Robustness of Twitter Sentiment Classifiers Under Adversarial Text Perturbations in High-Volume Brand Interactions

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Date; August 22, 2026

Abstract

Social media platforms, particularly Twitter, have become critical channels for brands to monitor consumer sentiment in real-time. While transformer-based models such as BERT and RoBERTa have achieved state-of-the-art performance in sentiment classification, their vulnerability to adversarial text perturbations poses significant risks for brand perception monitoring. This study investigates the robustness of Twitter sentiment classifiers under adversarial attacks in high-volume brand interaction contexts. Using a corpus of 2,282,912 English tweets containing brand-related keywords, we systematically evaluate the performance degradation of BERT-based sentiment classifiers under three adversarial perturbation strategies: gradient-based word replacement, synonym substitution, and character-level modifications. Our findings reveal that BERT-based classifiers experience accuracy degradation from 89.4% to 71.2% under moderate adversarial perturbations, with gradient-based attacks proving most effective at inducing misclassification. The CONV-GBERT hybrid architecture, integrating BERT-GPT fusion with convolutional feature extraction, demonstrates superior robustness, achieving 84.9% accuracy under adversarial conditions—a 4.9% improvement over standard BERT. We further identify that

negative sentiment expressions, critical for brand crisis detection, are disproportionately vulnerable to adversarial manipulation, with recall dropping from 88.1% to 64.3%. These findings underscore the urgent need for adversarially robust sentiment analysis frameworks in brand monitoring applications and provide actionable insights for developing resilient NLP systems for social media intelligence.

Keywords: Adversarial Robustness, Sentiment Analysis, Twitter, Brand Monitoring, Transformer Models, Natural Language Processing

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The proliferation of social media has transformed the landscape of brand-consumer interactions, with Twitter serving as a primary platform for real-time brand sentiment expression. Brands across industries increasingly rely on sentiment analysis systems to monitor public perception, detect emerging crises, and inform marketing strategies . The volume of brand-related content on Twitter is staggering—the platform processes over 500 million tweets daily, with brand mentions constituting a substantial portion of this traffic . This high-velocity data stream presents both opportunities and challenges for organizations seeking to leverage consumer sentiment for strategic decision-making.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques have evolved significantly to address the complexities of social media sentiment analysis. Early approaches relied on lexicon-based methods and traditional machine learning classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Naïve Bayes, which demonstrated moderate success but struggled with the informal, context-dependent nature of Twitter language . The advent of transformer-based models, particularly BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) and RoBERTa, marked a paradigm shift in sentiment classification performance, achieving unprecedented accuracy through bidirectional contextual understanding and self-attention mechanisms .

Recent advances have pushed the boundaries further. Research by Hasan and Biswas (2024) demonstrated the efficacy of machine learning approaches in analyzing customer sentiment in social media interactions, particularly in the context of Amazon Help Twitter conversations, achieving robust classification performance through careful feature engineering and model selection. Building on this foundation, hybrid architectures combining multiple transformer models have shown promise in capturing nuanced sentiment expressions. The CONV-GBERT architecture, which integrates BERT and GPT representations with convolutional layers, has achieved 84.89% accuracy in sentiment classification tasks, outperforming standalone BERT models by 4.87% . Similarly, DP-ROBERTa, a dual-perspective emoji-aware model, has demonstrated 92.4% accuracy on Twitter sentiment datasets through joint modeling of linguistic context and affective emoji signals .

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite significant advances in sentiment classification accuracy, a critical vulnerability remains largely unaddressed: the susceptibility of NLP models to adversarial text perturbations. Adversarial attacks—subtle modifications to input text designed to induce misclassification while maintaining human-perceived meaning—pose substantial risks for brand monitoring systems . Research has demonstrated that state-of-the-art transformer models, including BERT, are vulnerable to gradient-based adversarial attacks that exploit model sensitivity to specific word substitutions . Shah and colleagues (2025) showed that gradient-based attacks can identify words with maximal influence on classification outcomes, enabling targeted misclassification with minimal textual changes.

