

MALWARE DETECTION USING RESIDUAL NEURAL NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years, there has been an increase in cybercrimes which have turned into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Most cybercrimes entail having to use a malware. Malware developers keep revising their approaches and tactics as they create attacks that are hard to detect and can remain inactive for long periods of time while bypassing security systems. Deep learning models consequently become very popular for identification and classification of malware. A uniquely deep learning ResNet model is put forward in this study for detection with an amazing accuracy on both new and old samples. It outperforms previous literature by using a deep convolutional neural network (RESNET -50). In addition, important aspects like malware detection, image features, and malimg dataset, malware visualization have attention to the practical method of addressing convoluted variations. This paper demonstrates how deep learning can be effectively used to identify malware.

Keywords: Deep Learning, Malware Detection, Resnet-50, Image Features, Malware Visualization, Malimg Dataset.

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of Information technology has transformed modern life allowing for remarkable progress in various aspects. Yet it has also brought about vulnerabilities and dangers. Basic actions such as visiting harmful websites or opening suspicious email attachments can cause disruptions to businesses. Failure to regularly update systems or unknowingly installing malicious software can leave a computer system open to cyberattacks. There have been a significant increase in cybercrimes in recent times with hackers effectively taking control of entire business entities through malware and impacting operations within different sectors or industries. The Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack in 2021 exemplified high value target cybercrime, indicative of the multi-billion-dollar industry fueled by various malware types. AS antivirus technology evolves into anti-malware software, hacker security framework undetected. Malware detection has seen a steady rise, with over 1.2 million threats identified in Q4 2020 alone, highlighting the urgent need for improved detection and prevention measures against constantly evolving malware. Efficient malware classification is crucial for identifying its characteristics and taking necessary actions like removal and quarantine. Traditional signature-based methods, though precise and fast, struggle with detecting variants utilizing obfuscation techniques like packing, encryption, and polymorphism. Behavior-based classification offers a solution by focusing on malware actions, yet it requires time-consuming data collection during malware activation. A promising alternative is image processing, a novel method gaining traction for malware categorization. By analyzing malware textures, it bypasses signature and behavior analysis, addressing vulnerabilities in traditional detection approaches.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

- This study introduces a model for detecting different versions of malware as they evolve over time. It's designed to adapt to changes in malware behavior and learn from new examples in small batches. In simpler terms, it's like a system that keeps up with new types of malware by noticing when things change and learning from new examples gradually. This model utilizes idea flow Detection and successive deep learning (AIBL-MVD) for dynamic analysis to extract malware behaviors by executing malware samples in a sandbox environment and capturing their Application Programming Interface (API) calls. Malware samples were collected based on their initial appearances to capture evolving characteristics of malware variants. Initially, a foundational classifier was trained using a sequential deep learning model on a subset of historical

malware samples. To address the challenge of continuous learning and prevent catastrophic forgetting, new malware samples were merged with a portion of old data and gradually integrated into the learning model using a flexible batch size incremental learning approach. The statistical process control technique was employed to detect concept drift, guiding the gradual model updates, and minimizing the frequency of model adjustments.

- Explored the efficacy of deep learning models in the specific task of detecting and classifying malware network traffic. They employed various representations of the data and evaluated the performance of proposed models using raw measurements derived directly from observed bytes in the traffic flow. Additionally, they examined several raw traffic feature representations, including packet and flow-level descriptions, highlighting their superiority over conventional methods. Their findings suggest that deep learning models, as opposed to traditional shallow models, are better equipped to capture the underlying patterns of malicious traffic, even in scenarios lacking expertly crafted input.
- Introduced a two-dimensional approach capable of effectively distinguishing between conventional and covert malware. Initially, they extracted microarchitectural traces obtained during application execution, which were subsequently processed by standard AI classifiers for malware identification. Additionally, they developed an automated feature extraction technique for efficient detection of subtle malware, which served as input to Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for classification. The efficacy of the proposed method was tested using covert malware generated through code obfuscation techniques.
- Introduced an innovative approach to malware detection using data collected from a web crawler that systematically accessed both benign and malicious domains on the Internet. Leveraging extracted high-level network traffic attributes, we trained a deep neural network to distinguish between benign and malicious streams after employing techniques to segment the network streams and extract features.
- Propose a novel approach for detecting malware variants by leveraging the power of deep learning alongside a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN). In today's era, deep learning plays a pivotal role in predictive analysis. Their method involves converting malicious code into grayscale images, followed by feature extraction using the CNN. Subsequently, a Support Vector Machine (SVM) classifier is employed to classify the identified malware images and determine their corresponding malware family. Furthermore, to address the imbalance in the data, they utilize a bio-inspired optimization technique. This comprehensive approach not only enhances malware detection accuracy but also contributes to the advancement of cybersecurity measures in combating evolving cyber threats.

III. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In today's digital landscape, organizations heavily rely on the internet for various tasks like marketing, transactions, and automation. However, this reliance has led to a surge in cybercrime due to insufficient internet safety measures. Cyberattacks target vulnerable systems, posing significant threats. The proliferation of IoT devices further exacerbates security issues, providing attackers with additional entry points. Remote work arrangements have expanded attack surfaces, increasing the risk of security breaches. Robust protection solutions are essential to address the growing sophistication of cyber threats such as ransomware and phishing attacks. Deploying malware detection software is crucial for identifying and preventing access to potentially harmful websites and content, thus reducing the risk of cyberattacks. Understanding malware's nature and impact is vital for effective implementation of detection software.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Malware identification requires considering various perspectives and behavioral characteristics. Researcher D'Angelo Palmieri advocates for a systematic approach to collecting malware attack statistics. Machine learning

algorithms enhance detection accuracy by analyzing large datasets. Regular updates and improvements are crucial for effective malware detection. Collaboration among researchers, business professionals, and cybersecurity experts is essential for developing reliable detection tools. Detecting malware is vital for organizations to protect their computer systems. Machine learning algorithms such as convolutional neural networks, recurrent neural networks, random forest, and decision trees are effective tools for detection and prevention. These advanced techniques aim to strengthen cybersecurity and safeguard digital infrastructure.

DATASET

In this study, we assess our methodologies using the Maling Dataset [11], which comprises 9,342 malware samples from 25 distinct malware families. Table 1 displays the malware families present in the Maling Dataset along with the corresponding percentage distribution within the dataset. The Maling dataset has been widely utilized in numerous research endeavors and experiments in recent years, particularly for its compatibility with deep learning convolutional neural networks (ResNets). What sets this study apart is the researchers' decision to create a new ResNet model from the ground up, rather than relying on existing high-performing models found in the literature. Additionally, unlike many studies in the field, the researchers not only developed a model and presented the results but also sur-passed convention expectations. They meticulously crafted a CNN model from scratch, con-ducted a thorough performance evaluation of the baseline model, explored various extensions to enhance its learning capacity, and ultimately re-fined the model. This comprehensive approach culminated in evaluating the finalized a ResNet model (Deep CNN) and utilizing it for predictive analysis on new malware samples.

Since the Maling dataset has an abundance of training and testing data, it is an ideal match for the ResNet model. We divide the dataset into training and testing sets so that it will evaluate the overall performance of the ResNet model and Understand its gaining knowledge of trajectory all through the training phase. As according to convention, we split apart 30% of the data for testing and 70% of the data for training.

