Visvesvaraya Technological University

BELAGAVI, KARNATAKA

ವಿಶ್ವೇಶ್ವರಯ್ಯ ತಾಂತ್ರಿಕ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯ

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Technical Seminar Report on

"Securing Visual Integrity: Machine Learning Approaches for Forged Image Detection"

Submitted by

Pavan Kumar **4JN21IS067**

Under the guidance of

Mr. Pradeep H K B.E, M.Tech

Assistant Professor,

Dept. of IS&E,

JNNCE, Shivamogga

Department of Information Science & Engineering

J N N College of Engineering

Shivamogga-577204

2024-25

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This is to certify that technical seminar entitled

"Securing Visual Integrity: Machine Learning Approaches for Forged Image Detection"

Submitted by

Pavan Kumar 4JN21IS067

student of 8th semester B.E., ISE, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of Bachelor of Engineering in Information Science and Engineering under Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi during the year 2024-25.

Signature of Guide

Mr. Pradeep H K. B.E,M.Tech
Assistant Professor,
Dept. of IS&E,
JNNCE, Shivamogga

Signature of HOD

Dr. Raghavendra R.J. B.E.,M.Sc (Engg), Ph.D
Associate Professor & Head,
Dept. of IS&E,
JNNCE, Shivamogga

ABSTRACT

With the rise of advanced image editing tools and AI-generated content, ensuring the authenticity of digital images has become a critical challenge. This research explores machine learning approaches for forged image detection, focusing on copy-move forgeries, splicing forgeries, and deepfake manipulation. Traditional detection methods based on statistical analysis often fail against sophisticated alterations, necessitating the use of deep learning techniques. This study evaluates Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Autoencoders, and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for forgery detection. CNNs extract spatial features, autoencoders detect anomalies, and GANs, while used for generating realistic forgeries, also help in identifying inconsistencies in manipulated images. Additionally, feature engineering techniques like Local Binary Patterns (LBP), Discrete Wavelet Transform (DWT), and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) enhance detection accuracy. Experimental results demonstrate that deep learning-based models significantly outperform traditional methods in detecting forged images. However, challenges such as computational complexity and dataset dependency persist. Future advancements may include blockchain-based image authentication, explainable AI (XAI) models, and hybrid AI approaches for improved detection. This research highlights the importance of automated image forensics in combating digital forgery and ensuring visual integrity in media, cybersecurity, and forensic applications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On presenting the technical seminar report on **"Securing Visual Integrity: Machine Learning Approaches for Forged Image Detection"** I feel great to express my feeling of thanks to all those who have helped us directly or indirectly in the completion of the project work.

I would like to thank **Dr. Raghavendra R. J**, Associate Professor and Head of Dept of IS&E, JNNCE, Shivamogga and **Dr. Y. Vijaya Kumar**, Principal JNNCE, Shivamogga for their support and encouragement.

I would like to thank our respected guide **Mr. Pradeep H K**, Assistant Professor, Department of IS&E for his continuous encouragement and guidance.

I would like to thank our technical seminar Co-ordinators for their support. I am grateful to Dept of Information Science and Engineering and our institution JNN College of Engineering for imparting us the knowledge with which we could do our best.

Finally, I would like to thank the whole teaching and non- teaching staff of Information Science and Engineering Department.

PAVAN KUMAR 4JN21IS067

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Image Forgery: Risks and the Need for Detection

With the widespread use of digital media and advanced image editing tools, image forgery has become a significant threat to visual integrity, posing risks in areas such as journalism, forensics, cybersecurity, and identity verification. Image manipulation techniques such as copy-move forgeries, splicing, and deepfake generation enable the creation of misleading or fraudulent content, which can be used for disinformation, legal fraud, and other malicious activities. Unlike traditional counterfeiting methods, digital forgeries often remain undetected by the human eye, making automated detection systems a necessity. Studies indicate that forged images contribute to misinformation in over 60% of manipulated media cases, demonstrating the urgent need for reliable detection mechanisms.

The rise of deep learning-based forgeries such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) has significantly increased the complexity of detecting manipulated images. Conventional image forensic techniques, which rely on statistical analysis, error-level analysis (ELA), and metadata inspection, often fail to detect advanced deepfake forgeries due to their ability to mimic realistic textures, lighting, and facial expressions. Machine learning approaches, particularly deep learning models like Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have emerged as powerful tools in detecting forged images by identifying inconsistencies at a pixel, texture, or pattern level.

Existing image forgery detection methods can be broadly categorized into pixel-based, statistical, and deep learning-based approaches. Pixel-based techniques analyze artifacts in image compression and noise patterns, while statistical approaches examine inconsistencies in image histograms and frequency domains. However, these methods often struggle with highly sophisticated forgeries. Deep learning models, particularly CNNs and Autoencoders, offer superior accuracy by automatically extracting key image features and identifying anomalies without manual feature engineering.

With the advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and deep learning, real-time image forgery detection has become more practical and effective. AI-powered systems leverage computer vision techniques to analyze texture patterns, edge artifacts, and frequency

inconsistencies to determine image authenticity. Recent deep learning architectures, including CNN-based feature extraction models, have demonstrated high efficiency in classifying manipulated vs. authentic images. These AI-driven solutions provide higher detection accuracy, robustness against various forgery techniques, and adaptability to evolving threats, making them ideal for deployment in forensic investigations, digital watermarking, and content verification platforms.

In this context, our research introduces ForgeryDetectNet, a lightweight CNN-based model optimized for real-time image forgery detection with limited training data. Unlike conventional deep learning models that require large-scale datasets and high computational power, ForgeryDetectNet employs a shallow yet effective CNN structure that enhances detection efficiency while reducing resource constraints. The proposed system extracts image features using frequency analysis and edge detection techniques, ensuring precise identification of forged regions. By adopting a computationally efficient design, ForgeryDetectNet achieves real-time detection with high accuracy, making it suitable for practical deployment in digital forensic tools and media authentication systems.

The importance of AI-powered forgery detection extends beyond individual applications. Law enforcement agencies, media organizations, and cybersecurity firms can integrate such technologies to combat misinformation, prevent digital fraud, and enforce content authenticity. Additionally, the integration of image forgery detection with blockchain-based authentication systems enhances digital content verification by ensuring tamper-proof records. Despite the significant progress in AI-driven forgery detection, challenges such as dataset biases, generalizability across diverse forgery types, and adversarial attacks remain key areas for further research. The increasing adoption of AI-based visual integrity solutions highlights the need for robust, scalable, and real-time forgery detection models. Our proposed framework bridges the gap between high-performance deep learning models and real-world constraints, offering a lightweight yet effective solution for ensuring digital image authenticity.

