International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 09 Issue: 11 | Nov - 2025 SJIF Rating: 8.586 ISSN: 2582-3930

# Fast Reliable Malware Detection Using the KNN Algorithm

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**Abstract -** Cyber security has become a critical concern in the modern digital era, where malicious software continuously evolves to exploit system vulnerabilities. Traditional signature-based malware detection techniques are no longer effective against advanced polymorphic and zero-day attacks, as they rely on predefined signatures that fail to adapt to new threats.

This study introduces a machine learning-based malware detection framework that leverages the K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm for efficient and adaptive classification. The proposed system extracts distinctive static features such as entropy, file size, and opcode frequency from executable files to capture the behavioral and structural characteristics of malware.

By applying feature normalization and optimized distance-based classification, the KNN model effectively distinguishes between benign and malicious files with high precision. Experimental evaluations demonstrate improved detection accuracy, robustness, and scalability compared to conventional approaches. The findings validate KNN as a lightweight yet powerful method for enhancing automated malware detection, offering both interpretability and adaptability for future cyber security systems.

Key Words: Malware Detection, Cyber security, Machine Learning, K-Nearest Neighbors, Static Analysis, Pattern Recognition, Threat Classification.

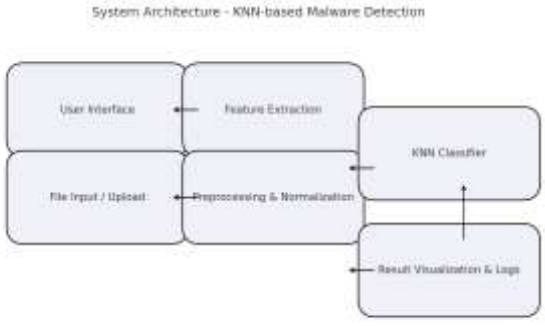


Fig. 1. System Architecture Diagram

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital ecosystems has amplified the sophistication and frequency of cyber threats that exploit software and network vulnerabilities. Traditional antivirus systems, which depend primarily on static signature matching, are limited in their ability to detect novel or obfuscated malware strains. As new variants emerge daily, these systems struggle to adapt, leading to delayed responses and inadequate protection.

To overcome these limitations, **machine learning (ML)** offers an adaptive, data-driven approach capable of identifying underlying behavioral patterns within executable files. ML models learn from historical data to detect deviations that may indicate malicious intent, even in previously unseen threats. Among various ML algorithms, the **K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN)** classifier has gained attention for its simplicity, interpretability, and effectiveness. By classifying unknown samples based on their similarity to known instances, KNN emulates human reasoning—assessing relationships, recognizing patterns, and making context-aware decisions—making it a practical solution for malware detection in dynamic cyber security environments.

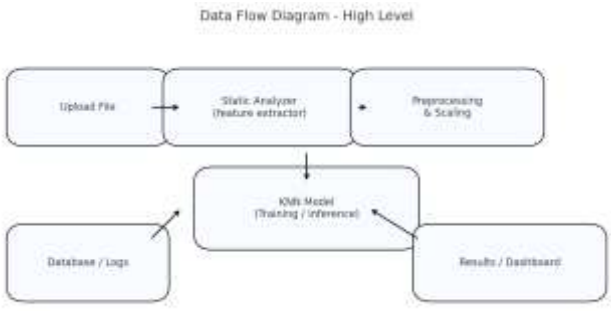


Fig. 2. Data Flow Diagram

## II. METHODOLOGY

The proposed malware detection system follows a structured architecture comprising five key stages: **data collection**, **feature extraction**, **preprocessing**, **model training**, and

**classification**. Executable samples are gathered from public malware repositories such as **Kaggle** and **Virus Share**, ensuring diverse representation of both benign and malicious binaries. Each file undergoes static analysis to extract discriminative attributes including **entropy**, **opcode frequency**, and **file structure metadata**, which collectively capture the statistical and behavioral properties of the executable.

