ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/IJISRT24NOV810

Fungal Infection Detection in Wheat Leaves Using Machine Learning

Mansoon Mangrulkar[1]; Mahesh Hattimare[2]; Mayur Mahale[3]; Om Supare[4]; Minakshi Ramteke[5]
UG Student[1,2,3,4]; Assistant Professor[5]
Department of Artificial Intelligence
G H Raisoni College of Engineering Nagpur-440016, India

Abstract:- Wheat is a cornerstone of global food security, but its production faces significant challenges from fungal diseases that can drastically reduce yield and quality. Traditional methods for detecting these diseases, such as visual inspections, are labor-intensive and often prone to error due to subjectivity and variability in expertise. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and deep learning (DL) [1] provide potential alternatives for automated and highly accurate illness identification. This study focuses on applying Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to identify common wheat diseases, leveraging the model's capability to learn multifaceted patterns directly from images. By employing techniques such as transfer learning, we fine-tune pre-trained CNN models on domain-specific datasets, enhancing accuracy even with limited labeled data. Additionally, we explore the combination of these models into user-friendly applications that can assist farmers in current disease diagnosis in the field. This approach aims to streamline the detection process, enabling faster and more effective disease management. Our findings demonstrate that AI-driven solutions can significantly aid agricultural practices, with the potential to boost yield quality and support sustainable wheat production.

I. INTRODUCTION

Wheat is among the most essential yields worldwide, serving as a primary food source and contributing significantly to global agriculture. However, wheat production is often compromised by various fungal diseases, including rusts, blights, and powdery mildew, which can lead to considerable yield losses. These diseases not only impact food security but also affect the livelihoods of millions of farmers, particularly in regions heavily dependent on wheat cultivation.

Traditionally, disease detection in wheat fields has relied on manual inspections conducted by agricultural experts. While effective to some degree, this method is often labor-intensive, subjective, and prone to error due to variability in disease symptoms. Environmental factors, such as varying light conditions and the presence of overlapping leaves, add further complexity to accurate diagnosis. Additionally, the time-sensitive nature of disease management in agriculture calls for quicker, more reliable solutions than what traditional methods can offer.

Advancements in AI and ML present a promising alternative for enhancing disease detection in wheat crops. With the capability to process vast amounts of visual data and identify complicated patterns, AI-driven approaches, particularly deep learning models, have shown potential in accurately diagnosing plant diseases from photos. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), in particular, have gained prominence for their ability to differentiate between healthy and diseased plant tissues based on visual features such as color, texture, and shape.

In this research, we aim to develop a robust system for wheat disease detection that leverages deep learning to accurately identify and classify common wheat diseases. By implementing a CNN-based model, our system aspires to provide a reliable, scalable, and efficient solution that can assist farmers in early disease detection and timely intervention. Ultimately, the integration of AI in agricultural practices can pave the way toward more sustainable crop management, ensuring higher yields and contributing to food security on a global scale.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

A. Literature Survey on Wheat Disease Detection Using AI

Agricultural productivity, particularly wheat cultivation, is vital for ensuring global food security. However, wheat crops face numerous threats from fungal diseases like rusts, powdery mildew, and blight, which can lead to severe yield losses. Traditional disease identification methods, including visual inspections by experts, are time-consuming, subjective, and require specialized knowledge. As a result, there is a growing curiosity in using AI and ML techniques to make better the accuracy and efficiency of disease detection in wheat crops.

B. Early Approaches to Digital Disease Detection

Initial research in digital plant disease detection relied heavily on classical image processing techniques. These methods involved manually extracting features like colour, texture, and shape to identify diseases in crop images. While these approaches demonstrated some success, they were often limited by environmental factors such as lighting and background noise, which affected the reliability of feature

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extraction. For instance, threshold-based segmentation and histogram analysis were among the earliest techniques used but struggled with high variability in real-world scenarios.

C. Emergence of Machine Learning

With advancements in machine learning [2], researchers began exploring algorithms like SVM, k-NN, and decision trees. These algorithms could handle more complex data, allowing for improved accuracy in disease identification. By training these models on annotated datasets of infected and healthy crop images, researchers achieved a higher detection rate than with traditional methods. However, these techniques still relied on hand-crafted features, which limited their adaptability to diverse datasets and environments.

D. The Impact of Deep Learning in Disease Detection

The advent of deep learning has revolutionized plant disease detection. Convolutional Neural Networks, in particular, have shown excellent performance in image classification tasks, which has made them a preferred choice for identifying plant diseases. Unlike traditional methods, CNNs automatically learn relevant features from images without manual intervention, thus providing greater adaptability and accuracy.

