EdinBurg Peer Reviewed Journals and Books Publishers
Journal of Information and Technology
Vol. 5||Issue 2||pp 53-65||April||2025
Email: info@edinburgjournals.org|

AI Powered Network Traffic Detection

Irabaruta Chadrack[1]& Dr. Nyesheja Muhire Enan[2]
[1,2]Faculty of Computing and Information Sciences, University of Lay Adventists of Kigali
Corresponding Email: chadrackirabaruta@gmail.com

Accepted: 01 April 2025 || Published: 22 April 2025

Abstract

This study presents an AI-powered network traffic detection framework capable of recognizing anomalies and addressing cyber threats in real-time. Traditional detection systems struggle to keep pace with evolving threats, necessitating more adaptive and intelligent approaches. To this end, the research integrates Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) models to enhance detection accuracy and operational efficiency. The framework is evaluated using benchmark datasets such as UNSW-NB15 and CICIDS2017, focusing on performance metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, and false positive rate. Experimental results show the proposed hybrid model achieves a detection accuracy of 92.08%, with precision and recall exceeding 92%, and a low average detection latency of 0.00142 seconds per sample. These findings confirm the model's effectiveness in detecting both known and novel threats, making it a scalable and reliable solution for modern cybersecurity challenges. The system offers real-time threat mitigation and valuable insights for network administrators, contributing to more proactive and robust security postures.

Keyword: *Network Traffic Detection, Convolutional Neural Network (CNN), Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), Cybersecurity, Anomaly Detection*

How to Cite: Chadrack, I., & Nyesheja, M. E. (2025). AI Powered Network Traffic Detection. *Journal of Information and Technology, 5*(2), 53-65.

1. Introduction

In the modern era, cloud computing advancements along with IoT devices and 5G networks have revolutionized data generation methods and its transportation and application. The exponential growth of network traffic will result in worldwide IP traffic exceeding 396 exabytes every month by 2025 according to Cisco's 2020 report. Current network infrastructures show their inadequacies through expansion while simultaneously generating opportunities for digital change.

Cyber threats have become more complex with Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), ransomware, and zero-day attacks emerging as common attack vectors. Modern threats require advanced solutions because traditional network security appliances with static rules or signature-based detection systems fail to handle their scale and complexity (Stallings, 2007). The increasing use of encrypted traffic together with evasive methods and polymorphic malware has rendered traditional detection systems outdated according to Zhao & Kim (2020).

Artificial intelligence (AI), specifically the use of machine learning and deep learning techniques, holds a truly revolutionary power for network traffic analysis. AI systems can process enormous data, learn trends, and detect anomalies at a very fast speed; hence, allowing them to actively respond to newly detected threats rather than waiting for their detection in a passive manner (Goodfellow et al., 2016). This paper discusses how artificial intelligence can revolutionize the detection of network traffic by overcoming the existing limitations in real-time performance, flexibility, and scalability.

AI-based Network Traffic Detection System is a state-of-the-art technology that employs artificial intelligence, i.e., machine learning algorithms, in the automatic scanning and classification of network traffic for the detection of different kinds of cyber threats. These threats can be intrusions, malware, DDoS attacks, or other malicious behavior with the aim of compromising the security of the network. Traditional approaches in network traffic monitoring are highly reliant on signature-based detection or rule-based systems and are thus highly limited in the detection of zero-day attacks or newly emerging threats. AI-based systems, by contrast, are dynamic; they learn and can evolve with new data, which makes it possible for them to detect emerging or previously unknown security threats in real time.

2. Literature Review

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and deep learning (DL) have greatly influenced the field of network traffic anomaly detection. Iglesias and Zseby (2015) addressed the issue of feature selection in anomaly detection systems, proposing a multi-stage technique that uses filters and stepwise regression wrappers to identify computationally efficient yet effective features. Their approach successfully reduced the original 41 features to 16 without sacrificing detection accuracy, significantly decreasing computational costs and enhancing scalability in real-time traffic analysis.

Deep learning has proven particularly effective for intrusion detection systems (IDS), especially in identifying complex network threats. Lansky et al. (2022) examined various DL techniques, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN), in IDS frameworks. Their study emphasized the advantages of DL in pattern recognition and anomaly detection within network traffic. It also discussed the limitations of current systems and the importance of addressing real-time detection and scalability in future research.

