have been evaluated as well and our results can be used as a guidance to future projects in this area.
- We have built a proof-of-concept web application which uses our algorithm to detect events and summarize them using Twitter data. The application provides a user friendly environment and data visualisations to allow the user to discover events in historic data.
- We have collected and analysed a large number of Twitter content related to the Arab Spring and we have used this dataset to conduct a case study on real data using our algorithm and web application.

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## 1.4 Report Structure

TODO: Complete this section when the rest of the report is done.

# Chapter 2

## Background research

In this chapter we present the state of the art for the individual problems of this project. We discuss the most prominent solutions and methodologies and we comment on their applicability in our work.

### 2.1 Event detection

#### 2.1.1 Traditional event detection vs social media event detection

Traditionally, event detection research has focused on detecting news events from continuous streams of news articles. The majority of the work done in this area does not account for any social effects but focuses only on the textual properties of a news article. Therefore, researchers have used natural language tools such as named entity extraction and part-of-speech tagging in order to perform event detection ?. However, in this project our problem exhibits several differences compared to traditional event detection since we aim to use data from Twitter.

Twitter and more generally social media documents exhibits several advantages in relation to the event detection task but at the same time pose significant challenges for the researchers. More specifically, a large number of social media documents are irrelevant to real world events as they usually describe updates on



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the user's life or information unconnected with an event. About 40% of all the tweets are pointless "babbles" ?. Additionally, social media documents contain little textual content which is usually restricted to a few characters (140 in the case of Twitter) which renders traditional event detection methods undesirable. On the other hand, social media documents provide us with new prospects since they often come with additional context information such as tags, locations and network structures.

### **2.1.2 State of the art event detection in social media streams**

One of the first research projects that tried to detect events in Twitter streams aimed to inform people about the occurrence of an earthquake ?. The explicit assumption in their research is that a large number of Twitter users are tweeting when an earthquake happens and therefore it is possible to detect its existence. They have developed an earthquake reporting system which monitors Twitter streams and reports the occurrence of an earthquake promptly. In order to detect tweets discussing earthquake occurrences they have used a support vector machine to detect real occurrences. In order to train their classifier they have prepared a set of training data consisting of positive tweets (tweets which mention an earthquake occurrence) and negative tweets. For each tweet they used different types of features to be used by the classifier:

- statistical features such as the number of words in a tweet message and the position of the query word within a tweet.
- keyword features such as the words in a tweet.
- word context features such as the words before and after the query word. By treating users as sensors they have built a socio-temporal model which can predict the occurrence of an earthquake and estimate the location using Kalman filtering.

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After evaluating their reporting system in Japan for a month, they reported that 96% of earthquakes larger than JMA seismic intensity scale 3 or more were successfully detected.

Researchers at University of Edinburgh [?] proposed a novel method for detecting news events in Twitter streams. The main objective in their work was the detection of a “first story” in a stream of tweets. The task of First Story Detection (FSD) was first coined in [?] and aims to identify the first story to discuss a particular event. The traditional method of First Story Detection (FSD) is to represent documents as vectors in term space. Then each document is compared to all the previous ones in the stream and a similarity value is produced. If this value is below a particular threshold it is declared to be a “first story”. However, the challenge they faced was that Twitter provides a vast amount of data in real-time which renders the traditional method inefficient. Therefore, in order to alleviate this problem they implemented a novel algorithm based on locality-sensitive hashing. Their method uses the cosine between two documents as the similarity metric and a hashing scheme proposed by Charikar [?]. This scheme limits the number of documents to be compared and increases the performance of the algorithm. They reported that the hashing scheme alone yields poor results with a lot of variance. In order to solve the problem they used a variance reduction strategy. They have tried their algorithm on Twitter data collected over a period of six months and they have showed that their system is able to detect major events with reasonable precision.

A different approach is proposed by Sayyadi et al. [?] in their paper “Event Detection and Tracking in Social Streams”. The main idea behind their proposed algorithm is that documents describing the same event will contain similar keywords, and the graph of keywords for a document collection will contain clusters which are effectively events. They extract keywords from the documents and they construct a graph whose nodes are the keywords and edges between the nodes are formed when those terms co-occur in a document. Their algorithm uses betweenness centrality to assign scores to the nodes and the nodes with high betweenness centrality score are removed. This way they manage to reduce the

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graph into several unconnected sub-graphs (communities). Then they consider each community of keywords as the key document/event with the keywords being a bag of words summary of the event. Documents in the original corpus which are similar to this key document can be clustered, thus retrieving a cluster of topical documents. Again in their methodology they used cosine similarity to discover document clusters for key documents. An important feature of their system is that they also took their approach one step further by proposing a sliding window approach for subsequent event detection in social media streams as it is considered impossible to apply the event detection algorithm to each new document arriving in the stream without performance degradation.

One of the best methodologies for event detection is proposed by Becker et al. ?. In this study they focus on on-line identification of real world event content. A common problem of event detection which arises in Twitter is the false identification of non-event content as event content. For example, specific conversation on topics or memes (e.g., using the hashtag #followfriday) which do not correspond to real world occurrences might be incorrectly identified as events. In order to deal with this problem they decided to introduce a two stage process where initially each event and its associated messages are grouped together with an online clustering algorithm. In the next stage they calculate several features associated with each cluster in order to train a classifier to distinguish between event and non-event clusters. The main advantage of this method is that the features used to classify the clusters exploit the Twitter-specific features thus making the process of event detection much more robust. They evaluated their system by collecting 2,600,000 tweets posted during February 2010. They have used a naive Bayesian classifier as the baseline method and they showed that their method outperformed the baseline.

