

Deep Learning-Based Fault Detection and Localization in Hollow-Core Fiber Communication Systems

Tanmayi J. Yogi

Department of Computer Science, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, AL, USA.

tanmayi.yogi@uab.edu

Alain Gimenez

Department of Computer Science, University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA.

gimenez94@unt.edu

Abstract

Hollow-core fiber communication systems are emerging as a transformative infrastructure for low-latency, high-capacity transport, particularly in data center interconnects, metropolitan backbones, and latency-sensitive computational fabrics. Unlike conventional solid-core silica fibers, hollow-core fibers confine light predominantly in air or vacuum, reducing nonlinear impairment and propagation delay while introducing new coupling, microbending, surface-mode, and manufacturing variability challenges. These characteristics alter the fault landscape: degradation may be more localized, more spatially intermittent, and less observable through conventional performance indicators. This paper examines deep learning-based fault detection and localization for hollow-core fiber communication systems from a system-level perspective. It analyzes how deep learning architectures can fuse optical time-domain reflectometry, spectral monitoring, coherent receiver telemetry, environmental sensing, and network control-plane data to identify and localize incipient failures. The discussion emphasizes architectural trade-offs involving latency, capacity, resilience, interpretability, cost, and operational complexity. It also considers governance, policy, sustainability, and fairness implications, especially where advanced diagnostic intelligence becomes concentrated among a small number of infrastructure operators. Through cross-domain comparisons with solid-core optical networks, data center fabrics, and critical infrastructure monitoring, the paper argues that hollow-core fiber fault analytics should be designed as a socio-technical capability rather than a narrow signal-processing task. The conclusion outlines deployment pathways, open challenges, and forward-looking perspectives for resilient, accountable, and equitable hollow-core fiber infrastructures.

Keywords

hollow-core fiber; fault detection; fault localization; deep learning; optical networks; system resilience; infrastructure governance.

1. Introduction

Hollow-core fiber communication systems represent a significant departure from the material and operational assumptions that have shaped optical networking for decades. In conventional solid-core silica fiber, light propagates through glass, which enables mature manufacturing, splicing, and characterization ecosystems but also imposes fundamental limits related to

nonlinearity, latency, and dispersion. Hollow-core fiber instead guides light in a central air or vacuum region through photonic bandgap or antiresonant structures, offering the prospect of lower propagation delay, reduced nonlinear interactions, and potentially higher power handling [1], [2], [3]. These advantages are especially relevant for intra-data center interconnects, high-frequency trading, distributed machine learning, and other applications where microseconds of latency and nonlinear signal degradation materially affect system performance [4], [14]. However, the same architectural shift that produces these benefits also complicates fault detection and localization, because the failure modes of hollow-core fiber are not simply scaled versions of those observed in solid-core fiber.

The operational promise of hollow-core fiber therefore depends not only on transmission performance but also on the ability to monitor, diagnose, and remediate faults across complex network infrastructures. Faults may arise from microbending, macrobending, coupling losses, splice imperfections, connector contamination, structural deformation, pressure changes, temperature gradients, or manufacturing defects in the cladding microstructure. Some of these faults produce gradual performance erosion, while others create intermittent or spatially bounded anomalies that are difficult to detect with threshold-based alarms [5], [6]. Deep learning offers a means to learn subtle multivariate signatures from heterogeneous telemetry, but its deployment raises system-level questions about where inference occurs, how models are trained, how errors are explained, and how diagnostic authority is distributed across vendors, operators, and regulators. This paper addresses those questions by treating deep learning-based fault detection and localization as an infrastructure capability embedded in governance, economics, and sustainability contexts.

