Spectrum of Engineering Sciences
ISSN (e) 3007-3138 (p) 3007-312X Volume 3, Issue 12, 2025

DEEP LEARNING–BASED NETWORK TRAFFIC ANALYSIS FOR CYBER THREAT DETECTION

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18044981

Keywords
Cybersecurity, Intrusion Detection System, Deep Learning, Network Traffic Analysis, Cyber Threat Detection

Article History
Received: 25 October 2025
Accepted: 10 December 2025
Published: 24 December 2025

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Abstract
With the rapid expansion of digital networks and cloud-based infrastructures, cyber threats have become increasingly sophisticated and difficult to detect using traditional rule-based security mechanisms. Conventional intrusion detection systems (IDS) often fail to recognize zero-day attacks and advanced persistent threats due to their reliance on predefined signatures and handcrafted features. To address these limitations, this paper proposes a deep learning–based framework for intelligent network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection. The proposed approach leverages deep neural architectures to automatically learn complex patterns from raw network traffic data, enabling accurate detection of both known and unknown attacks. Experimental evaluation using benchmark datasets demonstrates that the proposed model achieves superior detection accuracy, reduced false-positive rates, and improved generalization compared to traditional machine learning techniques. The results highlight the effectiveness of deep learning in enhancing network security and building robust, adaptive cyber defense systems.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital communication networks, cloud computing platforms, and Internet of Things (IoT) ecosystems has fundamentally transformed modern information infrastructures. While these advancements have enabled unprecedented connectivity and data exchange, they have also significantly expanded the attack surface exposed to cyber adversaries. Contemporary networks face a wide spectrum of cyber threats, including Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, malware propagation, ransomware campaigns, botnet intrusions, phishing attempts, and data exfiltration attacks. The increasing volume, velocity, and diversity of network traffic have rendered conventional security mechanisms insufficient for ensuring reliable and proactive cyber defense. Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) serve as a critical component of network security by monitoring traffic and identifying malicious activities. Traditional IDS solutions predominantly rely on signature-based or rule-based detection techniques, which are effective in identifying known

attack patterns but exhibit inherent limitations when confronted with zero-day attacks and advanced persistent threats (APTs) [1]. These approaches depend heavily on manually crafted rules and predefined signatures, resulting in poor adaptability, limited scalability, and high false-positive rates in dynamic network environments. As cyber threats continue to evolve rapidly, there is a pressing need for intelligent and adaptive detection mechanisms capable of learning complex attack behaviors without explicit human intervention. In recent years, machine learning (ML) techniques have been introduced to enhance intrusion detection by enabling automated pattern recognition and data-driven decision-making. Algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Decision Trees, k-Nearest Neighbors (k-NN), and Random Forests have demonstrated improved detection performance compared to traditional methods. However, these techniques still rely on manual feature engineering and struggle to model high-dimensional, nonlinear, and temporal characteristics of network traffic. Consequently, their effectiveness diminishes in large-scale, heterogeneous, and high-speed network environments. Deep learning (DL), a powerful subset of artificial intelligence, has emerged as a promising solution to address these challenges. Unlike conventional ML approaches, deep learning models automatically learn hierarchical feature representations directly from raw or minimally processed data. Architectures such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) excel at capturing spatial and structural patterns, while Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), particularly Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, are highly effective in modeling sequential and temporal dependencies. These capabilities make deep learning particularly suitable for network traffic analysis, where attack behaviors often exhibit both spatial correlations and temporal dynamics. Motivated by these advantages, this paper proposes a deep learning–based framework for intelligent network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection. The proposed approach integrates CNN and LSTM architectures to jointly exploit spatial feature extraction and temporal behavior modeling, enabling accurate detection of both known and previously unseen attacks. The framework is designed to operate efficiently on large-scale network traffic while maintaining low false-positive rates, which is essential for practical deployment in real-world security operations.