## 2.2 Event summarization

The first attempt to summarize events on Twitter was attempted by Chakrabati et al. ?. Their research paper discusses the problem of extracting the tweets which summarize long-running events, such as football games and they propose

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a two-step solution. The first part uses a Hidden Markov Model in order to partition the event time-line in sub-events (e.g, tweets before a goal and tweets after the goal) based on the burstiness and the word distribution in tweets. The second stage selects the key tweets of each segment and eventually all key tweets are combined to give the summary. The system takes as its input an event, which is detected using one of the existing event detection algorithms and it outputs a few tweets that best describe the occurrences in that event. Their proposed algorithm is able to isolate at most one sub-event in each time segment, which can then be used by the summarizer to output summaries. They use a variant of the Hidden Markov Model which models each event as a sequence of states. The tweets are the observations generated by the states and the transition between states models the chain of sub-events. They propose two other methods for summarization which are based on simple TF/IDF scores and segmenting the event time-line in equally spaced time intervals. They compare their algorithms performance in comparison to these baseline techniques for tweets pertaining to football games and they showed that their algorithm was performing particularly well. However, the authors state that they have not tested their system for one-shot long-running events such as revolutions which can be a significant problem in our project.

Becker et al. [?] proposed a different methodology for selecting quality tweets from the set of tweets related to a specific event. The goal of their summarization process is to extract tweets which meet the criteria of quality, relevance and usefulness. The extracted tweets should be comprehensible by a human (i.e. they do not contain short-hand notation), they must reflect the information related to their associated event and they must be useful in describing the main occurrences event. In order to satisfy these criteria the authors propose several methods for extracting these tweets. The main idea behind their approaches is that the tweets which are closer to the centre of a cluster (event) are more likely to reflect the key aspects of the event than other tweets. Therefore, their approaches are based on the notion of centrality. The first method, the centroid similarity approach computes the cosine similarity of the TF-IDF representation of each message to its event cluster centroid. Then the tweets with the highest similarity score are

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selected. The second method involves message similarity across all messages in an event cluster. This approach, constructs a graph where a cluster message is a node in the graph, and there is an edge connecting a pair of nodes whose cosine similarity exceeds a threshold. This method selects the nodes with the highest degree centrality which is defined as the degree of each node, weighted by the number of nodes in the graph. Finally they use a state of the art method, namely LexRank which defines centrality based on the idea that central nodes are connected to other central nodes. They have evaluated their approaches alongside with some other baseline approaches such as selecting the newest tweets in the cluster and selecting tweets from popular users. The results revealed that the centroid method outperformed the others in all three selection criteria: quality, relevance and usefulness.

## 2.3 User classification

Twitter users have diverse backgrounds and they tweet for a variety of topics. There are many different types of users such as celebrities, bloggers, journalists, media, and organizations. Several studies have tried to identify different type of users on Twitter and explore their distinct characteristics. In this section we discuss various techniques which have been used to identify and classify users.

In a recent study of the Arab Spring, Lotan et al. [1] investigated how information was propagating during Egypt's uprising. In order to identify information flows they have collected a large amount of tweets during that period and identified the active users in the social network. They selected 963 users, from their dataset, who either were first to tweet, or were retweeted or mentioned at least 15 times. Then they manually classified these users in different categories:

- Mainstream media organizations (e.g., @AJEnglish, @nytimes).
- Mainstream new media organizations (e.g., @HuffingtonPost).
- Non-media organizations (e.g., @Vodafone, @Wikileaks).

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- Mainstream media employees (e.g., @AndersonCooper).
  - Bloggers (e.g., @gr33ndata).
  - Activists: (e.g., @Ghonim).
  - Digerati: (e.g., @TimOReilly).
  - Political actors: (e.g., @Diego\_Arria, @JeanMarcAyrault).
  - Celebrities (e.g., @Alyssa\_Milano).
  - Researchers: (e.g., @JRICole).
  - Bots: (e.g., @toptweets).
  - Other: users that do not fall under any of the other categories.

It is apparent that since we are interested in automatic classification their method is not well suited in our case. However, their work has revealed several challenges of the user classification problem in Twitter which we must overcome in our implementation. The main challenge was that a number of users were very difficult to classify due to the fact that these users could be classified in multiple classes. For example, some users are bloggers but they are also activists and this led to ambiguities during the classification process. Furthermore, a number of accounts were deleted or suspended during the data collection process which inevitably introduced missing nodes in the social network graph.

Leaders, lurkers, associates and spammers are some of the type of users active in Twitter and another research project aimed to automatically identify them ?. They designed two different methods for user classification: a context-dependent method and a context-independent method. They classified the users in four types: leaders, lurkers, spammers and close associates. Their research is based on several assumptions on these types of users. More specifically, they assume that spammers follow many users but they are followed by a few people and they

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make on average 1,000 tweets per day. On the other hand, leaders are identified by the high rate of tweeting and a large number of followers but almost no followees. Close associates have strong connectivity to their followers and low rate of tweeting. The final class, lurkers, follow many people, but they rarely post any tweets. When there is no contextual information about a user, such as their followers and @-replies they use the context-independent method which examines the tweeting pattern, otherwise they exploit these contextual information by employing the alternative context-dependent method. The context-dependent method employs a fuzzy logic approach in the first stage to estimate inter-actor relationship strengths and then they remove the links with strong relationships because they naturally represent close associates. Then, in the second stage, they use a linear classifier, using the number of tweets and the followee-follower ratio as two features. The context-independent method uses traditional classifiers and generic actor tweet patterns. They collected the tweets of particular types of tweeters over a period of ten days and then they used these to train three classifiers: naive Bayesian, multi-layer perceptron (MLP) and a random forest (RF) classifier. In their evaluation the MLP classifier has been found to outperform the naive Bayesian and Random Forest classifiers on the more challenging problem of classifying actors with limited data. Their research gives strong indications that user classification with Twitter data is possible with high performance.

