

Final Project

Minjie Yang

1. Introduction

Large language models (LLMs) have achieved significant success in tasks like financial sentiment analysis, where accurate predictions can directly influence decision-making processes. However, their complex architectures often make them challenging to interpret, raising concerns about their reliability and transparency in high-stakes domains such as finance. This report uses a BERT sentiment analysis model fine-tuned on financial news and explores its interpretability techniques, aiming to uncover its internal workings and enhance trust in its predictions.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** focuses on attention analysis, visualizing attention matrices to understand the model's focus on input features.
- **Section 3** investigates the impact of input perturbations on sentiment scores, analyzing the model's robustness.
- **Section 4** introduces loss sensitivity analysis, a novel approach to study how input changes affect the model's loss function.

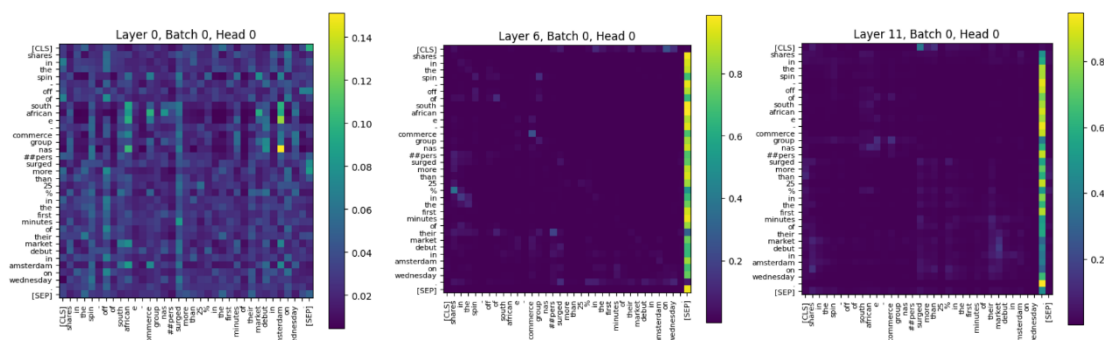
In each section, we analyze twenty positive and negative sentences respectively and identify the tokens that have the most significant impact on predictions based on different methods used in each section.

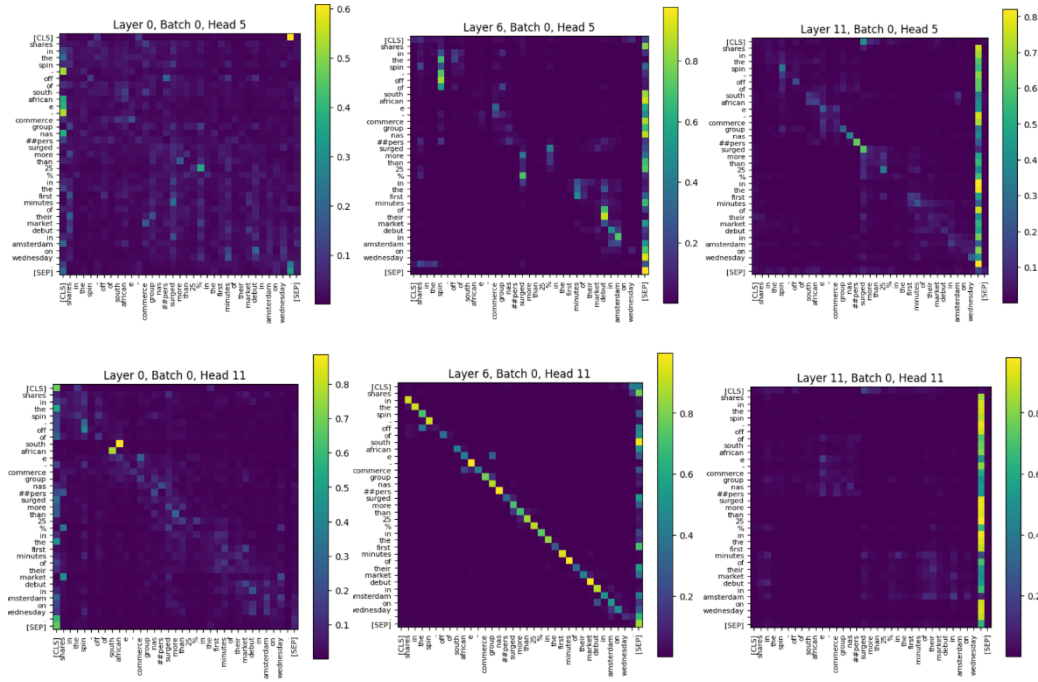
2. Attention Analysis

In this section, we obtained all attention matrices for each sample across different layers and heads. For both the positive and negative parts, we selected three specific layers for one sample from each to visualize. Subsequently, we summed the attention scores corresponding to each token, identifying the tokens with the highest attention scores as those most influential to the prediction (excluding irrelevant tokens such as CLS, SEP, and punctuation marks).

