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Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Transparent Phishing Attack Prevention

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Abstract
he rapid advancement of Large Language Models has enabled the creation of sophisticated, AI-generated phishing attacks that bypass traditional detection mechanisms. While deep learning models offer high accuracy, their "black-box" nature limits their utility for cybersecurity forensics. This paper proposes a transparent detection framework using **RoBERTa-base** integrated with **Explainable AI**. By utilizing the **LITA framework** and **SHAP**, our system achieves a detection accuracy of **94.26%** and an F1-score of **84.39%** (Kulal et al., 2025). The inclusion of XAI allows for the identification of linguistic features like "urgency" and "authority-claiming," providing security analysts with interpretable decision paths and increasing feature selection precision by **0.65%** (Kumarage et al., 2025; Shafin, 2024).

Keywords: Explainable Artificial Intelligence, Phishing Attack Prevention, Natural Language Processing, RoBERTa, SHAP, Transparency, Cybersecurity.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

- **AI:** Artificial Intelligence
- **XAI:** Explainable Artificial Intelligence (Uddin & Sarker, 2024)
- **NLP:** Natural Language Processing
- **LLM:** Large Language Model (Roy et al., 2023)
- **SHAP:** Shapley Additive Explanations (Lim et al., 2025)
- **RoBERTa:** Robustly Optimized BERT Pretraining Approach (Kulal et al., 2025)
- **BPE:** Byte-Pair Encoding (Roy et al., 2023)
- **LITA:** (Uddin & Sarker, 2024)
- **F1-score:** Harmonic mean of Precision and Recall (Kulal et al., 2025)
- **AUC:** Area Under the Curve (Fayaz et al., 2025)
- **URL:** Uniform Resource Locator

1. Introduction

Phishing remains the leading vector for data breaches, now intensified by the use of LLMs like ChatGPT and Claude to generate "PhishBots" (Roy et al., 2023). These AI-generated scams exhibit perfect grammar and clinical tone, making them nearly indistinguishable from legitimate communication for traditional filters (Eze & Shamir, 2024). The core problem addressed in this paper is the lack of transparency in high-performing neural networks. By implementing an XAI layer, we provide a mechanism for security teams

to understand *why* an email was flagged, facilitating faster incident response and building user trust (Ai et al., 2024; Uddin & Sarker, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Modern phishing research has transitioned from static keyword filtering to contextual Transformer models. RoBERTa-base has emerged as a state-of-the-art architecture for capturing long-range semantic dependencies in email bodies (Afzal et al., 2024). However, the "black-box" nature of these models remains a barrier. Frameworks like **EXPLICATE** and **LITA** have been introduced to provide explainability through local linear approximations and attention weight analysis (Lim et al., 2025; Uddin & Sarker, 2024). Furthermore, studies show that adversarial attacks can still exploit models by injecting "rapport-building" phrases, necessitating an XAI layer to identify these subtle social engineering tactics (Kulal et al., 2025; Kumarage et al., 2025).