A similar approach was taken by Choudhury et al. [?] in their research which aimed to automatically classify Twitter users in three categories: organizations, journalists and ordinary individuals. Their work offers two significant advantages compared to other methods in the literature. They used Twitter specific features to classify the users which make their system much more robust. They use standard features from previous studies such as network features (followers and followees) and activity features such as the number of tweets for a user. However, they added some additional ones including interaction features (number of retweets, @-replies and tweets containing URLs) and named entities features which capture the presence/absence of named entities in the tweets of a user. Finally, another important feature used in the classifier is the topic distribution which associates the user to a set of 18 broad themes from the IPTC Media Topic

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News Codes. They have used 8 different classifiers in order to evaluate their design and the results indicated that the best performing classifier was a  $k$  Nearest Neighbors classifier with  $k = 10$ . Another important contribution of their work is that they investigated the participation of different categories of users in different events. They have showed that different events gather different degrees of participation (number of users from each category) and attention (proportion of posts from each category).



## Chapter 3

# A data mining framework for automatic event detection and summarisation

In this chapter, we will define a theoretical framework for construction of a data mining system which can extract events from Twitter data. The system comprises of a number of individual components which when combined together construct a complete framework for event extraction. These components are explained in detail in the sections below and in Chapter ?? we discuss the concrete implementation of this framework as well as the development of a proof-of-concept application using this framework.

The sections of this chapter introduce the motivating work for the implementation of the system and we also take a closer look at the concepts and key ideas that are necessary to understand the process we employ.

### 3.1 Methodology overview

The main idea behind our methodology for event detection is the hypothesis that similar events will be described by tweets having similar content. Therefore, the main task in our methodology is to cluster the tweets in different groups. We further hypothesise that not all of the detected clusters will describe real events,

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since clustering will detect topics such as discussions about celebrities or politicians which cannot be thought as events according to our definition of an event. Having identified some events we can then further investigate these clusters extract useful information from them which will serve as the event summary. The theoretical foundations of this procedure and its sub-components are described in detail in the rest of this chapter.

## 3.2 Raw data processing

Mining and analysing text corpora are two well studied problems but in our case we face a slightly different problem. Social media content and especially tweets are very short (140 characters) and usually contain slang phrases, abbreviations and irrelevant information. Therefore, it is of foremost importance to ensure that clever data preprocessing takes place in order to help us in the subsequent tasks.

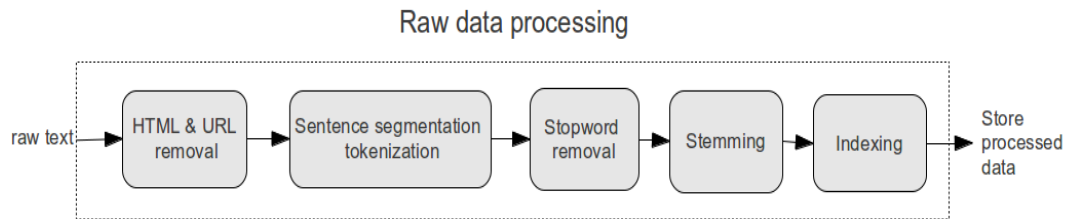


Figure 3.1: The raw data processing module - All the steps necessary to convert raw documents to a format suitable for storage in a database.

### 3.2.1 Natural language processing

Natural language processing (NLP) is a field of computer science and linguistics which is concerned with the extraction of information from a human language input. NLP is used extensively throughout this project since we deal with human generated content and we use several of its applications. NLP in the context of raw data processing is used to clean and normalise our initial input which is a tweet containing raw text.

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Since tweets usually contain URLs and HTML code one of the first priorities is to remove these elements. Then, the following NLP algorithms can be used on our data:

- **Sentence segmentation and tokenization:** Raw text is split into sentences and then each sentence is further subdivided into words using a tokenizer.
- **Stopword removal:** Some of the words occurring in the documents are common English words such as 'the', 'and' and 'a'. These words convey almost no information but most importantly, they can reduce the clustering accuracy. Two documents can be erroneously considered related if they contain common English words like the ones we have already mentioned. Therefore, it is important to remove these stopwords. Usually, a dictionary of the common English stopwords is used to filter them out.
- **Stemming:** This is a mechanism for reducing English words to their stem form. For example, the stem form of the words 'connections' and 'connected' is 'connect'. This mechanism is particularly useful in the field of information retrieval and indexing. M.F Porter designed the most widely used stemming algorithm in 1980 [Insert ref here]. This algorithm works by applying a set of different rules, which after a number of iteration yield the final result which is the stem of the word. Porter has developed 62 rules which may or may not apply to a given word.

In section ?? we explore more applications of NLP and how we can use them to extract automatic summaries, named entities or sentiment from documents.

