A Comprehensive Study of Deep Video Action Recognition

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Abstract

Video action recognition is one of the representative tasks for video understanding. Over the last decade, we have witnessed great advancements in video action recognition thanks to the emergence of deep learning. But we also encountered new challenges, including modeling long-range temporal information in videos, high computation costs, and incomparable results due to datasets and evaluation protocol variances. In this paper, we provide a comprehensive survey of over 200 existing papers on deep learning for video action recognition. We first introduce the 17 video action recognition datasets that influenced the design of models. Then we present video action recognition models in chronological order: starting with early attempts at adapting deep learning, then to the two-stream networks, followed by the adoption of 3D convolutional kernels, and finally to the recent compute-efficient models. In addition, we benchmark popular methods on several representative datasets and release code for reproducibility. In the end, we discuss open problems and shed light on opportunities for video action recognition to facilitate new research ideas.

1. Introduction

One of the most important tasks in video understanding is to understand human actions. It has many real-world applications, including behavior analysis, video retrieval, human-robot interaction, gaming, and entertainment. Human action understanding involves recognizing, localizing, and predicting human behaviors. The task to recognize human actions in a video is called *video action recognition*. In Figure 1, we visualize several video frames with the associated action labels, which are typical human daily activities such as shaking hands and riding a bike.

Over the last decade, there has been growing research interest in video action recognition with the emergence of high-quality large-scale action recognition datasets. We summarize the statistics of popular action recognition

Figure 1. **Visual examples of categories in popular video action datasets**.

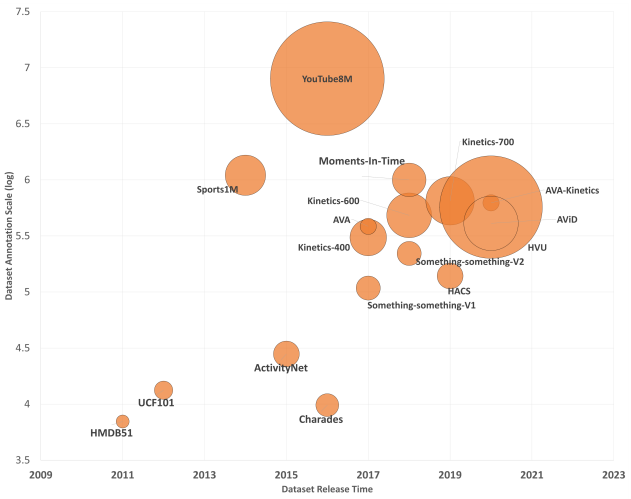

Figure 2. **Statistics of most popular video action recognition datasets** from past 10 years. The area of an circle represents the scale of each dataset (i.e., number of videos).

datasets in Figure 2. We see that both the number of videos and classes increase rapidly, e.g, from 7K videos over 51 classes in HMDB51 [109] to 8M videos over 3,862 classes in YouTube8M [1]. Also, the rate at which new datasets are released is increasing: 3 datasets were released from 2011 to 2015 compared to 13 released from 2016 to 2020.

Thanks to both the availability of large-scale datasets and the rapid progress in deep learning, there is also a

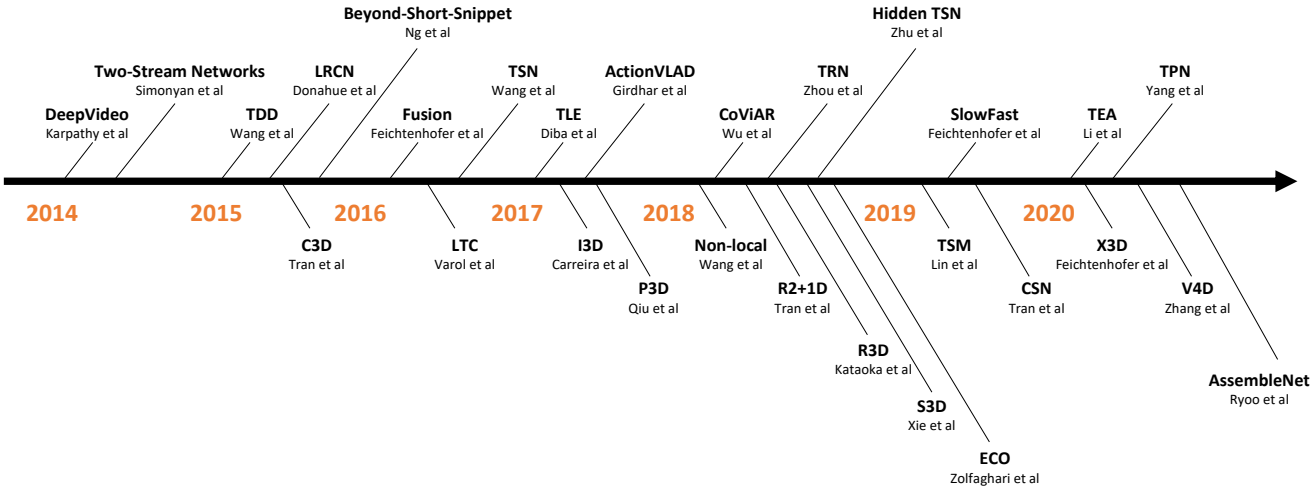

Figure 3. **A chronological overview of recent representative work in video action recognition**.

rapid growth in deep learning based models to recognize video actions. In Figure 3, we present a chronological overview of recent representative work. DeepVideo [99] is one of the earliest attempts to apply convolutional neural networks to videos. We observed three trends here. The first trend started by the seminal paper on Two-Stream Networks [187], adds a second path to learn the temporal information in a video by training a convolutional neural network on the optical flow stream. Its great success inspired a large number of follow-up papers, such as TDD [214], LRCN [37], Fusion [50], TSN [218], etc. The second trend was the use of 3D convolutional kernels to model video temporal information, such as I3D [14], R3D [74], S3D [239], Non-local [219], SlowFast [45], etc. Finally, the third trend focused on computational efficiency to scale to even larger datasets so that they could be adopted in real applications. Examples include Hidden TSN [278], TSM [128], X3D [44], TVN [161], etc.

Despite the large number of deep learning based models for video action recognition, there is no comprehensive survey dedicated to these models. Previous survey papers either put more efforts into hand-crafted features [77, 173] or focus on broader topics such as video captioning [236], video prediction [104], video action detection [261] and zero-shot video action recognition [96]. In this paper:

- We comprehensively review over 200 papers on deep learning for video action recognition. We walk the readers through the recent advancements chronologically and systematically, with popular papers explained in detail.

- We benchmark widely adopted methods on the same set of datasets in terms of both accuracy and efficiency. We also release our implementations for full reproducibility[1].

- We elaborate on challenges, open problems, and opportunities in this field to facilitate future research.

The rest of the survey is organized as following. We first describe popular datasets used for benchmarking and existing challenges in section 2. Then we present recent advancements using deep learning for video action recognition in section 3, which is the major contribution of this survey. In section 4, we evaluate widely adopted approaches on standard benchmark datasets, and provide discussions and future research opportunities in section 5.

2. Datasets and Challenges

2.1. Datasets

Deep learning methods usually improve in accuracy when the volume of the training data grows. In the case of video action recognition, this means we need large-scale annotated datasets to learn effective models.

For the task of video action recognition, datasets are often built by the following process: (1) Define an action list, by combining labels from previous action recognition datasets and adding new categories depending on the use case. (2) Obtain videos from various sources, such as YouTube and movies, by matching the video title/subtitle to the action list. (3) Provide temporal annotations manually to indicate the start and end position of the action, and (4) finally clean up the dataset by de-duplication and filtering

[1]Model zoo in both PyTorch and MXNet: `https://cv.gluon.ai/model_zoo/action_recognition.html`

Dataset	Year	# Samples	Ave. Len	# Actions
HMDB51 [109]	2011	7K	$\sim$5s	51
UCF101 [190]	2012	13.3K	$\sim$6s	101
Sports1M [99]	2014	1.1M	$\sim$5.5m	487
ActivityNet [40]	2015	28K	$[5, 10]m$	200
YouTube8M [1]	2016	8M	$229.6s$	3862
Charades [186]	2016	9.8K	$30.1s$	157
Kinetics400 [100]	2017	306K	$10s$	400
Kinetics600 [12]	2018	482K	$10s$	600
Kinetics700 [13]	2019	650K	$10s$	700
Sth-Sth V1 [69]	2017	108.5K	$[2, 6]s$	174
Sth-Sth V2 [69]	2017	220.8K	$[2, 6]s$	174
AVA [70]	2017	385K	$15m$	80
AVA-kinetics [117]	2020	624K	$15m, 10s$	80
MIT [142]	2018	1M	$3s$	339
HACS Clips [267]	2019	1.55M	$2s$	200
HVU [34]	2020	572K	$10s$	739
AViD [165]	2020	450K	$[3, 15]s$	887

Table 1. **A list of popular datasets for video action recognition**

out noisy classes/samples. Below we review the most popular large-scale video action recognition datasets in Table 1 and Figure 2.

HMDB51 [109] was introduced in 2011. It was collected mainly from movies, and a small proportion from public databases such as the Prelinger archive, YouTube and Google videos. The dataset contains $6,849$ clips divided into 51 action categories, each containing a minimum of 101 clips. The dataset has three official splits. Most previous papers either report the top-1 classification accuracy on split 1 or the average accuracy over three splits.

UCF101 [190] was introduced in 2012 and is an extension of the previous UCF50 dataset. It contains $13,320$ videos from YouTube spreading over 101 categories of human actions. The dataset has three official splits similar to HMDB51, and is also evaluated in the same manner.

Sports1M [99] was introduced in 2014 as the first large-scale video action dataset which consisted of more than 1 million YouTube videos annotated with 487 sports classes. The categories are fine-grained which leads to low inter-class variations. It has an official 10-fold cross-validation split for evaluation.

ActivityNet [40] was originally introduced in 2015 and the ActivityNet family has several versions since its initial launch. The most recent ActivityNet 200 (V1.3) contains 200 human daily living actions. It has $10,024$ training, $4,926$ validation, and $5,044$ testing videos. On average there are 137 untrimmed videos per class and 1.41 activity instances per video.

YouTube8M [1] was introduced in 2016 and is by far the largest-scale video dataset that contains 8 million YouTube videos (500K hours of video in total) and annotated with $3,862$ action classes. Each video is annotated with one or multiple labels by a YouTube video annotation system. This dataset is split into training, validation and test in the ratio 70:20:10. The validation set of this dataset is also extended with human-verified segment annotations to provide temporal localization information.

Charades [186] was introduced in 2016 as a dataset for real-life concurrent action understanding. It contains $9,848$ videos with an average length of 30 seconds. This dataset includes 157 multi-label daily indoor activities, performed by 267 different people. It has an official train-validation split that has $7,985$ videos for training and the remaining $1,863$ for validation.

Kinetics Family is now the most widely adopted benchmark. Kinetics400 [100] was introduced in 2017 and it consists of approximately 240k training and 20k validation videos trimmed to 10 seconds from 400 human action categories. The Kinetics family continues to expand, with Kinetics-600 [12] released in 2018 with 480K videos and Kinetics700[13] in 2019 with 650K videos.

