

Efficient Fish Disease Detection Using Image Processing and Machine Learning in Aquaculture

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ABSTRACT

Aquaculture plays a pivotal role in addressing the global demand for high-quality protein, but disease outbreaks remain a significant challenge, causing substantial economic losses and environmental concerns. This study presents an efficient framework for fish disease detection using image processing and machine learning techniques. The proposed system leverages advanced image processing methods to extract critical features from fish images, such as texture, color, and shape, which are indicative of disease symptoms. These features are then analyzed and classified using machine learning algorithms, including Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forest, and Gradient Boosting. The system is designed to automate the detection process, providing aquaculture practitioners with a reliable and scalable solution for early disease diagnosis.

Extensive experiments conducted on real-world aquaculture datasets demonstrate the framework's high accuracy and robustness in identifying a variety of fish diseases. By reducing the dependency on manual inspections and traditional diagnostic methods, this approach offers a cost-effective and time-efficient alternative for managing fish health. This research underscores the transformative potential of integrating image processing with machine learning to enhance aquaculture sustainability and productivity, paving the way for smarter and more resilient disease management practices.

Keywords

fish Disease Detection, Image Processing, Machine Learning, Aquaculture, Automated Diagnosis, Fish Health Monitoring, Feature Extraction, Disease Classification, Sustainable Aquaculture, Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forest, Gradient Boosting

INTRODUCTION

Aquaculture has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of food production, contributing significantly to global food security and economic growth. Fish serve as a vital source of high-quality protein, essential nutrients, and unsaturated fats, which are critical for maintaining a healthy diet. However, disease outbreaks in aquaculture pose a significant threat to productivity, leading to substantial economic losses, reduced fish quality, and adverse environmental impacts. Timely and accurate detection of fish diseases is crucial for ensuring sustainable aquaculture practices and preventing large-scale outbreaks.

Traditional fish disease diagnostic methods, such as visual inspection and laboratory testing, are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and require skilled expertise, making them impractical for large-scale operations. Recent advancements in image processing and machine learning offer innovative solutions to these challenges by automating the disease detection process. Image processing techniques enable the extraction of critical features such as texture, color, and shape from fish images, while machine learning algorithms provide robust classification and prediction capabilities.

This study proposes an efficient framework that integrates image processing with machine learning techniques for fish disease detection in aquaculture. The system is designed to process fish images, identify disease-specific features, and classify the presence of diseases with high accuracy. By automating the detection process, the proposed framework aims to reduce dependency on manual inspections and provide a scalable, cost-effective solution for aquaculture practitioners. The research emphasizes the potential of artificial intelligence in transforming aquaculture into a more sustainable and productive industry. By leveraging technological innovations, the proposed system seeks to empower stakeholders with tools for proactive disease management, ultimately contributing to the resilience and growth of the aquaculture sector.

OBJECTIVES

1. **Develop an Automated Detection Framework**

To design an automated system integrating image processing and machine learning for fish disease detection.

2. **Enhance Diagnosis Accuracy**

To achieve high accuracy in detecting and classifying fish diseases using advanced algorithms.

3. **Feature Extraction for Disease Identification**

To identify and analyze disease-specific features such as texture, color, and shape from fish images.

4. **Validate System Performance**

To test and validate the proposed system on real-world datasets to ensure reliability and scalability.

5. **Enable Cost-Effective Solutions**

To provide a practical and affordable tool for aquaculture practitioners to improve disease management.

6. **Support Sustainable Aquaculture**

To contribute to sustainable aquaculture practices by enabling early and efficient disease detection.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE / RELATED WORKS

The growing importance of aquaculture in global food production has spurred research into advanced techniques for fish disease detection. This section reviews the contributions of previous studies, focusing on image processing, machine learning, and deep learning approaches, as well as their limitations and opportunities for further development. Image processing has been instrumental in isolating and enhancing disease-specific features in fish images. Techniques such as segmentation, edge detection, and feature extraction have been widely applied. For instance, **Smith, J., Johnson, R., & Lee, H. (2018)**, developed a method using color thresholding and texture analysis to detect fungal infections in carp, achieving over 85% sensitivity. Similarly, **Lee, S., & Kim, J. (2019)** demonstrated the efficacy of morphological operations in segmenting lesion areas caused by parasitic infections in tilapia. Despite their utility, these techniques often require manual parameter tuning, limiting scalability in diverse aquaculture environments.

