**Neural Signal Processing to Identify Human Emotions**

**Pradeep Roy Yadlapalli(MS CS), Eric Jing (Phd CS), Annalie Swanepoel(BS CS)**

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Prof. Konstantinos Michmizos

# Abstract

Neural signal processing is a field of study that involves the analysis and interpretation of neural signals generated in the human brain, nervous systems or other biological systems. These signals, such as electroencephalograms (EEGs) and electromyograms (EMGs), provide insight into brain activity, neural communication, and muscle function. A low computational model was necessary for real time analysis of these data. We explored the Spiking Neural Network (SNN) model as a possible solution for this. So, a spiking neural network model was used to estimate the emotional state of a person into positive, neutral and negative using EEG brain waves as input.

Traditional machine learning and deep-learning techniques have achieved an accuracy of 98% on the test dataset. Our SNN model achieves an accuracy of 88.56% on our test dataset. The predictions result of our model are on par with some of the best available models. We conclude that spiking neural networks work very well and can serve as an alternative solution for real time data analysis when there are limitations on power usage and computational capabilities.

# Introduction

Neural Signal Processing is a specialized area of signal processing aimed at extracting information and decoding intent from neural signals recorded to better understand how the brain represents and conveys information, through neuronal ensembles from the central or peripheral nervous system. This has significant applications in the area of neuroscience and neural engineering. With the complexity and size of brain recordings growing, the use of neural signal processing has gained significance in the area of neuroscience. Interpreting these recorded signals such as electroencephalograms (EEGs) and electromyograms (EMGs), can provide insight into brain activity, neural communication, and muscle function. Electroencephalography is a non-invasive technique used to track the electrical activity of the brain through the placement of electrodes on the scalp. Analyzing EEG signals in real-time is becoming increasingly important in various applications such as neurofeedback, brain-computer interfaces, and monitoring of patients with neurological disorders. All these applications are possible through wearable technology, but the only drawback of these wearable tech is that they have less battery and low computational power. Hence, It is high time that we need machine learning models that can not only process the EEG signals in real time, but also are energy efficient. Spiking Neural Networks (SNN’s) best fit this role and have shown significant promise in recent years to be widely used. Since the scope of analyzing EEG signals is massive and there is very less EEG data available, we tried to address a smaller problem of estimating the emotional state of an individual into positive, neutral and negative using a Spiking Neural Network model on EEG brainwaves dataset.

Autonomous non-invasive detection of emotional states is potentially useful in multiple domains such as human robot interaction and mental healthcare. It can provide an extra dimension of interaction between user and device, as well as enabling tangible information to be derived that does not depend on verbal communication [1]. With the increasing availability of low-cost EEG devices, brainwave data is becoming affordable for the consumer industry as well as for research, introducing the need for autonomous classification without the requirement of an expert on hand[2]. Spiking neural networks can here act as an autonomous classification model.

Spiking neural networks are a type of artificial neural network that model the behavior of neurons more accurately than traditional artificial neural networks (ANNs), which makes them better suited for accurate modelling of applications that involve processing time-varying signals, such as EEG data. SSNs can process data more efficiently than traditional ANNs as they are more biologically realistic in their approach, which allows for better utilization of computational resources and more efficient processing of large datasets. Spiking neural networks can also be used for control tasks, such as controlling prosthetic limbs or computer cursors.

The above-mentioned smaller problem will aid in the development of many other real-world applications for better diagnostic capability of conditions such as epilepsy, depression, dementia, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease as well as improved monitoring and treatment options. Moreover, further along in the future, neural prosthetics (BMIs) can be used to restore muscle and cognition function to patients with spinal cord injuries and other neurological conditions.

# 2. Background (or Theory)

This paper explores single and ensemble methods to classify

emotional experiences based on EEG brainwave data. A

commercial MUSE EEG headband is used with a resolution of

four (TP9, AF7, AF8, TP10) electrodes. Positive and negative

emotional states are invoked using film clips with an obvious

valence, and neutral resting data is also recorded with no stimuli

involved, all for one minute per session

**2.1 Electroencephalography**

Electroencephalography is the process using applied electrodes to derive electrophysiological data and signals produced by the brain. Electrodes can be subdural ie. under the skull, placed on and within the brain itself. Noninvasive techniques require either wet or dry electrodes to be placed around the cranium. Raw electrical data is measured in Microvolts (uV) at observed time t producing wave patterns from t to t+n.