Open-source development and shared datasets can also accelerate innovation and promote transparency within the research community. As visual content continues to proliferate across digital platforms, the demand for intelligent and trustworthy forgery detection tools will only grow stronger. Ultimately, safeguarding visual authenticity is not just a technical challenge, but a societal imperative in the digital age.

1.2 AI-Powered Forgery Detection: Motivation and Contributions

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in digital forensics has revolutionized image forgery detection, enabling real-time, automated solutions. AI-powered techniques utilize deep learning models and computer vision algorithms to analyze visual inconsistencies, distinguishing between genuine and manipulated images. Traditional approaches, such as pixel-based analysis and statistical methods, struggle to detect sophisticated forgeries like deepfakes and copy-move attacks due to their evolving complexity. Recent research has explored deep learning architectures, including Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Vision Transformers (ViTs), and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), for image forgery detection. While these models achieve high accuracy, they often require extensive computational resources and large training datasets, making them impractical for lightweight, real-time applications.

To address these challenges, this research proposes a novel CNN-based forgery detection framework optimized for efficiency and real-time deployment. Unlike conventional deep learning methods that process entire images, the proposed model focuses on extracting localized features from manipulated regions, reducing computational overhead while maintaining high detection accuracy.

Fig 1.1 Generalized structure of the model

The key motivations behind this research include:

- **Enhancing Digital Security:** By offering a reliable, automated forgery detection pipeline, the framework helps protect against digital misinformation, fraud, and cybercrime, ensuring the integrity of visual content.
- **Developing a Lightweight Architecture:** Unlike deep, resource-heavy models, the proposed system uses a shallow CNN design optimized for edge computing. It

enables real-time processing on low-power devices without compromising performance.

- **Achieving High Accuracy with Limited Data:** Recognizing the scarcity of annotated forensic datasets, this model demonstrates strong generalization with minimal training samples. This makes it feasible for domains where data availability is limited or annotation is costly.

Despite its advantages, the proposed framework faces challenges in generalizing across diverse forgery types, image formats, lighting conditions, and resolution scales. Forgery detection remains an adversarial domain, where forgers continuously evolve techniques to bypass detection.

To address these limitations, future research will focus on:

- **Integrating Attention Mechanisms**: Enhancing the model's focus on suspicious regions using self-attention layers or Vision Transformers.
- **Hybrid Architectures**: Combining CNNs with recurrent or transformer-based modules for capturing temporal inconsistencies in video forensics.
- **Multi-modal Analysis**: Incorporating metadata, file signatures, and sensor noise patterns to enrich detection beyond visual content.
- **Adversarial Robustness**: Training the model using adversarial examples to resist evasion techniques used by sophisticated attackers.

While this approach improves detection accuracy and efficiency, challenges remain in generalizing the model across diverse image manipulations and varying resolutions. Future research will explore hybrid models integrating attention mechanisms and multi-modal analysis to enhance robustness against adversarial forgeries. By developing an AI-powered, scalable, and real-time forgery detection system, this research contributes to strengthening digital integrity and combating visual misinformation in an increasingly manipulated digital landscape. Further enhancements could include domain adaptation techniques to allow the model to perform reliably across various image sources and compression levels. Incorporating explainable AI (XAI) strategies will also help increase transparency and trust in the model's decisions, particularly in legal and forensic contexts. Additionally, efforts will be made to minimize false positives by refining the model's sensitivity to benign image edits such as cropping or colour adjustment.

1.3 Problem Description

Image forgery is a growing concern in digital media, contributing to misinformation, identity theft, and fraudulent activities across various domains, including journalism, social media, and financial transactions. With advancements in image editing tools and deep learning-based manipulation techniques, forged images are becoming increasingly sophisticated, making it difficult to distinguish between authentic and manipulated content. Unlike traditional forms of digital fraud, image forgery is often subtle and visually convincing, making manual detection unreliable and time-consuming.

One of the primary challenges in combating image forgery is the lack of an automated and accurate detection system that can analyze various types of forgeries, such as copy-move, splicing, and deepfake manipulations. Many existing approaches rely on handcrafted features or traditional forensic techniques, which struggle to detect complex alterations, especially in high-resolution and adversarially manipulated images. Moreover, deep learning-based forgery detection models, while highly effective, often require extensive computational resources and large-scale labeled datasets, limiting their real-world applicability.

Forgery detection methods can generally be categorized into pixel-based, statistical, and deep learning-based techniques. Pixel-based methods analyze inconsistencies in color, texture, or compression artifacts but often fail against advanced forgeries. Statistical methods, such as analyzing image noise patterns or frequency-domain features, provide additional clues but may not generalize well across diverse manipulations. Deep learning-based approaches leverage Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Vision Transformers (ViTs) for forgery classification, but their reliance on massive labeled datasets and computationally expensive training hinders real-time deployment.

The increasing need for a lightweight, efficient, and scalable forgery detection system has driven research towards optimized AI models that can operate in real-time without sacrificing accuracy. However, challenges remain in ensuring robustness against adversarial attacks, varying image quality, and different types of forgeries. Addressing these limitations is crucial in making forgery detection systems more accessible and reliable, ultimately strengthening digital security and combating misinformation on a global scale.

1.4 Objectives and Contributions

The increasing prevalence of image forgery in digital media highlights the urgent need for effective, automated forgery detection systems that can identify manipulated images with high accuracy. While traditional forensic approaches and handcrafted feature-based techniques have been explored in past research, they often struggle against sophisticated forgery techniques such as deepfakes, copy-move forgeries, and splicing attacks. Additionally, deep learning-based solutions require extensive computational resources and large labeled datasets, limiting their real-world application. There is a need for a lightweight, accurate, and efficient AI-powered forgery detection system that can operate across different image manipulation techniques while remaining computationally feasible.

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To develop an AI-powered forgery detection system leveraging deep learning and computer vision techniques while ensuring computational efficiency for real-time applications.
- To analyze and compare various deep learning architectures, including CNN-based and Vision Transformer-based models, for detecting forged images.
- To extract and analyze tampering artifacts using frequency-domain and spatial-domain features to enhance detection performance.
- To optimize hyperparameters such as batch size, learning rate, and number of epochs to improve model accuracy and robustness.
- To benchmark the proposed model against state-of-the-art forgery detection techniques in terms of accuracy, inference time, and computational cost.
- To evaluate the impact of limited training data on model generalization and propose strategies such as data augmentation and transfer learning to improve detection performance.

