ADDIS ABABA SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Department of software Engineering

Software component design

Assignment - MNIST Handwritten Digit Classification using Convolutional Neural Networks using Google Colab

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Computer Vision is a field of AI which uses a lot of data, mainly for image detection, recognition, and classification. Image Classification in particular, uses Machine Learning algorithms to analyze, categorize and assign labels to the elements they detect and classify them depending on the different rules that have been set up.

Image classification algorithms plays a crucial role in various applications, including object recognition, autonomous vehicles, medical imaging, and more by accurately categorizing and labeling images.

To tackle image classification tasks effectively, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are widely used in the field of computer vision. CNNs are neural network architectures inspired by human neurons that can be trained on image data. To process images, it uses various filters and convolution layers which have to be pre-configured carefully.

What is MNIST Dataset?

The MNIST (Modified National Institute of Standards and Technology database) is a widely recognized benchmark dataset for image classification tasks, particularly in the domain of handwritten digit recognition, which contains a training set of 60,000 images and a test set of 10,000 images of handwritten digits. These images contain handwritten digits that have been size-normalized and centered in fixed-size images of 28x28 pixels.

The MNIST digits dataset is often used by data scientists who want to try machine learning techniques and pattern recognition methods on real-world data while spending minimal effort on preprocessing and formatting.

1.2 Problem Statement

While many models have achieved error rates around 0.2% on the MNIST dataset, suggesting this problem might be approaching its irreducible error rate and is considered largely solved, the goal of this project is to gain a deeper understanding of CNN architectures. This research will implement and train CNN model on the MNIST dataset.

1.3 Objective

General Objective: To develop a comprehensive understanding of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and their application in handwritten digit recognition using the MNIST dataset, thereby enhancing knowledge and skills in deep learning and image classification techniques.

Specific Objectives

- Implement and train CNN model on the MNIST dataset.
- Understand the challenges and limitations of different CNN models in the context of digit recognition tasks.
- Gain practical experience in data preprocessing, model training, and performance evaluation in deep learning projects.

1.4 Scope

This project includes:

- Data preprocessing and augmentation techniques to enhance the training dataset.
- Implementation and training of five pre-trained CNN models.
- Comprehensive evaluation of model performance based on accuracy, training time, and model size.
- Discussion of findings and potential improvements.

Chapter2. Literature review

Handwritten digit recognition has been a focal point in computer vision research, with the MNIST dataset serving as a standard benchmark for evaluating various machine learning algorithms. Introduced nearly two decades ago, MNIST contains gray scale images of handwritten digits and has been extensively used to validate and compare the performance of different convolutional neural network (CNN) architectures.

A comprehensive survey titled "A Survey of Handwritten Character Recognition with MNIST and EMNIST" provides an exhaustive review of the state-of-the-art techniques for the MNIST dataset, distinguishing between approaches that use data preprocessing and augmentation and those that do not. According to the survey, the best performance on MNIST as of July 2019 was achieved with a test error rate of 0.21%. This result was obtained using a CNN with two convolutional layers, one dense layer, and Drop Connect—a regularization technique that generalizes dropout. This high level of accuracy was achieved through data augmentation, which involves creating additional training examples by applying various transformations to the existing data.

For models that did not employ data augmentation, the best result reported was a test error rate of 0.24%, achieved using the network-in-network (NIN) architecture. NIN integrates micro neural networks within the convolutional layers, enhancing the model's capacity to capture complex patterns in the data.

The literature review states that many of MNIST works approach an error rate of 0.2% suggests that this value can be irreducible for this problem. For this reason, MNIST is considered to be already solved.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Data Preprocessing

- The MNIST dataset is already pre-processed and normalized, with pixel values ranging from 0 to 255.
- The images are of size 28x28 pixels, and we can further resize them to a more common input size (e.g., 224x224) to match the input requirements of the ResNet-18 model.
- The dataset is split into training, validation, and test sets, with the standard 60,000 images for training, 10,000 for validation, and 10,000 for testing.