20BN-Something-Something [69] V1 was introduced in 2017 and V2 was introduced in 2018. This family is another popular benchmark that consists of 174 action classes that describe humans performing basic actions with everyday objects. There are $108,499$ videos in V1 and $220,847$ videos in V2. Note that the Something-Something dataset requires strong temporal modeling because most activities cannot be inferred based on spatial features alone (e.g. opening something, covering something with something).

AVA [70] was introduced in 2017 as the first large-scale spatio-temporal action detection dataset. It contains 430 15-minute video clips with 80 atomic actions labels (only 60 labels were used for evaluation). The annotations were provided at each key-frame which lead to $214,622$ training, $57,472$ validation and $120,322$ testing samples. The AVA dataset was recently expanded to AVA-Kinetics with $352,091$ training, $89,882$ validation and $182,457$ testing samples [117].

Moments in Time [142] was introduced in 2018 and it is a large-scale dataset designed for event understanding. It contains one million 3 second video clips, annotated with a dictionary of 339 classes. Different from other datasets designed for human action understanding, Moments in Time dataset involves people, animals, objects and natural phenomena. The dataset was extended to Multi-Moments in Time (M-MiT) [143] in 2019 by increasing the number of videos to 1.02 million, pruning vague classes, and increasing the number of labels per video.

HACS [267] was introduced in 2019 as a new large-scale dataset for recognition and localization of human actions collected from Web videos. It consists of two kinds of manual annotations. HACS Clips contains 1.55M 2-second clip annotations on 504K videos, and HACS Segments has 140K complete action segments (from action start to end) on 50K videos. The videos are annotated with the same 200 human action classes used in ActivityNet (V1.3) [40].

HVU [34] dataset was released in 2020 for multi-label multi-task video understanding. This dataset has 572K videos and 3,142 labels. The official split has 481K, 31K and 65K videos for train, validation, and test respectively. This dataset has six task categories: scene, object, action, event, attribute, and concept. On average, there are about 2,112 samples for each label. The duration of the videos varies with a maximum length of 10 seconds.

AViD [165] was introduced in 2020 as a dataset for anonymized action recognition. It contains 410K videos for training and 40K videos for testing. Each video clip duration is between 3-15 seconds and in total it has 887 action classes. During data collection, the authors tried to collect data from various countries to deal with data bias. They also remove face identities to protect privacy of video makers. Therefore, AViD dataset might not be a proper choice for recognizing face-related actions.

Before we dive into the chronological review of methods, we present several visual examples from the above datasets in Figure 4 to show their different characteristics. In the top two rows, we pick action classes from UCF101 [190] and Kinetics400 [100] datasets. Interestingly, we find that these actions can sometimes be determined by the context or scene alone. For example, the model can predict the action riding a bike as long as it recognizes a bike in the video frame. The model may also predict the action cricket bowling if it recognizes the cricket pitch. Hence for these classes, video action recognition may become an object/scene classification problem without the need of reasoning motion/temporal information. In the middle two rows, we pick action classes from Something-Something dataset [69]. This dataset focuses on human-object interaction, thus it is more fine-grained and requires strong temporal modeling. For example, if we only look at the first frame of dropping something and picking something up without looking at other video frames, it is impossible to tell these two actions apart. In the bottom row, we pick action classes from Moments in Time dataset [142]. This dataset is different from most video action recognition datasets, and is designed to have large inter-class and intra-class variation that represent dynamical events at different levels of abstraction. For example, the action climbing can have different actors (person or animal) in different environments (stairs or tree).

2.2. Challenges

There are several major challenges in developing effective video action recognition algorithms.

In terms of dataset, first, defining the label space for training action recognition models is non-trivial. It's because human actions are usually composite concepts and the hierarchy of these concepts are not well-defined. Second, annotating videos for action recognition are laborious (e.g., need to watch all the video frames) and ambiguous

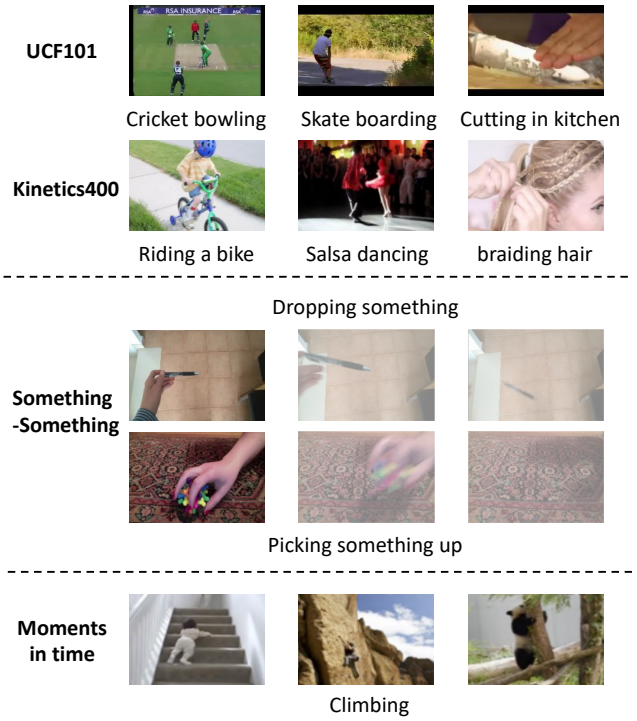

Figure 4. **Visual examples from popular video action datasets**. Top: individual video frames from action classes in UCF101 and Kinetics400. A single frame from these scene-focused datasets often contains enough information to correctly guess the category. Middle: consecutive video frames from classes in Something-Something. The 2nd and 3rd frames are made transparent to indicate the importance of temporal reasoning that we cannot tell these two actions apart by looking at the 1st frame alone. Bottom: individual video frames from classes in Moment in Time. Same action could have different actors in different environments.

(e.g, hard to determine the exact start and end of an action). Third, some popular benchmark datasets (e.g., Kinetics family) only release the video links for users to download and not the actual video, which leads to a situation that methods are evaluated on different data. It is impossible to do fair comparisons between methods and gain insights.

In terms of modeling, first, videos capturing human actions have both strong intra- and inter-class variations. People can perform the same action in different speeds under various viewpoints. Besides, some actions share similar movement patterns that are hard to distinguish. Second, recognizing human actions requires simultaneous understanding of both short-term action-specific motion information and long-range temporal information. We might need a sophisticated model to handle different perspectives rather than using a single convolutional neural network. Third, the computational cost is high for both training and inference, hindering both the development and deployment of action recognition models. In the next section, we will demonstrate how video action recognition methods developed over the last decade to address the aforementioned challenges.

3. An Odyssey of Using Deep Learning for Video Action Recognition

In this section, we review deep learning based methods for video action recognition from 2014 to present and introduce the related earlier work in context.

3.1. From hand-crafted features to CNNs

Despite there being some papers using Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for video action recognition, [200, 5, 91], hand-crafted features [209, 210, 158, 112], particularly Improved Dense Trajectories (IDT) [210], dominated the video understanding literature before 2015, due to their high accuracy and good robustness. However, hand-crafted features have heavy computational cost [244], and are hard to scale and deploy.

With the rise of deep learning [107], researchers started to adapt CNNs for video problems. The seminal work DeepVideo [99] proposed to use a single 2D CNN model on each video frame independently and investigated several temporal connectivity patterns to learn spatio-temporal features for video action recognition, such as late fusion, early fusion and slow fusion. Though this model made early progress with ideas that would prove to be useful later such as a multi-resolution network, its transfer learning performance on UCF101 [190] was 20% less than hand-crafted IDT features (65.4% vs 87.9%). Furthermore, DeepVideo [99] found that a network fed by individual video frames, performs equally well when the input is changed to a stack of frames. This observation might indicate that the learnt spatio-temporal features did not capture the motion well. It also encouraged people to think about why CNN models did not outperform traditional hand-crafted features in the video domain unlike in other computer vision tasks [107, 171].

3.2. Two-stream networks

Since video understanding intuitively needs motion information, finding an appropriate way to describe the temporal relationship between frames is essential to improving the performance of CNN-based video action recognition.

Optical flow [79] is an effective motion representation to describe object/scene movement. To be precise, it is the pattern of apparent motion of objects, surfaces, and edges in a visual scene caused by the relative motion between an observer and a scene. We show several visualizations of optical flow in Figure 5. As we can see, optical flow is able to describe the motion pattern of each action accurately. The advantage of using optical flow is it provides orthogonal information compared to the the RGB image. For example, the two images on the bottom of Figure 5 have cluttered backgrounds. Optical flow can effectively remove the non-moving background and result in a simpler learning problem compared to using the original RGB images as input.

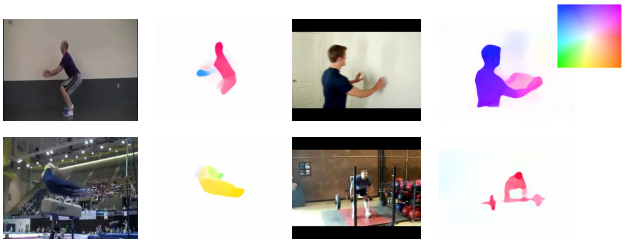

Figure 5. Visualizations of optical flow. We show four image-flow pairs, left is original RGB image and right is the estimated optical flow by FlowNet2 [85]. Color of optical flow indicates the directions of motion, and we follow the color coding scheme of FlowNet2 [85] as shown in top right.

In addition, optical flow has been shown to work well on video problems. Traditional hand-crafted features such as IDT [210] also contain optical-flow-like features, such as Histogram of Optical Flow (HOF) and Motion Boundary Histogram (MBH).

Hence, Simonyan *et al*. [187] proposed two-stream networks, which included a spatial stream and a temporal stream as shown in Figure 6. This method is related to the two-streams hypothesis [65], according to which the human visual cortex contains two pathways: the ventral stream (which performs object recognition) and the dorsal stream (which recognizes motion). The spatial stream takes raw video frame(s) as input to capture visual appearance information. The temporal stream takes a stack of optical flow images as input to capture motion information between video frames. To be specific, [187] linearly rescaled the horizontal and vertical components of the estimated flow (i.e., motion in the x-direction and y-direction) to a [0, 255] range and compressed using JPEG. The output corresponds to the two optical flow images shown in Figure 6. The compressed optical flow images will then be concatenated as the input to the temporal stream with a dimension of $H \times W \times 2L$, where H, W and L indicates the height, width and the length of the video frames. In the end, the final prediction is obtained by averaging the prediction scores from both streams.