Key Contributions

This study presents several novel contributions to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of AI-powered forgery detection systems:

1. Lightweight and Efficient Deep Learning Architecture

- Existing deep learning models, such as VGG-19, ResNet-50, and Vision Transformers (ViTs), offer high accuracy but are computationally expensive.
- This study explores a shallow CNN-based approach optimized for forgery detection, reducing computational overhead while maintaining high classification accuracy.

2. Feature Extraction Using Multi-Domain Analysis
    - Instead of relying solely on pixel-based analysis, this study incorporates spatial and frequency-domain features to detect subtle inconsistencies in forged images.
    - Techniques such as Discrete Wavelet Transform (DWT) and Fourier Transform-based analysis are leveraged to detect tampering traces effectively.
3. Performance Benchmarking Against Pre-Trained Models
    - A comparative analysis is conducted between the proposed shallow CNN model and state-of-the-art pre-trained models, including EfficientNet, MobileNetV2, and Vision Transformers.
    - The models are evaluated on accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and inference time to determine the best trade-off between performance and computational cost.
4. Hyperparameter Optimization for Enhanced Accuracy
    - The study examines the effect of various hyperparameters, including:
        - Batch sizes (4, 8, 16, 32)
        - Learning rates (0.1, 0.01, 0.001, 0.0001)
        - Epochs (10, 25, 50, 100)
        - Optimizers (Adam, RMSprop, SGD, Adagrad, Adadelta)
    - The optimal settings are identified to maximize detection accuracy while minimizing computational complexity.

5. Real-World Applicability and Scalability

    - By demonstrating high accuracy even with limited training data, the study highlights the potential for real-world deployment in social media forensics, law enforcement, and financial fraud detection.
    - The lightweight architecture ensures that the system can be integrated into digital forensic tools, anti-misinformation frameworks, and automated content verification pipelines.

This study contributes to the advancement of AI-driven forgery detection by proposing a computationally efficient and scalable solution that can effectively identify manipulated images with high accuracy. The findings pave the way for future research in robust deepfake detection, adversarial attack resistance, and real-time content authenticity verification.

1.5 Organization of the Report

This report is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the topic, outlining the motivation, problem description, research objectives, and key contributions of the study focused on AI-powered image forgery detection. Chapter 2 presents a literature survey, reviewing existing techniques in image forgery detection, including both traditional forensic approaches and recent advancements using deep learning models, and identifies key research gaps. Chapter 3 details the system design and implementation, describing the proposed shallow CNN architecture, data preprocessing steps, feature extraction using facial landmarks or frequency components, and hyperparameter tuning methods to optimize model performance. Chapter 4 discusses the experimental results and analysis, presenting performance metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, along with comparative evaluations against pre-trained models and discussions on the model's generalization with limited data. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing key findings, highlighting the real-world applicability of the proposed solution, and suggesting future research directions, followed by a list of references.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE SURVEY

[1] Image Forgery Detection Techniques: Latest Trends and Key Challenges

Authors: Dr. Poulomi Deb, Dr. Subhrajyoti Deb, Dr. Abhijit Das, Dr. Nirmalya Kar

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the latest trends and major challenges in the domain of image forgery detection. With the exponential growth in image editing tools and deep learning techniques, image forgery has become easier and more widespread, thus emphasizing the need for robust and accurate detection mechanisms. The research primarily categorizes image forgery techniques into two types: active and passive. Active techniques require pre-embedded information such as watermarks or signatures, whereas passive techniques do not rely on any prior information, making them more versatile for real-world applications.

The paper extensively discusses passive detection techniques, including copy-move forgery, splicing, resampling, and deep learning-based approaches. Each technique is evaluated based on its strengths, limitations, and applicable scenarios. Copy-move forgery detection typically uses block-based or keypoint-based methods, employing algorithms like PCA, DCT, SIFT, and SURF. Splicing detection relies on inconsistencies in lighting, color, or edges. Resampling detection leverages interpolation artifacts introduced during image resizing or rotation. In addition, the paper highlights the increasing application of convolutional neural networks (CNNs) in detecting sophisticated and subtle forgery patterns.

The paper also presents the challenges faced by researchers in this domain, such as dealing with high-resolution images, compression artifacts, and adversarial attacks. It notes that while machine learning and deep learning offer improved accuracy, they also introduce complexity in terms of model training and dataset preparation. The lack of standard datasets and benchmarks is another limitation discussed. The paper concludes by stressing the need for hybrid methods that combine traditional image processing with deep learning to achieve better performance across diverse scenarios.

Advantages:

• Covers both traditional and modern (deep learning) approaches to image forgery detection.

- Provides detailed classification of forgery types and detection techniques.
- Identifies current research gaps and challenges, guiding future research directions.

Disadvantages:

- Deep learning-based methods require large annotated datasets and extensive computational.
- Detection accuracy may degrade under compression or post-processing effects.
- Limited discussion on real-time implementation and performance in practical environments.

[2] Image Forgery Detection Using Deep Learning

Authors: Prof. D. D. Pukale, Prof. V. D. Kulkarni, Julekha Bagwan, Pranali Jagadale, Sanjivani More

The methodology involves preprocessing the image dataset followed by training a CNN model to detect forged regions. The CNN is designed to learn hierarchical features from images that help differentiate between authentic and tampered regions. The dataset used includes both authentic and forged images, with augmentation techniques applied to enhance model robustness. The model undergoes training and validation to achieve optimal accuracy and reduce false positives. The network architecture includes multiple convolutional and pooling layers followed by fully connected layers to perform binary classification (forged or original). The system outputs a prediction along with a heatmap highlighting the manipulated regions.

The study emphasizes the challenges of detecting forgeries due to the subtle nature of some manipulations and the diversity of forgery techniques. It also highlights the advantage of deep learning methods in automatically extracting complex features, eliminating the need for manual feature engineering. Experimental results demonstrate that the CNN-based model achieves high detection accuracy and outperforms traditional feature-based approaches. The authors suggest that the model can be further improved using Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for synthetic forgery generation and robust model training.

Advantages:

- Utilizes CNNs for automatic feature extraction and classification of forged images.
- Capable of localizing tampered regions using heatmaps, aiding in visual analysis.
- Provides high accuracy and scalability for large image datasets.