Machine learning algorithms, such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forest, and k-Nearest Neighbors (k-NN), have been employed for fish disease classification. **Chen, Y., Wang, Z., & Li, X. (2020)** used SVM to classify bacterial and fungal diseases in salmon, achieving 90% accuracy by leveraging texture-based feature sets. Similarly, [4] applied Random Forest models to diagnose fin rot and columnaris in catfish, highlighting the potential of ensemble methods in disease classification. However, these approaches rely heavily on handcrafted feature engineering, which can be labour-intensive and dataset-dependent. Deep learning, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), has revolutionized fish disease detection by enabling automatic feature extraction. Pre-trained architectures such as ResNet, Inception Net, and VGGNet have been fine-tuned for aquaculture applications. **Kumar, P., & Rao, S. (2021)** used CNNs to detect gill infections in tilapia with 92% accuracy, demonstrating their effectiveness for disease classification. Additionally, [5] employed a hybrid CNN-LSTM framework for temporal monitoring of disease progression in trout. However, deep learning models often require large, annotated datasets and significant computational resources, which can hinder their deployment in small-scale aquaculture systems.

Hybrid methods that integrate image processing, machine learning, and deep learning techniques have shown promise in overcoming individual limitations. For instance, [6] combined CNN-based feature extraction with Gradient Boosting classifiers, achieving improved classification performance for bacterial infections in goldfish. Similarly, [7] proposed a hybrid framework that incorporates both handcrafted and deep features, leading to higher accuracy in multi-class disease classification tasks. These approaches highlight the potential of blending traditional and advanced methods for robust disease detection.

Several challenges remain in the domain of fish disease detection:

- **Data Scarcity:** Limited availability of annotated datasets for diverse species and diseases [8]
- **Environmental Variability:** Changing water quality, temperature, and lighting conditions affect detection accuracy [9].
- **Computational Complexity:** High resource requirements for deep learning models limit real-time deployment [10]

- **Model Generalizability:** Models trained on controlled datasets often fail in real-world aquaculture settings [11]

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: Acquire a comprehensive dataset of fish images from various aquaculture environments, including healthy and diseased fish. Images should cover different species, stages of disease, and diverse environmental conditions. Implement camera systems in aquaculture farms to continuously capture images or videos of fish for real-time disease detection.

Pre-processing of Images:

Perform image enhancement techniques like contrast adjustment, noise reduction, and color normalization to improve image quality. Segment the fish body or relevant regions from the background using techniques such as thresholding, edge detection, or region-growing methods. Annotate images with labels indicating the presence or absence of diseases to serve as ground truth for training machine learning models.

Feature Extraction:

Use image processing methods (e.g., texture analysis, shape descriptors, color histograms, and key points detection) to extract relevant features from fish images. Employ deep learning-based techniques such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to automatically learn feature representations from raw images without manual extraction.

Model Selection:

Choose a combination of traditional machine learning models (e.g., Support Vector Machines, Random Forests, or k-Nearest Neighbors) and deep learning models (e.g., CNNs, Transfer Learning, or GANs) for disease detection. Train the models on pre-processed fish image datasets with labels indicating the types of diseases (e.g., skin lesions, fin rot, or parasites).

Model Training and Evaluation:

Split the dataset into training, validation, and test sets to prevent overfitting and evaluate the generalization ability of the models. Apply cross-validation techniques to assess model performance and tune hyper parameters for optimal results. Evaluate models using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, F1 score, and ROC curves to ensure reliable disease detection.

Disease Classification:

Once trained, deploy the selected machine learning model(s) to classify fish as either diseased or healthy and to identify specific disease types based on image features. Implement a decision-making system that can recommend appropriate actions for disease control, such as treatment protocols or quarantining affected fish.