### 3.2.2 Inverted index

An inverted index, also known as an inverted file, is a data structure central to text-based information retrieval. The name is derived from its purpose and design which is to map key-value pairs, where a key is a term in a document and the value is the list of documents that contain this term. For example if we have

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two documents:

*Document1*: The cat is on the tree.

*Document2*: The cat sat on the mat.

then the inverted index will look like:

Key	Value
the	{Document1, Document2}
cat	{Document1, Document2}
is	{Document1}
on	{Document1, Document2}
tree	{Document1}
sat	{Document2}
mat	{Document2}

The main reason for using an index is to increase the speed and efficiency of searches of the document collection. In our system the inverted index is vital component since it allows us to construct term-document vectors easily and also filter terms and documents. For example, using our index we can find the words that appear either too often or less frequently and filter them out. This is used to reduce the dimensionality of our dataset by removing unnecessary words. Alternatively, we can remove documents/tweets which contain keywords that appear too often or less frequently.

### 3.3 Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis is the process of grouping a set of data objects into multiple clusters where all the objects in a cluster have high similarity but they are very dissimilar to objects in other clusters. The set of clusters resulting from a cluster analysis can be referred to as a clustering. Clustering is an unsupervised learning method since deals with finding a structure in a collection of unlabeled data. Figure 3.3 depicts a simple clustering example where a clustering algorithm is applied on an unlabeled dataset and four different clusters are detected.

Cluster analysis is applied in a wide range of applications such as business intelligence, image pattern recognition, biology and security. In our project we

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are interested in cluster analysis and its application in document clustering. We would like to cluster tweets which are similar in terms of both textual content and describe the same topic.

In the rest of this section we describe the key ideas behind document clustering and we explain the main clustering algorithms that will be used in our implementation.

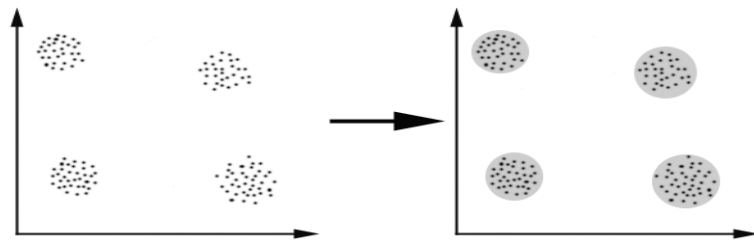


Figure 3.2: The result of applying a clustering algorithm to unlabeled data. Four distinct clusters have been detected.

### 3.3.1 Vector space representation

Document need to be preprocessed in order to be in a form that will allow us to perform clustering. The most common approach is to use the vector space representation model. The vector space representation transforms the documents into vectors of term frequencies which can then be used as a means to assess the similarity between documents.

We can represent each document in a dataset by a vector of identifiers. Usually, these identifiers are the distinct words in the document and the resulting vector is called term-frequency vector. If we combine all the vectors for the documents in our dataset we will end up with an  $m \times n$  matrix  $\mathbf{A}$ . Each of the  $m$  documents in the document collection are assigned a row in the matrix, while each of the  $n$  unique terms in each document are assigned a column in the matrix. A non-zero element  $a_{ij}$  in  $\mathbf{A}$ , indicates not only that term  $j$  occurs in document  $i$ , but also the number of times the term appears in that document. Since the number of terms in a given document is typically far less than the number of terms in the

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Document	team	ball	football	countries	world	england
<i>Document1</i>	3	0	5	1	3	1
<i>Document2</i>	2	1	2	0	8	2
<i>Document3</i>	1	5	3	0	1	3
<i>Document4</i>	5	0	1	2	5	4

---

Table 3.1: Term-frequency vector representation of documents

entire document collection,  $A$  is usually very sparse.

For example in Table 3.1 we see that *Document1* contains three instances of the word team, while football occurs five times. We can also infer that the words ball and world are missing for the entire document, as indicated by the value of zero at those entries of the matrix.

The main advantage of transforming the documents in the vector space is that we can define vector-space similarities between documents and therefore we can apply clustering algorithms on the document collection. In section we provide a more detailed discussion on similarity metrics and the vector space representation is used in clustering documents.

### 3.3.2 Assigning weights to terms with TF-IDF weighting

Once a document is transformed in its term-frequency vector we can assign weights to each term in the vector. So far the term-frequency vectors treat all the terms as equal but this may not be the case. For example, a word that appears more frequently than others in a document could be considered as an important word. At the same time words that appear frequently in the corpus, such as 'a', 'the', 'and', are not very useful and their importance must be discounted.

The most common method to solve this problem is the TF-IDF weight (TF-IDF stands for term frequency-inverse document frequency) which quantifies the importance of a term in a document of a document collection. More specifically, the more a word occurs in a document, and the less it occurs in the rest of the corpus, the higher its TF-IDF weighting will be. Mathematically, TF-IDF is expressed as:

$$tf - idf_{t,d} = tf_{t,d} \times idf_t \quad (3.1)$$

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where  $tf_{t,d}$  is the importance of term  $t$  in document  $d$  and  $idf_t$  is the importance of term  $t$  relative to the entire corpus.  $tf_{t,d}$  is higher when the term occurs many times in the document and  $idf_t$  is higher when it occurs rarely in the dataset. Therefore, the TF-IDF weighting for a term is very high if the term occurs frequently in a single document but very rarely in the entire corpus and it is low when the term either occurs rarely in a document or frequently in the entire corpus. TF-IDF is widely used to compare the similarity between documents and a common use case is for search queries where the similarity of a query  $q$  with a document  $d$  is calculated using TF-IDF, providing a sorted list of the most relevant documents.