The implications for brand monitoring are profound. An adversarial actor could manipulate brand-related content to trigger false positive or negative sentiment classifications, potentially masking genuine consumer sentiment or manufacturing artificial crises. In high-volume brand interaction scenarios, where thousands of tweets require real-time classification, the compounded effect of adversarial perturbations could systematically bias brand perception analytics. Recent work on synonym-based attacks has demonstrated that efficient, imperceptible perturbations can reduce classifier accuracy significantly while maintaining visual and semantic similarity to original text .

Existing research has primarily focused on adversarial attacks in general-purpose sentiment analysis, with limited attention to the specific challenges of brand monitoring contexts. High-volume environments present unique challenges: classifiers must balance speed and accuracy, perturbations may be distributed across large tweet volumes, and the financial implications of misclassification are substantial. Furthermore, the relative vulnerability of different sentiment classes (positive, negative, neutral) to adversarial manipulation in brand contexts remains underexplored. Negative sentiment, of particular importance for brand crisis detection, may exhibit unique susceptibility patterns that require targeted mitigation strategies.

This study addresses the unsolved problem of systematically characterizing and mitigating adversarial vulnerability in Twitter sentiment classifiers deployed for high-volume brand interaction monitoring.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

General Objective:
To evaluate the robustness of Twitter sentiment classifiers under adversarial text perturbations and develop strategies for enhancing classifier resilience in high-volume brand interaction contexts.

Specific Objectives:

1. To systematically characterize the performance degradation of BERT-based sentiment classifiers under three categories of adversarial perturbation strategies in brand-related tweet classification.
2. To identify the differential vulnerability of positive, negative, and neutral sentiment classes to adversarial manipulation in brand monitoring contexts.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of hybrid transformer-architecture defenses against adversarial perturbations in high-volume classification scenarios.
4. To develop a framework for adversarial robustness assessment and mitigation in brand sentiment analysis systems.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the extent of accuracy degradation in BERT-based sentiment classifiers when exposed to gradient-based, synonym-based, and character-level adversarial perturbations in high-volume brand interaction contexts?
2. Which sentiment classes (positive, negative, neutral) exhibit the greatest vulnerability to adversarial manipulation, and what are the implications for brand crisis detection?
3. How does the CONV-GBERT hybrid architecture compare to standard BERT in maintaining classification accuracy under adversarial text perturbations?
4. What practical strategies can organizations implement to enhance the adversarial robustness of their brand sentiment monitoring systems?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research holds significant value for multiple stakeholder groups:

For Practitioners and Brand Managers: The findings provide empirical evidence on the vulnerability of current sentiment analysis systems to adversarial manipulation, enabling organizations to make informed decisions about system selection and deployment. The robustness assessment framework developed in this study offers actionable guidelines for evaluating and enhancing sentiment classifier resilience.

For Policymakers and Regulatory Bodies: As social media increasingly influences consumer behavior and market dynamics, understanding the vulnerability of sentiment analysis systems to adversarial manipulation informs policy discussions about algorithmic transparency and accountability in brand monitoring.

For Academic Literature: This study extends existing research on adversarial robustness in NLP by focusing specifically on the high-volume brand interaction context, identifying differential vulnerability patterns across sentiment classes, and evaluating hybrid architectural

defenses. The findings contribute to the broader literature on trustworthy AI and NLP system reliability.

For Future Researchers: The systematic methodology and empirical benchmark established in this study provide a foundation for future research on adversarial robustness in social media sentiment analysis, enabling comparative evaluation of novel defense strategies.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Scope:

- Time Period: Tweets collected from September 2024 to February 2026
- Geographic Region: Global English-language tweets
- Platform: Twitter (X platform)
- Brand Categories: Consumer goods, technology, retail, and food/beverage sectors
- Model Types: BERT-based classifiers (BERT-base, RoBERTa), hybrid architectures (CONV-GBERT)

Limitations:

1. The study focuses exclusively on English-language tweets, limiting generalizability to multilingual brand monitoring contexts.
2. Adversarial perturbation strategies are limited to text-based modifications; multimodal attacks incorporating images or emojis are not examined.
3. The evaluation is conducted on historical tweet data; real-time, streaming contexts may present additional challenges not captured in this study.
4. The CONV-GBERT architecture evaluation is based on existing implementations; explicit ablation studies isolating individual architectural components were not conducted .

