Predicting Autism Spectrum Disorder Using Machine Learning Models

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Abstract: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disease that impairs a person's communication, conduct, and social relationships. Early identification is critical because it increases access to timely therapies, hence improving overall quality of life. Traditional diagnostic approaches, on the other hand, frequently necessitate comprehensive clinical evaluations, making them costly, time-consuming, and difficult to obtain, particularly in underserved areas.To overcome these issues, this research introduces a machine learning-based method that uses automation and data to streamline ASD identification. To improve data quality, the system processes responses from ASD screening questionnaires using techniques such as missing value handling, categorical data encoding, and numerical input normalization. Since ASD cases are frequently underrepresented in datasets, Random Oversampling is employed to balance the dataset, preventing the model from favoring the majority. Feature engineering techniques, such as grouping people into age groups and generating an overall ASD risk score from questionnaire responses, are used to further improve predictions. The approach utilizes numerous classification models, including Logistic Regression, Support Vector Machine (SVM), and XGBoost, to determine ASD risk levels. To guarantee accuracy and dependability, these models are assessed using important performance metrics such as confusion matrices and ROC-AUC scores.Data visualization tools, including as heatmaps, box plots, and count plots, are utilized to get deeper insights into feature correlations and model performance. This approach aims to improve accessibility to early ASD detection by acting as a scalable and affordable screening tool that can be incorporated into digital health platforms.

Keywords **– Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD), Early Diagnosis, Machine Learning, Sustainable Healthcare, Support Vector Machine (SVM), XGBoost , Imbalanced Data Handling**

I INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition in which some people's brains develop differently, influencing how they interact with others, communicate, and behave. Because we are seeing an increasing number of people diagnosed with ASD around the world, it is critical to be able to identify it early. Obtaining an early diagnosis can provide access to assistance and actions that can greatly enhance a person's life trajectory.However, the standard techniques for diagnosing ASD – involving medical visits, observing behavior, and utilizing specific tests – can take a lot of time, be expensive, and aren't always easy for everyone to access. This has created a demand for new, technology-driven techniques to detecting ASD early.One area of artificial intelligence called machine learning has grown to be a potent instrument in the medical field. It can automatically analyze data and make predictions about medical conditions. When it comes to ASD, machine learning algorithms can look at responses from questionnaires and basic personal information to assess how probable someone is to have ASD. Compared to conventional techniques, this provides a potentially quicker and more accessible means of screening for ASD. Many more people may be able to access ASD screening thanks to these computer-based models' rapid processing of vast volumes of data.This research is committed to constructing a machine learning system that can help identify individuals who might be at risk for ASD by studying their replies to organized sets of

questions. Preparing the data is the first stage. This include addressing any missing data, converting various response formats into a computer-understandable format, and making that all numerical data is comparable.The fact that there are frequently far more records of people without ASD than those with ASD is a common problem with data pertaining to ASD. Because of this imbalance, a computer model may simply tend toward forecasting that no one has ASD, which can hinder its ability to learn. To get around this, a method known as Random OverSampling is applied to produce a dataset that is more balanced.With this data, we can develop new, insightful features that will further improve the computer model's capacity to forecast ASD risk. For example, we can classify people according to their age or determine a risk score by looking at how they frequently respond to the screening questions.The likelihood of ASD is then actually predicted using a variety of machine learning techniques, including XGBoost, Support Vector Machine (SVM), and Logistic Regression. We next assess these models' performance using measures such as confusion matrices and ROC-AUC scores to make sure they are reliable and accurate. It is also crucial to visualize the data. We may better grasp the links between various pieces of information and gain important insights into how the computer model is making decisions by using tools like count plots, box plots, and correlation heatmaps. By integrating machine learning into ASD screening, this project aims to develop a cost-effective and scalable solution that can be integrated into digital health platforms. This aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) focused on ensuring better health and well-being by facilitating earlier diagnosis and improving access to healthcare services, particularly for neurodevelopmental conditions like ASD.

II OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this project is to design and develop an efficient machine learning-based system for the early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) using questionnaire and demographic data. This system aims to assist healthcare professionals and caregivers in identifying individuals at risk of ASD through automated analysis, reducing dependency on time-consuming and resource-intensive clinical evaluations.The project seeks to enhance predictive accuracy by incorporating comprehensive data preprocessing techniques such as handling missing values, encoding categorical variables, and normalizing numerical features. Additionally, it addresses the challenge of class imbalance in ASD datasets using RandomOverSampler, ensuring equal representation of both ASD and non-ASD cases during model training.Another key objective is to improve model performance through effective feature engineering. New features like total ASD screening scores and age group categorization are introduced to provide deeper insights into individual risk factors.The system implements and compares multiple machine learning algorithms, including Logistic Regression, Support Vector Machine (SVM), and XGBoost, evaluated through metrics such as ROC-AUC scores and confusion matrices to ensure robust model performance.Ultimately, this project aims to develop a reliable, accessible, and scalable ASD screening tool that can be integrated into healthcare platforms, contributing to early diagnosis and aligning with global health and well-being initiatives.

III PROPOSED SYSTEM

The proposed system is a comprehensive, machine learning-based approach designed to enable early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) using structured questionnaire and demographic data. This system incorporates a well-defined data processing pipeline, intelligent feature engineering, and robust classification models to deliver accurate predictions and facilitate timely intervention.

A. Data Collection and Preprocessing

The system begins with the acquisition of data from publicly available ASD screening datasets. The data includes responses to ASD screening questions, demographic attributes, and other health-related indicators. Preprocessing is a crucial step to ensure the quality and usability of the data. This includes handling missing values, converting categorical variables using label encoding, and standardizing numerical features to ensure consistency across all input data. Special attention is given to cleaning inconsistent entries like “?” or “others”.

B.Handling Imbalanced Data

ASD datasets are often highly imbalanced, with fewer positive (ASD) cases compared to negative cases. To address this, the system integrates the RandomOverSampler technique to duplicate minority class samples and balance the training dataset. This improves the model's ability to detect ASD cases accurately without bias toward the majority class.

C. Feature Engineering

Effective feature engineering is implemented to enhance model performance. A new feature, sum_score, is derived by summing individual scores from the ASD questionnaire items (A1 to A10).

D. Model Development and Evaluation

The system employs multiple machine learning algorithms—Logistic Regression, Support Vector Machine (SVM), and XGBoost—for classification tasks. Each model is trained using balanced and normalized data. Performance evaluation is conducted using metrics like ROC-AUC scores, confusion matrices, and accuracy measures on both training and validation sets. This ensures the system's reliability and generalization capability.

E. Visualization and Interpretation

Advanced data visualization techniques are used throughout the project, including count plots, box plots, and heatmaps. These help in understanding feature importance and model behavior, making the system more transparent and interpretable for healthcare professionals.

F. Deployment Possibility

The proposed system is scalable and can be integrated into mobile or web applications as a screening tool. It aims to support early diagnosis efforts and improve accessibility, particularly in resource-limited settings, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being.

IV ARCHITECTURE DIAGRAM

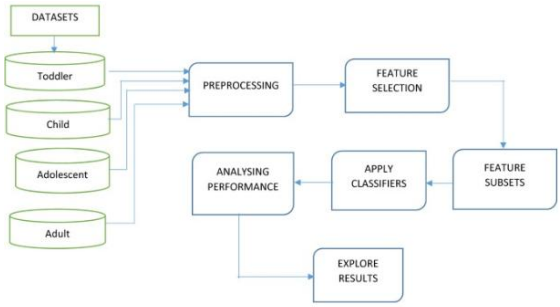

Figure 4.1 Architecture diagram

This architecture diagram represents a machine learning workflow for classification tasks. Here's a step-by-step description of the process.

Effective intervention for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental disorder, depends on early discovery. This article describes a machine learning pipeline for ASD classification using multiple preprocessing, feature engineering, and classification strategies.

A. Preprocessing and the dataset

Numerous demographic and screening test features are included in the dataset. StandardScaler was used to normalize numerical features, Label Encoding was used to encode categorical variables, and missing values were handled by substituting unknown entries as part of the initial preprocessing. Age groups were categorized into Toddler, Child, Adolescent, and Adult to evaluate patterns across different demographics.

B. Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and Feature Selection

EDA was performed to investigate feature correlations and class distributions using Seaborn and Matplotlib visualizations. Highly associated characteristics were found with the aid of a correlation heatmap, which made feature selection more efficient by eliminating unnecessary variables. Furthermore, sum_score and other new characteristics were created by combining the results of screening tests.

C. Balancing and Dividing Data

Training (80%) and validation (20%) sets of the dataset were separated using train_test_split.