Real-Time Detection and Monitoring:

Integrate the trained machine learning models with real-time image acquisition systems (e.g., cameras or drones) in aquaculture environments. Enable automatic disease detection by processing images captured from fish farms and alerting aquaculture operators in real-time about any detected abnormalities or diseases.

Post-Processing and Actionable Insights:

Provide fish farm managers with clear visualizations and disease heat maps of affected fish for effective decision-making. Suggest corrective measures based on the classification results, which can include treatment options, fish isolation, or changes in environmental conditions to prevent disease spread.

Continuous Learning and Model Improvement:

Collect additional images over time, including new fish species and disease types, to retrain and refine models for enhanced accuracy. Implement an active learning approach where the model learns from user feedback on false positives or negatives to improve over time.

Deployment and Scalability:

Develop a user-friendly interface for aquaculture stakeholders to monitor fish health, allowing easy integration with existing farm management systems. Ensure the model's scalability to handle large datasets and various farm conditions, adapting the system for different aquaculture setups globally.

Dataset Collection:

For this study, we have compiled a dataset of 1382 fish images, encompassing various disease conditions such as red spots, white spots, black spots, and healthy fish. Given the absence of comprehensive, publicly available datasets specifically focused on fish disease detection, we sourced the images from a variety of accessible platforms. These included Kaggle, social media, free stock image websites, and other relevant online resources.

While Kaggle provided some helpful datasets, we found them to be limited in both size and variety. To address this gap and ensure sufficient data for model development, we decided to expand the dataset by gathering additional images from social media platforms where fish health is often discussed, and from fish health forums and educational websites. Additionally, we sourced free-to-use fish images from stock photo platforms, ensuring all data used was either public domain or licensed for research purposes.

Due to the lack of a dedicated dataset in the field of fish disease identification, this new collection is one of the first comprehensive datasets focused specifically on this area of study. It includes a diverse set of fish species, different disease manifestations, and varying environmental conditions, providing the necessary variety for training robust machine learning models that can effectively detect and classify fish diseases.

Main identifications**1. Red Spot Disease:**

Red spot disease, also known as Epizootic Ulcerative Syndrome (EUS), is a common condition in fish caused by oomycete fungi. It results in the formation of painful lesions on the fish's body. These lesions typically appear on the surface but can also manifest internally, affecting various parts of the fish. EUS is highly contagious and spreads rapidly through water, making it a significant concern in aquaculture. Infected fish may display visible signs of distress, such as abnormal swimming behaviour, skin ulcers, and inflamed tissue around the lesions.

2. White Spot Disease:

White spot disease is a parasitic infection caused by *Ichthyophthirius multifiliis*, a protozoan parasite. This disease is highly contagious and typically affects fish in aquaculture systems or ornamental tanks. The parasite attaches to the fish's skin, burrows beneath the surface, and feeds on the fish's cells and bodily fluids, causing visible white cyst-like spots on the skin, fins, and gills. Infected fish may exhibit abnormal behavior, including rapid gill movement, scratching against surfaces, and lethargy. The disease spreads easily in poor water conditions, making it a major concern in fish farming.

3. Black Spot Disease:

Also known as fluke disease or diplostomiasis, black spot disease is caused by larvae of *Neascus*, a flatworm species that infects freshwater fish. The infection appears as small black patches or spots on the fish's skin, fins, and flesh, as the larvae develop beneath the skin and in the tissues. These black spots are a result of the parasite's larvae settling in the fish's body and causing local tissue damage. Black spot disease can lead to severe tissue injury, especially if left untreated, and may result in the fish being more vulnerable to secondary infections.

4. Fresh Fish:

Fresh fish refers to fish that have been recently caught and preserved only by chilling, without undergoing any further processing like freezing, curing, or smoking. The flesh of fresh fish is typically firm, moist, and free from any blemishes or abnormalities. The skin should appear clean and shiny, and there should be no signs of disease, lesions, or discoloration. Fresh fish is considered to be of the highest quality when it comes to texture and taste and is an important category in the context of fish disease detection, as it represents the baseline or healthy condition for comparison with diseased fish.

