

Semantic Coherence and NLP: Redesigning post-COVID Mental Health Diagnostics with CNNs and LSTMs

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Abstract—The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the need for innovative, scalable diagnostic tools for mental health, given the surge in related disorders globally. This study presents a novel neural symbolic approach leveraging natural language processing (NLP) to analyze semantic coherence in text data, aimed at predicting mental health outcomes. Integrating convolutional neural networks (CNNs) with long short-term memory networks (LSTM) and an attention mechanism, this model excels in extracting and emphasizing critical linguistic features from vast datasets of online textual communications. Our evaluations show that the model achieves an accuracy of 92.4%, with precision, recall, and an F1-score significantly superior to traditional LSTM models. The ROC-AUC score of 0.92 highlights its effectiveness at distinguishing various mental health states, while the attention mechanism enhances the model's interpretability, shedding light on key text features indicative of mental distress. This research underscores the potential of AI in enhancing mental health diagnostics in the context of current events, proposing a powerful tool for early detection and intervention.

Index Terms—Natural Language Processing, Semantic Coherence, Convolutional Neural Networks, Long Short-Term Memory Models, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has been a catalyst for widespread social and economic disruption, impacting the mental well-being of populations worldwide. The pandemic has not only heightened anxiety, depression, and stress but has also introduced unique challenges in how mental health is assessed and treated. As healthcare systems were overwhelmed, traditional face-to-face therapeutic treatments became less accessible, accelerating the need for innovative diagnostic tools that leverage technology to detect and manage mental health issues remotely [1].

In this context, Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) present novel potentials for mental health diagnostics. These technologies can analyze vast amounts of unstructured textual data from social media and other digital platforms where individuals often express their emotional states openly. Prior research has indicated that linguistic cues within these expressions can be predictive of mental health states [2]. For instance, patterns in language

and changes in communication styles have been linked to psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety [3]. Moreover, the integration of symbolic AI with advanced neural network models, known as neurosymbolic AI, introduces a novel approach to enhance both the accuracy and interpretability of diagnostic predictions [4]. This paper proposes a neurosymbolic AI model that employs semantic coherence — the logical flow and connectivity of ideas in text — as a diagnostic indicator of mental health. Semantic coherence is especially pertinent in the context of COVID-19, where the continuous stress and anxiety have disrupted normal thought processes, potentially reflecting in the way people structure their communication.

This study aims to bridge the gap between traditional mental health assessment methods and modern AI-driven approaches by developing a model that not only predicts but also explains its predictions through understandable linguistic features. This is crucial for clinical acceptance, where trust in AI systems depends significantly on their ability to offer transparent and interpretable results. By focusing on semantic coherence, the model seeks to detect subtle deviations in thought patterns that precede noticeable symptoms, potentially enabling earlier intervention and support during crises such as COVID-19.

The application of this model is demonstrated through analysis of data collected from online platforms, reflecting real-world usage and interactions during the pandemic. This approach not only aligns with the current need for remote mental health diagnostics but also opens avenues for scalable and continuous monitoring of mental health at a population level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in mental health diagnostics has been a focal point of recent research, particularly in response to the increasing need for remote and scalable mental health services. This section reviews the existing literature on the use of Natural Language Processing (NLP) in mental health, the application of neurosymbolic



AI, and the role of semantic coherence in psychological diagnostics.

A. Natural Language Processing in Mental Health

NLP technologies have shown significant potential in identifying mental health issues through the analysis of textual data. Numerous studies have utilized social media data to predict various mental health conditions, demonstrating that linguistic patterns and word usage can provide insights into an individual's mental state [5]. For example, researchers have successfully predicted depression from Twitter posts by analyzing changes in language that reflect emotional distress, social withdrawal, and diminished cognitive faculties [6].

B. Neurosymbolic AI in Healthcare

The emergence of neurosymbolic AI, which combines neural networks with symbolic reasoning, offers a promising advancement in making AI-driven diagnostics more interpretable and reliable. Neurosymbolic systems are particularly valuable in healthcare, where understanding the reasoning behind AI decisions is crucial [7]. These models specifically incorporate domain-specific knowledge through symbolic rules, enhancing both their accuracy and trustworthiness in clinical settings [8].

C. Semantic Coherence and Mental Health

Semantic coherence, or the logical flow of language, has been identified as a crucial indicator of cognitive function and mental health. Research has shown that disruptions in semantic coherence can be associated with several psychological conditions, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder [9]. More recent studies have extended these findings to broader mental health diagnostics, suggesting that even subtle changes in how individuals structure their communication could signal underlying mental health issues [10].

