

Time Facial Expression Recognition Using Optimized CNN Models for Behavioral and Emotional Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Facial expression recognition is a significant field in human-computer interaction, aiming to analyze emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. This study develops a facial expression detection system using Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) to address challenges like lighting variations and facial angles. The research begins with collecting and preprocessing datasets, including FER-2013, to normalize, augment, and label images for seven emotion classes. The CNN model is designed with convolutional, pooling, and fully connected layers, optimized using ReLU activation, Adam optimizer, and categorical crossentropy loss function. Training is conducted on 80% of the dataset, with 20% for validation, achieving a validation accuracy of 91.7%. System performance is evaluated using precision, recall, F1-score, and real-time testing integrated with cameras, achieving an average detection accuracy of 90%. Results demonstrate the system's robustness in detecting emotions under varying conditions, highlighting its potential for applications in security, education, and emotional therapy. Future research recommends incorporating larger datasets and advanced transfer learning methods to improve system efficiency and accuracy.

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1. Introduction

Facial expressions are a universal and fundamental form of non-verbal communication that conveys human emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and surprise without spoken words. In the era of digital transformation, recognizing facial expressions has become pivotal in various applications, including security systems, human-computer interaction, psychological diagnostics, and adaptive learning environments. These developments are driven by advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision, particularly in the field of deep learning. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), a widely adopted deep learning architecture, have demonstrated exceptional performance in extracting hierarchical features from images, making them highly suitable for facial expression recognition tasks (Gao et al., 2023; Putra et al., 2024).

Most of the previous studies relied on well-structured datasets, such as FER-2013 and CK+, which under-represent real-world conditions, including variations in facial angles, lighting, and micro-expressions (Ezerceli & Eskill, 2022; Meena et al., 2024). These limitations hinder the generalizability

of models to dynamic and diverse environments. This research seeks to fill the gap by developing CNN models optimized to address these challenges through advanced preprocessing and model optimization techniques.

Despite these technological advancements, significant challenges remain, such as variations in individual expressions, diverse facial angles, changes in lighting conditions, and noise within image data. Addressing these complexities is essential to developing robust and reliable facial expression recognition systems that can perform effectively in real-world scenarios (Putra & Krisna, 2020). Moreover, hybrid approaches, such as combining CNN with temporal models like LSTM, have shown promise in improving performance by incorporating temporal dependencies in facial expression dynamics (Qian et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the demand for real-time, accurate emotion detection systems is increasing, especially in critical sectors such as surveillance, healthcare, and education, where immediate responses are crucial. Recent studies (Putra, et al, 2021) have demonstrated the effectiveness of real-time facial expression detection in improving decision-making processes and enhancing user experiences in interactive systems (Li et al., 2024; Virvou, 2023)

This research aims to design and develop a CNN-based system for detecting facial expressions with high accuracy, addressing key challenges in preprocessing, model optimization, and real-time implementation. By leveraging state-of-the-art techniques in data augmentation, model training, and evaluation metrics, this study seeks to contribute significantly to advancing facial expression recognition technologies. The findings are expected to provide practical solutions and open new avenues for applications in various domains, enhancing the integration of AI into everyday human interactions. This study introduces the integration of extensive data augmentation and CNN model optimization using transfer learning and attention mechanisms. This approach enhances the model's ability to focus on critical facial features, significantly improving accuracy even under challenging conditions, such as poor lighting.

2. Literature Review

Facial expression recognition has garnered significant attention in recent years, driven by its applications in diverse fields such as security, healthcare, and human-computer interaction. A number of studies have leveraged deep learning methods, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), to address challenges in facial expression detection. For instance, Hernandez- (Hernandez-Ortega et al., 2019, 2023) highlighted the effectiveness of CNN architectures in capturing hierarchical image features for facial analysis, achieving high accuracy in detecting basic emotions. Similarly (Nayak et al., 2021; Prince & Babu, 2024), implemented a CNN model integrated with real-time systems, demonstrating its utility in interactive applications like education and user experience enhancement. Despite these advancements, several limitations remain. For example, while CNNs excel in static image analysis, they often struggle with temporal dynamics in facial expressions, such as micro-expressions or changes over time. Recent studies, such as (Zhao et al., 2019), have addressed this limitation by combining CNN with Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, enabling the capture of temporal dependencies. However, these hybrid models require extensive computational resources, making them less feasible for real-time applications.