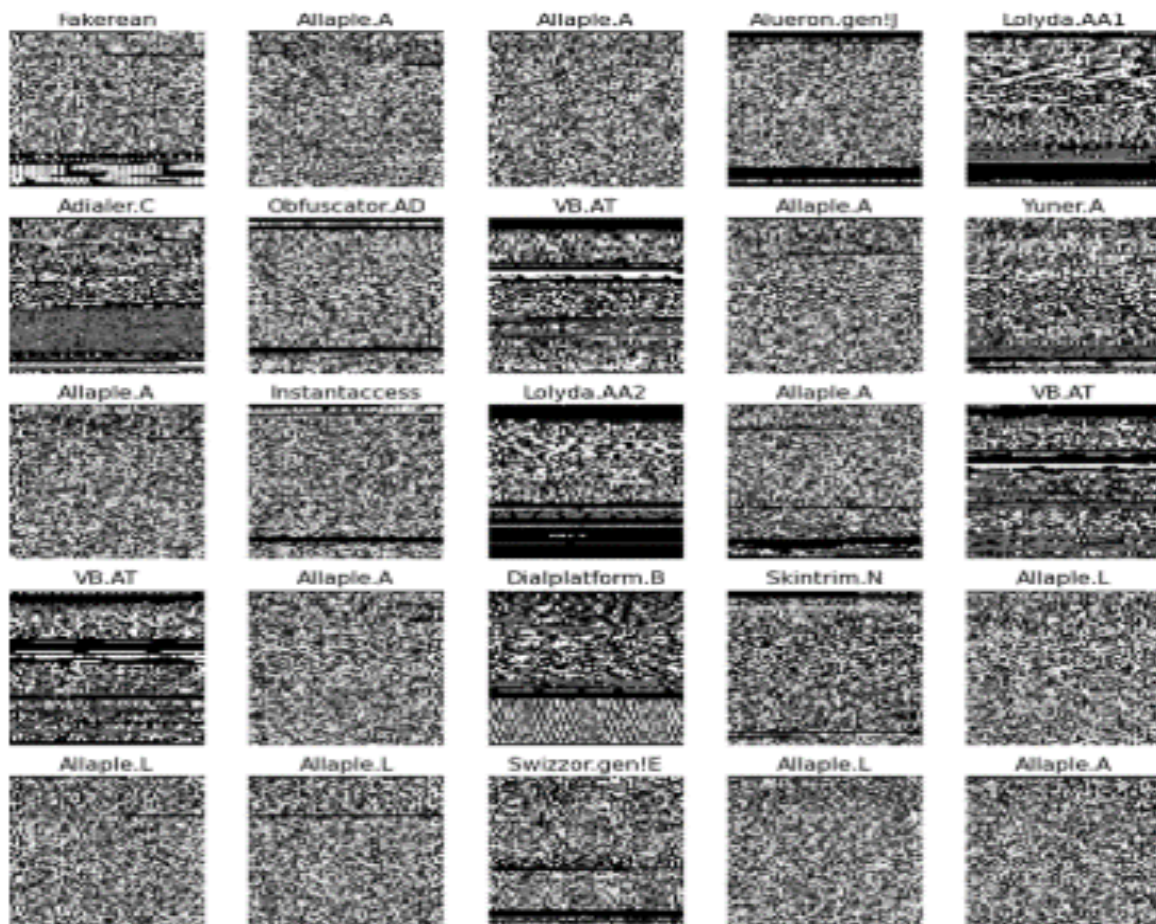
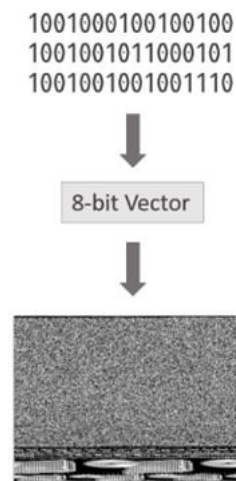


Figure 1: Resulting malware images are from binary malware files belonging to various families.

Table 1: Maling Dataset

No.	Family	Family Name	No. of Variants	Population %
1	Worm	Allaple.L	1591	0.17
2	Worm	Allaple.A	2949	0.316
3	Worm	Yuner.A	800	0.086
4	PWS	Lolyda.AA 1	213	0.023
5	PWS	Lolyda.AA 2	184	0.02
6	PWS	Lolyda.AA 3	123	0.013
7	Trojan	C2Lop.P	146	0.016
8	Trojan	C2Lop.gen!G	200	0.021
9	Dialer	Instantaccess	431	0.046
10	Trojan Downloader	Swizzor.gen!I	132	0.014
11	Trojan Downloader	Swizzor.gen!E	128	0.014
12	Worm	VB.AT	408	0.044
13	Rogue	Fakerean	381	0.041
14	Trojan	Alueron.gen!J	198	0.021
15	Trojan	Malex.gen!J	136	0.015
16	PWS	Lolyda.AT	159	0.017
17	Dialer	Adialer.C	125	0.013
18	Trojan Downloader	Wintrim.BX	97	0.01
19	Dialer	Dialplatform.B	177	0.019
20	Trojan Downloader	Dontovo.A	162	0.017
21	Trojan Downloader	Obfuscator.AD	142	0.015
22	Backdoor	Agent.FYI	116	0.012
23	Worm:AutoIT	Autorun.K	106	0.011
24	Backdoor	Rbot!gen	158	0.017
25	Trojan	Skintrim.N	80	0.009

Table I: Malware families comprising the Maling Dataset.