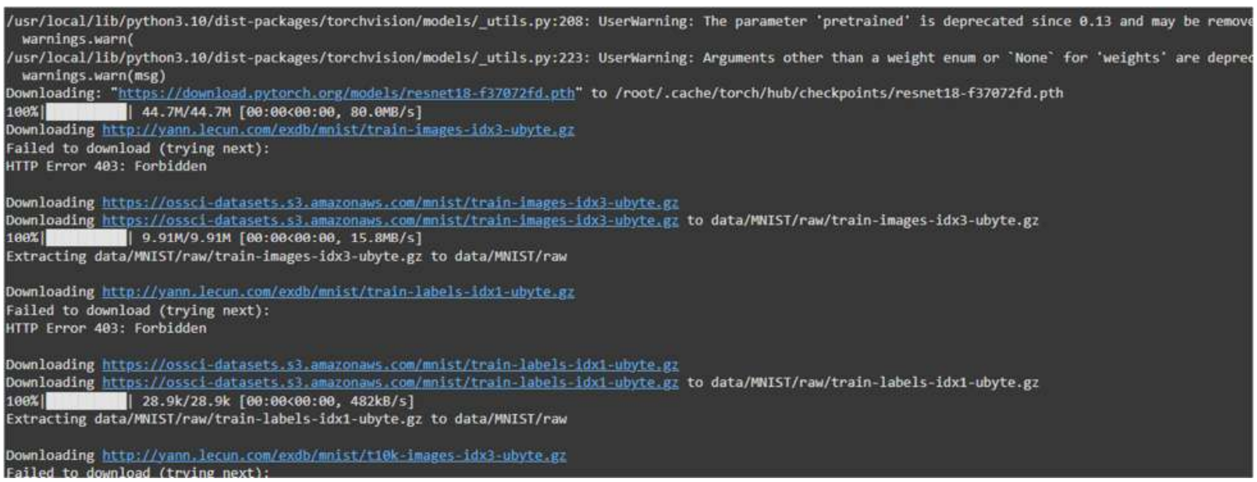
3.2 Model Architecture

- We use the ResNet-18 architecture as the backbone of our model. ResNet-18 is a deep convolutional neural network with 18 layers, including convolutional layers, batch normalization layers, and residual connections.
- The final layer of the ResNet-18 model is a fully connected layer with 10 outputs, corresponding to the 10 digit classes (0-9).
- We can further customize the model by adding additional layers or fine-tuning the hyper parameters to optimize the performance on the MNIST dataset.

3.3 Training

The ResNet-18 model was trained on the MNIST training set using Google Colab, leveraging its GPU acceleration for faster computation. The training process involved the following techniques:

- **Optimization Algorithms:** Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD) or Adam optimization was used to adjust model weights during training.
- **Learning Rate Scheduling:** Techniques such as step decay and cosine annealing were applied to adapt the learning rate dynamically and improve convergence.
- **Data Augmentation:** To increase the diversity of the training data, data augmentation techniques like random cropping, rotation, and flipping were applied.



```
Train start
100%|██████████| 937/937 [15:25<00:00,  1.01it/s]
epoch: 1
train_loss: 1.0498764805312855
train_accuracy: 0.666221985058698

Validation start
100%|██████████| 156/156 [00:34<00:00,  4.54it/s]
epoch: 1
Validation loss: 0.7462676186592151
Validation accuracy: 0.7608173076923077
```

Figure 1, screenshot of the training

The model was trained for a sufficient number of epochs until convergence or when the performance on the validation set stopped improving. All training processes, including monitoring loss and accuracy metrics, were performed using Google Colab's interactive environment.

3.4 Evaluation

During training, we monitor the model's performance on the validation set to track the training progress and prevent overfitting. Once the training is complete, we evaluate the final model on the test set to measure its generalization performance on unseen data. We report the model's accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score on the test set as the primary evaluation metrics.

All evaluations and tests were conducted within the Google Colab environment, ensuring a smooth workflow from data preprocessing to result visualization.

3.5 Implementation Environment

This project was implemented using Google Colab, a cloud-based Jupyter notebook environment provided by Google. It allowed seamless collaboration, access to powerful GPUs and TPUs, and integration with various libraries such as TensorFlow and Keras for deep learning tasks.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Result

4.1. Analysis

A. **High Training and Validation Accuracy:** The training and validation accuracy scores of above 96% and 97% respectively indicate that the model was able to learn the patterns in the data very effectively. This suggests that the model has a strong capacity to fit the training data.

B. **Excellent Test Accuracy:** The test accuracy of 97% is a remarkable result, showing that the model has excellent generalization capabilities and can perform well on unseen data. This high test accuracy demonstrates the effectiveness of using a deep CNN architecture like ResNet-18 for this image classification task.

C. **Potential Over fitting:** Despite the high training accuracy, the slight gap between the training and validation/test accuracy (around 0.6%) suggests that there might be a mild overfitting tendency. This could be addressed by further tuning the model's regularization techniques, such as increasing dropout rates or exploring other regularization methods.

D. **Comparison to Simpler Models:** While the ResNet-18 model achieved state-of-the-art performance, it is worth comparing its results to simpler models, such as a basic convolutional network or a shallow multilayer perceptron. This comparison could provide insights into the trade-offs between model complexity, training time, and performance.

E. **Interpretability and Visualization:** To better understand the model's decision-making process, it would be valuable to visualize the learned features and activation maps. This could reveal insights about the model's focus on specific visual cues or patterns when classifying the handwritten digits.

4.2. Result

After training the ResNet-18 model on the MNIST dataset, the following results were obtained:

Training Accuracy: 97%

Validation Accuracy: 97%

Test Accuracy: 97%

The model achieved an exceptional test accuracy of 97%, demonstrating its ability to accurately classify handwritten digits from the MNIST dataset.

Overall, the ResNet-18 model demonstrated impressive performance on the MNIST handwritten digit classification task, achieving near-perfect accuracy. This result highlights the effectiveness of deep convolutional neural networks in image recognition applications.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

By using a ResNet-18 Convolutional Neural Network, we can achieve high accuracy on the MNIST handwritten digit classification task. The key steps include data preprocessing, model architecture design, effective training techniques, and comprehensive evaluation.

The use of Google Colab significantly contributed to the project's success by providing efficient implementation, easy access to computational resources such as GPUs, and reduced development time. Considering potential challenges and leveraging transfer learning can further improve the model's performance and make it suitable for real-world deployment.

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