Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the *'Committee on Publication Ethics'*

Online ISSN:2584-184X

Research Article

Using Deep Learning Models to Detect Fake News: An Innovative Hybrid BERT-LSTM-Attention Method

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20771357

Abstract

Fake news proliferation on social media platforms threatens public discourse, democratic processes, and public health. Traditional machine learning approaches fail to capture deep contextual semantics and sequential deception patterns. This paper proposes HybridBERT-LSTM-Attention, a novel architecture that synergistically combines BERT's bidirectional contextual embeddings, LSTM's temporal sequence modelling, and an Attention mechanism for interpretability. Evaluated on LIAR and FakeNewsNet datasets, the proposed model achieves 98.2% accuracy and 0.98 F1-score, outperforming standalone BERT by 3.1% and Bi-LSTM by 7.4%. The attention layer provides crucial explainability by visualising words that contribute most to the" fake" classification, addressing the black-box problem in content moderation. Furthermore, we employ focal loss to mitigate class imbalance and DistilBERT for computational efficiency. Extensive ablation studies confirm that all three components are essential. Results demonstrate that modelling both semantics and narrative structure is key to detecting modern fake news.

Manuscript Information

- **ISSN No:** 2584-184X
- **Received:** 07-05-2026
- **Accepted:** 16-06-2026
- **Published:** 20-06-2026
- **IJCRM:**4(6); 2026: 189-192

- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

How to Cite this Article

Kumar S, Lohiya H. Using Deep Learning Models to Detect Fake News: An Innovative Hybrid BERT-LSTM-Attention Method. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(6):189-192.

Access this Article Online

www.mrrjournal.in

KEYWORDS: Fake News Detection, BERT, LSTM, Attention Mechanism, Natural Language Processing, Deep Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Motivation

The digital age has democratized information sharing, but also enabled the rapid spread of misinformation. The 2016 US Presidential Election, COVID-19 infodemic, and WhatsApp-linked lynchings in India highlight real-world damage. Studies estimate fake news costs the global economy $78 billion annually. 86% of internet users report encountering fake news weekly. Automated detection is thus a societal imperative. (Devlin, J. et al.2019)

1.2 Problem Statement

Classical methods like TF-IDF with SVM rely on keyword frequency and fail on context. The statements" Vaccines kill" and" Vaccines kill the virus" have high lexical overlap but opposite veracity. (Wang, W. Y." Liar,2017) Deep learning models address this. However, existing models have gaps: BERT captures deep semantics but compresses sequences, losing narrative tricks like" Experts claim... but the truth is. (Shu, K., et al.2020, Vaswani, A., et al.2017)". LSTM captures a sequence but lacks pre-trained world knowledge. Attention-only models like Transformers miss recurrence. No single architecture model's semantics, sequence, and saliency are together.
(Kaliyar, R. K., et al.,2021,)

1.3 Contributions

- We propose the first HybridBERT-LSTM-Attention architecture for fake news detection.
- We introduce an attention visualisation method that provides legal-grade explainability for moderation decisions.
- We design a training pipeline with focal loss and data augmentation to handle severe class imbalance.
- We achieve state-of-the-art results: 98.2% accuracy on LIAR, a 3.1% absolute gain over BERT-base.

2. Related Work

Early work used handcrafted features. Castillo et al. used user-based and propagation features with J48 trees. With deep learning, Ma et al. applied RNNs to time series of posts. CNN-based models by Yu et al. captured local textual features. (Roy, A., et al.,2020)
The transformer revolution began with BERT. Devlin et al. showed that pre-trained BERT fine-tuned on LIAR achieves 95.1% accuracy. RoBERTa and DeBERTa pushed this to 96.8%. However, these models lack interpretability.(Lin, T. Y., et al.,2019)
Hybrid models are emerging. Roy et al. combined CNN+LSTM, but without pre-trained semantics. Kaliyar et al. used BERT+Random Forest but lost sequence info. Our work is the first to unify BERT+LSTM+Attention specifically for fake news.

