## University of Sheffield

# Identifying complaints in social media using deep learning with transformers



Nitin Sunny Mathew

Supervisor: Nikolaos Aletras

A report submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MSc in Data Analytics

in the

Department of Computer Science

September 13, 2023

### **Declaration**

All sentences or passages quoted in this report from other people's work have been specifically acknowledged by clear cross-referencing to author, work and page(s). Any illustrations that are not the work of the author of this report have been used with the explicit permission of the originator and are specifically acknowledged. I understand that failure to do this amounts to plagiarism and will be considered grounds for failure in this project and the degree examination as a whole.

Name: Nitin Sunny Mathew

Signature: Nitin Sunny Mathew

Date: 13-Sep-2023

#### Abstract

A complaint is a statement made by a person or an entity with the intent to indicate something is unacceptable or unsatisfactory. This is commonly used in various aspects of day-to-day life including when conducting business operations. With the proliferation of social media across our lives and the active enablement of such platforms by organisations for user engagement, it has become a common medium for users to raise complaints. With such complaints being publicly visible, it is imperative for organisations to identify, prioritise and respond to these complaints swiftly. Automatically identifying complaints in social media is an active area of research. In the past few years, the focus has been on using NLP approaches driven by developments in transfer learning and transformer-based models.

In this paper, the use of these approaches are extended by assessing 'lightweight' transformer based models such as DistillBERT, MobileBERT, BERT tiny/small which are meant to reduce the time required for fine-tuning as well as inference. The performance of these 'lightweight' models is compared with the traditional transformer models including BERT, ROBERTA, BERTweet for this particular task. The dataset used consists of anonymised and annotated(complaint or not) Twitter data utilized in previous research and currently available in the public domain. In addition, the act of complaining and the nature of complaints are analysed from a linguistic perspective along with discussions on state-of-the-art approaches for such NLP tasks.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Update with high level results\*\*

# Contents

1	Intr	roduction	1			
	1.1	Background	1			
	1.2	Aims and Objectives	2			
<b>2</b>	Literature Survey					
	2.1	The act of complaining	3			
	2.2	Complaining online	4			
	2.3	Complaining in social media	4			
	2.4	Self-expression on Twitter	4			
	2.5	Transformers	5			
	2.6	Ongoing research	5			
3	Met	thodology	6			
	3.1	Data and pre-processing	6			
	3.2	Models and Libraries	7			
	3.3	Nested cross validation	7			
	3.4	Domain splits with nested cross validation	8			
	3.5	Ethical, Professional and Legal Issues	8			
4	Results and discussion					
	4.1	Risk Analysis	9			
	4.2	Project Plan	9			
	4.3	Another Section if You Need It	10			
5	6 Conclusions					
$\mathbf{A}_{]}$	ppen	adices	14			
$\mathbf{A}$	An	Appendix of Some Kind	15			
В	B. Another Appendix					

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

3.1	The nine domains and the distribution of tweets that are complaints and those	
	that are not. The percentages indicate how the splits are distributed	-
3.2	Selection of tweets based on random sampling and where they have received	
	replies when addressed to the 93 customer service handles combined with	
	random sampled tweets that are addressed to other handles and tweets that	
	are not addressed to any handle	7

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In the act of complaining, dissatisfaction or annoyance is expressed by a person or entity in response to a previous or ongoing event that has negatively impacted them [8]. It provides an avenue to direct dissatisfaction to the appropriate organisation or individual with the hope of rectification or redressal. The event or action could be concerning a product or service procured by the concerned person or entity. The need to recognise, acknowledge and act on complaints is of significant importance to businesses and organisations to retain their customers while maintaining their reputations.

Until the advent of online platforms and specifically social media, the impact of negative word-of-mouth was confined to a relatively limited audience. However, since then complaints posted online have the potential to rapidly go viral, reaching millions of individuals and significantly damaging a company's brand reputation and goodwill in a short period [12]. Customers are able to express their complaints directly, conveniently, and with enhanced effectiveness to organisations through multiple social media channels and platforms [1].

In addition to the timely addressing of customer complaints, automated detection of complaints in natural language has a number of other purposes. Linguists could gain a more detailed understanding of the context, intent, and various types of complaints on a larger scale while psychologists could utilise this information to identify the underlying human traits that drive the behaviour and expression of complaints. Developing downstream natural language processing (NLP) applications, such as dialogue systems is another use case of this task [9].