### 3.3.3 Feature selection

TODO: Discuss feature selection methods used in our system.

### 3.3.4 Distance measures

In data mining applications including clustering we must decide whether two objects are similar or dissimilar. In document clustering we wish to assess how similar are two documents in comparison to one another. Based on the similarity between two objects we can make the decision whether to group them in the same cluster or not. In this section we present three commonly used similarity measures which will be used throughout our work.

#### 3.3.4.1 Euclidean distance

Euclidean distance is probably the most popular distance measure and can be thought as the straight line connecting the two data points that we try to compare. Let the two data points be  $i = (x_{i,1}, x_{i,2}, \dots, x_{i,p})$  and  $j = (x_{j,1}, x_{j,2}, \dots, x_{j,p})$  where  $p$  is the number of the numeric attributes. The Euclidean distance between  $i$  and  $j$  can then be defined as:

$$d(i, j) = \sqrt{(x_{i,1} - x_{j,1})^2 + (x_{i,2} - x_{j,2})^2 + \dots + (x_{i,p} - x_{j,p})^2} \quad (3.2)$$

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Euclidean distance is the default distance measure used with the k-Means algorithm.

#### 3.3.4.2 Cosine similarity

The similarity of two documents which are represented as term vectors, corresponds to the correlation between the vectors. This is calculated as the cosine of the angle between vectors, the so-called cosine similarity. Cosine similarity is widely used for text documents and especially in clustering documents. Let  $x$  and  $y$  be two vectors for comparison. Cosine similarity is defined as:

$$sim(x, y) = \frac{x \cdot y}{||x|| ||y||} \quad (3.3)$$

where  $||a||$  is the Euclidean norm of vector  $a$ . This measure computes the cosine of the angle between the vectors  $x$  and  $y$  with a cosine value of 0 meaning that the two vectors are at 90 degrees to each other and therefore are not a match. If the cosine value is 1 then the two vectors are identical and they are a perfect match.

#### 3.3.4.3 Jaccard coefficient

The Jaccard coefficient measures similarity as the intersection divided by the union of the objects. For text document, the Jaccard coefficient compares the sum weight of shared terms to the sum weight of terms that are present in either of the two document but are not the shared terms.

$$sim(i, j) = \frac{q}{q + r + s} \quad (3.4)$$

where  $q$  is the number of variables that are positive for both objects,  $r$  is the number of variables that positive for  $i$  and negative for  $j$  and  $s$  is the number of variables that are positive for the  $j$  and negative for  $i$ .



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### 3.3.5 Clustering methods

There are many clustering algorithms and usually they belong to one of the following categories, as they are described in [put reference to the book]:

- **Partitioning methods:** Partitioning methods operate on a number of data points and form partitions of the data where each partition is a cluster. Usually, these methods have the restriction that each object must belong to a single cluster. They are only effective for a small to medium datasets.
- **Hierarchical methods:** A hierarchical method creates a hierarchical decomposition of the given set of data objects. These methods can be further subdivided in agglomerative and divisive, based on how the decomposition is formed. Hierarchical methods suffer from the fact that erroneous merges or split cannot be undone.
- **Density-based methods:** These methods, unlike most other techniques, can find clusters of arbitrary shapes. They can do so by employing the notion of density. The main idea is to keep growing a cluster as long as the density of a 'neighborhood' exceeds some threshold. Therefore, clusters are dense regions of data points that are separated by low-density regions.
- **Grid-based methods:** Grid-based methods quantize the space into a number of cells which form a grid structure. All the clustering operations are performed on the grid structure. Since the processing time is only dependent on the number of cells and not the number of data points these methods have fast processing time.

Below we outline the basic clustering methods that will be used in our system and we look into their key ideas that will guide our implementation.

#### 3.3.5.1 k-Means algorithm

k-Means algorithm belongs to the partitioning methods category. A partitioning method distributes the objects in  $D$  into  $k$  clusters,  $C_1, \dots, C_k$ , such that  $C_i \subset D$

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and  $C_i \cap C_j = \emptyset$  for  $(1 \leq i, j \leq k)$ . k-Means is a centroid-based technique which means that a cluster,  $C_i$ , is represented by a centroid which can be the mean of all the points in the cluster. Practically, this representation is the centre point of the cluster.

More specifically, the k-Means algorithm starts by randomly selecting  $k$  of the object in  $D$ , and each one represents a cluster centre. Then for each of the remaining objects in  $D$ , the algorithm calculates the distance between each of the  $k$  cluster centres. The closest cluster is selected and that point is assigned to this cluster. The mean of each cluster is re-calculated after a new point has been assigned to it. At this point the k-Means algorithm iteratively tries to improve the within cluster variation (improving an objective function) by reassigning all the objects according to the new cluster centres. The algorithm continues until it converges to the point where the clusters formed in the previous iteration are the same to the clusters formed in this iteration. Figure 3.4 (TODO:Put image ref) depicts a simple example of the k-Means algorithm with two clusters. In the first image, the two centroids, which are depicted as dark circles are initialised to a random position in the space. In the second image each of the data points is assigned to the nearest centroid and in this case A and B are assigned to the top centroid and C, D, and E are assigned to the bottom centroid. In the third image, each centroid's average is re-calculated and moved to its new position. When the assignments are calculated again, it turns out that C is now closer to the top centroid, while D and E remain closest to the bottom one. Thus, the final result is that A, B, and C belong in one cluster, and D and E in the other.