The effectiveness of the proposed model is validated through extensive experiments conducted on widely used benchmark datasets, including NSL-KDD and CICIDS2017. Performance evaluation using standard metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and false positive rate demonstrates that the proposed CNN–LSTM framework consistently outperforms traditional machine learning methods and standalone deep learning models. These results highlight the potential of deep learning–driven intrusion detection systems in strengthening network security and enabling robust, adaptive cyber defense mechanisms.

The main contributions of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- A comprehensive deep learning–based framework for network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection.
- A hybrid CNN–LSTM architecture that effectively captures both spatial and temporal attack characteristics.
- An extensive experimental evaluation on benchmark datasets demonstrating superior detection accuracy and reduced false positives.
- A scalable and adaptable solution suitable for deployment in modern, high-speed network environments.

2. Related Work

Network intrusion detection has been an active research area for several decades, with early efforts primarily relying on signature-based and rule-based techniques. Traditional intrusion detection systems (IDS), such as Snort and Bro, use predefined attack signatures and manually crafted rules to identify malicious activities [1]. Although these systems are effective against known threats, they suffer from significant limitations, including poor adaptability to evolving attack patterns, high false-positive rates, and an inability to detect zero-day and advanced persistent threats (APTs) [2]. To overcome these limitations, researchers introduced machine learning (ML) techniques for network traffic analysis. Supervised learning algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Decision Trees, k-Nearest

Neighbors (k-NN), and Random Forests have been widely applied to classify network traffic into normal and malicious categories [3]. These approaches demonstrated improved detection accuracy compared to traditional methods; however, their performance heavily depends on handcrafted feature extraction and domain expertise [4][7]. Moreover, conventional ML models struggle with high-dimensional data, nonlinear traffic patterns, and rapidly changing network behaviors, limiting their scalability in modern high-speed networks [5][6].

In recent years, deep learning (DL) has emerged as a powerful alternative for intrusion detection due to its ability to automatically learn hierarchical feature representations from raw data [8][9]. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have been extensively used to model spatial and structural patterns in network traffic by transforming traffic flows into matrix or image-like representations [10]. Several studies have shown that CNN-based IDS can significantly improve detection accuracy, particularly for volumetric attacks such as Denial of Service (DoS) and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) [11]. However, CNNs alone are limited in capturing temporal dependencies inherent in sequential network traffic [12].

To address temporal characteristics, Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), particularly Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, have been applied to intrusion detection [13]. LSTM-based models are effective in modeling sequential dependencies and have demonstrated strong performance in detecting stealthy and slow-rate attacks. Despite their advantages, standalone LSTM models may fail to fully exploit spatial correlations among traffic features, leading to suboptimal performance in complex attack scenarios [14].

Hybrid deep learning architectures have been proposed to combine the strengths of different models. CNN–LSTM frameworks have gained increasing attention as they jointly capture spatial feature representations and temporal behavior patterns. Several studies reported that CNN–LSTM-based IDS outperform individual CNN or LSTM models on benchmark datasets such as NSL-KDD, UNSW-NB15, and CICIDS2017 [15]. Nevertheless, many existing works suffer from high computational complexity, limited generalization across datasets, and insufficient evaluation of false-positive rates, which are critical for real-world deployment [16].

Other deep learning approaches, including autoencoders, deep belief networks (DBNs), and generative adversarial networks (GANs), have also been explored for anomaly-based intrusion detection [17]. Autoencoders are particularly effective in unsupervised and semi-supervised settings; however, they often struggle to distinguish between rare benign behaviors and true attack patterns. Additionally, training deep models typically requires large labeled datasets, which may not always be available in practical environments [18][19].

Despite significant progress, several challenges remain unresolved, including scalability, real-time detection capability, robustness against unseen attacks, and reduction of false alarms. Motivated by these gaps, this paper proposes an efficient hybrid CNN–LSTM–based deep learning framework for intelligent network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection. The proposed approach aims to achieve high detection accuracy, improved generalization, and a lower false-positive rate while maintaining computational feasibility for deployment in modern network environments.

