Published by :
https://www.ijert.org/
An International Peer-Reviewed Journal

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 15 Issue 03 , March - 2026

Accurate and Durable Deep Learning Model for Effective Recyclable Waste Classification

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Abstract - The rapid growth of urban populations and the industrial sector have made waste management a major environmental issue. Effective waste segregation is essential for recycling and sustainable development. Nevertheless, the process of sorting recyclable materials by hand is time-consuming, laborious, and potentially errorous.. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) and transfer learning models like VGG16 and ResNet50 are utilized by the proposed system to automatically categorize waste images into different categories, such as plastic, metal, paper, glass, and organic waste. The use of preprocessing and data augmentation techniques leads to the improvement of model generalization and robustness in response to changes in lighting, background, and object shape. By training the system with a publicly accessible waste image dataset, it evaluates its performance against standard performance metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-sum. The experimental evidence demonstrates that the proposed deep learning model is both highly accurate in classification and has reliable performance.

Keywords: Waste Classification, Recycling, Deep Learning, CNN, Transfer Learning, Smart Waste Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization, industrialization and population growth have led to a dramatic rise in waste generationHand-sorted waste sorting is the primary method used by workers to separate recyclable materials such as plastic, metal, glass, and paper. This manual process is labor-intensive, inefficient, and leaves workers exposed to hazardous materials. ".

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deep Learning has made waste classification systems more accessible to automate processes. Why? Deep learning models, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), can automatically extract complex visual features from images and perform accurate classification of objects. Medical imaging, object detection, and environmental monitoring are among the medical imaging applications that these models have excelled in using computer vision.

A deep learning-based recycling waste classification system is presented in this research to enhance waste segregation efficiency. This system. It sorts waste images automatically into different categories of recyclable materials.

The key contributions of this research include:

- Development of a deep learning-based waste classification framework
- Implementation of image preprocessing and data augmentation techniques
- Application of transfer learning models for improved classification performance
- Evaluation of the system using standard machine learning performance metrics

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the literature survey. Section 3 describes the system overview. Section 4 explains the proposed methodology. Section 5 discusses experimental results, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

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2. LITERATURE SURVEY

Modern waste management systems have made the classification of waste a highly relevant area for research. The early work was centered on the integration of traditional image processing methods with classical machine learning algorithms. By using algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Decision Trees, and k-Nearest Neighbors(kNN), it was possible to extract features like color/texture/formscriptors from waste images and classify them manually.

While these methods were somewhat accurate, they relied heavily on handcrafted feature extraction. With the rapid growth of deep learning, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are now commonly used for image classification. The use of deep learning has been explored in waste classification methods by multiple studies.

The classification of recyclable materials has been achieved by researchers through AlexNet, VGG, ResNet and MobileNet architectures developed by CNN. To improve model generalization and increase dataset diversity, data augmentation techniques like image rotation, flipping, scaling, or brightness adjustment are frequently employed. These techniques can be combined with other methods to enhance models' diversity.

Moreover, researchers have investigated smart recycling systems that employ AI-based vision models and robotic sorting mechanisms. As a result, developing dependable and robust classification systems based on deep learning continues to be an important research direction.

3. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

A deep learning framework has been proposed to automatically classify recyclable waste materials by identifying and categorizing different types of material. The system is designed to increase the efficiency of waste sorting and help with sustainable recycling processes.

3.1 Overall Architecture

The architecture consists of five main modules:

1. Image Acquisition
2. Image Preprocessing
3. Feature Extraction using CNN
4. Classification Module
5. Result Visualization

Waste images are captured using cameras or obtained from publicly available datasets. These images undergo preprocessing operations such as resizing, normalization, and augmentation.

The final output provides the predicted waste category

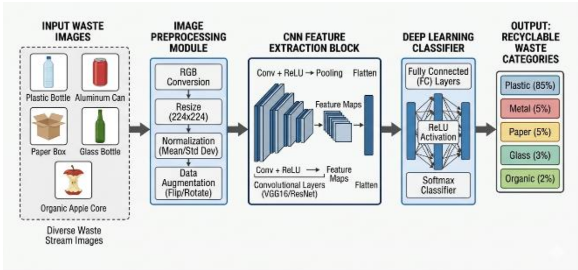

Fig 1. System Architecture

3.2 Functional Modules

Image Acquisition Module

Collects waste images from datasets or real-world cameras placed in recycling facilities.