The algorithm is not guaranteed to converge to a global optimum and the results depend on the initial allocations of the  $k$  centres. The time complexity is  $O(nkt)$  where  $n$  is the total number of objects,  $k$  is the number of clusters and  $t$  is the number of iterations. Therefore, the k-Means algorithm is relatively scalable.

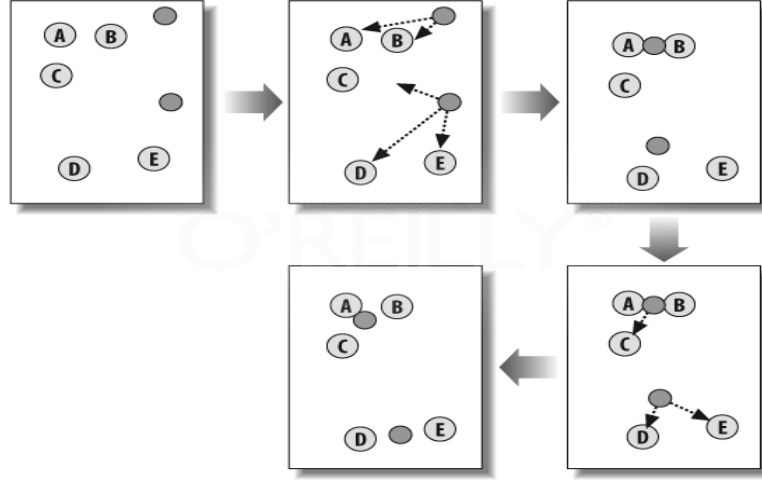


Figure 3.3: k-Means clustering with two clusters

### 3.3.5.2 DBSCAN algorithm

k-Means algorithm and hierarchical clustering algorithms are very good at clustering spherical-shaped clusters. However, they are not able to detect clusters of arbitrary shape such as the one below.

In order to alleviate the problem one have to look into density-based clustering algorithms. These algorithms model clusters as dense regions in the data space. One of the most popular algorithms of this kind is the Density-Based Clustering Based on Connected Regions with High Density (DBSCAN).

DBSCAN defines density of an object  $o$  as the number of objects close to  $o$ . DBSCAN finds core objects which are objects with dense neighborhoods. Then it connects those core objects and their neighborhoods to form clusters. In order to assess density, DBSCAN uses a constant  $\epsilon > 0$  which defines the radius of the neighborhood of an object  $o$  and then finds the number of objects in the neighborhood. If the number is above a threshold  $MinPts$  then the neighborhood is considered dense. Given a set,  $D$ , of objects, we can identify the core objects using  $\epsilon$  and  $MinPts$ . The problem of clustering then reduces to the task of finding dense regions using the core objects and their neighborhoods.

The complexity of the algorithm in our implementation is  $O(n^2)$  but it can be

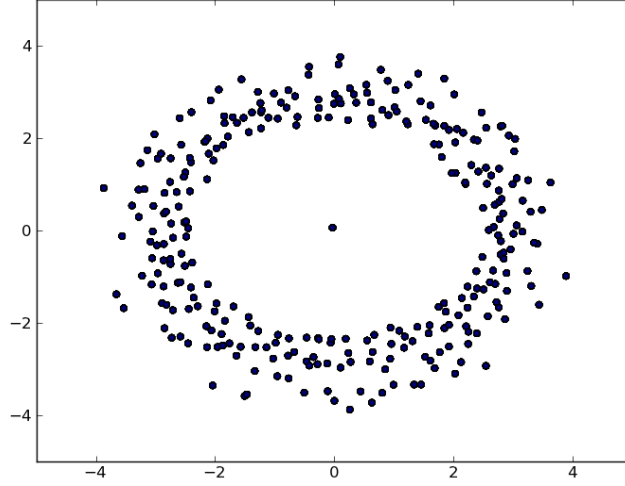


Figure 3.4: The DBSCAN algorithm belongs to the density-based methods which can find clusters of arbitrary shapes (not only spherical).

reduced to  $O(n \log n)$  if a spatial index is used. This means that this algorithm doesn't allow us to scale it up to large volume of data. The main disadvantage of the DBSCAN algorithm is that the user has to pass the  $\epsilon$  and the *MinPts* parameters which usually is a difficult task and some datasets are very sensitive to variations of these parameters.

### 3.3.5.3 Non-negative matrix factorisation algorithm

Non-negative matrix factorization (NMF) is not a clustering algorithm per se but it can be shown that it is equivalent to a relaxed form of k-Means algorithm. This algorithm takes as input the term-document matrix, constructed during clustering pre-processing and decomposes it into two other matrices. The first one is a feature-term matrix (or features matrix) and the other a document-feature matrix (or weight matrix). In the latent semantic space derived by the NMF, each axis captures the base topic of a particular document cluster, and each document is represented as an additive combination of the base topics. The cluster membership of each document can be easily determined by finding the base topic (the

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axis) with which the document has the largest projection value. The only constraint of the algorithm is that the two derived matrices should be non-negative.