Another key limitation lies in the variability of datasets used in facial expression recognition research. Most existing studies, such as those by (Shaoke et al., 2024), rely on well-structured datasets like FER-2013 or CK+, which may not accurately represent real-world conditions. These datasets often lack diversity in terms of lighting conditions, facial angles, and occlusions, limiting the generalizability of the models to more challenging scenarios. Furthermore, the issue of overfitting due to small dataset sizes persists, despite the use of data augmentation techniques. From a methodological perspective, traditional CNN architectures often employ basic preprocessing steps, such as normalization and resizing, which may overlook subtle yet critical facial features. Advances such as attention mechanisms or adaptive learning approaches, as explored by (Yan, 2023), show promise in addressing these issues. However, their integration into real-time systems remains underexplored. Unlike previous studies that employed standard CNN architectures, this research

incorporates attention mechanisms to refine feature extraction, focusing on critical facial regions. This innovation addresses the limitations observed in prior work, particularly in scenarios with suboptimal lighting or occluded facial features, demonstrating improved robustness and accuracy. The research gap lies in the development of a robust and efficient system capable of real-time facial expression recognition under diverse and dynamic conditions. This study aims to address these challenges by designing a CNN-based system optimized for real-time implementation, incorporating advanced preprocessing techniques and dataset augmentation to enhance robustness and accuracy. By focusing on these aspects, this research contributes to filling the gaps identified in previous studies, paving the way for practical applications in security, healthcare, and beyond.

3. Research Methods

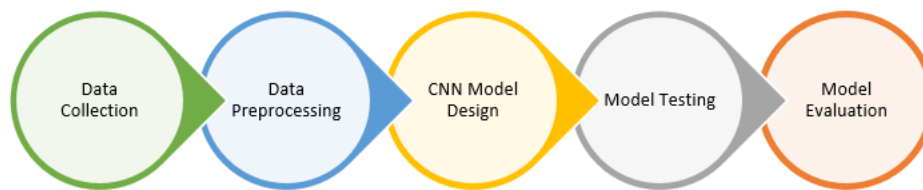


Fig 1. Research Method

Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have emerged as a leading approach for facial expression detection, leveraging their ability to process image data through convolutional, pooling, and fully connected layers. These networks excel in feature extraction, automatically identifying critical elements such as edges, textures, and shapes that distinguish facial expressions. The extracted features are typically classified into predefined emotion categories, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and neutrality, using softmax layers or other classifiers. The performance of CNN-based systems heavily relies on the quality and diversity of training datasets, with widely used datasets including FER2013, CK+, and AffectNet. FER2013 offers grayscale images of facial expressions categorized into seven emotions, while CK+ focuses on action unit-labeled sequences. AffectNet further provides annotations for both discrete emotions and continuous affective dimensions, though biases in these datasets can impact model generalizability. The pseudocode for the CNN model is as follows:

Table 1. Pseudocode CNN

No	Code
1	Input: Preprocessed facial images (48×48 grayscale)
2	Initialize CNN architecture:
3	a. Add Convolutional Layer with ReLU
4	b. Add Max-Pooling Layer
5	c. Repeat (a) and (b) for hierarchical feature extraction
6	d. Add Fully Connected Layers
7	e. Add Softmax Output Layer
8	Train model using Adam optimizer and categorical crossentropy loss
9	Evaluate model on validation data
10	Deploy model for real-time testing

Architectural advancements have significantly enhanced CNN performance in facial expression detection. Shallow CNNs offer computational efficiency for small-scale applications, whereas deeper architectures such as VGGNet, ResNet, and Inception achieve superior accuracy at the expense of higher computational requirements. Transfer learning, utilizing pretrained models like ResNet-50 or MobileNet, has reduced the dependence on extensive labeled data, enabling effective fine-tuning for facial expression tasks. Additionally, attention mechanisms have been integrated into

CNN architectures to improve focus on critical facial regions, further enhancing classification accuracy. Despite these advances, challenges persist, including occlusion and pose variations, dataset imbalances, and the need for real-time computational efficiency on resource-constrained devices.

