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# Convolutional Neural Network Based Chart Image Classification

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## ABSTRACT

Charts are frequently embedded objects in digital documents and are used to convey a clear analysis of research results or commercial data trends. These charts are created through different means and may be represented by a variety of patterns such as column charts, line charts and pie charts. Chart recognition is as important as text recognition to automatically comprehend the knowledge within digital document. Chart recognition consists on identifying the chart type and decoding its visual contents into computer understandable values. Previous work in chart image identification has relied on hand crafted features which often fails when dealing with a large amount of data that could contain significant varieties and less common chart types. Hence, as a first step towards this goal, in this paper we propose to use a deep learning-based approach that automates the feature extraction step. We present an improved version of the LeNet [LeCu 89] convolutional neural network architecture for chart image classification. We derive 11 classes of visualization (Scatter Plot, Column Chart, etc.) which we use to annotate 3377 chart images. Results show the efficiency of our proposed method with 89.5 % of accuracy rate.

## Keywords

Chart Image Classification, Data Visualization, Deep Learning, Dataset Annotation.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing interest in data visualization due to its ability to present meaningful insights into the complex and data of ever increasing sizes. Thus, Visualization is important for scientists as it helps them in exploring, analyzing, and publishing their results.

Most of the different types of visualizations and graphs, produced in papers, are designed to be human understandable and are not typically machine readable. In most cases, these visualizations (which are typically in raster image format) are hard to decode by machines. However, there is a growing need in many applications and domains for machine's ability to read, extract and interpret insights presented in chart images automatically. The major challenge when attempting to interpret such charts automatically is the variant structure and

visual appearance of these images. Thus, it is difficult for machines to automatically classify the chart type and understand the encoded information efficiently. The field of Document Analysis and Recognition addresses this problem by using Computer Vision techniques to decode the information from charts. This has led to the emergence of a sub field which is known as 'Chart Image Analysis'. Techniques in 'Chart Image Analysis' extract, classify and interpret charts to provide valuable information. This information then helps in chart redesigning, knowledge mining and domain-based visualization recommendation studies. Motivated by advances in pattern recognition techniques, especially convolutional neural networks (CNNs), which has managed to produce remarkable results in the field of image classification, we propose a new system based on CNNs for chart analysis. The model can learn visual features directly from images and is able to recognize eleven types or classes of charts (Categorical Boxplot, Column Chart, Dendrogram, Heatmap, Line Chart, Map, Node-Link Diagram, Ordination scatterplot, Pie Chart, Scatterplot and Stacked Area Chart). While the identification of a visualization class does not on its own generate the full information that the visualization presents, it can provide basic

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and important clues about the representational goal of the statistical graph. For example, whether the graph is representing a comparison among data entities (variables) or is showing the distribution of some entities (variables) over the temporal scale, etc. This information can then be combined with some auxiliary information (e.g. knowledge extracted from carrying out Natural Language Processing on the caption of the statistical graph) to derive the concrete message that visualization conveys.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we present the motivation behind this work. The literature review is presented in Section 3. Our proposed method is described in Section 4. Experimental evaluation and results are reported in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper and provides an outlook to future work.

## 2 MOTIVATION

The motivation behind this work is to automatically classify the chart image types from an image dataset and to use this classification in tagging captions from these chart images. This will help in the creation of domain (biodiversity in our case) knowledgebase which will provide the contextual information about the dataset that needs to be visualized. This further will be an assistant to our visualization recommendation engine. Visualization recommendation is a subdomain in data visualization research that uses different strategies to assist user in the selection of suitable visualization for representing their data. With the growing amount of data and increasing availability of different visualization techniques, the selection of suitable visualization become more critical especially for users who are not well versed in visualization creation process. Hence, visualization recommendation strategies can effectively assist the user in making a choice of an appropriate visualization by considering different aspect of data, domain, user and goals. To provide visualization suggestions for the specific domain, it is important to first understand the visualization usage pattern from this domain. To fulfil that, we have gathered a dataset of 96837 images from 26588 biodiversity publications. To automatically classify this big dataset of chart images into different visualization classes or chart types, we used a model based on Convolutional Neural Network (CNN).