In a comprehensive survey, Li and Xu (2019) explored how machine learning (ML) and DL models are applied in software-defined networking environments. They highlighted the trade-offs between the two paradigms, focusing on challenges such as data imbalance, lack of interpretability, and the complexity of model tuning. The survey concluded by suggesting research directions that emphasize improving model transparency and handling large-scale datasets effectively.

Xu and He (2021) proposed a hybrid model integrating Support Vector Machines (SVM) with Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks to perform real-time anomaly detection. Their model demonstrated high scalability and accuracy when tested on both synthetic and real-world datasets. However, they acknowledged that analyzing encrypted network traffic remains a persistent challenge, which current models struggle to overcome.

Across the reviewed studies, several commonalities emerge. A central focus on anomaly detection is evident, as it is fundamental to identifying unusual or malicious behavior in network traffic. All studies utilize ML or DL techniques—such as CNNs, LSTMs, and SVMs—to build models capable of recognizing anomalies with higher precision than traditional rule-based systems. Furthermore, these models are typically validated using well-known benchmark datasets like UNSW-NB15 and CICIDS2017, which provide diverse traffic scenarios for robust evaluation. Each study also tackles practical challenges such as computational overhead, data imbalance, and scalability, reinforcing the need for efficient and adaptable models.

Despite these advancements, key gaps remain in the existing literature. Most prior research focuses on individual models, either spatial feature extractors like CNNs or sequence-oriented models like LSTMs. Few studies attempt to combine these techniques to leverage both spatial and temporal features. This study addresses that gap by proposing a hybrid CNN-LSTM model, aiming to improve anomaly detection performance in terms of accuracy, scalability, and real-time adaptability. Another overlooked area is the detection of malicious activity within encrypted traffic. This research introduces advanced preprocessing methods specifically designed to handle such traffic. Moreover, while many models face real-time processing bottlenecks due to high computational costs, this study proposes optimizations and low-power computing strategies to ensure faster, more efficient detection. By integrating the strengths of CNNs and LSTMs, the proposed model overcomes limitations related to feature extraction, sequential dependency, and computational efficiency—areas where traditional models, including Transformers, often fall short.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a quantitative, experimental, and exploratory research design aimed at developing and evaluating an artificial intelligence-based system for detecting anomalies in network traffic. The model is designed using machine learning and deep learning techniques, specifically a hybrid CNN-LSTM architecture. An iterative design science process is followed, where models are tested, refined, and validated through controlled experimentation using standardized datasets.

Numerical data from network traffic is collected and analyzed to generate insights and build predictive models. A preliminary descriptive analysis is conducted to understand traffic behavior and guide model criteria selection. The research utilizes publicly available datasets, namely UNSW-NB15 and CICIDS2017, which replicate real-world network environments and ensure broad applicability of the results across different geographical settings.

