DS4DH at TREC Health Misinformation 2021: Multi-Dimensional Ranking Models with Transfer Learning and Rank Fusion

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Abstract

This paper describes the work of the Data Science for Digital Health (DS4DH) group at the TREC Health Misinformation Track 2021. The TREC Health Misinformation track focused on the development of retrieval methods that provide relevant, correct and credible information for health related searches on the Web. In our methodology, we used a two-step ranking approach that includes i) a standard retrieval phase, based on BM25 model, and ii) a re-ranking phase, with a pipeline of models focused on the usefulness, supportiveness and credibility dimensions of the retrieved documents. To estimate the usefulness, we classified the initial rank list using pre-trained language models based on the transformers architecture fine-tuned on the MS MARCO corpus. To assess the supportiveness, we utilized BERT-based models fine-tuned on scientific and Wikipedia corpora. Finally, to evaluate the credibility of the documents, we employed a random forest model trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset combined with a list of credible sites. The resulting ranked lists were then combined using the Reciprocal Rank Fusion algorithm to obtain the final list of useful, supporting and credible documents. Our approach achieved competitive results, being top-2 in the compatibility assessment for the automatic runs. Our findings suggest that integrating automatic ranking models created for each information quality dimension with transfer learning can increase the effectiveness of health-related information retrieval.

1 Introduction

The purpose of the TREC Health Misinformation Track\textsuperscript{1} is to develop retrieval systems that provide relevant and correct information for health-related Web searches. The challenge provides 50 health-related topics, among which only 35 topics are evaluated. As illustrated in Table 1, each topic contains a query, a description, a narrative, a stance and an evidence. For automatic runs, only the query and the description are used. The TREC Health Misinformation corpus contains one billion English documents extracted from the April 2019 snapshot of Common Crawl (Raffel et al., 2020).

For a document to be relevant and correct, the TREC Health Misinformation challenge considers three levels of information quality: (1) usefulness, that is, whether a document contains relevant information to answer a topic’s question; (2) supportiveness, that is, whether a document contains supportive information for the descriptions marked as helpful or dissuasive information for the descriptions marked as unhelpful; and (3) credibility, that is, whether an information source document is considered credible in the field of knowledge.

This paper describes submissions of DS4DH to the TREC Health Misinformation 2021, which achieved top-2 performance in the compatibility assessment for the automatic runs. Section 2 introduces our methodology based on a two-step approach of document retrieval for the multidimensional retrieval task and the specific evaluation criteria used to assess these dimensions with a single ranked list. Section 3 presents and discusses our results. Finally, Section 4 concludes this paper and proposes future studies.

2 Methods

The overview of our pipeline is presented in Figure 1. First, in the retrieval phase, we extracted 10,000 documents using a BM25 model (Robertson and Zaragoza, 2009). Second, in the re-ranking phase, we estimated relevance of the documents according to the usefulness, supportiveness and credibility scores. At the end, 7 runs with different model combinations were submitted.
Achilles tendonitis is a condition where one experiences pain in the Achilles tendon located near the heel. An ankle brace is usually worn around the ankles to protect and limit movement. A very useful document would discuss the effectiveness of using ankle braces to help heal Achilles tendonitis. A useful document would help a user make a decision about the use of ankle braces for treating tendonitis by providing information about recommended treatments for Achilles tendonitis, ankle braces, or both.

Evidence
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3134723/

Table 1: Topic Example.

Figure 1: Retrieval Pipeline. M1: BM25 baseline. M2: M1 combined with a fine-tuned index using a silver standard query relevance. M3: a re-ranked list using masked language models (MLMs) fine-tuned on the MS MARCO dataset. M4: a combination BM25 and MLMs. M5: a RoBERTa model fine-tuned on the FEVER+SciFact fact-checking datasets. M6: A combination of three MLMs trained on the FEVER+SciFact fact-checking corpora. M7: a random forest model trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset to predict a site’s credibility. M8: a list of credible websites scrapped from the Health-on-Net search engine for the challenge’s queries. M9: a linear combination of M7 and M8 models. M10: a combination of model M4, M6 and M9. All ranking combinations, apart from M9, were created using the reciprocal ranking fusion (RRF) algorithm with the k parameter set to 60.