2.1 Positive Part

We randomly selected a sentence predicted as positive ("Shares in the spin-off of South African e-commerce group Naspers surged more than 25% in the first minutes of their market debut in Amsterdam on Wednesday.") to visualize the attention of all heads in its 1st, 7th, and 12th layers. In the report, we showcased a few representative heads.

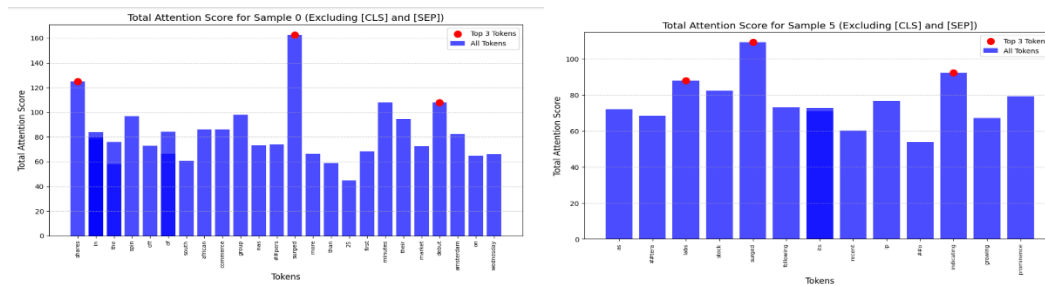




From the figures, we can observe clear differences in the attention patterns across layers and heads. In the initial layers, the attention matrices are relatively dispersed, with no specific tokens receiving noticeably higher attention weights. This suggests that the model is in the early stages of feature extraction, where attention is distributed across all tokens to capture broad contextual information. By the 7th layer, we see a shift in focus, with the [SEP] token attracting significantly higher attention. This indicates that the model begins using [SEP] as a boundary or aggregation token, potentially as a marker for summarizing the semantic content of the sentence. In the final layer, the attention becomes highly concentrated, with the [.] token (punctuation) receiving the majority of the attention. This behavior suggests that the model might be leveraging punctuation as a key delimiter for finalizing sentence-level representations or as a structural cue in its prediction process.

When analyzing the behavior across different heads, the first and last layers of each head appear relatively similar, likely reflecting consistent initial and final processing patterns across the model. However, in the middle layers, significant differences emerge between heads. For instance, in the 7th layer, the first head and last head allocate almost all their attention to the [SEP] token, while other tokens receive minimal attention. This indicates a specialized role for these heads, possibly focusing on sentence segmentation or aggregation tasks. In contrast, the 6th head in the same layer not only assigns high attention to the [SEP] token but also shows elevated attention for each token to itself. This self-attention behavior suggests that this head might be refining individual token representations by reinforcing their unique contributions to the overall sentence structure.

Next, I summed the attention scores of different tokens across different heads and layers, and then calculated the top 3 tokens for each sample based on their scores.



Hint: In this analysis, we excluded punctuation tokens as well as the special tokens [CLS] and [SEP], focusing only on the attention scores assigned to the meaningful tokens within the sentence. The figures display the aggregated attention scores for different tokens across two samples, showcasing which words the model deemed most important. Notably, tokens such as "surged," "debut," and "indicating" stood out with the highest total attention scores. This suggests that these words play a critical role in how the model interprets and understands the sentence.