2. Hollow-Core Fiber Communication Systems: Architecture and Operational Characteristics

The architecture of a hollow-core fiber communication system includes the fiber medium itself, coupling and splicing interfaces, transceivers, amplifiers or amplification-free spans, wavelength routing elements, and the monitoring and control plane. The fiber's air-guided mode reduces interaction with glass, which lowers Kerr nonlinearity and can improve signal fidelity in high-power or high-capacity regimes. It also reduces latency because light propagates faster in air than in silica, an advantage that becomes systemically important when many interconnects are traversed in parallel or when synchronization tolerances are tight [4], [14], [15]. Yet these benefits are accompanied by sensitivity to structural irregularities. The cladding microstructure can be perturbed by mechanical stress, temperature variation, and manufacturing tolerances, producing mode coupling, leakage, or localized loss that may not follow the same statistical patterns as solid-core fiber degradation [2], [3], [18].

From a monitoring perspective, hollow-core fiber introduces a distinctive observability problem. In solid-core systems, mature techniques such as optical time-domain reflectometry, optical frequency-domain reflectometry, and coherent performance monitoring provide recognizable signatures for breaks, bends, and connector losses. In hollow-core fiber, the relationship between physical disturbance and measurable optical response can be more complex because the guided mode may interact with surface modes, higher-order modes, and the surrounding microstructure. A localized bend may affect only certain wavelengths or polarization states, and a splice anomaly may manifest as a wavelength-dependent coupling loss rather than a simple reflectance event. Consequently, fault detection must often combine time-domain, frequency-domain, polarization, and environmental data rather than relying on a single monitoring modality [6], [7], [18]. Deep learning is attractive in this setting because it

can learn non-linear mappings across multiple weak indicators, but its success depends on the quality, coverage, and governance of the underlying telemetry.

3. Fault Detection and Localization: From Classical Monitoring to Deep Learning

Classical fault management in optical networks relies on alarm correlation, threshold crossing, performance monitoring, and reflectometry-based localization. These methods are effective when faults produce clear deviations from nominal behavior and when the network topology is stable enough for rule-based reasoning. They become less reliable in soft-failure scenarios, where degradation is gradual, intermittent, or masked by adaptive transceiver equalization and forward error correction. Machine learning has therefore been applied to optical performance monitoring, modulation format identification, anomaly detection, and failure prediction [6], [7], [8]. Early approaches used supervised classifiers and shallow neural networks to distinguish known impairment types, while more recent work has employed deep learning to capture temporal dependencies and high-dimensional correlations across transceivers, amplifiers, and routing elements [9], [10], [11]. In hollow-core fiber systems, these techniques must be adapted to a different impairment balance: nonlinearity may be lower, but coupling and structural sensitivity may be higher.

Fault localization adds a spatial reasoning requirement. The system must determine not only that a fault exists but also where it resides along a fiber span, within a connectorized interface, inside a data center patch panel, or across a multi-domain route. Classical reflectometry provides distance estimates, but its resolution and interpretability degrade when faults are weak, intermittent, or distributed. Deep learning can improve localization by fusing reflectometry traces with topology data, traffic patterns, environmental sensors, and historical maintenance records. For example, a recurrent model may detect temporal precursors to a splice failure, while a convolutional model extracts spatial features from reflectometry traces. A graph-based model can then map those features onto the physical topology and identify the most probable fault segment [10], [12], [13]. The required capability is not merely classification but probabilistic localization under uncertainty, because maintenance crews need actionable guidance rather than ambiguous alarms.

4. Deep Learning Architectures for Hollow-Core Fiber Fault Analytics

Several deep learning architectures are relevant to hollow-core fiber fault analytics. Convolutional neural networks are well suited to spatial and spectral patterns, including reflectometry waveforms, optical spectra, and polarization-resolved measurements. Recurrent neural networks and temporal convolutional networks can model degradation trajectories, distinguishing transient environmental fluctuations from persistent faults. Autoencoders and generative models support unsupervised anomaly detection when labeled fault data are scarce, which is common in early hollow-core deployments. Transformer-based models can integrate long sequences of telemetry and cross-modal relationships, while graph neural networks can represent network topology, dependency, and fault propagation pathways [8], [11], [13]. The choice of architecture should be driven by the operational question: detection, diagnosis, localization, prediction, or remediation planning.