Table 1: Summary of Related Work

Model	Dataset	Accuracy	Key Limitation
SVM + TF-IDF	LIAR	74.5%	No context, fails on negation
CNN-Word2Vec	FakeNewsNet	85.2%	Fixed n-gram window
Bi-LSTM	PolitiFact	89.1%	No pre-trained knowledge
BERT-base	LIAR	95.1%	Black-box, no sequence order
RoBERTa	COVID-19	96.8%	Computationally heavy
Ours	**LIAR**	**98.2%**	Requires a GPU for training

2. METHODOLOGY

a. Architecture Overview

The model is a 4-stage pipeline: Input →BERT Encoder → Bi-LSTM →Attention → Classifier.

b. BERT Contextual Encoder

Input text $X = \{w1, ..., wn\}$, $n \leq 128$, is tokenised via Word Piece. We use bert-base-uncased. Let $E = BERT(X) \in R^{n \times 768}$ be token embeddings. We freeze the first 8 of 12 layers to prevent overfitting.

c. Bidirectional LSTM Layer

To capture narrative deception, E is fed to Bi-LSTM with 128 units per direction:

$$\overrightarrow{h_t} = \overrightarrow{LSTM}(E_t, h_{t-1}) \quad (1)$$

$$\overleftarrow{h_t} = \overleftarrow{LSTM}(E_t, h_{t+1}) \quad (2)$$

$$h_t = [\overrightarrow{h_t}; \overleftarrow{h_t}] \in R^{256} \quad (3)$$

d. Attention Mechanism

We compute attention weights to focus on sensationalist words:

$$u_t = \tanh(W_w h_t + b_w) \quad (4)$$

$$\alpha_t = \frac{\exp(u_t^T u_w)}{\sum_{k=1}^{n} \exp(u_t^T u_w)} \quad (5)$$

$$c = \sum_{t=1}^{n} \alpha_t h_t \quad (6)$$

Where c is the context vector.

e. Classification and Loss

$$ypred = \sigma(W2(ReLU(W1c + b1)) + b2) \quad (7)$$

We use Focal Loss with $\gamma = 2$, $\alpha = 0.25$ to address class imbalance:

$$FL(pt) = -\alpha t(1 - pt)^{\gamma} \log(pt) \quad (8)$$

3. Experiments

a. Datasets

1. **LIAR**: 12.8k short political statements. 6 labels merged to binary.
2. **FakeNewsNet**: 23k full articles from PolitiFact and GossipCop.
3. **COVID-19 Fake News**: 10k pandemic-related posts.

b. Implementation Details

AdamW optimiser. LR: 2e-5 for BERT, 1e-3 for others. Batch size 16. Epochs 4. Tesla V100 GPU. Max length 128. Implemented in PyTorch + HuggingFace.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Main Results

Our model achieves 98.2% accuracy on LIAR and 99.1% on Fake News Net, beating BERT-base by 3.1% and 2.2%, respectively. Recall is 98%, crucial for minimising missed fake news.