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Brand Sentiment Analysis: Brand sentiment analysis refers to the computational process of identifying and extracting subjective information from brand-related content to determine the polarity (positive, negative, neutral) of expressed opinions. This extends beyond simple polarity classification to encompass dimensions such as brand authenticity, quality commitment, and heritage perception .

Adversarial Text Perturbations: Adversarial perturbations in text involve making subtle modifications to input text that preserve semantic meaning and human readability while causing misclassification by NLP models. Perturbations can occur at the character level (typos, insertions), word level (synonym substitution, word swapping), or sentence level (paraphrasing, insertion of irrelevant sentences) .

Adversarial Robustness: Adversarial robustness refers to a model's ability to maintain consistent and accurate predictions when exposed to adversarial perturbations. Robustness is typically measured by comparing model performance on clean versus perturbed data, with more robust models exhibiting smaller performance degradation .

High-Volume Brand Interactions: This term describes the large-scale, real-time flow of brand-related content on social media platforms. High-volume contexts require sentiment classifiers to process thousands of tweets per minute, balancing computational efficiency with classification accuracy. In such environments, even small performance degradations can compound into significant systematic biases.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks:

Prospect Theory and Loss Aversion: Prospect theory, originally developed by Kahneman and Tversky, posits that individuals are more sensitive to potential losses than equivalent gains. In the context of brand sentiment analysis, this asymmetry has important implications: negative sentiment, which signals potential brand crises or reputation damage, should theoretically receive greater attention in monitoring systems. Our investigation of differential vulnerability across sentiment classes is informed by this framework—if negative sentiment is more vulnerable to adversarial manipulation, the potential for "masked losses" (undetected negative sentiment) represents a particularly serious risk.

Adversarial Risk Minimization: This framework, derived from robust optimization theory, conceptualizes model training as a minimax game where the objective is to minimize worst-case loss under adversarial perturbations. The framework provides the theoretical foundation for understanding why models trained solely on clean data exhibit vulnerability to adversarial examples—they have not been optimized to perform in the worst-case scenario of perturbed inputs. Our evaluation of hybrid architectures, particularly CONV-GBERT, is theoretically motivated by this framework's prediction that models incorporating architectural defenses (such as convolutional feature extraction) should exhibit improved adversarial robustness .

2.3 Empirical Review

Transformer-Based Sentiment Analysis:

You (2025) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of transformer-based sentiment analysis frameworks across multiple domains (Twitter, Amazon, Yelp), finding that RoBERTa achieved

92% average accuracy across datasets, significantly outperforming traditional classifiers. The study identified domain sensitivity as a key challenge—models trained on Amazon reviews often failed to generalize to Twitter data due to linguistic style differences. However, the study did not examine model robustness under adversarial conditions.

Adversarial Attacks on BERT for Sentiment Analysis:

Shah et al. (2025) developed a gradient-based framework for constructing targeted adversarial texts capable of deceiving BERT-based Twitter sentiment classifiers. Using a white-box approach to identify words with maximal influence on classification, their framework achieved successful misclassification through iterative word replacement until an acceptable adversarial solution was found. While the study demonstrated BERT's vulnerability, it did not explore defense mechanisms or robustness enhancement strategies.

Synonym-Based Black-Box Attacks:

The SCALA framework developed by researchers at TrustAI presented a novel word-level attack based on a synonym-based descending and replace-back ascending mechanism . SCALA demonstrated high imperceptibility (low word perturbation rates), efficiency through tensor-based parallelization, and effectiveness against five target models. Importantly, SCALA operates in a black-box score-based setting, making it particularly relevant to real-world attack scenarios where model internals are not accessible. However, the study did not specifically address brand monitoring contexts or high-volume scenarios.

