

**International Journal of  
Engineering Research and Science & Technology**



**ISSN : 2319-5991**

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# INTELLIGENT PROFILING OF EMERGING CYBER THREATS USING NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING AND MACHINE LEARNING

<sup>1</sup>P. Karthik, MCA Student, Department of MCA

<sup>2</sup>B. Harish Kumar Reddy, M.Tech, (Ph.D), Assistant Professor, Department of MCA

<sup>1,2</sup>Dr KV Subba Reddy Institute of Technology, Dupadu, Kurnool

## ABSTRACT

The time window between the disclosure of a new cyber vulnerability and its use by cybercriminals has been getting smaller and smaller over time. Recent episodes, such as Log4j vulnerability, exemplifies this well. Within hours after the exploit being released, attackers started scanning the internet looking for vulnerable hosts to deploy threats like cryptocurrency miners and ransomware on vulnerable systems. Thus, it becomes imperative for the cybersecurity defense strategy to detect threats and their capabilities as early as possible to maximize the success of prevention actions. Although crucial, discovering new threats is a challenging activity for security analysts due to the immense volume of data and information sources to be analyzed for signs that a threat is emerging. In this sense, we present a framework for automatic identification and profiling of emerging threats using Twitter messages as a source of events and MITRE ATT&CK as a source of knowledge for threat characterization. The framework comprises three main parts: identification of cyber threats and their names; profiling the identified threat in terms of its intentions or goals by employing two machine learning layers to filter and classify tweets; and alarm generation based on the threat's risk. The main contribution of our work is the approach to characterize or profile the identified threats in terms of their intentions or goals, providing additional context on the threat and avenues for mitigation. In our experiments, the profiling stage reached an F1 score of 77% in correctly profiling discovered threats.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been an increasing reliance on the Internet for business, government, and social interactions as a result of a trend of hyper-connectivity and hyper-mobility. While the Internet has become an indispensable infrastructure for businesses, governments, and societies, there is also an increased risk of cyber attacks with different motivations and intentions. Preventing organizations from cyber exploits needs timely intelligence about cyber vulnerabilities and attacks, referred to as threats [1].

Threat intelligence is defined as “evidence-based knowledge, including context, mechanisms, indicators, implications, and actionable advice, about an existing or emerging menace or hazard to assets that can be used to inform decisions regarding the subject's response to that menace or hazard” [2]. Threat intelligence in cyber security domain, or cyber threat intelligence, provides timely and relevant information, such as signatures of the attacks, that can help reduce the uncertainty in identifying potential security vulnerabilities and attacks.

Cyber threat intelligence can generally be extracted from informal or formal sources, which officially release threat information in structured data format. Structured threat intelligence adheres to a well-defined data model, with a common format and structure. Structured cyber threat intelligence, therefore, can be easily parsed by security tools to analyze and respond to security threats accordingly. Examples of formal sources of cyber threat intelligence include the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVE) database [1]

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

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and the National Vulnerability Database (NVD).<sup>2</sup>

Cyber threat intelligence is also available on informal sources, such as public blogs, dark webs, forums, and social media platforms. Informal sources allow any person or entity on the Internet to publish, in real-time, the threat information in natural language, or unstructured data format. The unstructured and publicly available threat intelligence is also called Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) [3]. Cyber security-related OSINT are early warning sources for cyber security events such as security vulnerability exploits [4].

To conduct a cyber-attack, malicious actors typically have to 1) identify vulnerabilities, 2) acquire the necessary tools and tradecraft to successfully exploit them, 3) choose a target and recruit participants, 4) create or purchase the infrastructure needed, and 5) plan and execute the attack. Other actors— system administrators, security analysts, and even victims— may discuss vulnerabilities or coordinate a response to attacks [5]. These activities are often conducted online through social media, (open and dark) Web forums, and professional blogs, leaving digital traces behind. Collectively, these digital traces provide valuable insights into evolving cyber threats and can signal a pending or developing attack well before the malicious activity is noted on a target system. For example, exploits are discussed on Twitter before they are publicly disclosed [4] and on dark web forums even before they are discussed on social media [6].