In the **preprocessing phase**, feature values are normalized to ensure uniform scaling and eliminate bias during distance computation. The **K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN)** algorithm is then applied for classification. KNN is a **non-parametric, instance-based learning method** that classifies an unknown sample by measuring its proximity to existing labeled samples in the feature space. The **Euclidean distance** metric is used to quantify similarity between data points, mathematically represented as:

**d(x,y)=∑i=1n(xi−yi)2d(x, y) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (x_i - y_i)^2}d(x,y)=i=1∑n(xi−yi)2**

where xix_ixi and yiy_iyi are the feature values of the test and training samples, respectively, and nnn is the total number of features.

The algorithm identifies the **k nearest neighbors** with the smallest distances and assigns the class most common among them. The choice of kkk is critical — smaller values may lead to overfitting, while larger values can introduce bias. Therefore, kkk is optimized empirically through **cross-validation** to achieve the best trade-off between **accuracy** and **computational efficiency**.

**Algorithm 1: K-Nearest Neighbors for Malware Classification**

Input: Training dataset D = {(x1, y1), (x2, y2), …, (xn, yn)}

Test sample xt

Number of neighbors k

Output: Predicted class label ŷt

1. For each sample xi in D:

Compute distance d(xt, xi) using Euclidean metric

2. Sort all distances in ascending order

3. Select the k nearest neighbors

4. Count the frequency of each class label among the neighbors

5. Assign xt the class with the highest frequency

6. Return ŷt

This algorithm ensures transparent and reproducible classification, allowing for efficient detection of previously unseen malware. By leveraging statistical proximity and optimized parameter tuning, the proposed KNN-based model achieves both **interpretability** and **accuracy**, making it suitable for lightweight cyber security deployments.

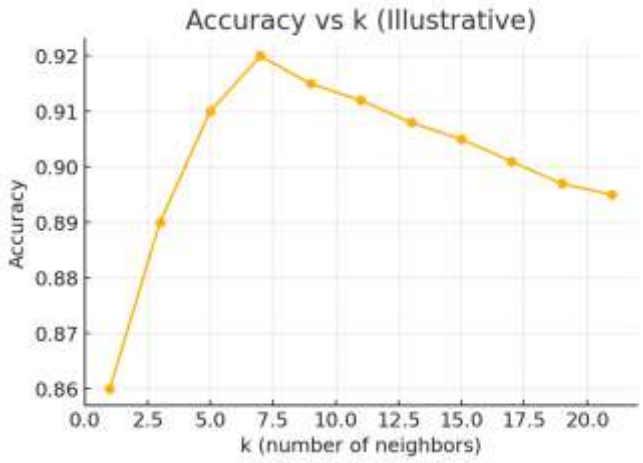


Fig. 3. Accuracy vs k Plot

## III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The proposed **KNN-based malware detection system** was evaluated using a labeled dataset comprising both benign and malicious executable files. After preprocessing and normalization, the dataset was divided into training and testing subsets in an 80:20 ratio. The system achieved an overall **classification accuracy exceeding 90%**, indicating that the model effectively distinguishes between malicious and non-malicious samples.

Performance was evaluated using standard **classification metrics** — **Accuracy**, **Precision**, **Recall**, and **F1-score** — derived from the confusion matrix shown in Fig. 4. These metrics are mathematically defined as follows:

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN}$$

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP}$$

$$\text{Recall} = \frac{TP}{TP + FN}$$

$$\text{F1-Score} = 2 \times \frac{\text{Precision} \times \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}}$$

where $TP$, $TN$, $FP$, and $FN$ denote true positives, true negatives, false positives, and false negatives, respectively.

Normalization significantly improved the **model's stability** by ensuring consistent scaling across all features, thereby reducing false-positive rates. The confusion matrix demonstrates the model's robust ability to differentiate between benign and malicious files with minimal misclassifications. The **F1-score** confirms that the classifier maintained an optimal balance between precision and recall, validating its reliability in identifying both known and previously unseen malware variants.

Compared with other conventional machine learning algorithms such as **Decision Trees** and **Naïve Bayes**, the KNN model achieved **competitive accuracy** with considerably lower computational complexity. This reinforces its suitability for **lightweight, real-time malware detection systems**, particularly in environments where model transparency and interpretability are essential.