In the context of document clustering we use matrix factorisation to reduce a large set of documents to a smaller set that captures their common topics (features) [put ref to the book Collective Intelligence ]. We start with a term-frequency matrix and we wish to factorise this matrix to get the two matrices we mentioned above. The features matrix has a row for each feature and a column for each term (word). An example of such a matrix is shown below. The values indicate how important a word is to a feature. Each feature represents a topic that is implied from a set of documents.

$$\begin{matrix} & \textit{football} & \textit{ball} & \textit{england} & \textit{newspaper} \\ \textit{feature1} & \left( \begin{array}{cccc} 1 & 0 & 3 & 2 \end{array} \right. \\ \textit{feature2} & \left( \begin{array}{cccc} 0 & 1 & 3 & 1 \end{array} \right. \\ \textit{feature3} & \left( \begin{array}{cccc} 0 & 2 & 2 & 1 \end{array} \right) \end{matrix}$$

The weights matrix maps the features to the documents. It has a row for each document and a column for each feature. The values indicate how much each feature matches to each document. An example of the weights matrix is shown below.

$$\begin{matrix} & \textit{feature1} & \textit{feature2} & \textit{feature3} \\ \textit{Document1} & \left( \begin{array}{ccc} 1 & 5 & 3 \end{array} \right. \\ \textit{Document2} & \left( \begin{array}{ccc} 3 & 1 & 1 \end{array} \right. \\ \textit{Document3} & \left( \begin{array}{ccc} 0 & 2 & 3 \end{array} \right) \end{matrix}$$

The original matrix can be reconstructed by multiplying the weights matrix by the features matrix, although the resulting matrix would not be an exact reconstruction of the original one but an approximation.

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#### 3.3.5.4 Online clustering algorithm

All the algorithms described above operate on the whole dataset,  $D$ , and sometimes this is not desirable or not even necessary. Especially if the dataset is too large and we are concerned about performance and scalability. Therefore, a family of algorithms have been studied in order to modify common algorithms for scalability. These algorithms are called sequential or online clustering algorithms. By online in this context we mean an algorithm that does not keep all the data objects in memory at the same time, but processes them sequentially, keeping only a subset of them.

Suppose we are given a sequence of  $N$  tweets  $T = t_1, \dots, t_N$  where each  $t_i$  is a vector of  $a$  attribute values, and we want to split them into  $K$  clusters. Each cluster is described by a prototype vector  $p_i = p_1, \dots, p_f$  where  $i = 1, \dots, K$ . Given that the task of finding good clusters is to minimize an objective distance function  $J$  the algorithm works as follows:

1. Pick the next example in the sequence  $T$
2. Compute the distances from this example to all the cluster prototypes and pick the minimum one.
3. Update the prototype vector in order to come closer to the current example
4. Goto step 1

The implementation of our online algorithm is based on the work proposed in the paper "Improving the Robustness of Online Agglomerative Clustering Method Based on Kernel-Induce Distance Measures" by Zhang et al. They have used kernel-functions for distance measures and post-processing filtering is performed to remove noise from data. Extending their work, in our implementation we have tried to increase its scalability by allowing only a sliding window of  $n$  tweets to be in memory each time when the term-document vectors are calculated.

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## 3.4 Automatic text summaries

Another integral component of our framework is the module responsible for generating automatic summaries of the events. In Chapter ?? we described the problem of event summarisation as the task that will extract the top tweets for an event that are most helpful for a human to understand the event. The term 'helpful' is vague and therefore we have defined three criteria, described in [TODO: put ref for the paper Selecting Quality Twitter Content for Events ] that will evaluate qualitatively our summaries and guide our implementation choices. The three criteria are:

- **Quality:** It refers to the textual quality of the messages, which reflects how well they can be understood by a human.
- **Relevance:** It refers to how well a Twitter message reflects information related to its associated event.
- **Usefulness:** It refers to the potential value of a document for someone who is interested in learning more about an event.

### 3.4.1 Generating automatic document cluster summaries

In general, in automatic text summarisation we are interested in generating a shortened version of a large corpus or document but maintaining the integrity and meaning of the original text. There are two variations of the automatic text summarisation: the extractive summarisation method which produces summaries by choosing a subset of the sentences in the original document or documents and abstractive summarisation, where the information in the text is rephrased.

In our case the task is to reduce a large set of tweets in a smaller subset by ranking the individual tweets in a subset and selecting the top ranking ones. In our project we consider two methods extractive summarisation methods, the centroid-based summarisation and the LexRank algorithm.

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#### **3.4.1.1 Centroid-based summarisation**

The centroid similarity approach computes the similarity of each message to its associated event cluster centroid. The cluster centroid is calculated by averaging the weight across all the document TF-IDF weighed term-frequency vectors in a specific event. The method then selects the documents with the highest similarity value. The implicit assumption is that a clusters centroid emphasises important terms which are relevant to the event. For example a cluster describing the topic of some protesters giving flowers to policemen in Cairo would give higher weight to the terms "protesters", "flowers" and "policemen". Therefore documents with high similarity to these key terms are more likely to reveal key aspects of the event which is highly desired by the relevance and usefulness goals. Additionally, the quality criterion is satisfied since the centroid weights are based on frequency across all messages, and therefore they contain no typos or spelling mistakes (which can greatly affect the quality of a document).

#### **3.4.2 LexRank algorithm**

[TODO explain LexRank]

#### **3.4.3 Detecting named entities and locations in documents**

The summaries produced by the algorithms described above are a good representation of the event and can help a human to understand the event. However, sometimes some additional information is needed to comprehend an event. In Chapter ?? we described an event as a collection of attributes such as keywords, geographic location and entities involved. Therefore, we wish to be able to automatically extract these attributes for an event and included them in the summary of an event. The keywords describing the event are simply the words having the highest weight in an event cluster and can be extracted very easily. For the named entities and locations we have to use a technique called named entity extraction which is part of the NLP algorithms. The method takes as input a piece of text and locates and classifies atomic elements in text into different categories such as the names of persons, organisations and locations.



