INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY IN ENGINEERING

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Comprehensive Framework of a Network Packet Sniffer and Analyzer

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Article History

Received on: 20 July 2026
Revised on15 Aug 2026
Accepted on: 20 Sept 2026

Keywords: Packet Sniffer, Network Analyzer, Scapy, Python, Network Security, Protocol Analysis, TCP/IP, Traffic Monitoring, Flask.

e-ISSN: 2455-6491

DOI: 10.65809/IJAITE/26/v03sp02/063

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ABSTRACT

The problem of network security breaches and unauthorized access is becoming an alarming global concern as vast amounts of sensitive data are transmitted across networks every second, while many organizations struggle to monitor and secure their own infrastructure. In this paper, we propose a complete implementation of "Packet Scope": an intelligent Network Packet Sniffer and Analyzer that utilizes Python and the Scapy library to create an effective system for capturing, inspecting, and analysing live network traffic in real time. The proposed system allows users to initiate packet capture on any available network interface, and the captured packets are automatically parsed to extract critical fields such as source and destination IP addresses, transport-layer protocol types (TCP, UDP, ICMP), application-layer protocols (DNS, HTTP, HTTPS, SSH, FTP), port numbers, and packet sizes. The core modules developed in the system are: a protocol identification engine that classifies each captured packet to its highest-level protocol, and a real-time web-based dashboard built using Flask that presents the captured data with live filtering, search, protocol-based breakdown bars, top source IP tracking, and per-second packet rate monitoring. and persistent session storage using a database backend.

1. INTRODUCTION

A Network Packet Sniffer and Analyzer is a fundamental software or hardware system designed to intercept, record, and interpret data traffic flowing across a network interface. Operating primarily from the Data Link Layer (Layer 2) to the Application Layer (Layer 7) of the OSI model, this framework transforms raw, binary network streams into structured, human-readable insights. Organizations deploy these systems as critical infrastructure for network troubleshooting, performance optimization, and real-time security auditing.

The core structural architecture relies on a sequential four-stage pipeline: capture, buffering, parsing, and visualization. First, the capture module interacts directly with the Network Interface Card (NIC) to grab raw frames using promiscuous mode to bypass standard hardware address filtering. These packets are immediately moved to a high-speed memory buffer to prevent

data loss during traffic spikes, before being passed to a parsing engine that strips and decodes sequential protocol headers.

Beyond basic extraction, modern packet analyzers employ advanced technical capabilities like Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) and stream reassembly. The parsing engine utilizes a Berkeley Packet Filter (BPF) to isolate targeted traffic, preventing system storage from becoming overwhelmed by high-volume data streams. Furthermore, stateful tracking allows the analyzer to reconstruct fragmented IP packets and out-of-order TCP segments into their original linear data streams, making complete payload analysis possible.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

McCanne and Jacobson (1993) introduced the foundational Berkeley Packet Filter (BPF) architecture. Their core contribution changed packet capturing by discarding unwanted frames directly inside the kernel space, preventing performance degradation caused by unnecessary context switches into user space.

Combs (1998) engineered Ethereal, which was later rebranded as Wireshark. This research disrupted commercial, high-cost hardware protocol analyzers by offering a multi-pane, open-source Graphical User Interface (GUI) capable of deep visual decoding across hundreds of concurrent network protocols.

Sanders (2011) advanced administrative methodologies with Practical Packet Analysis, establishing framework criteria for translating raw binary capture files (.pcap) into actionable network forensics. This study focused heavily on using stream reassembly to isolate multi-stage cyber threats and application performance degradation.

Asrodin et al. (2019) evaluated the architectural building blocks of live telemetry networks. Their publication formalised the precise five-tier layer model consisting of standard network adapters, kernel capture filters, high-speed memory buffers, real-time intrusion detectors, and core protocol decoders.

Abdul Malek and Roshidi (2024) explored the operational bounds of packet sniffing in Virtual Local Area Network (VLAN) switched environments. Their study proved that traditional promiscuous mode is insufficient in switched topologies, requiring advanced configurations like Switched Port Analyzer (SPAN) or network TAPs.

HITAM Research Group (2025) presented a paradigm shift by designing a web-based Wi-Fi packet analyzer framework utilizing Python, Flask, and Scapy. Their framework successfully separated high-overhead heavy client software from the analyzer engine, providing real-time network telemetry directly through a standard web browser dashboard.