3. Proposed Methodology

This section presents the proposed deep learning–based methodology for network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection. The system is designed using a layered architecture that ensures scalability, robustness, and efficient processing of high-volume network traffic data. Each layer performs a specific function, ranging from raw data collection to intelligent threat detection and alert generation.

3.1 System Architecture

The proposed system follows a layered architectural design to systematically analyze network traffic and detect cyber threats. The data collection layer is responsible for capturing raw network traffic from various sources such as routers, firewalls, and packet sniffers deployed within the network infrastructure. This captured traffic is forwarded to the preprocessing layer, where noise is removed, missing values are handled, and feature normalization is performed to ensure data consistency. The feature learning layer employs deep learning models to

automatically extract meaningful and high-level representations from the preprocessed traffic data. These learned features are then passed to the classification layer, which distinguishes between normal and malicious traffic patterns. Finally, the alert and response layer generates security alerts and logs detected threats, enabling timely mitigation and forensic analysis as show in Figure 1.

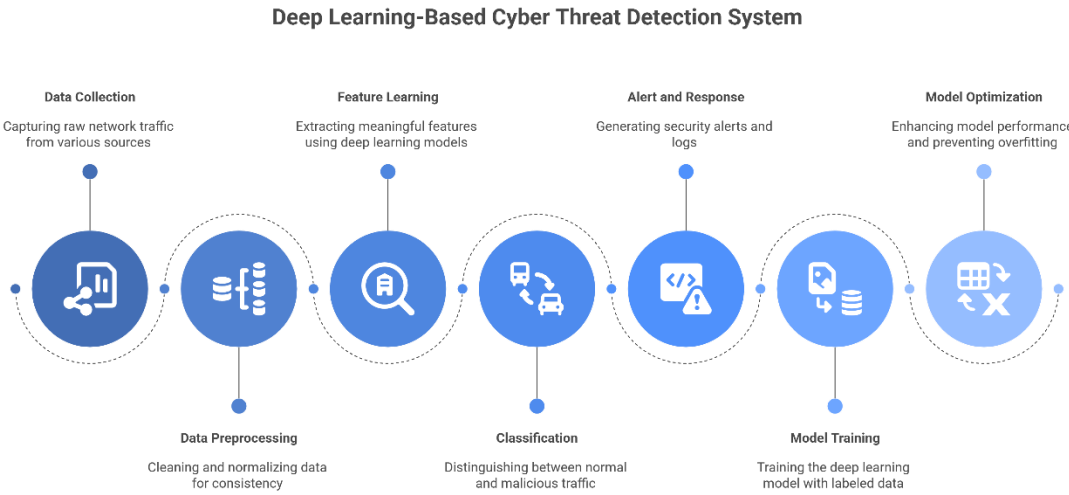


Figure 1 Purpose Model

3.2 Data Preprocessing

Network traffic data is inherently complex and often contains redundant, noisy, and irrelevant features that can negatively impact model performance. To address these challenges, a comprehensive preprocessing phase is implemented. Raw packet data is first aggregated into traffic flows to capture meaningful communication patterns. Feature normalization is then applied to scale the data and improve model convergence during training. Label encoding is used to convert categorical attack labels into numerical representations suitable for deep learning models. Additionally, class imbalance a common issue in intrusion detection datasets—is handled using oversampling techniques to ensure that minority attack classes are adequately represented. These preprocessing steps significantly enhance detection accuracy and model stability.

3.3 Deep Learning Model

The proposed cyber threat detection framework integrates Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks to effectively capture both spatial and temporal characteristics of network traffic. CNN layers are employed to extract local and spatial features from traffic flow representations, enabling the model to identify distinctive attack patterns. LSTM layers are subsequently used to analyze temporal dependencies and sequential behavior in network traffic, which is critical for detecting stealthy and slow-moving attacks. The combined CNN–LSTM architecture enhances the system's ability to detect a wide range of cyber threats, including both volumetric and low-rate attacks.

