



معهد قطر لبحوث الحوسبة
Qatar Computing Research Institute
Member of Qatar Foundation قطر مؤسسة قطر

Press Release

QCRI and Al Jazeera launch predictive web analytics platform for news

New platform developed by QCRI and Al Jazeera can predict visits to news articles by taking cues from social media

Doha, Qatar, X August 2013:

News organisations have vast archives of information, as well as a number of web analytic tools that aid in allocating editorial resources to cover different news events, and capitalise on this information. These tools allow editors and media managers to react to shifts in their audience's interest, but what is lacking is a tool to help predict such shifts.

Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) and Al Jazeera are announcing the launch of FAST (Forecast and Analytics of Social Media and Traffic), a platform that analyses in real-time the life cycle of news stories on the web and social media, and provides predictive analytics that gauge audience interest.

"The explosion of big data in the media domain has provided QCRI an excellent research opportunity to develop an innovative way to derive value from the information," said Dr Ahmed Elmagarmid, Executive Director of QCRI. "Together with our valued partner, Al Jazeera, the QCRI team has developed a platform that will help shift the way media does business."

"Al Jazeera English's website thrives on good original content in news and features, dynamic ways of creativity through interactive and crowd sourcing methods, and up-to-date social media tools. We welcome working with QCRI in developing FAST as it allows us to understand the consumption of news and what is expected to do well in driving traffic forward. Analytics in predicting the future trend of a web story is a crucial component in understanding web traffic, this initiative is a component we welcome," said Imad Musa, Head of Online for Al Jazeera English.

The study of consumption patterns of online news has attracted considerable attention from the research community for more than a decade, primarily making predictions on patterns as single time series to determine website traffic, number of visits, number of comments, and personalised news recommendations among others. Predicting user behaviour around news articles is valuable for a news organisation as it allows them to deliver more relevant and engaging content, as well as improve the allocation of resources to developing stories.

FAST introduces a unique approach to prediction by integrating different user interactions to a news article, including website visits, social media reactions, and search and referrals in order to forecast the number of page views an article will receive during its effective lifetime, which is approximately three days for most articles. This hybrid observation method is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis that determines typical patterns in the life cycle of news.

The underlying algorithms, which are the result of joint research by scientists at QCRI, Al Jazeera, Carnegie Mellon University and the MIT Center for Civic Media, have been validated using vast amounts of data made available by Al Jazeera English. The platform accurately models the overall traffic an article will receive by observing the first thirty to sixty minutes of social media reactions. Achieving the same prediction accuracy by using data from visits alone would require at least three hours of data. FAST continuously learns to produce more accurate predictions as data from the most recent related articles streams into the system.

“One of the main conclusions from our research is that social media reactions cannot be ignored when producing traffic predictions,” said Dr Carlos Castillo, Senior Scientist in QCRI’s Social Computing team. “You need to take into account not only the number of Facebook shares and tweets each article receives, but also the richness of the discussion around an article in Twitter. This leads to much more accurate predictions than simply extrapolating from current page views.”

To access FAST, please visit <http://fast.qcri.org/>.

QCRI is a national research institute and a member of Qatar Foundation Research and Development, supporting Qatar’s mission to build the nation’s innovation and technology capacity. Al Jazeera is an award-winning international news network headquartered in Doha, Qatar.

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About Qatar Computing Research Institute

Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) was established in 2010 by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar's transformation from a hydrocarbon-based economy to knowledge-based economy.

QCRI is a national research institute supporting Qatar Foundation's Research and Development mission to build Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by focusing on large-scale computing challenges that address national priorities for growth and development.

In doing this, QCRI conducts world-class multidisciplinary computing research that is relevant to the needs of Qatar, the wider Arab region, and the world. It performs cutting-edge research in such areas as Arabic language technologies, data analytics, distributed systems, cyber security, social computing, and computer science and engineering.

The research conducted at QCRI is aligned with the Qatar National Research Strategy and supports the strategic priorities outlined in the Qatar National Vision 2030. For more information, please visit www.qcri.qa.

About Qatar Foundation Research and Development

Leading Qatar's vision to become an international center for research and development excellence and innovation, QF R&D is home to the Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP), a world-class hub for technology innovation and commercialization, as well as the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), a globally renowned scientific research funding organization, and prominent research institutes operating at the frontiers of science including Qatar Biomedical Research Institute (QBRI), Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) and Qatar Environment & Energy Research Institute (QEERI).

About Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera is a globally orientated Arab media service. With its motto "*the opinion and the other opinion*" it acts as a forum for plurality seeking the truth while observing the principles of professionalism within an institutional framework.

Al Jazeera English is an international news channel with over seventy bureaus around the world that span six different continents. Since being established in 2006, it has continued to grow in reach and popularity due to its global coverage, especially from underreported regions. The channel currently broadcasts to over 250 million households across 130 countries.

Al Jazeera English is part of the Al Jazeera Network - one of the world's leading media corporations, encompassing news, documentary and sport channels.

Al Jazeera started out more than fifteen years ago as the first independent news channel in the Arab world dedicated to covering and uncovering stories in the region.



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It is now a media network consisting of over twenty channels – Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera Balkans, Al Jazeera America, Al Jazeera Sport, Al Jazeera Mubasher, Al Jazeera Documentary, the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center and the Al Jazeera Center for Studies.

To access Al Jazeera , please visit www.aljazeera.com