sample_index	top_token_1	score_1	top_token_2	score_2	top_token_3	score_3
0	surged	162.735061	shares	124.815539	debut	107.947751
1	ceo	118.475872	said	108.184221	demand	108.144755
2	interesting	121.576624	hour	113.540335	after	105.416734
3	index	111.006245	seeing	101.237735	experienced	100.797043
4	fluctuations	104.059250	emerged	99.328293	labs	92.378754
5	surged	109.333225	indicating	92.271358	labs	87.811344
6	advised	113.965262	investors	88.224614	caution	87.999794
7	indicates	123.052237	leading	111.938697	commit	109.619852
8	labs	118.302443	##formed	107.565546	establishing	98.524320
9	reported	108.904731	increase	106.602683	announced	105.132162
10	surged	102.662351	posted	100.509029	driving	97.025727
11	rose	140.835594	confidence	120.750716	fueled	110.290162
12	rallied	100.074804	today	82.006457	and	79.515066
13	announced	107.823168	acquisition	105.776788	sending	96.292233
14	praised	97.092722	move	81.097113	step	78.454471
15	hit	107.356344	trillion	96.389337	with	94.356649
16	surged	112.273752	as	97.700226	remained	80.587030
17	reported	117.043054	with	102.691276	best	91.411124
18	increase	119.868466	announced	110.715613	reflecting	106.604744
19	saw	109.746710	today	101.728979	as	99.214233

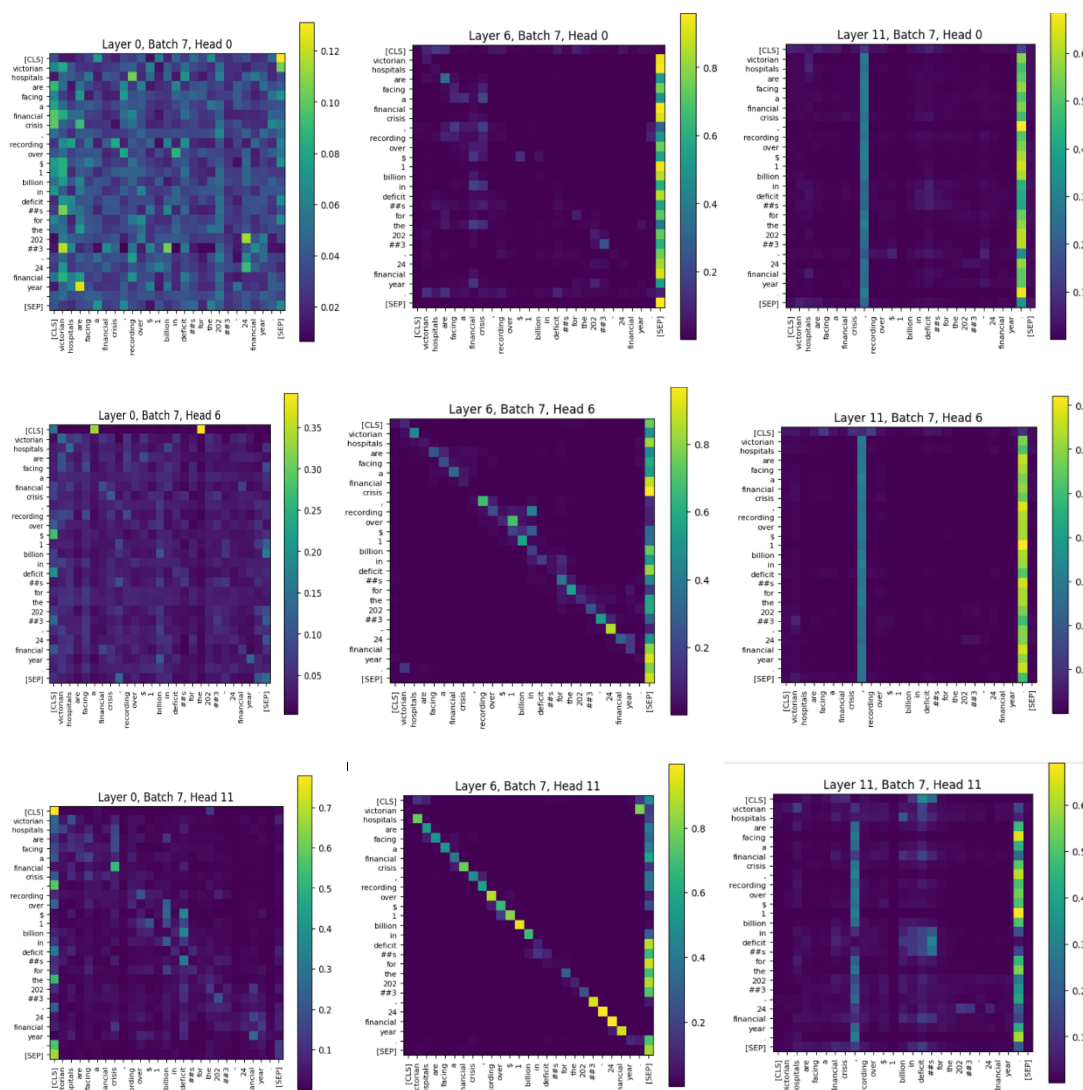
The above figures show the top 3 tokens with the highest attention scores across all test samples. We can observe that tokens such as "surged," "interesting," "rose," "confidence," and "shares" all have attention scores exceeding 120.

