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SKIN DISEASE DETECTION USING NEURAL NETWORKS

PRIYANKA B, DR. DEEPA D

Student, Dept. of Biomedical Engineering, Anna University, IN
Head of the Department, Dept. of Biomedical Engineering, Anna University, IN

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Abstract - *Skin diseases represent a significant global health issue, affecting individuals across diverse age groups and regions. Early and accurate diagnosis is essential for effective management and prevention of complications, yet traditional diagnostic methods relying on dermatologist expertise can be time-consuming, subjective, and less accessible in resource-limited settings. Advances in artificial intelligence, particularly deep learning, have opened new avenues for automating skin disease detection and enhancing diagnostic efficiency. This project explores the application of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and pre-trained deep learning models, such as VGG16, to classify a range of skin conditions. By training and evaluating various models, this study assesses the viability of deep learning for automated skin disease classification, with attention to accuracy, generalization, and computational feasibility. Results suggest that while CNN architectures can detect relevant patterns, deeper models, like VGG16, offer improved performance in distinguishing complex skin conditions. Further, advanced architectures such as Res-Net and Efficient-Net are anticipated to enhance generalization and efficiency, addressing the limitations found in simpler models. Overall, this project underscores the potential of deep learning models to support dermatological diagnostics and improve access to timely, accurate treatment. The findings lay groundwork for continued research toward developing robust, scalable solutions for automated skin disease detection in clinical and remote settings.*

Key Words: *VGG16, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Res-Net and Efficient-Net, Feature extraction.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Skin diseases, impacting millions globally across various age groups and regions, are a significant public health concern. These conditions range in severity, from minor irritations to chronic and life-altering diseases that can severely impair the quality of life. Access to early and accurate diagnosis is critical, as it enables effective treatment and minimizes complications, yet remains a challenge in many regions.

This project aims to leverage Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to develop an automated system for detecting and classifying skin diseases. CNNs, a class of deep learning models inspired by the human visual system, are known for their exceptional ability to process image data, making them ideal for applications in medical imaging. By building a robust CNN model, we aim to accurately distinguish between various skin conditions, ultimately creating a tool that can assist healthcare providers and improve patient care. Such a system could also serve as an initial screening mechanism in resource-limited settings, making early and accurate diagnosis more accessible.

1.1 Problem Identification

Skin diseases are among the most commonly diagnosed conditions worldwide, accounting for a substantial portion of healthcare visits annually. These conditions affect individuals irrespective of age or background, creating a broad demand for dermatological care. Despite their prevalence, effective diagnosis and treatment remain limited by several key challenges, particularly in low-resource areas.

Traditionally, dermatologists diagnose skin ailments through visual examination, patient history, and, in some cases, histological analysis of biopsied tissue. This process requires years of specialized training and experience, as the visual similarities among different skin diseases can complicate accurate diagnosis. The diagnostic process can also be time-consuming and subjective, with accuracy varying based on the dermatologist's expertise and experience.

In resource-limited environments, the challenges intensify. The lack of specialized dermatologists and diagnostic tools can delay diagnosis and treatment, often resulting in disease progression and increased patient suffering. Additionally, the variability in diagnostic accuracy due to limited training and resources highlights a need for accessible, standardized diagnostic tools. This project addresses these challenges by exploring machine learning approaches to automate and enhance the diagnostic process, potentially increasing diagnostic accuracy and consistency while expanding accessibility.

2. METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology involves using a CNN-based deep learning pipeline to detect and classify skin diseases.

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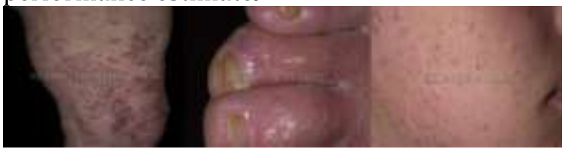
This pipeline encompasses data preparation, model training, validation, and evaluation:

2.1. Data Preparation:
A large dataset of skin disease images is curated, ideally representing diverse skin tones, ages, and disease types. Preprocessing steps include resizing images, normalizing pixel values, and applying data augmentation. Augmentation techniques, such as random flips, rotations, and brightness adjustments, help the model generalize better by introducing variability.

The dataset is then split into training, validation, and test sets, ensuring the model is tested on data it has not encountered before, thereby providing an accurate performance estimate.



2.2. Model Selection and Training:
To achieve high accuracy, we experiment with different neural network architectures, namely CNN, VGG16, Res-Net, and Efficient-Net. Each architecture is trained using the prepared dataset, allowing us to compare their performance and select the best-performing model.