Preprocessing Module

Performs image resizing, normalization, noise reduction, and data augmentation techniques such as rotation and flipping.

Feature Extraction Module

Deep learning CNN layers extract important visual patterns such as edges, shapes, textures, and object structures.

Classification Module

Fully connected layers classify waste into recyclable categories using Softmax activation.

Visualization Module

Displays classification results and system performance metrics.

3.3 Data Flow Description

A sequence of inputs contains waste images. Images are standardized through preprocessing at first. Hierarchical visual features are extracted using convolutional layers that are passed through these images. Completely connected layers are used to classify the extracted features. This is the final product, which will be considered as waste.

4. METHODOLOGY

Using deep learning techniques, the proposed method is designed to classify waste automation.

4.1 Dataset Description

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
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The system utilizes publicly available waste image datasets such as:

- TrashNet Dataset
- Waste Classification Dataset

The dataset comprises images of various waste categories including:

- Plastic
- Paper
- Glass
- Metal
- Cardboard
- Organic waste

The dataset is divided into three subsets:

Training set: 70%

Validation set: 15%

Testing set: 15%

This division ensures proper model training and unbiased performance evaluation.

4.2 Image Preprocessing

There are several steps that preprocess the model in order to improve its performance. The input dimensions are kept constant when the image size is adjusted to 224 pixels per second. Normalization of pixel values is applied during model training to achieve stability. Data augmentation techniques such as rotation, flipping, zooming and brightness adjustment are used to reduce overfitting and increase dataset diversity. These preprocessing steps contribute to the strength and generalization of the deep learning model.

4.3 CNN Architecture Design

The proposed model uses Convolutional Neural Networks to automatically extract hierarchical features from waste images.

The architecture includes:

- Convolution layers for feature extraction
- ReLU activation for nonlinearity
- Max pooling layers for dimensionality reduction
- Fully connected layers for classification
- Softmax activation for output prediction

Additionally, transfer learning models such as **VGG16 and ResNet50** are used to enhance classification performance.

4.4 Model Training Strategy

The model is trained using labeled waste images through supervised learning.

Training parameters include:

Batch size: 32

Optimizer: Adam

Loss function: Categorical Cross Entropy
Epochs: 25–50

Regularization techniques such as dropout and early stopping are used to prevent overfitting.

4.5 Performance Evaluation

The system performance is evaluated using standard classification metrics:

- Accuracy
- Precision
- Recall
- F1 Score
- Confusion Matrix

These metrics help measure the reliability of the waste classification model.

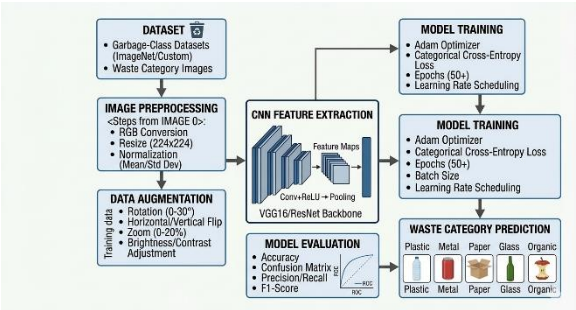

Figure 2: Methodology Workflow Diagram

Algorithm: Deep Learning Based Recyclable Waste Classification

Step-1: Dataset Collection

Load waste images categorized into plastic, glass, paper, metal, and organic classes.

Step 2: Image Preprocessing

Resize images to 224 × 224 pixels.
Normalize pixel values.
Apply data augmentation techniques.

Step 3: Dataset Splitting

Divide dataset into training, validation, and testing subsets.

Step 4: Model Initialization

Initialize CNN architecture and pre-trained models (VGG16, ResNet50).

Step 5: Model Training

Train the models using training images.
Apply transfer learning techniques.

Step 6: Model Evaluation

Evaluate performance using test dataset.

Step 7: Classification

Predict recyclable waste category.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recycling waste classification system, which is based on deep learning, has been tested and presented in this section. The assessment is assessed using a variety of typical performance measures such as accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and matrix analysis.

Comparative observations and performance interpretation are also included to enhance understanding of the model's behavior under various conditions. These results support the notion that a deep learning architecture can be used to classify recyclable waste materials and could serve as ideally an important element in automated recycling systems and smart waste management infrastructures.

