Volume 12, No.10, October 2025

Journal of Global Research in Mathematical Archives

ISSN 2320 – 5822

UGC Approved Journal

RESEARCH PAPER

Available online at http://www.jgrma.info

FORMAL METHODS IN NETWORK VERIFICATION: A SURVEY OF TECHNIQUES, TOOLS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract: Software-Defined Networking (SDN) (NFN), Network Function Virtualisation (NFV), and large-scale cloud infrastructures are examples of contemporary networking technologies that are gaining popularity. Such technologies have demonstrated the weaknesses of conventional testing and simulation techniques which often fail to ensure security, scalability or even accuracy. Formal techniques offer a mathematically rigorous, principle-based rationale for the conduct of a network, enabling protocols, configurations, and policies to be modelled, analysed, and verified. Formal verification explores all possible system states to guarantee attributes such as safety, liveness, reachability, and isolation, unlike heuristic methods. This review covers model checking, theorem proving, symbolic execution, static analysis, and hybrid methods, and provides a structured account of key formal verification methods. Also, it considers popular tools and models such as VeriFlow, NetKAT, Header Space Analysis, and Batfish, as well as general-purpose provers such as Coq, Isabelle, and HOL. These tools have proven effective at identifying misconfigurations, routing loops, black holes, and policy inconsistencies across various network settings. The SDN, NFV, and security policy enforcement are just a few applications where formal methods have demonstrated usefulness in terms of reliability and correctness guarantees. By amalgamating theoretical background and tool-perspective, the current piece demonstrates the necessity of formal approaches for promoting safe, reliable, and high-efficiency networked systems.

Keywords: Formal Method, Network Verification, Theorem Proving, Symbolic Execution, Software-Defined Networking (SDN), Header Space Analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION

The networking sector emerged as a natural consequence of its immense popularity. The Internet rapidly became the mass phenomenon, and the analysis of most of its design features was not even possible, after the fact that it was a research experiment of the late 1960s [1]. Because of the meteoric ascendancy of the Internet, developers have not been slow in adding new features and upgrading old protocols. Nevertheless, this has resulted in a development culture more one based on heuristics, engineering opinion and running code than extensive testing. This leads to instances where developers end up committing mistakes without much knowledge of their effects. Traditional testing and simulation technologies struggle with scalability and lack comprehensiveness in today's environments that place a premium on accuracy, reliability, and security, including Software-Defined Networking (SDN), Network Function Virtualization (NFV), 5G, and enormous cloud systems [2]. Networks are frequently susceptible to failure with disastrous practical impacts since exhaustive testing can be infeasible with the number of possibilities growing exponentially.

Formal methods offer a mathematically sound structure of reasoning about the behavior of the system [3][4][5]. A property that can be systematically validated using techniques like model checking, theorem proving, symbolic execution, and satisfiability solution is the systematization of liveness, reachability, performance, and safety [6][7] [8]. In contrast to ad hoc testing, formal methods can offer a high confidence level of accuracy because they thoroughly examine all system states [9]. As an example, performance of networks may be modeled using formal analysis to determine the movements of packets in networks, measures of performance (throughput and delay), and situations where performance goals fail [10]. So too, formal checking programs, like VeriFlow, APV, ddNF, and Delta-net, show how network misconfigurations, like black holes, forwarding loops, and isolation violations, can be automatically detected in a vendor-independent way.

Formal use is not novel Hardware design and safety-critical systems have long used formal verification as a means to verify that they are correct prior to deployment [11][12]. This rigor can be extended to networking so that engineers can now be able to reason about more complex infrastructures with a sense of confidence. With the increasing level of technology [13][14], formal verification is not only desirable, but also mandatory, to ensure resilience and reliability in the mission-critical systems. Verification is an important aspect in hybrid and cloud-native networks, where workloads are in a dynamic state between on-premises data centers and a cloud system, and microservices, containers, and service meshes provide topologies that are highly dynamic. Formal approaches help to enforce policy consistency in a heterogeneous environment, maintain security properties throughout scaling and migration, and the orchestration system, like Kubernetes, further enforces runtime correctness [15][16][17]. Therefore, formal

verification is one of the essential facilitators in the development of the state of hybrid and cloud-native network verification as it fills the void between operational agility and mathematically-grounded correctness guarantees.