2.1 Retrieval Phase
We extracted 10,000 documents using a BM25 model with standard (Robertson and Zaragoza, 2009) and fine-tuned parameters. For the fine-tuning version, as the query relevance was not available, we created topics, that is, query + description, for a set of indexed documents using the a keyword2query and doc2query approaches proposed by Bennani-Smires et al. (Bennani-Smires et al., 2018) and Nogueira et al. (Nogueira et al., 2019b), respectively. Then, a known-item search approach was applied using the silver topics and the BM25 parameters was fine-tuned using a grid search. This resulted in two initial ranking lists.

2.2 Re-Ranking Phase
For re-ranking the retrieved documents, we use a set of machine learning models trained to classify documents according to the usefulness, supportive-
Supportiveness In this information quality dimension, documents are identified under three levels: 1) supportive - the document supports the treatment; 2) dissuades - the document refutes the treatment; 3) neutral - the document does not contain enough information to make the decision. We want documents that are either supportive or dissuasive on the top of the ranking list, which means that correct or factual documents are boosted and misinforming documents should be downgraded.

The supportiveness dimension shares similarities with claim-checking models, which take a claim and a document as the information source, and validate or refute the claim based on document content (Stammbach et al., 2021). Their main difference is that for claim-checking models, we assume that the information source is always correct. Thus, for the supportiveness criterion, we add a further classification step, which evaluates the documents as correct or incorrect. To do so, we used a k-nearest neighbors algorithm (Teodoro et al., 2010) based on the top-k assignments provided by the claim-checking models, that is, a majority vote is used to decide whether the treatment should be supported or dissuaded. Then, higher rank is given to the correct supportive/dissuasive documents, medium rank is given to the neutral documents and lower rank is given to the incorrect supportive/dissuasive documents. The details are shown in Figure 2 and Table 2.

We used three models from the Scientific Claim Verification task (Wadden et al., 2020) to classify the treatments: RoBERTa-Large (Liu et al., 2019), BioMedRoBERTa-base (Gururangan et al., 2020) and SciBERT-base (Beltagy et al., 2019). These models were trained on either scientific or large English corpora and fine-tuned on the FEVER (Thorne et al., 2018) and SciFact (Wadden et al., 2020) datasets. The information that these models learned from previous corpora benefits our ranking task through transfer learning.

Credibility For estimating credibility, we develop a random forest classifier trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset (Schwarz and Morris, 2011) with a set of features, such as readability, openpage rank and number of CSS style sheets. The dataset consists of 1,000 Web pages on five topics of Health, Politics, Finance, Environmental Science, and Celebrity News. The Web pages are manually rated with credibility scores between 1 ("very non-credible") and 5 ("very credible"). We convert these scores for a binary classification setting – that is, the scores of 4 and 5 are considered as 1 or credible and scores of 1, 2, and 3 are considered as 0 or non-credible. For the readability score, we rely on SMOG index, which estimates the years of education an average person needs to understand a piece of writing. Following (Schwarz and Morris, 2011), we retrieve a Web page’s PageRank and use it as a feature to train the classifier. We further use the number of CSS style definitions for estimating the effort for the design of a Web page (Olteanu et al. (2013) showed the effectiveness of this feature). Furthermore, a list of credible websites scraped from the Health On the Net search engine for the challenge’s queries is combined with the baseline model to explore better performance. The result of the classifier was added with a unitary value for the Health on the Net credible sites.

2.3 Submitted Runs

Run 1: Baseline run. A combination of M1, M5 and M7 in Figure 1. This automatic run was created using a model based on Reciprocal Rank Fusion (RRF) (Cormack et al., 2009) of three models: i) usefulness, created using a default BM25, ii) supportiveness, created using a RoBERTa large model fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a credibility random forest classifier as described in Section 2.