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Chart image classification is an important step in chart recognition and understanding. One of the major challenges in chart image classification is the variability of the structure and visual appearance of each chart type. To address this challenge, techniques from image processing, raster to vector conversion, layout and

pattern analysis have been used. These techniques are broadly divided into model based approaches and machine learning based approaches.

### Model Based Approaches

A distinctive model is designed for each chart type that constitutes of specific features of the chart. These features include: (1) graphical elements of the charts, e.g., axis, colors etc. [Shao 05], (2) layout of the chart, e.g., rectangular (for xy charts), circular (for pie charts) etc. [Yoko 97], and (3) patterns or local structures appearing frequently in charts [Inok 00]. By extracting the feature information, a model is developed for each chart type that contain specific feature information about the specific chart and governs some rules and constraints to distinguish one chart from other. The main drawback of the model based approaches is that such a system can handle only predefined charts for which the graphical model was available. Even a slight change in the chart style will be considered different and would need a new model. Thus, such technique cannot be used to classify wide styles of chart. Therefore, machine learning techniques that considers graphical elements of charts as whole object instead of different segments were adopted.

### Machine Learning Based Approaches

We have done a survey of the different machine learning techniques used for recognition and classification. Table 1 summarize some work.

Paper	Year	Dataset	# Classes	Technique	Accuracy
[Kart 12]	2012	155	8	KNN	78.06%
				MLP	69.68%
				SVM	69.68%
[Savv 11]	2011	2601	10	Multiclass SVM	80%
				Binary SVM	96%
[Pras 07]	2007	653	5	Multiclass SVM	84%
[Huan 07]	2007	200	4	C4.5 Decision Tree	90%
[Shao 05]	2006	36	5	MLP	94.2%
				LogitBoost	100%
[Zhou 01]	2001	350	3	HMM	86%
				Feedforward Neural Network	77.7 %

Table 1: Machine learning based approaches

Even though different methods have achieved good classification results for identifying and recognizing certain types of chart images, they mostly rely on hand-crafted features such as color histograms, texture features, shape features and Scale-invariant feature transformation (SIFT). Also, these methods do not generalize well and they are not effective when dealing with a large amount of data that could contain significant varieties as in the case of our chart image dataset. For example, the bar chart and column chart are considered the same but their orientation is different. Furthermore, the problem of multi-chart images with same or different chart types hinders the accurate detection. Recently, [Lee 15] have proposed an algorithm to automatically segment multi-chart visualizations into a

set of single-chart visualizations. Besides, due to the lack of standardization in chart construction and chart templates, there exist great diversity of chart types and styles, which are somehow very subjective. Moreover, the accurate detection becomes more difficult when handling degraded, distorted or rotated charts with different scales, noisy and hand-drawn inputs.

Hence, in our work we designed a convolutional neural network (CNN) based model to automatically classify chart images and consequently avoid segmentation and hand-crafted features extraction.

## 4 PROPOSED METHOD

As described above, different approaches have been proposed in the literature to deal with the problem of chart image classification, the variation in chart style, size, color, resolution and content are not yet resolved (i.e. marks within data graphics are discrete and areas are in uniform color). Hence, following the successful application of convolutional neural networks [Deng 14, Arel 10] in many computer vision tasks, we propose a method based on CNN to classify chart images into eleven types. More specifically, we designed a CNN based model inspired from the LeNet architecture [LeCu 89]. It has a total of eight layers comprising one initial input layer, five hidden layers followed by one fully connected layer and ending with the output classifier layer. The hidden layers are convolution and pooling layers which act as feature extractors from the input images while the fully connected layer acts as a classifier. In fact, the main purpose of convolution is to extract features automatically from each input image. The dimensionality of these features is then reduced by the pooling layer. At the end of the model, the fully connected layer with a softmax activation function makes use of the learned high-level features to classify the input images into predefined classes.