1.1 Structured of the paper

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 explains with foundations, classification, and main concepts. Section 3 examines general-purpose and network-specific tools such as VeriFlow, Net KAT, HSA and Batfish. Section 4 identifies applications in SDN, NFV, and security policy verification. Section 5 offers future directions, including AI, blockchain, cloud-native, and 6G networks, and Section 6 revises the literature with a comparative overview. Section 7 concludes the paper with the key findings and future opportunities.

2 FOUNDATIONS OF FORMAL METHODS FOR NETWORK VERIFICATION

Formal Methods Computational approaches that are based on mathematical logic are expected to play a leading role. These methods include languages, network simulators and massive software applications. Verifying a network formally Network protocols, settings, and even operational properties can be modeled, analysed, and proven to be sound using formal verification methods, which are based on rigorous mathematical approaches like logic, automata theory, and formal specification languages [1]. These techniques offer a systematic approach to error detection, security property verification, and compliance according to requirements, and they include model checking, theorem proving, and abstract interpretation. Verification goes beyond ad hoc testing as formal models of network components and their interaction are developed, which can be systematically and provably guaranteed that they are reliable, scalable, and secure.

2.1 Key concept in network verification

Network verifying is based on a number of basic notions that allow the analysis and validation of the correctness of networks systems systematically, these are as follows:

2.1.1 Network Modeling

Network verification is based on network modeling. It gives a formal abstraction of network components, behaviors and policies, which allow systematic reasoning and verification [18]. The validation depends mostly on the accuracy and scalability of the underlying model.

- **Topology Representation**: A network is normally considered a directed or undirected graph.
- **Nodes**: Represent the routers, switches, firewalls, servers, or hosts.
- **Edges**: Forwarding paths or representation communication links.

2.1.2 Policy Modeling

- **Access Control Policies:** Modeled as constraints specifying which flows are permitted or denied (e.g., ACLs, firewall rules).
- **Routing Policies:** Captured as path constraints (e.g. BGP, OSPF or SDN rules).
- **Service Chains:** Representation of traffic in a formal way (e.g., firewall -IDS load balancer etc.).

2.1.3 Formal Verification Techniques

- **Model checking:** The foundation of model checking is building a first, limited model of the system and then using the model checker to explore its state space [19]. As the number of components and variables increases, along with the range of possible values for each, the state space of the model expands exponentially.
- **Theorem proving:** One of the most important steps of creating a mechanical proving is the choice of a suitable theorem prover [20] The discussion highlight their characteristics, functions, and the communities that work on them and support them.
- **Symbolic Execution:** Symbolic execution is a program analysis technique where the input is defined in symbology, i.e. in form of symbolic variables instead of the actual values so that multiple execution paths can be explored simultaneously. This helps in the systematic detection of errors.

2.1.4 Automation and Tool Support

- Manual analysis is much slower than automated tools, making it possible to verify thousands of devices, flows, and policies.
- The tools used include Veriflow and HSA that facilitate continuous monitoring and re-verifying only those parts of the network that have been affected by updates.
- General-purpose (NuSMV, SPIN, Coq) and network-specific (HSA, NetKAT, Batfish) tools offer a variety of support on both safety and reachability and policy compliance.

2.2 Formal Verification Techniques for Networks

Formal verification methods are characterized as techniques aimed at establishing or demonstrating that the software under analysis complies with the requirement specifications defined during the requirements phase.

2.2.1 Model Checking-Based Approaches

A state transition function is usually used to create the system's global state graph, which model verification tools use explicitly [21]. In order to verify that the model's temporal features are accurate, an explicit state model checker uses a Kripke structural interpretation of the model's global state transition graph.

Included in this category of model analyzers are SPIN, FDR2, and the C/ESAR/ALDEBARAN Development Package (CADP).

- **Finite-State Model Checking:** a formal method for ensuring that a system's attributes are true by representing it as a finite-state model and then checking each possible state in turn. It is effective for detecting design errors such as deadlocks, unreachable states, and safety violations in finite systems.
- **Symbolic Model Checking:** Symbolic Model Checking is one of the many types of model checking tools that uses Boolean formulas to calculate transition systems. The NuSMV tool is used by model checking tools in this category to find flaws in network settings. The NICE test suite for software-defined networking integrates symbolic execution with model validation.
- **Bounded Model Checking:** verification technique that checks whether a system violates a given property within a fixed number of execution steps (bound). It translates the problem into a Boolean satisfiability (SAT/SMT) instance, making it efficient for detecting bugs in large and complex systems.

