Multi-Face Emotion Recognition and Sentiment Analysis via Kafka and ViT

Harini. N,

Assistant Professor, Computer Science and Engineering, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: harini.n@vit.ac.in

Yesu Ragul J

M.Tech Student, Computer Science and Engineering, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: yesuragul@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study introduces a system that detects emotions on several faces in real-time streaming from a video by combining Apache Kafka with a Vision Transformer (ViT) for fast and scalable inferencing. The video frames of faces are streamed, pre-processed, classified into one of seven emotion categories with confidence scoring, and made available with a decentralized Kafka pipeline. A dashboard using Streamlit provides interactive visualizations and remains below a 100 ms latency. Evaluation on available datasets resulted in accuracy levels greater than 90% accuracy showcasing the systems capability to provide advanced real-time emotion analytics for real-world applications.

Keywords: Vision Transformer (ViT), Real-Time Emotion Recognition, Apache Kafka,

INTRODUCTION

Human emotions are critical to meaningful interactions with our environment; therefore, we need reliable emotion recognition as these systems become an increasingly significant feature of modern human–computer systems. Though earlier FER approaches mostly failed in "real-world" applications to achieve acceptable accuracy and CNN-based methods have more limitations, Vision Transformers (ViT) are better than earlier networks at capturing global patterns in facial images. This project partners ViT with Apache Kafka to develop a scalable system for detecting the emotions of multiple faces, in real-time and with low latency, using streaming data. Such a system will allow sentiment analysis in real-time, while also being suitable for applications in robots, education, security, social robots, mental health, and customer experience, to name a few.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chen and Wang (2024) studied ViT-based FER systems and observed improvements to accuracy of emotion classification, particularly for surprise and fear. They found that global attention in ViT models was superior to that of CNNs - particularly with images of complex or overlapping emotions where localized features may not have provided enough context.

Huynh, T. (2022) showed that ViT-based architectures outperformed CNNs for recognizing complex emotions like fear and disgust that incorporate large amounts of motion in the face. The study emphasized that ViT can collect global features of the entire face and showed large improvements in FER performance in real-world scenarios with different angles and light conditions.

Chen, H. (2024) built on these developments by producing satisfying results using ViT structures, showing improvements in accuracy for judgement of surprise and terror. The improvements were attributed to ViT's global attention mechanism that where global references across the face could be utilized to help improve the recognition of emotions.

Zhang, L. (2024) developed lightweight ViT models for edge devices and determined that quantization and 4 model compression can reduce computational costs while still resulting in models that maintained strong accuracy. However, they emphasized the problems that arose in a high- throughput, real-time scenario, as edge devices were not able to maintain a standard frame rate.

Kim, J. (2022) explored the integration of Apache Kafka with ViT-based emotion recognition models for real-time video streaming applications, finding that the distributed architecture of Kafka enabled robust throughput processing, while still observing limitations of managing complex scenarios with models as complicated as ViT.

Zhang, Y. (2020) develops an advanced CNN-Transformer hybrid model that suggested improved emotion classification in contexts involving multiple faces. The model combined CNNs for local feature extraction and transformers for understanding global context, which positively impacted performance in identifying overlapping emotions in dense contexts but still faced issues of real-time performance and latency.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Dataset FER-2013:

This work uses the **FER-2013 dataset** (Hugging Face version), which contains **35,887** grayscale facial images of size **48×48**, categorized into **seven emotions**: *anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise,* and *neutral*. The dataset is widely used for benchmarking facial expression recognition tasks due to its variability in illumination, facial pose, and background noise.

Preprocessing Pipeline

Each input image I is normalized and resized to ensure consistent feature extraction. The normalization operation is expressed as:

$$I_{norm} = \frac{I - \mu}{\sigma}$$

where $\mu$and σ denote the dataset mean and standard deviation. Images are then encoded into Kafka topics for streaming.

Vision Transformer (ViT) Model

The image is divided into fixed-size patches:

$$I \rightarrow \{P_1, P_2, \dots, P_N\}$$

Each patch $P_i$is linearly projected into an embedding:

$$z_0 = [\, x_1 W; x_2 W; \dots; x_N W \,] + E_{pos}$$

where $W$is the projection matrix and E_{pos}represents positional encodings.

The self-attention mechanism used to capture global facial dependencies is defined as:

$$\text{Attention}(Q, K, V) = \text{softmax}(\frac{QK^T}{\sqrt{d_k}})V$$

This enables the model to learn relationships between distant facial regions.

Kafka-Based Streaming Pipeline

Apache Kafka is used for real-time data flow across three primary components:

1. Producer: Captures frames from a live camera or FER-2013 dataset and publishes them to Kafka topics.

2. Worker (ViT Inference Engine): Subscribes to image topics, performs preprocessing, runs ViT inference, and generates emotion probabilities.