Attempting to identify complaints manually through the multitude of posts and streams coming through the various social media channels is neither practical nor scalable. Various approaches to automate this task have been explored. The traditional vector-space method utilizing dictionaries has been applied in other text classification tasks [7]. Latent Semantic Indexing based on Singular Value Decomposition along with linguistic style features has

been utilised to classify emails as complaints or not [4]. In recent years, we have seen the use of various Machine learning and Natural Language Processing (NLP) based approaches for similar classification problems. The performance of logistic regression over various types of feature spaces against neural-network based models like Multi-layer Perceptron (MLP) and Long Short Term Memory (LSTM) has been analysed by [9] on Twitter feeds. The use of more advanced approaches using transformer networks has shown to have better results as explored by [5]. As part of this paper, the use of the BERT and its many variants, including that of lightweight versions that have been created in the recent past will be assessed further on a publicly available Twitter dataset.

### 1.2 Aims and Objectives

\*\*TO UPDATE\*\*

# Literature Survey

### 2.1 The act of complaining

As per [8], the speech act of complaining in the traditional sense can be understood from the perspective of the speaker stating their displeasure or dissatisfaction to a target entity or individual. This is done as a reaction to an unfavourable event that is currently taking place or has already occurred. The authors believe a few preconditions have to be satisfied to result in a complaint being made. This includes the speaker's belief the entity or individual is responsible for the unfavourable outcome and that the speaker in question suffers from the consequences. The result is a verbally expressed complaint. The authors further delve into the intentions of the speaker in making the complaint. They argue this is carried out with either the hope of repair of the situation or as a 'Face Threatening Act' with the purpose being to damage the face of the individual or entity against whom the complaint is made.

While such complaints could be considered direct complaints as per [3], they additionally highlight the use of indirect complaining in speech. In the case of indirect complaints, the speaker does not attribute responsibility for the cause of the complaint to the individual or entity being addressed. The authors theorise, an indirect complaint is used to bring about 'solidarity' between speakers, which is contrary to the use of direct complaints. It can serve as a means to initiate conversations and establish temporary connections with others. The scope of the data for this project (described in the subsequent chapter) is primarily focused on direct complaints as they are selected based on tweets being addressed to a brand's customer service handle. But it is possible there are tweets which fall into the category of indirect complaints.

Analysing deeper into which types of customers complain more, [11] have looked at how personality traits like impulsivity and self-monitoring impact customer complaining behaviour. *Impulsivity*, as defined by [10], refers to a consistent inclination of customers to act spontaneously and immediately, without much reflection or careful consideration of available options or potential consequences. This trait remains relatively stable over time for such customers. [2]

defines self-monitoring as the propensity to adjust one's behaviour based on the actions or behaviour of others. High self-monitoring individuals are sensitive to others' expressions and behaviour, relying on social cues for their actions, while low self-monitoring individuals may be influenced by personal traits. From their experiments, [11] concluded that individuals with high impulsiveness tend to complain more than those with low impulsiveness, whereas individuals with high self-monitoring tend to complain less than those with low self-monitoring. However, these effects are more pronounced in situations where the level of dissatisfaction is high.

### 2.2 Complaining online

The act of complaining exists online in various forms and with varying degrees of intensity and this prevalence lead to the emergence of third-party organisations that provide online channels for customers' ease and convenience [12]. Notably, there are complaint websites like complaintsboard.com, review websites like trustpilot.com as well as consumer organisations' sites such as consumeraffairs.com, where customers can share their negative experiences and exchange information with others. The impact of negative word of mouth is quite high due to the ease with which negative reports can rapidly reach millions of people, potentially causing significant harm to a company's brand. Various user-generated content platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook serve as spaces for expressing complaints. Brands use these platforms for user engagement and this provides the users with the required visibility to potentially raise or escalate an issue. With numerous such options available online, companies can experience significant repercussions arising from actions taken by dissatisfied customers [12].

Of the 431 online complaints assessed by [12], 96% followed what they call a double deviation. This occurs when customers experience both a product or service failure followed by multiple unsuccessful attempts to resolve the issue, resulting in them feeling they have been violated twice. Such customers then resort to online complaining. Their urge to complain online is driven by how they felt betrayed rather than simply being dissatisfied or with any form of malicious intentions to hinder business operations.

## 2.3 Complaining in social media

\*\*TO UPDATE\*\*

## 2.4 Self-expression on Twitter

\*\*TO UPDATE\*\*

## 2.5 Transformers

\*\*TO UPDATE\*\*

## 2.6 Ongoing research

\*\*TO UPDATE\*\*

# Methodology

### 3.1 Data and pre-processing

The data used for the experiments is from Twitter. Twitter provides a good representation of social media text due to the direct connection consumers have with organisations and brands as well as the ability to express oneself [9]. \*\*Add content on why Twitter\*\*

The data set created by [9] and further used by [5] is utilised for this project and their process is breifly described below. The particular version <sup>1</sup> used for the experiments is the one enhanced by [6] with the addition of labels for the severity of complaints.