2.2.2 Theorem Proving Techniques

Formal verification methods also include theorem proving [22]. Automated and interactive theorem proving are two main categories of theorem proving. The first one deals with using programs to prove mathematical theorems. Computer science has advanced substantially thanks to automated reasoning over algebraic proofs, notwithstanding the proofs' complexity. The proof problem is handled using interactive theorem proving with human assistance.

2.2.3 Static analysis

The goal of static analysis is to gather information about how a program or configuration file behaves when performed at runtime without actually executing the source file [23]. The difference between static analysis (e.g., SLAM) and dynamic analysis (e.g., running the program) is crucial to consider (e.g., Verisoft).

2.2.4 Hybrid approach

This involve learning to adopt the various types of verification methods and developing a methodology that combines all these procedures in order to make the best use of them [24]. Theorem proving is more expressive than model checking both in the types of qualities that it can express and test, and is complete and comprehensive. Model checking often requires human work, which is less than in theorems proving.

3 TOOLS AND FRAMEWORK FOR NETWORK VERIFICATION

Tools for Network Verification are specialized software systems that apply formal methods to check network configurations, policies, and behaviors for correctness and compliance. They help detect errors such as policy violations, reachability issues, and misconfigurations before deployment. Examples include VeriFlow, NetKAT, HSA, Batfish, and Minesweeper, each offering unique verification techniques and scalability trade-offs.

3.1 General-Purpose Formal Verification Tools

Isabelle, HOL, Coq, SPIN, and NuSMV are examples of general-purpose formal verification tools. These frameworks offer mathematical and logical grounds for describing and demonstrating the correctness of systems in various fields and can see an example of one of these approaches in figure 1. The following are important factors backed by scholarly sources.

Modeling checking tool	Theorem Proving Tools
•NuSMV •SPIN •UPPAAL	•Coq •Isabelle •HOL

Figure 1: Formal verification tools

3.1.1 Modeling checking tool

- **NuSMV:** The current input language used by NUSMV is very similar to the one used by CMU SMV. For the purpose of describing finite state systems, the NUSMV input language was developed [25]. Booleans, bounded integer subranges, and symbolic enumerated types are the sole data types offered by the language.
- **SPIN:** SPIN is a powerful tool for verifying distributed software system models. Various applications have utilized it to detect design errors, including distributed algorithm high-level descriptions and actual algorithms.
- **UPPAAL:** UPPAAL model checker is designed to ensure that wireless protocols are functioning properly by modeling and validating certain formal features [26].

3.1.2 Theorem Proving Tools

- **Coq:** the framework of point geometry theory and to formalize it in a reliable way using the theorem prover [27]. Coq, a collection of methods for proving geometric statements are also created.
- **Isabelle:** The interactive theorem prover Isabelle uses higher-order logic to make proofs and formal specifications easier to create.
- **HOL:** Higher-Order Logic (HOL) is a set of interactive theorem provers that are used for formal system definition, verification, and proof.

3.2 Network Specific Verification Frameworks

The reliability of modern networks has prompted the development of several formal verification methods. Real-time SDN invariant verification is made possible by VeriFlow , network policy algebraic semantics are provided by NetKAT, and protocol-agnostic reachability analysis is provided by Header Space Analysis in figure 2.

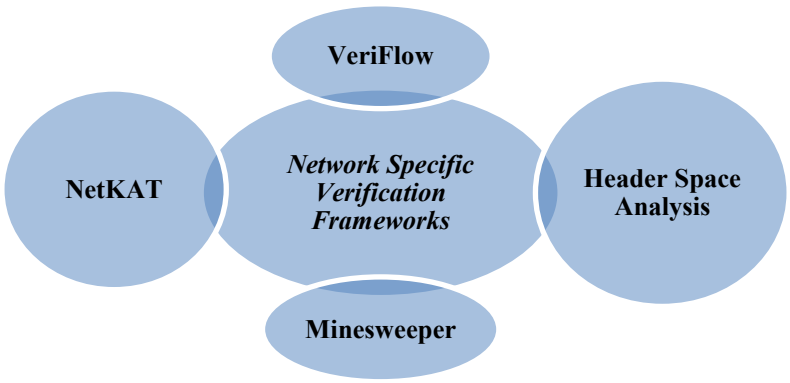

Figure 2: Network Verification Framework

3.2.1 VeriFlow

VeriFlow introduces an innovative incremental methodology to identify potential violations of critical network invariants, including path availability to the destination, the absence of routing loops, adherence to access control policies, and isolation between virtual networks. This ensures a true real-time response. The rules for OpenFlow and IP forwarding are tested by prototype VeriFlow implementation. Using actual BGP traces obtained from Route Views, micro-tested VeriFlow by creating an IP network simulator.