**2.2 Human Emotion:**

Human emotions are varied and complex but can be generalized into positive and negative categories. Some emotions overlap such as ’hope’ and ’anguish’, which are considered positive and negative respectively but that are often experienced.

Diagram

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: L¨ovheim’s cube: mapping levels of noradrenaline, dopamine, and serotonin to human emotion.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Emotion Category** | |  | | |  | | --- | | **Emotion/Valence** | |  | |
| A | Shame (Negative) Humiliation (Negative) |
| B | Contempt (Negative) Disgust (Negative) |
| C | Fear (Negative), Terror (Negative) |
| D | Enjoyment (Positive) Joy (Positive) |
| E | Distress (Negative) Anguish (Negative) |
| F | Surprise (Negative) (Lack of Dopamine) |
| G | Anger (Negative) Rage (Negative) |
| H | Interest (Positive) Excitement (Positive) |

Table 1. Table to show Lövheim categories and their encapsulated emotions with a valence label.

Lövheim’s three-dimensional emotional model maps brain chemical composition to generalized states of positive and negative valence. This is shown in Fig. 1 with emotion categories A-H from each of the model’s vertices, further detailed in Table I. Each vertex of the cube represents a centroid of an emotional category. It is worth noting that categories are not completely concrete, and that emotions are experienced in gradient, as well as overlapping between categories It is this chemical composition that causes certain nervous oscillation and thus electrical brainwave activity. These chemical compositions can be mapped to emotions with positive and negative classes. Since emotions are encoded within chemical composition that directly influence electrical brain activity, the above study proposes that they can be classed using statistical features of the produced brainwaves.

The works [2][3] explores single and ensemble methods to classify emotional experiences based on EEG brainwave data. A commercial MUSE EEG headband is used with a resolution of four (TP9, AF7, AF8, TP10) electrodes. Positive and negative emotional states are invoked using film clips with an obvious valence, and neutral resting data is also recorded with no stimuli involved, all for one minute per session.

Diagram, shape

Description automatically generated

Figure 2: EEG sensors TP9, AF7, AF8, TP10 of the Muse headband on the international standard EEG placement system

**2.3** **Data Acquisition:**

The dataset (emotional state) was based on whether a person was feeling positive, neutral, or negative emotions (https://www.kaggle.com/birdy654/eeg-brainwave-datasetfeeling-emotions). The study [2][3] employs four dry extra-cranial electrodes via a commercially available MUSE EEG headband. Micro voltage measurements are recorded from the TP9, AF7, AF8, and TP10 electrodes, as seen in figure 3. Because the signals are quite weak in nature, signal noise is a major issue due to it effectively masking useful information. The EEG headband employs various artefact separation techniques to best retain the brainwave data and discard unwanted noise. Sixty seconds of data were recorded from two subjects (1 male, 1 female, aged 20-22) for each of the 6 film clips found in Table II producing 12 minutes (720 seconds) of brain activity data (6 minutes for each emotional state). Six minutes of neutral brainwave data were also collected resulting in a grand total of 36 minutes of EEG data recorded from subjects. With a variable frequency resampled to 150Hz, this resulted in a dataset of 324,000 data points collected from the waves produced by the brain. Activities were exclusively stimuli that would evoke emotional responses from the set of emotions found in Table I and were considered by their valence labels of positive and negative rather than the emotions themselves. Neutral data were also collected, without stimuli and before any of the emotions data (to avoid contamination by the latter), for a third class that would be the resting emotional state of the subject. Three minutes of data were collected per day to reduce the interference of a resting emotional state.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stimulus | Valence | Studio | Year |
| Marley and Me | Neg | Twentieth Century Fox, etc. | 2008 |
| Up | Neg | Walt Disney Pictures, etc. | 2009 |
| My Girl | Neg | Imagine Entertainment, etc. | 1991 |
| La La Land | Pos | Summit Entertainment, etc. | 2016 |
| Slow Life | Pos | BioQuest Studios | 2014 |
| Funny Dogs | Pos | MashupZone | 2015 |