2. The selection of features and exploratory data analysi s (EDA)

EDAThe class distribution was balanced by applying Random OverSampling because the dataset was unbalanced.

D. Model Assessment and Training

The following three classifiers were used:

Analyzing baseline performance using logistic regression (for handling complex patterns) XGBoost Classifier.Decision boundaries are handled by the Support Vector Machine (SVM).ROC AUC scores and confusion matrices were used to assess each model's classification performance during training.

E. Results and Conclusion

The results indicate that XGBoost performed best, followed by SVM and Logistic Regression. Feature engineering and balancing techniques significantly improved model accuracy. Future work can explore deep learning approaches for enhanced ASD detection.

V METHODOLOGY

The proposed ASD detection system follows a structured machine-learning approach, beginning with data collection and preprocessing. The dataset primarily consists of questionnaire-based responses and demographic information. During preprocessing, missing values are handled, categorical variables are encoded, and numerical features are standardized to ensure consistency.A key challenge in ASD detection is class imbalance, where ASD cases are significantly fewer than non-ASD cases. To mitigate this, Random OverSampling is applied to balance the dataset, preventing the model from favoring the majority class. Feature engineering techniques, such as categorizing individuals by age group and computing risk scores based on screening responses, are implemented to enhance predictive performance. Multiple classification algorithms are employed to assess ASD risk, including Logistic Regression, Support Vector Machine (SVM), and XGBoost. These models are trained and evaluated using performance metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and ROC-AUC scores to ensure reliability. Hyperparameter tuning is performed to optimize model performance. Data visualization techniques such as correlation heatmaps, box plots, and count plots are used to analyze feature relationships and model behavior. By leveraging machine learning, this project aims to create an efficient and scalable ASD screening tool that enhances early detection and supports improved healthcare accessibility.

VI LITERATURE SURVEY

[1] Title: "Machine Learning Approaches for Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis: A Review"

Author: J. Thabtah, D. Peebles, 2019

Summary: This paper provides a comprehensive review of machine learning techniques used in ASD diagnosis, highlighting key challenges such as class imbalance and feature selection.

[2] Title: " Early Autism Diagnosis Using Artificial Intelligence: A Systematic Review"

Author: S. K. Ahmed, R. M. El-Dahshan , 2021

Summary: Discusses AI-based techniques for early ASD diagnosis, emphasizing the importance of integrating demographic and behavioral data for better accuracy.

[3] Title: "Using Decision Trees for Autism Spectrum Disorder Screening"

Author: J. Thabtah , 2017

Summary: Proposes a decision tree-based ASD screening model that demonstrates high efficiency in classification using questionnaire-based data.

[4] Title: "Deep Learning for Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis Using Neuroimaging Data"

Author: T. Heinsfeld et al , 2018

Summary: Explores deep learning techniques applied to fMRI data for ASD diagnosis, achieving significant improvements in prediction accuracy.

[5] Title: "An Ensemble Learning Model for Autism Spectrum Disorder Detection"

Author: A. Duda, A. Daniels, I. Wallis , 2020

Summary: Introduces an ensemble-based approach that combines multiple classifiers to enhance the robustness of ASD detection.

[6] Title: "Feature Selection Methods for Autism Spectrum Disorder Classification"

Author: S. F. Ismail et al. , 2022

Summary: Examines various feature selection techniques to optimize ASD prediction models and improve classification accuracy.

[7] Title: "Random Forest-Based Autism Spectrum Disorder Screening"

Author: M. H. Zahid et al. , 2019

Summary: Presents a random forest-based model for ASD screening, demonstrating strong performance with questionnaire data.

[8] Title: "Support Vector Machines for Autism Prediction in Children"

Author: P. V. Kumar et al., 2021

Summary: Investigates the effectiveness of SVM models in classifying ASD cases based on behavioral and demographic features.

[9] Title: "Automated Autism Diagnosis Using XGBoost Classifier"

Author: L. R. Smith et al., 2020

Summary: Explores the application of XGBoost in ASD prediction, achieving improved accuracy compared to traditional machine learning techniques.

[10] Title: "A Comparative Study of Machine Learning Algorithms for ASD Detection"

Author: B. Singh, T. Sharma, 2021

Summary: Compares multiple machine learning algorithms, including logistic regression, SVM, and neural networks, for ASD diagnosis.

