



Impossibly Stupid

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Minneapolis, MN, United States

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3 years ago

Zeynep Tufekci: We're building a dystopia just to make people click on ads

In addition to what Alex said, what is meant by no one understanding is in regards to exactly *what* the algorithms are keying in on when they do their classifications. Not that long ago there were some stories about a researcher "hacking" an AI to make a 45 mph speed limit sign get seen as a STOP sign (or vice versa). By reverse engineering what gets learned, it becomes very apparent that these algorithms focus on a *very* small subset of the image data, so it is easy to intentionally confuse them by tweaking signs in very subtle ways. The same is true for all pseudo-AI machine learning. The systems are very good at picking up *that* something is significant, not *why* it is significant (at a human level of understanding). This is most problematic when they're used to classify you in some way (e.g. likely DWI/DUI risk), but the *reason* for your behavior is not part of the equation (had to search for impaired driving info as part of a work or school project).



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3 years ago

Chris Sheldrick: A precise, three-word address for every place on earth

I would agree that words *could* be more memorable for humans, but that doesn't mean that what3words' convoluted method is a good way to use words to represent locations. I maintain that this "solution" will continue to be ignored because their algorithm doesn't mesh with how humans build mental maps of their environment.



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> I assume the chosen 40K are the most frequent minus profanity, taboo, homophones. It's a linguist's dream to make such a list, and your examples inch vs. inches and itch vs. itches are very different from my ears' point of view. It's not just about how you perceive your own speech, it's about this being in *global* usage, by people who speak words with very different accents. It's also about the "typo" problem you brought up. And beyond that it's about how human memory works when trying to recall words that may be cognitively similar (in multiple dimensions) to other words. It's just not always an obvious win to replace long numbers with random-seeming words. > You mentioned an icon of the United States, but even without Googling a list of them, I can tell you I've seen two more identical statues of liberty--one in Paris and one in Tokyo. But the question is only which one gets top billing in the database rather than three other generic words. Same goes for all sorts of other landmark locations around the world. Nobody sane would ever expect the.eiffel.tower to refer to the knock-off copy in Las Vegas or anywhere else. > It's a question of being a slave to numbers and their infiniteness, or could we actually map out the Earth's surface in just three words to a three-meter square? But that's exactly my point! IF the problem to be solved is creating the best database that refers to locations on Earth using 3 words, the right solution is *not* to make an association that is opaque to humans. The w3w scheme *is* a slave to the underlying numbers, but it does it in a way that doesn't even allow a person to make a mental map of their own neighborhood. > Whose going to look more backwards 100 years from now, the adopters or the non-adopters? The adopters, clearly. Their whole system is closed and requires you to use their services to know where you are. Any number of alternatives would be better than this.



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> The advantage I see over numerical coordinate systems is that one mistyped number can't happen. Each encoding method will have it's own set of failure modes. A dictionary of 40,000 words is itself a *lot* of potential confusion when it comes to memorizing and communicating them. Consider: inch vs. inches vs. itch vs. itches (all are in the w3w list). And by using them without any inherent order, people can't even begin to use them to inform their sense of direction. A typo has a greater chance of ruining your day if you can't do the mental error correction that ordered numbers make possible. > Is it more human to use words or numbers? Somehow I find this system more human-friendly than numbers. Well, humans certainly use words more than numbers to communicate, but that also means we form associations that impacts how we deals with words. A better system would be to have a curated word list that more intelligently maps to an ordered grid. That way, you can at least *think* about how locations-as-words are related to each other. > You probably have a cozy address that you do not want to give up, but it's only a local address--not part of a global system. It could be. I mean, these 3 word locations essentially require you to use a massive technological infrastructure to find *anything*. If that's acceptable, why *not* go to the effort to do a reverse mapping and incorporate the "words" for the local address into the global system? It makes zero sense, for example, that the Statue of Liberty is given as planet.inches.most when the logical thing to do would be to list it as statue.of.liberty instead.



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Chris Sheldrick: A precise, three-word address for every place on earth

Not sure how to do proper formatting here, so excuse the Markdown . . . > We definitely need some way to precisely have a global address. We already have it in the form of GPS coordinates. That's essentially what lies underneath this 3 word encoding scheme, too. I picked it apart nearly a year ago when I blogged about a different way to turn locations into words. The lack of altitude/elevation is only one of the major shortcomings of what3words. > I love what the three-word address system aims to accomplish. However, from the get-go, it needs further refinement to uniquely differentiate multi-floor addresses. But then, it would no longer be a three-word address (four-word address, or three-word plus 1 number address?). It all comes down to how many bits of information you're looking to represent for the floors/height. Do you want to be able to go all the way from the center of the Earth to the Moon (and beyond)? Do you want to have resolution down to 1cm or less? Only when you set those sorts of parameters can you begin to figure out how many more words you need to add. > (It could even be four dimensional, so that it can identify from when to when someone lived at that address, a la space-time fabric). Indeed. Done correctly, it's all just bits for potential encoding. But that's *not* something that what3words is prepared to handle. Nor would I *want* to have time and height values that are disjointed the same way their locations are disjointed.



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