Studies have shown that CNN architectures like AlexNet, ResNet, and VGGNet can successfully identify wheat diseases with high precision when trained on large datasets. These networks can capture intricate details in leaf texture and colour, which are critical for distinguishing between different types of fungal infections in wheat. For example, advanced models trained on annotated wheat leaf images have achieved accuracy rates exceeding 90%, making them viable for field application.

E. Transfer Learning and Fine-Tuning for Limited Datasets

One challenge in agricultural AI research is the limited availability of labelled datasets, particularly for specific plant diseases in various regions. Transfer learning has been proposed as a solution, allowing models pre-trained on huge, generic datasets to be refined on smaller, domain-specific datasets. This approach has proven effective in wheat disease detection, where researchers adapt models trained on general plant images to identify wheat-specific diseases. By fine-tuning layers of pre-trained networks, researchers can leverage the model's prior knowledge while focusing on the unique features of wheat diseases.

F. Hybrid Models and Ensemble Techniques

To further enhance accuracy, recent studies have experimented with hybrid models that combine CNNs with other techniques such as support vector machines or random forests. Ensemble methods, which aggregate predictions from multiple models, have also been used to improve reliability. For instance, combining CNNs with decision tree classifiers has helped mitigate issues with false positives in wheat disease detection, thus making the diagnosis more robust.

G. Real-Time Disease Detection with Mobile Applications

An emerging trend is the integration of AI models into mobile applications to allow real-time disease detection by farmers in the field [3]. Using lightweight versions of CNNs or optimized architectures like MobileNet, these applications offer portability and accessibility, enabling farmers to identify diseases on-site with a simple smartphone camera. Such developments not only empower farmers but also enable quicker responses to disease outbreaks, reducing crop loss and improving management practices.

H. Future Directions

While deep learning has made significant strides in plant disease detection, challenges remain, encompassing the requirement for more extensive annotated datasets, improved model generalization, and robustness under varying environmental conditions. Future research may focus on creating more extensive, open-access databases and developing models that are resilient to environmental variations. Additionally, the integration of Internet of Things (IoT) devices and remote sensing technologies could offer real-time monitoring capabilities, providing a comprehensive solution for managing wheat diseases on a large scale.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study involves designing a robust Convolutional Neural Network model capable of detecting and classifying wheat diseases from leaf images. The process can be divided into five main stages: data collection, data preprocessing, model architecture selection, model training and optimization, and evaluation.

A. Data Collection

The first stage is gathering a comprehensive dataset of wheat leaf images exhibiting various disease symptoms as well as healthy leaves. Data is sourced from public agricultural image databases, research publications, and field collection. For accurate training and evaluation, each image in the dataset is labeled based on the disease type (e.g., wheat rust, blight, or powdery mildew) or classified as healthy.

Since real-world data variability is crucial for a model's effectiveness, the dataset includes images captured under diverse conditions, such as varying lighting, angles, and backgrounds. To augment the dataset, image enhancement techniques like rotation, scaling, and flipping are applied, which helps improve the model’s robustness by simulating different viewing perspectives.

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B. Data Preprocessing

➢ *In the Preprocessing Stage, Each Image Undergoes Several Adjustments to Improve Model Performance:*

- Resizing: Images are resized to a uniform resolution to ensure compatibility with the CNN model.
- Normalization: To enable quicker and more reliable training, pixel values are normalized to a range of [0, 1]. Noise Reduction: Filters such as Gaussian blur are applied to minimize background noise and highlight disease symptoms more clearly.
- Additionally, data preprocessing involves dividing the dataset into training, validation, and testing subsets. Typically, 70% of images are allocated for training, 15% for validation, and 15% for testing. This division allows for balanced evaluation and helps in fine-tuning the model's hyperparameters during validation.

C. Selection of Model Architecture

For this study, a Convolutional Neural Network is chosen due to its proven effectiveness in image classification tasks. Based on prior research and initial experiments, popular CNN architectures such as ResNet and VGGNet are considered for their depth and feature extraction capabilities [4].

The selected architecture includes multiple convolutional layers, each followed by ReLU activation and max-pooling layers. The convolutional layers automatically learn spatial hierarchies in the input images, capturing both fine and coarse details relevant to disease identification. These characteristics are combined by dense layers at the network's end, producing a probability distribution across the disease classes.