A system-level design must also decide where inference occurs. Centralized cloud-based analytics offer computational scale and model reuse, but they introduce latency, bandwidth cost, and data sovereignty concerns. Edge inference at transceivers, amplifiers, or data center gateways can reduce response time and preserve privacy, but it limits model size and complicates fleet-wide updates. A hybrid architecture may place lightweight anomaly

detection at the edge and deeper diagnostic reasoning in regional or central controllers. This layering aligns with emerging work on AI-enabled fault management in optical networks, where closed-loop automation depends on timely but accountable decision-making [19], [20]. For hollow-core fiber, the edge is particularly important because latency advantages can be undermined if fault detection requires round-trip communication to a distant analytics platform. The monitoring architecture must therefore be co-designed with the fiber's intended latency and availability guarantees.

5. System-Level Trade-Offs: Latency, Capacity, Resilience, and Cost

Deep learning-based fault detection introduces trade-offs that are not merely technical. Higher detection sensitivity can reduce outage duration, but it can also increase false positives, triggering unnecessary maintenance and degrading trust in automation. More complex models may improve localization accuracy, yet they require more training data, computational resources, and specialized personnel. In hollow-core fiber systems, these trade-offs are amplified by the relative immaturity of deployment experience. There is less historical fault data than for solid-core fiber, and the fault signatures may vary across fiber designs, manufacturers, and installation practices [4], [15], [18]. A model trained on one hollow-core fiber generation may not transfer cleanly to another, especially if cladding geometry, coating, or coupling technology differs. Consequently, resilience depends as much on data governance and standardization as on model architecture.

Capacity and cost considerations also matter. Hollow-core fiber is often justified by latency reduction and nonlinearity suppression, but the economic case depends on installation cost, splice yield, availability, and maintainability. If deep learning monitoring requires additional sensors, dedicated fibers, or high-bandwidth telemetry channels, those costs must be weighed against avoided outages and improved service differentiation [5], [14]. In data center environments, where hollow-core fiber may be deployed in short-reach, high-density links, the monitoring system must be compact, low-power, and compatible with existing patch-panel workflows. In longer-haul or submarine contexts, the system must tolerate limited physical access and support remote diagnosis with high confidence. These differences suggest that no single deep learning architecture or deployment topology will be optimal across all hollow-core fiber applications [16], [17].

6. Governance, Policy, Sustainability, and Fairness Implications

Fault detection and localization systems are governance instruments as well as engineering tools. They determine who can see network health, who receives alerts, how maintenance is prioritized, and what evidence is available for regulatory oversight. If advanced deep learning diagnostics are proprietary and opaque, operators may struggle to explain service degradation to customers, regulators, or public agencies. In critical infrastructure contexts, explainability and auditability become essential for accountability. A fault localization model that cannot justify its output may be unacceptable when it triggers costly maintenance, reroutes sensitive traffic, or attributes an outage to a particular vendor. Governance frameworks should therefore require documentation, version control, performance validation, and human-in-the-loop escalation for high-impact decisions [6], [7], [19].

Sustainability and fairness add further dimensions. Training large deep learning models consumes energy and computational resources, and continuous telemetry collection can increase network energy use. However, better fault detection can also reduce truck rolls, minimize unnecessary equipment replacement, and extend fiber lifetime, producing

environmental benefits. The net sustainability effect depends on model efficiency, edge versus cloud processing, and the operational practices that surround the analytics [17], [18]. Fairness concerns arise when advanced monitoring is deployed selectively in high-value commercial corridors while underserved regions continue to rely on less resilient infrastructure. If hollow-core fiber and its diagnostic intelligence become concentrated in wealthy data center clusters, the digital divide may deepen even as latency improves for privileged users. Policy should therefore consider public-interest deployment incentives, open standards for monitoring interfaces, and equitable access to resilient broadband infrastructure.