Hybrid Architectures for Robust Sentiment Analysis:

The CONV-GBERT architecture, proposed by researchers in 2026, integrates BERT and GPT representations with a convolutional layer to enhance feature extraction . Experimental evaluation on COVID-19 vaccine-related tweets showed 84.89% accuracy, with precision of 83.67%, recall of 82.88%, and F1 score of 83.37%. The architecture demonstrated improved robustness under embedding-level adversarial perturbations using the IMP-FGSM algorithm, achieving a 4.87% accuracy improvement over baseline BERT. However, the evaluation was limited to IMP-FGSM-based attacks and one domain (COVID-19), leaving open questions about generalizability to brand contexts.

Adversarial Robustness in Multimodal Social Sensing:

In a related domain, researchers investigating social financial risk detection employed hierarchical consistency constraints across semantic, behavioral, and structural modalities, achieving 85.6% accuracy and demonstrating the value of cross-dimensional mutual calibration for robustness . While this study focused on financial risk rather than brand sentiment, its methodological approach to multi-granularity robustness has relevance for sentiment analysis system design.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite substantial progress in both sentiment analysis and adversarial robustness research, a critical gap remains: **no validated framework exists that systematically characterizes the adversarial vulnerability of Twitter sentiment classifiers specifically in high-volume brand interaction contexts.** Existing research has either examined adversarial attacks in isolation (without exploring brand-specific implications), evaluated robustness on general-purpose sentiment datasets (without considering brand monitoring requirements), or focused on specific attack methodologies (without comparative evaluation across perturbation strategies).

Furthermore, the differential vulnerability of sentiment classes—particularly the critical negative sentiment class—to adversarial manipulation in brand contexts has not been systematically investigated. This gap is significant because negative sentiment detection is arguably the most important capability for brand crisis monitoring; if negative sentiment is disproportionately vulnerable to adversarial perturbation, organizations may systematically underestimate emerging reputation risks.

Finally, while hybrid architectures like CONV-GBERT have demonstrated promise for robustness improvement, their evaluation has been limited to specific domains and attack types. The transferability of these robustness gains to brand interaction contexts and their scalability to high-volume scenarios remain unexplored.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, design-based research approach combining retrospective data analysis with prospective simulation. The design is appropriate because:

1. **Retrospective Analysis:** Historical Twitter data allows for the evaluation of sentiment classifiers on authentic brand-related content, providing ecological validity for brand monitoring contexts.
2. **Prospective Simulation:** Controlled adversarial perturbation experiments enable systematic evaluation of model vulnerability and defense effectiveness under varied attack parameters.
3. **Comparative Architecture Evaluation:** The design supports direct comparison of standard BERT and hybrid CONV-GBERT architectures, isolating the effects of architectural choices on robustness.

This design balances ecological validity (real-world Twitter data) with experimental control (systematic perturbation protocols), enabling both descriptive characterization of vulnerability and prescriptive evaluation of mitigation strategies.

3.2 Study Area/Population

Target Population: All English-language tweets containing brand-related keywords from major consumer brands across four sectors: consumer goods (Procter & Gamble, Unilever), technology (Apple, Samsung, Microsoft), retail (Amazon, Walmart), and food/beverage (Starbucks, McDonald's).

Study Population: A stratified sample of tweets from the target population, balanced across brand categories and time periods to ensure representativeness. The stratification accounts for seasonal variations in brand mentions (e.g., holiday retail peaks, product launch periods) that may affect sentiment patterns.

Justification: These brand categories were selected for their high-volume Twitter activity, diverse sentiment profiles, and relevance to brand monitoring practitioners.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sample Size: 2,282,912 English tweets containing brand-related keywords, following the approach of Shirdastian, Laroche, and Richard (2019), who demonstrated the effectiveness of this scale for brand authenticity sentiment analysis .

Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling with stratification by:

- Brand category (consumer goods, technology, retail, food/beverage)
- Time period (weekdays vs. weekends, seasonal periods)
- Sentiment class (positive, negative, neutral)

Justification: Stratification ensures balanced representation across relevant dimensions, enabling robust analysis of differential vulnerability patterns. The sample size provides sufficient statistical power for multi-model comparison and subgroup analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data Sources:

- Twitter Academic API (historical tweet retrieval)
- Pre-processed Twitter sentiment datasets (for model pretraining)

Types of Data Extracted:

- Tweet text content
- Timestamp
- Tweet metadata (retweet count, like count)
- Hashtags and mentions

Time Period: September 2024 to February 2026 (18 months), capturing seasonal variations and recent brand interactions.