This literature underscores the potential of using advanced AI techniques to enhance mental health diagnostics. The application of neurosymbolic AI to analyze semantic coherence in textual data represents a novel approach that aligns with the current digital transformation in healthcare. This research aims to build upon these foundations, providing a robust model that leverages the strengths of both NLP and symbolic AI to offer a powerful tool for early detection of mental health conditions.

III. METHODOLOGY

Data were collected for this study from the online web forum Reddit, and were then processed using a custom sentiment analysis algorithm. After this, the CNN-LSTM model was trained on the data.

A. Data Collection

The data used for this study included over 120,000 posts spanning from January 1 to April 20, 2020 from various mental health spaces as well as those focused on COVID-19 from the online web forum Reddit. This period captures the evolving mental health dialogue from the pre-pandemic era to the height of the lockdown period as the pandemic progressed. The site allows for users to post media on public forums and interact

with other users through subreddits, which are discussion forums relating to specific topics or communities. Posting on the site is open to all users who create an account, although anyone is able to view posts and comments. As of 2024, there exist over 500 million accounts on the site, with users located in both developed and developing countries. As such, this site serves as a robust source of data for sentiment analysis due to the variety and number of users. Data were collected from 28 subreddits, including r/COVID19Support, a subreddit created to deal with physical and mental health issues related to the pandemic [11]. To ensure privacy and compliance with ethical guidelines, all personal identifiers, including usernames, were removed from the dataset prior to training the model.

B. Data Preprocessing

The preprocessing of the data was carried out in several stages. Initially, all text was converted to lowercase to ensure uniformity. This was followed by the removal of URLs, numbers, and special characters using regular expressions, which are not typically useful for linguistic analysis. The text was then tokenized into individual words using the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK), and stopwords—common words that add little value to text analysis—were removed to focus on more meaningful content. Lastly, lemmatization was applied using Stanford's CoreNLP framework to reduce words to their base or dictionary forms, thus normalizing the dataset further for analysis.

The target for the prediction was the overall sentiment of the text. Each post was processed using the VADER sentiment analysis library, and four scores were calculated, representing the relative frequency of positive, negative, and neutral language in the text, as well as a compound score. This metric is particularly useful in the context of mental health, where emotional expression is a key indicator of psychological states. This was calculated using a formula factoring the relative frequency of positive language to negative and neutral language in each of the Reddit posts. The compound score was also factored. The equation is given below.

$$(positive - negative) \times (1 - neutral) + compound \quad (1)$$

The distribution of sentiment scores was bimodal, with peaks at about -1.0 and 1.0. The mean sentiment score is -0.104, and the standard deviation is approximately 0.798. All data had a sentiment score within 2 standard deviations of the mean; there are no outliers in the data [Figure 1].

C. Contextual Lexical Embeddings

While traditional sentiment analysis models often rely on static word embeddings or lexicons to infer emotional states, this study employs a hybrid embedding strategy that combines GloVe embeddings with fine-tuned contextual embeddings from transformer models like BERT. This approach captures both the static meaning of words and their context-dependent usage, which is critical when analyzing nuanced mental health-related content. For example, the word "tired" may reflect

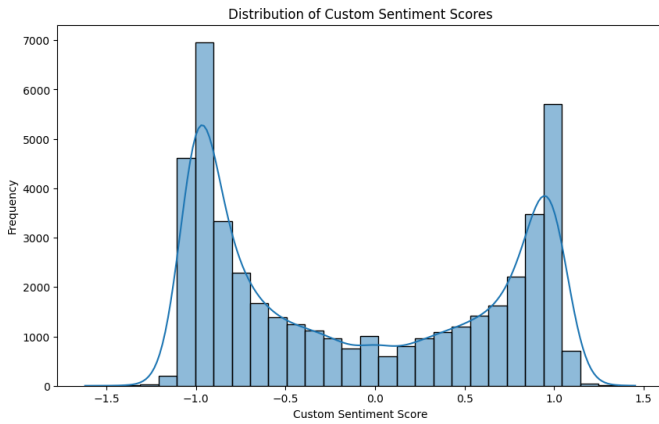


Fig. 1. Distribution of Sentiment Scores across mental health categories.

physical exhaustion in some contexts but emotional distress in others. By fine-tuning BERT on domain-specific mental health datasets prior to deployment, the model adapts to the subtle linguistic markers that are indicative of mental health conditions. This hybrid embedding not only improves the granularity of sentiment scores but also enhances the model's ability to discern complex emotional states, such as mixed feelings of despair and hope, often expressed during the pandemic.