7. Deployment Pathways and Case Illustrations

Deployment pathways for hollow-core fiber fault analytics will likely follow a staged model. In early data center trials, operators may begin with passive monitoring and rule-based alarms, then add unsupervised anomaly detection to identify unusual reflectometry or spectral patterns. As labeled data accumulate, supervised deep learning can be introduced for known fault classes and localization tasks. In metro and regional networks, where environmental variation and multi-domain routing are more complex, hybrid edge-cloud architectures may be necessary to balance latency and accuracy [1], [10], [15]. In submarine or long-haul systems, fault localization must be highly reliable because physical intervention is expensive; deep learning may be combined with digital twins that simulate expected performance under temperature, pressure, and aging conditions. These staged pathways reflect a broader pattern in critical infrastructure, where automation is adopted incrementally as trust and evidence grow [20].

Cross-domain comparisons are instructive. In aviation, predictive maintenance combines sensor data, maintenance logs, and physics-based models, with strict certification and explainability requirements. In power grids, fault localization uses phasor measurement units, topology models, and machine learning, but regulatory oversight demands auditable decision trails. In cloud computing, anomaly detection is highly automated but often centralized and hidden from end users. Hollow-core fiber fault analytics sits at the intersection of these domains: it requires the speed and scale of cloud operations, the reliability of telecommunications, and the accountability of critical infrastructure. A successful deployment will therefore integrate technical monitoring with organizational processes, vendor-neutral interfaces, and clear escalation protocols. It will also need to accommodate legacy fiber, mixed hollow-core and solid-core spans, and heterogeneous equipment from multiple vendors [10], [15], [20].

8. Open Challenges and Forward-Looking Perspectives

Several open challenges remain. First, data scarcity is acute for hollow-core fiber faults. Transfer learning, synthetic data generation, and physics-informed machine learning may help, but they must be validated against real field failures. Second, model interpretability is limited, especially for deep neural networks that fuse many telemetry sources. Operators need explanations that map model outputs to physical causes and recommended actions. Third, standardization is immature. Without common data models, interfaces, and performance metrics, vendors may create proprietary monitoring silos that inhibit cross-domain fault localization [11], [12], [13]. Fourth, security is a concern: adversarial manipulation of telemetry could induce false alarms or mask real faults. Fault analytics must therefore be designed with integrity checks, authenticated data streams, and robust model validation.

Forward-looking perspectives point toward digital twins, federated learning, and autonomous remediation. A digital twin of a hollow-core fiber network could simulate normal and degraded behavior, providing a baseline for anomaly detection and a testbed for maintenance planning. Federated learning could allow operators to share model improvements without exposing sensitive telemetry, although it introduces coordination and trust challenges. Autonomous remediation could reroute traffic, adjust power, or dispatch maintenance before a hard failure occurs, but it requires clear policy boundaries and fail-safe mechanisms. Importantly, these capabilities should not be pursued as ends in themselves. The goal is resilient, sustainable, and equitable communication infrastructure. Deep learning is valuable only insofar as it improves operational decisions, reduces harm, and supports public-interest outcomes [18], [19], [20]. Future research should therefore combine technical advances with governance experiments, field trials, and interdisciplinary evaluation.

9. Conclusion

Deep learning-based fault detection and localization in hollow-core fiber communication systems is a promising but inherently socio-technical undertaking. Hollow-core fiber offers compelling advantages in latency, nonlinearity, and capacity, yet its distinctive physical behavior creates new monitoring challenges that cannot be fully addressed by conventional alarm thresholds or single-modality diagnostics. Deep learning can fuse reflectometry, spectral, polarization, environmental, and topology data to detect subtle degradation and localize faults with greater precision. However, the design space is shaped by trade-offs among sensitivity, false alarms, latency, cost, interpretability, and deployment complexity. Governance, sustainability, and fairness considerations are not peripheral; they determine whether these systems build trust and distribute benefits equitably. The most credible path forward is incremental, standards-aware, and interdisciplinary, combining field data, explainable models, edge-cloud architectures, and accountable operational processes. If designed well, deep learning-based fault analytics can help hollow-core fiber fulfill its promise as a resilient foundation for next-generation communication infrastructure.

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