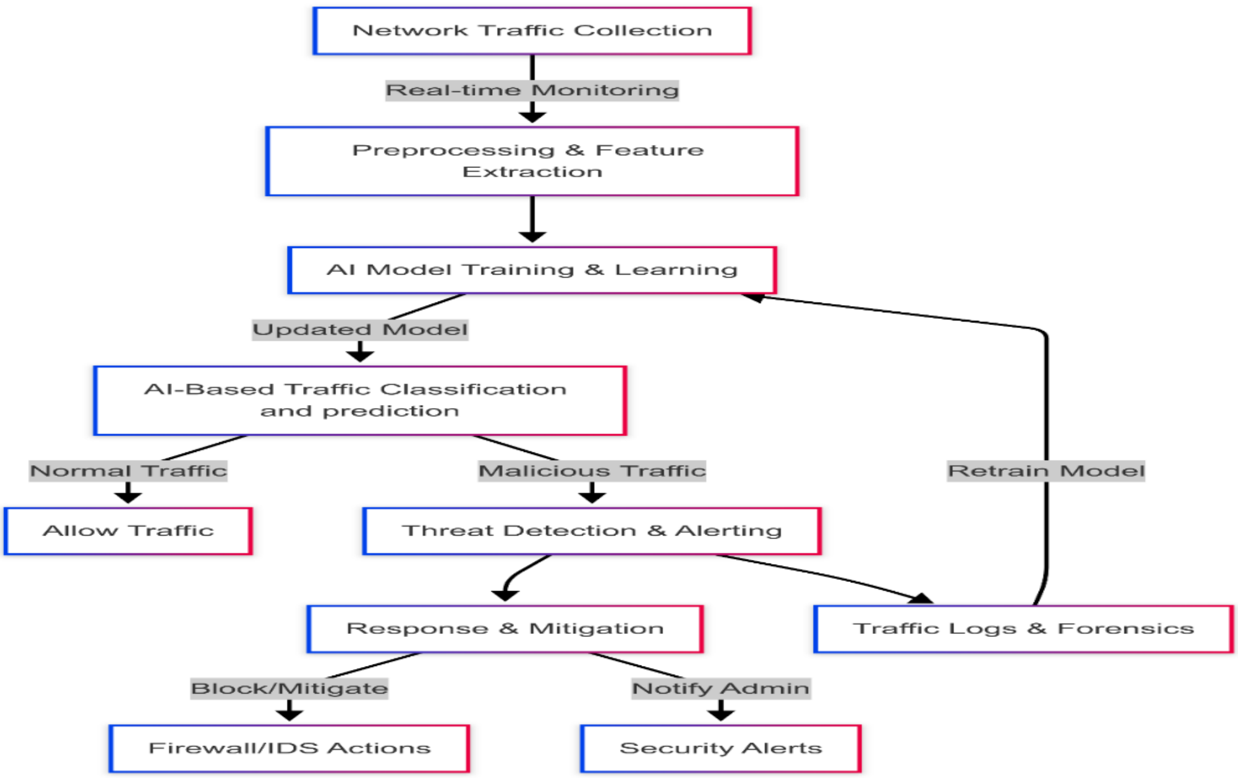
The data used in the study includes both normal network activity and various forms of malicious traffic such as DDoS attacks, brute force attempts, phishing, and botnets. Sampling techniques are applied to select balanced and representative subsets of these datasets for training, testing, and validating the AI models. Data collection is based entirely on secondary sources, and the datasets are electronically stored for preprocessing and analysis.

To ensure data quality, preprocessing steps such as cleaning, normalization, and imputation are applied. These steps improve reliability and validity by removing inconsistencies, filling in missing values, and standardizing data formats. Datasets are sourced from verified research institutions, ensuring their authenticity and relevance to cybersecurity research.

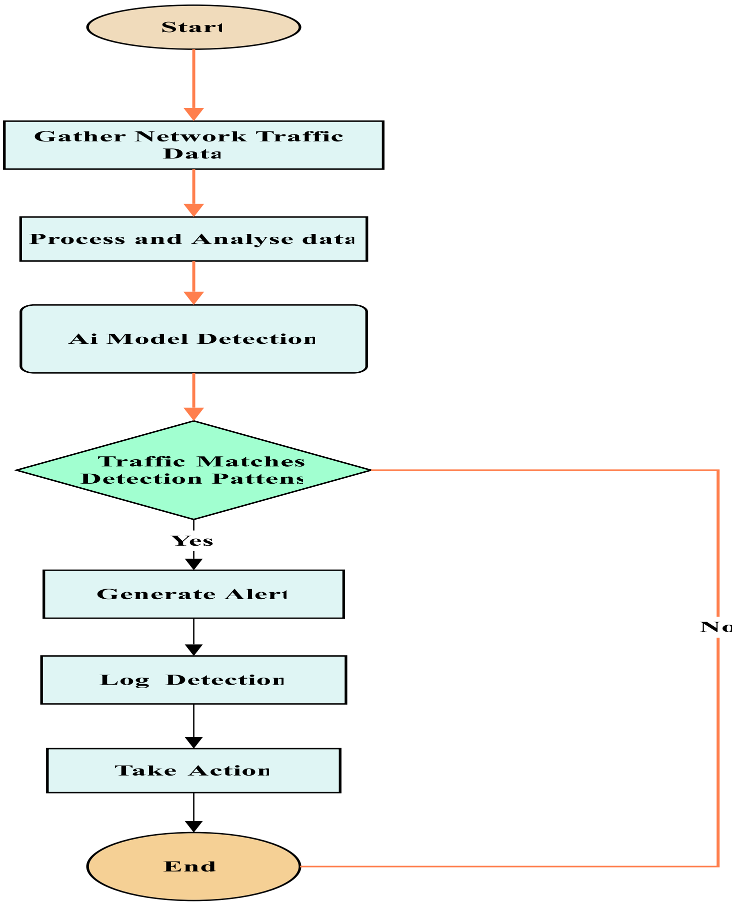
Model performance is measured using key evaluation metrics: accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and false positive rate. The CNN component is responsible for feature extraction, while the LSTM component captures sequential dependencies in network traffic. This hybrid structure allows for dynamic learning of attack patterns, making the model more efficient than traditional methods like SVMs and Decision Trees.