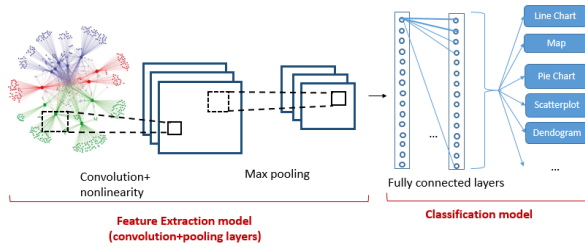


Figure 1: A graphical depiction of the proposed approach

Consequently the proposed model, illustrated in Figure 1, is composed of two main parts: the first part is the self-taught feature extraction model and the second part is the classification model. In the rest of this section, we will detail these two components.

### 4.1 Feature extraction model

The feature extraction model is the part where the network learns to detect different high-level features from the input images. It consists of a sequence of convolution and pooling layers.

**Convolution map:** The convolution layer is an elementary unit in a CNN architecture. The goal of convolution is to extract features from the input image. It consists of a set of learnable filters. Each filter is applied to the raw pixel values of the image taking into account the red, green and blue color channels in a sliding window fashion, computing the dot product between the filter pixel and the input pixel. This will result in a 2-dimensional activation map of the filter called feature map. Hence, the network learns filters (i.e., edges, curves) that will activate when they find known features in the input. The CNN learns the values of these filters on its own during the training process.

The Convolution operation is presented in Equation 1. A convolution layer is configured by the number of convolution maps it contains  $M_i$ , the size of the filters which are often squared  $k_x \cdot k_y$ . The feature map  $M_i$  is computed as follows:

$$M_i = b_i + \sum_k W_{ik} \star X_k \quad (1)$$

where  $\star$  is the convolution operator,  $X_k$  is the  $k^{th}$  input channel,  $W_{ik}$  is the sub kernel of that channel and  $b_i$  is a bias term. In other words, the convolution operation being performed for each feature map is the sum of the application of  $k$  different 2D squared convolution features plus a bias term. Hence, In comparison with traditional image feature extraction that relies on crafted general feature extractors (SIFT, Gabor filter, etc), the power of CNN is noted in its ability to learn the weights and biases of different feature maps which lead to task specific powerful feature extractors.

Moreover, Rectified nonlinear activation function (ReLU) is performed after every convolution. ReLU is a very popular activation function which is defined as  $f(x) = \max(0, x)$  where  $x$  is the input to a neuron. Its role is to introduce nonlinearity to the CNN.

**Max-pooling map:** In the architecture of convolutional neural networks, convolution layers are followed by subsampling layers. A layer of sub-sampling reduces the size of the convolution maps, and introduces invariance to (low) rotations and translations that can appear in the input. A layer of max-pooling is a variant of such layer that has shown different benefits in its use. The output of max-pooling layer is given by the maximum activation value in the input layer over sub windows within each feature map. The max-pooling operation reduce the size of the feature map.

## 4.2 Classification model

Within the classification step we use fully connected layers where each neuron provides a full connection to all learned feature maps issued from the previous layer in the convolution neural network. These connected layers are based on the softmax activation function in order to compute the class scores. The input of the softmax classifier is a vector of features resulting from the learning process and the output is a probability that an image belongs to a given class. The softmax function  $\zeta$  takes as input a C-dimensional vector  $z$  and outputs a C-dimensional vector  $y$  of real values between 0 and 1. This function is calculated as below:

$$y_c = \zeta(\mathbf{z})_c = \frac{e^{z_c}}{\sum_{d=1}^C e^{z_d}} \quad \text{for } c = 1, \dots, C \quad (2)$$

In the next section, we will present the conducted experiments and results.

## 5 EXPERIMENTS

In this section, we evaluate the proposed method on our collected dataset for image chart classification. Experiments were conducted on an Intel Xeon CPU E5 PC with 32 GB of RAM. In our implementation we used deeplearning4j the open source deep learning library in Java. We start by describing the dataset then we present the performance of our approach before comparing obtained results to relevant proposed method from the literature.