## II. LITERATURE SURVEY

**“Vulnerability disclosure in the age of social media: Exploiting Twitter for predicting real-world exploits,”**

**C. Sabottke, O. Suci, and T. Dumitras,**

In recent years, the number of software vulnerabilities discovered has grown significantly. This creates a need for prioritizing the response to new disclosures by assessing which vulnerabilities are likely to be exploited and by quickly ruling out the vulnerabilities that

are not actually exploited in the real world. We conduct a quantitative and qualitative exploration of the vulnerability-related information disseminated on Twitter. We then describe the design of a Twitter-based exploit detector, and we introduce a threat model specific to our problem. In addition to response prioritization, our detection techniques have applications in risk modeling for cyber-insurance and they highlight the value of information provided by the victims of attacks.

**“Early warnings of cyber threats in online discussions,”**

**A. Sapienza, A. Bessi, S. Damodaran, P. Shakarian, K. Lerman, and E. Ferrara,**

We introduce a system for automatically generating warnings of imminent or current cyber-threats. Our system leverages the communication of malicious actors on the darkweb, as well as activity of cyber security experts on social media platforms like Twitter. In a time period between September, 2016 and January, 2017, our method generated 661 alerts of which about 84% were relevant to current or imminent cyber-threats. In the paper, we first illustrate the rationale and workflow of our system, then we measure its performance. Our analysis is enriched by two case studies: the first shows how the method could predict DDoS attacks, and how it would have allowed organizations to prepare for the Mirai attacks that caused widespread disruption in October 2016. Second, we discuss the method's timely identification of various instances of data breaches.

**“Darknet and deepnet mining for proactive cybersecurity threat intelligence,”**

**E. Nunes, A. Diab, A. Gunn, E. Marin, V. Mishra, V. Paliath, J. Robertson, J. Shakarian, A. Thart, and P. Shakarian,**

In this paper, we present an operational system for cyber threat intelligence gathering from various social platforms on the Internet particularly sites on the darknet and deepnet. We focus our attention to collecting information from

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

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hacker forum discussions and marketplaces offering products and services focusing on malicious hacking. We have developed an operational system for obtaining information from these sites for the purposes of identifying emerging cyber threats. Currently, this system collects on average 305 high-quality cyber threat warnings each week. These threat warnings include information on newly developed malware and exploits that have not yet been deployed in a cyber-attack. This provides a significant service to cyber-defenders. The system is significantly augmented through the use of various data mining and machine learning techniques. With the use of machine learning models, we are able to recall 92% of products in marketplaces and 80% of discussions on forums relating to malicious hacking with high precision. We perform preliminary analysis on the data collected, demonstrating its application to aid a security expert for better threat analysis.

**“CyberTwitter: Using Twitter to generate alerts for cybersecurity threats and vulnerabilities,”**

**S. Mittal, P. K. Das, V. Mulwad, A. Joshi, and T. Finin,**

In order to secure vital personal and organizational system we require timely intelligence on cybersecurity threats and vulnerabilities. Intelligence about these threats is generally available in both overt and covert sources like the National Vulnerability Database, CERT alerts, blog posts, social media, and dark web resources. Intelligence updates about cybersecurity can be viewed as temporal events that a security analyst must keep up with so as to secure a computer system. We describe CyberTwitter, a system to discover and analyze cybersecurity intelligence on Twitter and serve as a OSINT (Open-source intelligence) source. We analyze real time information updates, in form of tweets, to extract intelligence about various possible threats. We use the Semantic Web RDF to represent the intelligence gathered and SWRL

rules to reason over extracted intelligence to issue alerts for security analysts.

### III. SYSTEM ANALYSIS & DESIGN EXISTING SYSTEM

Cybersecurity is becoming an ever-increasing concern for most organizations and much research has been developed in this field over the last few years. Inside these organizations, the Security Operations Center (SOC) is the central nervous system that provides the necessary security against cyber threats. However, to be effective, the SOC requires timely and relevant threat intelligence to accurately and properly monitor, maintain, and secure an IT infrastructure. This leads security analysts to strive for threat awareness by collecting and reading various information feeds. However, if done manually, this results in a tedious and extensive task that may result in little knowledge being obtained given the large amounts of irrelevant information. Research has shown that Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) provides useful information to identify emerging cyber threats.

OSINT is the collection, analysis, and use of data from openly available sources for intelligence purposes [21]. Examples of sources for OSINT are public blogs, dark and deep websites, forums, and social media. In such platforms, any person or entity on the Internet can publish, in real-time, information in natural language related to cyber security, including incidents, new threats, and vulnerabilities. Among the OSINT sources for cyber threat intelligence, we can highlight the social media Twitter as one of the most representative [22]. Cyber security experts, system administrators, and hackers constantly use Twitter to discuss technical details about cyber attacks and share their experiences [4].