Disadvantages:

• Model performance may degrade on unseen forgery types or novel manipulation techniques.

• Requires a large and diverse dataset for training to ensure robustness.

• May not detect very subtle or well-camouflaged forgeries effectively without enhancement techniques.

[3] Detection of Forged Images Using a Combination of Passive Methods Based on Neural Networks

Authors: Ancilon Leuch Alencar, Marcelo Dornbusch Lopes, Anita Maria da Rocha Fernandes, Julio Cesar Santos dos Anjos, Juan Francisco De Paz Santana, and Valderi Reis Quietinho Leithardt

This paper addresses the increasing problem of image manipulation due to the proliferation of social media and the advancement of image editing tools. It discusses the two main approaches to image manipulation detection: active methods, which embed structures into images for later verification, and passive methods, which analyze the image content for signs of manipulationThe authors propose a novel solution using a multi-stream neural network architecture that combines three convolutional neural networks (CNNs) to analyze different aspects of the image

The approach involves using two passive detection methodologies to create separate data streams, along with a third stream that processes the original, unaltered image.Each CNN processes its respective stream, and their outputs are combined to determine if the image has been manipulatedThe study also introduces a new dataset composed of a combination of four publicly available datasets, featuring realistically manipulated images.

The paper emphasizes that this dataset is more representative of real-world manipulation scenarios compared to algorithmically generated datasetsThe results of their approach demonstrated improved accuracy and robustness in detecting image forgeries.

Advantages:

- Presents a novel multi-stream neural network architecture for image forgery detection.
- Utilizes a dataset of realistically manipulated images, enhancing the model's ability to generalize.

- Combines traditional passive detection methods with deep learning.

Disadvantages:

- The method does not provide specific information about the location or type of tampering.
- The dataset creation was limited by the availability of humanly manipulated images.

[4] Image forgery detection: a survey of recent deep-learning approaches

Authors: Marcello Zanardelli, Fabrizio Guerrini, Riccardo Leonardi, Nicola Adami

This paper surveys recent image forgery detection methods, focusing on deep learning techniques for copy-move and splicing attacks. The authors note the increase in fake and altered images due to the availability of image editing tools. They discuss both active and passive methods, with a focus on deep learning techniques.

The survey covers common forgery types like copy-move, splicing, inpainting, DeepFakes, and CGI-generated images. It also details traditional passive forgery detection methods and then delves into deep learning approaches, analyzing their strengths, limitations, and performance.

Advantages:

- Provides a comprehensive overview of both traditional and deep learning methods for image forgery detection.
- Discusses various types of image forgeries, including recent DeepFake techniques.
- Analyzes the performance of deep learning methods and the datasets used for training and testing.

Disadvantages:

- Points out the challenges in comparing different methods due to variations in datasets and evaluation metrics.
- Discusses the difficulty in creating large, realistic datasets for training deep learning models.
- Notes that DeepFake detection remains a challenging area with performance that needs improvement.

[5] Detection of Image Tampering Using Deep Learning, Error Levels and Noise Residuals

Authors: Sunen Chakraborty, Kingshuk Chatterjee, Paramita Dey

This paper addresses the increasing problem of image tampering due to the widespread use of image-editing software. The authors emphasize that deep learning models are effective tools for detecting hidden signs of tampering in images because they can automatically extract intricate features.

The authors propose a dual-branch Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) that combines traditional handcrafted features with deep learning to differentiate between genuine and forged images. The two branches of the CNN are fed with Error Level Analysis (ELA) images and noise residuals from the Spatial Rich Model (SRM). They used the CASIA dataset for their experiments.

The paper highlights that their hybrid approach, using deep learning with ELA and SRM, can achieve better results in detecting tampered images.

Advantages:

- Presents a dual-branch network model for classifying real and tampered images.
- Combines features from Error Level Analysis and Spatial Rich Model to train the deep learning model.
- The model is designed to be small, easy to understand and implement, and suitable for resource-constrained environments.
- Experimental results show that the proposed model performs well compared to other image tampering classification methods.

Disadvantages:

- The model classifies images as real or tampered but does not detect or localize the specific area of tampering.
- The method relies on JPEG images as ELA is most effective with lossy compression formats. This means the model's effectiveness might be limited with lossless formats like PNG.

- The paper mentions that ELA can give uncertain results if a forger uses heavy post-processing.

[6] Image Forgery Detection System using VGG16 UNET Model

Authors: Ravi Raj Choudhary, Salvi Paliwala, Gaurav Meena

This paper addresses the growing concern of image forgery, exacerbated by the easy availability of advanced image manipulation tools. The authors propose a deep learning-based approach combining Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) with Error Level Analysis (ELA) to detect tampered images. Transfer learning with the UNET architecture is employed to localize forged areas within the image.

The methodology involves extracting ELA features from input images and feeding them into a CNN pipeline. The UNET model is trained to highlight manipulated regions. Additionally, the study presents a user-friendly graphical user interface (GUI) to assist users in determining image authenticity.

Advantages:

- Presents a hybrid method that integrates CNN with ELA for forgery detection.
- Effectively uses transfer learning and UNET for tampered region localization.
- Offers a GUI-based application, making the system usable for non-expert users.

Disadvantages:

- Does not clearly outline limitations of the proposed method.
- Focuses mainly on image splicing, limiting applicability to other forgery types.
- May struggle with advanced or subtle forgeries.
- ELA-based detection can be affected by image compression.
- Lacks evaluation on diverse, real-world datasets.

CHAPTER 3

SYSTEM DESIGN

3.1 Overview of the Architecture

The architecture of the proposed Image Forgery Detection System is designed to efficiently detect manipulated or tampered images using a sequence of processing stages integrated with a deep learning model. The architecture ensures that every input image is standardized, analyzed, and classified with high accuracy by utilizing both image processing techniques and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs).