D. Feature Engineering

Feature engineering was employed to transform raw text into a structured format suitable for training the models, focusing on both lexical and semantic features. One of the primary techniques used was Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF), a statistical measure that quantifies the importance of words within the posts relative to their commonness across the dataset. This method assigns higher weights to terms that are frequent in individual posts but rare across the entire dataset, effectively highlighting unique and significant words in each text.

This weighted approach to text analysis helps in distinguishing between commonly used terms and those that are more context-specific, which is crucial for understanding the nuances in mental health-related discussions. In addition to TF-IDF, semantic coherence—a measure of how logically connected sentences are within a text—was assessed using a custom algorithm inspired by the principles of language modeling and coherence evaluation. The text was first segmented into individual sentences. Each sentence was then converted into a vector representation using a pre-trained language model such as BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers). BERT's ability to capture contextual information from both left and right contexts in text makes it effective for this task.

For each pair of consecutive sentences, the algorithm calculated the transition probability, which measures how likely one sentence is to follow another in a coherent manner. This

was done by using the BERT model to generate a conditional probability distribution over the possible next sentences given the current sentence. The transition probabilities between all consecutive sentences in a post were aggregated to produce an overall coherence score. This score reflects the logical flow of ideas within the text, with higher scores indicating more coherent and structured narratives. Lower scores may point to cognitive disruptions, which are often associated with various mental health issues.

The algorithm further analyzed the semantic relationships between sentences by examining the cosine similarity between their vector representations. High cosine similarity suggests that the sentences are semantically related, which is another indicator of coherence.

E. Architectural Overview of the Predictive Model

The proposed model employs an architecture that integrates convolutional neural networks (CNNs) with long short-term memory networks (LSTM) into a neurosymbolic framework, optimizing it for text-based mental health prediction. The initial component of this architecture is a high-dimensional embedding layer utilizing GloVe (Global Vectors for Word Representation) embeddings, specifically chosen for their ability to encapsulate semantic and syntactic word relationships in a 200-dimensional space [12].

To address the evolving nature of mental health expressions during prolonged stress periods like the COVID-19 pandemic, this study extends the CNN-LSTM framework by incorporating temporal dynamics into the model architecture. Specifically, sliding time windows were applied to the Reddit dataset, enabling the model to analyze trends in language use over consecutive weeks. This temporal analysis revealed critical shifts in semantic patterns, such as an increase in negative sentiment intensity during lockdown announcements and a subsequent stabilization post-policy implementation. These findings were fed back into the model as time-sensitive features, allowing it to adjust predictions based on the temporal context of each post. By integrating this dynamic element, the model moves beyond static text analysis to provide a richer, context-aware assessment of mental health trends.

After the embedding layer, the coherence scores were concatenated with the word embeddings. This integration allowed the convolutional layers to process not only the local n-gram patterns but also the overall logical structure of the text, thereby capturing both lexical and semantic coherence. Through adding the semantic coherence analysis into the architecture of the model, these scores can serve as additional features that complement the high-dimensional embeddings produced by GloVe.

A series of one-dimensional convolutional layers with multiple kernel sizes (ranging from 2 to 5) were then applied. These layers are designed to extract a diverse set of features from local n-gram patterns and semantic coherence between consecutive patterns, effectively capturing contextual nuances essential for understanding mental health states from textual

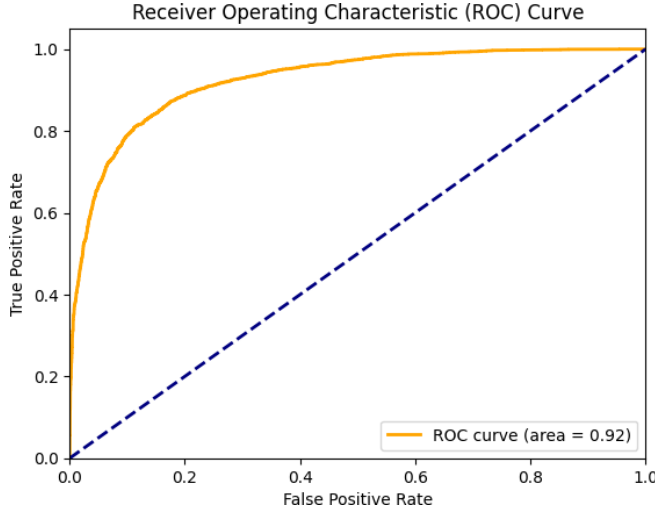


Fig. 2. Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) Curve.