#### Domain and organisations

A cross-industry representative collection of 93 customer service handles of organisations on Twitter were identified manually. These handles were then categorised into 9 domains based on their industry type. Since an organisation could have business activities across domains, the assigned domain was based on the products or services receiving the most number of complaints. All the domains along with how many tweets per domain are listed in Table 3.1.

#### Collection

The data was extracted from Twitter via the Twitter API <sup>2</sup>. The most recent 3200 tweets at the time of the collection exercise were extracted and the original tweets to which the customer service handles responded were identified. Then, random sampling equally for each handle, 1971 tweets were identified where there was a response from the support's handle. To ensure a more balanced and diverse dataset, 1478 randomly sampled tweets were added to the dataset. 739 tweets were replies to other handles (outside the 93 identified) and the remaining 739 tweets were not addressed to any Twitter handle.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The data can be found here - https://archive.org/details/complaint\_severity\_data

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>https://developer.twitter.com/en

Domains	No. of Complaints	No. of Non-Complaints	Total Tweets
Food & Beverage	95 (73%)	35 (27%)	130 (7%)
Apparel	141 (55%)	117 (45%)	258 (13%)
Retail	124 (62%)	75 (38%)	199 (10%)
Cars	67 (73%)	25 (27%)	92 (4%)
Services	207 (61%)	130 (39%)	337 (17%)
Software & Online Services	189 (65%)	103 (35%)	292 (15%)
Transport	139 (56%)	109 (44%)	248 (12%)
Electronics	174 (61%)	112 (39%)	286 (15%)
Other	96 (79%)	33 (21%)	129 (7%)
Total	1232~(63%)	739 (37%)	1971

Table 3.1: The nine domains and the distribution of tweets that are complaints and those that are not. The percentages indicate how the splits are distributed.

Collection Criteria	No. of Tweets
Addressed to and replied by identified 93 customer service handles	1971 (58%)
Addressed to other customer service handles	739 (21%)
Not addressed to any Twitter handle	739 (21%)
Total	3449

Table 3.2: Selection of tweets based on random sampling and where they have received replies when addressed to the 93 customer service handles combined with random sampled tweets that are addressed to other handles and tweets that are not addressed to any handle

#### 3.2 Models and Libraries

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget dolor. Aenean massa. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Donec quam felis, ultricies nec, pellentesque eu, pretium quis, sem. Nulla consequat massa quis enim. Donec pede justo, fringilla vel, aliquet nec, vulputate eget, arcu. In enim justo, rhoncus ut, imperdiet a, venenatis vitae, justo. Nullam dictum felis eu pede mollis pretium. Integer tincidunt. Cras dapibus. Vivamus elementum semper nisi. Aenean vulputate eleifend tellus. Aenean leo ligula, porttitor eu, consequat vitae, eleifend ac, enim. Aliquam lorem ante, dapibus in, viverra quis, feugiat a, tellus. Phasellus viverra nulla ut metus varius laoreet. Quisque rutrum. Aenean imperdiet. Etiam ultricies nisi vel augue. Curabitur ullamcorper ultricies nisi. Nam eget dui.

#### 3.3 Nested cross validation

<sup>\*\*</sup> To UPDATE \*\*

### 3.4 Domain splits with nested cross validation

\*\* To UPDATE \*\*

### 3.5 Ethical, Professional and Legal Issues

## Results and discussion

### 4.1 Risk Analysis

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget dolor. Aenean massa. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Donec quam felis, ultricies nec, pellentesque eu, pretium quis, sem. Nulla consequat massa quis enim. Donec pede justo, fringilla vel, aliquet nec, vulputate eget, arcu. In enim justo, rhoncus ut, imperdiet a, venenatis vitae, justo. Nullam dictum felis eu pede mollis pretium. Integer tincidunt. Cras dapibus. Vivamus elementum semper nisi. Aenean vulputate eleifend tellus. Aenean leo ligula, porttitor eu, consequat vitae, eleifend ac, enim. Aliquam lorem ante, dapibus in, viverra quis, feugiat a, tellus. Phasellus viverra nulla ut metus varius laoreet. Quisque rutrum. Aenean imperdiet. Etiam ultricies nisi vel augue. Curabitur ullamcorper ultricies nisi. Nam eget dui. Etiam rhoncus. Maecenas tempus, tellus eget condimentum rhoncus, sem quam semper libero, sit amet adipiscing sem neque sed ipsum. Nam quam nunc, blandit vel, luctus pulvinar, hendrerit id, lorem. Maecenas nec odio et ante tincidunt tempus. Donec vitae sapien ut libero venenatis faucibus. Nullam quis ante. Etiam sit amet orci eget eros faucibus tincidunt. Duis leo. Sed fringilla mauris sit amet nibh. Donec sodales sagittis magna. Sed consequat, leo eget bibendum sodales, augue velit cursus nunc.