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## 3.5 Twitter user classification

Different types of users interact and disseminate information daily on Twitter. Depending on the type of user we expect the content of a tweet to vary and consequently the quality of a tweet will vary too. For example renowned journalists are more likely to produce high quality tweets which easily be trusted as a reliable source of information. On the other hand tweets generated by a tweet bot might be considered unreliable since bots are known to release rumors. Therefore, it is crucial to be able to distinguish different types of users in order to ensure that we will extract high quality events that provide useful information and not just rumors. Additionally, it is interesting in its own right to investigate what is the distribution of the users tweeting for an event. For example, we would like to find out whether activists can start and sustain an event discussion online or whether celebrities or political figures can spark the interest of other Twitter users. In order to do that we need to find a way to classify users.

Classification is the process of finding a model that describes and classifies data classes. The model is derived based on a set of training data (data objects which their class labels are known). Then the derived model is used to predict the class of an unknown instance which is presented to the learning system.

### 3.5.1 Decision trees

Decision Tree learning is a method for approximating discrete classification functions using a tree-based representation. We can make use of this method to inductively infer [put ref here] unknown relations within our dataset. A nice property of the decision trees is that they can also be represented as a set of if-then rules, therefore the task of interpreting them is an easy task for a human. A learned decision tree is able to classify a new instance by sorting it down the tree to the appropriate leaf node, then returning the classification associated with this leaf. Every node in the tree tests some attribute value of each new instance, and the branches of each node represent a possible value for that attribute.

Figure 3.6 illustrates a simple decision tree, which classifies a day's weather condi-

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tions according to whether they are suitable for playing tennis [put ref to mitchell's book]. If the decision tree is presented with an example of a day when the outlook is sunny, the temperature is hot, the humidity is high and the wind is strong then this example would be sorted down the leftmost branch and therefore would be classified as negative, i.e, this day is not suitable for playing tennis. Alternatively, the tree could be represented as if-then rules:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &(\text{Outlook} = \text{Sunny} \wedge \text{Humidity} = \text{Normal}) \\
 &\vee (\text{Outlook} = \text{Overcast}) \\
 &\vee (\text{Outlook} = \text{Rain} \wedge \text{Wind} = \text{Weak})
 \end{aligned}$$

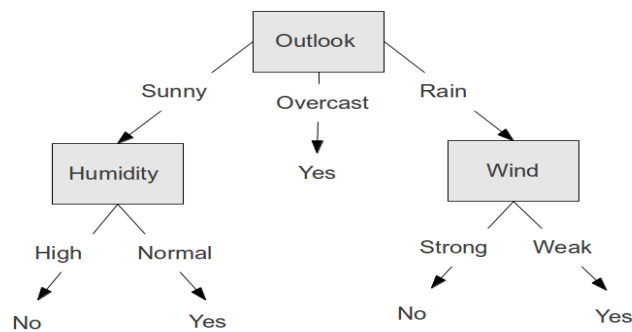


Figure 3.5: A simple decision tree.

### 3.5.2 Neural networks

[TODO explain Neural Nets]

## 3.6 Summary

Show a simple diagram with a lot of tweets becoming vectors and then those becoming clusters and then some of them events. This is the output of the algorithm.

# Chapter 4

## Design and implementation

The aim of this chapter is to give a thorough description of our concrete implementation of the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 3. We list and provide an explanation of the individual components and also explain our reasoning for certain design choices. In section 4.9 we present a proof-of-concept web application that we have developed in order to demonstrate how the different components can be integrated together to form a platform for event detection.

### 4.1 System Overview

Figure 4.1 shows an overview of the system architecture. Initially, historical tweets from a service provider (Twitter API or another provider) should be retrieved and stored in an appropriate format in the database. Subsequently, the system receives a stream of tweets from the database and process and transforms them in a format that is appropriate for clustering. The next step in the pipeline is the actual clustering of the tweets in order to detect groups of tweets discussing the same topic. Then, the extracted clusters are processed in order to identify the events and generate their summaries. Finally, a visual representation of the results should be generated in order to aid understanding of the events.



Figure 4.1: System overview - The event extraction system comprises of several independent components.

## 4.2 Tools

Broef description of the main tools used (Python, NLTK, Orange etc)

- 
- 4.3 Data Retrieval and Preprocessing
  - 4.4 Clustering
  - 4.5 Identifying events
  - 4.6 Generating automatic summaries
  - 4.7 Classifying users
  - 4.8 Optimisations
  - 4.9 Developing a proof-of-concept web application
  - 4.10 Summary

# Chapter 5

## Evaluation

### 5.1 Document clustering evaluation

#### 5.1.1 Background

Explain the metrics and the method used.

#### 5.1.2 Results and discussion

Present and discuss the results

### 5.2 Cluster labelling (summarization) evaluation

#### 5.2.1 Background

Explain the metrics and the method used.

#### 5.2.2 Results and discussion

Present and discuss the results

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## **5.3 Twitter user classification evaluation**

### **5.3.1 Background**

Explain the metrics and the method used.

### **5.3.2 Results and discussion**

Present and discuss the results

## **5.4 Summary**

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions

Here I put my conclusions ...



# Appdx A

and here I put a bit of postamble ...

# Appdx B

and here I put some more postamble ...

## References