Image Classification with Model Fusion - Detailed Report

Project Title: Image Classification with Model Fusion

Introduction

Deep learning, especially Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), has transformed image classification tasks with high accuracy and efficiency. However, the performance of a single model often hits a ceiling due to dataset-specific biases, architectural limitations, or overfitting.

Inspired by the "wisdom of crowds" philosophy, this project explores model fusion—an ensemble learning technique that combines predictions from multiple CNNs to improve robustness, accuracy, and generalizability. We employ two powerful CNN architectures—VGG16 and ResNet18—on the CIFAR-10 dataset and experiment with two fusion strategies: Late Fusion and Stacking (Meta-Learning).

1. Methodology

Dataset: CIFAR-10

- 60,000 32x32 color images in 10 classes (6,000 images/class).
- Divided into 50,000 training and 10,000 test samples.
- Contains a mix of vehicles and animals (e.g., airplane, dog, frog, truck).
- Preprocessing Techniques

Standardization: Normalize pixel values using channel-wise mean and std.

Data Augmentation:

- Random horizontal flips
- Random cropping with padding
- Normalization to zero-mean and unit-variance
- Batching: Done using PyTorch's DataLoader with shuffling and parallel loading.

CNN Architectures

1. VGG16

- Deep and structured architecture: 13 convolution layers + 3 fully connected layers.
- Transfer learning: Initialized with ImageNet weights.
- Pros: Stable learning; easy to understand and debug.

2. ResNet18

- Utilizes skip (residual) connections to mitigate vanishing gradients.
- Pretrained weights on ImageNet, fine-tuned on CIFAR-10.
- Lightweight and fast, yet deep enough for hierarchical features.

Hyperparameters

Parameter	Value
Optimizer	Adam
Learning Rate	1e-4 with cosine scheduler
Epochs	25
Batch Size	128
Loss Function	CrossEntropyLoss

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Early Stopping Based on validation loss

🔗 2. Fusion Techniques

🔄 Late Fusion (Score-Level Averaging)

- Average the softmax probabilities from both models.
- No retraining required.
- Simple but effective when models are independently well-performing.

🔁 Stacking (Meta-Learning)

- Train a meta-classifier (logistic regression) using the outputs of VGG16 and ResNet18.
- Meta-model learns to weigh predictions based on input patterns.
- More powerful than averaging, at the cost of additional complexity and training time.

3. Experiments and Results

📈 Performance Metrics

- Accuracy: Correct predictions over total predictions.
- Precision: TP / (TP + FP) – How well the model avoids false positives.
- Recall: TP / (TP + FN) – How well the model finds all relevant cases.
- F1 Score: Harmonic mean of Precision and Recall.

Visuals (in code repo)

- Training/Validation accuracy curves
- Confusion matrices
- ROC and PR Curves
- Misclassification snapshots

4. Evaluation and Insights

📌 Key Observations:

Late Fusion: Provided an immediate boost with minimal effort. Works best when base models disagree only occasionally.
Stacking: Showed the best overall performance by learning dynamic weighting of base model outputs.

Robustness:

Fusion models performed better under test-time noise or corruptions.
Smoother decision boundaries.

Ablation Study:

- Removing VGG16 from stacking led to F1 drop from 87.8% → 86.4%.
- Highlights the importance of diversity in ensemble models.

Error Patterns:

- VGG struggled with complex textures (e.g., animal fur).
- ResNet misclassified similar animals (e.g., cat vs. dog).
- Fusion corrected many of these by combining diverse strengths.

5. Conclusion

This project confirms the hypothesis that model fusion outperforms individual CNNs in terms of accuracy, stability, and robustness. Stacking provided the most flexible and accurate approach, although Late Fusion remains a viable option for faster deployment.

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Takeaways:

- Ensemble diversity is more valuable than just stacking similar models.
- Stacking allows meta-learning from model behavior, not just predictions.
- Fusion techniques are especially valuable in noisy or ambiguous data settings.

Future Work

- Integrate DenseNet, EfficientNet for increased diversity.
- Use Bayesian Fusion to account for prediction uncertainty.
- Apply Knowledge Distillation to compress ensemble into a single model.
- Test on more complex datasets like CIFAR-100 or TinyImageNet.