By adding the extra temporal stream, for the first time, a CNN-based approach achieved performance similar to the previous best hand-crafted feature IDT on UCF101 (88.0% vs 87.9%) and on HMDB51 [109] (59.4% vs 61.1%). [187] makes two important observations. First, motion information is important for video action recognition. Second, it is still challenging for CNNs to learn temporal information directly from raw video frames. Pre-computing optical flow as the motion representation is an effective way for deep learning to reveal its power. Since [187] managed to close the gap between deep learning approaches and traditional hand-crafted features, many follow-up papers on two-stream networks emerged and greatly advanced the devel-

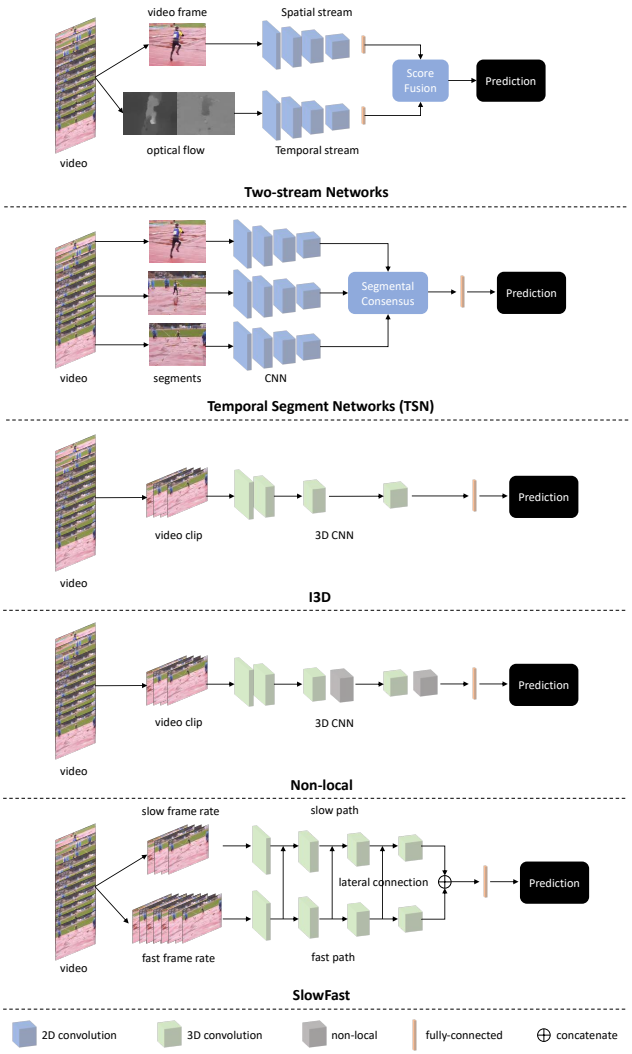

Figure 6. **Workflow of five important papers**: two-stream networks [187], temporal segment networks [218], I3D [14], Non-local [219] and SlowFast [45]. Best viewed in color.

opment of video action recognition. Here, we divide them into several categories and review them individually.

3.2.1 Using deeper network architectures

Two-stream networks [187] used a relatively shallow network architecture [107]. Thus a natural extension to the two-stream networks involves using deeper networks. However, Wang *et al*. [215] finds that simply using deeper networks does not yield better results, possibly due to overfitting on the small-sized video datasets [190, 109]. Recall from section 2.1, UCF101 and HMDB51 datasets only have thousands of training videos. Hence, Wang *et al*. [217] introduce a series of good practices, including cross-modality initialization, synchronized batch normalization, corner cropping and multi-scale cropping data augmentation, large dropout ratio, etc. to prevent deeper networks from overfitting. With these good practices, [217] was able to train a two-stream network with the VGG16 model [188] that outperforms [187] by a large margin on UCF101. These good practices have been widely adopted and are still being used. Later, Temporal Segment Networks (TSN) [218] performed a thorough investigation of network architectures, such as VGG16, ResNet [76], Inception [198], and demonstrated that deeper networks usually achieve higher recognition accuracy for video action recognition. We will describe more details about TSN in section 3.2.4.

3.2.2 Two-stream fusion

Since there are two streams in a two-stream network, there will be a stage that needs to merge the results from both networks to obtain the final prediction. This stage is usually referred to as the spatial-temporal fusion step.

The easiest and most straightforward way is late fusion, which performs a weighted average of predictions from both streams. Despite late fusion being widely adopted [187, 217], many researchers claim that this may not be the optimal way to fuse the information between the spatial appearance stream and temporal motion stream. They believe that earlier interactions between the two networks could benefit both streams during model learning and this is termed as early fusion.

Fusion [50] is one of the first of several papers investigating the early fusion paradigm, including how to perform spatial fusion (e.g., using operators such as sum, max, bilinear, convolution and concatenation), where to fuse the network (e.g., the network layer where early interactions happen), and how to perform temporal fusion (e.g., using 2D or 3D convolutional fusion in later stages of the network). [50] shows that early fusion is beneficial for both streams to learn richer features and leads to improved performance over late fusion. Following this line of research, Feichtenhofer *et al*. [46] generalizes ResNet [76] to the spatio-temporal domain by introducing residual connections between the two streams. Based on [46], Feichtenhofer *et al*. [47] further propose a multiplicative gating function for residual networks to learn better spatio-temporal features. Concurrently, [225] adopts a spatio-temporal pyramid to perform hierarchical early fusion between the two streams.

3.2.3 Recurrent neural networks

Since a video is essentially a temporal sequence, researchers have explored Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for temporal modeling inside a video, particularly the usage of Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) [78].

LRCN [37] and Beyond-Short-Snippets [253] are the first of several papers that use LSTM for video action recog-

nition under the two-stream networks setting. They take the feature maps from CNNs as an input to a deep LSTM network, and aggregate frame-level CNN features into video-level predictions. Note that they use LSTM on two streams separately, and the final results are still obtained by late fusion. However, there is no clear empirical improvement from LSTM models [253] over the two-stream baseline [187]. Following the CNN-LSTM framework, several variants are proposed, such as bi-directional LSTM [205], CNN-LSTM fusion [56] and hierarchical multi-granularity LSTM network [118]. [125] described VideoLSTM which includes a correlation-based spatial attention mechanism and a lightweight motion-based attention mechanism. VideoLSTM not only show improved results on action recognition, but also demonstrate how the learned attention can be used for action localization by relying on just the action class label. Lattice-LSTM [196] extends LSTM by learning independent hidden state transitions of memory cells for individual spatial locations, so that it can accurately model long-term and complex motions. ShuttleNet [183] is a concurrent work that considers both feedforward and feedback connections in a RNN to learn long-term dependencies. FASTER [272] designed a FAST-GRU to aggregate clip-level features from an expensive backbone and a cheap backbone. This strategy reduces the processing cost of redundant clips and hence accelerates the inference speed.

However, the work mentioned above [37, 253, 125, 196, 183] use different two-stream networks/backbones. The differences between various methods using RNNs are thus unclear. Ma *et al*. [135] build a strong baseline for fair comparison and thoroughly study the effect of learning spatio-temporal features by using RNNs. They find that it requires proper care to achieve improved performance, e.g., LSTMs require pre-segmented data to fully exploit the temporal information. RNNs are also intensively studied in video action localization [189] and video question answering [274], but these are beyond the scope of this survey.

3.2.4 Segment-based methods

Thanks to optical flow, two-stream networks are able to reason about short-term motion information between frames. However, they still cannot capture long-range temporal information. Motivated by this weakness of two-stream networks , Wang *et al*. [218] proposed a Temporal Segment Network (TSN) to perform video-level action recognition. Though initially proposed to be used with 2D CNNs, it is simple and generic. Thus recent work using either 2D or 3D CNNs, are still built upon this framework.

To be specific, as shown in Figure 6, TSN first divides a whole video into several segments, where the segments distribute uniformly along the temporal dimension. Then TSN randomly selects a single video frame within each segment and forwards them through the network. Here, the network shares weights for input frames from all the segments. In the end, a segmental consensus is performed to aggregate information from the sampled video frames. The segmental consensus could be operators like average pooling, max pooling, bilinear encoding, etc. In this sense, TSN is capable of modeling long-range temporal structure because the model sees the content from the entire video. In addition, this sparse sampling strategy lowers the training cost over long video sequences but preserves relevant information.

Given TSN's good performance and simplicity, most two-stream methods afterwards become segment-based two-stream networks. Since the segmental consensus is simply doing a max or average pooling operation, a feature encoding step might generate a global video feature and lead to improved performance as suggested in traditional approaches [179, 97, 157]. Deep Local Video Feature (DVOF) [114] proposed to treat the deep networks that trained on local inputs as feature extractors and train another encoding function to map the global features into global labels. Temporal Linear Encoding (TLE) network [36] appeared concurrently with DVOF, but the encoding layer was embedded in the network so that the whole pipeline could be trained end-to-end. VLAD3 and ActionVLAD [123, 63] also appeared concurrently. They extended the NetVLAD layer [4] to the video domain to perform video-level encoding, instead of using compact bilinear encoding as in [36]. To improve the temporal reasoning ability of TSN, Temporal Relation Network (TRN) [269] was proposed to learn and reason about temporal dependencies between video frames at multiple time scales. The recent state-of-the-art efficient model TSM [128] is also segment-based. We will discuss it in more detail in section 3.4.2.

3.2.5 Multi-stream networks

Two-stream networks are successful because appearance and motion information are two of the most important properties of a video. However, there are other factors that can help video action recognition as well, such as pose, object, audio and depth, etc.

Pose information is closely related to human action. We can recognize most actions by just looking at a pose (skeleton) image without scene context. Although there is previous work on using pose for action recognition [150, 246], P-CNN [23] was one of the first deep learning methods that successfully used pose to improve video action recognition. P-CNN proposed to aggregates motion and appearance information along tracks of human body parts, in a similar spirit to trajectory pooling [214]. [282] extended this pipeline to a chained multi-stream framework, that computed and integrated appearance, motion and pose. They

introduced a Markov chain model that added these cues successively and obtained promising results on both action recognition and action localization. PoTion [25] was a follow-up work to P-CNN, but introduced a more powerful feature representation that encoded the movement of human semantic keypoints. They first ran a decent human pose estimator and extracted heatmaps for the human joints in each frame. They then obtained the PoTion representation by temporally aggregating these probability maps. PoTion is lightweight and outperforms previous pose representations [23, 282]. In addition, it was shown to be complementary to standard appearance and motion streams, e.g. combining PoTion with I3D [14] achieved state-of-the-art result on UCF101 (98.2%).

Object information is another important cue because most human actions involve human-object interaction. Wu [232] proposed to leverage both object features and scene features to help video action recognition. The object and scene features were extracted from state-of-the-art pre-trained object and scene detectors. Wang *et al*. [252] took a step further to make the network end-to-end trainable. They introduced a two-stream semantic region based method, by replacing a standard spatial stream with a Faster RCNN network [171], to extract semantic information about the object, person and scene.

Audio signals usually come with video, and are complementary to the visual information. Wu *et al*. [233] introduced a multi-stream framework that integrates spatial, short-term motion, long-term temporal and audio in videos to digest complementary clues. Recently, Xiao *et al*. [237] introduced AudioSlowFast following [45], by adding another audio pathway to model vision and sound in an unified representation.

In RGB-D video action recognition field, using depth information is standard practice [59]. However, for vision-based video action recognition (e.g., only given monocular videos), we do not have access to ground truth depth information as in the RGB-D domain. An early attempt Depth2Action [280] uses off-the-shelf depth estimators to extract depth information from videos and use it for action recognition.

Essentially, multi-stream networks is a way of multi-modality learning, using different cues as input signals to help video action recognition. We will discuss more on multi-modality learning in section 5.12.

