CNN Cat vs Dog Classifier - Technical Documentation

Executive Summary

This project implements a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) for binary classification of cat and dog images, achieving 90.6% test accuracy with comprehensive model interpretability through Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM). The implementation demonstrates modern deep learning practices including functional model architecture, proper data validation, and visualization techniques for understanding model decision processes.

Key Results:

- Test Accuracy: 90.6%
- Precision: 100.0%
- Recall: 82.4%
- Final Training Accuracy: 89.4%
- Final Validation Accuracy: 84.4%

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1. Dataset and Preprocessing

1.1 Data Collection

- **Source**: Manual collection from Google Images
- **Initial Collection**: Cat and dog images from search queries
- **Final Dataset**: 143 images total
  - Cat images: 80 (Class 0)
  - Dog images: 63 (Class 1)

1.2 Data Cleaning Pipeline

Manual Preprocessing:

- Removal of files smaller than 10KB
- Elimination of vector graphics and non-photographic content
- Visual inspection for quality control

Automated Cleaning:

```
# File format validation
image_exts = ['jpeg', 'jpg', 'bmp', 'png']
for image_path in dataset:
    img = cv2.imread(image_path)
    file_type = imghdr.what(image_path)
    if file_type not in image_exts:
        os.remove(image_path)
```

Filename Sanitization:

- Unicode character normalization (ä→ae, ü→ue, ß→ss)
- Special character removal and underscore replacement
- Path compatibility across operating systems

1.3 Data Pipeline

- **Input Resolution**: 256×256×3 pixels
- **Normalization**: Pixel values scaled from [0,255] to [0,1]
- **Data Split**: 70% train, 20% validation, 10% test
- **Shuffling**: Buffer size of 1000 for random sampling
- **Batch Size**: 32 (TensorFlow default)

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2. Model Architecture

2.1 Network Design Philosophy

The architecture uses a functional API approach rather than Sequential to enable better interpretability and Grad-CAM integration. The design follows a classic CNN pattern with increasing feature complexity and spatial reduction.

2.2 Detailed Architecture

```
Input Layer: (None, 256, 256, 3)
    ↓
Conv2D(16 filters, 3×3, stride=1, ReLU) → (None, 254, 254, 16)
    ↓
MaxPooling2D(2×2) → (None, 127, 127, 16)
    ↓
Conv2D(32 filters, 3×3, stride=1, ReLU) → (None, 125, 125, 32)
    ↓
MaxPooling2D(2×2) → (None, 62, 62, 32)
    ↓
Conv2D(16 filters, 3×3, stride=1, ReLU) → (None, 60, 60, 16)
    ↓
MaxPooling2D(2×2) → (None, 30, 30, 16)
    ↓
Flatten → (None, 14400)
    ↓
Dense(256, ReLU) → (None, 256)
    ↓
Dense(1, Sigmoid) → (None, 1)
```

2.3 Parameter Analysis

Layer	Parameters	Calculation
conv2d_1	448	(3×3×3×16) + 16 = 448
conv2d_2	4,640	(3×3×16×32) + 32 = 4,640
conv2d_3	4,624	(3×3×32×16) + 16 = 4,624
dense_1	3,686,656	(14400×256) + 256 = 3,686,656
output_layer	257	(256×1) + 1 = 257

Total Parameters: 3,696,625 (14.10 MB)

2.4 Design Rationale

- **Filter Progression**: 16→32→16 creates a bottleneck effect
- **Kernel Size**: 3×3 for optimal feature detection vs computational efficiency
- **Activation Functions**: ReLU for hidden layers, Sigmoid for binary output
- **Pooling Strategy**: Max pooling for translation invariance

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3. Mathematical Foundations

3.1 Convolution Operation

For a 2D convolution with input I, kernel K, and output S:

```
S(i,j) = Σₘ Σₙ I(m,n) × K(i-m, j-n)
```

3.2 Activation Functions

ReLU (Rectified Linear Unit):

```
f(x) = max(0, x)
```

- Advantages: Computationally efficient, mitigates vanishing gradients
- Used in all convolutional and dense hidden layers

Sigmoid:

```
σ(x) = 1/(1 + e^(-x))
```

- Output range: (0, 1), ideal for binary classification probabilities

3.3 Loss Function

Binary Cross-Entropy:

```
L = -[y × log(ŷ) + (1-y) × log(1-ŷ)]
```

Where $y \in \{0,1\}$ is the true label and $\hat{y}$ is the predicted probability.