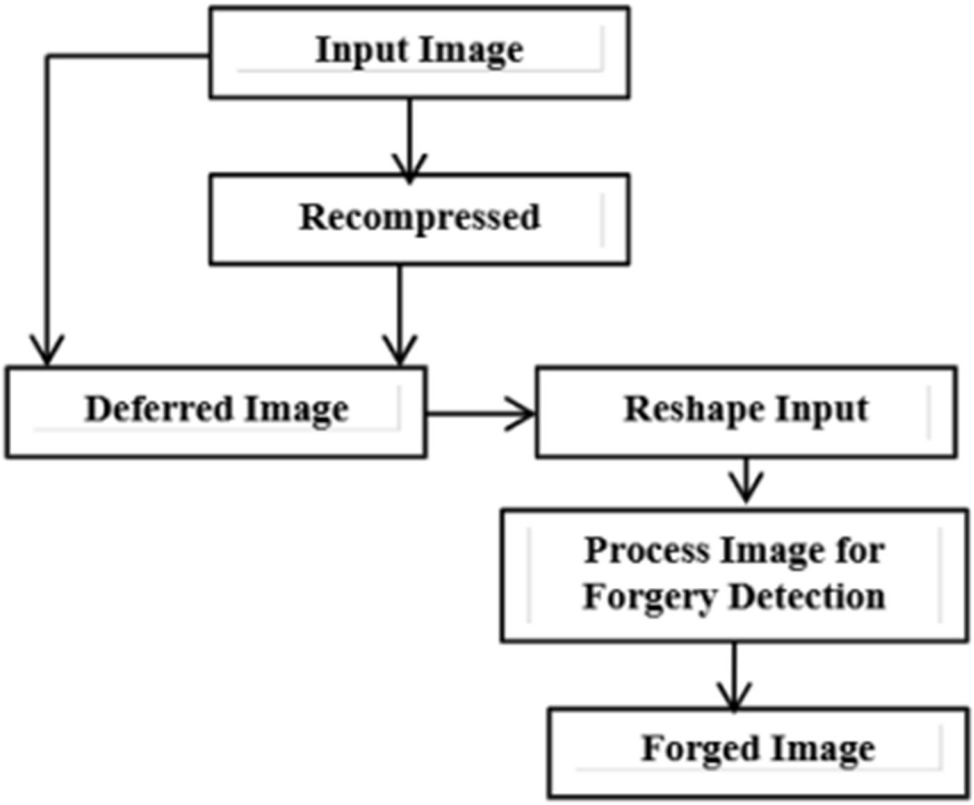

Fig 3.1 Block Diagram of Image Forgery Detection System

The system follows a modular design consisting of the following key components:

1. Input Image Acquisition

The process begins with the ingestion of the input image, which may vary in format (e.g., JPEG, PNG, BMP) and resolution. This image is assumed to be potentially tampered and is subjected to scrutiny. The system is designed to handle both color and grayscale images,

ensuring compatibility across different input types. At this stage, metadata may also be extracted for auxiliary forensic use (e.g., EXIF data analysis).

2. Recompression Module

One of the key innovations of this system lies in the JPEG recompression module, which deliberately re-saves the image using controlled compression parameters. This simulates a common post-processing behavior seen in tampered images—where after manipulation, the image is saved again, often introducing new or exaggerated artifacts. These artifacts, such as block boundary misalignments and irregular DCT coefficients, are instrumental in revealing hidden tampering. This module helps in differentiating between naturally compressed content and suspicious recompressed regions.

3. Deferred Image Handling

The recompressed version of the input, referred to as the **Deferred Image**, retains crucial compression-based clues that may not be visible in the original. This image serves as an enhanced representation for forensic analysis. It encapsulates both the visual structure and compression footprints, and is passed to the subsequent units for more rigorous processing.

4. Preprocessing Unit

To ensure compatibility with the deep learning model, the image undergoes preprocessing which includes:

- **Noise Reduction** – Eliminates high-frequency noise or compression-induced distortions using Gaussian or median filters.
- **Image Resizing** – Standardizes image dimensions (e.g., 224×224) for uniform input across the CNN layers.
- **Color Space Conversion** – Converts RGB images into more analysis-friendly color spaces like YCbCr or HSV, which are effective in separating chrominance and luminance information—critical for detecting forgery.
- **Filtering** – Applies edge-enhancing and contrast-adjusting filters to emphasize areas of potential manipulation.

5. Input Reshaping Layer

After preprocessing, the image is reshaped to conform to the required input shape of the CNN. This includes expanding dimensions to fit batch processing or converting to the necessary number of channels. The reshaping ensures consistent data flow during both training and inference, reducing architectural errors and computational inconsistencies.**6. 6**

6. CNN-based Processing Block

This stage represents the core intelligence of the system, comprising a deep CNN model such as VGG16, ResNet50, or a custom lightweight CNN designed for efficiency:

- **Feature Extraction**: Multiple convolutional layers extract low-level features (edges, lines, textures) and high-level semantics (object boundaries, unnatural patterns).
- **Forgery Pattern Recognition**: The CNN learns to detect complex manipulative operations—such as splicing boundaries, cloned textures, irregular lighting, or inconsistent compression patterns.
- **Training & Adaptation**: The network is trained on a diverse dataset of authentic and tampered images, learning to adapt to various forgery methods, including subtle edits that are hard to detect visually.

7. Output Layer

The final layer of the system produces the classification result:

- **Forged Image:** Indicates manipulation based on detected visual and compression anomalies.
- **Authentic Image:** Suggests no evidence of tampering, based on the model's confidence and learned patterns.

3.2 Methodology

This methodology outlines a hybrid framework for image forgery detection that combines the power of Deep Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) with the precision of JPEG compression artifact analysis. The objective is to effectively identify image manipulations by detecting both visual distortions and compression inconsistencies that commonly arise in tampered media. The integration of data-driven deep learning with traditional forensic

features offers a comprehensive solution for robust and accurate classification of digital images as either authentic or forged.

1. Dataset Compilation and Preprocessing

The initial phase involves compiling a comprehensive dataset that includes a balanced mix of authentic and forged images. Forged images encompass a variety of tampering types such as copy-move, splicing, object removal, and region cloning. To ensure the generalizability of the model, the dataset includes images from multiple sources with varying resolutions, lighting conditions, and compression qualities.

To prepare the data for training, several preprocessing steps are employed:

- **Resizing**: All images are resized to a fixed resolution (e.g., 256×256 or 224×224 pixels) to standardize the input shape required by the CNN model. This ensures consistent feature extraction across the dataset.
- **Standardization**: The pixel values are normalized, typically scaled to the [0, 1] range or standardized using mean subtraction and division by standard deviation. This normalization speeds up the training process and stabilizes gradient descent during backpropagation.
- **Data Augmentation**: To improve model robustness and prevent overfitting, various augmentation techniques are applied. These include horizontal and vertical flipping, random rotation, cropping, zooming, brightness and contrast adjustments, and Gaussian noise injection. These variations simulate real-world conditions and make the model more resilient to subtle tampering techniques.
- **Class Balancing**: In cases where there is a class imbalance (e.g., more authentic images than forged ones), oversampling or under-sampling techniques are used to ensure fair model training. Alternatively, synthetic forged samples may be generated using controlled editing tools to balance the dataset.
- **JPEG Compression Simulation**: To further aid in artifact analysis, images are also saved at various JPEG compression levels. This allows the model to learn how compression affects tampered versus untampered regions and enhances its sensitivity to recompression anomalies.

