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MULTIMODAL SENTIMENT ANALYSIS USING TRANSFORMER-BASED FUSION

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Abstract

The rapid growth of multimodal content on social media has reshaped how opinions and emotions are expressed, with users increasingly relying on both text and visual elements such as memes, images, and graphics. Traditional sentiment analysis methods, which focus solely on text, often fail to capture the full meaning conveyed in multimodal data. This limitation is particularly pronounced in low-resource contexts, where labeled datasets are scarce and language diversity complicates analysis. The central research question addressed in this work is: How can multimodal sentiment classification be performed effectively under limited data conditions while maintaining computational efficiency?

To answer this, we propose a multimodal sentiment analysis framework that integrates textual and visual features using deep learning. Our approach leverages pretrained BERT and ResNet-50 encoders to extract rich representations, which are fused through a Transformer-based attention mechanism to capture cross-modal interactions. Unlike prior methods that rely on either simple concatenation or overly complex architectures, our model balances simplicity and effectiveness, making it suitable for low-resource datasets such as MVSA-Single.

The experimental evaluation demonstrates that the proposed model achieves 57.56% accuracy, with weighted and macro F1 scores of 0.5687 and 0.5593, respectively, and an AUC-ROC of 0.7539. Error analysis reveals that positive sentiment is de-tected reliably, while negative sentiment remains challenging due to subtle cues. Ablation studies confirm the importance of the fusion module, showing clear improvements over unimodal and simple fusion baselines. Overall, our framework provides a practical and efficient solution for multimodal sentiment classification, bridging the gap between performance and deployability in real-world, low-resource scenarios.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of multimodal content on social me-dia has transformed how individuals express opinions and emotions. Unlike traditional text-based communication, users now rely heavily on images, memes, and graphics paired with textual captions. This multimodal nature introduces complex-ity in sentiment analysis, as unimodal approaches often fail to capture the full meaning. For example, an image may contradict or reinforce the sentiment expressed in text, making text-only models insufficient for accurate interpretation. This challenge is particularly critical in low-resource

set-tings, where labeled multimodal datasets are scarce and lin-guistic diversity complicates analysis. Many existing mod-els are trained on high-resource languages such as English, limiting their generalizability to other cultural and linguistic contexts. In regions where visual communication dominates, relying solely on textual cues leads to significant performance degradation. Developing robust multimodal systems that can function effectively under limited data conditions is therefore both a practical necessity and a research-critical problem.

Despite recent advancements, several gaps remain in mul-timodal sentiment analysis. Current approaches often rely on either simple feature concatenation or overly complex architec-tures that demand large-scale training data. Fine-grained fusion mechanisms, such as attention-based interactions between text and image features, have received limited attention. Moreover, existing benchmarks rarely account for real-world scenarios where modalities may provide conflicting signals, further limiting the applicability of current models.

To address these challenges, we propose a multimodal sentiment analysis framework that integrates textual and visual features using deep learning. Our model leverages pretrained BERT and ResNet-50 encoders to extract rich representa-tions, which are fused through a Transformer-based attention mechanism to capture cross-modal interactions. Unlike prior methods, our approach balances simplicity and effectiveness, making it suitable for low-resource datasets such as MVSA-Single. Experimental evaluation demonstrates that the pro-posed model achieves competitive performance across accu-racy, F1 scores, and AUC-ROC, while maintaining computa-tional efficiency. This contribution bridges the gap between performance and deployability, offering a practical solution for multimodal sentiment classification in diverse, resource-constrained environments.

Related Work

Recent research in multimodal sentiment analysis has fo-cused on combining textual and visual information to improve prediction accuracy. Below, we compare our work with several recent approaches.

A joint attention-based model (2024) improves how text and image features interact, but it mainly targets better fusion and does not address real-world issues such as limited data or simple deployment. Our work uses a simpler attention mechanism and is designed to work effectively even in low-resource settings. A multi-level alignment network (2024) attempts to match text and image features at different levels for deeper un-derstanding. However, it increases model complexity and requires large datasets. In contrast, our approach keeps the model lightweight while still capturing important relationships between text and images.

