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Bot detection using unsupervised machine learning

by Haluka Maier-Borst Whether it's about smart homes, cancer detection or the day when machines will take over our world – it's all connected to a buzzword: machine learning. But as much as machine learning is often depicted as a kind of black magic; playing around with it is actually easy. (The hard part is getting it to perfection and I'm still working on this.) I've used mostly scikit-learn, a well-documented library for Python. Other applications and libraries that you might want to look at are: Tensorflow for Python from Google WEKA for Java CRAN for R The reason I started using scikit-learn was the subject of my master thesis. I wanted to build a machine learning based program that monitors the German Twittersphere and estimates that the party is heavily pushed by bots on Twitter. But before I built my application, I asked myself two questions: Is this a matter for supervised learning or unsupervised learning? Supervised learning means that the algorithm is trained in a dataset with defined properties. Essentially, it's like giving a child a basket full of fruit and some other stuff. There is a sticker attached to each item telling whether it is a fruit or not. You let the child learn from this basket and then give it another basket and check how well it can spot the items in the other basket that are not fruits. Unsupervised learning essentially means you skip step one. You do not give the algorithm prior training, but essentially ask it immediately to find outliers, in our example non-fruit entries. In my case, I used supervised learning. I classified a tweet as a clear bot tweet if it came from an account that tweeted more than 24 times a day. And I classified a tweet as non-bot if it came from an account that tweeted only once a day. I then trained an algorithm on these classified tweets so it could learn to distinguish between the two. Should I interpret the results of the algorithm? There are models in machine learning from which you can easily understand the reasoning that the algorithm has used. For example, one example is a regression analysis showing that fewer people voted for the Social Democrats in areas with higher unemployment. Or a decision tree first asks you if you are a boy or a girl, and then asks you if you are third grader or not not to not assess how likely it is that you will kill a plant. But there are also more complicated models like support vector machines and neural networks and I have to say that I struggle with imagining a 15-dimensional space with a 14-dimensional surface that shares a group of dots from the other. But if this method does the work and I don't have to understand the solution, then that's fine. That's why I chose a so-called random forest classification, since it turned out to be the most accurate algorithm, and I didn't have to interpret its reasoning. It is essentially a method in which you build different decision trees for partial samples of and then create an average of all these decision trees (I have no idea what this average of trees looks like). Now, after answering these two questions, I can build my application. Step 1: Create a data set for bots and non-bot tweets I take a data set for the last 24 hours of tweets that I monitored. So I simply run one for loop to check which account IDs can be found in the dataset more than 24 times and which are only in there once and save both lists. In the next step, I then use these lists to build a data set of 1000 bot tweets and 1000 non-bot tweets. Step 2: Convert tweets to a set of numbers In the next step, I converted these 2000 tweets to a list of numbers by counting properties such as the number of characters, the number of unique words, the number of exclamation marks, etc. This is called a stylometric approach. Step 3: Prepare the dataset to be read into by the algorithm Now we have to take care of a few things. First, we want to ensure that the dependent variable (the one we want to predict) botornot criteria is stored separately from the rest of the dataset. Then we divide the dataset into two parts. The training data set and the test data set where we want to check how accurate the algorithm is. Step 4: Build the machine learning model, let it predict and verify its accuracy With two lines of code, we train the algorithm on the training data set and test its performance by running it toward the test data set. The performance statistics that we are looking at are the accuracy, the average absolute error and the confusion matrix. The documentation is here, but in essence, the more values are on the diagonal axis from upper left to bottom right, the better your algorithm. Step 5: Use the model to make predictions for a new, unknown dataset Finally, we're running the random forest classification against a new dataset to make predictions whether a tweet is a bot or not a bot tweet. In my case, I actually used a combined approach. A tweet was classified as a bot tweet if the account had tweeted more than 24 times a day, or if the algorithm determined it was a bot. In this code, I look at the stylometric features of tweets. But it might have been more fruitful to look for distinctive features on the accounts' profile pages rather than for every tweet. This is an approach that mainly SRF Data did on its Instagram influential story that also used machine learning to determine how many followers of influencers were probably fake. --- Would you like to try Halukas' example yourself? Download the code and data sets here. < Back to the Tree This research focuses on bot detection through the implementation of techniques such as traffic analysis, unattended machine learning, and similarity analysis between benign traffic data and bot traffic data. In this study, we tested and experimented with different cluster algorithms and recorded their accuracy our prepared data sets. Later, the best clustering is clustering was used to proceed with the next steps of the methodology, such as determining majority clusters (cluster with most flows), removing double flows and calculating equity analysis. Results were recorded for the removal of duplicate flows phase, the results indicate how many flows each plural cluster contains and how many duplicate flows were removed from this plural cluster. Next, the results for equity analysis show the value of the similarity coefficient for the comparisons between all data sets (bot data sets and benign data sets). With these results we can present some heuristic conclusion for determining possible bot infection in a particular host. Ab Rahman NH, Cahyani NDW, Choo KKR (2016) Cloud incident handling and forensic-by-design: cloud storage as a case study. Concurrency and Calculation: Practice and Experience. Cahyani NDW et al (2016) Forensic data collection from cloud-of-things devices: windows Smartphones as a case study. Concurrency and calculation: Practice and Experience. Alomari E, Manickama S (2014) Design, implementation and use of http-based botnet test bed. National Advanced IPv6 Centre (NAv6), Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. 16th International Conference on Advanced Communication Technology, 1265-1269 (IEEE). Arndt D (2016) How to: calculate flow statistics using netmate. . Access 04 Dec 2016. Barford Pedersen, Yegneswaran V (2006) An inside look at botnets. In Special Workshop on Malware Detection, Advances in Information Security, Springer Verlag. 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