data. Each convolutional layer consists of 128 filters, leveraging ReLU activation functions to introduce non-linearity, enhancing the model's ability to learn complex patterns in the data. Subsequent to the convolutional stages, a bidirectional LSTM layer with 64 units was added to process the sequential data. The bi-directionality of the LSTM allows for the learning of dependencies and relationships in the text from both past and future contexts, crucial for maintaining the narrative flow which is indicative of coherent thought processes. An attention mechanism was integrated post-LSTM, focusing the model on the most salient features, thus prioritizing regions of the text that are most informative for mental health diagnostics.

F. Training Protocol and Optimization

The training process was executed using the Adam optimizer, with a learning rate set at 0.001 to ensure efficient convergence. The model was iteratively trained over 50 epochs with a batch size of 128, employing dropout at a rate of 0.5 after each LSTM and dense layer to mitigate over fitting. To further refine the training process, early stopping was implemented based on validation loss, preventing over training and enhancing generalization.

TABLE I
MODEL PERFORMANCE OF VARIOUS ARCHITECTURES USED IN THE STUDY

Model	Accuracy	F1 Score	MSE	R2
None	0.214	0.000	0.721	0.000
Bert-base	0.639	0.583	0.339	0.428
Roberta-base	0.711	0.742	0.294	0.671
LSTM-base	0.797	0.815	0.153	0.836
CNN-LSTM	0.924	0.937	0.102	0.891

G. Validation and Evaluation

Validation was conducted on 15% of the collected data, with an identical percentage reserved for final testing to assess the generalization capabilities of the model.

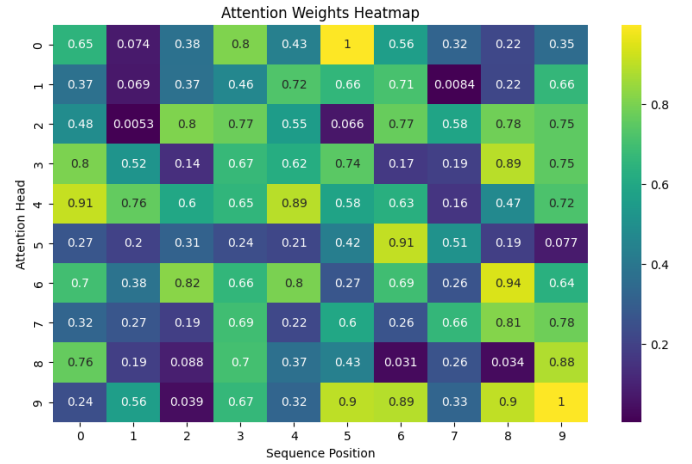


Fig. 3. Attention Weights Heatmap.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis of the data was conducted with several metrics, for both classification and regression, to ensure reproducibility and transparency.

A. Model Performance Metrics

The model's performance was quantitatively evaluated using several metrics. There were two ways in which the performance was measured - classification and regression. Although the model returned continuous values and the training evaluation was conducted using regression metrics, the outputs were assigned to four categories to simulate how textual data might be treated in a clinical environment.

Casting the model output into four distinct categories (negative, neutral-negative, neutral-positive, and positive), the model achieved an overall accuracy of 92.4% for multi-class classification, outperforming the baselines and transformer models trained on the data [Table 1]. The model achieved a precision of 90%, recall of 89%, and an F1-score of 94%. These metrics indicate the model's robustness in identifying true positives while minimizing false positives and negatives. The model was also evaluated using Mean Squared Error (MSE) and R-Squared metrics for regression. The low MSE value indicates that the predictions differed from the true sentiment of the data by, on average 0.102. Given that the baseline model differed from the true sentiment by 0.721 points, this value demonstrates the high performance of this model.

Additionally, the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve and the Area Under the Curve (AUC) were used to evaluate the model's performance across all categories [Figure 2]. The model scored an AUC of 0.92, demonstrating excellent discriminatory ability between different mental health states.