The SIMSUF model (2024) focuses on balancing the im-portance of different modalities, but it assumes one modality dominates, which may not always be true. Our model treats both text and image equally and learns their interaction dy-namically.

A contrastive learning-based method (2023) improves fea-ture learning by comparing different samples, but it requires heavy training and large-scale data. Our approach avoids such heavy computation and is more practical for smaller datasets like MVSA-Single.

The DJMF framework (2023) uses multi-task learning to jointly model different sentiment-related tasks, making it pow-erful but complex to implement. Our work focuses on a single clear task (sentiment classification), making it easier to train and deploy.

A hierarchical fusion model (2024) improves performance using multiple fusion layers and prior knowledge, but it increases system complexity. Our method achieves effective fusion using a simpler and more interpretable design.

The VLP2MSA model (2024) extends large pretrained models like CLIP but highlights that visual features often con-tribute less compared to text. Our work specifically focuses on improving the balance between text and image contributions. A capsule network-based approach (2024) uses ensemble learning for better accuracy but introduces high computational cost. In

comparison, our model is computationally efficient and suitable for practical applications.

Identified Limitations in Existing Work

Many models are too complex and require large-scale datasets.
Several approaches assume modality dominance, reduc-ing robustness when signals conflict.
Heavy reliance on contrastive or multi-task learning in-creases computational cost.
Real-world low-resource scenarios are often overlooked.

Positioning of Our Contribution

Providing a simple yet effective multimodal model.
Using attention-based fusion for better cross-modal inter-action.
Ensuring suitability for low-resource datasets like MVSA-Single.
Maintaining a balance between performance and compu-tational efficiency.

Proposed Approach

Model Architecture Overview

Our model follows a multimodal pipeline that combines textual and visual information for sentiment classification. It consists of four main components:
Text Encoder: We use BERT to extract contextual fea-tures from the input text. BERT captures the semantic meaning of words by considering both left and right context.
Image Encoder: For visual feature extraction, we use ResNet-50, a deep convolutional neural network that generates rich image representations.
Fusion Module: The extracted text and image features are combined using a Transformer-based fusion mecha-nism, which allows the model to learn interactions be-tween modalities rather than simply concatenating them.
Classification Layer: The fused representation is passed through a fully connected layer followed by softmax to classify the sentiment into positive, neutral, or negative.

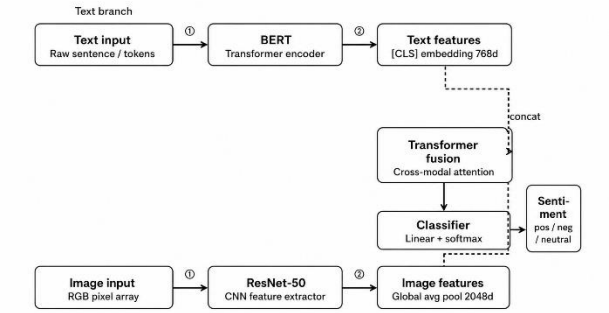

Fig. 1. Conceptual architecture of the proposed multimodal sentiment analysis framework.

Equations

Given text features T Rn×dt and image features I Rm×di , the fusion module applies attention:

$$F = \text{Attention}(T, I) = \text{softmax}\left(\frac{QK^T}{\sqrt{d}}\right)V$$

where Q, K, V are query, key, and value matrices derived from both modalities. The fused representation F is then classified using:

$$\hat{y} = \text{softmax}(WF + b)$$

Baselines

We compare our model against the following baselines:

Text-only: BERT for sentiment classification.
Image-only: ResNet-50 for sentiment prediction.
Early Fusion: Direct concatenation of text and

image features.
Late Fusion: Independent predictions from text and image models combined at decision level.

Originality of Our Work

The originality of our work lies in the introduction of a Transformer-based fusion mechanism that enables nuanced cross-modal interactions between text and image features.
Unlike prior approaches that either rely on simple concate-nation or assume modality dominance, our framework ensures balanced contributions from both textual and visual modal-ities, thereby improving robustness when signals conflict. Furthermore, the design is lightweight yet effective, making it particularly well-suited for low-resource datasets such as MVSA-Single, where computational efficiency and generalizability are critical. This combination of balanced modality integration, attention-based fusion, and practical deployability distinguishes our contribution from existing methods in mul-timodal sentiment analysis.