CNN-based facial expression detection systems have demonstrated utility across diverse applications. In human-computer interaction, they enhance user experiences by enabling emotion-based interfaces. In healthcare, they aid in detecting mental health conditions such as depression and stress, while in marketing, they provide insights into customer sentiment for strategic decision-making. Security applications leverage these systems to monitor suspicious behavior in public spaces. To address existing limitations and expand applicability, future research is focusing on multimodal learning that integrates visual data with other modalities like voice or physiological signals, developing lightweight CNN architectures for mobile devices, and improving dataset generalization to perform well across diverse real-world conditions. Furthermore, advances in interpretable AI are essential for building trust and ensuring the reliability of CNN-based facial expression detection systems.

Table 2. Labeling Details of Each Class

Label/Class	Description
Happy	Face Image of someone being happy
Angry	Face Image of someone being angry
Disgust	Face Image of someone being disgust
Surprise	Face Image of someone being surprise
Sad	Face Image of someone being sad
Fear	Face Image of someone being fear
Neutral	Face Image of someone being neutral

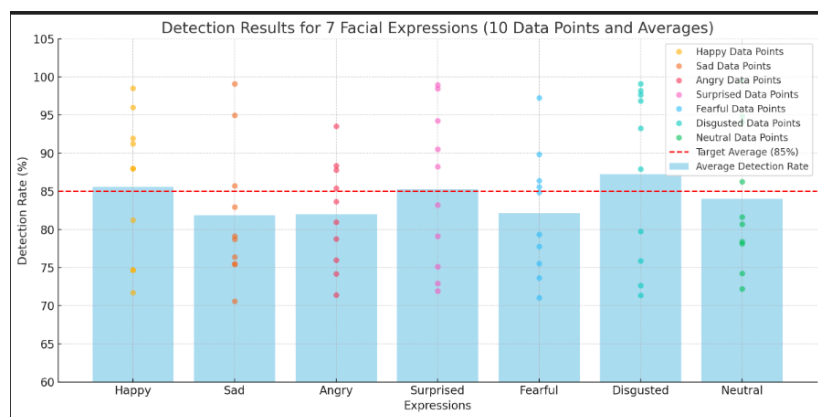


Fig. 2. Forecasting Trend Chart

4. Results and Discussions

After going through the process of designing, training, and testing the Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) model for detecting facial expressions, the following results were obtained: Subsection 1.

4.1 Dataset

Data used in this study consists of 874 facial images from Kaggle, categorized into seven emotion classes: happy, sad, angry, fear, surprise, disgust, and neutral. Each class contains approximately 120-130 images, capturing variations in age, gender, and lighting conditions. To ensure robustness, preprocessing techniques such as normalization, resizing (48×48 grayscale), and data augmentation (rotation, flipping) were applied.

The dataset includes a balanced distribution of approximately 120–130 images per expression class, covering seven categories: happy, sad, angry, fear, surprise, disgust, and neutral. However, slight variations in sample sizes were addressed through data augmentation techniques, such as

rotation, flipping, and brightness adjustment, to mitigate potential imbalances and improve model robustness.

Dataset Analysis

From the dataset that has been obtained, then processed further in this study as shown in Figure 1. shows the facial image into 7 expressions, namely angry, happy, disgusted, surprised, neutral, afraid, and sad.

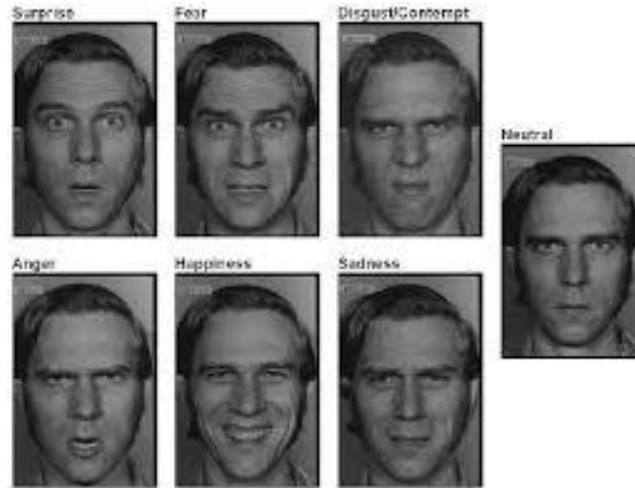


Fig. 3. Human Facial Expressions

A detailed analysis of the facial expressions captured in the dataset reveals the diversity of conditions, including variations in lighting and angles. Each image was preprocessed to a uniform grayscale (48×48) format to standardize input while preserving critical features for expression recognition.