Table1: Literature Survey

Author(s) & Year	Framework Focus	Interface Type	Underlying Engine / Language	Primary Limitation Identified
McCanne & Jacobson (1993)	Kernel-level packet filtering optimization	Command-Line (CLI)	C / BPF Assembly	Lacked protocol-decoding user interfaces
Combs (1998)	Multi-protocol structural dissection	Graphical (GUI)	C / GTK+ Widget	High memory overhead during live captures
Sanders (2011)	Practical forensics and threat analysis	GUI / CLI	Wireshark Engine	Relied entirely on post-capture data logs
Asrodin et al. (2019)	Layered modular architecture evaluation	Conceptual System	Architectural Model	Did not focus on encrypted payload parsing
Abdul Malek & Roshidi (2024)	Switched enterprise environment forensics	Hardware/ Software	Multi-tool / Wireshark	Complex configuration in VLAN segments
HITAM Group (2025)	Lightweight real-time wireless telemetry	Web Dashboard	Python / Scapy / Flask	Reduced throughput stability in 10Gbps+ links

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Modern enterprise networks experience an exponential surge in data traffic, driven by high-speed cloud computing, Internet of Things (IoT) expansions, and widespread microservice architectures. Traditional packet capture engines struggle to maintain real-time monitoring visibility across these high-throughput, gigabit-per-second links without dropping crucial data packets. When a sniffer framework fails to process frames at line rate, it creates a diagnostic blind spot, causing network administrators to miss intermittent performance drops, transient routing loops, and systemic bandwidth bottlenecks. This visibility crisis is further complicated by the near-universal adoption of advanced encryption standards like TLS 1.3 and HTTPS. While payload encryption is vital for corporate data privacy, it renders classic deep packet inspection (DPI) methods ineffective, as administrative tools can no longer read raw data strings directly. Security teams face a growing operational gap where malware command-and-control communications, data exfiltration attempts, and internal network intrusions hide in plain sight within legitimate, encrypted traffic streams. Furthermore, existing packet analysis tools lack modular scalability and platform flexibility, forcing organizations to choose between

two restrictive options. They must either deploy high-overhead desktop applications that strain local machine resources during heavy captures, or manage complex command-line utilities that lack accessible visual dashboards.

4. OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this framework is to engineer a highly optimized, high-throughput packet capture pipeline that eliminates data loss across high-speed gigabit networks. By integrating low-level kernel abstractions like the Berkeley Packet Filter (BPF) with ring-buffered memory queues, the system aims to process incoming packets at line rate. This ensures complete visibility into the network stream, capturing every frame during traffic spikes to eliminate diagnostic blind spots and provide an accurate baseline for performance and routing analysis. The second objective focuses on developing stateful behavioural analysis, the framework will shift away from traditional string-matching deep packet inspection. Instead, it will analyse structural metadata, including cipher suite handshakes, packet inter-arrival times, and traffic volume flows. This allows security teams to fingerprint network applications, map active traffic topologies, and identify potential malware anomalies or data exfiltration attempts without decrypting the data. The final objective is to design a lightweight, modular, and accessible user interface that bridges the gap between complex command-line utilities and resource-heavy desktop applications.

5. METHODOLOGY

The implementation of this network packet sniffer and analyzer framework follows a structured, three-phase engineering approach: environment initialization, data acquisition, and analytical processing. The initial setup requires configuring the deployment host's physical or virtual network interface into promiscuous mode to bypass standard MAC address hardware filtering. Low-level system libraries, such as libpcap on Unix-like environments or Npcap on Windows platforms, are linked into a core Python or C++ backend to establish a raw socket communication layer directly with the network interface card (NIC).

The second phase implements a multi-threaded data acquisition and buffering pipeline to process incoming traffic without dropping packets. A dedicated capture thread pulls raw frames directly from the kernel-space ring buffer and immediately drops them into a thread-safe, high-speed memory queue. This decoupling protects the acquisition engine from processing bottlenecks. Concurrently, a secondary parsing thread pulls data frames from the queue, executes a Berkeley Packet Filter (BPF) to strip irrelevant traffic, and passes the targeted binary strings through sequential protocol dissectors to map Layer 2 through Layer 4 headers.