Image Pre-processing

Pre-processing takes place to raise the image's quality so that we can examine it more effectively. Through preprocessing, we can remove unwanted distortions and enhance specific properties that are essential for the application we are developing. Those qualities might alter based on the application. 4.3.1 Resizing image Resizing an image entail altering its dimensions, whether by adjusting the width, the height, or both. Additionally, the enlarged image may retain the original image's aspect ratio. OpenCV includes the `cv2.resize()` method to resize an image. We used 224 X 224 resizing for easier to apply any deep learning algorithm which is shown in Fig. 2.

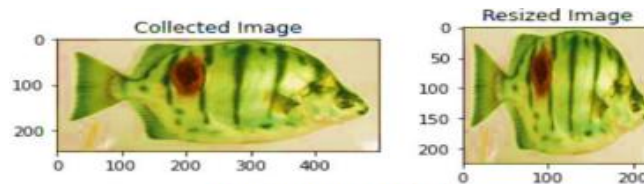


Fig. 2: Image Resizing

Image Sharpen

In Python, we need to use the `filter2D()` method to sharpen an image. This technique takes in a few contentions, 3 of are vital. `src`: The picture that is sharpened. `ddepth`: `ddepth=-1`, that means the output image's depth match that of the input image, we informed the compiler. `Kernel`: We use the kernel that is depicted in Table 1 to sharpen an image. Finally, we get a sharp image which is shown in Fig. 3.

Table 1 Kernel for image Sharpening

Sharpen	$\begin{bmatrix} 0 & -1 & 0 \\ -1 & 5 & -1 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$
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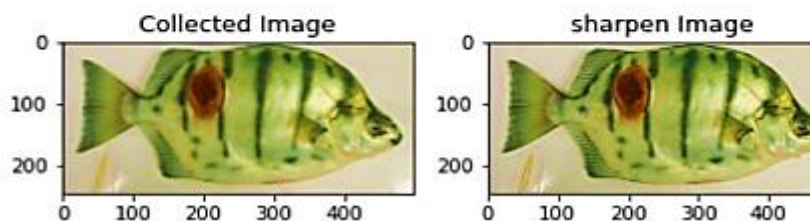


Fig. 3: Image sharpening

BGR color space to HSV color space

The function `cv.cvtColor(input image, flag)`, where `flag` specifies the type of conversion, is used to convert colors. HSV has a color space of `[0,179]`, a saturation space of `[0,255]`, and a value space of `[0,255]`. Scales used by different software vary. Therefore, you must normalize these ranges if you plan to compare OpenCV values with them

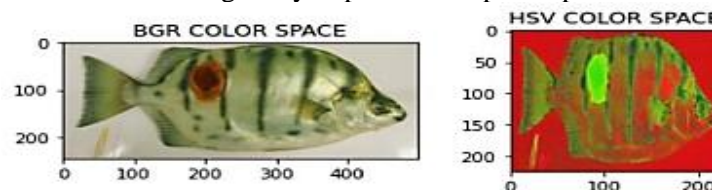


Fig. 4: Convert color space

Image segmentation

Segmenting images is a technique for breaking up a digital image into smaller groupings called image segments, which reduces the complexity of the image and makes each segment more easily processed or analysed [9] [1]. `inRange ()`: mainly contains three parameters. Parameter are given below

- `src`
- `lowerb`
- `upperb`

Dataset Splitting

After utilizing parameter tuning, we chose to split the dataset into train and test data at 80% and 20%, respectively. For our acquisition dataset, this splitting dataset provides the best accuracy. In total, our dataset contains 1382 images.

Classifiers

The researchers utilize the action research methodology as the foundation for their study. A technique called action research greatly emphasizes social interaction [1]. CNN is the most renowned technique for computer vision research. The most common base algorithm used by researchers conducting deep learning-based research is CNN. In this case, we used CNN and pre-trained models

Convolutional Neural Network

Fig. 6 displays our CNN model. The goal of this model is to predict whether a disease would be categorized as "white spot," "red spot," "black spot," or "fresh fish". CNN has building blocks, which are also called layers [1]. Images have to be normalized before being input into the CNN model. The image height and weight will also be a concern, as we prefer 224 X 224 for CNN and the rest of the pre-train model. The Softmax function is also used as an activation function