3.3. The rise of 3D CNNs

Pre-computing optical flow is computationally intensive and storage demanding, which is not friendly for large-scale training or real-time deployment. A conceptually easy way to understand a video is as a 3D tensor with two spatial and one time dimension. Hence, this leads to the usage of 3D CNNs as a processing unit to model the temporal information in a video.

The seminal work for using 3D CNNs for action recognition is [91]. While inspiring, the network was not deep enough to show its potential. Tran *et al*. [202] extended [91] to a deeper 3D network, termed C3D. C3D follows the modular design of [188], which could be thought of as a 3D version of VGG16 network. Its performance on standard benchmarks is not satisfactory, but shows strong generalization capability and can be used as a generic feature extractor for various video tasks [250].

However, 3D networks are hard to optimize. In order to train a 3D convolutional filter well, people need a large-scale dataset with diverse video content and action categories. Fortunately, there exists a dataset, Sports1M [99] which is large enough to support the training of a deep 3D network. However, the training of C3D takes weeks to converge. Despite the popularity of C3D, most users just adopt it as a feature extractor for different use cases instead of modifying/fine-tuning the network. This is partially the reason why two-stream networks based on 2D CNNs dominated the video action recognition domain from year 2014 to 2017.

The situation changed when Carreira *et al*. [14] proposed I3D in year 2017. As shown in Figure 6, I3D takes a video clip as input, and forwards it through stacked 3D convolutional layers. A video clip is a sequence of video frames, usually 16 or 32 frames are used. The major contributions of I3D are: 1) it adapts mature image classification architectures to use for 3D CNN; 2) For model weights, it adopts a method developed for initializing optical flow networks in [217] to inflate the ImageNet pre-trained 2D model weights to their counterparts in the 3D model. Hence, I3D bypasses the dilemma that 3D CNNs have to be trained from scratch. With pre-training on a new large-scale dataset Kinetics400 [100], I3D achieved a 95.6% on UCF101 and 74.8% on HMDB51. I3D ended the era where different methods reported numbers on small-sized datasets such as UCF101 and HMDB51[2]. Publications following I3D needed to report their performance on Kinetics400, or other large-scale benchmark datasets, which pushed video action recognition to the next level. In the next few years, 3D CNNs advanced quickly and became top performers on almost every benchmark dataset. We will review the 3D CNNs based literature in several categories below.

We want to point out that 3D CNNs are not replacing two-stream networks, and they are not mutually exclusive. They just use different ways to model the temporal relationship in a video. Furthermore, the two-stream approach is a generic framework for video understanding, instead of a specific method. As long as there are two networks, one for spatial appearance modeling using RGB frames, the other for temporal motion modeling using optical flow, the

[2] As we can see in Table 2

method may be categorized into the family of two-stream networks. In [14], they also build a temporal stream with I3D architecture and achieved even higher performance, 98.0% on UCF101 and 80.9% on HMDB51. Hence, the final I3D model is a combination of 3D CNNs and two-stream networks. However, the contribution of I3D does not lie in the usage of optical flow.

3.3.1 Mapping from 2D to 3D CNNs

2D CNNs enjoy the benefit of pre-training brought by the large-scale of image datasets such as ImageNet [30] and Places205 [270], which cannot be matched even with the largest video datasets available today. On these datasets numerous efforts have been devoted to the search for 2D CNN architectures that are more accurate and generalize better. Below we describe the efforts to capitalize on these advances for 3D CNNs.

ResNet3D [74] directly took 2D ResNet [76] and replaced all the 2D convolutional filters with 3D kernels. They believed that by using deep 3D CNNs together with large-scale datasets one can exploit the success of 2D CNNs on ImageNet. Motivated by ResNeXt [238], Chen *et al*. [20] presented a multi-fiber architecture that slices a complex neural network into an ensemble of lightweight networks (fibers) that facilitate information flow between fibers, reduces the computational cost at the same time. Inspired by SENet [81], STCNet [33] propose to integrate channel-wise information inside a 3D block to capture both spatial-channels and temporal-channels correlation information throughout the network.

3.3.2 Unifying 2D and 3D CNNs

To reduce the complexity of 3D network training, P3D [169] and R2+1D [204] explore the idea of 3D factorization. To be specific, a 3D kernel (e.g., $3\times3\times3$) can be factorized to two separate operations, a 2D spatial convolution (e.g., $1\times3\times3$) and a 1D temporal convolution (e.g., $3\times1\times1$). The differences between P3D and R2+1D are how they arrange the two factorized operations and how they formulate each residual block. Trajectory convolution [268] follows this idea but uses deformable convolution for the temporal component to better cope with motion.

Another way of simplifying 3D CNNs is to mix 2D and 3D convolutions in a single network. MiCTNet [271] integrates 2D and 3D CNNs to generate deeper and more informative feature maps, while reducing training complexity in each round of spatio-temporal fusion. ARTNet [213] introduces an appearance-and-relation network by using a new building block. The building block consists of a spatial branch using 2D CNNs and a relation branch using 3D CNNs. S3D [239] combines the merits from approaches mentioned above. It first replaces the 3D convolutions at the bottom of the network with 2D kernels, and find that this kind of top-heavy network has higher recognition accuracy. Then S3D factorizes the remaining 3D kernels as P3D and R2+1D do, to further reduce the model size and training complexity. A concurrent work named ECO [283] also adopts such a top-heavy network to achieve online video understanding.

3.3.3 Long-range temporal modeling

In 3D CNNs, long-range temporal connection may be achieved by stacking multiple short temporal convolutions, e.g., $3\times3\times3$ filters. However, useful temporal information may be lost in the later stages of a deep network, especially for frames far apart.

In order to perform long-range temporal modeling, LTC [206] introduces and evaluates long-term temporal convolutions over a large number of video frames. However, limited by GPU memory, they have to sacrifice input resolution to use more frames. After that, T3D [32] adopted a densely connected structure [83] to keep the original temporal information as complete as possible to make the final prediction. Later, Wang *et al*. [219] introduced a new building block, termed non-local. Non-local is a generic operation similar to self-attention [207], which can be used for many computer vision tasks in a plug-and-play manner. As shown in Figure 6, they used a spacetime non-local module after later residual blocks to capture the long-range dependence in both space and temporal domain, and achieved improved performance over baselines without bells and whistles. Wu *et al*. [229] proposed a feature bank representation, which embeds information of the entire video into a memory cell, to make context-aware prediction. Recently, V4D [264] proposed video-level 4D CNNs, to model the evolution of long-range spatio-temporal representation with 4D convolutions.

3.3.4 Enhancing 3D efficiency

In order to further improve the efficiency of 3D CNNs (i.e., in terms of GFLOPs, model parameters and latency), many variants of 3D CNNs begin to emerge.

Motivated by the development in efficient 2D networks, researchers started to adopt channel-wise separable convolution and extend it for video classification [111, 203]. CSN [203] reveals that it is a good practice to factorize 3D convolutions by separating channel interactions and spatio-temporal interactions, and is able to obtain state-of-the-art performance while being 2 to 3 times faster than the previous best approaches. These methods are also related to multi-fiber networks [20] as they are all inspired by group convolution.

Recently, Feichtenhofer *et al*. [45] proposed SlowFast, an efficient network with a slow pathway and a fast path-

way. The network design is partially inspired by the biological Parvo- and Magnocellular cells in the primate visual systems. As shown in Figure 6, the slow pathway operates at low frame rates to capture detailed semantic information, while the fast pathway operates at high temporal resolution to capture rapidly changing motion. In order to incorporate motion information such as in two-stream networks, SlowFast adopts a lateral connection to fuse the representation learned by each pathway. Since the fast pathway can be made very lightweight by reducing its channel capacity, the overall efficiency of SlowFast is largely improved. Although SlowFast has two pathways, it is different from the two-stream networks [187], because the two pathways are designed to model different temporal speeds, not spatial and temporal modeling. There are several concurrent papers using multiple pathways to balance the accuracy and efficiency [43].

Following this line, Feichtenhofer [44] introduced X3D that progressively expand a 2D image classification architecture along multiple network axes, such as temporal duration, frame rate, spatial resolution, width, bottleneck width, and depth. X3D pushes the 3D model modification/factorization to an extreme, and is a family of efficient video networks to meet different requirements of target complexity. With similar spirit, A3D [276] also leverages multiple network configurations. However, A3D trains these configurations jointly and during inference deploys only one model. This makes the model at the end more efficient. In the next section, we will continue to talk about efficient video modeling, but not based on 3D convolutions.

3.4. Efficient Video Modeling

With the increase of dataset size and the need for deployment, efficiency becomes an important concern.

If we use methods based on two-stream networks, we need to pre-compute optical flow and store them on local disk. Taking Kinetics400 dataset as an illustrative example, storing all the optical flow images requires 4.5TB disk space. Such a huge amount of data would make I/O become the tightest bottleneck during training, leading to a waste of GPU resources and longer experiment cycle. In addition, pre-computing optical flow is not cheap, which means all the two-stream networks methods are not real-time.

If we use methods based on 3D CNNs, people still find that 3D CNNs are hard to train and challenging to deploy. In terms of training, a standard SlowFast network trained on Kinetics400 dataset using a high-end 8-GPU machine takes 10 days to complete. Such a long experimental cycle and huge computing cost makes video understanding research only accessible to big companies/labs with abundant computing resources. There are several recent attempts to speed up the training of deep video models [230], but these are still expensive compared to most image-based computer vision tasks. In terms of deployment, 3D convolution is not as well supported as 2D convolution for different platforms. Furthermore, 3D CNNs require more video frames as input which adds additional IO cost.

Hence, starting from year 2018, researchers started to investigate other alternatives to see how they could improve accuracy and efficiency at the same time for video action recognition. We will review recent efficient video modeling methods in several categories below.

3.4.1 Flow-mimic approaches

One of the major drawback of two-stream networks is its need for optical flow. Pre-computing optical flow is computationally expensive, storage demanding, and not end-to-end trainable for video action recognition. It is appealing if we can find a way to encode motion information without using optical flow, at least during inference time.

[146] and [35] are early attempts for learning to estimate optical flow inside a network for video action recognition. Although these two approaches do not need optical flow during inference, they require optical flow during training in order to train the flow estimation network. Hidden two-stream networks [278] proposed MotionNet to replace the traditional optical flow computation. MotionNet is a lightweight network to learn motion information in an unsupervised manner, and when concatenated with the temporal stream, is end-to-end trainable. Thus, hidden two-stream CNNs [278] only take raw video frames as input and directly predict action classes without explicitly computing optical flow, regardless of whether its the training or inference stage. PAN [257] mimics the optical flow features by computing the difference between consecutive feature maps. Following this direction, [197, 42, 116, 164] continue to investigate end-to-end trainable CNNs to learn optical-flow-like features from data. They derive such features directly from the definition of optical flow [255]. MARS [26] and D3D [191] used knowledge distillation to combine two-stream networks into a single stream, e.g., by tuning the spatial stream to predict the outputs of the temporal stream. Recently, Kwon *et al*. [110] introduced MotionSqueeze module to estimate the motion features. The proposed module is end-to-end trainable and can be plugged into any network, similar to [278].

3.4.2 Temporal modeling without 3D convolution

A simple and natural choice to model temporal relationship between frames is using 3D convolution. However, there are many alternatives to achieve this goal. Here, we will review some recent work that performs temporal modeling without 3D convolution.