This indicates that these tokens play a significant role in the model's interpretation and decision-making process. Words like "surged" and "rose" are action-oriented, often associated with positive sentiment, especially in financial contexts, which aligns with the FinBERT model's focus on financial text analysis. Similarly, "confidence" and "shares" are key domain-specific terms that frequently appear in financial discourse, reflecting the importance of understanding market sentiment and activities. The inclusion of "interesting" as a highly attended token suggests that the model may also give weight to words that provide subjective or evaluative context, further influencing the sentiment classification.

2.2 Negative Part

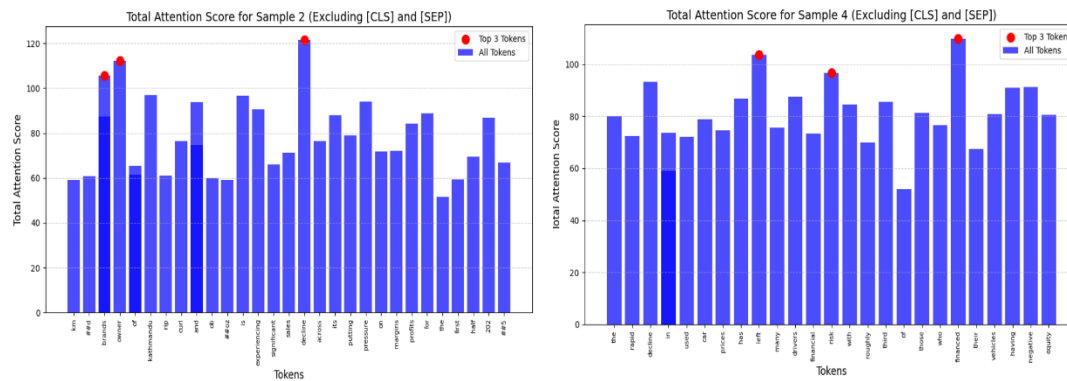
Here, we selected a sample predicted as negative: "Victorian hospitals are facing a financial crisis,

recording over \$1 billion in deficits for the 2023-24 financial year."



The attention pattern here is similar to that observed in the positive sample. In Layer 1, the attention matrix is relatively dispersed, with most tokens receiving low attention scores. However, as the layers progress, the majority of the attention becomes concentrated on punctuation and the [SEP] token. In the middle layers, attention matrices from the later heads show a notable pattern where different tokens assign high attention to themselves.

This progression reflects the model's typical behavior during hierarchical representation learning. In the initial layers, attention is distributed broadly, allowing the model to capture general contextual relationships across all tokens. This stage serves as a foundation for deeper semantic extraction. In the middle layers, the model begins refining these representations, as seen in the heads where tokens focus more on themselves. This self-attention mechanism likely helps the model enhance individual token embeddings, emphasizing their specific contributions within the sentence context. Finally, in the later layers, the attention converges on punctuation and the [SEP] token. This behavior suggests that these tokens act as aggregation points, consolidating the information necessary for the model to make predictions.



In the two samples shown in the figure, we observe that tokens such as "financed," "left," and "declined" have notably high attention scores. These tokens likely play a critical role in how the model interprets and classifies the sentences. For instance, "declined" conveys a clear negative sentiment, which is essential for identifying the overall tone of the sentence, especially in financial or evaluative contexts. Similarly, "financed" and "left" might act as key indicators of contextual shifts or significant events, providing the model with important clues about the narrative's direction.