Run 2: A combination of M2, M6 and M9 in Figure 1. This automatic run was created using a rank fusion based on RRF of three models: i) usefulness, created using a combined default BM25 with a fine-tuned BM25 model using known item search with query and description been generated using transfer learning from language models, ii) supportiveness, created using a combined rank of three transformer-based models fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a credibility random forest classifier trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset combined with a list of credible sites.

Run 3: A combination of M3, M6 and M9 in Figure 1. This automatic run was created using a rank fusion based on RRF of three models: i) usefulness, created using a combined default BM25 with a fine-tuned BM25 model using known item search with query and description been generated using transfer learning from language models, ii) supportiveness, created using a combined rank of three transformer-based models fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a credibility random forest classifier trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset combined with a list of credible sites.

3A credible Web page is defined as "a page whose information one can accept as the truth without needing to look elsewhere."
usefulness, created using a combination of three transformed-based language models trained on the MS MARCO corpus\(^5\), ii) supportiveness, created using a combined rank of three transformer-based models fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a random forest model trained on the Microsoft Credibility dataset combined with a list of credible sites.

**Run 4:** A combination of M4, M5 and M9 in Figure 1. This automatic run was created using a rank fusion based on RRF of three models: i) usefulness, created using a combined BoW model with three transformed-based language models trained on the MS MARCO corpus, ii) supportiveness, created using a RoBERTa large model fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a random forest model trained on the

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\(^5\)https://microsoft.github.io/msmarco/
MS MARCO corpus, ii) supportiveness, created using a combined rank of three transformer-based models fine-tuned on the FEVER and SciFact corpus, and iii) credibility, created using a random forest classifier combined with a list of credible sites.

Run 7: A combination of all the individual models in Figure 1. This automatic run was created using a rank fusion based on RRF of the individual models used to create the i) usefulness (5 individual models), ii) supportiveness (3 individual models), and iii) credibility (2 individual models).

2.4 Evaluation Methods
The assessments of this year’s TREC Health Misinformation were divided into “compatibility with helpful” (help) and “compatibility with harmful” (harm) metrics. In order to evaluate the system’s ability to have higher levels for helpful information and lower levels for harmful information, the “compatibility with harmful” results were subtracted from the “compatibility with helpful” results, which is marked as “help-harm”. This orders systems correctly with similar helpful compatibility and lower harmful compatibility. For more details, please see (Clarke et al., 2021).

3 Results and Discussion
The official challenge results are shown in Table 3 and Figure 3. The ‘Best Help’, ‘Best Harm’ and ‘Best Hp-Hm’ are are the highest “compatibility with helpful” (help), lowest “compatibility with harmful” (harm) and highest “help-harm” from the list of top-3 automatic runs from each group. Note that ‘Run 1’ to ‘Run 7’ are runs submitted by the DS4DH group. ‘BM25 Baseline’ is the baseline model by the TREC Health Misinformation.

In our submitted runs, the best harm is in ‘Run 4’, the best help and help-harm are both in ‘Run 7’. This is as expected since Run 7 combines all the individual models to maximize the system ranking ability. The helpful compatibility is 0.136 which is comparable to the ‘Best Help’, and the harmful compatibility 0.095 is significantly low, which is similar to the ‘Best Harm’. Therefore, we obtained help-harm at 0.041, which is right after the overall ‘Best Hp-Hm’, together with superior performance on lower ranking harmful information.

The ‘Best Help’ run achieved in the challenge gives the helpful compatibility at 0.203. However, for this run, the harmful compatibility is also as high as 0.168. Therefore, the help-harm is 0.034, which can distinguish the helpful and harmful information but needs improvement by lower ranking the harmful one. The ‘Best Harm’ gives the harmful compatibility at 0.022, which is significantly lower than other runs. However, the helpful compatibility for this run is only 0.006, resulting in a help-harm of -0.016, in a sense that neither helpful nor harmful information is retrieved. On the other hand, the ‘Best Hp-Hm’ gives relatively higher helpful compatibility at 0.195 and relatively lower compatibility at 0.153. In the end, the best help-harm 0.041 is obtained.