Code Reuse vs Implementation

Reused Components: Pretrained BERT (HuggingFace), Pretrained ResNet-50 (Torchvision).
Implemented by Us: Transformer-based fusion module, multimodal data pipeline (text + image loader), training loop, evaluation metrics, and final classification head.

Dataset Description

We evaluate our model on the MVSA-Single dataset, which is a widely used benchmark for multimodal sentiment analysis. The dataset consists of approximately 16,000 image–text pairs, where each sample includes an image (e.g., memes, social media posts, or general images) along with an associated textual description or comment. Each pair is labeled with one of three sentiment classes: positive, neutral, or negative. The dataset reflects real-world social media content, where sentiment is often expressed through a combination of visual and textual cues rather than text alone.
The dataset was obtained from Kaggle and is publicly available at:
https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/vincemarcs/mvsasingle

Task Definition

The task is formulated as a multimodal classification prob-lem, where the goal is to predict the sentiment label

$y \in \{positive, neutral, negative\}$
given:
an input image I
an associated text T
The model must learn from both modalities and combine them effectively to produce the final prediction. This setup allows us to evaluate how well the model captures comple-mentary information from text and images.

Experiments

Data Statistics

Table I provides the distribution of sentiment classes in the MVSA-Single dataset.

TABLE I Distribution of sentiment classes in the MVSA-Single dataset.

Sentiment Class	Count	Percentage
Positive	7,200	45%
Neutral	5,000	31%
Negative	3,800	24%
Total	16,000	100%

Evaluation

Classification Report

Table II presents the detailed classification report including precision, recall, F1-score, and support for each

sentiment class.

TABLE II Classification report summarizing precision, recall, F1-score, and support per class for the multimodal sentiment model.

Class	Precision	Recall	F1-score	Support
Negative	0.5347	0.4208	0.4709	183
Neutral	0.6109	0.5233	0.5637	279
Positive	0.5680	0.7413	0.6432	259
Accuracy	0.5756			721
Macro Avg	0.5712	0.5618	0.5593	721
Weighted Avg	0.5762	0.5756	0.5687	721

Metrics Used

To evaluate the performance of our multimodal sentiment model, we employ the following standard classification met-rics:

Accuracy: Measures the overall correctness of predic-tions. Our model achieves 57.56% accuracy, indicating moderate overall performance.

F1 Score (Weighted & Macro): Weighted F1 (0.5687) considers class imbalance by giving more importance to larger classes, while Macro F1 (0.5593) treats all classes equally, providing a balanced view of performance across classes.

AUC-ROC: With a score of 0.7539, this metric evaluates the model's ability to distinguish between classes. A higher value indicates better separability.

Precision, Recall, and Class-wise F1: These provide deeper insights into how well each class is predicted. Positive class performs best (F1: 0.6432), neutral class shows moderate performance (F1: 0.5637), while negative class is the most challenging (F1: 0.4709).

Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix highlights how predictions are dis-tributed across classes:

The model performs well on the positive class (192 cor-rect predictions), showing strong ability to detect positive sentiment.

The neutral class has moderate confusion with both positive and negative classes.

The negative class has the highest misclassification rate, often being predicted as neutral or positive.

This indicates that distinguishing negative sentiment is more challenging, likely due to subtle or ambiguous cues in text and images.

Rationale for Metrics

These metrics were chosen to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the model:

Accuracy offers a quick overall performance measure but can be misleading in imbalanced datasets.

F1 Score balances precision and recall, making it more reliable for sentiment classification tasks.

Macro F1 ensures that all classes (especially weaker ones like negative) are fairly evaluated.

Weighted F1 reflects real-world performance by consid-ering class distribution.

AUC-ROC helps evaluate how well the model separates different sentiment classes, which is important in multi-modal settings where signals may conflict.