	sample_index	top_token_1	score_1	top_token_2	score_2		top_token_3	score_3
0	0	indicted	139.306440	bribery	121.841362	0	prosecutors	114.534549
1	1	kenya	108.265742	wiping	101.959222	1	cancel	101.908179
2	2	decline	121.375572	owner	112.109817	2	brands	105.624554
3	3	drop	167.814020	decrease	165.598664	3	revealed	141.432842
4	4	financed	109.763300	left	103.680337	4	risk	96.806223
5	5	exceed	134.784358	drop	106.273036	5	loan	103.415594
6	6	citing	123.740925	##grade	120.302903	6	mexico	112.747401
7	7	deficit	124.329950	recording	106.418054	7	hospitals	103.331361
8	8	affected	126.930670	include	116.257885	8	deficit	115.353217
9	9	attributed	98.665260	challenges	98.572823	9	strain	92.786432
10	10	dropped	114.698018	crash	102.728225	10	leading	97.981386
11	11	announced	109.805572	citing	108.130303	11	##offs	93.760202
12	12	declined	124.075034	as	95.920092	12	weighed	90.975367
13	13	climbed	116.045172	disruption	94.673825	13	leading	90.930269
14	14	dropped	113.313488	as	90.708994	14	deter	78.697933
15	15	contraction	110.837183	shows	105.851932	15	sector	91.426934
16	16	shares	97.301561	after	95.976751	16	rumors	94.716350
17	17	disappointing	102.851639	reported	98.678016	17	shares	94.549580
18	18	stretched	99.073574	as	92.620754	18	debt	87.592419
19	19	disrupted	99.115017	##rank	95.317034	19	as	90.233686

Among the top 3 tokens, we observe that "indicated," "decline," "drop," "exceed," "citing," "deficit," "affected," "bribery," "decrease," and "revealed" all have total attention scores exceeding 120. This suggests that these words play a significant role in shaping the model's negative predictions. Some of these tokens, such as "decline," "drop," "deficit," and "decrease," are directly associated with negative sentiment and align well with the expected behavior of the model. These words often appear in contexts describing loss, reduction, or unfavorable outcomes, making their high attention scores logical and aligned with the overall negative prediction.

However, the prominence of certain other tokens, like "indicated" and "exceed," may seem less intuitive. While they can be associated with neutral or even positive contexts depending on usage, their high attention scores here might indicate biases in the training data or the model's tendency to overemphasize specific words without fully contextualizing their meanings.

3. Input Perturbation based on sentiment score

In this section, we evaluate the importance of each word in a sentence by individually removing each token and observing its impact on the sentiment score. By comparing the sentiment scores before and after the removal of a word, we are able to measure the contribution of that specific token to the overall prediction. This approach helps us identify the tokens that are most influential in driving the model's decision-making process.

The sentiment score of this model is calculated by subtracting the logit of the negative prediction from the logit of the positive prediction. Therefore, a larger positive sentiment score indicates a higher confidence in the model's positive prediction, while a smaller negative sentiment score indicates a higher confidence in its negative prediction.

3.1 Positive Part

We deleted each word from 20 sentences predicted as positive and re-evaluated the predictions, resulting in the figure shown below.

	sentiment_score	prediction	logit	difference
Shares	0.92369	positive	[0.94218206, 0.01849228, 0.03932558]	-0.001557
in	0.922126	positive	[0.9431523, 0.021026215, 0.035821468]	0.000007
the	0.922833	positive	[0.94464755, 0.02181423, 0.033538174]	-0.0007
spin-off	0.921319	positive	[0.94425005, 0.022931384, 0.032818563]	0.000814
of	0.924829	positive	[0.9461665, 0.021337539, 0.03249601]	-0.002696
...
optimism	0.914679	positive	[0.942567, 0.02788804, 0.029545031]	0.005426
in	0.914455	positive	[0.9425469, 0.028091744, 0.029361345]	0.00565
the	0.920315	positive	[0.9452996, 0.024984999, 0.029715423]	-0.00021
crypto	0.923253	positive	[0.94650394, 0.02325084, 0.03024516]	-0.003148
market.	0.922101	positive	[0.9457774, 0.02367643, 0.030546144]	-0.001996

411 rows × 4 columns

The difference column is calculated by subtracting the sentiment score of the new sample (after deleting a word) from the sentiment score of the original sample. From the figure, we can see that the deletion of most words has little impact on the model's predictions, indicating that these words are not critical to the model's sentiment classification

Next, we identified and analyzed the 20 words with the largest differences, as shown in the figure below. These words had the greatest impact on the sentiment score when deleted, indicating their critical importance in the model's sentiment predictions.