3.3 CNN Architecture for Forgery Detection

Convolutional Layers

The foundation of a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) lies in its convolutional layers, which are designed to automatically and adaptively learn spatial hierarchies of features. These layers apply multiple learnable filters (kernels) across the input image, capturing a wide range of visual characteristics. Early layers typically detect basic features such as edges, corners, and textures, while deeper layers extract higher-level patterns such as shapes, object boundaries, and region-specific inconsistencies. Each convolution operation is typically followed by a non-linear activation function like ReLU (Rectified Linear Unit), which introduces non-linearity and allows the network to model complex relationships within the image data. Batch normalization is also commonly applied to stabilize and accelerate training by normalizing the output of activation functions.

Pooling Layers

Following the convolutional layers, pooling layers—most often max pooling—are used to reduce the dimensionality of feature maps. This downsampling operation not only decreases computational cost but also helps achieve translational invariance, meaning the model becomes less sensitive to small shifts or distortions in the image. By summarizing local regions of the feature map, pooling retains the most prominent features while discarding less relevant details. This is especially useful in forgery detection, where subtle changes like cloned regions or spliced patches need to be identified across different scales and positions.

Fully Connected Layers

Once the image features have been sufficiently abstracted through convolution and pooling, the resulting feature maps are flattened into a one-dimensional vector and passed into fully connected (dense) layers. These layers perform the high-level reasoning required for classification. They integrate and interpret the learned spatial features to make a final prediction. The last dense layer typically employs a sigmoid activation function for binary classification tasks—classifying an image as either forged or authentic—or a softmax function for multi-class scenarios. Dropout is often used between dense layers during training to prevent overfitting by randomly disabling a fraction of neurons, thus enhancing generalization.

Feature Learning

One of the most powerful capabilities of CNNs in forgery detection lies in their ability to automatically learn discriminative features that are difficult to define manually. During training, the network adjusts its internal weights through backpropagation to minimize classification error. This learning process enables the CNN to detect subtle artifacts such as blurring, compression anomalies, unnatural edges, and texture mismatches—clues that are often indicative of image manipulation. Over time, the network becomes proficient at recognizing even sophisticated tampering techniques, adapting to different forgery types without the need for handcrafted features.

Advanced Architectures and Transfer Learning

Modern CNN architectures like VGGNet, ResNet, and EfficientNet have further improved forgery detection performance by introducing deeper and more optimized network designs. Techniques such as residual connections (in ResNet) help in training deeper networks by mitigating vanishing gradient problems. Additionally, transfer learning allows these networks to leverage knowledge learned from large-scale image datasets (e.g., ImageNet) and fine-tune their weights for forgery detection using relatively smaller forensic datasets. This approach drastically reduces training time while improving accuracy and robustness, especially when dealing with limited annotated data.

3.4 Evaluation Metrics

To evaluate the performance of the model, several metrics are computed during training and testing phases:

- **Accuracy:** Measures the overall correctness of predictions.
- **Precision:** Indicates the proportion of true forgeries among those predicted as forged.
- **Recall:** Measures the ability to identify all forged images.
- **F1-score:** Balances precision and recall.
- **ROC Curve and AUC:** Visualizes the trade-off between true positive and false positive rates.

These metrics ensure the model achieves high reliability and low false-positive rates. Once trained, the model is validated using a separate validation set to tune hyperparameters and

avoid overfitting. Finally, it is tested on a previously unseen test dataset to evaluate its ability to generalize. The model predicts whether the input image is authentic or forged, based on the learned features and observed artifacts.

3.5 JPEG Compression and Its Role in Forgery Detection

JPEG compression is a widely adopted technique used to reduce the file size of digital images, particularly photographs. It operates by exploiting the limitations of the human visual system, selectively discarding visual information that the eye is less sensitive to, especially in high-frequency regions. The compression process involves several steps, including dividing the image into 8×8 pixel blocks, applying the Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT) to convert spatial pixel values into frequency domain data, and then quantizing the resulting coefficients to reduce redundancy. While this allows for efficient image storage and transmission, it introduces lossy compression artifacts—slight distortions that may go unnoticed during normal viewing but are crucial for forensic examination.

In the field of digital image forensics, these compression artifacts play a significant role in the detection of image forgery. When an image is tampered with—through splicing, object removal, or cloning—and then re-saved in JPEG format, the new compression cycle can leave behind distinct traces. Altered regions often exhibit inconsistencies in comparison to untouched parts of the image. These inconsistencies may appear as irregular DCT block patterns, misaligned block boundaries, or anomalies in quantization noise. Such differences can be subtle, but they provide forensic investigators with a powerful means to identify manipulated content.

Techniques such as Error Level Analysis (ELA), double JPEG compression detection, and DCT coefficient histogram analysis are commonly employed to reveal these inconsistencies. For instance, in cases of double compression—where an image is saved in JPEG format more than once—secondary quantization effects can lead to telltale signs such as periodic gaps in DCT coefficient distributions. Additionally, inconsistencies in JPEG quantization tables or residual compression noise can help pinpoint areas that have been edited or introduced from other sources with different compression settings. These indicators are especially effective in identifying localized tampering that may not be visible to the naked eye.

Despite its effectiveness, JPEG artifact analysis must be used cautiously. Legitimate actions, such as standard photo editing or saving an image multiple times, can also produce compression signatures similar to those introduced by tampering. Therefore, JPEG-based detection methods are most reliable when integrated with complementary techniques, such as sensor noise pattern analysis, metadata examination, or deep learning-based classifiers. When combined, these approaches offer a comprehensive and accurate framework for verifying image integrity and uncovering even the most sophisticated digital forgeries.

3.5.1 Detection of Manipulation through Artifact Analysis

During image tampering, particularly in cases where regions are copied and pasted from one area of the image to another, subtle but measurable discrepancies often emerge. These discrepancies tend to be especially pronounced at the boundaries of manipulated regions. In copy-paste or copy-move forgeries, the abrupt transition between the original and altered areas introduces visual and structural inconsistencies. This manipulation disrupts the natural flow and compression structure of the image, especially when the copied region originates from a different part of the image or an entirely different source.