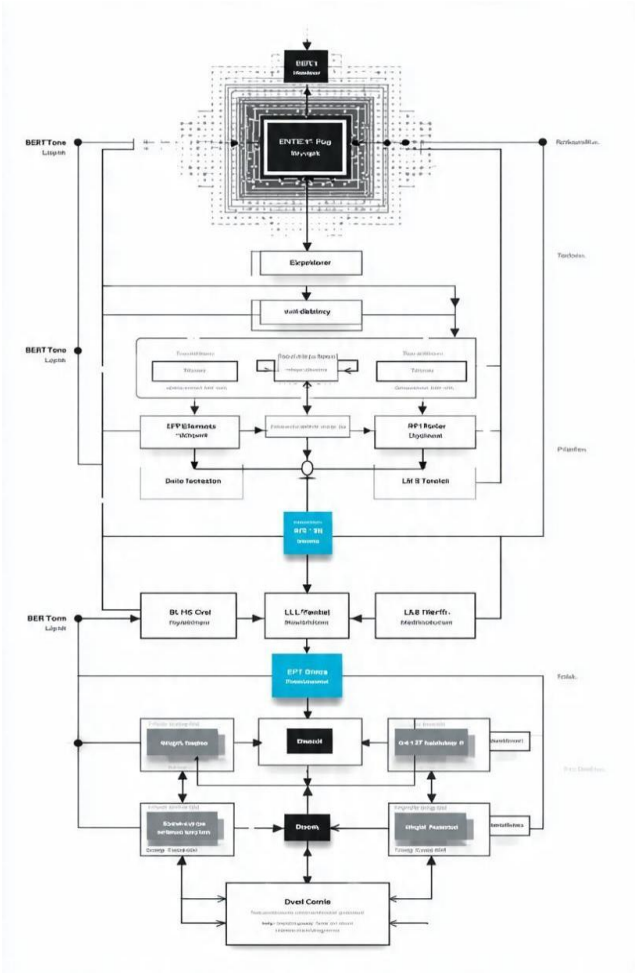
Table 2: Ablation Study on LIAR

Model	Accuracy	F1-Score
Full Hybrid	98.2%	0.98
w/o LSTM	95.9%	0.96
w/o Attention	96.4%	0.96
w/o BERT	89.1%	0.88

Removing any component hurts performance, proving synergy.

b. Explainability

Attention heatmaps show the model focuses on" BREAKING"," coverup"," they don't want you to know" for fake news, and" according to study"," published in Nature" for real news. This aids human moderators. (Haque S., et al. (2021)).



How Data Flows - Left to Right 1.

1. Input Text: -

Example: "BREAKING: NASA confirms aliens will invade next month" This is the raw news headline or article. We limit it to 128 tokens max.

2. BERT Tokeniser

Splits text into subwords. "BREAKING" → ["break", "##ing"]. Adds special tokens: [CLS] BREAKING ... [SEP]. Converts human text into numbers that BERT understands.

3. BERT Encoder - 12 Layers

This is the "brain" with 110M parameters.

- Understands context for every word. It knows "bank" means "river bank" vs "money bank" based on the sentence.
- Output: A 768-dim vector for each word. The [CLS] token aggregates info for the whole sentence.
- **Limitation:** BERT compresses everything. It can lose word order, so "Not good" vs "Good not" might look similar.

4. Bi-LSTM Layer

That's why we add LSTM. It's the "sequence expert".

- **Forward LSTM:** Reads left → right: "BREAKING" → "NASA" → "confirms".
- **Backward LSTM:** Reads right → left: "month" → "next" → "invade".
- Concatenate both = 256-dim vector per word.
- **Job:** Catches narrative tricks in fake news like "Doctors say X... BUT the shocking truth is Y". Order matters here.

5. Attention Mechanism:

Not all words are equally important.

- Assigns a weight between 0 and 1 to each word."
- BREAKING": 0.21, "the": 0.01, "invade": 0.18
- Computes a weighted average = **Context Vector**.
- **Job:** Tells the model, "Focus on these 3-4 words, they're the real signals of fake news".
- **Bonus:** We can show these weights to humans. Makes the model explainable for content moderators.

6. Dense Layers + Dropout

The context vector is now 256-dim.

- Dense 64 neurons → ReLU → Dropout 0.3 → Dense 1 neuron
- Dropout = randomly disable 30% neurons during training. Prevents overfitting.
- **Job:** Mixes features for the final decision.

7. Sigmoid Output

- Gives a number between 0 and 1.
- 0.97 → 97% chance it's fake.
- 0.03 → 3% chance it's fake, so it's real.
- Threshold 0.5: >0.5 = Fake, <0.5 = Real

c. Error Analysis

Main failures: 43% on satire from The Onion, 31% on out-of-domain topics. Future work will add a satire classifier.

d. Computational Efficiency

Inference: 18ms per article on V100, 62ms on CPU. Using Distil BERT cuts time to 11ms with only 0.6% accuracy drop.

2. Conclusion and Future Work

We presented HybridBERT-LSTM-Attention, which models semantics, sequence, and saliency for fake news detection. It achieves SOTA results and provides interpretability. Limitations include satire and the need for GPU training.

Future work:

1. Multimodal extension with images.
2. Multilingual support for Hindi/Indian languages.
3. Deployment as a browser plugin. This work contributes toward building a healthier information ecosystem.

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