### 5.1 Datasets

We have collected our data set from images presented in biodiversity publications. We have downloaded all available volumes and issues using a Python script from seven different biodiversity journals. This resulted in 26588 publications downloaded, out of which we were able to extract 96837 images. This corpus of 96837 images have mixed content. The majority of the images are related to data visualization and the rest are general images such as camera clicked pictures, conceptual diagrams and flowcharts.

To annotate our dataset we have used the Viper GT tool which is a Java based Ground Truth Software. This tool allows the user to mark up a media file (image file in our case) with the information about its content. This information is then stored in an xml format. So each image has a respective xml file defining the class label of the marked content in the image file.

#### 5.1.1 Annotation Process

In the beginning, we were not aware of different chart types available in the collected dataset. Hence, we created the classes as they appeared in the images and have labeled them. Following this procedure, we ended

up with 51 different classes from 1000 images. There was a huge variation in the samples' count per class. To solve this problem of unequal class distribution and to gather more training data, we did another round of annotation. This time, we preselected 11 different classes to annotate this dataset. Then, we had randomly selected 3377 images for our training dataset.

These 11 classes or superclasses were derived according to two important criteria that we have observed from our previous annotation phase: count of images per class and visualization shape similarity. Classes or chart types which are associated with a significant amount of images like Ordination Scatterplot, Map and Line Chart were retained. However, those who had less than 5 images were excluded from further processing unless they have a visual shape similarity to other retained classes. Hence, chart types that use the same coordinate space (e.g. xy plot) and same visual marks (e.g. bars) can be considered visually similar and then merged into one super class. For example, all the chart types which are visually similar to Column Chart e.g. Bar Chart, Stacked Bar Chart, Multi-set Bar Chart and Dual Axis Bar Chart are all merged into one super class as 'Column Chart'. Besides, to increase the number of images per class, we have included additional images for classes whose count was less than 200. These images were gathered from the dataset provided by [Savv 11] and from the Internet. In Table 2, we have presented our final training set count for each class.

### 5.2 Results

To validate the performance of the proposed approach, we conducted a set of experiments using our collected and annotated dataset containing 3377 images. Our goal is to evaluate the predictive performance of our model on unseen data of chart images. Hence, in our experiments, 80% of the annotated dataset is used for training and the rest 20 % is used for testing with the use of hyper parameters described in Table 3. These parameters are determined empirically according to a series of experiments carried on the whole dataset that give the best results of classification.

As shown in Table 3, the stochastic gradient descent (SGD) algorithm is used in our model to learn the best set of weights and biases of the neural network that minimize the loss function. While learning, the SGD algorithm works by randomly choosing a small number of training inputs. We refer to this as the batch size which is set to 10. The learning rate is set to 0.001. It is the rate at which a function move through the search space. A small learning rate leads to more precise results but it requires more training time. The momentum is an additional factor to determine how fast the SGD algorithm converges on the optimum point. It is set to

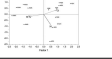










Ordination Scatterplot 279	Map 468	Scatter plot 420	Line Chart 412	Dendrogram 243	Column Chart 476	Heat map 214	Box plot 203	Area Chart 212	Pie Chart 245	Node Link Diagram 205
										

Table 2: Annotated dataset count

Parameter	Optimization algorithm	Learning rate	Momentum	Weight decay	Batch size	Activation function	Iterations
value	SGD	0.001	0.9	0.005	10	Sigmoid	80

Table 3: Hyper parameters choices

0.9.

Also, the effectiveness of our system is evaluated using accuracy, precision, recall and F1-measure. They are defined as follows:

$$Precision = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \quad (3)$$

$$Recall = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \quad (4)$$

$$F1 - measure = 2 \cdot \frac{P \cdot R}{P + R} \quad (5)$$

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN} \quad (6)$$

Where **TN**(True Negative) denotes the case of a negative sample being predicted negative (e.g., a non-line chart image being classified into the complement class of line chart correctly); **TP**(True Positive) refers to the case a positive sample being predicted positive (e.g., a line chart image being classified into the class of line chart correctly); **FN** (False Negative) refers to the case that a positive sample being predicted negative (e.g., a line chart image being classified into the complement class of line chart incorrectly); **FP** (False Positive) denotes the case that a negative sample being predicted positive (e.g., a non- line chart leaf image being classified into the class of line chart incorrectly); **P** refers to precision and **R** refers to recall.