JPEG compression plays a critical role in this context because of its block-based architecture. The algorithm compresses images by dividing them into 8×8 pixel blocks, applying the Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT), and then quantizing the frequency coefficients. When tampered regions do not align perfectly with this grid structure, they can cause misalignment at block boundaries. These misalignments manifest as irregularities in the compression pattern, producing detectable signs of manipulation that may appear as unnatural edges, blocky textures, or inconsistencies in color and tone distribution.

These inconsistencies become even more detectable when an image undergoes multiple rounds of JPEG compression. Each recompression introduces new quantization artifacts and enhances existing ones, particularly in regions that have been tampered with. As a result, the manipulated sections often degrade differently from the authentic ones. This differential degradation acts like a spotlight on the altered areas, unintentionally amplifying the very evidence forensic analysts seek. Thus, the act of saving a tampered image in JPEG format paradoxically aids in its forensic examination.

While JPEG compression was designed solely for reducing file size and optimizing image storage, its by-products—namely, compression artifacts—are of significant forensic value.

These artifacts include quantization noise, DCT coefficient anomalies, and misaligned block boundaries. When carefully analyzed, these clues can reveal patterns that human observers would typically overlook. Investigators can extract and examine these details using specialized tools and algorithms that assess the distribution and alignment of compression noise across the image, helping to differentiate authentic content from forged elements.

In essence, JPEG compression not only preserves visual content but also encapsulates a digital footprint of an image's editing history. The very process that simplifies image storage simultaneously records traces of tampering. By studying the pattern, intensity, and alignment of compression artifacts, forensic experts can uncover manipulations that are invisible to the naked eye. Therefore, rather than being a limitation, JPEG compression becomes an unexpected yet powerful ally in the fight against digital image forgery.

3.6 Experimental Results

This section presents a detailed evaluation of the performance of various image forgery detection techniques using key performance metrics. The primary goal is to measure the capability of these techniques to detect tampered regions accurately and efficiently, thereby validating their applicability in real-world scenarios such as digital forensics and media verification.

Evaluation Metrics

To assess the effectiveness of the proposed and existing forgery detection techniques, the following standard metrics are used:

- **Accuracy:** This metric determines the ratio of successfully detected forged and authentic regions to the total number of regions. It provides insight into the overall correctness of the detection method and is a key indicator of the model's general performance.
- **Precision:** Precision evaluates the proportion of accurately detected forged regions to the total number of regions predicted as forged. A high precision indicates a low rate of false positives, which is crucial in applications where incorrect labeling of genuine images could lead to misinformation or unwarranted consequences.

- **Recall:** Recall assesses the proportion of actual forged regions that were correctly identified by the algorithm. A high recall indicates that most forged regions were successfully detected, demonstrating the model's sensitivity to manipulations.

Two-Class Classification

The classification task involved binary categorization of images into genuine or forged. This enabled the evaluation of the model's capability to differentiate clearly between untampered and manipulated content. The use of binary classification simplifies the decision-making process and ensures that the detection system is focused on identifying any form of tampering, regardless of the technique used.

Dataset Splitting

The dataset was divided into two sets: 80% for training and 20% for testing. This 80:20 split ensures a robust evaluation of the classifier's performance on unseen data, preventing overfitting and enhancing generalization. The training set was used to fine-tune the model parameters, while the testing set evaluated how well the model could detect forgeries in unfamiliar images.

Patch Creation

To further enhance detection accuracy, images were divided into smaller patches before being processed by the model. This patch-based strategy enables the detection system to focus on localized distortions and micro-level inconsistencies that may not be visible in a global image analysis. These patches act as fine-grained inputs, helping the algorithm to learn subtle tampering cues such as edge discontinuities, abnormal texture patterns, and compression artifacts. The localized analysis significantly improves the system's ability to detect minor manipulations and provides spatial granularity to the detection output.

Comparative Performance Analysis

A comparative analysis of the proposed and existing techniques is presented in Table 4. It demonstrates that the proposed models consistently outperform traditional methods in terms of accuracy, recall, and precision. This superior performance can be attributed to the advanced feature extraction capabilities of deep learning models, which are able to learn complex representations of manipulated patterns that conventional methods often fail to capture. Traditional techniques, such as block-matching and statistical analysis, typically

rely on handcrafted features and perform well under constrained scenarios; however, they often struggle to detect subtle or skillfully hidden tampering, especially in high-resolution or post-processed images.

Model Training and Optimization

To ensure optimal performance, the deep learning models were trained using stochastic gradient descent with momentum (SGDM) as the optimizer, combined with a learning rate scheduler that adjusted dynamically based on validation loss. Batch normalization and dropout layers were incorporated to promote stable convergence and minimize overfitting. These strategies contribute to a more robust model that adapts well to complex data patterns, particularly in the presence of diverse forgery techniques such as splicing, copy-move, and inpainting. Data augmentation was also employed to increase the model's generalization ability by simulating various real-world alterations, including flipping, rotation, scaling, and noise addition.

Evaluation Metrics

The performance of each model was assessed using key classification metrics, including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. Accuracy provided an overall measure of correctness, while precision and recall gave deeper insight into the model's behavior concerning forged and genuine classifications. The F1-score served as a harmonic mean between precision and recall, balancing the trade-off between false positives and false negatives. These metrics offer a comprehensive evaluation framework, ensuring that the model not only achieves high accuracy but also maintains sensitivity to even the most minute forms of tampering.

Visualization and Interpretability

To further improve transparency and explainability, class activation maps (CAMs) were used to visualize which regions of an image the model focused on while making its predictions. These visualizations provide intuitive insights into the model's decision-making process, highlighting tampered zones such as unnatural edges, cloned textures, or inconsistent illumination. The inclusion of CAMs helps build trust in the model's predictions, which is particularly crucial in forensics and legal contexts where explainable decisions are essential.

In contrast, the proposed models—particularly those utilizing architectures like VGG16 and ResNet50—exhibit a robust ability to identify forged regions with high precision, even under challenging conditions such as variable lighting, compression artifacts, and background clutter.