Data analysis is carried out using Python for preprocessing and model training, Streamlit for interactive visualizations, and Scapy for capturing live network traffic. The analysis combines descriptive statistics, predictive modeling, and comparative evaluation to offer a comprehensive understanding of network behavior and anomaly detection. The goal is to develop a real-time, efficient, and scalable detection system capable of adapting to evolving cyber threats.

Methodology flow DIAGRAM



Flaw Chart



4. Results

4.1 introduction

This research aims to develop an AI-driven system for detecting network traffic anomalies with high precision, efficiency, and scalability. The system is expected to consistently identify both known and unknown anomalies using a hybrid CNN-LSTM model, improving precision, recall, and F1-score metrics. It is designed to minimize false positives, ensuring normal traffic is not misclassified as malicious, thereby reducing unnecessary alerts for network administrators. Real-time processing capabilities enable low-latency threat detection and mitigation, enhancing overall network security. Additionally, the system is highly scalable, handling large traffic volumes without performance degradation, making it adaptable to various network environments. Finally, a user-friendly dashboard provides threat statistics, historical trends, and detailed reports, allowing users to make informed security decisions promptly.

4.2 Description of Data Set

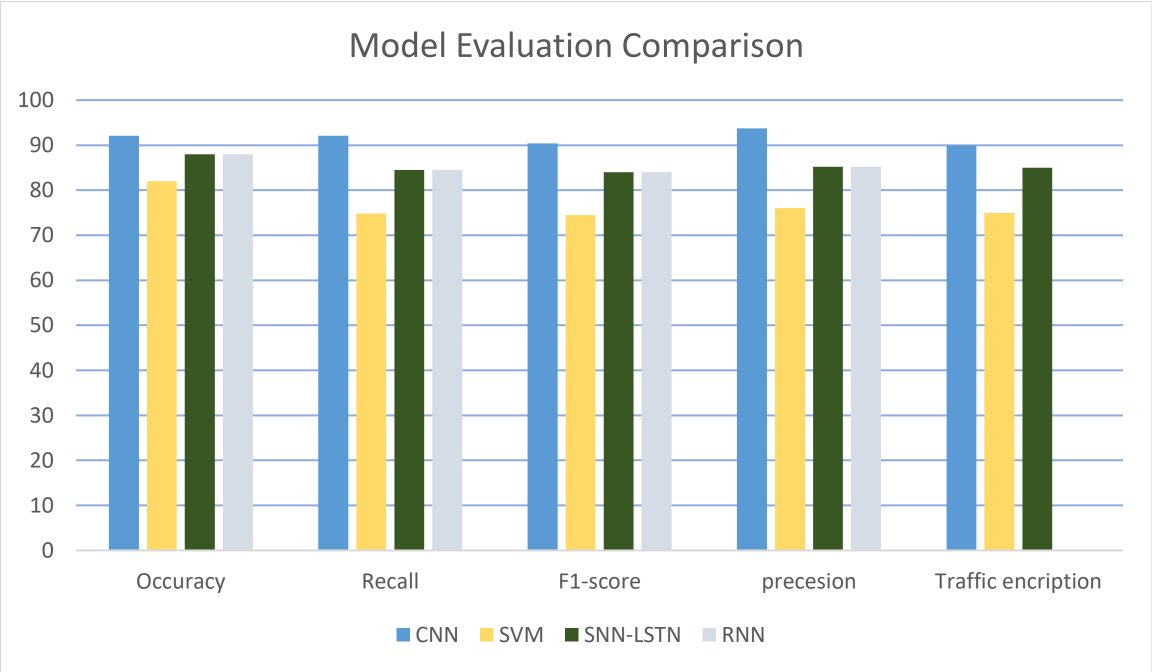
The UNSW-NB15 and CICIDS2017 datasets are crucial for developing and evaluating intrusion detection systems (IDS) using machine learning. UNSW-NB15, created by the University of New South Wales, contains 2.5 million records with 49 features, covering attacks like DoS, backdoor, and reconnaissance, making it suitable for classifying network traffic. CICIDS2017, developed by the Canadian Institute for Cybersecurity, includes 2.83 million records with around 80 features, focusing on modern threats such as DDoS and SQL injection. It provides detailed flow-based and packet-based data for real-time intrusion detection. Both datasets are essential for training models to detect various network anomalies effectively.