Utilization of OSINT to automatically identify cyber threats via social media, forums and other openly available sources using text analytics was proposed in different researches [1], [23], [7], [24], [25], [26], [13], [27] and [28]. However,

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

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most proposals focus on identifying important events related to cyber threats or vulnerabilities but do not propose identifying and profiling cyber threats.

Amongst research, [13] proposes an early cyber threat warning system that mines online chatter from cyber actors on social media, security blogs, and dark web forums to identify words that signal potential cyber-attacks. The framework is comprised by two main components: text mining and warning generation. The text mining phase consists on pre-processing the input data to identify potential threat names by discarding “known” terms and selecting repeating “unknown” among different sources as they potentially can be the name of a new or discovered cyber threat. The second component, warning generation, is responsible for issuing alarms for unknown terms that meet some requirements, like appearing twice in a given period of time. The approach presented in this research uses keyword filtering as the only strategy to identify cyber threat names, which may result in false positives as unknown words may appear in tweets or other content not necessarily related to cyber security. Additionally, this research does not profile the identified cyber threat.

In [26] an identification and classification approach of cyber threat indicators in the Twitter stream is presented. The research proposes a data-driven approach for

modeling and classification of tweets using a cascaded Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture to both classify tweets as related or not to cyber security and classify the cyber-related tweets into a fixed listed of cyber threats. The proposed solution includes a pre-processing phase that uses IBM’s Watson Natural Language API to identify tweets related to cyber security according to Watson classification results. Additionally, in the pre-processing phase, there is a pre-labeling step performed by simple string

matching on the pure tweet text. The threat types considered were: “vulnerability”, “DDoS”, “ransomware”, “botnet”, “data leak”, “zero-day” and “general”. Further, the proposed approach uses CNN models trained to classify each tweet as relevant or irrelevant to cyber security. The relevant tweets are passed to a second CNN layer to be classified as one of the 8 different threat types mentioned above. There are important differences of our proposal compared to this one.

First, the proposed approach does not name the identified threat. Naming the threat is an important step to cyber threat intelligence as it may allow analysts to identify and mitigate campaigns based on the historic *modus operandi* employed by a given threat or group.

Second, the proposed approach relies on an external component to classify tweets as related or not to cyber security as opposed to our approach that proposes a component to classify tweets using machine learning trained with the evolving knowledge from MITRE ATT&CK. Third, instead of using a keyword match to pre-filter threats and a fixed list of threat types, we present an approach to profile the identified cyber threat to spot in which phase of phases of the cyber kill chain the given threat operates in. This is important for a cyber threat analyst as he or she may employ the necessary mitigation steps depending on the threat profile.

In [1], a framework for automatically gathering cyber threat intelligence from Twitter is presented. The framework utilizes a novelty detection model to classify the tweets as relevant or irrelevant to Cyber threat intelligence. The novelty classifier learns the features of cyber threat intelligence from the threat descriptions in the Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVE) database 5 and classifies a new unseen tweet as normal or abnormal in relation to Cyber threat intelligence. The normal tweets are

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considered as Cyber threat relevant while the abnormal tweets are considered as Cyber threat-irrelevant. The paper evaluates the framework on a data set created from the tweets collected over a period of twelve months in 2018 from 50 influential Cyber security-related accounts. During the evaluation, the framework achieved the highest performance of 0.643 measured by the F1-score metric for classifying Cyber threat tweets. According to the authors, the proposed approach outperformed several baselines including binary classification models. Also, was analyzed the correctly classified cyber threat tweets and discovered that 81 of them do not contain a CVE identifier. The authors have also found that 34 out of the 81 tweets can be associated with a CVE identifier included in the top 10 most similar CVE descriptions of each tweet. Despite presenting a proposal to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant tweets, the proposal does not address the identification of threats and their intentions. Those are important requirements for Cyber Threat Intelligence in formulating defense strategies against emerging threats.

The tool proposed in [23] collects tweets from a selected subset of accounts using the Twitter streaming API, and then, by using keyword-based filtering, it discards tweets unrelated to the monitored infrastructure assets. To classify and extract information from tweets the paper uses a sequence of two deep neural networks. The first is a binary classifier based on a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture used for Natural Language Processing (NLP) [29]. It receives tweets that may be referencing an asset from the monitored infrastructure and labels them as either relevant when the tweets contain security-related information, or irrelevant otherwise.

