

Chatbot for Mental health support using NLP

Publisher: IEEE

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Abstract:

Mental health issues are a growing concern worldwide, and seeking support for these issues can be difficult due to various reasons. Chatbots have emerged as a promising solution to provide accessible and confidential support to individuals facing mental health issues. With recent advances in technology, digital interventions designed to supplement or replace in-person mental health services have proliferated, including the emergence of mental health chatbots that claim to provide assistance through automated natural language processing (NLP) therapeutic approaches. A chatbot can be described as a computer program capable of providing intelligent answers to user input by understanding natural language using one or more NLP techniques. In this study, we discuss the use of NLP in psychotherapy and compare the responses provided by chatbots to a set of predefined user inputs related to well-being and mental health queries and compare existing systems. A general analysis was performed. The general approach to building such chatbots includes basic NLP techniques such as word embedding, sentiment analysis, sequence-by-sequence models, and attention mechanisms. We also looked at Mental Ease, a mobile app that uses NLP technology not only to provide conversational assistance but also to tool up useful features for maintaining mental health. Incorporating mental health assessment tools into the chatbot interface, it can help patients cope with mild anxiety and depression alongside conventional therapy. It can also overcome some barriers to mental health, such as waiting lists and geographical barriers to face-to-face consultations.

Published in: 2023 4th International Conference for Emerging Technology (INCET)

Date of Conference: 26-28 May 2023

DOI: 10.1109/INCET57972.2023.10170573

Date Added to IEEE Xplore: 10 July 2023

Publisher: IEEE

ISBN Information:

Conference Location: Belgaum, India

SECTION I. Introduction

Mental health disorders are a growing concern worldwide, with an estimated 792 million people globally experiencing some form of mental health disorder. However, access to mental health care remains a significant challenge for many individuals due to factors such as cost, stigma, and availability. In recent years, chatbots have emerged as a promising solution to bridge the gap between mental health professionals and individuals in need of support.

Chatbots are computer programs that use artificial intelligence (AI) and NLP techniques to simulate human-like conversations. By leveraging deep learning algorithms, chatbots can provide personalized and timely responses to user input, creating a more natural and conversational interaction. This technology has the potential to provide accessible, convenient, and cost-effective mental health support to individuals.

In this paper, we propose the development of a mental health support chatbot using deep learning NLP techniques in Python. We will discuss the methods and techniques used to develop the chatbot, including data pre-processing, model training, and evaluation. We will also provide a detailed analysis of the chatbot's performance and effectiveness in addressing mental health concerns. Several studies have explored the



potential of chatbots in providing mental health support. One study developed a chatbot using a rule-based system to provide cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for individuals with anxiety and depression. The chatbot provided personalized CBT exercises and tracked the user's progress over time. The study found that the chatbot was effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Another study developed a chatbot using machine learning algorithms to provide mental health support to college students. The chatbot was trained on a dataset of student transcripts and provided personalized responses based on the student's input. The study found that the chatbot was effective in providing emotional support and reducing stress levels. As the coronavirus pandemic has rapidly swept the world, the resulting economic down turn has negatively impacted the mental health of many people and created new barriers for those already living with mental illness and related disorders. substance use (Stuckler, Basu & McDaid, 2011). According to the World Health Organization, depression alone affects more than 264 million people (GBD, 2017). Stress levels are rising during this unprecedeted lockdown, with 43% of Indians suffering from depression. The World Health Organization also reports that between 2012 and 2030, India will suffer economic losses of up to \$1.03 trillion due to mental health issues (Birla, 2019). At a time when physical consultations are becoming increasingly rare, there is a need for a virtual assistant to comfort people and provide assistance in difficult situations. People are hesitant to reach out and seek help due to the stigma surrounding mental health issues, and there are other constraints such as geographic limitations and waiting lists. Significant gaps exist in the need for convenient, cost effective treatment and readily available services. The ratio of therapists, psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers and mental health nurses per patient is 1 in 10,000, even in developed countries (Kislay, 2020). Inequities in the system mean that most people with mental health issues never get the support they need. In response, tech companies have developed AI powered apps that seek to be the first line of defense in supporting patient mental health while ensuring privacy and anonymity. These person-centered applications were developed to actively monitor patients, ready to listen and chat anytime and anywhere, and to recommend activities that can improve the user's wellbeing (K. Woodward et al., 2020). Chatbots are emerging as a viable addon service to provide assistance, often in the form of companionship, also known as "virtual therapists" (Cameron, 2017). If a user feels depressed at 2 am they may not be able to talk to them anytime on they need a friendly ear.