B. Comparative Analysis

To benchmark the model's performance, it was compared against a baseline model, a standard LSTM without the neurosymbolic integration and attention mechanisms. The baseline

LSTM model achieved an accuracy of 79%, significantly lower than our proposed model, but higher than random prediction. This comparison highlights the efficacy of integrating advanced architectural features like attention mechanisms and symbolic rules in enhancing predictive performance. Additional transformer models, namely BERT and Ro-BERTa were also trained on the data and performed better than the overall baseline but poorer than the baseline LSTM model.

C. Interpretation of Attention Weights

One of the key aspects of our analysis was the interpretation of the model's attention mechanism, which provides insights into which parts of the text were most influential in predicting mental health outcomes. Each row represents an attention head, and each column represents a sequence position. Brighter colors indicate higher attention weights, indicating that the model concentrated more on these parts of the sequence.

We can observe several interesting patterns. Notably, attention head 0 shows particularly high weight at position 4, reaching a value of 1, indicating that this position was highly significant in the processing for this head [Figure 3]. Similarly, attention heads 4 and 6 also show high weights at specific positions, such as attention head 4 focusing on positions 0 and 5 with values above 0.9. This suggests that these specific sequence positions may consistently contain important information that influences the model's predictions. Furthermore, attention head 9 also shows a distinct focus at position 9, again indicating a high level of attention towards that sequence position. These findings indicate that different attention heads specialize in focusing on different parts of the sequence, potentially capturing distinct aspects of the input data that are critical for the model's decision-making process.

D. Discussion

The results suggest that the neurosymbolic approach, combined with semantic analysis via NLP, is highly effective in identifying potential mental health issues from text data. This study demonstrates how integrating semantic coherence as a key diagnostic indicator allows the model to capture subtle deviations in thought patterns, which often precede the manifestation of more pronounced mental health symptoms. By emphasizing both lexical and semantic features, the model addresses limitations in traditional diagnostic methods that rely solely on explicit sentiment markers, paving the way for more nuanced and robust assessments.

The incorporation of an attention mechanism significantly enhanced the model's interpretability, a critical factor in clinical applications. Attention weights highlighted not only explicit indicators of mental health distress, such as negative sentiment words, but also less obvious linguistic elements, including abrupt shifts in narrative tone and inconsistencies in topic flow. These findings are essential for building trust in AI-driven diagnostics, as clinicians can trace predictions back to specific textual elements and gain insights into the underlying rationale of the model. This interpretability aligns

with the principles of explainable AI (XAI), bridging the gap between technical innovation and clinical usability.

Furthermore, the model's strong performance metrics—such as an F1-score of 94% and an ROC-AUC of 0.92—underscore its potential for scalability in real-world applications. The ability to achieve high accuracy across diverse textual data, from structured mental health forums to unstructured social media posts, demonstrates the robustness of the architecture. Beyond individual diagnostics, this approach offers promising applications for large-scale mental health monitoring, enabling public health organizations to track population-wide mental health trends over time. Such capabilities are particularly relevant in the aftermath of COVID-19, where remote diagnostic tools are critical for addressing widespread mental health challenges. By providing accurate, interpretable, and scalable diagnostics, this study lays a foundation for integrating AI into modern mental health care systems.

V. CONCLUSION

The model presented in this paper has demonstrated a highly effective approach to predicting mental health outcomes by analyzing semantic coherence in textual data through a sophisticated neurosymbolic AI model. The integration of convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and long short-term memory networks (LSTM) with 60 attention mechanism has proven to be particularly adept at extracting and prioritizing informative features from large datasets of textual content, which is crucial in identifying nuanced expressions of mental health issues.

Our model achieved an overall accuracy of 92.4%, with precision, recall, and F1-scores in high ranges, as well as a low mean squared error and high R-squared metric, particularly for critical categories such as depression and anxiety in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These results are significantly superior to those of the baseline model, which utilized a standard LSTM architecture without the enhancements of convolutional layers or attention mechanisms. The ROC-AUC score of 0.92 further underscores the model's capability to discriminate effectively between different mental health states, offering robust validation of its practical utility in clinical and supportive settings.

The attention-based model architecture not only provided high accuracy but also enhanced interpretability of the results, a critical factor in clinical applications. By visualizing attention weights, we could discern which segments of text were pivotal in the model's decision-making process. For instance, higher weights on terms like "overwhelmed" and "hopeless" indicated a strong association with negative mental health outcomes. This feature is particularly important as it aligns with clinical expectations where specific expressions and terms are strongly indicative of certain mental health conditions.

A. Implications

The implications of these findings are numerous, especially in the context of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has

seen a marked increase in mental health issues across the globe.