Lin *et al*. [128] introduce a new method, termed temporal shift module (TSM). TSM extends the shift operation

[228] to video understanding. It shifts part of the channels along the temporal dimension, thus facilitating information exchanged among neighboring frames. In order to keep spatial feature learning capacity, they put temporal shift module inside the residual branch in a residual block. Thus all the information in the original activation is still accessible after temporal shift through identity mapping. The biggest advantage of TSM is that it can be inserted into a 2D CNN to achieve temporal modeling at zero computation and zero parameters. Similar to TSM, TIN [182] introduces a temporal interlacing module to model the temporal convolution.

There are several recent 2D CNNs approaches using attention to perform long-term temporal modeling [92, 122, 132, 133]. STM [92] proposes a channel-wise spatio-temporal module to present the spatio-temporal features and a channel-wise motion module to efficiently encode motion features. TEA [122] is similar to STM, but inspired by SENet [81], TEA uses motion features to recalibrate the spatio-temporal features to enhance the motion pattern. Specifically, TEA has two components: motion excitation and multiple temporal aggregation, while the first one handles short-range motion modeling and the second one efficiently enlarge the temporal receptive field for long-range temporal modeling. They are complementary and both light-weight, thus TEA is able to achieve competitive results with previous best approaches while keeping FLOPs as low as many 2D CNNs. Recently, TEINet [132] also adopts attention to enhance temporal modeling. Note that, the above attention-based methods are different from non-local [219], because they use channel attention while non-local uses spatial attention.

3.5. Miscellaneous

In this section, we are going to show several other directions that are popular for video action recognition in the last decade.

3.5.1 Trajectory-based methods

While CNN-based approaches have demonstrated their superiority and gradually replaced the traditional hand-crafted methods, the traditional local feature pipeline still has its merits which should not be ignored, such as the usage of trajectory.

Inspired by the good performance of trajectory-based methods [210], Wang *et al*. [214] proposed to conduct trajectory-constrained pooling to aggregate deep convolutional features into effective descriptors, which they term as TDD. Here, a trajectory is defined as a path tracking down pixels in the temporal dimension. This new video representation shares the merits of both hand-crafted features and deep-learned features, and became one of the top performers on both UCF101 and HMDB51 datasets in the year 2015. Concurrently, Lan *et al*. [113] incorporated both Independent Subspace Analysis (ISA) and dense trajectories into the standard two-stream networks, and show the complementarity between data-independent and data-driven approaches. Instead of treating CNNs as a fixed feature extractor, Zhao *et al*. [268] proposed trajectory convolution to learn features along the temporal dimension with the help of trajectories.

3.5.2 Rank pooling

There is another way to model temporal information inside a video, termed rank pooling (a.k.a learning-to-rank). The seminal work in this line starts from VideoDarwin [53], that uses a ranking machine to learn the evolution of the appearance over time and returns a ranking function. The ranking function should be able to order the frames of a video temporally, thus they use the parameters of this ranking function as a new video representation. VideoDarwin [53] is not a deep learning based method, but achieves comparable performance and efficiency.

To adapt rank pooling to deep learning, Fernando [54] introduces a differentiable rank pooling layer to achieve end-to-end feature learning. Following this direction, Bilen *et al*. [9] apply rank pooling on the raw image pixels of a video producing a single RGB image per video, termed dynamic images. Another concurrent work by Fernando [51] extends rank pooling to hierarchical rank pooling by stacking multiple levels of temporal encoding. Finally, [22] propose a generalization of the original ranking formulation [53] using subspace representations and show that it leads to significantly better representation of the dynamic evolution of actions, while being computationally cheap.

3.5.3 Compressed video action recognition

Most video action recognition approaches use raw videos (or decoded video frames) as input. However, there are several drawbacks of using raw videos, such as the huge amount of data and high temporal redundancy. Video compression methods usually store one frame by reusing contents from another frame (i.e., I-frame) and only store the difference (i.e., P-frames and B-frames) due to the fact that adjacent frames are similar. Here, the I-frame is the original RGB video frame, and P-frames and B-frames include the motion vector and residual, which are used to store the difference. Motivated by the developments in the video compression domain, researchers started to adopt compressed video representations as input to train effective video models.

Since the motion vector has coarse structure and may contain inaccurate movements, Zhang *et al*. [256] adopted knowledge distillation to help the motion-vector-based temporal stream mimic the optical-flow-based temporal stream.

Method	Pre-train	Flow	Backbone	Venue	UCF101	HMDB51	Kinetics400
DeepVideo [99]	I	-	AlexNet	CVPR 2014	65.4	-	-
Two-stream [187]	I	✓	CNN-M	NeurIPS 2014	88.0	59.4	-
LRCN [37]	I	✓	CNN-M	CVPR 2015	82.3	-	-
TDD [214]	I	✓	CNN-M	CVPR 2015	90.3	63.2	-
Fusion [50]	I	✓	VGG16	CVPR 2016	92.5	65.4	-
TSN [218]	I	✓	BN-Inception	ECCV 2016	94.0	68.5	**73.9**
TLE [36]	I	✓	BN-Inception	CVPR 2017	**95.6**	**71.1**	-
C3D [202]	S	-	VGG16-like	ICCV 2015	82.3	56.8	59.5
I3D [14]	I,K	-	BN-Inception-like	CVPR 2017	95.6	74.8	71.1
P3D [169]	S	-	ResNet50-like	ICCV 2017	88.6	-	71.6
ResNet3D [74]	K	-	ResNeXt101-like	CVPR 2018	94.5	70.2	65.1
R2+1D [204]	K	-	ResNet34-like	CVPR 2018	96.8	74.5	72.0
NL I3D [219]	I	-	ResNet101-like	CVPR 2018	-	-	77.7
S3D [239]	I,K	-	BN-Inception-like	ECCV 2018	96.8	**75.9**	74.7
SlowFast [45]	-	-	ResNet101-NL-like	ICCV 2019	-	-	79.8
X3D-XXL [44]	-	-	ResNet-like	CVPR 2020	-	-	**80.4**
TPN [248]	-	-	ResNet101-like	CVPR 2020	-	-	78.9
CIDC [121]	-	-	ResNet50-like	ECCV 2020	**97.9**	75.2	75.5
Hidden TSN [278]	I	-	BN-Inception	ACCV 2018	93.2	66.8	72.8
OFF [197]	I	-	BN-Inception	CVPR 2018	96.0	74.2	-
TSM [128]	I	-	ResNet50	ICCV 2019	95.9	73.5	74.1
STM [92]	I,K	-	ResNet50-like	ICCV 2019	96.2	72.2	73.7
TEINet [132]	I,K	-	ResNet50-like	AAAI 2020	96.7	72.1	76.2
TEA [122]	I,K	-	ResNet50-like	CVPR 2020	**96.9**	73.3	76.1
MSNet [110]	I,K	-	ResNet50-like	ECCV 2020	-	**77.4**	**76.4**

Table 2. **Results of widely adopted methods on three scene-focused datasets**. Pre-train indicates which dataset the model is pre-trained on. I: ImageNet, S: Sports1M and K: Kinetics400. NL represents non local.

However, their approach required extracting and processing each frame. They obtained comparable recognition accuracy with standard two-stream networks, but were 27 times faster. Wu *et al*. [231] used a heavyweight CNN for the I frame and lightweight CNN's for the P frames. This required that the motion vectors and residuals for each P frame be referred back to the I frame by accumulation. DMC-Net [185] is a follow-up work to [231] using adversarial loss. It adopts a lightweight generator network to help the motion vector capturing fine motion details, instead of knowledge distillation as in [256]. A recent paper SCSampler [106], also adopts compressed video representation for sampling salient clips and we will discuss it in the next section 3.5.4. As yet none of the compressed approaches can deal with B-frames due to the added complexity.

3.5.4 Frame/Clip sampling

Most of the aforementioned deep learning methods treat every video frame/clip equally for the final prediction. However, discriminative actions only happen in a few moments, and most of the other video content is irrelevant or weakly related to the labeled action category. There are several drawbacks of this paradigm. First, training with a large proportion of irrelevant video frames may hurt performance. Second, such uniform sampling is not efficient during inference.

Partially inspired by how human understand a video using just a few glimpses over the entire video [251], many methods were proposed to sample the most informative video frames/clips for both improving the performance and making the model more efficient during inference.

KVM [277] is one of the first attempts to propose an end-to-end framework to simultaneously identify key volumes and do action classification. Later, [98] introduce AdaScan that predicts the importance score of each video frame in an online fashion, which they term as adaptive temporal pooling. Both of these methods achieve improved performance, but they still adopt the standard evaluation scheme which does not show efficiency during inference. Recent approaches focus more on the efficiency [41, 234, 8, 106]. AdaFrame [234] follows [251, 98] but uses a reinforcement learning based approach to search more informative video clips. Concurrently, [8] uses a teacher-student framework, i.e., a see-it-all teacher can be used to train a compute ef-

ficient see-very-little student. They demonstrate that the efficient student network can reduce the inference time by 30% and the number of FLOPs by approximately 90% with negligible performance drop. Recently, SCSampler [106] trains a lightweight network to sample the most salient video clips based on compressed video representations, and achieve state-of-the-art performance on both Kinetics400 and Sports1M dataset. They also empirically show that such saliency-based sampling is not only efficient, but also enjoys higher accuracy than using all the video frames.

3.5.5 Visual tempo

Visual tempo is a concept to describe how fast an action goes. Many action classes have different visual tempos. In most cases, the key to distinguish them is their visual tempos, as they might share high similarities in visual appearance, such as walking, jogging and running [248]. There are several papers exploring different temporal rates (tempos) for improved temporal modeling [273, 147, 82, 281, 45, 248]. Initial attempts usually capture the video tempo through sampling raw videos at multiple rates and constructing an input-level frame pyramid [273, 147, 281]. Recently, SlowFast [45], as we discussed in section 3.3.4, utilizes the characteristics of visual tempo to design a two-pathway network for better accuracy and efficiency trade-off. CIDC [121] proposed directional temporal modeling along with a local backbone for video temporal modeling. TPN [248] extends the tempo modeling to the feature-level and shows consistent improvement over previous approaches.

We would like to point out that visual tempo is also widely used in self-supervised video representation learning [6, 247, 16] since it can naturally provide supervision signals to train a deep network. We will discuss more details on self-supervised video representation learning in section 5.13.

4. Evaluation and Benchmarking

In this section, we compare popular approaches on benchmark datasets. To be specific, we first introduce standard evaluation schemes in section 4.1. Then we divide common benchmarks into three categories, scene-focused (UCF101, HMDB51 and Kinetics400 in section 4.2), motion-focused (Sth-Sth V1 and V2 in section 4.3) and multi-label (Charades in section 4.4). In the end, we present a fair comparison among popular methods in terms of both recognition accuracy and efficiency in section 4.5.

4.1. Evaluation scheme

During model training, we usually randomly pick a video frame/clip to form mini-batch samples. However, for evaluation, we need a standardized pipeline in order to perform fair comparisons.