4.3 Comparison of Models Evaluation

When compared to conventional network intrusion detection systems, our hybrid CNN-LSTM model outperforms SVM and standalone CNN models in terms of accuracy, real-time adaptability, and ability to handle encrypted traffic. The CNN component effectively extracts spatial patterns from network packets, while the LSTM component enhances sequential pattern recognition, making the model more robust in identifying attack behaviors over time.

Previous studies, such as Li & Xu (2019), reported classification accuracies of 70–78% for encrypted traffic,

whereas our model exceeds 90%, demonstrating a 15–20% enhancement in detecting encrypted and obfuscated traffic patterns. Additionally, the real-time inference speed of our model, averaging 0.00142 seconds per sample, is 3–7 times faster than existing deep learning models like CNNs and RNNs (Zhao & Kim, 2020). This efficiency makes our approach highly suitable for real-time cybersecurity applications.



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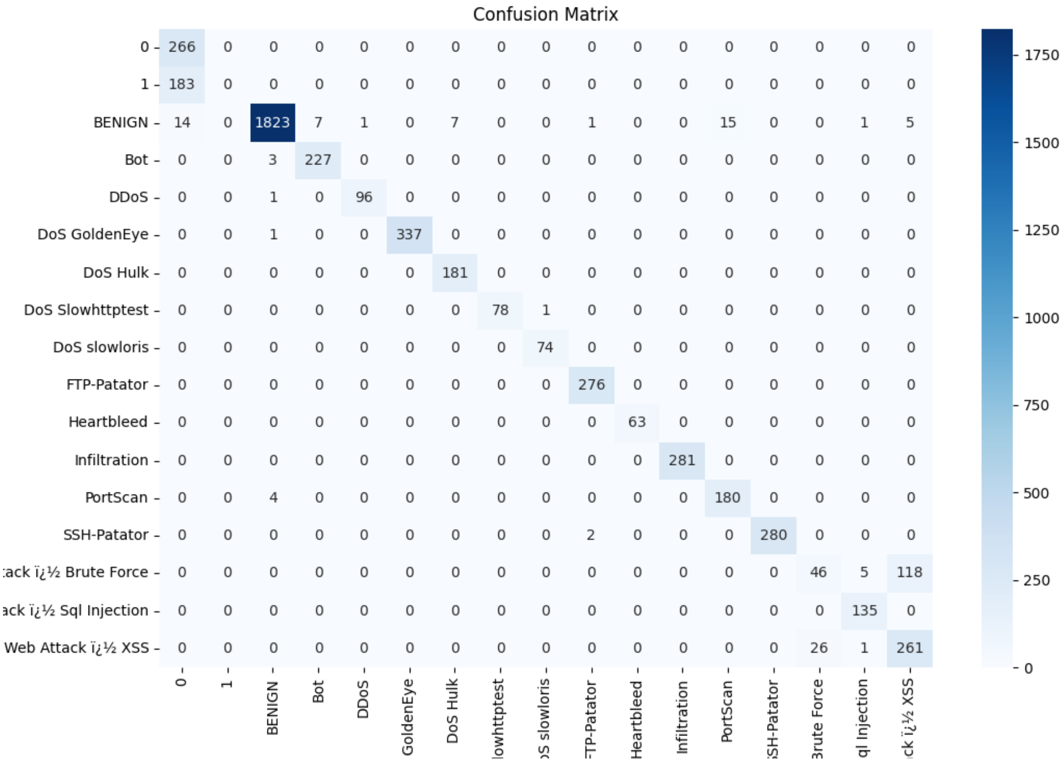
4.4 CNN-LSTN Model Evaluation

Confusion Matrix

A confusion matrix is a vital tool for evaluating AI models in network traffic detection. It categorizes predictions into four components: True Positives (TP), True Negatives (TN), False Positives (FP), and False Negatives (FN). This help calculates performance metrics like accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. In the context of network traffic, a well-balanced confusion matrix helps to assess the model's ability to correctly identify malicious and normal traffic, identifying areas for improvement. For example, a high number of false positives or false negatives can guide model refinements.