3.2.2 NetKAT

NetKAT is an innovative framework for network-related tasks such as specification, programming, and reasoning that utilizes Kleene algebra with testing. Inspired by NetCore, but with important modifications and extensions to make it sound for KAT, NetKAT is a programming language with a basic denotational semantics [28]. The axioms of KAT govern the relationships between primitive program actions, predicates, and other operators; this semantic foundation has delivered real guidance. Further, can easily

rule out any future primitive proposals that break the equations that enable us to reason efficiently regarding the network if they violate a KAT axiom.

3.2.3 Minesweeper

The NP-completeness of Minesweeper was demonstrated by modeling Boolean circuits as Minesweeper positions. The issue of determining is how Kaye characterizes the Minesweeper consistency problem [29]. The data provided is consistent because there is a pattern of mines in the empty spaces that generate the numbers visible on a board that is half filled with numbers and marked with mines.

3.2.4 Header Space Analysis

The invariants, such as access control list (ACL) violations, black holes, loops, traffic isolations, etc., can be statistically examined by system administrators using Header Space Analysis (HSA) [30]. Despite these methods' flexibility in checking network-wide invariants in various contexts, they are unable to automatically discover network-wide invariants when policies change.

4 APPLICATIONS OF FORMAL METHODS IN NETWORKING

Formal methods for networking mathematically validate network setups, regulations, and behaviors to guarantee accuracy, security, and dependability. Data center networks, SDN, NFV, cloud systems, and security policy enforcement are among the areas in which they are used.

4.1 Software-Defined Networking

A relatively new approach to network design, software-defined networking (SDN) divides the control plane's logic from the forwarding plane's logic. A new approach to network programmability, software-defined networking (SDN) relies on open interfaces rather than locked boxes and proprietary specified interfaces to allow for dynamic control, modification, and management of network activity.

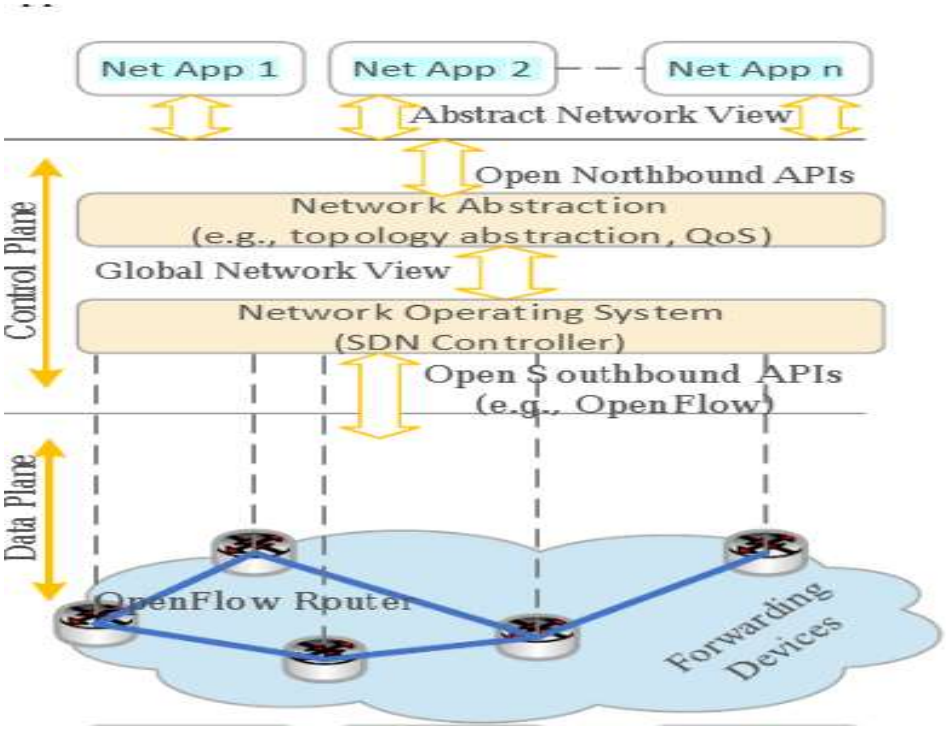

Figure 3: Simplified view of an SDN architecture

The SDN design enables vendor-agnostic network technology management of data channel components through centralization. See Figure 3 for an illustration of the SDN architecture [31]. It shows the data plane, control plane, and applications all separated. The network's nerve center integrates all the intelligence and maintains tabs on every component of the data flow and the relationships between them.