3.4 Optimization

Adam Optimizer with default parameters:

- Learning rate (α): 0.001
- β_1: 0.9 (first moment decay)
- β_2: 0.999 (second moment decay)
- ε: 1e-7 (numerical stability)

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4. Training Process and Results

4.1 Training Configuration

- **Epochs**: 20
- **Optimizer**: Adam
- **Loss Function**: Binary Cross-Entropy
- **Metrics**: Accuracy
- **Callbacks**: TensorBoard logging

4.2 Training Progression

Key Training Milestones:

- Epoch 1: Training Acc: 44.7%, Val Acc: 40.6%
- Epoch 10: Training Acc: 73.4%, Val Acc: 66.0%
- Epoch 15: Training Acc: 75.0%, Val Acc: 83.0%
- Epoch 20: Training Acc: 89.4%, Val Acc: 84.4%

Final Loss Values:

- Training Loss: 0.308
- Validation Loss: 0.325

4.3 Model Performance Analysis

Test Set Evaluation (n=16 images):

- **Precision**: 1.000 (no false positives)
- **Recall**: 0.824 (82.4% of true positives detected)
- **Accuracy**: 0.906 (90.6% overall correctness)

Performance Interpretation:

- High precision indicates the model rarely misclassifies cats as dogs
- Lower recall suggests some dogs are misclassified as cats
- Overall accuracy demonstrates strong generalization to unseen data

4.4 Learning Curve Analysis

The training curves show:

- **Convergent Learning**: Both loss curves decrease steadily
- **Minimal Overfitting**: Small gap between training and validation metrics

- **Stable Training**: No significant oscillations in later epochs
- **Good Generalization**: Validation accuracy tracks training performance

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5. Grad-CAM Implementation

5.1 Theoretical Foundation

Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM) uses gradients flowing into the final convolutional layer to produce a coarse localization map highlighting important regions for prediction.

Mathematical Formulation:

1. **Gradient Calculation**:

   ```
   α_k^c = (1/Z) × Σᵢ Σⱼ ∂y^c/∂A_{ij}^k
   ```

2. **Weighted Feature Map Combination**:

   ```
   L_{Grad-CAM}^c = ReLU(Σₖ α_k^c × A^k)
   ```

Where:

- α_k^c = importance weight for feature map k and class c
- A^k = activations of feature map k
- y^c = class score before softmax
- Z = number of pixels in feature map

5.2 Implementation Details

```
def create_gradcam_heatmap(model, img_array, target_layer='conv2d_1'):
    # Create gradient model
    grad_model = tf.keras.Model(
        inputs=model.inputs,
        outputs=[model.get_layer(target_layer).output, model.outputs[0]]
    )

    # Compute gradients
    with tf.GradientTape() as tape:
        conv_outputs, predictions = grad_model(img_array)
        loss = predictions[:, 0]

    grads = tape.gradient(loss, conv_outputs)
    pooled_grads = tf.reduce_mean(grads, axis=(0, 1, 2))

    # Generate heatmap
    conv_outputs = conv_outputs[0]
    heatmap = conv_outputs @ pooled_grads[..., tf.newaxis]
    heatmap = tf.squeeze(heatmap)
    heatmap = tf.maximum(heatmap, 0) / tf.math.reduce_max(heatmap)

    return heatmap.numpy()
```

5.3 Layer Selection Analysis

Comparative Layer Analysis:

- **conv2d_1**: High spatial resolution (254×254), basic edge/texture features
- **conv2d_2**: Medium resolution (125×125), intermediate object parts
- **conv2d_3**: Low resolution (60×60), abstract semantic features

Optimal Layer Choice: conv2d_1 provides the best balance of spatial detail and meaningful feature activation for visualization purposes.

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6. Model Interpretability Analysis

6.1 Grad-CAM Visualization Results

Cat Classification Example (gradcamtestcat.jpg):

- Prediction: Cat (98% confidence)
- Primary focus areas: Facial features, ears, eyes
- Secondary activation: Body outline, fur textures
- Background attention: Minimal (appropriate behavior)

Dog Classification Example (gradcamtestdog.jpg):

- Prediction: Cat (98% confidence) - **Misclassification**
- Focus areas: Facial region, particularly around eyes and snout
- Interesting observation: Model attends to correct anatomical features despite wrong classification

6.2 Layer-wise Feature Analysis

conv2d_1 Analysis:

- Strong activation on edges and contours
- Clear object boundary detection
- High spatial resolution preserves fine details

conv2d_2 Analysis:

- More selective activation patterns
- Focus on specific object regions
- Reduced spatial resolution but maintained semantic relevance

conv2d_3 Analysis:

- Sparse, highly abstract activations
- Limited spatial information
- Represents high-level conceptual features

6.3 Model Behavior Insights

Positive Findings:

- Model focuses on biologically relevant features (faces, body structure)
- Ignores background clutter appropriately
- Shows anatomically consistent attention patterns

Areas for Improvement:

- Occasional misclassification despite correct feature attention
- Suggests need for more diverse training data
- Possible breed-specific biases in learned features