For 2D CNNs, a widely adopted evaluation scheme is to evenly sample 25 frames from each video following [187, 217]. For each frame, we perform ten-crop data augmentation by cropping the 4 corners and 1 center, flipping them horizontally and averaging the prediction scores (before softmax operation) over all crops of the samples, i.e., this means we use 250 frames per video for inference.

For 3D CNNs, a widely adopted evaluation scheme termed 30-view strategy is to evenly sample 10 clips from each video following [219]. For each video clip, we perform three-crop data augmentation. To be specific, we scale the shorter spatial side to 256 pixels and take three crops of 256×256 to cover the spatial dimensions and average the prediction scores.

However, the evaluation schemes are not fixed. They are evolving and adapting to new network architectures and different datasets. For example, TSM [128] only uses two clips per video for small-sized datasets [190, 109], and perform three-crop data augmentation for each clip despite its being a 2D CNN. We will mention any deviations from the standard evaluation pipeline.

In terms of evaluation metric, we report *accuracy* for single-label action recognition, and *mAP (mean average precision)* for multi-label action recognition.

4.2. Scene-focused datasets

Here, we compare recent state-of-the-art approaches on scene-focused datasets: UCF101, HMDB51 and Kinetics400. The reason we call them scene-focused is because most action videos in these datasets are short, and can be recognized by static scene appearance alone as shown in Figure 4.

Following the chronology, we first present results for early attempts of using deep learning and the two-stream networks at the top of Table 2. We make several observations. First, without motion/temporal modeling, the performance of DeepVideo [99] is inferior to all other approaches. Second, it is helpful to transfer knowledge from traditional methods (non-CNN-based) to deep learning. For example, TDD [214] uses trajectory pooling to extract motion-aware CNN features. TLE [36] embeds global feature encoding, which is an important step in traditional video action recognition pipeline, into a deep network.

We then compare 3D CNNs based approaches in the middle of Table 2. Despite training on a large corpus of videos, C3D [202] performs inferior to concurrent work [187, 214, 217], possibly due to difficulties in optimization of 3D kernels. Motivated by this, several papers - I3D [14], P3D [169], R2+1D [204] and S3D [239] factorize 3D convolution filters to 2D spatial kernels and 1D temporal kernels to ease the training. In addition, I3D introduces an inflation strategy to avoid training from scratch by bootstrap-

Method	Pre-train	Backbone	Frames×Views	Venue	V1 Top1	V2 Top1
TSN [218]	I	BN-Inception	8×1	ECCV 2016	19.7	-
I3D [14]	I,K	ResNet50-like	32×6	CVPR 2017	41.6	-
NL I3D [219]	I,K	ResNet50-like	32×6	CVPR 2018	44.4	-
NL I3D + GCN [220]	I,K	ResNet50-like	32×6	ECCV 2018	46.1	-
ECO [283]	K	BNIncep+ResNet18	16×1	ECCV 2018	41.4	-
TRN [269]	I	BN-Inception	8×1	ECCV 2018	42.0	48.8
STM [92]	I	ResNet50-like	8×30	ICCV 2019	49.2	-
STM [92]	I	ResNet50-like	16×30	ICCV 2019	50.7	-
TSM [128]	K	ResNet50	8×1	ICCV 2019	45.6	59.1
TSM [128]	K	ResNet50	16×1	ICCV 2019	47.2	63.4
bLVNet-TAM [43]	I	BLNet-like	8×2	NeurIPS 2019	46.4	59.1
bLVNet-TAM [43]	I	BLNet-like	16×2	NeurIPS 2019	48.4	61.7
TEA [122]	I	ResNet50-like	8×1	CVPR 2020	48.9	-
TEA [122]	I	ResNet50-like	16×1	CVPR 2020	51.9	-
TSM + TPN [248]	K	ResNet50-like	8×1	CVPR 2020	49.0	62.0
MSNet [110]	I	ResNet50-like	8×1	ECCV 2020	50.9	63.0
MSNet [110]	I	ResNet50-like	16×1	ECCV 2020	**52.1**	**64.7**
TIN [182]	K	ResNet50-like	16×1	AAAI 2020	47.0	60.1
TEINet [132]	I	ResNet50-like	8×1	AAAI 2020	47.4	61.3
TEINet [132]	I	ResNet50-like	16×1	AAAI 2020	49.9	62.1

Table 3. **Results of widely adopted methods on Something-Something V1 and V2 datasets**. We only report numbers without using optical flow. Pre-train indicates which dataset the model is pre-trained on. I: ImageNet and K: Kinetics400. View means number of temporal clip multiples spatial crop, e.g., 30 means 10 temporal clips with 3 spatial crops each clip.

ping the 3D model weights from well-trained 2D networks. By using these techniques, they achieve comparable performance to the best two-stream network methods [36] without the need for optical flow. Furthermore, recent 3D models obtain even higher accuracy, by using more training samples [203], additional pathways [45], or architecture search [44].

Finally, we show recent efficient models in the bottom of Table 2. We can see that these methods are able to achieve higher recognition accuracy than two-stream networks (top), and comparable performance to 3D CNNs (middle). Since they are 2D CNNs and do not use optical flow, these methods are efficient in terms of both training and inference. Most of them are real-time approaches, and some can do online video action recognition [128]. We believe 2D CNN plus temporal modeling is a promising direction due to the need of efficiency. Here, temporal modeling could be attention based, flow based or 3D kernel based.

4.3. Motion-focused datasets

In this section, we compare the recent state-of-the-art approaches on the 20BN-Something-Something (Sth-Sth) dataset. We report top1 accuracy on both V1 and V2. Sth-Sth datasets focus on humans performing basic actions with daily objects. Different from scene-focused datasets, background scene in Sth-Sth datasets contributes little to the final action class prediction. In addition, there are classes such as "Pushing something from left to right" and "Pushing something from right to left", and which require strong motion reasoning.

By comparing the previous work in Table 3, we observe that using longer input (e.g., 16 frames) is generally better. Moreover, methods that focus on temporal modeling [128, 122, 92] work better than stacked 3D kernels [14]. For example, TSM [128], TEA [122] and MSNet [110] insert an explicit temporal reasoning module into 2D ResNet backbones and achieves state-of-the-art results. This implies that the Sth-Sth dataset needs strong temporal motion reasoning as well as spatial semantics information.

4.4. Multi-label datasets

In this section, we first compare the recent state-of-the-art approaches on Charades dataset [186] and then we list some recent work that use assemble model or additional object information on Charades.

Comparing the previous work in Table 4, we make the following observations. First, 3D models [229, 45] generally perform better than 2D models [186, 231] and 2D models with optical flow input. This indicates that the spatio-temporal reasoning is critical for long-term complex concurrent action understanding. Second, longer input helps with the recognition [229] probably because some actions require long-term feature to recognize. Third, models with strong backbones that are pre-trained on larger datasets gen-

Method	Extra-information	Backbone	Pre-train	Venue	mAP
2D CNN [186]	-	AlexNet	I	ECCV 2016	11.2
Two-stream [186]	flow	VGG16	I	ECCV 2016	22.4
ActionVLAD [63]	-	VGG16	I	CVPR 2017	21.0
CoViAR [231]	-	ResNet50-like	-	CVPR 2018	21.9
MultiScale TRN [269]	-	BN-Inception-like	I	ECCV 2018	**25.2**
I3D [14]	-	BN-Inception-like	K400	CVPR 2017	32.9
STRG [220]	-	ResNet101-NL-like	K400	ECCV 2018	39.7
LFB [229]	-	ResNet101-NL-like	K400	CVPR 2019	42.5
TC [84]		ResNet101-NL-like	K400	ICCV 2019	41.1
HAF [212]	IDT + flow	BN-Inception-like	K400	ICCV 2019	43.1
SlowFast [45]	-	ResNet-like	K400	ICCV 2019	42.5
SlowFast [45]	-	ResNet-like	K600	ICCV 2019	**45.2**
Action-Genome [90]	person + object	ResNet-like	-	CVPR 2020	**60.1**
AssembleNet++ [177]	flow + object	ResNet-like	-	ECCV 2020	59.9

Table 4. **Charades evaluation using mAP**, calculated using the officially provided script. NL: non-local network. Pre-train indicates which dataset the model is pre-trained on. I: ImageNet, K400: Kinetics400 and K600: Kinetics600.

erally have better performance [45]. This is because Charades is a medium-scaled dataset which doesn't contain enough diversity to train a deep model.

Recently, researchers explored the alternative direction for complex concurrent action recognition by assembling models [177] or providing additional human-object interaction information [90]. These papers significantly outperformed previous literature that only finetune a single model on Charades. It demonstrates that exploring spatio-temporal human-object interactions and finding a way to avoid overfitting are the keys for concurrent action understanding.

4.5. Speed comparison

To deploy a model in real-life applications, we usually need to know whether it meets the speed requirement before we can proceed. In this section, we evaluate the approaches mentioned above to perform a thorough comparison in terms of (1) number of parameters, (2) FLOPS, (3) latency and (4) frame per second.

We present the results in Table 5. Here, we use the models in the GluonCV video action recognition model zoo[3] since all these models are trained using the same data, same data augmentation strategy and under same 30-view evaluation scheme, thus fair comparison. All the timings are done on a single Tesla V100 GPU with 105 repeated runs, while the first 5 runs are ignored for warming up. We always use a batch size of 1. In terms of model input, we use the suggested settings in the original paper.

As we can see in Table 5, if we compare latency, 2D models are much faster than all other 3D variants. This is probably why most real-world video applications still adopt frame-wise methods. Secondly, as mentioned in [170, 259], FLOPS is not strongly correlated with the actual inference time (i.e., latency). Third, if comparing performance, most 3D models give similar accuracy around 75%, but pre-training with a larger dataset can significantly boost the performance[4]. This indicates the importance of training data and partially suggests that self-supervised pre-training might be a promising way to further improve existing methods.

5. Discussion and Future Work

We have surveyed more than 200 deep learning based methods for video action recognition since year 2014. Despite the performance on benchmark datasets plateauing, there are many active and promising directions in this task worth exploring.

5.1. Analysis and insights

More and more methods haven been developed to improve video action recognition, at the same time, there are some papers summarizing these methods and providing analysis and insights. Huang *et al*. [82] perform an explicit analysis of the effect of temporal information for video understanding. They try to answer the question "how important is the motion in the video for recognizing the action". Feichtenhofer *et al*. [48, 49] provide an amazing visualization of what two-stream models have learned in order to understand how these deep representations work and what they are capturing. Li *et al*. [124] introduce a concept, representation bias of a dataset, and find that current datasets

[3]To reproduce the numbers in Table 5, please visit `https://github.com/dmlc/gluon-cv/blob/master/scripts/action-recognition/README.md`

[4]Note that, R2+1D-ResNet152$*$ and CSN-ResNet152$*$ in Table 5 are pretrained on a large-scale IG65M dataset [60].