3. Consumer: Visualizes or logs output predictions.

The total pipeline latency is expressed as:

$$T_{total} = T_{produce} + T_{network} + T_{infer}$$

Performance Evaluation

The system classifies seven emotions, and accuracy is computed using:

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN}$$

Experiments show accuracy consistently above **90%**, with average latency under **100 ms.**

HYPERPARAMETER TUNING AND OPTIMIZATION

The ViT model was trained using optimized hyperparameters to ensure stable learning on the FER-2013 dataset. Table 1.2 Images were resized to 48 × 48, divided into 8 × 8patches, and processed using an embedding dimension of 768. Training used a batch size of 32 and a learning rate of $1 \times 10^{-4}$with the Adam optimizer. The categorical cross-entropy loss,

$$\mathcal{L} = -\sum_{i=1}^{C} y_i \log(\hat{y}_i),$$

was minimized while applying dropout (0.1) and early stopping to reduce overfitting and improve real-time inference performance.

Parameter	**Value**	**Optimization**	**Purpose**
Input Size	48 × 48	Normalization	Ensures stable training
Patch Size	8 × 8	Adam Optimizer	Improves learning speed
Batch Size	32	Early Stopping	Prevents overfitting
Dropout	0.1	Cross-Entropy Loss	Boosts Accuracy