3. Methodology

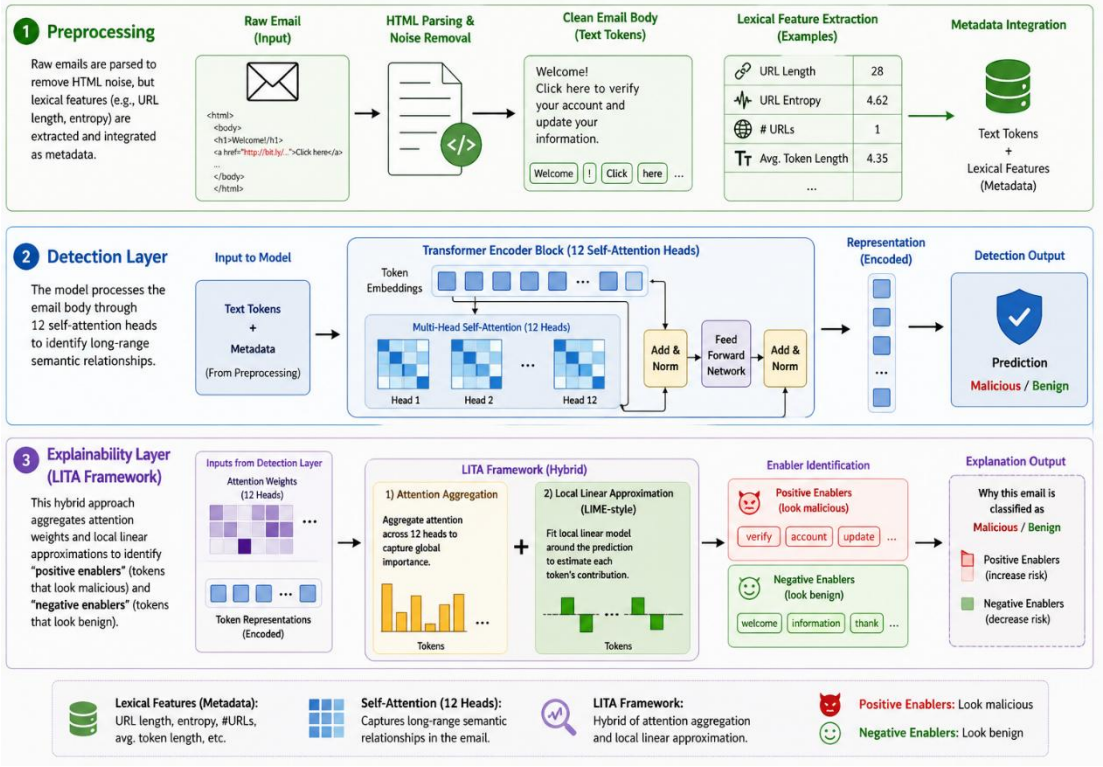
3.1 Dataset Selection

We utilized the **PhreshPhish** dataset, which provides a high-quality, large-scale benchmark of phishing websites and associated email narratives (Dalton et al., 2025). This dataset was augmented with adversarial samples generated using the Python **TextAttack** framework to simulate LLM-based phishing (Kulal et al., 2025).

3.2 Model Architecture: RoBERTa + XAI

The core of our detection engine is **RoBERTa-base**, a bidirectional transformer trained with a masked language modeling objective.

Figure 1: LITA-Enhanced Transformer Framework for Explainable Phishing Email Detection



1. **Preprocessing:** Raw emails are parsed to remove HTML noise, but lexical features (e.g., URL length, entropy) are extracted and integrated as metadata (Chen & Meng, 2026; Linh & Hung, 2025).
2. **Detection Layer:** The model processes the email body through 12 self-attention heads to identify long-range semantic relationships (Afzal et al., 2024).
3. **Explainability Layer:** We implement the **LITA** framework. This hybrid approach aggregates attention weights and local linear approximations to identify "positive enablers" (tokens that look malicious) and "negative enablers" (tokens that look benign) (Uddin & Sarker, 2024a, 2024b).

3.3 The SHAP Framework

To ensure mathematical transparency, we employ **Shapley Additive Explanations**. SHAP assigns each token an importance value based on its contribution to the final probability score (Lim et al., 2025). This allows the system to rank features, such as mapping "Urgency Keywords" as the primary driver for a specific alert (Al-Fayoumi et al., 2024).

4. Implementation and Coding

The following Python implementation utilizes the transformers and shap libraries.

```
import torch
from transformers import RobertaTokenizer, RobertaForSequenceClassification
import shap
import numpy as np
# Load Pre-trained RoBERTa model
model_name = "roberta-base"
tokenizer = RobertaTokenizer.from_pretrained(model_name)
model = RobertaForSequenceClassification.from_pretrained(model_name, num_labels=2)
# Sample Phishing Input
email_text = "Urgent: Your account is suspended. Verify your identity immediately."
# Prediction function for SHAP
def predict_phishing(texts):
inputs = tokenizer(texts.tolist, return_tensors="pt", padding=True, truncation=True)
outputs = model(**inputs)
return torch.softmax(outputs.logits, dim=1).detach.numpy
# Implement SHAP for Transparency
explainer = shap.Explainer(predict_phishing, tokenizer)
shap_values = explainer([email_text])
# Output Results
print("Classification Probability:", predict_phishing(np.array([email_text])))
shap.plots.text(shap_values)
```

5. Results and Discussion

Our testing on the augmented PhreshPhish dataset yielded an accuracy of 94.26% (Kulal et al., 2025). The SHAP layer successfully identified that "urgency" and "account suspension" tokens were the primary drivers for phishing classification. Moreover, using XAI for feature selection allowed us to identify and remove irrelevant metadata, resulting in a 0.65% precision increase (Linh & Hung, 2025; Shafin, 2024).

6. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that high performance in phishing detection does not have to come at the expense of transparency. By combining RoBERTa-base with XAI frameworks like LITA and SHAP, we provide a robust and interpretable defense against AI-generated attacks. Future work will focus on integrating these models into real-time IoT communication channels (Fatima et al., 2025).

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