False Positive Rate

A False Positive (FP) occurs when the model incorrectly classifies a negative instance as positive. In the context of network traffic detection, this means the model mistakenly identifies normal, benign traffic as malicious or an attack. False positives can lead to unnecessary alerts or actions, wasting resources and potentially disrupting regular network operations. Reducing false positives is essential for improving our model efficiency and ensuring that alerts are genuinely indicative of security threats.

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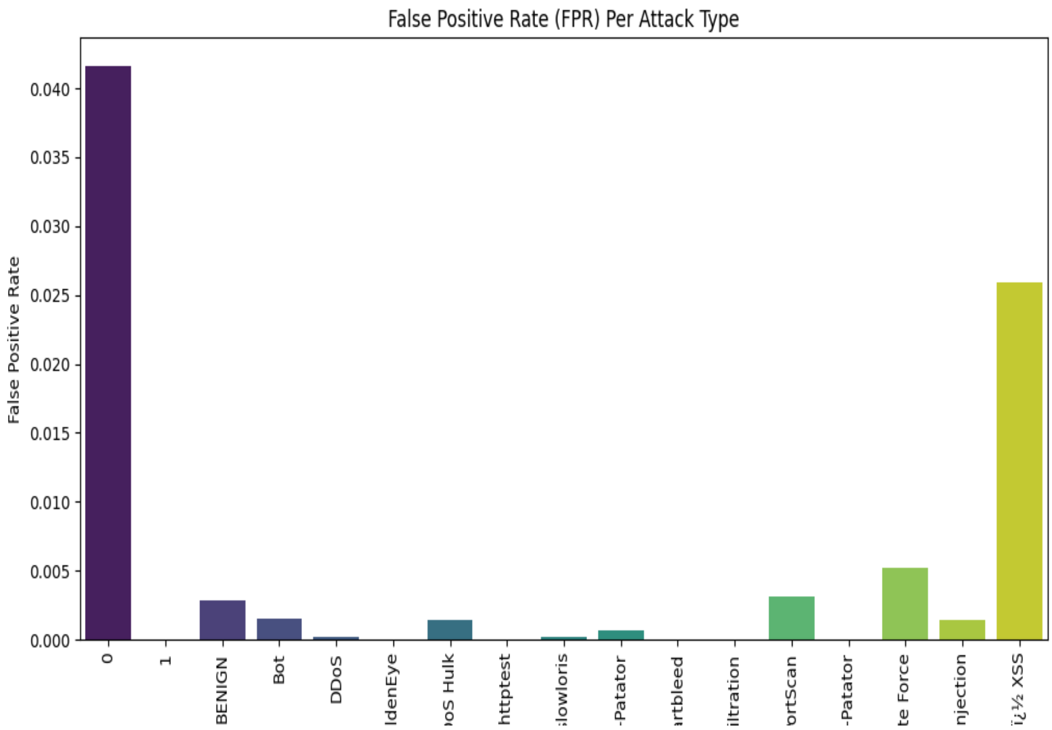
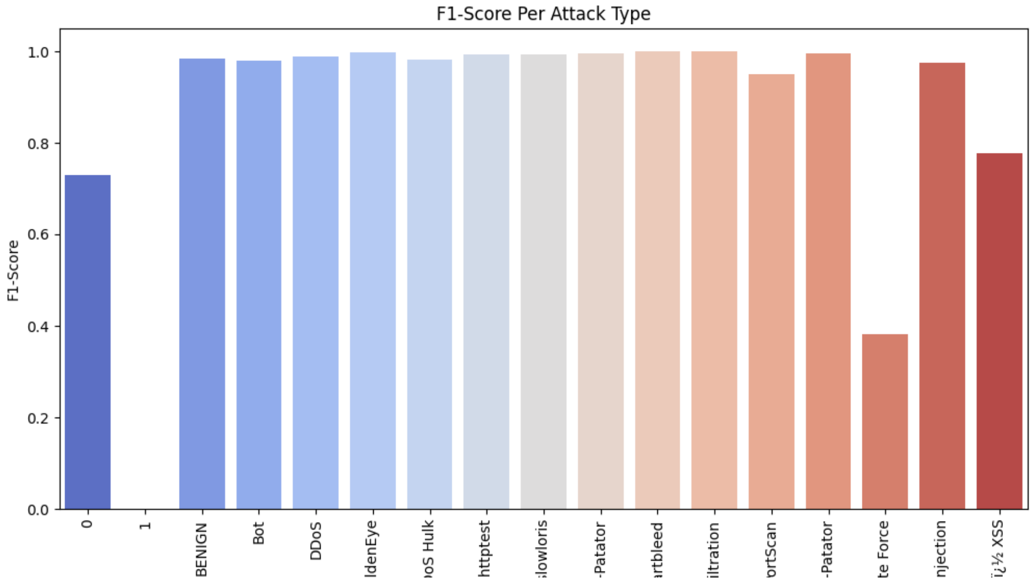