Relevant tweets are processed for information extraction by a Named Entity Recognition (NER) model, implemented as a Bidirectional Long

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Short-Term Memory (BiLSTM) neural network [30]. This network labels each word in a tweet with one of six entities used to locate relevant information. Furthermore, the authors chose to use the application of deep learning techniques because of its advantages in the NLP domain [31]. Thus, they propose an end-to-end threat intelligence tool that relies on neural networks with no feature engineering.

#### Disadvantages

- An existing system never implemented Multi-Class machine learning (ML) algorithms - the next steps in the pipeline.
- An existing system didn't implement the following method PROCESS IDENTIFIED AND CLASSIFIED THREATS.

#### PROPOSED SYSTEM

The overall goal of this work is to propose an approach to automatically identify and profile emerging cyber threats based on OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) in order to generate timely alerts to cyber security engineers. To achieve this goal, we propose a solution whose macro steps are listed below.

- 1) Continuously monitoring and collecting posts from prominent people and companies on Twitter to mine unknown terms related to cyber threats and malicious campaigns;
- 2) Using Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) to identify those terms most likely to be threat names and discard those least likely;
- 3) Leveraging MITRE ATT&CK techniques' procedures examples to identify most likely tactic employed by the discovered threat;
- 4) Generating timely alerts for new or developing threats along with its characterization or goals associated with a risk rate based on how fast the threat is evolving since its identification.

#### Advantages

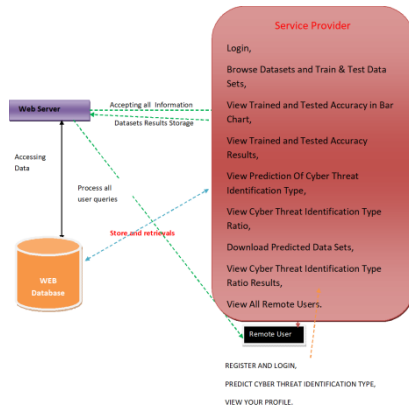
<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

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To conduct a cyber-attack, malicious actors typically have to

- 1) Identify vulnerabilities,
- 2) acquire the necessary tools and tradecraft to successfully exploit them,
- 3) choose a target and recruit participants,
- 4) Create or purchase the infrastructure needed, and
- 5) Plan and execute the attack. Other actors—system administrators, security analysts, and even victims— may discuss vulnerabilities or coordinate a response to attacks

**SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE**



**IV. IMPLEMENTATIONS**

**Modules**

**Service Provider**

In this module, the Service Provider has to login by using valid user name and password. After login successful he can do some operations such as Browse Datasets and Train & Test Data Sets, View Trained and Tested Accuracy in Bar Chart, View Trained and Tested Accuracy Results, View Prediction Of Cyber Threat Identification Type, View Cyber Threat Identification Type Ratio, Download Predicted Data Sets, View Cyber Threat Identification Type Ratio Results, View All Remote Users.

**View and Authorize Users**

In this module, the admin can view the list of users who all registered. In this, the admin can

view the user’s details such as, user name, email, address and admin authorizes the users.

**Remote User**

In this module, there are n numbers of users are present. User should register before doing any operations. Once user registers, their details will be stored to the database. After registration successful, he has to login by using authorized user name and password. Once Login is successful user will do some operations like REGISTER AND LOGIN, PREDICT CYBER THREAT IDENTIFICATION TYPE, VIEW YOUR PROFILE.

**ALGORITHM**

**Logistic regression Classifiers**

Logistic regression analysis studies the association between a categorical dependent variable and a set of independent (explanatory) variables. The name logistic regression is used when the dependent variable has only two values, such as 0 and 1 or Yes and No. The name multinomial logistic regression is usually reserved for the case when the dependent variable has three or more unique values, such as Married, Single, Divorced, or Widowed. Although the type of data used for the dependent variable is different from that of multiple regression, the practical use of the procedure is similar.

Logistic regression competes with discriminant analysis as a method for analyzing categorical-response variables. Many statisticians feel that logistic regression is more versatile and better suited for modeling most situations than is discriminant analysis. This is because logistic regression does not assume that the independent variables are normally distributed, as discriminant analysis does.

This program computes binary logistic regression and multinomial logistic regression on both numeric and categorical independent variables. It reports on the regression equation as well as the

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

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goodness of fit, odds ratios, confidence limits, likelihood, and deviance. It performs a comprehensive residual analysis including diagnostic residual reports and plots. It can perform an independent variable subset selection search, looking for the best regression model with the fewest independent variables. It provides confidence intervals on predicted values and provides ROC curves to help determine the best cutoff point for classification. It allows you to validate your results by automatically classifying rows that are not used during the analysis.