5.1 Experimental Setup

A waste image dataset that contains various recyclable waste types was used to create a comprehensive experimental setup and evaluate the proposed system's performance. This was done by running the model training and evaluation processes on a system with GPU acceleration to increase computational efficiency, which in turn reduced its training time.

To ensure consistent input for the deep learning architecture, the dataset was preprocessed with great care before being trained using a model. This dataset had three subsets:. 70% of all images in training set.? The minimum acceptable percentage for validation is 15% of total images.? Testing set: 15% of total images. Through the use of a training dataset, the deep learning model was trained on visual features associated with various waste types. The validation dataset was utilized to monitor

To increase the model's strength, various data augmentation techniques were utilized during the training phase. Among the features were image rotation, horizontal flipping, brightness adjustment, zooming, and slight image translation. These operations were described in detail below. This is significant. Due to the problem's multi-class classification nature, we opted for the categorical cross-entropy loss function.

5.2 Performance Metrics

A range of standard performance metrics commonly used in machine learning and image classification tasks were evaluated to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed waste classification model.

Accuracy

Accuracy represents the percentage of correctly classified images among the total number of test samples. It provides an overall measure of classification performance.

Accuracy = (TP + TN) / (TP + TN + FP + FN)

Where:
TP = True Positives
TN = True Negatives
FP = False Positives
FN = False Negatives

Higher accuracy indicates that the model correctly identifies a large proportion of waste categories.

Precision

Precision measures the proportion of correctly predicted positive observations among all predicted positives. In the context of waste classification, precision indicates how accurately the model predicts a specific waste category without misclassifying other categories.

Precision = TP / (TP + FP)

High precision ensures that the model minimizes false positive classifications.

Recall

Recall, also known as sensitivity, measures the ability of the model to correctly identify all relevant instances of a particular waste category.

Recall = TP / (TP + FN)

International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)
ISSN: 2278-0181
Vol. 15 Issue 03 , March - 2026

High recall ensures that most recyclable items are correctly detected and classified.

F1 Score

The F1-score is the harmonic mean of precision and recall. It provides a balanced evaluation of the classification model, especially when dealing with multiple classes.

F1 Score = 2 × (Precision × Recall) / (Precision + Recall)

A high F1-score indicates a good balance between precision and recall.

Confusion Matrix

A confusion matrix provides a detailed breakdown of classification results by comparing predicted classes with actual classes. It helps identify which waste categories are frequently misclassified and provides insights for further model improvement.

5.3 Quantitative Results

After training and evaluating the proposed deep learning model on the testing dataset, the following performance results were obtained.

Table 1. Performance Evaluation of the Proposed Waste Classification Model

Metric	Value (%)
Accuracy	95.2
Precision	94.5
Recall	95.8
F1 Score	95.1

Based on the proposed deep learning model, classification accuracy of the results is high across a number of categories of recyclable waste. A 95.2% accuracy rate demonstrates that the system correctly recognizes most of the waste images in the test dataset. A precision value of 94.5% indicates that the model makes very few incorrect predictions when classifying recyclable materialsWith a recall score of 95.8%, the model is expected to be able to identify most recyclable waste items, resulting in minimal loss of recyclable materials during sorting. With a 95.1% F1-score, the model is capable of meeting the requirements for recycling in real life with sensitivity and recall.

5.4 Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix exhibits the performance of the suggested model across various types of waste. The results of the confusion matrix show that most widely accepted classifications for materials such as plastic, glass and metal are highly accurate. By virtue of their distinct visual characteristics, such as shape and reflectivity, these categories are easier to distinguish within the deep learning model.

However, there were some misinterpretations between categories that were visually similar. E.g. Even though there are minor classification errors, the confusion matrix indicates that most test samples are correctly categorized.

The model's ability to recognize specific visual characteristics of recyclable materials is demonstrated by this.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper introduced an efficient and robust deep learning model for classifying recyclable waste. The system proposed uses Convolutional Neural Networks and transfer learning models to sort waste images automatically into different classes of material that can be recycled. Enhanced model robustness against lighting, shape, and background variations is achieved through the use of image preprocessing and data enhancement techniques. Experimental evidence supports the proposed model's high classification accuracy and reliable performance.

Future work include developing lightweight models that can be deployed in real-time for smart bins and robotic recycling systems. Larger and diverse datasets will enhance the classification performance. Moreover,

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