4.2 Network Function Virtualization (NFV) & Service Function Chains (SFCs)

NFV is an architectural paradigm that envisions the software-based deployment of network functions on a general-purpose server, or NFVI. The purpose of introducing this suggestion was to make use of hardware virtualization. Because NFV makes it easier to virtualize and install many middle boxes on a single or several general-purpose servers, it also reduces the expense of obtaining new hardware middle boxes, which substantially simplifies the deployment of network services [32]. This is the ETSI NFV architectural framework as shown in Service Function Paths (SFFs), operations and business support systems (OSS and BSS, respectively), communicate directly with virtual network functions (vNFs), and the SFC proxy and service function must be operational.

4.3 Security Policy Verification

High-level security policy documents should be authored by senior management and should serve as the defining framework of security within the organization. Use of security mechanisms becomes more challenging in the absence of such a definition of the security objectives. It is from this overarching high-level policy that the implementation, or technical policies, are derived [33]. This is the "how" that is utilized to enforce the policy about security. Both broad, overarching policies and more specific, more tactically applied guidelines are described by the word "policy" in academic works.

5 FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN FORMAL VERIFICATION METHOD

Formal methods in network verification are changing as a result of developments in AI, real-time verification, and quantum networking. Incorporating AI-assisted proof generation, incremental verification for dynamic systems, and applying formal approaches to quantum and 6G networks are the main areas of emerging study.

5.1 AI-Enhanced Formal Verification

AI methods, specifically LLMs, used to improve the proof making process. Several circuit design applications have investigated them, and they have also lately been explored in the verification context [8]. Generate proofs that humans can understand by looking at the examples provide. Modern LLMs make it possible to write content that is both informative and easy to understand; for example, ChatGPT 4o is utilized here. However, in the end, the correctness needs to be demonstrated because of the AI tool's hallucinations [34].

5.2 Formal Methods for Quantum and 6G Networks

The advancements indicate that 5G is unlikely to completely satisfy future requirements beyond 2030. 6th generation (6G) wireless communication networks are anticipated to bring numerous benefits, including improved security, intelligence, global coverage, and spectrum/cost/energy efficiency (figure 4).