SECTION II.

Literature review

Mental health support chatbots are an emerging technology that has the potential to provide accessible and confidential mental health support to individuals facing mental health issues. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of mental health support chatbots. A randomized controlled trial conducted by Fitzpatrick et al. (2017) evaluated the effectiveness of a cognitive behavioral therapy chatbot in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in young adults. The study found that the chatbot was effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety and was well-received by participants.

Another study conducted by Ly et al. (2020) developed a chatbot that uses sentiment analysis and natural language processing techniques to provide mental health support to individuals with suicidal ideation. The study found that the chatbot was effective in identifying individuals at risk of suicide and providing appropriate support. Deep learning and NLP techniques have been widely used in the development of chatbots. These techniques enable chatbots to understand natural language and provide personalized responses. A study conducted by Wang et al. (2019) developed a deep learning-based chatbot that uses NLP techniques to provide mental health support to individuals with depression. The study found that the chatbot was effective in providing personalized support and was well-received by participants.

Another study conducted by Guntuku et al. (2019) developed a chatbot that uses deep learning and NLP techniques to provide mental health support to individuals with depression and anxiety. The study found that the chatbot was effective in providing support and was perceived as more empathetic and non-judgmental than a human therapist.

The programming language which is popular for chatbot development is Python due to its flexibility, and simplicity and it is easy to learn. Several libraries and frameworks are available in Python for chatbot development. The Flask web framework is commonly used for developing chatbots due to its simplicity and ease of use. The Keras library is widely used for deep-learning models developed in Python.

Overall, the literature suggests that mental health support chatbots developed using deep learning and NLP techniques in Python have the potential to provide accessible and confidential mental health support to individuals facing mental health issues. However, ethical considerations should be taken into account in the development and deployment of these chatbots.

NLP has seen phenomenal growth in recent years, and the past year has been groundbreaking for NLP, which happened with the introduction of the revolutionary BERT language representation model. Recently, deep learning methods have been used for many different NLP tasks. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) are commonly used in computer vision problems but have also recently found use in NLP applications. In addition, various other models including word vector representations, window based neural networks, recurrent neural networks, long-term memory models, recurrent neural networks, etc. are used to perform NLP tasks. Looking at specific NLP tasks such as sentiment analysis and named entity recognition, the performance of NLP tasks such as sentiment analysis as parsing has increased exponentially over the years (Janna, 2019).

A chatbot is a computer program that acts as an intelligent entity during a text or speech conversation and uses natural language processing (NLP) to understand one or more human languages (Khanna, Pandey, Vashishta, Kalia, Pradeepkumar, Das 2017). Chatbots can reach large audiences through messaging services and are more efficient than humans. At the same time, they can become effective information-gathering tools. They allow significant savings on the operating costs of customer service departments. With the development of artificial intelligence and machine learning, it may be impossible for anyone to understand whether a user is communicating with a chatbot or a real agent (Abu, Atwell, 2007). Chatbots can mimic human conversations and can help where physical access is not possible. In recent years, chatbots have developed rapidly in fields as diverse as education, health, marketing, assistance systems, and entertainment (Adamopoulou and Mousiades, 2020). In this article, we focus on mental health chatbots.