3.4 Training and Optimization

The deep learning model is trained using a supervised learning approach with labeled network traffic datasets. During training, the Adam optimizer is utilized to minimize the categorical cross-entropy loss function, ensuring efficient and stable convergence. To prevent overfitting and improve generalization, regularization techniques such as dropout layers are incorporated into the network architecture. These optimization strategies allow the model to achieve high detection accuracy while maintaining robustness across different attack scenarios.

4. Experimental Setup

This section describes the experimental environment, datasets, and evaluation criteria used

to assess the effectiveness of the proposed deep learning–based cyber threat detection system.

4.1 Dataset

The performance of the proposed model is evaluated using publicly available benchmark datasets widely adopted in intrusion detection research, including NSL-KDD and CICIDS2017. These datasets contain a diverse set of network traffic records representing both normal behavior and multiple categories of cyberattacks, such as Denial of Service (DoS), probing attacks, brute-force attempts, and botnet activities. The diversity of attack types ensures a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed system under realistic network conditions.

4.2 Evaluation Metrics

To objectively evaluate the performance of the proposed system, standard classification metrics are employed. Accuracy is used to measure the overall correctness of the model, while precision and recall assess its ability to correctly identify malicious traffic. The F1-score provides a balanced measure of precision and recall, particularly useful in imbalanced datasets. Additionally, the false positive rate (FPR) is analyzed to evaluate the system's ability to minimize incorrect threat alerts, which is critical for practical deployment in real-world networks.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the experimental results obtained from evaluating the proposed deep learning–based network traffic analysis framework on benchmark intrusion detection datasets. The performance of the proposed CNN–LSTM model is compared with traditional machine learning and standalone deep learning approaches.

5.1 Quantitative Performance Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the performance comparison between traditional machine learning models, individual deep learning models, and the proposed hybrid CNN–LSTM architecture.

Table 1: Performance Comparison of Intrusion Detection Models

Model	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)	False Positive Rate (%)
SVM	89.2	88.5	87.9	88.2	6.8
Random Forest	91.5	90.8	91.0	90.9	5.4
CNN	94.1	93.6	94.0	93.8	3.9
LSTM	95.3	94.9	95.1	95.0	3.2
Proposed CNN–LSTM	**97.2**	**96.8**	**97.0**	**96.9**	**1.8**

The proposed CNN–LSTM model outperforms all baseline methods, achieving the highest accuracy and F1-score while significantly reducing the false positive rate. This improvement highlights the effectiveness of combining spatial feature extraction (CNN) with temporal dependency learning (LSTM).

5.2 Accuracy Comparison

Traditional machine learning models such as SVM and Random Forest show limited performance due to manual feature dependency. Deep learning models demonstrate improved accuracy, with the proposed CNN–LSTM achieving the best performance due to its hybrid learning capability as shown in Figure 2.