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7. Domain Gap Analysis

7.1 Performance Discrepancy

Test Set Performance: 90.6% accuracy on held-out data from same distribution **External Image Performance**: Significantly lower accuracy on new Google Images

7.2 Root Cause Analysis

Data Homogeneity Issues:

- Training images likely share common characteristics (lighting, style, compression)
- Model learns dataset-specific artifacts rather than universal animal features
- Limited pose and environmental diversity in training set

Evidence from Grad-CAM:

- Model attends to correct anatomical features
- Architecture and learning process are sound
- Problem lies in training data distribution, not model design

7.3 Domain Gap Implications

This represents a classic machine learning challenge where statistical learning theory meets real-world deployment. The model successfully minimizes training loss but fails to generalize across different data distributions - a fundamental limitation of supervised learning with limited, homogeneous datasets.

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8. Technical Implementation

8.1 Code Architecture

File Structure:

- `main.py` : Model definition, training, and evaluation
- `gradcam_functional.py` : Grad-CAM implementation and visualization
- `fix_filenames.py` : Data preprocessing utilities

Key Technical Decisions:

1. **Functional API**: Enables explicit layer naming and Grad-CAM integration
2. **Modular Design**: Separate preprocessing, training, and analysis scripts
3. **Error Handling**: Robust file validation and processing

8.2 Preprocessing Pipeline

Data Validation:

```
# Format validation
for image_path in dataset:
    img = cv2.imread(image_path)
    file_type = imghdr.what(image_path)
    if file_type not in ['jpeg', 'jpg', 'bmp', 'png']:
        os.remove(image_path)
```

Filename Sanitization:

- Unicode normalization for cross-platform compatibility
- Special character removal to prevent path errors
- Duplicate name handling with automatic numbering

8.3 Model Persistence

Saving Strategy:

```
model.save(os.path.join('models', 'catdogmodel.h5'))
```

- Complete model architecture and weights preserved
- Cross-platform compatibility
- Easy loading for inference and analysis

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9. Conclusions and Future Work

9.1 Project Achievements

Technical Success:

- Implemented working CNN with 90.6% test accuracy
- Successfully integrated Grad-CAM for model interpretability
- Demonstrated understanding of modern deep learning practices
- Created reproducible, well-documented codebase

Learning Outcomes:

- Identified and analyzed domain gap challenges
- Understood the importance of data quality over model complexity
- Gained experience with model interpretability techniques
- Developed practical skills in TensorFlow/Keras implementation

9.2 Limitations and Challenges

Data Limitations:

- Small dataset size (143 images) limits generalization
- Potential bias toward specific animal breeds or image styles
- Limited pose, lighting, and environmental diversity

Model Limitations:

- Simple architecture may lack capacity for complex pattern recognition
- No data augmentation to increase effective dataset size
- Missing regularization techniques (dropout, batch normalization)

9.3 Future Improvements

Immediate Enhancements:

1. **Dataset Expansion**: Collect 1000+ images per class with diverse characteristics
2. **Data Augmentation**: Implement rotation, scaling, brightness adjustment
3. **Architecture Improvements**: Add dropout layers, batch normalization
4. **Transfer Learning**: Use pre-trained models (VGG16, ResNet) as feature extractors

Advanced Enhancements:

1. **Multi-class Extension**: Expand to breed classification
2. **Real-time Deployment**: Optimize for mobile/edge inference
3. **Uncertainty Quantification**: Implement Bayesian approaches for confidence estimation
4. **Advanced Interpretability**: Explore attention mechanisms, LIME, SHAP

9.4 Professional Impact

This project demonstrates several key competencies valuable in machine learning engineering:

Technical Skills:

- Deep learning framework proficiency (TensorFlow/Keras)
- Model interpretability implementation
- Data preprocessing and validation
- Performance evaluation and analysis

Critical Thinking:

- Recognition of domain gap challenges
- Honest assessment of model limitations
- Understanding of data quality importance
- Practical deployment considerations

Communication:

- Clear technical documentation
- Effective visualization of results
- Transparent reporting of limitations
- Professional code organization

References

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3. LeCun, Y., Bottou, L., Bengio, Y., & Haffner, P. (1998). "Gradient-based learning applied to document recognition." *Proceedings of the IEEE*, 86(11), 2278-2324.

4. Kingma, D. P., & Ba, J. (2014). "Adam: A Method for Stochastic Optimization." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1412.6980*.

5. Goodfellow, I., Bengio, Y., & Courville, A. (2016). *Deep Learning*. MIT Press.

Project Statistics:

- Implementation Time: Multiple development iterations
- Lines of Code: ~400 across all modules
- Model Size: 14.10 MB
- Training Time: ~60 seconds per epoch
- Final Model Performance: 90.6% test accuracy

Technical Documentation for CNN Cat vs Dog Classifier
Implementation Date: September 2025
Framework: TensorFlow 2.x with Keras