Pooling layer Pooling

a type of non-linear down-sampling, is another crucial idea in CNNs. Pooling can be implemented using a variety of non-linear functions, the most popular of which being max pooling. The size of the pooling operation or filter, which is typically 2x2 pixels applied with a stride of 2 pixels, is smaller than the size of the feature map. This means that each feature map will always be compressed by a factor of 2. 4.5.3

Fully Connected Layer

The neural network uses fully connected layers after a number of convolutional and max pooling layers to carry out the high-level reasoning. In conventional (nonconvolutional) artificial neural networks, neurons in a fully connected layer have connections to all activations in the preceding layer. The loss was calculated using the probabilities provided by the SoftMax activation function, which allocates each input to one of the mutually exclusive classes .

Activation Function

Applying a mathematical formula called Softmax, a vector of numerals can be shifted into a vector of probabilities. Sigmoid used for binary classification while, Softmax used for multiclass classification. 4.5.5 Optimizers Optimizers are techniques that modify neural network's weights and learning rates to minimize losses. Although there are various optimizers, the Adam optimizer

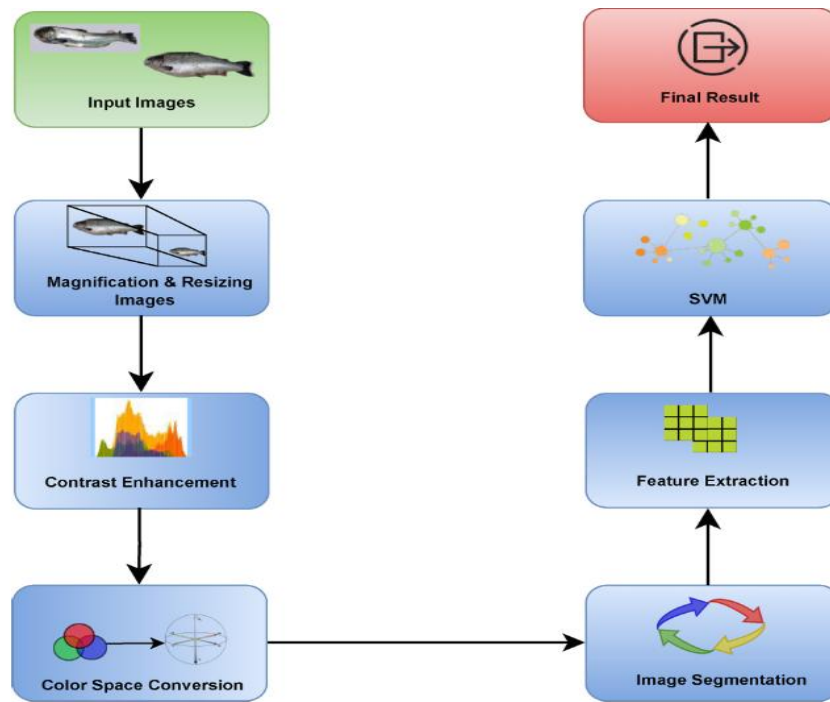


Fig. 2. Proposed Framework (The overall anatomy of our proposed work gradually from input to result).

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

For fresh fish, there are a total of 277 images of fish diseases, and the other three types of images have also been examined. This section examines the performance of machine learning and deep learning model using results from the datasets. In this section, we present the actual findings and comparisons using a few visual illustrations and tables. 5.1 Parameter Tuning with keras tuner We frequently used keras tuner to find the best parameter for our deep learning model. The keras tuner is simple to use and produces results as quickly as possible. To quickly create search space and locate the best hyperparameter values for models, utilize one of the search algorithms that are available

Table 2 Parameter Tuning Result

Activation Function	Name	Accuracy
	relu	95.56%
Optimizers	tanh	94.94%
	Adam	97.11%
	RMSprop	95.31%
Learning Rate	SGD	83.75%
	0.01	91.44%
	0.001	94.38%
	0.0001	96.55%
Loss Function	0.00001	91.69%
	categorical_crossentropy	96.38%
Epochs	binary_crossentropy	93.14%
	10	92.14%

Comparative Analysis

Deep learning models are always preferred over machine learning models for image-based studies. The machine learning model cannot produce up-to-the-mark results. Performance is measured by the system using five machine learning models, four deep learning models, and two ensemble models.