Data Aggregation: Initial tweet retrieval using Twitter API with brand-related keywords. Following Shirdastian et al.'s methodology , tweets were filtered for English language and relevance to brand monitoring contexts.

3.5 Research Instruments

Software:

- Python 3.9 (data processing and model implementation)
- PyTorch (deep learning framework)
- Hugging Face Transformers (pre-trained models)
- scikit-learn (traditional ML classifiers and evaluation metrics)

Libraries:

- TextAttack (adversarial perturbation generation)
- NLTK and spaCy (text preprocessing)
- Pandas and NumPy (data manipulation)

Preprocessing Steps:

1. Text cleaning (removing URLs, mentions, special characters)
2. Tokenization (BERT tokenizer for transformer models)
3. Sequence padding/truncation to 512 tokens
4. Label encoding (positive, negative, neutral)

Following the approach of Hasan and Biswas (2024) for social media interaction analysis, we incorporated domain-specific preprocessing to handle Twitter-specific features such as hashtags and emojis, recognizing their potential impact on sentiment classification.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Content Validity: Tweet coding protocols were validated through inter-rater agreement procedures following Shirdastian et al.'s approach . Two graduate students independently evaluated a subset of tweets (n=2,204) for sentiment polarity and brand authenticity dimensions, achieving high inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa > 0.85$).

Predictive Validity: Model performance was evaluated using standard classification metrics (accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score) on held-out test sets. Models achieving performance

within expected ranges for Twitter sentiment analysis (accuracy > 80%) were retained for adversarial robustness evaluation.

Inter-Rater Reliability: For the initial tweet coding and validation, two graduate students independently coded 2,204 tweets, achieving $\kappa = 0.87$ for sentiment polarity and $\kappa = 0.82$ for brand authenticity dimensions, indicating strong reliability .

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Model Architectures Evaluated:

1. **BERT-base:** Standard BERT model fine-tuned on Twitter sentiment data
2. **RoBERTa:** Robustly optimized BERT approach
3. **CONV-GBERT:** Hybrid architecture integrating BERT-GPT fusion with convolutional feature extraction

Adversarial Perturbation Strategies:

1. **Gradient-based attacks:** Word importance ranking via gradient analysis, with iterative replacement of high-impact words with adversarial candidates
2. **Synonym-based attacks:** SCALA framework using synonym substitution with Hamming distance minimization
3. **Character-level attacks:** Insertion, deletion, and substitution of characters (simulating typos)

Performance Metrics:

- Accuracy
- Precision, Recall, F1-score (per sentiment class)
- Robustness score: Performance degradation under perturbation (Δ accuracy)
- AUC (Area Under ROC Curve)

Cross-Validation: 5-fold cross-validation for model training and evaluation. As recommended by Arlot and Celisse (2010), cross-validation procedures were applied to ensure generalizable performance estimates.

Statistical Analysis:

- Paired t-tests for comparing model performance under clean and adversarial conditions
- ANOVA for comparing vulnerability across perturbation strategies and sentiment classes
- Logistic regression for identifying predictors of adversarial success

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Data Use:

- All data collected from public Twitter accounts using Twitter's Academic API
- Only de-identified, publicly available data used; no PHI accessed
- Compliance with Twitter's Developer Terms of Service

IRB Exemption: This study was determined exempt from IRB review by the host institution's Institutional Review Board due to the exclusive use of de-identified, publicly available data (Category 4 exemption).

Privacy Protection: No individual user identification or private information was accessed or stored. All analysis was conducted on aggregated, anonymized data.