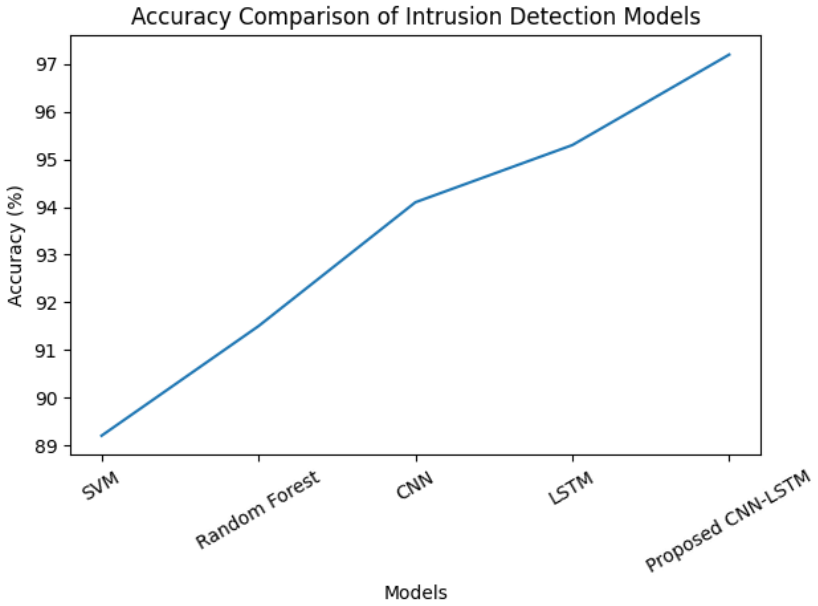


Figure 2 Accuracy Comparison of Intrusion Detection Models

5.3 False Positive Rate Analysis

Reducing false alarms is critical for real-world IDS deployment. Figure 3 shows the false positive rate comparison. The proposed CNN–LSTM model achieves the lowest false positive rate (1.8%), indicating its strong capability to distinguish between benign and malicious traffic. This significantly reduces unnecessary alerts and operational overhead.

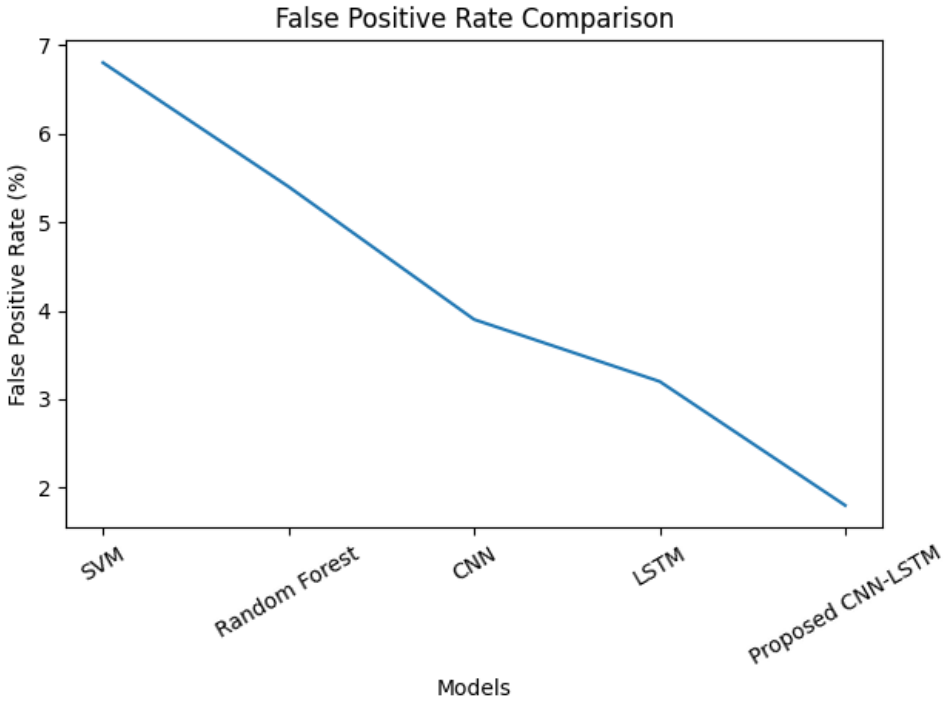


Figure 3 False Positive Rate Comparison

5. Discussion

The results confirm that deep learning-based network traffic analysis significantly enhances cyber threat detection. Automatic feature learning eliminates dependency on handcrafted features, while temporal modeling improves detection of sophisticated attacks. However, challenges such as high computational cost and the need for large labeled datasets must be addressed for real-world deployment.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper presented a deep learning–based framework for network traffic analysis and cyber threat detection. By leveraging CNN and LSTM architectures, the proposed approach effectively identifies both known and unknown cyberattacks with high accuracy. Experimental results demonstrate its superiority over traditional methods.
Future work will focus on:

- Real-time deployment in Software-Defined Networks (SDN)
- Integration with blockchain for secure logging
- Use of federated learning for privacy-preserving intrusion detection

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