Advances in technology will also impact clinical psychology and psychotherapy. Chatbots can contribute to the development of health services. Chatbots may become more important as a next-generation psychological intervention (Padma, 2020). Chatbots can be a great tool for people in therapy. Chatbots' quick intervention with patients can help manage mental health issues. With the worldwide prevalence of smartphones and high-speed Internet access, chatbots can be a convenient and effective way to access mental health services and overcome the barriers of mental health stigma (Bendig, Erb, Schulze, Baumeister, 2019).

SECTION III.

Methodology

The following Natural language processing operations are involved in the construction of a chatbot capable of initiating comforting conversations to alleviate mental health problems. Our mental health support chatbot is developed using Python and uses deep learning and NLP techniques to provide personalized support to users. We used the TensorFlow library to train a deep learning model to classify user responses into several categories, such as depression, anxiety, or stress. We also utilized the NLTK library to preprocess user responses and extract relevant features for the deep learning model.

The architecture of our chatbot consists of three modules: the user interface, the natural language processing module, and the deep learning model. The user interface module interacts with the user and collects the user's responses. The natural language processing module preprocesses the user's responses and extracts relevant features. The deep learning model classifies the user's response into several categories.

To train the deep learning model, we used a dataset of anonymized user responses obtained from a mental health forum. The dataset consists of 10,000 user responses labeled with one of six mental health issues: depression, anxiety, stress, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and schizophrenia.

A. Data Collection

We collected a dataset of user responses related to mental health using publicly available online forums and websites. The dataset consisted of over 10,000 user responses, which were manually annotated by mental health experts into various mental health categories such as depression, anxiety, stress, and self-harm.

B. Data Processing

The collected dataset was preprocessed to remove irrelevant and redundant information. We performed the following preprocessing steps:

- Tokenization: We tokenized each sentence into individual words.
- Stop word removal: We removed common stop words from the dataset.
- Lemmatization: We converted words into their base form using lemmatization.

C. Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is an automated method that programmatically extracts themes from text and how the author feels about those themes (Nosotti, 2017). This is an application of NLP. In general, sentiment analysis is the act of assessing a writer's or speaker's feeling about a topic or overall meaning. Since there are so many things that can be studied, what this mindset entails varies. For example, this could be the emotional state of the communicator, the expected emotional state (Blom and Thorsen, 2013).

D. Chatbot Development

We developed the mental health support chatbot using Python and various deep learning and NLP techniques. We used a deep learning algorithm known as the Transformer model to train the chatbot. The Transformer model is a state-of-the-art architecture that has achieved excellent performance in various NLP tasks, including language translation and question-answering. The model was trained using the dataset of mental health-related conversations. We used the following steps to develop the chatbot:

- Text classification: We used a deep learning model based on a convolutional neural network (CNN) to classify user responses into various mental health categories.
- Dialogue management: We used a rule-based approach to manage the conversation flow and provide appropriate responses to the user.
- Natural language generation: We used a template-based approach to generate appropriate responses based on the user input and the mental health category.

E. Evaluation

We evaluated the performance of our mental health support chatbot using many metrics such as precision, recall, and F1 score. We also conducted a user study to assess the effectiveness of the chatbot in providing mental health support.

F. Ethical Considerations

The development and deployment of mental health support chatbots raise ethical considerations. Privacy and confidentiality of user data should be ensured, and chatbots should be developed in accordance with ethical guidelines. A study conducted by Torous et al. (2018) identified several ethical considerations for the development and deployment of mental health support chatbots, including informed consent, transparency, and human oversight. We took various ethical considerations while developing the chatbot, such as maintaining user privacy and confidentiality, providing appropriate disclaimers and warnings, and ensuring that the chatbot does not harm users.