	sentiment_score	prediction	logit	difference
good,"	0.068635	neutral	[0.11809569, 0.049460977, 0.83244336]	0.830444
as	-0.082535	negative	[0.3786951, 0.46123058, 0.16007434]	0.648470
interesting	0.138042	neutral	[0.22252367, 0.08448123, 0.6929951]	0.589166
soaring	0.483208	positive	[0.7066987, 0.22349058, 0.06981068]	0.388370
trade	0.366527	neutral	[0.3941972, 0.02767026, 0.5781325]	0.360682
12%.	0.524737	positive	[0.694211, 0.16947375, 0.13631523]	0.346841
Despite	0.495997	positive	[0.5094254, 0.0134285, 0.47714618]	0.321669
leading	0.522941	positive	[0.5380221, 0.015080707, 0.44689715]	0.294724
among	0.56432	positive	[0.57850754, 0.014187782, 0.40730467]	0.253346
as	0.590841	positive	[0.60621387, 0.015372949, 0.37841317]	0.226824
fluctuations	0.616743	positive	[0.62949747, 0.012754396, 0.35774812]	0.200922
emerged	0.617871	positive	[0.6349014, 0.017030187, 0.34806842]	0.199794
stock	0.689186	positive	[0.8206323, 0.13144654, 0.0479212]	0.182392
this	0.547731	positive	[0.5788615, 0.031130847, 0.39000767]	0.179478
surged	0.772276	positive	[0.87833256, 0.106056705, 0.015610698]	0.158886
startup,	0.717989	positive	[0.84351224, 0.12552324, 0.030964553]	0.153589
after	0.595639	positive	[0.62117594, 0.025537405, 0.35328665]	0.131570
opportunities	0.436105	positive	[0.6495621, 0.2134575, 0.1369804]	0.129830
gains	0.802553	positive	[0.8874956, 0.08494278, 0.027561678]	0.117552
its	0.775669	positive	[0.8486212, 0.072952494, 0.07842629]	0.095909

The table highlights the 20 most influential tokens in terms of sentiment score differences when removed from their respective sentences. Tokens such as *"good,"*, *"soaring"*, and *"gains"* demonstrate significant importance in the model's sentiment predictions, with *"good,"* exhibiting the largest logit difference (0.830444). These words are highly domain-relevant, particularly in the financial context, where terms like *"soaring"* and *"gains"* strongly align with positive sentiment predictions.

Interestingly, some tokens such as *"as"* and *"Despite"* show substantial influence despite their less direct connection to sentiment, suggesting the model may rely on contextual or structural roles these tokens play in shaping the overall sentence meaning.

Moreover, words like *"good,"* and *"interesting"* originally contributed to positive predictions, but their deletion caused the model to reclassify the samples as neutral. This demonstrates that these words are not only highly influential but also critical for the model to maintain its original sentiment classification. Such shifts suggest that the model heavily depends on specific tokens to anchor its predictions, which can lead to vulnerabilities in cases where these tokens are absent or misinterpreted.

3.2 Negative Part

We deleted each word from 20 sentences predicted as negative and re-evaluated the predictions,

resulting in the figure shown below.

	sentiment_score	prediction	logit	difference
Indian	-0.721372	negative	[0.041953944, 0.7633263, 0.1947197]	0.007595
billionaire	-0.705192	negative	[0.042453617, 0.74764556, 0.20990081]	-0.008586
Gautam	-0.721889	negative	[0.037089285, 0.7589781, 0.20393266]	0.008111
Adani	-0.710095	negative	[0.03911514, 0.7492105, 0.21167442]	-0.003682
and	-0.690834	negative	[0.039287176, 0.73012114, 0.23059164]	-0.022944
...
supply	-0.965646	negative	[0.007015892, 0.97266227, 0.020321807]	0.000028
chains	-0.965751	negative	[0.006965438, 0.97271603, 0.020318551]	0.000133
and	-0.965787	negative	[0.0070580156, 0.9728453, 0.0200966]	0.000169
reduced	-0.965036	negative	[0.0069455667, 0.9719819, 0.021072548]	-0.000582
demand.	-0.964116	negative	[0.0074608536, 0.97157663, 0.020962585]	-0.001502

414 rows × 4 columns

This figure demonstrates a pattern similar to the previous one.