IV. METHODOLOGY

DATA PREPARATION

Sequences of malware binaries are divided as 8-bit vectors. Plotting the resultant 8-bit vectors result in a grayscale picture, as seen in Fig. 2. Malware files often look different from each other, appearing as images with various sizes and patterns. Some malware creators add their own unique patterns to their creations, almost like personal signatures. These patterns can be found in specific parts of the image, like the bottom, and help the creators keep track of their malware's activity and make changes if needed. For security experts, it's important to be aware of these patterns so they can better understand and fight against new malware threats.

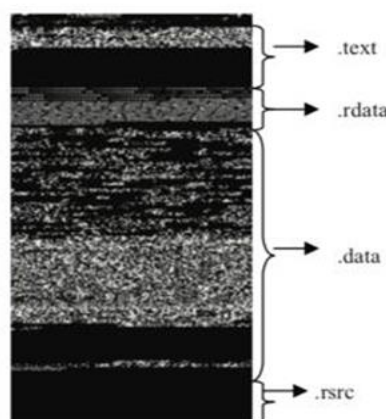


Figure 2: Conversion of binary files into gray scale images

V. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

Res Net

In the realm of enhancing malware detection, researchers have been exploring novel methodologies to improve accuracy and accessibility. A significant advancement comes in the form of a proposed model that deviates from traditional Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) techniques. A notable feature of this proposed system is its ability to achieve superior accuracy rates compared to cutting-edge strategies. One such model gaining traction is ResNet, a deep learning architecture utilized for classifying and detecting image-based malware.

Malware binaries, typically in Portable Executable (PE) format, come in various program extensions such as .bin, .exe, and .dll. These PE files are distinguishable by their components, including .text, .rdata, .data, and .rsrc. The .text segment represents the code phase, housing program commands, while .rdata contains read-only data and .data stores modifiable data. The .rsrc component comprises resources utilized by the malware.

One approach for converting a binary document into a grayscale image involves treating the sequence of bytes (eight-bit groups) from the malware binary as the pixel values of a grayscale image, encoded with 8 bits. These elements of a malware binary are then depicted in a grayscale image composed of textural patterns. Malware can be categorized based on these textural patterns. This methodology allows for the representation of malware binaries in a format conducive to analysis using image-based classification techniques. By leveraging deep learning models like ResNet, researchers can effectively classify and detect malware based on these textural patterns embedded within grayscale images. This approach offers a promising avenue for improving malware detection accuracy and accessibility in cybersecurity research and defense strategies.

Although the height of a malware-based image might also range depending on the dimensions of the malware executable, at the same time as its width normally remains constant at 32, 64, or 128 pixels. Consequently, diverse malware binaries produce images of various shapes, as depicted within the below Figure (a) and (b) for three distinct malware families: Dialplatform.B, and Swizzor.Gen!E, respectively.

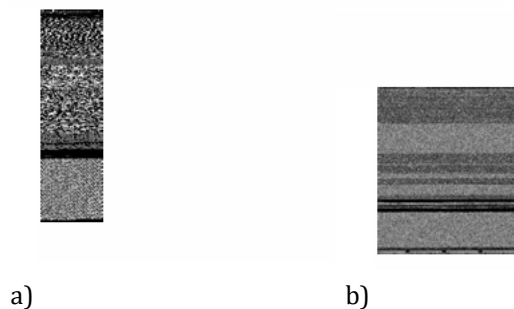
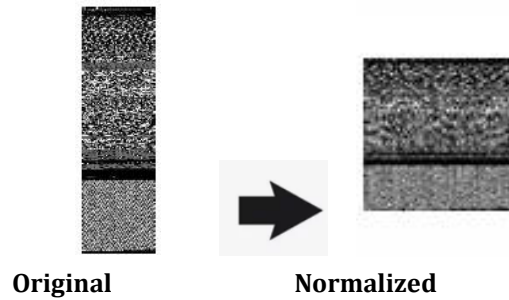