Model	Input	FLOPS (G)	# of params (M)	FPS	Latency (s)	Acc (%)
TSN-ResNet18 [218]	$3 \times 224 \times 224$	3.671	21.49	151.96	0.0066	69.85
TSN-ResNet34 [218]	$3 \times 224 \times 224$	1.819	11.382	264.01	0.0038	66.73
TSN-ResNet50 [218]	$3 \times 224 \times 224$	4.110	24.328	114.05	0.0088	70.88
TSN-ResNet101 [218]	$3 \times 224 \times 224$	7.833	43.320	59.56	0.0167	72.25
TSN-ResNet152 [218]	$3 \times 224 \times 224$	11.558	58.963	36.93	0.0271	72.45
I3D-ResNet50 [14]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	33.275	28.863	1719.50	0.0372	74.87
I3D-ResNet101 [14]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	51.864	52.574	1137.74	0.0563	75.10
I3D-ResNet50-NL [219]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	47.737	38.069	1403.16	0.0456	75.17
I3D-ResNet101-NL [219]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	66.326	61.780	999.94	0.0640	75.81
R2+1D-ResNet18 [204]	$3 \times 16 \times 112 \times 112$	40.645	31.505	804.31	0.0398	71.72
R2+1D-ResNet34 [204]	$3 \times 16 \times 112 \times 112$	75.400	61.832	503.17	0.0636	72.63
R2+1D-ResNet50 [204]	$3 \times 16 \times 112 \times 112$	65.543	53.950	667.06	0.0480	74.92
R2+1D-ResNet152$*$ [204]	$3 \times 32 \times 112 \times 112$	252.900	118.227	546.19	0.1172	81.34
CSN-ResNet152$*$ [203]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	74.758	29.704	435.77	0.1469	83.18
I3D-Slow-ResNet50 [45]	$3 \times 8 \times 224 \times 224$	41.919	32.454	1702.60	0.0376	74.41
I3D-Slow-ResNet50 [45]	$3 \times 16 \times 224 \times 224$	83.838	32.454	1406.00	0.0455	76.36
I3D-Slow-ResNet50 [45]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	167.675	32.454	860.74	0.0744	77.89
I3D-Slow-ResNet101 [45]	$3 \times 8 \times 224 \times 224$	85.675	60.359	1114.22	0.0574	76.15
I3D-Slow-ResNet101 [45]	$3 \times 16 \times 224 \times 224$	171.348	60.359	876.20	0.0730	77.11
I3D-Slow-ResNet101 [45]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	342.696	60.359	541.16	0.1183	78.57
SlowFast-ResNet50-4x16 [45]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	27.820	34.480	1396.45	0.0458	75.25
SlowFast-ResNet50-8x8 [45]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	50.583	34.566	1297.24	0.0493	76.66
SlowFast-ResNet101-8x8 [45]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	96.794	62.827	889.62	0.0719	76.95
TPN-ResNet50 [248]	$3 \times 8 \times 224 \times 224$	50.457	71.800	1350.39	0.0474	77.04
TPN-ResNet50 [248]	$3 \times 16 \times 224 \times 224$	99.929	71.800	1128.39	0.0567	77.33
TPN-ResNet50 [248]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	198.874	71.800	716.89	0.0893	78.90
TPN-ResNet101 [248]	$3 \times 8 \times 224 \times 224$	94.366	99.705	942.61	0.0679	78.10
TPN-ResNet101[248]	$3 \times 16 \times 224 \times 224$	187.594	99.705	754.00	0.0849	79.39
TPN-ResNet101[248]	$3 \times 32 \times 224 \times 224$	374.048	99.705	479.77	0.1334	79.70

Table 5. **Comparison on both efficiency and accuracy**. Top: 2D models and bottom: 3D models. FLOPS means floating point operations per second. FPS indicates how many video frames can the model process per second. Latency is the actual running time to complete one network forward given the input. Acc is the top-1 accuracy on Kinetics400 dataset. TSN, I3D, I3D-slow families are pretrained on ImageNet. R2+1D, SlowFast and TPN families are trained from scratch.

are biased towards static representations. Experiments on such biased datasets may lead to erroneous conclusions, which is indeed a big problem that limits the development of video action recognition. Recently, Piergiovanni *et al*. introduced the AViD [165] dataset to cope with data bias by collecting data from diverse groups of people. These papers provide great insights to help fellow researchers to understand the challenges, open problems and where the next breakthrough might reside.

5.2. Data augmentation

Numerous data augmentation methods have been proposed in image recognition domain, such as mixup [258], cutout [31], CutMix [254], AutoAugment [27], FastAutoAug [126], etc. However, video action recognition still adopts basic data augmentation techniques introduced before year 2015 [217, 188], including random resizing, random cropping and random horizontal flipping. Recently, SimCLR [17] and other papers have shown that color jittering and random rotation greatly help representation learning. Hence, an investigation of using different data augmentation techniques for video action recognition is particularly useful. This may change the data pre-processing pipeline for all existing methods.

5.3. Video domain adaptation

Domain adaptation (DA) has been studied extensively in recent years to address the domain shift problem. Despite the accuracy on standard datasets getting higher and higher, the generalization capability of current video models across datasets or domains is less explored.

There is early work on video domain adaptation [193, 241, 89, 159]. However, these literature focus on small-scale video DA with only a few overlapping categories, which may not reflect the actual domain discrepancy and may lead to biased conclusions. Chen *et al*. [15] intro-

duce two larger-scale datasets to investigate video DA and find that aligning temporal dynamics is particularly useful. Pan *et al*. [152] adopts co-attention to solve the temporal misalignment problem. Very recently, Munro *et al*. [145] explore a multi-modal self-supervision method for fine-grained video action recognition and show the effectiveness of multi-modality learning in video DA. Shuffle and Attend [95] argues that aligning features of all sampled clips results in a sub-optimal solution due to the fact that all clips do not include relevant semantics. Therefore, they propose to use an attention mechanism to focus more on informative clips and discard the non-informative ones. In conclusion, video DA is a promising direction, especially for researchers with less computing resources.

5.4. Neural architecture search

Neural architecture search (NAS) has attracted great interest in recent years and is a promising research direction. However, given its greedy need for computing resources, only a few papers have been published in this area [156, 163, 161, 178]. The TVN family [161], which jointly optimize parameters and runtime, can achieve competitive accuracy with human-designed contemporary models, and run much faster (within 37 to 100 ms on a CPU and 10 ms on a GPU per 1 second video clip). AssembleNet [178] and AssembleNet++ [177] provide a generic approach to learn the connectivity among feature representations across input modalities, and show surprisingly good performance on Charades and other benchmarks. AttentionNAS [222] proposed a solution for spatio-temporal attention cell search. The found cell can be plugged into any network to improve the spatio-temporal features. All previous papers do show their potential for video understanding.

Recently, some efficient ways of searching architectures have been proposed in the image recognition domain, such as DARTS [130], Proxyless NAS [11], ENAS [160], one-shot NAS [7], etc. It would be interesting to combine efficient 2D CNNs and efficient searching algorithms to perform video NAS for a reasonable cost.

5.5. Efficient model development

Despite their accuracy, it is difficult to deploy deep learning based methods for video understanding problems in terms of real-world applications. There are several major challenges: (1) most methods are developed in offline settings, which means the input is a short video clip, not a video stream in an online setting; (2) most methods do not meet the real-time requirement; (3) incompatibility of 3D convolutions or other non-standard operators on non-GPU devices (e.g., edge devices).

Hence, the development of efficient network architecture based on 2D convolutions is a promising direction. The approaches proposed in the image classification domain can be easily adapted to video action recognition, e.g. model compression, model quantization, model pruning, distributed training [68, 127], mobile networks [80, 265], mixed precision training, etc. However, more effort is needed for the online setting since the input to most action recognition applications is a video stream, such as surveillance monitoring. We may need a new and more comprehensive dataset for benchmarking online video action recognition methods. Lastly, using compressed videos might be desirable because most videos are already compressed, and we have free access to motion information.

5.6. New datasets

Data is more or at least as important as model development for machine learning. For video action recognition, most datasets are biased towards spatial representations [124], i.e., most actions can be recognized by a single frame inside the video without considering the temporal movement. Hence, a new dataset in terms of long-term temporal modeling is required to advance video understanding. Furthermore, most current datasets are collected from YouTube. Due to copyright/privacy issues, the dataset organizer often only releases the YouTube id or video link for users to download and not the actual video. The first problem is that downloading the large-scale datasets might be slow for some regions. In particular, YouTube recently started to block massive downloading from a single IP. Thus, many researchers may not even get the dataset to start working in this field. The second problem is, due to region limitation and privacy issues, some videos are not accessible anymore. For example, the original Kinetcis400 dataset has over 300K videos, but at this moment, we can only crawl about 280K videos. On average, we lose 5% of the videos every year. It is impossible to do fair comparisons between methods when they are trained and evaluated on different data.

5.7. Video adversarial attack

Adversarial examples have been well studied on image models. [199] first shows that an adversarial sample, computed by inserting a small amount of noise on the original image, may lead to a wrong prediction. However, limited work has been done on attacking video models.

This task usually considers two settings, a white-box attack [86, 119, 66, 21] where the adversary can always get the full access to the model including exact gradients of a given input, or a black-box one [93, 245, 226], in which the structure and parameters of the model are blocked so that the attacker can only access the (input, output) pair through queries. Recent work ME-Sampler [260] leverages the motion information directly in generating adversarial videos, and is shown to successfully attack a number of video classification models using many fewer queries. In summary,

this direction is useful since many companies provide APIs for services such as video classification, anomaly detection, shot detection, face detection, etc. In addition, this topic is also related to detecting DeepFake videos. Hence, investigating both attacking and defending methods is crucial to keeping these video services safe.

5.8. Zero-shot action recognition

Zero-shot learning (ZSL) has been trending in the image understanding domain, and has recently been adapted to video action recognition. Its goal is to transfer the learned knowledge to classify previously unseen categories. Due to (1) the expensive data sourcing and annotation and (2) the set of possible human actions is huge, zero-shot action recognition is a very useful task for real-world applications.

There are many early attempts [242, 88, 243, 137, 168, 57] in this direction. Most of them follow a standard framework, which is to first extract visual features from videos using a pretrained network, and then train a joint model that maps the visual embedding to a semantic embedding space. In this manner, the model can be applied to new classes by finding the test class whose embedding is the nearest-neighbor of the model's output. A recent work URL [279] proposes to learn a universal representation that generalizes across datasets. Following URL [279], [10] present the first end-to-end ZSL action recognition model. They also establish a new ZSL training and evaluation protocol, and provide an in-depth analysis to further advance this field. Inspired by the success of pre-training and then zero-shot in NLP domain, we believe ZSL action recognition is a promising research topic.

5.9. Weakly-supervised video action recognition

Building a high-quality video action recognition dataset [190, 100] usually requires multiple laborious steps: 1) first sourcing a large amount of raw videos, typically from the internet; 2) removing videos irrelevant to the categories in the dataset; 3) manually trimming the video segments that have actions of interest; 4) refining the categorical labels. Weakly-supervised action recognition explores how to reduce the cost for curating training data.

The first direction of research [19, 60, 58] aims to reduce the cost of sourcing videos and accurate categorical labeling. They design training methods that use training data such as action-related images or partially annotated videos, gathered from publicly available sources such as Internet. Thus this paradigm is also referred to as webly-supervised learning [19, 58]. Recent work on omni-supervised learning [60, 64, 38] also follows this paradigm but features bootstrapping on unlabelled videos by distilling the models' own inference results.