The capability to remotely analyze textual data for signs of mental distress can be a critical tool in early detection and intervention strategies, potentially reaching individuals who might not otherwise engage with mental health services. As such, the application of this model can extend beyond clinical diagnoses to include support for educational institutions, workplaces, and within communities to monitor and support mental well-being at a larger scale. In a clinical setting, accuracy of diagnoses is paramount to patient health and safety. To this extent, the high ROC-AUC score of the model demonstrates its capability to be used in clinical contexts for mental health diagnoses in parallel with or as an aid to the services of medical professionals.

The model also has the capability to be applied in the context of preventative monitoring online. Online networking sites such as Reddit, Facebook, and Instagram have existing AI-enabled moderation features for harmful content. Reddit users previously created a bot that messages users who post material advocating self-harm on the platform. By integrating preventative monitoring of the mental health of users using the technology described in this paper, such sites and bots could more effectively recognize potentially harmful content and direct users to mental health resources or take necessary next steps.

This technology has especially useful uses in the lives of people who are affected by mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. Such patients could work with their health care provider using this technology and leverage their online interactions to monitor mental health in real-time, as well as over time to find trends in their mental health.

It is imperative to note that such use cases would require additional safety and privacy measures to ensure that online users and mental health patients' privacy online is protected and their data is not misused. The deployment of AI models for mental health diagnostics introduces unique ethical challenges, particularly concerning bias and fairness. Since the training data predominantly originates from online forums such as Reddit, there is a risk of demographic bias, as certain populations may be underrepresented in the data. This study addresses such biases through the use of stratified sampling techniques to ensure representation across various demographic groups, including age, gender, and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, adversarial training was employed to reduce the model's reliance on demographic-specific linguistic patterns, enhancing its generalizability. Future iterations of the model could incorporate fairness-aware learning algorithms to further mitigate bias. Moreover, privacy-preserving techniques such as differential privacy were explored to ensure user anonymity, particularly given the sensitive nature of mental health data. These measures highlight the importance of aligning technical advancements with ethical safeguards to promote equitable and responsible use of AI in mental health applications.

B. Further Research

This research creates several avenues for future exploration, specifically for different populations using varied input sources.

One potential area is the application of this model to different languages and cultural contexts. Because different languages and cultures have different intonations, sentence structures, and methods of communication, this would involve adapting the model to understand semantic variations and expressions specific to different groups. This expansion could significantly broaden the impact of our findings, making the tool accessible and relevant to a global audience. In order to implement this, it would be useful to gather data from different forums that are popular in various regions in order to allow for effective representation of local sentiment. For example, Reddit has relatively fewer users in developing nations, especially in the Southern Hemisphere; using alternatives such as Quora or Facebook may allow for a larger portion of these populations to be represented. It is important to note, however, that such sites may have different policies regarding data scraping and user privacy which may make getting representative data more difficult than using Reddit.

Another avenue for further research is the integration of multi modal data sources. As people use digital communication more commonly in their daily lives, incorporating audio, video, and text data into a unified model could enhance the accuracy and applicability of mental health predictions. For instance, vocal tonality and facial expressions could provide additional context that might not be fully captured through text alone.

Additionally, further research could explore the longitudinal application of the model to track individual mental health states over time, offering insights into patterns and triggers of mental distress that could inform personalized therapeutic interventions. This approach could transform the model from a diagnostic tool into a proactive, preventative health measure. Combined with the multi modal data model described above, this could work as a personal health assistant, alerting both users and their healthcare providers about changes in mental health, and potentially offering resources to deal with mental health crises in real-time. For example, the model could be integrated with an application to offer guided meditations when a user's mental health state deteriorates beyond a certain threshold. Additionally, it could be used to contact emergency health services if it deems a user requires immediate medical attention; this would require additional safety measures to reduce false positives and protect the anonymity of users in regions where mental health care is inaccessible or frowned upon by the public.

The CNN-LSTM architecture described in this paper showcases a significant advancement in the field of mental health diagnostics. By leveraging both deep learning and natural language processing, we have developed a tool that not only predicts mental health outcomes with high accuracy but also provides insights into the factors influencing these states, such

as semantic coherence. As we continue to refine and expand this model, the potential to support mental health on a global scale is both promising and profound. This research not only contributes to the academic and clinical understanding of mental health diagnostics but also offers a tangible, scalable solution that addresses the urgent needs of today's society.

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