Table 2. Source of Film Clips used as Stimuli for EEG Brainwave Data Collection

Participants were asked to watch the film without making any conscious movements (eg. drinking coffee) to prevent the influence of Electromyographic (EMG) signals on the data due to their prominence over brainwaves in terms of signal strength. Observations of the experiment showed a participant smile for a short few second during the ‘funny dogs’ compilation clip, as well as become visibly upset during the ‘Marley and Me’ film clip (death scene). These facial expressions will influence the recorded data but are factored into the classification model because they accurately reflect behavior in the real world, where these emotional responses would also occur. Hence, to accurately model realistic situations, both EEG and facial EMG signals are considered informative. To generate a dataset of statistical features, an effective methodology from a previous study [4] was used to extract 2400 features through a sliding window of 1 second beginning at t=0 and t=0.5. The down sampling was set to the minimum observed frequency of 150Hz.

**2.4** **Full Set of Features (Preselection):**

This section describes the reasoning behind the necessity of performing statistical extraction, as well as the method to perform the process. The EEG sensor used for the experiments, the Muse headband, communicates with the computer using Bluetooth Low energy (BLE). The use of this protocol improves the autonomy of the sensor at the expense of a nonuniform sampling rate. The first step applied to normalize the dataset is using a Fourier-based method to resample the data to a fixed frequency of 200Hz. Brainwave data is nonlinear and nonstationary in nature, and thus single values are not indicative of class. That is, mental classification is based on the temporal nature of the wave, and not the values specifically. For example, a simplified concentrative and relaxed wave can be visually recognized due to the fact that wavelengths of concentrative mental state class data are far shorter, and yet, a value measured at any one point might be equal for the two states (i.e., x Microvolts). Additionally, the detection of the natures that dictate alpha, beta, theta, delta, and gamma waves also require analysis over time. It is for these reasons that temporal statistical extraction is performed. For temporal statistical extraction, sliding time windows of total length 1s are considered, with an overlap of 0.5 seconds. That is, windows run from [0s−1s), [1.5s − 2.5s), [2s – 3s), [2.5s – 3s), continuing until the experiment ends [3]. The remainder of this subsection describes the different statistical feature types which are included in the initial dataset:

1. A set of values of signals within a sequence of temporal windows x 1, x 2, x3 …. xn are considered and mean values are computed:

Schematic

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1. The standard deviation of values is recorded:

Text

Description automatically generated

1. Asymmetry and peakedness of waves are statistically represented by the skewness and kurtosis via the statistical moments of the third and fourth order.

Skewness:

Text

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Kurtosis:

Text, schematic

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

are taken where k=3rd and k=4th moment about the mean.

1. Max value within each particular time window {max 1, max 2 …… max n}
2. Minimum value within each time window {min 1, min 2 ……. min n}.
3. Derivatives of the minimum and maximum values by dividing the time window in half and measuring the values from either half of the window.
4. Performing the min and max derivatives a second time on the presplit window, resulting in the derivatives of every 0.25s time window.
5. For every min, max, and mean value of the four 0.25s time windows, the Euclidean distance between them is measured. For example, the maximum value of time window one of four has its 1D Euclidean distance measured between it and max values of windows two, three, and four of four.
6. From the 150 features generated from quarter-second min, max, and mean derivatives, the last six features are ignored and thus a 12x12 (144) feature matrix can be generated. Using the Logarithmic Covariance matrix model [51], a log-cov vector and thus statistical features can be generated for the data as such.

Text

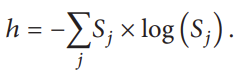
Description automatically generated with low confidence

U returns the upper triangular features of the resultant vector and the covariance matrix (cov(M)) is

Text

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1. For each full 1s time window, the Shannon Entropy is measured and considered as a statistical feature:



The complexity of the data is summed up as such, where h is the statistical feature and S relates to each signal within the time window after normalization of values.