D. Model Training and Optimization

➢ *Using Supervised Learning, the CNN Model is Trained on the Labelled Dataset. Key Steps in Training Process Include:*

- Loss Function: Because categorical cross-entropy loss works well for multi-class classification tasks, it is chosen as the loss function.
- Optimizer: The initial learning rate is set at 0.001, and the weights are adjusted using the Adam optimizer. If the model's performance reaches a plateau, the learning rate is automatically decreased to guarantee convergence.
- Regularization: To avoid overfitting, which can happen when the model learns noise specific to the training data rather than general patterns, dropout layers are added in between dense layers [3].
- A predetermined number of 10 epochs are used for the training process, and early stopping is used to cease training if the validation accuracy does not increase for a number of consecutive epochs. This conserve computing power and avoids overfitting.

E. Evaluation

➢ *The Test Dataset is Used to Assess the Model's Performance Following Training. Important Metrics for Assessment Consist of:*

- Accuracy: Our Model predicted training 96% accuracy and validation accuracy of 90%.
- Precision, Recall, and F1-Score: These measures show any imbalance in prediction quality and offer insights into how well the model performs for each diseased class.

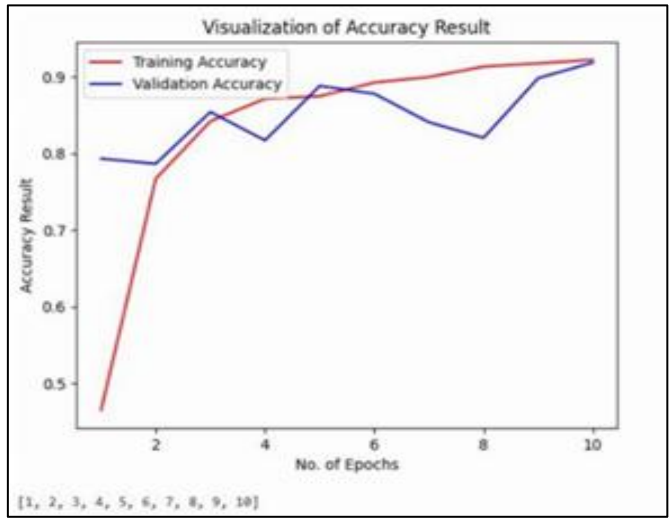

Fig 1: Visualization of Accuracy

- Confusion Matrix: A confusion matrix is generated for visualization of distribution of the true and predicted labels, allowing for detailed analysis of misclassifications.

To further verify the model's robustness, it is tested under different environmental conditions. This is done by applying filters to the test images which helps determine how the model performs in less controlled environments.

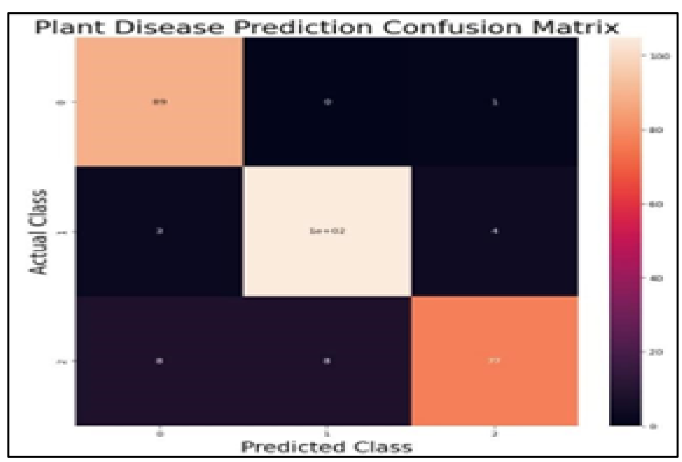

Fig 2: Confusion Matrix

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/IJISRT24NOV810

F. Deployment

Once validated, the model is exported and optimized for deployment. The model's size and processing needs are decreased by using strategies like model quantization and pruning, enabling integration into mobile applications or web platforms. This allows end-users, particularly farmers, to use the model in real-time to detect diseases directly from their devices, offering practical benefits in agricultural management.