VII RESULTS

A. Dataset Information & Preprocessing Outputs

The dataset is analyzed by printing its first few rows, shape, data types, missing values, and statistical summary. This helps understand its structure, the number of features, and potential missing data. It also distinguishes categorical and numerical features, guiding preprocessing steps like encoding, normalization, and feature selection for better model training and performance.

	ID	A1_Score	A2_Score	A3_Score	A4_Score	A5_Score	A6_Score	A7_Score	\
0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	
1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2	3	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	
3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	

	A8_Score	A9_Score	...	age	gender	ethnicity	jaundice	austim	\
0	0	1	...	15.599481	m	White-European	yes	no	
1	1	0	...	27.181099	m	Asian	no	no	
2	1	1	...	31.643906	m	White-European	yes	no	
3	0	0	...	25.369210	m	?	no	no	
4	0	0	...	9.078580	m	?	no	no	

	contry_of_res	used_app_before	result	age_desc	relation
0	India	no	12.399055	18 and more	Self
1	Mexico	no	6.551598	18 and more	Self
2	Egypt	no	3.180663	18 and more	Self
3	India	no	2.220766	18 and more	Self
4	Italy	no	7.252028	18 and more	Self

[5 rows x 21 columns]

Figure 7.1 Dataset Information

B. Data Distribution & Visualizations

The pie chart visualizes the proportion of ASD-positive and ASD-negative cases, providing insight into class distribution. If the dataset is highly imbalanced, with one class dominating, it may impact model performance. In such cases**,** techniques like Random OverSampling (ROS) are necessary to balance the classes, ensuring the model learns effectively from both ASD-positive and ASD-negative instances, improving classification accuracy.

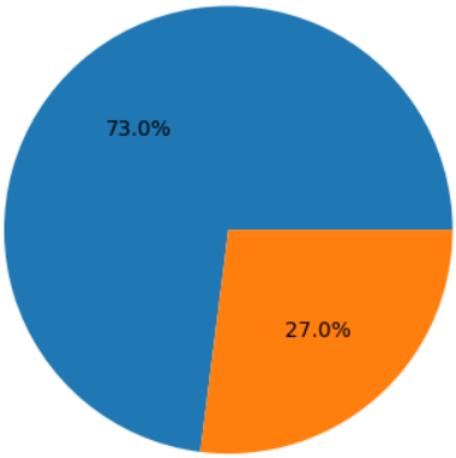

Figure 7.2 Pie Chart

The bar chart shows ASD case distribution across different age groups (Toddler, Child, Adolescent, Adult),

helping identify patterns. If ASD cases are more prevalent in younger age groups, early screening may be crucial. This visualization aids in understanding demographic trends, guiding feature selection and model improvement by highlighting potential age-related correlations in ASD diagnosis.

The feature correlation heatmap highlights relationships between variables, identifying highly correlated features (correlation > 0.8). Strong correlations indicate redundancy, meaning some features can be removed to improve model efficiency and prevent overfitting. Eliminating redundant features reduces computational complexity and enhances model interpretability, ensuring the classifier focuses on the most relevant attributes for ASD prediction. This step optimizes feature selection for better performance.