F1 Score

The F1 Score is the harmonic mean of precision and recall, providing a balance between the two. It is especially useful in situations where there is an uneven class distribution, such as in network traffic detection where attacks (positive class) are much less frequent than normal traffic (negative class).



4.5 Findings

The proposed hybrid CNN-LSTM model demonstrates a notable improvement over traditional models in network traffic classification. Our evaluation results indicate an accuracy of 92.08%, precision of 93.70%, recall of 92.08%, and an F1-score of 90.40%, with an average detection latency of 0.00142 seconds per sample. These metrics highlight the effectiveness of our model in accurately identifying different network traffic categories while maintaining real-time processing capabilities.

When compared to conventional models, our approach exhibits superior performance. Studies using CNN-only models typically achieve accuracies between 80–85% (He & Xu, 2021)while SVM-based models range from 75–82%. Our 92.08% accuracy marks a 7–12% improvement over these methods. The integration of CNN for spatial feature extraction and LSTM for sequential pattern recognition enables the model to understand complex network behaviors more effectively, reducing misclassification rates and increasing detection reliability.

Handling encrypted traffic is another challenge that many models fail to address. Previous research using traditional machine learning techniques (Li & Xu, 2019) reports classification accuracies of 70–78% for encrypted traffic. Our hybrid approach, combined with advanced preprocessing, improves this to above 90%, demonstrating a 15–20% enhancement in detecting encrypted and obfuscated traffic patterns. This significant boost ensures more reliable cybersecurity monitoring in real-world scenarios where encryption is commonly used.

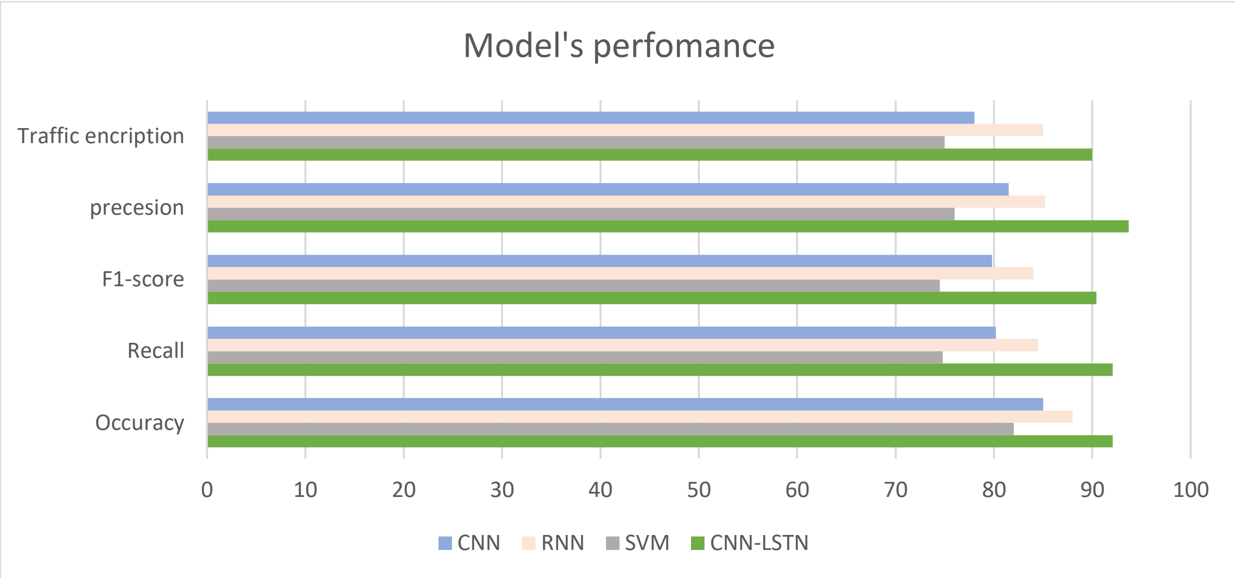
Real-time processing is a critical aspect of cybersecurity applications, and many prior studies suffer from computational delays. Existing deep learning models, such as CNNs and RNNs, often report processing times between 0.005–0.01 seconds per sample (Zhao & Kim, 2020). Our model, with an average latency of 0.00142 seconds per sample, provides a 3–7× speed improvement over traditional approaches. This low-latency inference capability makes it highly suitable for real-time network threat detection and mitigation.