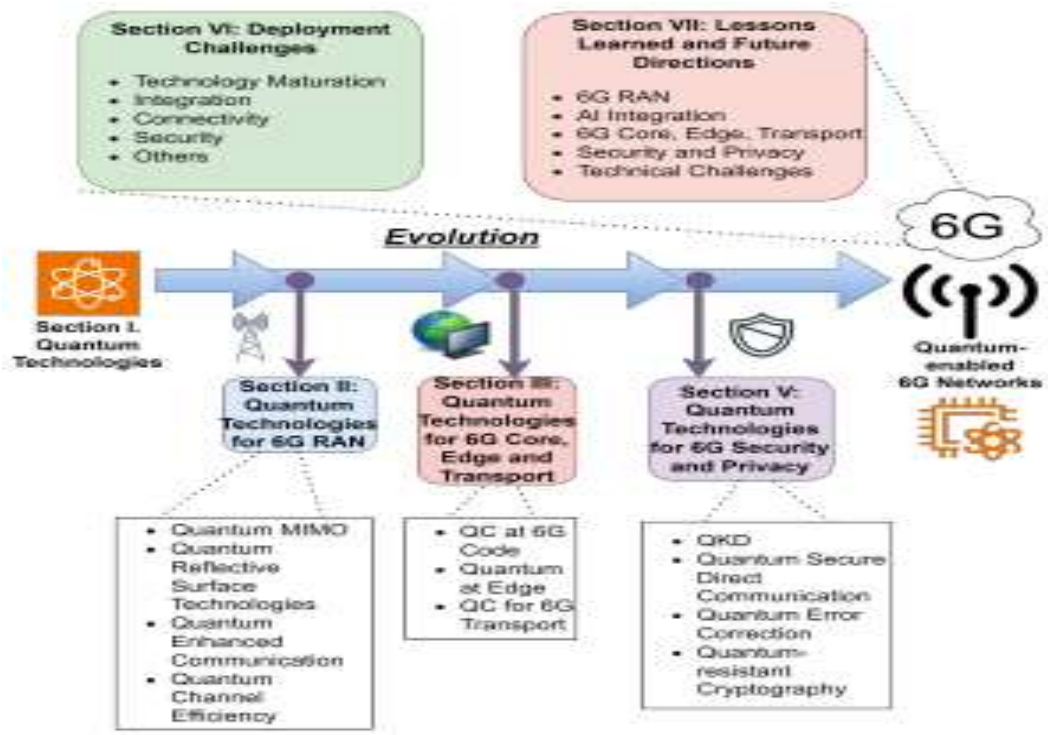

Figure 4: Quantum-enabled 6G vision projected

Wireless communications have come a long way, baby, and the next generation, 6G networks, promises to be the most advanced yet in terms of speed, dependability, and safety. New, state-of-the-art technology power 6G networks. The development of quantum

computers is one such exciting prospect. As the number of services and users continues to rise, the primary motivation for incorporating quantum technology into 6G networks is to keep up with the data demands of the listed sources.[35]

5.3 Verification in Hybrid and Cloud-Native Networks

Verification in **hybrid and cloud-native networks** is challenging due to their dynamic, heterogeneous, and elastic nature, where physical, virtual, and containerised components coexist and frequently reconfigure[36]. Scalable techniques such as model checking, symbolic execution, configuration analysis and runtime verification **[**37] are necessary to ensure policy consistency, tenant isolation, and reliability in these environments. Although these methods enhance accuracy and safety, the way forward is to adopt cloud-native verification systems, artificial intelligence-aided arguments, and blockchain-based trust systems to enable persistent, automated, and end-to-end verification in dynamic infrastructures.

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section presents the complete literature review of Formal Methods in Network Verification: A Survey of Techniques, Tools, and Future Directions and the overview has been summarised in Table 1.

Lastre *et al.* (2025), provided a formal security verification of the RSP Common Mutual Authentication protocol (in Burrows Abadi Needham logic). This study delves into the Subscription Manager Data Preparation+ (SM-DP) server's authentication process as it relates to the embedded Universal Integrated Circuit Card (eUICC). The protocol achieves its mutual authentication objectives under the given security assumptions by strictly adhering to BAN logic principles. Although the protocol is mathematically correct as verified, there is the possibility of enhancing the security architecture of RSP with the emerging technologies such as blockchain, cloud-based authentication proxies, and automated verification processes [38].

Abu-Haeyeh *et al.* (2025) present an alternative characterisation of these analogy neural networks and confirm the network's correctness using formal methods of neural network verification. Demonstrate that experimentally two reachability-based methods can decrease test time in days to milliseconds. Consequently, they offer a more scalable and less difficult means of determining whether similar neural networks are healthy [39].

Liang, Taofeek and Johnson, Mary (2024), Formal analysis and verification techniques provide rigorous mathematical foundations for analysing, specifying, and verifying AI systems to satisfy predetermined correctness, safety, and security properties. Model checking, theorem proving, and abstract interpretation are methods that assist in detecting flaws, illogicalities, and undesirable behaviors in artificial intelligence models, particularly those involving neural networks and ML. With formal verification, AI systems can be designed to conform to ethical and regulatory norms, reducing the risk of bias, adversarial attacks, and faulty decisions.[40].

Johnson, Lopez and Tran (2024), AI is through formal verification, particularly in machine learning (ML) components like neural networks, to establish that they meet certain formal specifications. The NNV software tool implements automated formal methods for this purpose, specifically reachability analysis, and this interactive tutorial demonstrates them for formally verifying specifications in neural networks, as well as in closed-loop CPS. The tutorial begins with a lecture on the emerging research area of neural network verification[41].

Hunagund and K (2024), formal verification scheme for a POSIT arithmetic block, responding to the increasing curiosity about POSIT's possible accuracy and efficiency in computing Building a solid formal verification framework for POSIT arithmetic ensures efficient and trustworthy computing, which is essential for high-precision computing applications. It also lays the groundwork for future innovations in numerical computation hardware. Mathematically ensuring correctness and resilience, it boosts confidence in POSIT-based systems and encourages their wider use in other application domains [42].

