# Sentiment Analysis in the Era of Large Language Models: A Reality Check

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#### Abstract

Sentiment analysis (SA) has been a longstanding research area in natural language processing. With the recent advent of large language models (LLMs), there is great potential for their employment on SA problems. However, the extent to which current LLMs can be leveraged for different sentiment analysis tasks remains unclear. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive investigation into the capabilities of LLMs in performing various sentiment analysis tasks, from conventional sentiment classification to aspect-based sentiment analysis and multifaceted analysis of subjective texts. We evaluate performance across 13 tasks on 26 datasets and compare the results against small language models (SLMs) trained on domain-specific datasets. Our study reveals that while LLMs demonstrate satisfactory performance in simpler tasks, they lag behind in more complex tasks requiring a deeper understanding of specific sentiment phenomena or structured sentiment information. However, LLMs significantly outperform SLMs in fewshot learning settings, suggesting their potential when annotation resources are limited. We also highlight the limitations of current evaluation practices in assessing LLMs' SA abilities and propose a novel benchmark, SENTIEVAL, for a more comprehensive and realistic evaluation. Data and code are available at ht tps://

opinions, sentiments, emotions, etc, through computational methods (Liu, 2015; Poria et al., 2020). Since its inception (Turney, 2002; Hu and Liu, 2004), this field has attracted significant interest from both academia and industry given its wide range of applications, such as analyzing product reviews and gaining insights from social media posts (Barbieri et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, achieving a deep understanding of human subjective feeling through sentiment analysis is undoubtedly an important step toward developing artificial general intelligence (Bubeck et al., 2023).

In recent years, large language models (LLMs) have demonstrated impressive performance on various NLP tasks (Brown et al., 2020; Chowdhery et al., 2022; OpenAl, 2023, inter alia). They can directly perform tasks in zero-shot or few-shot incontext learning manner and achieve strong performance without the need for any in-domain supervised training (Bang et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023). Although there have been some initial attempts to apply LLMs to sentiment analysis (Deng et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023), these studies are often limited to some specific tasks and adopt different models, datasets, and settings in experiments. As such, the extent to which existing large language models can be leveraged for sentiment

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#### **Table of Contents Sentiment Of Reality**

- 1. Understanding the eBook Sentiment Of Reality
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Sentiment Of Reality
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
- 2. Identifying Sentiment Of Reality
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
- 3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Sentiment Of Reality
  - User-Friendly Interface
- 4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Sentiment Of Reality
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Sentiment Of Reality User Reviews and Ratings
  - Sentiment Of Reality and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Sentiment Of Reality Free and Paid eBooks
  - Sentiment Of Reality Public Domain eBooks
  - Sentiment Of Reality eBook Subscription Services
  - Sentiment Of Reality Budget-Friendly Options

- 6. Navigating Sentiment Of Reality eBook Formats
  - o ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Sentiment Of Reality Compatibility with Devices
  - Sentiment Of Reality Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Sentiment Of Reality
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Sentiment Of Reality
  - Interactive Elements Sentiment Of Reality
- 8. Staying Engaged with Sentiment Of Reality
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Sentiment Of Reality
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Sentiment Of Reality
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Sentiment Of Reality
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Sentiment Of Reality
  - Setting Reading Goals Sentiment Of Reality
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Sentiment Of Reality
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Sentiment Of Reality
  - Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements

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