3.1 Models Analysis
To understand the performance of each component, we study the compatibility of individual models. The results are depicted in Table 4 and Figure 4. The BM25 model for usefulness in the retrieval phase gives highest helpful compatibil-

| Run   | Help  | Harm  | Help-Harm |
|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Best Help | 0.203 | 0.168 | 0.034     |
| Best Harm  | 0.006 | 0.022 | -0.016    |
| Best Hp-Hm | 0.195 | 0.153 | 0.043     |

| Run   | Help  | Harm  | Help-Harm |
|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Run 1 | 0.107 | 0.101 | 0.006     |
| Run 2 | 0.103 | 0.089 | 0.014     |
| Run 3 | 0.101 | 0.086 | 0.015     |
| Run 4 | 0.108 | 0.076 | 0.032     |
| Run 5 | 0.093 | 0.094 | -0.001    |
| Run 6 | 0.098 | 0.089 | 0.009     |
| Run 7 | 0.136 | 0.095 | 0.041     |
| BM25 Baseline | 0.122 | 0.144 | -0.022    |

Table 3: Averaged Compatibility of Submitted Runs.
Figure 4: Relations between ‘Help’ and ‘Harm’ for Individual Models. ELE: ELECTRA. RwC: Random Forest with Credibility Sites. mnBT: monoBERT. RF: Random Forest. BioB: BioMedRoBERTa-base. RBL: RoBERTa-Large. SciBT: SciBERT. BM25: Standard BM25. Ft: Fine-tuned BM25. BM25-B: BM25 Baseline by TREC Health Misinformation

...with 0.143. This is beneficial since at this phase, overall compatibility is more critical. The monoBERT model for usefulness in the re-ranking phase gives highest help-harm compatibility at 0.053, which is the top-1 result compared to the automatic runs submitted by the participants. This indicates that the model can effectively differentiate between helpful and harmful information. The SciBERT-base model for supportiveness gives lowest harmful compatibility at 0.009 with satisfactory helpful compatibility. This demonstrates the model’s ability to identify misinformation.

As a result of the foregoing analysis, further experiments could be explored: 1) in the document retrieval phase, BM25 should be the prior model. 2) in the re-ranking phase: prioritising the monoBERT for usefulness, the SciBERT-base model for supportiveness, the ‘Random Forest with Credibility Sites’ model for credibility.

4 Conclusion

In the average compatibility measurement of automatic runs, our contributions came out on top-2. Our findings imply that combining automatic ranking models for each information quality dimension with transfer learning can improve the quality of health-related information retrieval by allowing the proper documents to be retrieved while discarding the incorrect ones. The RRF algorithm is a robust alternative for combining ranks when no trained set is available. Further empirical approaches could be to fine-tune our models based on topic content and generate manual runs and to re-rank the top 10% of the retrieved documents to reduce the possibility of bringing the harmful documents from the bottom of the ranking list to the top.

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| Model Type | Individual Model | Help | Harm | Help-Harm |
|------------|-------------------|------|------|----------|
| Usefulness (Retrieval) | BM25 | 0.143 | 0.133 | 0.010 |
| | Fine-tuned BM25 | 0.095 | 0.071 | 0.024 |
| Usefulness (Re-Ranking) | BERT-base | 0.060 | 0.031 | 0.029 |
| | monoBERT | 0.103 | 0.050 | 0.053 |
| | ELECTRA | 0.071 | 0.047 | 0.024 |
| Supportiveness | BioMedRoBERTa-base | 0.015 | 0.024 | -0.009 |
| | RoBERTa-large | 0.031 | 0.033 | -0.002 |
| | SciBERT-base | 0.023 | **0.009** | 0.014 |
| Credibility | RandomForest | 0.017 | 0.024 | -0.007 |
| | RFwithCredibilitySites | 0.036 | 0.016 | 0.020 |
| TREC HM | BM25 Baseline | 0.122 | 0.144 | -0.022 |

Table 4: Averaged Compatibility of Individual Models.

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A  Additional Illustration for Compatibility Measurement

Figure A.1: Runs Evaluated with Compatibility.

Figure A.2: Individual Models Evaluated with Compatibility.