Kumar *et al.* (2023), There has been very little effort to formally validate these procedures. Here, offer two UWSN abstraction techniques that can handle multi-channel models and varying propagation delays. The Time Delay Allocation MAC (TDA-MAC) protocol uses these abstraction methods to construct a validation model for use in UWSN. As part of its formal verification process, TDA-MAC is tested for reachability and for the presence of design flaws on specific designated states inside the model. The verification results identify marked state cycles that do not advance when a PING message is lost. This document proposes an update to the current TDA-MAC protocol definition. No non-progress cycles or unreachable states were found during formal verification of the updated validation model [43].

Table 1: Comprehensive analysis of formal methods in network verification tools and techniques

Author(s), Year	Focus	Key Findings	Limitations	Challenges	Future Work
Lastre et al., 2025	Formal security verification of RSP Common Mutual	Verified mathematical correctness of the	BAN logic depends on stated security assumptions, may	Ensuring robustness against advanced	Enhance RSP security architecture using blockchain,

	Authentication protocol using BAN logic	authentication procedure between eUICC and SM-DP server	not capture all real-world threats	cyberattacks and scalability in real deployments	cloud authentication proxies, and automated verification
Abu-Haeyeh et al., 2025	Formal verification of analogy neural circuits using reachability analysis	Reduced test time from days to milliseconds; scalable methodology for verifying correctness	Limited to analogy neural circuits; generalization to broader AI models not shown	Accuracy of reachability analysis in highly complex neural networks	Extend methods to broader AI/ML systems, explore hybrid formal-verification techniques
Liang, Taofeek & Johnson Mary, 2024	Formal methods for verifying AI systems (model checking, theorem proving, abstract interpretation)	Formal verification detects vulnerabilities, ensures correctness, safety, and security in AI/ML	Complexity of AI models may hinder verification scalability	Addressing adversarial robustness and bias detection	Develop automated scalable frameworks for ethical AI verification
Johnson, Lopez & Tran, 2024	Neural Network Verification (NNV) tool using reachability analysis for ML and CPS	Demonstrated automated formal methods to verify neural networks and closed-loop CPS	Focused mainly on tutorial demonstration; lacks broad empirical validation	Verification of large-scale neural networks remains difficult	Extend NNV to complex architectures and integrate into industrial CPS
Hunagund & K, 2024	Formal verification framework for POSIT arithmetic block	Established correctness and robustness of POSIT-based arithmetic, boosting confidence in high-precision computing	Limited scope (focused on POSIT blocks)	Adoption barriers in industry for new numerical representation	Expand verification framework to complex hardware and promote broader adoption
Kumar et al., 2023	Formal verification of TDA-MAC protocol in UWSN using abstraction + reachability	Detected design faults (non-progress cycles) in original protocol; refined version proved correct	Applied to a specific MAC protocol; generalization needed	Variable delays and channel complexity in UWSNs	Extend methods to other UWSN protocols; enhance scalability of formal models

7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Formal methods have become indispensable for ensuring the correctness, safety, and reliability of modern networks that are increasingly complex, dynamic, and heterogeneous. Formal verification methods offer mathematically rigorous assurances of system behaviour, in contrast to conventional testing and simulation, which frequently fall short of covering all potential scenarios. These techniques are model checking, theorem proving, symbolic execution and hybrid techniques. VeriFlow, NetKAT, Header Space Analysis (HSA), Batfish, and general-purpose theorem provers, such as Coq, Isabelle, and HOL, have been shown to be useful for detecting misconfigurations, routing anomalies, black holes, and policy violations across domains such as SDN, NFV, and large-scale cloud infrastructures. These advances have shown that integrating formal methods into network design and operation significantly improves reliability, security. Future research should focus on developing **AI-assisted verification** techniques to automate proof generation and enhance efficiency, as well as **blockchain-based frameworks** to provide transparent trust management and auditable verification across distributed environments. Extending formal methods to **cloud-native, hybrid, IoT, and quantum-enabled 6G networks** represents another vital area of exploration. Furthermore, detection of verification within continuous integration and deployment pipelines can assure developing network infrastructures in real-time. Through the movement towards unified, adaptive and automated frameworks formal methods will still remain at the forefront in the development of secure, reliable and high-performance next-generation networks.

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