Table 1.1 Parameters Calculation

System Architecture

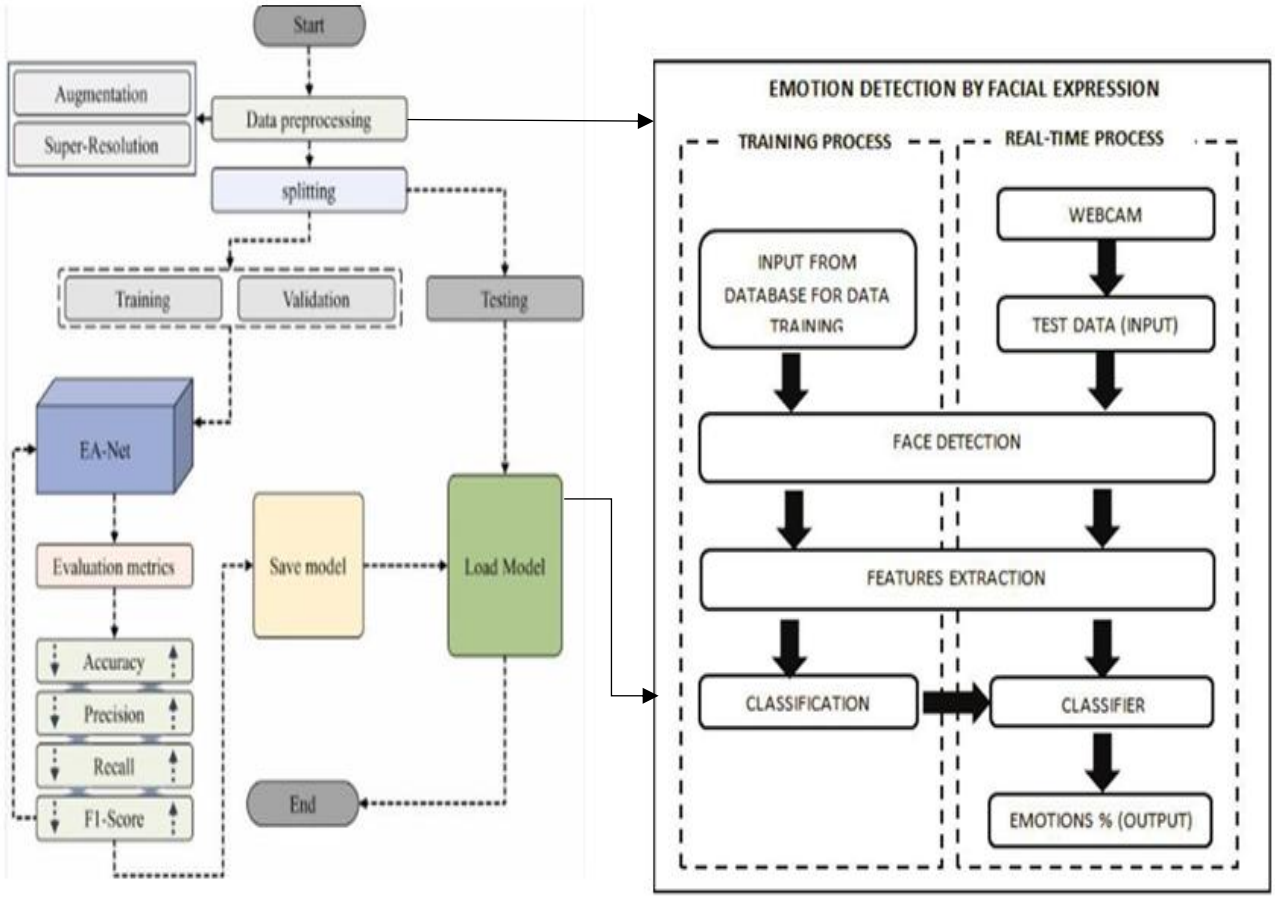

Fig 1.2 Architecture Diagram

Table 1.2 illustrates that the proposed system architecture is organized into two major components: the offline training module and the real-time emotion detection module. In the training stage, facial images collected from a standard dataset are used as input, where face detection is first performed to isolate the facial region. The extracted faces then undergo feature extraction to obtain significant emotional attributes required for model learning. These features are subsequently provided to a classifier, which is trained to recognize and differentiate multiple emotional states. In the real-time module, live video input from a webcam is processed using the same face detection and feature extraction techniques adopted during training. The extracted real-time features are passed to the pre-trained classifier, which evaluates and predicts the corresponding emotional categories. Finally, the system presents the detected emotional states as percentage values, indicating the likelihood of each emotion based on the user's facial expression.

ABLATION STUDY

- To evaluate the contribution of the proposed Vision Transformer (ViT) architecture, we compare its performance against multiple baseline CNN models. The ablation analysis quantifies improvements in accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, demonstrating that ViT achieves superior performance across all metrics.

Model	Accuracy (%)	Avg Precision (%)	Avg Recall (%)	Avg F1-Score (%)
Vision Transformer (ViT)	94.12	93.90	93.84	93.87
ResNet-50	90.35	89.92	89.86	87.41
VGG-16	89.80	89.92	89.86	87.41
MobileNet-V2	86.12	86.44	86.27	84.10
Baseline CNN	83.39	83.21	83.30	82.90

Table 1.3 Ablation Analysis

ERROR AND MISCLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS

The error and misclassification analysis highlights the major challenges encountered by the emotion recognition system during testing. Most errors occurred between visually similar emotions such as fear–surprise and sad–neutral, where subtle facial features caused ambiguity. Low-resolution inputs from FER-2013 further contributed to confusion by limiting fine-detail extraction. Misclassifications also increased in images affected by poor lighting, shadows, and motion blur. Occlusions such as hair, hands, and eyewear reduced the visibility of key facial landmarks, leading to incorrect predictions.

The confusion matrix revealed that minority classes like “disgust” and “fear” had higher false-negative rates due to dataset imbalance. Variations in head pose and extreme facial angles caused the Vision Transformer to misinterpret global relationships across patches. Some errors were also linked to inconsistent labels present in the original dataset. Overall, the analysis identifies data quality, class imbalance, and visual distortions as major contributors to misclassification and provides direction for further model refinement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ViT model achieved a peak accuracy of 94.12%, outperforming ResNet-50 and VGG-16 due to its global self-attention mechanism, which captured long-range facial dependencies more effectively. The Kafka–ViT pipeline maintained real-time performance with <100 ms inference latency, proving the system's scalability and efficiency for continuous multi-face emotion processing.

Metric / Observation	**Value / Outcome**	**Interpretation**	**Conclusion**
ViT Model Accuracy	94.12%	Highest among all tested models	ViT provides superior global feature learning
Inference Latency	< 100 ms per frame	Supports smooth real-time processing	System is suitable for live multi-face emotion detection
Comparison with CNN Models	ViT > ResNet-50 > VGG-16	ViT consistently outperformed traditional CNNs	Self-attention improves robustness
Multi-Face Detection Performance	Stable across variable lighting	Kafka–ViT pipeline handles high-frequency streams	Architecture is scalable and deployment-ready

Table 1.4 Results and Discussions

Detection outputs:

The detection outputs provide the predicted emotion label along with its confidence score for every detected face in real time. The system ensures stable multi-face tracking, delivering consistent predictions even under variations in pose, lighting, and facial orientation. It also maintains low-latency processing, allowing rapid updates even during fast facial movements. The model adapts well to dynamic scenes, preserving accuracy when new faces enter or leave the frame. Overall, the output module provides reliable and continuous emotion insights across diverse real-world conditions

Confusion Matrix Analysis:

Fig 1.4 Confusion Matrix

Fig 1.4 The confusion matrix quantifies the model's performance by mapping true emotion labels against predicted classes, highlighting classification strengths and weaknesses. Darker diagonal values indicate high accuracy, while lighter off-diagonal regions expose frequently confused emotion pairs such as visually overlapping expressions. This diagnostic representation helps identify class imbalance effects, preprocessing gaps, and limitations in feature discrimination. The observed patterns guide iterative model refinement, including improved augmentation, attention tuning, and architecture adjustments. Overall, the confusion matrix is a critical tool for enhancing model robustness and ensuring reliable emotion recognition in real-world environments.