### Naïve Bayes

The naïve bayes approach is a supervised learning method which is based on a simplistic hypothesis: it assumes that the presence (or absence) of a particular feature of a class is unrelated to the presence (or absence) of any other feature .

Yet, despite this, it appears robust and efficient. Its performance is comparable to other supervised learning techniques. Various reasons have been advanced in the literature. In this tutorial, we highlight an explanation based on the representation bias. The naïve bayes classifier is a linear classifier, as well as linear discriminant analysis, logistic regression or linear SVM (support vector machine). The difference lies on the method of estimating the parameters of the classifier (the learning bias).

While the Naive Bayes classifier is widely used in the research world, it is not widespread among practitioners which want to obtain usable results. On the one hand, the researchers found especially it is very easy to program and implement it, its parameters are easy to estimate, learning is very fast even on very large databases, its accuracy is reasonably good in comparison to the other approaches. On the other hand, the final users do not obtain a model easy to interpret and deploy, they does not understand the interest of such a technique.

Thus, we introduce in a new presentation of the results of the learning process. The classifier is easier to understand, and its deployment is also made easier. In the first part of this tutorial, we present some theoretical aspects of the naïve bayes classifier. Then, we implement the approach on a dataset with Tanagra. We compare the obtained results (the parameters of the model) to those obtained with other linear approaches such as the logistic regression, the linear discriminant analysis and the linear SVM. We note that the results are highly consistent. This largely explains the good performance of the method in comparison to others. In the second part, we use various tools on the same dataset (Weka 3.6.0, R 2.9.2, Knime 2.1.1, Orange 2.0b and RapidMiner 4.6.0). We try above all to understand the obtained results.

### Random Forest

Random forests or random decision forests are an ensemble learning method for classification, regression and other tasks that operates by constructing a multitude of decision trees at training time. For classification tasks, the output of the random forest is the class selected by most trees. For regression tasks, the mean or average prediction of the individual trees is returned. Random decision forests correct for decision trees' habit of overfitting to their training set. Random forests generally outperform decision trees, but their accuracy is lower than gradient boosted trees. However, data characteristics can affect their performance.

The first algorithm for random decision forests was created in 1995 by Tin Kam Ho[1] using the random subspace method, which, in Ho's formulation, is a way to implement the "stochastic discrimination" approach to classification proposed by Eugene Kleinberg.

An extension of the algorithm was developed by Leo Breiman and Adele Cutler, who registered "Random Forests" as a trademark in 2006 (as of 2019, owned by Minitab, Inc.).The extension

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>

combines Breiman's "bagging" idea and random selection of features, introduced first by Ho[1] and later independently by Amit and Geman[13] in order to construct a collection of decision trees with controlled variance.

Random forests are frequently used as "blackbox" models in businesses, as they generate reasonable predictions across a wide range of data while requiring little configuration.

### SVM

In classification tasks a discriminant machine learning technique aims at finding, based on an independent and identically distributed (iid) training dataset, a discriminant function that can correctly predict labels for newly acquired instances. Unlike generative machine learning approaches, which require computations of conditional probability distributions, a discriminant classification function takes a data point  $x$  and assigns it to one of the different classes that are a part of the classification task. Less powerful than generative approaches, which are mostly used when prediction involves outlier detection, discriminant approaches require fewer computational resources and less training data, especially for a multidimensional feature space and when only posterior probabilities are needed. From a geometric perspective, learning a classifier is equivalent to finding the equation for a multidimensional surface that best separates the different classes in the feature space.

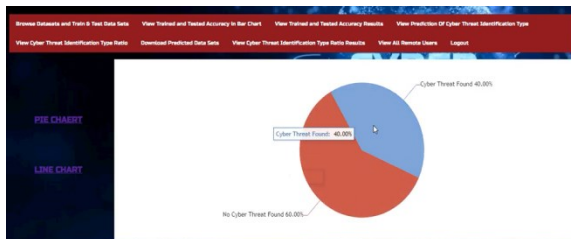
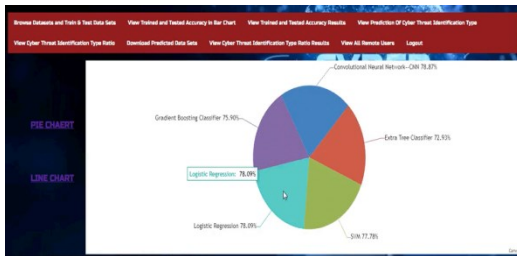
SVM is a discriminant technique, and, because it solves the convex optimization problem analytically, it always returns the same optimal hyperplane parameter—in contrast to genetic algorithms (GAs) or perceptrons, both of which are widely used for classification in machine learning. For perceptrons, solutions are highly dependent on the initialization and termination criteria. For a specific kernel that transforms the data from the input space to the feature space, training returns uniquely defined SVM model