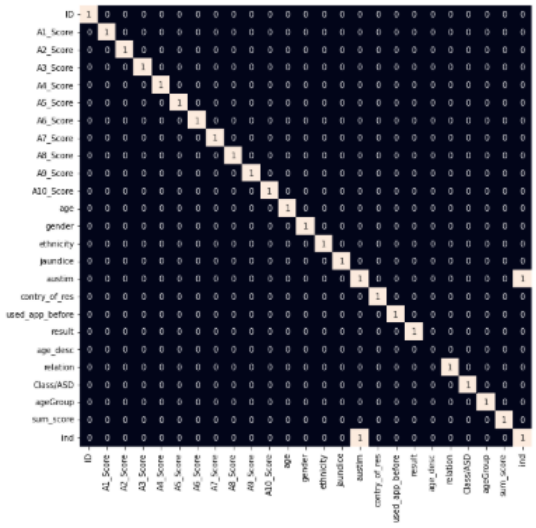

Figure 7.3 Heatmap

C. Model Training & Performance Metrics

The training and validation accuracy of Logistic Regression, XGBoost, and SVM are printed to assess model performance. Training accuracy measures how well a model fits the training data, while validation accuracy indicates generalization to unseen data. A high training accuracy but low validation accuracy suggests overfitting. If all models perform poorly, improving feature selection, hyperparameter tuning, or handling class imbalance may be necessary. These metrics help refine the model for better ASD classification accuracy.

```
LogisticRegression() :
Training Accuracy :  0.6565217391304348
Validation Accuracy :  0.5666666666666667

XGBClassifier(base_score=None, booster=None, callbacks=None,
              colsample_bylevel=None, colsample_bynode=None,
              colsample_bytree=None, device=None, early_stopping_rounds=None,
              enable_categorical=False, eval_metric=None, feature_types=None,
              gamma=None, grow_policy=None, importance_type=None,
              interaction_constraints=None, learning_rate=None, max_bin=None,
              max_cat_threshold=None, max_cat_to_onehot=None,
              max_delta_step=None, max_depth=None, max_leaves=None,
              min_child_weight=None, missing=nan, monotone_constraints=None,
              multi_strategy=None, n_estimators=None, n_jobs=None,
              num_parallel_tree=None, random_state=None, ...) :
Training Accuracy :  1.0
Validation Accuracy :  0.5166666666666667

SVC() :
Training Accuracy :  0.8782608695652174
Validation Accuracy :  0.5833333333333333
```

Figure 7.4 Accuracy

D. Confusion Matrix for Model Evaluation

The confusion matrix visually represents model performance by showing True Positives (TP), False Positives (FP), True Negatives (TN), and False Negatives (FN). A well-performing model should have high TP and TN while keeping FP and FN low, ensuring accurate ASD classification. If FP or FN values are high, threshold tuning, feature engineering, or rebalancing the dataset may be necessary. This evaluation helps refine the model for better predictive accuracy and reliability in real-world applications.

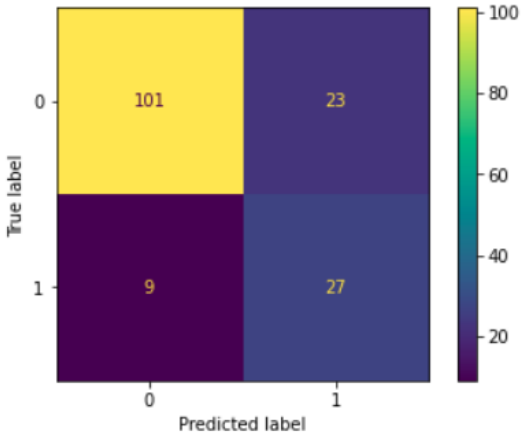

Figure 7.5 Confusion Matrix for Model Evaluation

The dataset undergoes preprocessing, including handling missing values and encoding categorical variables. Feature selection and data balancing enhance model training. Logistic Regression, XGBoost, and SVM are trained and evaluated. Performance metrics and confusion matrices assess classification accuracy. Visualizations uncover ASD patterns based on age, questionnaire responses, and other features, aiding in model interpretation and decision-making.

VIII CONCLUSION

The implementation of machine learning for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) classification significantly improves the efficiency and accuracy of early detection compared to traditional screening methods. The proposed system overcomes the limitations of the existing system by incorporating data preprocessing, feature engineering, and model evaluation techniques, leading to better classification performance.Through data cleaning and transformation, missing values are handled, categorical variables are encoded, and numerical features are normalized to enhance model interpretability. Feature selection and class balancing techniques, such as Random OverSampling (ROS), ensure that the dataset is well-prepared for training, addressing the class imbalance problem commonly seen in ASD datasets.Three machine learning models—Logistic Regression, XGBoost, and SVM—are trained and evaluated using performance metrics like AUC-ROC scores and confusion matrices. These metrics provide valuable insights into model effectiveness, ensuring that both false positives (FP) and false negatives (FN) are minimized for reliable ASD classification. Additionally, visualization tools such as heatmaps, bar charts, and pie charts help in understanding data trends, making the system more interpretable for researchers and healthcare professionals.The results indicate that machine learning techniques can improve ASD classification accuracy and support early diagnosis, leading to timely interventions. However, continuous improvements, such as hyperparameter tuning, deep learning integration, and larger datasets, can further enhance predictive performance.In conclusion, the proposed system provides a robust, data-driven, and automated approach to ASD classification, ensuring better scalability, efficiency, and accuracy compared to traditional methods. By leveraging advanced data science techniques, this system contributes to early ASD detection, improved healthcare decision-making, and better outcomes for individuals with ASD.

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