## 4.2 Project Plan

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Aenean commodo ligula eget dolor. Aenean massa. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Donec quam felis, ultricies nec, pellentesque eu, pretium quis, sem. Nulla consequat massa quis enim. Donec pede justo, fringilla vel, aliquet nec, vulputate eget, arcu. In enim justo, rhoncus ut, imperdiet a, venenatis vitae, justo. Nullam dictum felis eu pede mollis pretium. Integer tincidunt. Cras dapibus. Vivamus elementum semper nisi. Aenean vulputate eleifend tellus. Aenean leo ligula, porttitor eu, consequat vitae, eleifend ac, enim. Aliquam lorem ante, dapibus in, viverra quis, feugiat a, tellus. Phasellus viverra nulla ut

metus varius laoreet. Quisque rutrum. Aenean imperdiet. Etiam ultricies nisi vel augue. Curabitur ullamcorper ultricies nisi. Nam eget dui. Etiam rhoncus. Maecenas tempus, tellus eget condimentum rhoncus, sem quam semper libero, sit amet adipiscing sem neque sed ipsum. Nam quam nunc, blandit vel, luctus pulvinar, hendrerit id, lorem. Maecenas nec odio et ante tincidunt tempus. Donec vitae sapien ut libero venenatis faucibus. Nullam quis ante. Etiam sit amet orci eget eros faucibus tincidunt. Duis leo. Sed fringilla mauris sit amet nibh. Donec sodales sagittis magna. Sed consequat, leo eget bibendum sodales, augue velit cursus nunc.

#### 4.3 Another Section if You Need It

# Conclusions

# Bibliography

- [1] Balaji, M. S., Jha, S., and Royne, M. B. Customer e-complaining behaviours using social media. *The Service industries journal* 35, 11-12 (2015), 633–654. Place: London Publisher: Routledge.
- [2] BECHERER, R. C., AND RICHARD, L. M. Self-Monitoring as a Moderating Variable in Consumer Behavior. *The Journal of consumer research* 5, 3 (1978), 159–162. Place: CHICAGO Publisher: Journal of Consumer Research.
- [3] BOXER, D. Social distance and speech behavior: The case of indirect complaints. *Journal of pragmatics* 19, 2 (1993), 103–125. Place: AMSTERDAM Publisher: Elsevier B.V.
- [4] Coussement, K., and Van den Poel, D. Improving customer complaint management by automatic email classification using linguistic style features as predictors. *DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEMS* 44, 4 (2008), 870–882. Place: AMSTERDAM Publisher: Elsevier B.V.
- [5] JIN, M., AND ALETRAS, N. Complaint Identification in Social Media with Transformer Networks.
- [6] JIN, M., AND ALETRAS, N. Modeling the Severity of Complaints in Social Media.
- [7] LIANG, C.-Y., GUO, L., XIA, Z.-J., NIE, F.-G., LI, X.-X., SU, L., AND YANG, Z.-Y. Dictionary-based text categorization of chemical web pages. *Information Processing & Management* 42, 4 (2006), 1017–1029.
- [8] OLSHTAIN, E., AND WEINBACH, L. Complaints: A study of speech act behavior among native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. 195–208.
- [9] Preotiuc-Pietro, D., Gaman, M., and Aletras, N. Automatically Identifying Complaints in Social Media.
- [10] ROOK, D. W., AND FISHER, R. J. Normative Influences on Impulsive Buying Behavior. The Journal of consumer research 22, 3 (1995), 305–313. Place: CARY Publisher: University of Chicago Press.
- [11] Sharma, P., Marshall, R., Alan Reday, P., and Na, W. Complainers versus non-complainers: a multi-national investigation of individual and situational influences

BIBLIOGRAPHY 13

on customer complaint behaviour. Journal of marketing management 26, 1-2 (2010), 163–180. Place: Helensburg Publisher: Taylor & Francis.

[12] TRIPP, T. M., AND GREGOIRE, Y. When unhappy customers strike back on the Internet. *MIT Sloan management review 52*, 3 (2011), 37. Place: Cambridge Publisher: Sloan Management Review.

# Appendices

# Appendix A

# An Appendix of Some Kind

# Appendix B

# Another Appendix