parameters for a given training set, whereas the perceptron and GA classifier models are different each time training is initialized. The aim of GAs and perceptrons is only to minimize error during training, which will translate into several hyperplanes' meeting this requirement.

### V. SCREEN SHOTS

Model Type	Accuracy
Convolutional Neural Network-CNN	78.87%
Extra Tree Classifier	75.51%
SVM	77.26%
Logistic Regression	78.0%
Gradient Boosting Classifier	75.8%

<https://doi.org/10.62643/ijerst.2025.v21.i2.pp986-996>



REGISTER YOUR DETAILS HERE !!

Enter Username: Manjunath, Enter Password: #902k4th  
 Enter Email Id: trikonanjur@gmail.com, Enter Address: Cross Rajanagar  
 Enter Gender: Male, Enter Mobile Number: 95996627  
 Enter Country Name: , Enter State Name: ,  
 Enter City Name: , REGISTER

Registered Status: ..

PREDICTION OF CYBER THREAT TYPE I

ENTER DATASETS DETAILS HERE !!

Enter fid: 44102579, Enter tweet\_text: MO  
 Enter timestamp: Tue Jul 10 07:05:27 +0000, Enter source: TheLincolnian  
 Enter symbols: TMK, Enter company\_names: Torchmark Corporation  
 Enter url: http://thelincolnianonline, Enter source\_ip: 140.171.126.3  
 Enter protocol: http, Enter dest\_ip: 59.166.0.9

Predict

PREDICTED CYBER THREAT TYPE : -->

PREDICTION OF CYBER THREAT TYPE II

ENTER DATASETS DETAILS HERE !!

Enter fid: , Enter tweet\_text:   
 Enter timestamp: , Enter source:   
 Enter symbols: , Enter company\_names:   
 Enter url: , Enter source\_ip:   
 Enter protocol: , Enter dest\_ip:

Predict

PREDICTED CYBER THREAT TYPE : --> Cyber Threat Found

## VI. CONCLUSION

Given the dynamism of the cyber security field, with new vulnerabilities and threats appearing at any time, keeping up to date on them is a challenging but important task for analysts. Even following the best practices and applying the best controls, a new threat may bring an unusual way to subvert the defenses requiring a quick response. This way, timely information about emerging cyber threats becomes paramount to a complete cyber security system.

This research proposes an automated cyber threat identification and profiling based on the natural language processing of Twitter messages. The objective is exactly to cooperate with the hard work of following the rich source of information that is Twitter to extract valuable information about emerging threats in a timely manner.

This work differentiates itself from others by going a step beyond identifying the threat. It seeks to identify the goals of the threat by mapping the text from tweets to the procedures conducted by real threats described in MITRE ATT&CK knowledge base. Taking advantage of this evolving and collaborative knowledge base to train machine learning algorithms is a way to leverage the efforts of cyber security community

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to automatically profile identified cyber threats in terms of their intents.

To put in test our approach, in addition to the research experiment, we implemented the proposed pipeline and run it for 70 days generating online alerts for the Threat Intelligence Team of a big financial institution in Brazil. During this period, at least three threats made the team take preventive actions, such as the Petit Potam case, described in section V. Our system alerted the team making them aware of Petit-Potam 17 days before the official patch was published by Microsoft. Within this period, the defense team was able to implement mitigations avoiding potential exploits and, consequently, incidents.

Our experiments showed that the profiling stage reached an F1 score of 77% in correctly profiling discovered threats among 14 different tactics and the percentage of false alerts of 15%. In future work, we consider it important to advance in tweets selection stages (Unknown Words and One-class), to improve the false positives rate and in the profiling stage, to reach higher accuracy in determining the technique associated with the identified threat. We are working on this way by experimenting with a different NLP approach using the part of speech (POS) algorithm implementation from Spacy29 Python library. The object is to identify the root verb, the subject, and the object of the phrases to select tweets where the action described (the root verb) is referencing the unknown word (the subject).

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