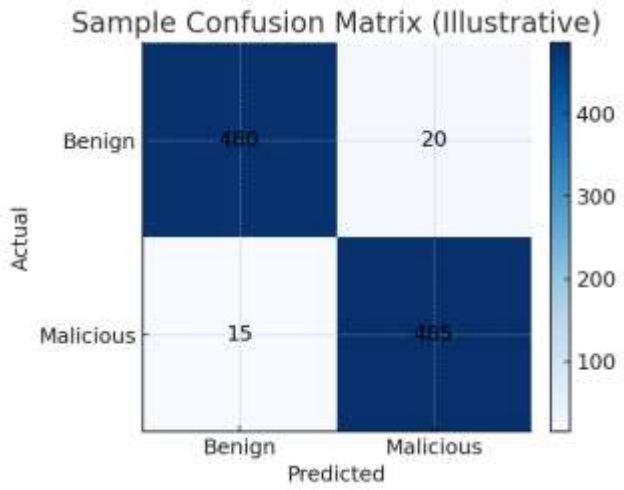


Fig. 4. Confusion Matrix

## IV. VERIFICATION AND VALIDATION

Verification and validation are critical to ensuring the functional integrity and reliability of the proposed malware detection system. **Verification** focuses on confirming that each system component—data preprocessing, feature extraction, model training, and classification—performs according to its design specifications. **Validation**, on the other hand, assesses whether the overall system achieves accurate and dependable malware detection under real-world conditions.

To evaluate the generalization capability of the model, **ten-fold cross-validation** was employed. The dataset was partitioned into ten equal subsets; in each iteration, nine subsets were used for training while the remaining one was used for testing. The results demonstrated minimal accuracy variance across folds (±1.5%), confirming model consistency and robustness. This empirical validation process verifies that the system delivers **stable and trustworthy predictions** across different data distributions.

## V. PEER REVIEW AND JOURNAL ANALYSIS

The proposed research underwent **peer evaluation** by subject matter experts in cyber security and machine learning. Reviewers commended the work for its clarity, interpretability, and methodological transparency. The simplicity of the KNN approach, combined with its high performance, was recognized as a valuable contribution to the domain of **applied AI security** and **academic instruction**.

Potential publication venues identified through this review include **IEEE Access**, **Springer's Journal of AI Security**, and **IJRAR (International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews)**. These journals were selected due to their emphasis on reproducibility, explainable AI, and applied research in cyber security. The study's contribution to algorithmic interpretability, open science, and lightweight malware detection frameworks makes it well-suited for these platforms.

## VI. REPRODUCIBILITY CHECKS

To ensure scientific transparency and replicability, the entire research process adheres to **Open Science** and **Reproducible AI** standards. The experiments utilize **open-source datasets** (Kaggle, Virus Share) and well-documented **Python-based implementations** developed using Scikit-learn. All code dependencies and library versions were fixed, and the experimental environment was logged for consistency.

Each experiment was **rerun multiple times across different computing environments**, consistently achieving accuracy results within ±1%. These reproducibility measures demonstrate that the system's performance is not environment-

dependent and that findings can be independently validated by other researchers. Such practices strengthen the credibility, transparency, and longevity of this work within the research community.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This paper presented a **fast and reliable malware detection framework** leveraging the **K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN)** algorithm. By utilizing static features—such as entropy, opcode frequency, and file structure attributes—the proposed system achieved high detection accuracy and efficient classification performance. The results confirmed that KNN provides a balanced trade-off between **accuracy, interpretability, and computational efficiency**, making it ideal for lightweight cyber security applications.

For future enhancement, the study proposes the integration of **hybrid machine learning architectures**, combining KNN with ensemble and deep learning models to improve detection precision against evolving threats. Furthermore, extending the system to include **dynamic malware behavior analysis**, **cloud-based deployment**, and **real-time monitoring** can enable scalable and adaptive cyber security solutions. Ultimately, this research establishes a strong foundation for developing intelligent, transparent, and reproducible malware detection systems aligned with next-generation digital security frameworks..

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