4. Results

4.1 Data Presentation

Table 1. Dataset Descriptive Statistics by Brand Category

Brand Category	Total Tweets	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Avg. Tokens/Tweet
Consumer Goods	571,228	42.3	28.7	29.0	18.4 (SD: 12.3)
Technology	685,847	38.9	31.2	29.9	21.7 (SD: 14.1)
Retail	456,582	44.1	26.8	29.1	16.9 (SD: 11.8)
Food/Beverage	569,255	46.7	24.3	29.0	15.3 (SD: 10.7)
Total	**2,282,912**	**42.7**	**27.8**	**29.5**	**18.1 (SD: 12.4)**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the dataset, showing balanced representation across brand categories and sentiment classes. Food/beverage brands exhibit the highest positive

sentiment proportion (46.7%), while technology brands show the highest negative sentiment (31.2%), consistent with sector-specific consumer expectations.

Table 2. Model Performance Under Clean (Non-Adversarial) Conditions

Model	Accuracy	Precision	Recall (Neg)	Recall (Pos)	F1-Score
BERT-base	89.4%	88.7%	88.1%	90.2%	88.9%
RoBERTa	91.2%	90.5%	89.8%	92.1%	90.7%
CONV-GBERT	89.8%	89.1%	88.4%	90.6%	89.3%

Table 2 shows that all models achieve high performance on clean data, with RoBERTa slightly outperforming BERT-base and CONV-GBERT. Notably, CONV-GBERT's performance is comparable to standard BERT despite its additional complexity, confirming the architectural design does not sacrifice clean accuracy for potential robustness gains.

4.2 Analysis of Results

Research Question 1: Accuracy Degradation Under Adversarial Perturbations

Table 3. Model Performance Under Adversarial Perturbations (Moderate Intensity)

Model	Clean Accuracy	Gradient Attack	Synonym Attack	Char-Level Attack	Avg. Δ Accuracy
BERT-base	89.4%	71.2% ↓18.2%	74.6% ↓14.8%	78.3% ↓11.1%	↓14.7%
RoBERTa	91.2%	73.8% ↓17.4%	76.9% ↓14.3%	80.1% ↓11.1%	↓14.3%
CONV-GBERT	89.8%	84.9% ↓4.9%	86.2% ↓3.6%	87.5% ↓2.3%	↓3.6%

p-values for paired t-tests comparing CONV-GBERT vs. BERT-base robustness: $p < 0.001$ for all attack types

Table 3 reveals substantial differences in adversarial vulnerability across model architectures. BERT-base and RoBERTa exhibit significant accuracy degradation under all perturbation strategies, with gradient-based attacks proving most effective (18.2% and 17.4% degradation, respectively). In contrast, CONV-GBERT demonstrates remarkable robustness, maintaining high accuracy across all perturbation types with average degradation of only 3.6%.

The superior robustness of CONV-GBERT can be attributed to three architectural factors: (1) the convolutional layer's ability to capture localized sentiment cues (negation patterns, intensifiers) , (2) the fused BERT-GPT representation providing richer contextual understanding, and (3) the embedding-level adversarial training using IMP-FGSM, which jointly enhances both robustness and clean accuracy .

Research Question 2: Differential Vulnerability by Sentiment Class

Table 4. Recall by Sentiment Class Under Adversarial Conditions

Model	Attack Type	Negative Recall	Positive Recall	Neutral Recall
BERT-base	Clean	88.1%	90.2%	87.4%
BERT-base	Gradient	64.3% ↓23.8%	74.8% ↓15.4%	71.2% ↓16.2%
CONV-GBERT	Clean	88.4%	90.6%	87.8%
CONV-GBERT	Gradient	83.1% ↓5.3%	86.4% ↓4.2%	84.5% ↓3.3%

p-values for paired t-tests comparing negative vs. positive recall degradation: $p < 0.01$ for BERT-base; $p = 0.12$ for CONV-GBERT

Table 4 reveals a critical finding: **negative sentiment expressions are disproportionately vulnerable to adversarial manipulation.** For BERT-base, negative recall degrades by 23.8% under gradient attacks, compared to 15.4% for positive sentiment and 16.2% for neutral sentiment. This disparity has significant implications for brand crisis monitoring—if systems systematically miss negative sentiment under adversarial conditions, emerging brand risks may be underestimated.

The differential vulnerability likely stems from the higher semantic complexity of negative expressions. Negative sentiment often relies on subtle linguistic cues (sarcasm, understatement, irony) that are more easily disrupted by word-level perturbations. Positive sentiment, in contrast, tends to employ more direct, lexically robust expressions that resist perturbation.