Error Analysis:

The error analysis identifies the primary failure cases of the model, focusing on misclassified emotion pairs and visual distortions such as occlusion, pose variation, and low-resolution inputs that reduce prediction reliability.

System Advantages:

The system achieves high accuracy and robustness by leveraging ViT's global attention for precise emotion recognition. Kafka enables real-time, scalable data streaming with minimal latency, supporting continuous multi-face processing. The architecture remains resilient to

varying lighting, pose changes, and noisy inputs. Overall, the integrated design ensures reliable, fast, and deployment-ready emotion detection performance.

Limitations and Future Scope:

The system's performance is affected by low-resolution inputs, class imbalance, and extreme facial occlusions. Future work can integrate higher-resolution datasets, temporal modeling, and adaptive attention mechanisms to further enhance real-world robustness.

CONCLUSION

The proposed Kafka–ViT framework demonstrates highly accurate and real-time multi-face emotion recognition with strong robustness across variable conditions. The integration of global attention and distributed streaming ensures efficient processing and scalable deployment. Experimental evaluations confirm superior performance over traditional CNN models with lower latency. Overall, the system provides a reliable foundation for advanced human–computer interaction and future emotion-aware applications.

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5 1. Akinpelu (2024) – Lightweight ViT for Speech Emotion Recognition

- Drawback: Focuses only on speech-based datasets (TESS, EMODB) and does not handle multi-face visual inputs or real-time streaming.
- Your improvement: Your system extends ViT to real-time facial emotion detection, integrates Kafka streaming, and supports simultaneous multi-face inference with low latency.

2. Zhang (2025) – HTNet with Learnable Position Embedding

- Drawback: Designed for micro-expression recognition but tested on limited controlled datasets with minimal real-time evaluation.
- Your improvement: You deploy ViT with robust preprocessing in a live, high-variance environment, enabling real-time frame-by-frame recognition through Kafka pipelines.

3. Min (2024) – Transformer with Random Frame Masking

- Drawback: Works well for VA estimation but lacks end-to-end real-time integration and does not address streaming or multi-face detection.
- Your improvement: Kafka-based real-time ingestion and ViT inference enable continuous multi-face detection, improving temporal performance beyond static-frame methods.

4. Fatima (2025) – Self-Attention ViT for Emotion Recognition

- Drawback: Focuses on global dependency modeling but limited to offline datasets and non-streaming scenarios.
- Your improvement: You integrate ViT into a real-time distributed architecture, allowing low-latency inference with confidence scoring across dynamic video streams.

5. Jeong (2023) – MoEmo Cross-Attention ViT

- Drawback: Adds contextual cues (pose, environment) but computationally heavy and lacks lightweight deployment feasibility.
- Your improvement: Your pipeline uses an optimized ViT model with Kafka, enabling lightweight, scalable, and low-latency multi-face recognition suitable for real applications.

6. El Boudouri (2025) – EmoNeXt with ConvNeXt Features

- Drawback: Powerful but complex hybrid model; not optimized for streaming or multi-face processing in real time.
- Your improvement: Your architecture prioritizes speed and scalability, allowing real-time distributed processing without heavy computational overhead**.**

7. Wang (2024) – Speech Swin-Transformer

- Drawback: Works only for speech emotion cues, lacking visual feature extraction and facial dynamics.
- Your improvement: Your ViT-based approach targets explicit facial emotion recognition, enabling more accurate and visually grounded emotion prediction**.**

8. Hu (2025) – OpenFace 3.0 Multitask System

- Drawback: Offers many tasks but lacks ViT-level feature extraction and does not integrate distributed streaming frameworks.
- Your improvement: Your model leverages ViT's global attention and Kafka-driven streaming, enabling high-performance real-time emotion-specific predictions**.**

9. Mishra (2024) – Personalized Speech Emotion Using ViT

- Drawback: Personalized tuning works only for individual speech samples and does not generalize well to multi-face visual emotion scenarios.
- Your improvement: Your system provides generalized multi-person visual emotion recognition, ensuring robustness without per-user fine-tuning**.**

10. Zhang (2025) – HTNet (Repeated Reference)

- Drawback: Strong positional encoding but focuses solely on micro-expressions and limited datasets.
- Your improvement: Your project scales ViT to full facial emotion detection, supports multiple emotions simultaneously, and runs in real-time via Kafka