	sentiment_score	prediction	logit	difference
budgets.	0.399661	positive	[0.6851602, 0.28549957, 0.029340144]	-1.001607
disruptions,	0.629297	positive	[0.8033928, 0.17409614, 0.022511037]	-0.746734
leading	0.609838	positive	[0.79286677, 0.1830283, 0.024104938]	-0.727276
prices	0.597024	positive	[0.78641224, 0.18938848, 0.024199292]	-0.714461
year,	-0.06385	negative	[0.455684, 0.51953447, 0.024781482]	-0.538096
this	-0.081507	negative	[0.44374073, 0.52524745, 0.031011831]	-0.520440
dropped	-0.500098	negative	[0.24210863, 0.7422071, 0.015684191]	-0.466366
stretched	-0.217887	negative	[0.37121284, 0.58909935, 0.039687794]	-0.384060
\$20,000,	-0.591108	negative	[0.1957379, 0.78684545, 0.017416667]	-0.363994
affected	-0.600284	negative	[0.026838254, 0.6271222, 0.34603953]	-0.349463
Oil	0.203283	positive	[0.58856577, 0.385283, 0.026151229]	-0.320720
costs	0.196352	positive	[0.5844783, 0.388126, 0.027395722]	-0.313790
businesses	0.179871	positive	[0.57802695, 0.3981563, 0.023816738]	-0.297308
chain	0.15186	positive	[0.5626893, 0.4108291, 0.026481569]	-0.269297
per	0.120486	positive	[0.5478036, 0.42731804, 0.024878394]	-0.237923
contraction	-0.722458	negative	[0.128578, 0.8510359, 0.020386048]	-0.232516
highs	-0.375539	negative	[0.29991993, 0.6754593, 0.02462075]	-0.226407
and	0.060665	positive	[0.5179526, 0.45728794, 0.024759494]	-0.178102
supply	0.059315	positive	[0.5157843, 0.45646948, 0.027746202]	-0.176752
exacerbated	-0.770584	negative	[0.1055006, 0.87608415, 0.018415272]	-0.176423

This table analyzes top20 tokens influencing prediction. Tokens such as "*budgets,*", "*disruptions,*",

and *"leading"* show significant logit differences, indicating their critical role in maintaining negative sentiment predictions. Domain-specific terms like *"prices,"* *"\$20,000,"* and *"businesses"* heavily influence the model's understanding, reflecting their importance in financial contexts where they often convey evaluative meaning.

Interestingly, some less sentiment-laden tokens, such as *"and"* and *"per,"* also show influence, likely due to their structural importance within sentences. Additionally, tokens strongly associated with negative sentiment, such as *"contraction,"* *"exacerbated,"* and *"dropped,"* consistently anchor the model's predictions, maintaining negative classifications even with minor adjustments. Overall, the analysis underscores the model's reliance on both sentiment-heavy and contextual tokens, while also revealing areas where certain structural words disproportionately affect predictions.

4. Input Perturbation based on loss

In this section, we evaluate the impact of each word in a sentence by removing tokens one at a time and examining the resulting change in the loss function. The difference in loss before and after the removal highlights the importance of the token in shaping the prediction.

The overall process is similar to the third part, except that the sentiment score is replaced with the loss. However, when analyzing the top 20 tokens here, we considered not only the top 20 highest values but also the top 20 lowest values.

4.1 Positive Part

	losses	difference		losses	difference
good,"	2.136261	2.045047	not	0.124650	-0.204354
interesting	1.502723	1.215577	caution,	0.132678	-0.196326
trade	0.930905	0.643758	may	0.162645	-0.166359
as	0.971026	0.642021	maintaining	0.190089	-0.138916
Despite	0.674473	0.486953	Investors	0.202386	-0.126619
leading	0.619856	0.432335	of	0.172980	-0.114167
among	0.547303	0.359783	represent	0.227747	-0.101258
as	0.500522	0.313001	are	0.236987	-0.092017
fluctuations	0.462833	0.275313	players	0.099654	-0.087866
12%.	0.364979	0.269940	advised	0.245657	-0.083348
emerged	0.454286	0.266765	market	0.248325	-0.080680
this	0.546693	0.259547	smaller	0.118944	-0.068576
soaring	0.347152	0.252112	Nvidia,	0.121971	-0.065550
after	0.476141	0.188994	morning."	0.223708	-0.063438
an	0.397870	0.110723	to	0.268187	-0.060818
demand	0.199174	0.107960	trend.	0.280347	-0.048658
stock	0.197681	0.102641	Alphabet	0.145071	-0.042449
opportunities	0.431457	0.102452	have	0.146103	-0.041417
be	0.387697	0.100551	sending	0.058542	-0.036498
sustained	0.428616	0.099611	like	0.151704	-0.035817

The left figure shows the top 20 highest values, while the right figure shows the top 20 lowest values. The left table highlights the top 20 tokens with the largest differences in loss values when removed, showcasing their significant impact on the model's performance. Tokens such as *"good,"*, *"interesting"*, and *"trade"* have the highest differences, indicating their critical role in shaping the model's predictions. Many of these tokens, like *"good,"*, *"soaring"*, and *"opportunities"*, are strongly associated with positive sentiment, suggesting the model heavily relies on these words to capture and reinforce positive outcomes. Additionally, the inclusion of contextually important tokens like *"Despite"* and *"fluctuations"* reflects the model's ability to consider nuanced sentence structures and contextual cues.