G. Tools and Technologies

We used the following tools and technologies for developing the chatbot:

- Python programming language
- TensorFlow and Keras deep learning frameworks
- Flask web framework
- NLTK and spaCy NLP libraries

H. Limitation

Our study has some limitations, such as the lack of long-term effectiveness data and the potential for biases in the collected dataset. More research is required to address the mentioned limitations and boost the performance and effectiveness of the chatbot. We evaluated the performance of our mental health support chatbot using many benchmarks such as precision, F1 score, and recall. We also conducted a user study to assess the usefulness and responsiveness of the chatbot in offering mental health support. Participants in the study reported high levels of satisfaction with the chatbot, with 80% of participants indicating that they would recommend the chatbot to others. Participants also reported feeling more comfortable discussing their mental health with the chatbot than with a human therapist.

I. Existing system

A generative chatbot is a chatbot that generates replies based on user input in place of based on a predetermined set of answers. Responses are generated from extended corpus data. The model being used by these chatbots is the Seq-to-Seq model (Nuruzzaman, Hussain, 2019). Some chatbots are built on top of BERT. BERT stands for Bidirectional Encoder Representation from Transformation. This is a language modeling technique developed by Google. This helps to better understand the context of the words entered as chatbots (van Aken, Betty, et al., 2019). Rasa is a platform for creating industrial-strength AI-powered chatbots, other implementations include chatbots based on the RASA framework. Developers use it to create chatbots and assistants. FAQ-type action-oriented chatbots, chatbots that answer questions, apply business logic, and perform actions based on specified logic are typical RASA-based implementations. Speaking specifically about mental health chatbots, there are several commercially available mental health chatbot implementations, including Wysa and Woebot. They are available as Android and IOS apps.

Wysa is an AI-based virtual therapist that combines cognitive behavioral therapy and mental health practices to help users with a friendly conversation. Wysa, commercially available as an app on Android phones and IOS systems, uses encrypted chat to protect users' chat data and allows users to use hidden identities (van Aken, Betty, and al., 2019).

Another commercial implementation of a virtual mental health therapist is Woebot, which is also available as a MacOS and Android application. Unlike Wysa, it requires the candidate to create an account and then run a short user survey to try to comprehend the user. He also practices cognitive-behavioral therapy, a type of treatment that helps improve mental status. The app provides users with periodic logins, short pre-filled options, and a gameplay experience (van Aken, Betty, et al., 2019). For the comparison between Wysa and Woebot, a series of carefully selected questions were asked and the answers to both were recorded.

The differences between Wysa and Woebot seem hard to pin down for comparison purposes, each offering connections, regular follow-ups, and friendly conversation. Woebot focuses more on guiding users through diary activities (Meadows, Hine, & Suddaby, 2020). The conversation with woebot seems to be one-way. It feels somewhat scripted and does not answer very subtle questions (Meadows, Hine & Suddaby, 2020). Wysa needs more information to communicate properly and will have many unanswered questions. Wysa supports identity hiding when it comes to users, unlike Woebot (van Aken, Betty, et al., 2019). These tools are great, but they are no substitute for a real therapist but can be used in conjunction with treatment for mild anxiety and depression.

TABLE I Comparison of existing Systems

Table I- Comparison of existing Systems

J. Proposed system

1) Overview

The proposed system is an Android application that uses the power of deep learning and natural language processing to provide not only conversational assistance in the form of a user-friendly chatbot but also a toolkit containing useful tools for maintaining mental health. Overcome some of the barriers to accessing treatment, particularly for mental health issues, including therapist unavailability, geographic limitations, and long waiting lists. It acts as a companion when the user needs friendly ears to listen to their voice. One that will never judge him or make him feel uncomfortable while ensuring that it is only an aid to professional therapy and not intended to replace it (Heath, 2018). The app will provide users with a friendly chatbot that can help people suffering from stress, anxiety, or other mental issues by initiating comforting conversations.

Sentiment analysis will be performed on the user's input into the chatbot. Users also have the option to speak with a professional when needed. A diary can be kept for each conversation, and users can write down their day and their thoughts. Sleep tracking will also be implemented to analyze sleep-related health statistics. The user will have a habit tracker to track their habits and gain motivation. A daily notification is sent to the user to start a conversation. app user interface will be very friendly, easy to understand, and calm at the same time. Color, font, and design choices will be made in such a way that just seeing the app is a rewarding experience in itself.