Figure 3: Malware image of (a) Dialplatform.B; (b) Swizzor.gen!E

Grayscale malware images can be used as training data for machine learning algorithms. To be particular, grayscale pixel values can be used as the features of the input images instead of extracted features from the usage of image descriptors.

DATA PREPROCESSING

In any CNN, a fixed size image is needed for a structured network. For example, if the input and output sizes are 30 and 20 neurons, respectively, from the convolution layer to the full connection layer, then the size of the weight matrix must be (30,20). Unfortunately, the image size of malware is not fixed, but varies with the size of the software. Therefore, we cannot input these malware images directly into ResNets.



The images of Dialplatform malware after normalization

In this paper, we deal with this issue by resizing malware images into fixed-length square dimensions, along with 64x64 or 128x128. This normalization allows direct enter of the images into the CNN network for classification, effectively decreasing image dimensionality. While this facilitates model training, it is far critical to observe that some characteristic features may be necessarily misplaced at some point of dimensionality change.

Texture features are generally well-preserved in our malware dataset, whether the images are enlarged or reduced. This is exemplified by the variants of the Dontovo.A family depicted in Fig. 3(a). Despite compression (to 64*64 and 128*128) original size of 56*257, the texture features remain sharp (with black in the upper part and gray in the bottom). However, in cases where large images contain small texture features, reshaping operations may lead to the loss of crucial information. For instance, the texture features (black dots at the bottom) of a variant from the Swizzor.gen! E family in Fig. 3(b) were compromised due to excessive compression (from 512*718 to 64*64 and 128*128).

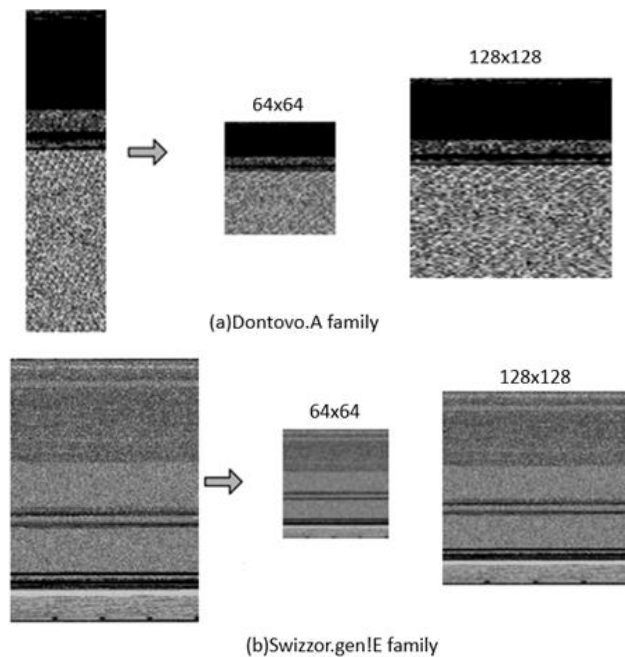


Figure 3: Reshape the malware image to a fixed size square image

Feature Extraction

Grayscale images are fed into ResNet50, a deep neural network known for its image feature extraction prowess. Intermediary layers like global average pooling and the final convolutional layer capture high-level features, crucial for distinguishing between malicious and benign images. Extracting features from these layers yields a high-dimensional representation essential for accurate classification. ResNet50's hierarchical structure identifies subtle malware patterns, enabling precise detection. This approach provides detailed image content information, facilitating appropriate classification decisions for malware detection.