1. For each 0.5s time window, the log-energy entropy is measured as

A picture containing text, watch, clock

Description automatically generatedw

where i is the first-time window n to n+0.5 and j is the second time window n+0.5 to n+1.

1. Analysis of a spectrum is performed by an algorithm to perform Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) [52] of every recorded time window, derived as follows:

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Description automatically generated

The above statistical features are used to represent the waves. With these features considered for each electrode and time window (including those formed by overlaps), this produces a total of 2147 scalars per measure.

2.5 **Spiking Neural Network (SNNs)**

SNNs are based on the idea that information in the brain is processed and communicated through the generation of electrical signals, or spikes, by individual neurons. These neurons generate output in the form of spikes, which are discrete electrical events that occur at specific points in time. When the input signal to a neuron exceeds a certain threshold, the neuron generates a spike, which is then transmitted to other neurons in the network. Neurons in an SNN are connected by synapses, which are the connections between neurons that transmit electrical signals. In SNNs, synapses are modeled as variable strength connections that can be modified by the arrival of spikes from other neurons. SNNs can learn to recognize patterns in the input data by modifying the strengths of the synapses between neurons. When a neuron generates a spike, it can cause the strength of the synapse between it and the receiving neuron to increase or decrease, depending on the timing of the spike. SNNs represent the behavior of each neuron and synapse using mathematical equations and simulating the flow of electrical spikes through the network over time.

# 3. Experimental/Modeling Design

Due to the complexity, randomness, and non-stationary aspects of brainwave data, classification is very difficult with a raw EEG stream. For this reason, stationary techniques such as time windowing must be introduced alongside feature extraction of the data within a window. There are many statistics that can be derived from such EEG windows, each of which has varying classification efficacy depending on the goal. Feature engineering must be performed to identify useful statistics from the EEG signals.

As mentioned in the Preselection section of the background, temporal statistical extraction was performed on the EEG signals using the above mentioned 12 feature engineering techniques from the sliding time windows of length 1 second with an overlap of 0.5 seconds. This resulted in 2548 individual features.

**Feature Selection:**

The resulting number of features is too large to be used in real time (i.e., it would be computationally intensive) and would not yield good classification results because of the large dimensionality. Attribute selection is therefore performed to overcome these limitations and, additionally, make the training process significantly faster. Attribute selection or feature selection is a method that identifies a significant subset of features by eliminating redundant features. This can improve the model performance, reduce model overfitting, reduce computational processing costs and can also speed up the model training and processing time.

The data was min-max normalized, and a Random Forest (RF) based feature selection technique was used on the 2548 features. 255 significant features were identified using the forest’s feature importance.

**Spiking Neural Network propagation:**

Chart, scatter chart

Description automatically generated

**Figure 3. [5]** Structure of the proposed brain-inspired spiking neural network architecture for emotion classification. The responses from the 255 significant features are encoded into spiking data and presented to an 255 × 80 × 30 X 3 spiking neural networks (SNN).

There are many different ways to implement spiking neural networks. One way to approach this is to follow the model that faithfully recreates the system of variables and equations that govern a biological neuron. While such a model may be most accurate to real life, it is also the most computationally intensive way to implement. Additionally, for a classification problem, it is difficult to translate a spiking output from time series data into discrete categories.

Another approach to spiking neural networks focuses less on fidelity and more on capturing the general idea of a neuron without sacrificing performance. The leaky integrate-and-fire neuron hardly qualifies as biologically accurate [Lapicque]. However, it is good enough to be useful in practical applications such as classification.

While backpropagation does not directly translate to any biological process, it is so prevalent in machine learning that many implementations of spiking neural networks use it to train supervised models. This mismatch is especially apparent when considering the difficulty of obtaining a gradient for spiking neural networks, since spiking neurons are not differentiable. Therefore, a pseudo gradient is used to aid in backpropagation.