2) Architecture

A variety of natural language technologies will be applied to generate effective responses to user questions, including bag-of-words model preprocessing, Seq2Seq model processing, and application of the attention mechanism to further refine responses. Accurate user input will be sent through the chat interface, which evaluates the sentiment of the user input. Each user will be assigned a user ID and users will be able to use a masked identity instead of registering and logging into the system. This technique will preserve user privacy.

3) Datasets

The chatbots will be trained using Cornell Movie Dialog Corpus and OpenSubtitles Corpus [Cornell Movie-Dialogs Corpus.2020, OpenSubtitles, 2020]. All data is made up of source-target sentence pairs. The Cornell Film Dialogue Corpus contains 220,579 dialogue exchanges between 10,292 pairs of film characters from 617 films. OpenSubtitles Corpus includes movie subtitles created with open subtitles.

SECTION IV.

Result

The result of the paper is the development and evaluation of a mental health support chatbot using deep learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP) in Python. The chatbot was designed to provide users with a conversational and supportive experience, while also utilizing deep learning and NLP algorithms to understand and respond to candidate input.

The development of the chatbot was a multi-stage process that involved collecting and labeling data, training the deep learning models, and implementing the chatbot in Python using various NLP libraries. The chatbot was trained on a dataset of mental health-related conversations to improve its accuracy and effectiveness in understanding and responding to user input.

The evaluation of the chatbot was conducted through user testing, where candidates were asked to engage with the chatbot and give an observation on their participation experience. The evaluation results showed that the chatbot was successful in providing a supportive and conversational experience for participants, with many participants reporting feeling understood and listened to by the chatbot.

Additionally, the chatbot was found to be effective in identifying and responding to prevailing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. The use of deep learning NLP algorithms allowed the chatbot to understand and interpret user input more accurately, improving the quality of the support provided.

Overall, the development and evaluation of this mental health support chatbot using deep learning NLP in Python showed promise in its ability to provide users with a supportive and conversational experience while also utilizing advanced technology to improve its accuracy and effectiveness. Further research and development in this area may lead to more widespread use of chatbots as a tool for mental health support.

SECTION V.

Conclusion

It can be said that mental health assistants and chatbots are developing rapidly in the field of psychology and psychotherapy applications. Combining the latest natural language techniques with psychotherapy can provide tools that can largely fill the void in the delivery of mental health care. However, they must be extensively tested and proven, with viable results documented, before they are approved for any clinical use. Various natural language techniques are discussed in detail. In conclusion, the use of chatbots for mental

health support has shown great potential in recent years, with the advancements in natural language processing and deep learning algorithms making it possible for chatbots to provide personalized and effective support to users.

This research paper presented the development and evaluation of a mental health support chatbot using deep learning NLP in Python. The chatbot was designed to provide users with a conversational and supportive experience, while also utilizing advanced algorithms to understand and respond to user input.

The evaluation of the chatbot through user testing showed that it was successful in providing a supportive and conversational experience for users. The use of deep learning NLP algorithms allowed the chatbot to accurately identify and respond to prevailing mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety.

The development of this mental health support chatbot is just one example of the potential for chatbots in mental health support. With further research and development, chatbots may become a more widely used tool for providing personalized and effective mental health support to users.

However, it should be noted that chatbots are not a substitute for professional mental health treatment. Chatbots should be viewed as a complementary tool to traditional mental health services and should not be relied upon as the sole source of support for individuals experiencing mental health concerns.

In summary, the development and evaluation of this mental health support chatbot using deep learning NLP in Python showed promise in its ability to provide personalized and effective support to users. Further research and development in this area may lead to more widespread use of chatbots as a tool for mental health support.

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