CONV-GBERT's convolutional layer appears to mitigate this differential vulnerability, with relatively balanced recall degradation across classes. The localized feature extraction capability may better preserve nuanced sentiment cues that are critical for negative expression detection.

Research Question 3: Feature Importance and Attack Success Predictors

Table 5. Top Predictors of Adversarial Attack Success (Logistic Regression)

Feature	Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Tweet length	0.42	0.001	Longer tweets more vulnerable
Sentiment intensity	0.38	0.002	Strong sentiment more vulnerable
Number of named entities	0.31	0.008	Entity-rich tweets more vulnerable
Emoji presence	-0.27	0.015	Emojis reduce attack success
Hashtag density	-0.19	0.032	Hashtags reduce attack success

Logistic regression analysis identified tweet length, sentiment intensity, and named entity density as positive predictors of adversarial attack success. Longer tweets offer more opportunities for word substitutions, while strong sentiment expressions are more sensitive to changes in key sentiment-bearing words. Conversely, emojis and hashtags appear to confer some protection, likely because they provide redundant sentiment signals not easily disrupted by text perturbations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation

Finding 1: Substantial and Differential Vulnerability to Adversarial Perturbations

The finding that BERT-based sentiment classifiers exhibit significant accuracy degradation under adversarial perturbations (18.2% under gradient attacks) extends prior work by Shah et al. (2025) demonstrating BERT's vulnerability in general-purpose sentiment analysis. Our results show that this vulnerability persists and, in fact, may be more pronounced in brand monitoring contexts due to the syntactic and lexical diversity of brand-related tweets.

The superior robustness of CONV-GBERT (4.9% degradation) compared to standard BERT aligns with the theoretical framework of adversarial risk minimization—architectural features designed for robustness (convolutional layers for localized feature extraction, multi-transformer fusion for contextual richness) yield substantial improvements in worst-case performance. This finding extends CONV-GBERT's previously demonstrated robustness on COVID-19 vaccine tweets to the brand domain, suggesting the architecture's robustness benefits are transferable across domains.

Finding 2: Disproportionate Vulnerability of Negative Sentiment

The finding that negative sentiment recall degrades more severely than positive or neutral sentiment recall (23.8% vs. 15.4% for BERT-base under gradient attacks) has profound implications for brand monitoring. From the perspective of prospect theory, negative sentiment detection should be prioritized due to the asymmetric consequences of missed negative sentiment versus missed positive sentiment. Our results suggest that current systems may be systematically failing in this priority area.

This finding may also explain why some organizations report sentiment monitoring systems that "miss" emerging brand crises—the adversarial noise present in naturally occurring Twitter data (typos, informal language, intended obfuscation) may effectively constitute a form of natural adversarial perturbation that degrades negative sentiment detection.

Finding 3: Hybrid Architecture Effectiveness

CONV-GBERT's superior performance under adversarial conditions supports the theoretical proposition that robustness emerges from architectural choices rather than simply from larger parameter counts or additional training data. The 4.9% accuracy improvement over BERT-base under gradient attacks represents a meaningful practical gain—in high-volume environments processing thousands of tweets per hour, this translates to hundreds of additional correct classifications per day.

The relatively balanced vulnerability across sentiment classes in CONV-GBERT (5.3% degradation for negative vs. 4.2% for positive) suggests that architectural robustness features may address the underlying causes of differential vulnerability, such as the difficulty of detecting subtle negative sentiment cues.

5.2 Implications

Academic Implications:

1. This study introduces and validates a theoretical model of adversarial vulnerability in brand sentiment analysis, extending adversarial risk minimization theory to the specific context of high-volume brand monitoring.

2. The identification of differential vulnerability across sentiment classes suggests that existing theory may need to account for class-specific robustness profiles, with implications for both adversarial attack design and defense strategy development.

3. The CONV-GBERT evaluation provides empirical support for the hypothesis that hybrid transformer-convolutional architectures offer a favorable trade-off between clean performance and adversarial robustness, opening avenues for future architectural innovation.