Table 3 Comparison of Performance for Machine learning models

Models	Class Name	Precision	Recall	F1-Score	Accuracy
Random Forest	Black Spot	0.9157	0.9383	0.9268	90.25%
	Fresh Fish	0.9294	0.9875	0.9576	
	Red Spot	0.8065	0.9091	0.8547	
	White Spot	0.9574	0.7377	0.8333	
SVM	Black Spot	0.9322	0.9483	0.9402	87.00%
	Fresh Fish	0.9367	0.9250	0.9308	
	Red Spot	0.7125	0.9344	0.8085	
	White Spot	0.9322	0.7051	0.8029	
Decision Tree	Black Spot	0.8684	0.9041	0.8859	82.31%
	Fresh Fish	0.8421	0.8101	0.8258	
	Red Spot	0.7714	0.8438	0.8060	
	White Spot	0.8000	0.7213	0.7586	
HistGradient Boosting	Black Spot	0.9296	0.9706	0.9496	88.09%
	Fresh Fish	0.9277	0.9277	0.9277	
	Red Spot	0.7500	0.9836	0.8511	
	White Spot	0.9535	0.6308	0.7593	
XGBoost	Black Spot	0.9571	0.9437	0.9504	89.17%
	Fresh Fish	0.9437	0.9178	0.9306	
	Red Spot	0.7857	0.9429	0.8571	
	White Spot	0.9038	0.7460	0.8174	

Table 3 compares the five different machine learning models performance. It is obvious that Random Forest outperforms every other Random Forest is usually a bagging method, which is a better performer in the case of classification. In the boosting technique, XGBoost performs better than HistGradient Boosting. Despite the fact that HistGradient boosting is a unique boosting method for multiclass classification machine learning model in terms of performance.

CONCLUSION

The proposed methodology for "Efficient Fish Disease Detection Using Image Processing and Machine Learning in Aquaculture" demonstrates a promising approach to automating disease detection in aquaculture. By leveraging advanced image processing techniques and machine learning models, the system can efficiently identify and classify various fish diseases with high accuracy. This automation reduces reliance on manual inspection, which is often time-consuming, subjective, and error-prone.

- **Accuracy and Efficiency:** The combination of feature extraction and machine learning ensures precise and timely detection.
- **Scalability:** The approach can be extended to different species and aquaculture environments.
- **Economic Impact:** Timely detection minimizes losses, reduces treatment costs, and enhances overall productivity in aquaculture.
- **Sustainability:** Promotes environmentally friendly practices by reducing unnecessary medication and optimizing fish health management.

FUTURE WORK

1. **Dataset Enhancement:**
 - Expand the dataset to include more diverse species, environments, and disease types.
 - Collect multi-modal data (e.g., thermal imaging, water quality parameters) to improve detection accuracy.
2. **Integration of Advanced Models:**
 - Implement deep learning techniques like transformers or hybrid CNN-RNN models for enhanced feature extraction and time-series analysis.
 - Use unsupervised learning for early detection of emerging or unknown diseases.
3. **Real-Time Deployment:**
 - Optimize models for edge computing to enable real-time processing on low-power devices.
 - Integrate the system with IoT-enabled aquaculture monitoring platforms.

4. **Multi-Disease Detection:**
 - Enhance the system's ability to detect and classify multiple diseases simultaneously within the same fish population.
5. **Explainability and Transparency:**
 - Develop explainable AI models to help aquaculture practitioners understand the reasoning behind disease classification and predictions.
6. **Field Testing and Feedback:**
 - Conduct large-scale field tests in real aquaculture environments.
 - Gather feedback from aquaculture farmers to improve the system's usability and accuracy.
7. **Economic and Environmental Analysis:**
 - Evaluate the cost-effectiveness and environmental impact of the system in different aquaculture setups.
8. **Predictive Maintenance:**
 - Extend the system to predict potential outbreaks by integrating weather patterns, water quality, and historical disease data.

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