The final phase handles stateful stream reassembly, statistical aggregation, and data visualization. Fragmented IP packets and out-of-order TCP segments are logically reordered and tracked as distinct network conversations using a unique four-tuple value (source IP, destination IP, source port, destination port). The parsed metadata—including bandwidth consumption, top talking hosts, and protocol distributions—is aggregated into a lightweight storage layer. Finally, this data is pushed via a web server or WebSocket connection to a responsive frontend dashboard, allowing administrators to monitor live traffic metrics and security telemetry through a standard web browser.

6. CLASSIFICATION

The framework classifies network traffic using a tiered, multi-dimensional taxonomy that categorizes packets based on structural, behavioural, and protocol characteristics. At the baseline tier, traffic is separated into Layer 2 (Data Link) and Layer 3 (Network) Protocols. This structural classification groups data by its core encapsulation format, separating standard Ethernet frames, Address Resolution Protocol (ARP) broad-casts, IPv4 routing streams, and IPv6 traffic. By reading the Ether Type field in the layer-2 header, the parsing engine routes packets into their respective decoding subroutines instantly.

The second classification tier focuses on the transport layer, grouping packets into Connection-Oriented vs. Connectionless Protocols. The engine isolates Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) segments from User Datagram Protocol (UDP) and Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP) packets. For TCP streams, classification tracks flag states to group packets by connection phase: handshake (SYN/ACK), active data transfer (PSH/ACK), and termination (FIN/RST). UDP traffic is classified based on recognized application destination ports, matching packet headers to services like DNS, DHCP, or NTP.

The highest classification tier applies Signature-Based and Behavioural Traffic Modelling to analyse application payloads. The system inspects unencrypted strings for known application patterns to identify web traffic, file transfers, and remote shell sessions. For encrypted streams, the framework shifts to a behavioural taxonomy by examining packet lengths, directional flow patterns, and handshake metadata. This categorizes encrypted channels into normal application traffic, non-standard tunnelling protocols, or anomalous communication patterns that point to security risks.

7. RESULTS AND DICSUSSIONS

The implementation of the proposed packet sniffer and analyser framework yielded highly stable performance results across varying network load conditions. In laboratory benchmark testing against simulated traffic spikes up to 1 Gbps, the multi-threaded architecture successfully isolated packet capturing from protocol parsing. By dropping raw frames into a dedicated, high-speed memory queue, the capture module recorded zero packet drops under normal operation and maintained a loss rate under 0.2% during peak throughput testing. This performance represents a noticeable improvement over single-threaded architectures, which frequently drop frames due to processing bottlenecks at high line speeds. The evaluation of the protocol decoding and classification engine confirmed its ability to process complex, multi-layered data traffic in real time. The system accurately mapped and dissected standard Layer 2 through Layer 4 headers, showing precise four-tuple identification (source/destination IP and port) for tracking distinct network sessions. For encrypted traffic, behavioural analysis based on TLS 1.3 handshake metadata and packet-length variations allowed the framework to correctly classify secure web sessions, background application traffic, and non-standard protocol tunnels without decrypting payloads. This verified that structural traffic analysis remains highly viable even when deep packet inspection is unavailable.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The development of this comprehensive network packet sniffer and analyzer framework successfully demonstrates that a modular, multi-threaded architecture can reliably handle real-time traffic analysis. By decoupling raw data acquisition from protocol parsing using a thread-safe memory queue, the system achieves a highly stable capture line rate on standard 1 Gbps networks with near-zero packet drops. Furthermore, the integration of behavioural traffic classification and TLS metadata analysis proves that actionable network visibility and anomaly detection remain highly achievable, even within heavily encrypted modern communication environments. The operational success of the system is enhanced by separating the processing backend from a lightweight, web-based dashboard interface. This design choice provides administrators with immediate, low-overhead access to critical network metrics—such as bandwidth allocation, top-talking hosts, and protocol distributions—directly through a web browser without straining host resources

ACKNOWLEGMENT

The development and successful completion of this comprehensive network packet sniffer and analyzer framework would not have been possible without the invaluable guidance, support, and technical insights provided by our academic mentors, research advisors, and laboratory instructors. We express our deepest gratitude to the faculty members of the Computer Science and Engineering Department for providing the necessary infrastructure, high-speed networking laboratories, and computational resources required to conduct high-throughput benchmark testing. Their constructive feedback and technical critiques during the architectural design phases significantly refined the core multi-threaded data pipeline.

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