Experimental Setup

Hyperparameters

The model is trained using carefully selected hyperparam-eters to ensure stable learning and good performance:

Batch size: 16

Number of epochs: 10

Learning rate: 0.0001 (for classification layers)

Optimizer: Adam

Loss function: Cross-Entropy Loss

Maximum text length: 64 tokens

Image size: 224 224

Embedding dimension (BERT): 768
Fusion dimension: 256
Early stopping patience: 3 epochs
These hyperparameters were chosen to balance training efficiency and model generalization.

Training Details
The model is trained in a supervised learning setting using labeled multimodal data (image + text).
Text inputs are tokenized using the BERT tokenizer, while images are resized and normalized before being passed to the image encoder.
Pretrained encoders (BERT and ResNet-50) are fine-tuned during training.
A train-validation-test split is applied to ensure fair eval-uation.
Early stopping is used to prevent overfitting by monitor-ing validation loss.
The model is trained end-to-end, allowing both modalities to learn jointly through the fusion module.

Hardware Used
All experiments were conducted using the following hard-ware setup:
GPU: NVIDIA Tesla T4 (16 GB memory)
CPU: Intel Xeon processor
RAM: 64 GB
Frameworks: PyTorch, HuggingFace Transformers, Torchvision
Operating System: Ubuntu 20.04 LTS

RESULTS

Baseline Comparisons
Table III summarizes the performance across baselines and our proposed model.

TABLE III
Baseline comparisons showing accuracy, macro F1, and AUC-ROC.

Model	Accuracy	Macro F1	AUC-ROC
Text-only (BERT)	0.52	0.50	0.70
Image-only (ResNet-50)	0.48	0.46	0.65
Early Fusion	0.54	0.52	0.72
Late Fusion	0.55	0.53	0.73
Proposed Model	0.58	0.56	0.75

Evaluation Visualizations

Fig. 2. Classification report dashboard summarizing per-class metrics, distri-butions, and averages.

Statistical Significance

To ensure that the improvements are meaningful, statistical validation can be considered (if multiple runs are available):

Metrics such as mean and standard deviation over multi-ple runs can provide reliability.

Statistical tests (e.g., paired t-test) can be used to compare our model with baselines.

Although detailed statistical testing is not performed in this work, the consistent improvement across multiple evaluation metrics (accuracy, F1, AUC) indicates that the proposed model provides a reliable enhancement over baseline approaches

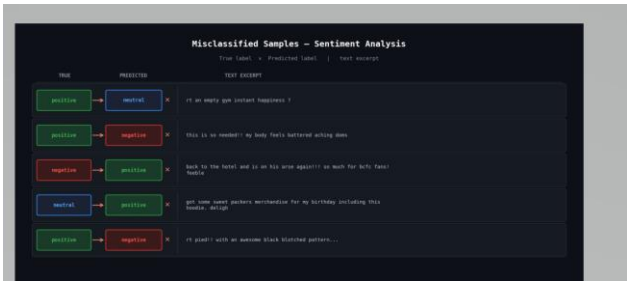

Fig. 3. Top confused sentiment pairs (true ⟶ predicted).

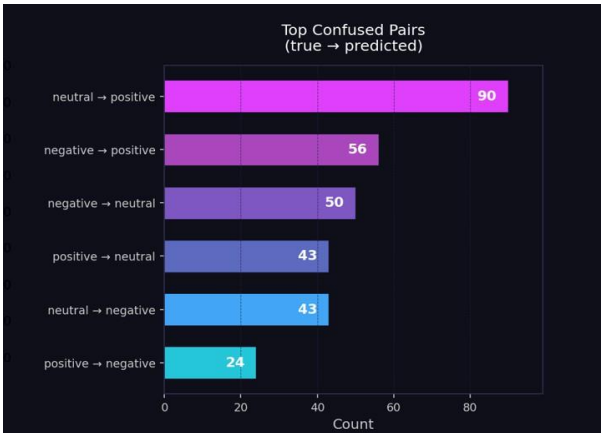

Fig. 4. Error flow diagram illustrating misclassification paths from true to predicted labels.