Sr. No.	Techniques	Accuracy	Recall	Precision
1	Markovian rake transform [11]	79.74%	-	-
2	DCT coefficients analysis [14]	90.91	-	-
3	Markov chain [12]	95.6		
4	Proposed + VGG16	94.6	92.4	97.0
5	Proposed + ResNet50	95.09	92.6	97.4
6	Proposed + ResNet50 with fine tuning	98.65	93.7	98.6
6	Proposed + VGG16 with fine tuning	99.15	95.3	98.7

Table 3.1 Technique-specific comparative analysis

The results clearly demonstrate that deep learning architectures, especially VGG16 and ResNet50, substantially outperform traditional approaches such as keypoint-based matching, block matching, and handcrafted feature-based methods. The strength of these deep models lies in their ability to automatically extract and learn hierarchical features—from low-level textures to high-level semantics—without the need for manual intervention.

Among the evaluated models, VGG16 emerges as the most effective, achieving an exceptional accuracy of 99.15%, recall of 95.3%, and precision of 98.7%. These metrics highlight VGG16's capability to accurately detect even the most subtle manipulations, such as localized tampering, lighting inconsistencies, or blended regions. The model's deep architecture, comprising multiple convolutional layers, enables it to capture intricate spatial patterns and distinguish authentic content from forged areas effectively.

Similarly, ResNet50, with its residual connections and deeper structure, performs competitively, offering high generalization and resistance to overfitting. Fine-tuning these models on domain-specific datasets further enhances their detection performance by aligning them more closely with the statistical distribution of the target images.

In contrast, traditional methods suffer from several limitations, including sensitivity to transformations (e.g., rotation, scaling), reliance on handcrafted features, and lower adaptability to new or complex forgery techniques. These approaches often yield lower accuracy and struggle with detecting forgeries that involve texture blending or semantic inconsistencies.

In summary, the comparative analysis highlights the efficacy of deep learning models especially VGG16 and ResNet50 as reliable and high-performing solutions for modern image forgery detection tasks. Their superior performance, scalability, and minimal requirement for manual feature engineering make them ideal candidates for deployment in real-world forensic and security systems.

ResNet50 also exhibits commendable results, leveraging residual learning to mitigate issues like vanishing gradients that often affect deeper networks. Its identity shortcut connections facilitate the training of very deep models and allow it to extract discriminative features even from heavily tampered or compressed images. While slightly trailing VGG16 in raw accuracy, ResNet50 provides a favorable trade-off between depth, convergence speed, and detection robustness.

Moreover, fine-tuning these pretrained models on domain-specific datasets further enhances their ability to generalize across diverse forgery patterns. Fine-tuning allows the model to adapt to the distributional nuances of the target dataset, leading to improved detection of artifacts introduced during tampering—such as inconsistent lighting, texture misalignment, or abnormal noise patterns

Furthermore, the practical advantages of utilizing VGG16 and ResNet50 extend beyond just performance metrics. These deep learning models benefit from transfer learning, enabling efficient knowledge transfer from large-scale image datasets such as ImageNet to the task of forgery detection. This strategy significantly reduces the need for large annotated forensic datasets, which are often scarce and expensive to create. When fine-tuned on even a relatively small number of domain-specific examples, these models can

quickly learn to identify complex tampering techniques, including copy-move, splicing, and GAN-generated manipulations.

VGG16's straightforward and uniform architecture contributes to its stability and interpretability. Despite being computationally more demanding due to its large number of parameters, it consistently demonstrates high precision and recall across various test cases. Its ability to maintain spatial hierarchies within an image helps detect fine-grained discrepancies that simpler architectures might overlook. This is particularly crucial in real-world forensic settings where subtle tampering can have significant implications, such as in legal evidence, journalistic integrity, or national security.

ResNet50, on the other hand, achieves a compelling balance between depth and efficiency. Thanks to its residual blocks, the model maintains gradient flow across deep layers, enabling it to learn more abstract and discriminative features. These characteristics make it especially adept at identifying tampered regions that involve complex transformations or compression artifacts. Additionally, ResNet50's architecture lends itself well to modular improvements, such as attention mechanisms or ensemble techniques, which can further boost its detection capabilities.

Another important aspect of these models is their robustness to adversarial variations and image degradations. In practice, forged images may undergo multiple stages of compression, resizing, or format conversion before analysis. While traditional detection techniques often break down under such conditions, deep learning models retain a higher level of performance due to their ability to abstract features across multiple layers. VGG16 and ResNet50, once fine-tuned, can generalize to such scenarios with minimal degradation in accuracy, making them well-suited for operational deployment in automated forgery detection pipelines.

Moreover, visualization tools such as Grad-CAM can be employed alongside these models to interpret their decisions. This capability is crucial in forensic investigations, as it allows experts to identify exactly which regions of an image the model deems suspicious. Such interpretability not only enhances trust in automated systems but also provides human analysts with valuable cues for further manual examination.

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Chapter 4

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

The rise of digital image manipulation has made forgery detection an essential task in numerous domains including journalism, digital forensics, legal evidence authentication, and social media content verification. This study has addressed the growing need for accurate and automated image forgery detection by proposing a deep learning-based framework that utilizes powerful convolutional neural networks, namely VGG16 and ResNet50, enhanced through fine-tuning strategies. The methodology adopted involves a patch-based approach, where images are broken into smaller segments (patches), enabling the system to focus on localized features that are often altered during tampering. This approach enhances the model's ability to learn subtle discrepancies that may not be apparent when analyzing the image as a whole.

The model training followed a standard 80:20 split, where 80% of the data was used for training and 20% for testing. Evaluation metrics such as accuracy, recall, and precision were used to assess the performance of the proposed system in a rigorous and comprehensive manner. Traditional techniques like DCT coefficient analysis, Markovian rake transforms, and Markov chain models were also tested for comparative analysis. These classical methods, while effective in earlier eras, demonstrated relatively lower accuracy and were less robust to modern, high-quality manipulations. The experimental results confirm that deep learning models, particularly the fine-tuned VGG16 network, significantly outperform traditional methods. The proposed system achieved a peak performance of 99.15% accuracy, indicating a very high proportion of correctly identified tampered and authentic image regions. The recall value of 95.3% signifies the model’s strength in detecting most of the forged areas without missing significant manipulations, while the precision of 98.7% highlights its ability to avoid false positives, ensuring that authentic regions are not mistakenly labeled as tampered.

Overall, this work demonstrates that leveraging pre-trained deep convolutional neural networks with appropriate fine-tuning and patch-wise training can produce a highly effective and scalable solution for digital image forgery detection. It serves as a robust baseline for future research in this domain and paves the way for integrating such intelligent systems in real-world applications, where the authenticity of digital content is of utmost importance.

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