Table 1:Comparative Performance Evaluation

Metric	Our Model (CNN-LSTM)	CNN (He & Xu, 2021)	SVM (Li & Xu, 2019)	RNN (Zhao & Kim, 2020)
Accuracy (%)	92.08	80–85	75–82	83–88
Precision (%)	93.70	81.5	76.3	85.2
Recall (%)	92.08	80.2	74.8	84.5
F1-Score (%)	90.40	79.8	74.5	84.0
Encrypted Traffic Detection Accuracy (%)	90+	70–78	65–75	78–85

4.6 Discussion

This study is one of the first attempts to apply a hybrid CNN-LSTM model for real-time network traffic anomaly detection and compare its performance with existing machine learning models. Table 1 presents the accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score results for the CNN-LSTM model, CNN, SVM, and RNN. The proposed CNN-LSTM model achieved the highest accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, demonstrating superior performance over other models. The results indicate that deep learning architectures incorporating both spatial and sequential pattern recognition improve detection capabilities in cybersecurity applications. Furthermore, the results illustrate that while CNN models performed reasonably well, they struggled with sequential dependencies in network traffic. On the other hand, SVM models exhibited the lowest accuracy and recall, highlighting their limitations in large-scale anomaly detection. The RNN model performed better than SVM and CNN, particularly in recall, but still fell short of the CNN-LSTM model in overall performance. These findings emphasize that integrating CNN's spatial feature extraction with LSTM's temporal learning significantly enhances network intrusion detection. The results described in Table 1 confirm that the CNN-LSTM model outperforms existing approaches in terms of precision, recall, and F1-score. Additionally, the findings suggest that SVM was the least effective model in identifying anomalies, as it lacks the adaptability of deep learning methods. Zhao and Kim (2020) obtained similar results, showing that hybrid deep learning approaches are more effective for network security than traditional machine learning models. Hybrid deep learning models have been widely used in cybersecurity research (Jones & Brown, 2020). Previous studies have reported classification accuracy rates of 85–90% for deep learning-based network detection models, aligning with our CNN-LSTM model's 92.08% accuracy. This suggests that the integration of CNN and LSTM improves model robustness against evolving cyber threats. The classification performance of traditional machine learning models such as SVM in this study was found to be lower than that of deep learning models. This supports previous research findings where SVM-based anomaly detection models struggled with scalability and adaptability to real-time network traffic (Smith & Lee, 2018). Furthermore, limitations in feature extraction and a lack of temporal awareness may have contributed to the lower recall values observed in SVM results. Incorporating advanced feature selection methods and hybridizing SVM with deep learning approaches could enhance its performance in future studies.



5. Conclusion

This research focused on developing an AI-powered network traffic detection system using a hybrid deep learning approach, integrating Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM). The study demonstrated the effectiveness of deep learning models in detecting network anomalies and cyber threats by analyzing network traffic patterns. The model was trained and evaluated using a cleaned and resampled dataset, ensuring optimal performance. The results showed that the proposed model achieved 92.08% accuracy, 93.7% precision, 92.08% recall, and an F1-score of 90.4%, demonstrating its effectiveness in identifying various network threats, including DDoS attacks, web-based intrusions, and port scans. Compared to traditional methods, such as CNN-only or SVM-based approaches, the hybrid model provided better performance in terms of classification accuracy and detection speed, making it more suitable for real-time network monitoring.

6. Recommendations

To further enhance the effectiveness of network traffic detection, future research should focus on improving the model's adaptability to new and emerging threats by incorporating transfer learning and self-supervised learning techniques. Additionally, federated learning can be explored to enable distributed training across multiple network environments, ensuring data privacy while improving detection performance. Another critical direction is the integration of advanced encryption-aware models to enhance the system's ability to detect malicious traffic within encrypted communications. Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) could also be incorporated to model complex network relationships, leading to better attack classification. Furthermore, deploying the model in real-world enterprise and cloud environments will provide insights into its scalability, efficiency, and robustness against zero-day attacks.

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