The experimental results of the proposed method are summarized in Table 4 and Figure 2 .

As shown in Table 4, our model has achieved better performance than LeNet which is expected since our model is deeper (has more layers).

Many approaches in the literature return to pre-trained networks to effectively classify their small data. This pre-trained network will learn common useful features from a large dataset such as the ImageNet dataset and then fine-tune it (re-train it) on another dataset with a very small weight updates.

Model	Precision	Accuracy	Recall	F1-measure
LeNet [LeCu 89]	0,885	0,795	0,765	0,821
Pretrained LeNet	0,822	0,409	0,372	0,512
Our Model	0,906	0,895	0,893	0,902

Table 4: Comparison with existing models

However, as can be noticed in Table 4, pre-trained model was not able to provide good results in our case.

This could be because of the big differences between natural images contained in the ImageNet dataset and the chart images in our dataset which lead to the low performance of the model.

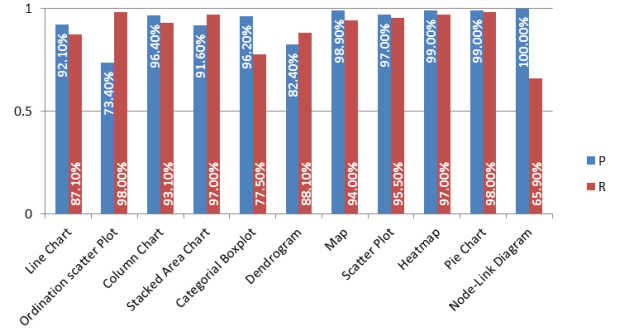


Figure 2: Obtained recall and precision per class

The performance per class is presented in Figure 2. These scores show that our method produces good recall (R) and precision (P) rates.

Our method performs well on heterogenous data in terms of color and monochrome images and considers challenging conditions like orientation and scale. However, we think that the lowest recall rates in all our experiments is due to similarity between the visual appearance of chart images within some classes. This is the case for example of Ordination scatter plot that can easily be confused with Node link Diagram and Scatter plot which consequently affect the recall rate of these three classes. Figure 3 illustrates such similarity in visual appearance.

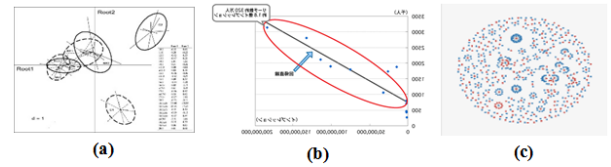


Figure 3: Illustration of confusing chart images (a) ordination scatterplot,(b) Scatterplot, (c) Node link Diagram

Consequently, the confusion in the learning process is mainly caused by the similar visual appearance of images belonging to different classes. In fact, reducing the size of each input image within the step of normalization and subsampling makes it hard to find and extract discriminating features from each image classes.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper is on the classification of chart images contained in scientific publications especially in the biodiversity research. This work is motivated by the importance of automatically classifying the chart type as an aid in the development of domain knowledge base that can further assist in the visualization recommendation as well as for chart analysis and redesign.

The proposed approach is based on convolution neural networks for chart image classification. We have collected 96837 chart images from scientific publications and have annotated 3377 images according to 11 classes (Categorical Boxplot, Column Chart, Dendrogram, Heatmap, Line Chart, Map, Node-Link diagram, Ordination Scatterplot, Pie Chart, Scatterplot and Stacked Area Chart). Although the challenging conditions of low resolution, dissimilarity, variation in size, color (binary and colored images) and low variance between graphics, the experimental results demonstrate the efficiency of our proposed method.

As future direction, we will focus on the segmentation of each type of chart image and extract informative clues as textual information, shape and area distribution and then provide support for chart redesign and interpretation. Furthermore we will work on multiple type of graphics since they are commonly included in scientific publications.

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