The right table showcases the 20 tokens with the smallest differences in loss values when removed, revealing that these tokens not only contribute minimally to the model's predictions but may also negatively impact its original predictions. Tokens such as *"not,"*, *"caution,"*, and *"may"* exhibit the largest negative differences, suggesting that their presence slightly increases the loss, indicating they could be introducing noise or ambiguity into the model's decision-making process.

4.2 Negative Part

	losses	difference		losses	difference
disruptions,	1.748147	1.143163	climbed	0.060755	-0.544229
leading	1.698112	1.093129	by	0.074233	-0.530751
prices	1.663956	1.058972	higher	0.101645	-0.503339
budgets.	1.253515	1.014133	above	0.189008	-0.415976
affected	0.466614	0.423392	\$100	0.341984	-0.262999
year,	0.654821	0.415438	geopolitical	0.346327	-0.258656
this	0.643885	0.404503	barrel,	0.397324	-0.207660
Oil	0.953780	0.348796	tensions	0.404306	-0.200678
costs	0.946424	0.341441	as	0.048798	-0.190585
businesses	0.920914	0.315931	to	0.459402	-0.145582
stretched	0.529159	0.289776	for	0.480292	-0.124692
chain	0.889578	0.284594	inflation	0.123758	-0.115624
dropped	0.298127	0.272855	consumers'	0.159512	-0.079871
per	0.850227	0.245243	rising	0.162198	-0.077185
\$20,000,	0.239725	0.208305	hit	0.169523	-0.069859
supply	0.784235	0.179251	driven	0.550782	-0.054202
and	0.782442	0.177458	India.	0.231174	-0.051014
highs	0.392363	0.152981	U.S.	0.231750	-0.050438
contraction	0.161301	0.131145	consumers.	0.563851	-0.041133
debt	0.343350	0.103967	have	0.241770	-0.040419

These are the token deletion test results for sentences originally predicted as negative. The left figure shows the top 20 highest values, while the right figure shows the top 20 lowest values.

The left table highlights the top 20 tokens that cause the largest increases in loss values when removed from sentences originally predicted as negative. These tokens play a critical role in maintaining the model's negative sentiment predictions. Tokens such as *"disruptions,"* *"leading,"* *"prices,"* and *"budgets."* show the highest loss differences, indicating their strong contribution to the negative sentiment classification. These words are often associated with financial or economic difficulties, aligning well with the negative sentiment context. Other domain-relevant tokens like *"affected,"* *"costs,"* *"businesses,"* and *"dropped"* also significantly influence the model's predictions, reflecting their importance in shaping the overall sentiment. Even structural or quantitative terms like *"\$20,000,"* and *"per"* contribute meaningfully, suggesting the model recognizes their relevance in the specific negative contexts.

The right table highlights the top 20 tokens with the smallest differences in loss values when

removed from sentences originally predicted as negative. These tokens contribute minimally to the model's predictions and, in some cases, even negatively affect the accuracy of its original negative sentiment classification. Tokens such as "*climbed*," "*higher*," "*above*," and "*\$100*" show the largest negative differences, indicating that their removal slightly reduces the loss. These tokens are typically associated with positive or neutral contexts, which might conflict with the overall negative sentiment of the sentences, thereby hindering the model's ability to make accurate predictions.

5. Summary

This report evaluates the interpretability of a sentiment analysis model using three methods: attention analysis, sentiment score perturbation, and loss-based perturbation. Key tokens like "*good*," "*soaring*," "*opportunities*," "*disruptions*," and "*budgets*." consistently emerged as critical for predictions, reflecting the model's reliance on sentiment-laden and domain-specific words. Structural words like "*as*" and "*Despite*" also played contextual roles, while some neutral or positive tokens, such as "*climbed*" and "*\$100*", negatively influenced predictions in negative contexts, highlighting areas for improvement. The findings underscore the model's strengths in leveraging key tokens but reveal vulnerabilities in handling ambiguous inputs.