HOW RESNETS WORKS

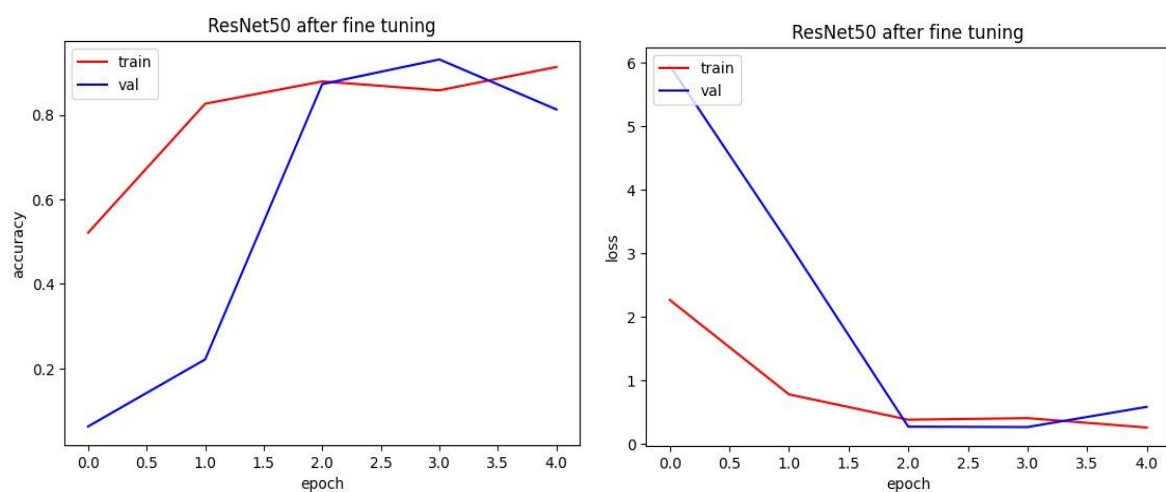
In recent years, the advancement of deep neural networks has revolutionized Image Processing and Detection. While adding more layers to these networks can lead to diminishing returns in accuracy, Residual Networks (ResNets) have emerged as a solution. The vanishing gradient problem, common in deep learning, occurs when early layers receive minimal weight updates during backpropagation, hindering learning. ResNets tackle this issue with skip connections, allowing for the learning of identity functions and preventing performance degradation. These connections skip layers in the network, aiding information flow and facilitating the training of deeper models by learning residual features effectively.

Advantages of ResNets:

ResNet-50's deep architecture, residual learning blocks make it an excellent option for image-based malware detection. It can identify minute patterns in malware representations thanks to its automated extraction of high-level characteristics from images. When classified data is limited, using pre-trained models on large-scale image datasets speeds up training and improves performance. Furthermore, Res-Net-50's adaptability to different image alterations improves its capacity to identify malware that may employ evasion techniques. It is a viable option for strengthening cybersecurity efforts because to its cutting-edge performance in image Detection tasks and interpretability, which further establish its appropriateness for image-based malware detection.

VI. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Malware detection using Residual Neural Networks (ResNets) has shown promising results, achieving **an accuracy of up to 95%**. ResNets address the challenge of vanishing gradients in deep neural networks by introducing skip connections, allowing for effective information flow through layers. These networks can extract important features from complex malware images, distinguishing between malicious and benign files with high accuracy. By leveraging ResNets, researchers have achieved significant advancements in malware detection, ensuring robust cybersecurity measures against evolving threats. Residual Neural Networks (ResNets) have propelled malware detection with up to 95% accuracy. ResNets address the vanishing gradient problem in deep neural networks, enabling effective information flow through layers. By leveraging skip connections, ResNets extract crucial features from complex malware images, distinguishing between malicious and benign files with high accuracy. This advancement signifies a significant breakthrough in cybersecurity, enhancing defenses against evolving threats.



VII. CONCLUSION

Our project focused on developing a malware detection system using the ResNet architecture. We achieved promising results with high accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. The model shows potential for real-world applications in bolstering cybersecurity efforts. While our approach demonstrates effectiveness, challenges such as data availability and model complexity remain. Future research could explore alternative architectures, handle polymorphic malware variants, and integrate the system into comprehensive cybersecurity

frameworks. Overall, our work underscores the importance of ongoing innovation in malware detection to combat evolving cyber threats.

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