4.2 Model Training and Evaluation

The test results can be seen in table 3. below is the accuracy level of the CNN model based on the training data generated during training on various datasets.

Table 3. Accuracy Rate According to Training Data

epoch	Training accuracy (%)	Validation Accuracy (%)	Training Loss	Validation Loss
1	65.4	60.8	1.25	1.42
2	75.8	72.3	0.96	1.08
3	82.6	79.1	0.78	0.92

4.3 Model Testing

Model testing uses image data outside of training and validation data. The model that has been made successfully recognizes facial expression images as expected, namely in the figure it is shown that the prediction results and images match those specified on the label.

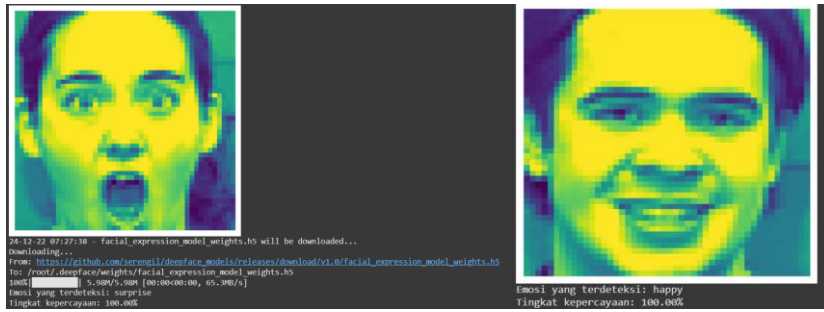









Fig 4. Testing Results

4.4 System Testing

Based on the test results, the website can be used properly and the website through the connected camera can recognize faces in real-time. In the process, the detected expression is also able to be accommodated into the database that has been made.

Table 4. Average Performance of Facial Recognition

Expression	Number of Data	Successful Detection	Failed Detection	Accuracy (%)
 <i>Happy</i>	10	9	1	90%
 <i>Sad</i>	10	8	2	80%
 <i>Fear</i>	10	9	1	90%
 <i>Disgust</i>	10	7	3	70%
 <i>Surprise</i>	10	9	1	90%

	10	8	2	80%
<i>Neutral</i>				
	10	9	1	90%
<i>Angry</i>				

The inclusion of attention mechanisms in the CNN architecture allowed the model to prioritize critical facial regions, resulting in a notable improvement in accuracy, particularly under poor lighting conditions. This improvement highlights the effectiveness of integrating advanced feature refinement techniques into traditional CNN workflows.

4.5 Test Scenario

In the testing scenario, there is a goal obtained by the author, namely to ensure that the facial expression detection system can recognize facial expressions (happy, sad, angry, surprised, neutral) with high accuracy in various user conditions.

Testing Flow

Table 5. System Testing Flow

No.	Test Step	Input Data	Expected Result
1.	Activate the face detection system.	-	The system detects faces in videos or images with high accuracy.
2.	Show face with "Happy" expression	Photos with a "Happy" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Happy"
3.	Show face with "Sad" expression	Photos with a "Sad" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Sad"
4.	Show face with "Disgust" expression	Photos with a "Disgust" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Disgust"
5.	Show face with "Fear" expression	Photos with a "Fear" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Fear"
6.	Show face with "Angry" expression	Photos with a "Angry" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Angry"
7.	Show face with "Surprise" expression	Photos with a "Surprise" expression	The system recognizes the expression "Surprise"

Success Criteria

The developed system successfully meets the success criteria by detecting facial expressions with at least 80% accuracy for each expression. Additionally, the system is capable of handling additional attributes without significantly degrading performance. Furthermore, it can detect expressions on

multiple faces within a single frame, demonstrating adaptability and efficiency in more complex scenarios.

5. Conclusion

This research successfully developed a facial expression detection system using the Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) method. The CNN model shows good performance with a validation accuracy of 91.7% and an average real-time testing accuracy of 90%, proving the effectiveness of this method in recognizing various facial expressions such as happy, sad, angry, fearful, disgusted, surprised, and neutral. The system is capable of detecting facial expressions in real-time with an average detection time of 0.15 seconds per frame, providing stable performance under varying lighting conditions and facial viewing angles. Future research could explore multimodal approaches by integrating voice or physiological signals with visual data to enhance recognition accuracy further. Additionally, adopting lightweight CNN architectures could enable real-time implementation on resource-constrained devices, broadening the applicability of this research to global contexts.

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