The second direction aims at removing trimming, the most time consuming part in annotation. UntrimmedNet [216] proposed a method to learn action recognition model on untrimmed videos with only categorical labels [149, 172]. This task is also related to weakly-supervised temporal action localization which aims to automatically generate the temporal span of the actions. Several papers propose to simultaneously [155] or iteratively [184] learn models for these two tasks.

5.10. Fine-grained video action recognition

Popular action recognition datasets, such as UCF101 [190] or Kinetics400 [100], mostly comprise actions happening in various scenes. However, models learned on these datasets could overfit to contextual information irrelevant to the actions [224, 227, 24]. Several datasets have been proposed to study the problem of fine-grained action recognition, which could examine the models' capacities in modeling action specific information. These datasets comprise fine-grained actions in human activities such as cooking [28, 108, 174], working [103] and sports [181, 124]. For example, FineGym [181] is a recent large dataset annotated with different moves and sub-actions in gymnastic videos.

5.11. Egocentric action recognition

Recently, large-scale egocentric action recognition [29, 28] has attracted increasing interest with the emerging of wearable cameras devices. Egocentric action recognition requires a fine understanding of hand motion and the interacting objects in the complex environment. A few papers leverage object detection features to offer fine object context to improve egocentric video recognition [136, 223, 229, 180]. Others incorporate spatio-temporal attention [192] or gaze annotations [131] to localize the interacting object to facilitate action recognition. Similar to third-person action recognition, multi-modal inputs (e.g., optical flow and audio) have been demonstrated to be effective in egocentric action recognition [101].

5.12. Multi-modality

Multi-modal video understanding has attracted increasing attention in recent years [55, 3, 129, 167, 154, 2, 105]. There are two main categories for multi-modal video understanding. The first group of approaches use multi-modalities such as scene, object, motion, and audio to enrich the video representations. In the second group, the goal is to design a model which utilizes modality information as a supervision signal for pre-training models [195, 138, 249, 62, 2].

Multi-modality for comprehensive video understanding Learning a robust and comprehensive representation of video is extremely challenging due to the complexity

Method	Dataset	Video	Audio	Text	Size	Backbone	Venue	UCF101		HMDB51	
								Linear	FT	Linear	FT
AVTS [105]	K400	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2018	–	86.2	–	52.3
AVTS [105]	AS	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2018	–	89.1	–	58.1
CBT [194]	K600+	✓	–	✓	112	S3D	arXiv 2019	54.0	79.5	29.5	44.6
MIL-NCE [138]	HTM	✓	–	✓	224	S3D	CVPR 2020	82.7	91.3	53.1	61.0
ELO [162]	YT8M	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-50	CVPR 2020	–	93.8	64.5	67.4
XDC [3]	K400	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2020	–	86.8	–	52.6
XDC [3]	AS	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2020	–	93.0	–	63.7
XDC [3]	IG65M	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2020	–	94.6	–	66.5
XDC [3]	IG-K	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-18	NeurIPS 2020	–	**95.5**	–	68.9
AVID [144]	AS	✓	✓	–	224	R(2+1)D-50	arXiv 2020	–	91.5	–	64.7
GDT [154]	K400	✓	✓	–	112	R(2+1)D-18	arXiv 2020	–	89.3	–	60.0
GDT [154]	AS	✓	✓	–	112	R(2+1)D-18	arXiv 2020	–	92.5	–	66.1
GDT [154]	IG65M	✓	✓	–	112	R(2+1)D-18	arXiv 2020	–	95.2	–	72.8
MMV [2]	AS+ HTM	✓	✓	✓	200	S3D	NeurIPS 2020	89.6	92.5	62.6	69.6
MMV [2]	AS+ HTM	✓	✓	✓	200	TSM-50x2	NeurIPS 2020	**91.8**	95.2	**67.1**	**75.0**
OPN [115]	UCF101	✓	–	–	227	VGG	ICCV 2017	–	59.6	–	23.8
3D-RotNet [94]	K400	✓	–	–	112	R3D	arXiv 2018	–	62.9	–	33.7
ST-Puzzle [102]	K400	✓	–	–	224	R3D	AAAI 2019	–	63.9	–	33.7
VCOP [240]	UCF101	✓	–	–	112	R(2+1)D	CVPR 2019	–	72.4	–	30.9
DPC [71]	K400	✓	–	–	128	R-2D3D	ICCVW 2019	–	75.7	–	35.7
SpeedNet [6]	K400	✓	–	–	224	S3D-G	CVPR 2020	–	81.1	–	48.8
MemDPC [72]	K400	✓	–	–	224	R-2D3D	ECCV 2020	54.1	86.1	30.5	54.5
CoCLR [73]	K400	✓	–	–	128	S3D	NeurIPS 2020	**74.5**	87.9	**46.1**	54.6
CVRL [167]	K400	✓	–	–	224	R3D-50	arXiv 2020	–	92.2	–	66.7
CVRL [167]	K600	✓	–	–	224	R3D-50	arXiv 2020	–	**93.4**	–	**68.0**

Table 6. **Comparison of self-supervised video representation learning methods.** Top section shows the multi-modal video representation learning approaches and bottom section shows the video-only representation learning methods. From left to right, we show the self-supervised training setting, e.g. dataset, modalities, resolution, and architecture. Two last right columns show the action recognition results on two datasets UCF101 and HMDB51 to measure the quality of self-supervised pre-trained model. HTM: HowTo100M, YT8M: YouTube8M, AS: AudioSet, IG-K: IG-Kinetics, K400: Kinetics400 and K600: Kinetics600.

of semantics in videos. Video data often includes variations in different forms including appearance, motion, audio, text or scene [55, 129, 166]. Therefore, utilizing these multi-modal representations is a critical step in understanding video content more efficiently. The multi-modal representations of video can be approximated by gathering representations of various modalities such as scene, object, audio, motion, appearance and text. Ngiam *et al*. [148] was an early attempt to suggest using multiple modalities to obtain better features. They utilized videos of lips and their corresponding speech for multi-modal representation learning. Miech *et al*. [139] proposed a mixture-of embedding-experts model to combine multiple modalities including motion, appearance, audio, and face features and learn the shared embedding space between these modalities and text. Roig *et al*. [175] combines multiple modalities such as action, scene, object and acoustic event features in a pyramidal structure for action recognition. They show that adding each modality improves the final action recognition accuracy. Both CE [129] and MMT [55], follow a similar research line to [139] where the goal is to combine multiple-modalities to obtain a comprehensive representation of video for joint video-text representation learning. Piergiovanni *et al*. [166] utilized textual data together with video data to learn a joint embedding space. Using this learned joint embedding space, the method is capable of doing zero-shot action recognition. This line of research is promising due to the availability of strong semantic extraction models and also success of transformers on both vision and language tasks.

Multi-modality for self-supervised video representation learning Most videos contain multiple modalities such as audio or text/caption. These modalities are great source of supervision for learning video representations [3, 144, 154, 2, 162]. Korbar *et al*. [105] incorporated the natural synchronization between audio and video as a supervision signal in their contrastive learning objective for self-supervised representation learning. In multi-modal self-supervised representation learning, the dataset plays an im-

portant role. VideoBERT [195] collected 310K cooking videos from YouTube. However, this dataset is not publicly available. Similar to BERT, VideoBERT used a "masked language model" training objective and also quantized the visual representations into "visual words". Miech *et al*. [140] introduced HowTo100M dataset in 2019. This dataset includes 136M clips from 1.22M videos with their corresponding text. They collected the dataset from YouTube with the aim of obtaining instructional videos (how to perform an activity). In total, it covers 23.6K instructional tasks. MIL-NCE [138] used this dataset for self-supervised cross-modal representation learning. They tackled the problem of visually misaligned narrations, by considering multiple positive pairs in the contrastive learning objective. ActBERT [275], utilized HowTo100M dataset for pre-training of the model in a self-supervised way. They incorporated visual, action, text and object features for cross modal representation learning. Recently AVLnet [176] and MMV [2] considered three modalities visual, audio and language for self-supervised representation learning. This research direction is also increasingly getting more attention due to the success of contrastive learning on many vision and language tasks and the access to the abundance of unlabeled multimodal video data on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or Flickr. The top section of Table 6 compares multi-modal self-supervised representation learning methods. We will discuss more work on video-only representation learning in the next section.

5.13. Self-supervised video representation learning

Self-supervised learning has attracted more attention recently as it is able to leverage a large amount of unlabeled data by designing a pretext task to obtain free supervisory signals from data itself. It first emerged in image representation learning. On images, the first stream of papers aimed at designing pretext tasks for completing missing information, such as image coloring [262] and image reordering [153, 61, 263]. The second stream of papers uses instance discrimination [235] as the pretext task and contrastive losses [235, 151] for supervision. They learn visual representation by modeling visual similarity of object instances without class labels [235, 75, 201, 18, 17].

Self-supervised learning is also viable for videos. Compared with images, videos has another axis, temporal dimension, which we can use to craft pretext tasks. Information completion tasks for this purpose include predicting the correct order of shuffled frames [141, 52] and video clips [240]. Jing *et al*. [94] focus on the spatial dimension only by predicting the rotation angles of rotated video clips. Combining temporal and spatial information, several tasks have been introduced to solve a space-time cubic puzzle, anticipate future frames [208], forecast long-term motions [134] and predict motion and appearance statistics [211]. RSPNet [16] and visual tempo [247] exploit the relative speed between video clips as a supervision signal.

The added temporal axis can also provide flexibility in designing instance discrimination pretexts [67, 167]. Inspired by the decoupling of 3D convolution to spatial and temporal separable convolutions [239], Zhang *et al*. [266] proposed to decouple the video representation learning into two sub-tasks: spatial contrast and temporal contrast. Recently, Han *et al*. [72] proposed memory augmented dense predictive coding for self-supervised video representation learning. They split each video into several blocks and the embedding of future block is predicted by the combination of condensed representations in memory.

The temporal continuity in videos inspires researchers to design other pretext tasks around correspondence. Wang *et al*. [221] proposed to learn representation by performing cycle-consistency tracking. Specifically, they track the same object backward and then forward in the consecutive video frames, and use the inconsistency between the start and end points as the loss function. TCC [39] is a concurrent paper. Instead of tracking local objects, [39] used cycle-consistency to perform frame-wise temporal alignment as a supervision signal. [120] was a follow-up work of [221], and utilized both object-level and pixel-level correspondence across video frames. Recently, long-range temporal correspondence is modelled as a random walk graph to help learning video representation in [87].

We compare video self-supervised representation learning methods at the bottom section of Table 6. A clear trend can be observed that recent papers have achieved much better linear evaluation accuracy and fine-tuning accuracy comparable to supervised pre-training. This shows that self-supervised learning could be a promising direction towards learning better video representations.

6. Conclusion

In this survey, we present a comprehensive review of 200+ deep learning based recent approaches to video action recognition. Although this is not an exhaustive list, we hope the survey serves as an easy-to-follow tutorial for those seeking to enter the field, and an inspiring discussion for those seeking to find new research directions.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Peter Gehler, Linchao Zhu and Thomas Brady for constructive feedback and fruitful discussions.

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