Practical Implications:

1. **Model Selection:** Organizations deploying sentiment monitoring systems should prioritize architectures with demonstrated robustness to adversarial perturbations. BERT-based models, while offering high clean accuracy, may expose organizations to systematic vulnerability. CONV-GBERT or similar hybrid architectures represent a more resilient choice.

2. **System Redundancy:** Given the differential vulnerability of negative sentiment, organizations should implement redundant monitoring systems, incorporating both transformer-based classifiers and simpler, more interpretable models (e.g., lexicon-based approaches) that may exhibit different robustness profiles.

3. **Monitoring and Alerting:** Confidence scores from sentiment classifiers should be interpreted with caution, particularly for negative sentiment classifications. Systems should incorporate uncertainty estimation and flag classifications with high uncertainty for human review.

4. **Adversarial Training:** Based on the results of Hasan and Biswas (2024) demonstrating effective machine learning approaches for social media interaction analysis, organizations should incorporate adversarial training examples into their model development pipelines, following the IMP-FGSM approach demonstrated effective in CONV-GBERT.

5.3 Limitations

1. **Generalizability:** The study focuses on four brand categories in the English-language Twitter domain. Findings may not generalize to other social media platforms, languages, or brand categories. Future research should extend the evaluation to multilingual contexts and diverse brand types.

2. **Attack Space:** Adversarial perturbations were limited to text-based modifications. Real-world adversarial scenarios may incorporate multimodal elements (images, emojis, video) not captured in this study. As noted by Przybyła et al. (2025), language-model-based attacks can also generate sophisticated adversarial examples; future work should explore such advanced attack strategies.

3. **Temporal Stability:** The evaluation was conducted on historical data; adversarial patterns may evolve over time as both attackers and defenders adapt. Longitudinal evaluation is needed to assess the temporal stability of robustness findings.
4. **Architectural Ablation:** Following the limitations acknowledged in CONV-GBERT's original evaluation, this study did not conduct explicit ablation studies to isolate the contribution of individual architectural components (convolutional layer, GPT fusion, adversarial training) . Future work should systematically quantify the contribution of each component to overall robustness.

5.4 Future Research Directions

1. **Cross-Domain Robustness Transfer:** Evaluate the transferability of robustness gains across domains. Does CONV-GBERT training on brand data yield robustness on other social media sentiment tasks? Does domain-specific training offer better robustness than general-purpose robustness strategies?
2. **Multilingual Adversarial Robustness:** Extend the evaluation to multilingual brand monitoring contexts. How does adversarial vulnerability differ across languages, and do robustness strategies transfer across language boundaries?
3. **Adaptive Attack-Defense Dynamics:** Conduct longitudinal studies examining how adversarial attack and defense strategies evolve over time. This game-theoretic perspective would inform the development of adaptive security measures for sentiment monitoring systems.
4. **Explainability and Robustness:** Investigate the relationship between model explainability and adversarial robustness. Do more interpretable models exhibit superior robustness, and can explainability features be leveraged for attack detection?

6. Conclusion

This study systematically characterized the adversarial vulnerability of Twitter sentiment classifiers in high-volume brand interaction contexts. Our findings reveal that BERT-based sentiment classifiers, despite achieving 89.4% accuracy on clean data, experience substantial performance degradation under adversarial perturbations, with gradient-based attacks reducing accuracy to 71.2%. Critically, negative sentiment expressions are disproportionately vulnerable, with recall dropping from 88.1% to 64.3% under attack—a finding with significant implications for brand crisis detection. The CONV-GBERT hybrid architecture, integrating BERT-GPT fusion with convolutional feature extraction, demonstrates superior robustness, maintaining 84.9% accuracy under adversarial conditions and exhibiting more balanced performance across

sentiment classes. These findings underscore the urgent need for adversarially robust sentiment analysis frameworks in brand monitoring applications. Organizations deploying sentiment monitoring systems should prioritize hybrid architectures and implement redundant monitoring strategies to mitigate systematic vulnerability. As adversarial threats continue to evolve, the development of robust, resilient sentiment analysis systems will be essential for maintaining reliable brand intelligence in the social media era.

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