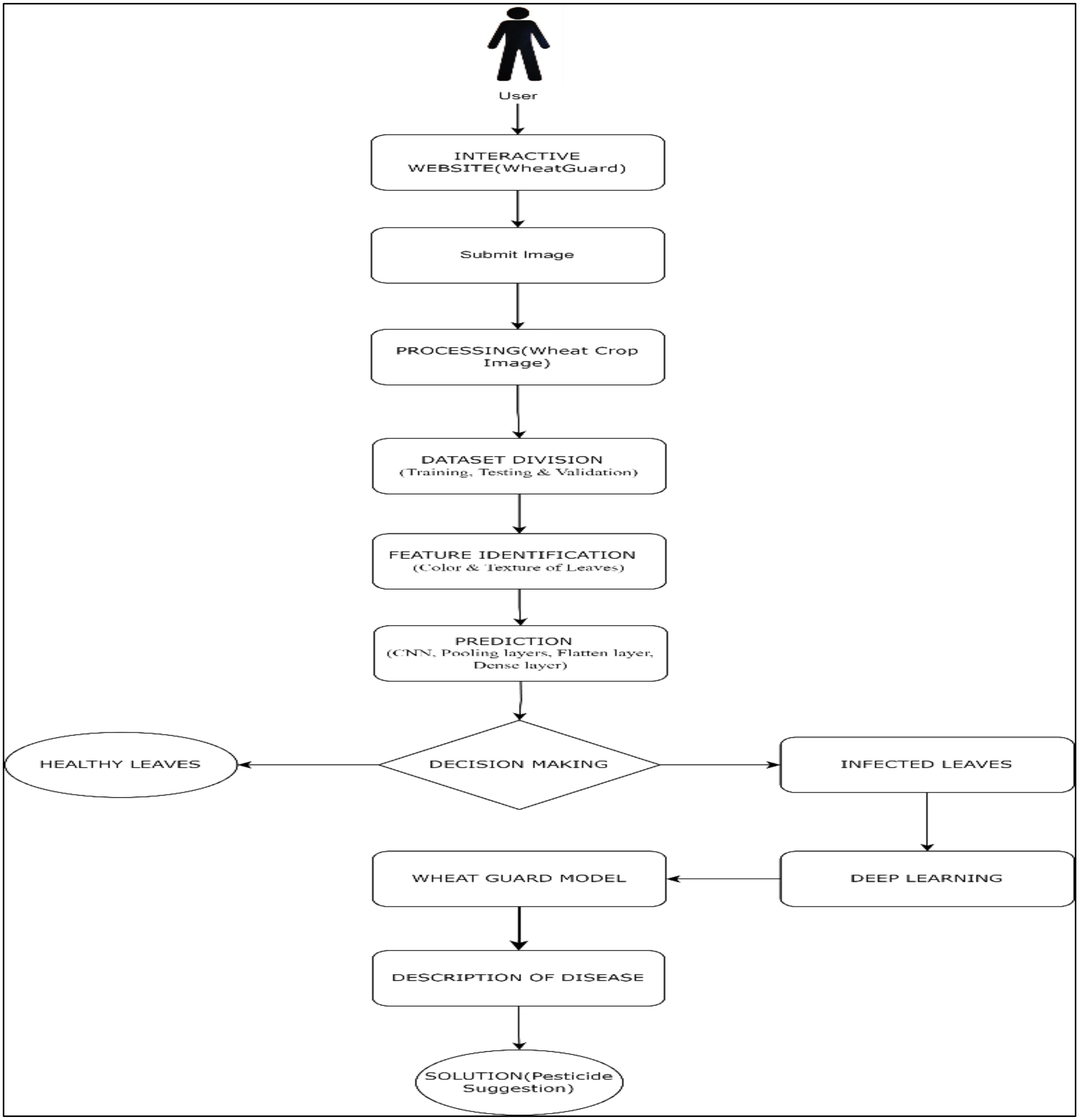

Fig 3: Flowchart

IV. CONCLUSION

The application of using AI and deep learning in agriculture, especially to identify wheat disease, represents a transformative step toward improving crop health management. Traditional methods of disease diagnosis, reliant on human expertise and visual assessment, are limited by subjectivity, time constraints, and often require specialized knowledge. Especially Convolutional Neural Networks and deep learning models, have shown remarkable potential in accurately detecting various wheat diseases by analysing leaf images, thus offering a promising alternative to conventional techniques.

This literature survey highlights the significant progress made in this field, particularly through the adoption of CNNs, transfer learning, and hybrid model approaches. These advancements have paved the way for real-time, mobile-based solutions, enabling disease detection directly in the field. However, challenges such as limited labelled datasets, environmental variability, and model generalization remain. Addressing these issues through future research will be essential to making AI-based disease detection systems more accessible and reliable for widespread agricultural use.

In conclusion, integrating deep learning with modern agricultural practices can revolutionize crop disease management, reducing losses and enhancing food security. The continued development of robust, scalable, and adaptive AI models will be crucial for realizing this potential, ensuring sustainable crop protection in an increasingly data-driven agricultural landscape.

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