In our work, we tried to recreate such a faithful model. In the process, the above normalized data from the significant features were encoded into spike trains with 50 timesteps. A Leaky integrate-and-Fire(LIF) neuron model was used to model the neurons of our Spiking Neural Network with an input layer of dimension 255 , two hidden layers and one output layer containing 3 output nodes representing the emotional states was built. These encoded spike trains are propagated through the network and the cross-entropy loss is calculated. The loss was used to optimize the network weights using stochastic gradient descent optimization technique as a process of back propagation. The synaptic connections between neurons will be modeled as conductance-based synapses. The strength of the synapses will be adjusted during training using a spike-timing-dependent plasticity (STDP) rule, such as the one proposed by Song et al. (2000)[6]. The STDP rule will ensure that the synaptic weights are adjusted in a way that strengthens connections between neurons that fire together and weakens connections between neurons that fire out of sync.

# 4. Results and Discussion

There are many neural signal processing studies done with various datasets using traditional high computational models but spiking neural network has proven to be a reliable model even though being a low computational model. Our Random Survival Forest model used for feature selection has also shown significant results. Below are some of the alternative’s studies in this field.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Study** | **Method** | **Accuracy** |
| Bos, et al. [7] | Fisher’s Discriminant | 94.9 |
| Li, et al. [8] | Common Spatial Patterns | 93.5 |
| Li, et al | Linear SVM | 93 |
| Zheng, et al. [9] | Deep Belief Network | 87.62 |
| Koelstra, et al. [10] | Common Spatial Patterns | 58.8 |
| *This study* | Random Forest model | 98.7 |
| *This study* | Spiking Neural Network | 88.56 |

Table 5. An Indirect Comparison of this Study to Similar Works Performed on Different Dataset

Using the spiking neural network model, the testing accuracy reached 88.56%, which is lower than the 98% baseline using the original random forest classifier. One reason for this performance could be that the EEG dataset has already been heavily filtered and processed such that the spiking neural network could not benefit from the time series nature of the data. Indeed, the paper that originally put forward the dataset mentioned that the data was preprocessed to render it more suitable to a conventional machine learning algorithm. If the original time series data were available, a spiking network may have more success using it. Other alternative approaches to improve the accuracy could be to

1. Using additional datasets to train as SNNs typically require a larger dataset to achieve high accuracy compared to traditional machine learning algorithms. This is because SNNs learn by adjusting the strengths of connections between neurons, which can require more data to achieve accurate representations of the input.
2. Adjust the architecture of your network: There are many different architectural choices to make when building an SNN, including the number of layers, the number of neurons in each layer, and the connectivity pattern between neurons. Experimenting with different architectures can help you find the optimal design for your dataset.
3. Adjust the parameters of your network: There are many different parameters to tune in an SNN, including the learning rate, weight initialization, and regularization strength. Experimenting with different values for these parameters can help you find the optimal settings for your dataset.
4. Using different neuron models and different neuron activations

Many further improvements could be made to the existing models which can give amazing results and as future scope of the project we shall implement this architecture to other EEG datasets to understand the limitations and capabilities of this model.

# 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, our study explored the potential of using a Spiking Neural Network model to estimate the emotional state of a person into positive, neutral and negative using EEG brain waves as input. The results showed that the SNN model achieved an accuracy of 87% on our test dataset, which is comparable to some of the best available models. The use of spiking neural networks has shown great promise in real-time data analysis, especially in situations where power usage and computational capabilities are limited. This study demonstrates the potential of using SNNs for other real-world applications, such as monitoring and treating patients with neurological disorders and restoring muscle and cognitive function through neural prosthetics. Further research can be conducted to improve the accuracy of the SNN model and explore other potential applications for neural signal processing. Overall, the results of this study contribute to the growing body of research on spiking neural networks and their potential use in real-time data analysis for various applications.

Some additional future research directions would involve having an enhanced understanding of brain activity and its relationship to neurological conditions and disorders. Finding ways to improve the Diagnostic capability of conditions such as epilepsy, depression, dementia, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson's disease. Improved treatment outcomes to optimize designs and advancements in brain computer interfaces developing neural prosthetics to restore function to patients with spinal cord injuries and other neurological conditions.

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# Appendix

Include all the code that you used – commented and clean.