During training, the model's parameters are optimized using techniques like backpropagation and gradient descent, with cross-entropy as the loss function for multiclass classification. The Adam optimizer is employed for its efficiency and ability to handle sparse gradients, improving convergence speed.

2.3. Evaluation and Optimization:

Model performance is evaluated using metrics like accuracy, precision, recall, F1 score, and confusion matrix. In addition, a ROC curve and AUC score are used to analyse classification thresholds and determine the model's robustness across classes.

To prevent overfitting, regularization techniques, such as dropout and early stopping, are applied during training. Hyperparameter tuning is also conducted to optimize model performance further.

2.4. Deployment:

Once trained and evaluated, the selected model is saved and integrated into a user-friendly application or API. This system can then be deployed for real-world use, allowing practitioners or patients to upload skin images and receive diagnostic results.

3. MODELS

3.1 Convolution Neural Network (CNN)

A CNN forms the foundation for most deep learning models in image analysis due to its ability to detect spatial hierarchies. Basic CNN models consist of convolutional layers interspersed with pooling layers, followed by fully connected layers. For skin disease detection, the CNN identifies features such as texture, colour, and shape, which are essential for differentiating among various skin conditions. Although effective, a simple CNN may struggle with complex image patterns or large datasets, which is why more advanced architectures are explored.

3.2 VGG16

The VGG16 model, developed by the Visual Geometry Group at Oxford, is a popular CNN architecture known for its simplicity and depth. VGG16 consists of 16 layers with small 3x3 convolutional filters, focusing on deeper networks with smaller filter sizes. VGG16 captures intricate patterns by stacking multiple convolutional layers, making it well-suited for tasks requiring high detail. However, it has a high parameter count, which can increase computational demands. In this project, VGG16 is utilized to see if its depth can improve accuracy over the basic CNN model.

3.3 Res-Net (Residual Network)

Res-Net, introduced by Microsoft, incorporates residual connections to address the vanishing gradient problem in deep networks. Unlike traditional CNNs, Res-Net introduces "skip connections," allowing the model to pass information from one layer to several layers ahead, preventing information degradation. For skin disease classification, this feature is beneficial as it enables the model to learn complex patterns without losing information, making it highly effective in medical imaging tasks. Res-Net's robustness allows it to generalize well across diverse datasets, making it a promising candidate for accurate skin disease detection.

3.4 Efficient-Net

Efficient-Net is a family of models that balances depth, width, and resolution to achieve optimal performance with fewer parameters. Developed by Google, Efficient-Net uses a compound scaling method, which uniformly scales all dimensions of the network. This efficiency is particularly useful for skin disease detection, as it provides high accuracy without the extensive computational resources required by deeper models like VGG16. Efficient-Net's ability to handle large-scale image data efficiently makes it an excellent choice for deploying real-world skin disease detection applications.

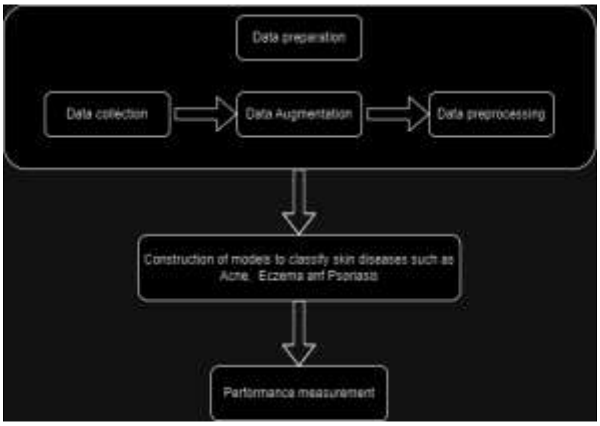


Fig -1- Flowchart

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this project, the use of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and pre-trained models like VGG16 for automating the detection and classification of skin diseases was explored. The analysis demonstrated that while CNNs can provide a foundational approach to skin disease detection, their limited accuracy of 0.33 indicates the need for deeper architectures to capture the intricate details required for precise classification. The VGG16 model, with an accuracy of 0.5, showed improved performance, highlighting the benefit of deeper architectures. However, achieving high accuracy and robust generalization remains a challenge that may be addressed by more advanced architectures like Res-Net and Efficient-Net.

The study also highlighted that computational resources and model complexity play a significant role in real-world deployment, especially in resource-limited settings. Models such as Efficient-Net are promising for clinical applications due to their balance of accuracy and efficiency. Future work may focus on further optimizing these models, exploring ensemble approaches, and incorporating Res-Net and Efficient-Net architectures to enhance performance. Overall, the project underscores the potential of deep learning in improving accessibility to dermatological diagnosis and assisting healthcare professionals in providing timely, accurate treatment.

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