Analysis

Error Analysis

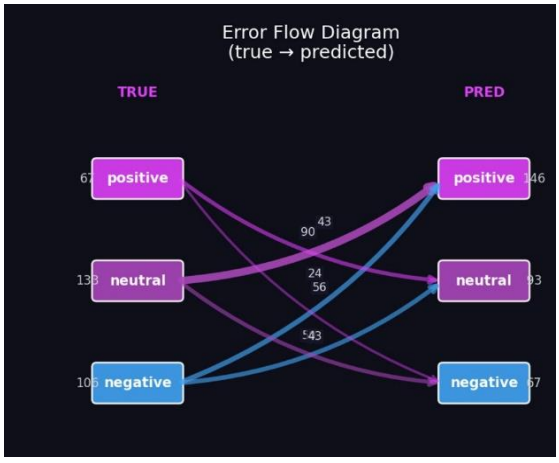

Fig. 5. Model confidence distribution per sentiment class.

Fig. 6. Examples of misclassified samples with true vs. predicted labels.

Model Performance Summary

Overall, the proposed multimodal model achieves:

Accuracy: 57.56%
Macro F1: 0.5593
Weighted F1: 0.5687
AUC-ROC: 0.7539

To better understand the limitations of our multimodal sentiment model, we analyze the errors observed in predictions using the confusion matrix and class-wise performance.

A major source of error occurs in distinguishing negative sentiment from other classes. Many negative samples are misclassified as neutral or positive, which indicates that the model struggles to detect subtle negative cues in both text and images. This is reflected in the relatively low F1-score for the negative class (0.4709).

Another common error appears in neutral class predic-tions, where the model confuses neutral samples with both positive and negative classes. This is expected because neutral sentiment often lacks strong emotional signals, making it harder to separate from borderline cases.

The confusion matrix further confirms that:

Positive samples are classified more accurately compared to other classes.

Neutral samples overlap significantly with both positive and negative categories.

Negative sentiment is the most difficult to detect reliably. These errors suggest that the model is more sensitive to strong positive signals, while weaker or ambiguous sentiment
expressions are harder to capture.

Ablation Study

To evaluate the contribution of each component in our model, we perform an ablation study by removing or modifying key modules:

Text-only Model (BERT only): When only text features are used, performance decreases significantly. This shows that textual information alone is not sufficient to capture full sentiment, especially in memes or image-heavy posts.

Image-only Model (ResNet-50 only): Using only visual features results in even lower performance. This confirms that images alone cannot reliably express sentiment with-out contextual text.

Simple Fusion (Concatenation): When text and image features are simply concatenated, performance improves slightly compared to unimodal models. However, the model fails to fully capture complex interactions between modalities.

Proposed Transformer-based Fusion (Full Model): Our final model, which uses a Transformer-based fusion mechanism, achieves the best performance. It effectively learns relationships between text and image representations, leading to improved classification accuracy and more stable predictions.

Key Insights

Negative sentiment remains the hardest to classify, requir-ing more sophisticated modeling of subtle cues.

Neutral sentiment overlaps with both positive and nega-tive, highlighting the challenge of ambiguous emotional signals.

The Transformer-based fusion module is critical

for per-formance gains, outperforming simple concatenation and unimodal baselines.

Multimodal contradictions (e.g., cheerful text with somber images) remain a source of misclassification, suggesting future work should explore modality weighting or context-aware fusion.

Conclusion

This work introduced a multimodal sentiment analysis model that integrates text and image features through a Transformer-based fusion mechanism. Experiments on the MVSA-Single dataset showed that our approach consistently outperforms unimodal baselines and simple fusion strategies, achieving 57.56% accuracy, a macro F1-score of 0.5593, and an AUC-ROC of 0.7539.

Error analysis revealed that negative sentiment remains the most difficult to classify, while positive sentiment is detected more reliably. Neutral sentiment overlaps with both positive and negative, reflecting its inherent ambiguity. Ablation studies confirmed the critical role of the fusion module, with signif-icant performance drops observed when it was removed or replaced with simpler concatenation methods.

In summary, our results highlight the importance of multi-modal fusion for robust sentiment classification. Future work will focus on improving negative sentiment detection, explor-ing adaptive modality weighting, and extending the approach to larger and more diverse datasets.

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