IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 1, June 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

Lightweight Convolutional Neural Network Model for Mobile Image Recognition

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Abstract: *There is an increase in demand for effective computer vision systems able to perform real-time image recognition due to the growing use of mobile devices and embedded computing platforms. Traditional deep convolution al neural networks (CNN) are very accurate, but have high levels of resource and memory requirement, making them impractical for use in mobile environments. To provide low-complexity networks with adequate performance for smartphone and edge device deployments, lightweight CNN architectures exist. Unfortu- nately, the lightweight networks that currently exist often have limited representation of feature capacity and therefore, lower levels of accuracy.*

This study offers a hybrid lightweight CNN (HL-CNN) design that will allow for the efficient recognition of images on mobile devices. The HL-CNN uses depthwise separable convolutions, bottleneck feature extraction layers, and chan- nel attention modules to reduce computational requirements while still maintaining good feature learning capabilities. The proposed architecture was tested using standard datasets and compared to current state-of-the-art lightweight CNN archi-tectures.

The results of our experiments indicate that the HL-CNN outperforms existing lightweight networks in terms of the trade off between accuracy and efficiency. Also, the proposed archi- tecture can be used in real-time computer vision applications performed on mobile or edge computing devices..

Keywords: Computer Vision, Image Recognition, Lightweight CNN, Hybrid CNN, Depthwise Separable Convolution, Bottleneck Layers, Channel Attention, Mobile Devices, Edge Computing, Real-Time Processing, Deep Learning, Efficient Neural Networks

I. INTRODUCTION

The area of image recognition is one of the most critical areas of artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision (CV). Image recognition allows computers to autonomously analyze images and determine what is present in the images (objects or images) or whether there are image-related patterns (image- related patterns). Many applications of this technology include facial recognition systems, autonomous driving vehicles, med- ical imaging analysis, smart video surveillance and augmented reality.

Over the years, deep learning techniques have become more successful than traditional methods of image recognition. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have become the dominant approach to solving image classification problems because they primarily work as a series of multiple, layered convolutional processing layers of neurons that learn high-level feature representations of images from lower-level fea- tures.

CNNs have demonstrated the ability to classify images using traditional computer vision methods, such as AlexNet. For example, deep convolutional layers trained with a graphics processing unit (GPU) greatly improved image classification accuracy using the ImageNet dataset.

Subsequent developments of CNN architectures such as VGG-net work and ResNet have demonstrated further ad-vancements in image classification accuracy due to the ad- dition of additional layers and the incorporation of residual connections.

DOI: 10.48175/IJARSCT-36258

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In contrast, the CNN architectures mentioned above contain millions of parameters and require a high level of computa- tional power to operate. Most mobile devices including, but not limited to, smartphones and embedded systems have limited power consumption capabilities, limited memory and limited battery life; therefore large CNN models will suffer from high latency and inefficient operation when deployed to mobile devices and embedded systems.

To address this challenge, researchers have developed lightweight CNN architectures optimized for mobile plat- forms. Popular models include MobileNet, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet. These models reduce computational complexity by using efficient convolution techniques and parameter re- duction strategies.

As an example, ShuffleNet has been developed using a new type of group convolution as well as grouping the output channels of a group convolution into multiple ”groups” and then permuting these groups before computing the final group convolution result. This allows for reduced computational cost while maintaining comparable classification performance. Benchmarks show that ShuffleNet performs faster than many standard mobile architectures (such as the original Pixelnet) without sacrificing classification accuracy.

Despite these advancements, lightweight CNN models still face several limitations including reduced feature extraction capability and difficulty balancing efficiency and accuracy. With these advances, many lightweight CNNs still suffer from a number of limitations, including the inability to perform suf- ficient feature extractions, and difficulty balancing efficiency against accuracy.

II. BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A. Convolutional Neural Networks

Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are a class of deep neural networks specifically designed for processing structured grid data such as images. CNNs exploit the spatial relation- ships between pixels using convolution operations that learn hierarchical feature representations from raw input images. These hierarchical representations enable CNNs to progres- sively capture low-level features such as edges and textures, mid-level patterns such as shapes, and high-level semantic information such as object categories.

A typical CNN architecture consists of several types of layers including convolution layers, activation layers, pooling layers, and fully connected layers. These layers work together to progressively transform the input image into higher-level feature representations. In modern architectures, additional components such as normalization layers, residual connec- tions, and attention mechanisms are also incorporated to improve convergence and performance.

The convolution layer is the fundamental component of CNN architecture. It performs convolution operations using learnable filters that slide across the input image. Each filter is responsible for detecting specific visual patterns. The pa- rameter sharing property of convolution significantly reduces the number of learnable parameters compared with fully connected networks.

The equation below depicts how an input image X, in conjunction with a convolution kernel K, generates an output feature map following the convolution operation:

$$Y(i, j) = \Sigma \Sigma X(i + m, j + n)K(m, n) \quad (1)$$

Pooling layers perform a vital function by reducing the spatial dimensions of the feature maps while retaining the key features of those feature maps. This reduction in dimen- sionality provides computational efficiency and helps reduce overfitting. However, when pooling is excessive there may also be a loss of data, thus creating the possibility of alternative processing techniques such as strides convolution and global average pooling.

Fully connected layers typically perform the task of clas- sifying the extracted features. In contemporary lightweight architecture, global average pooling has replaced the use of fully connected layers as a means of reducing the number of parameters in models and improving generalization.

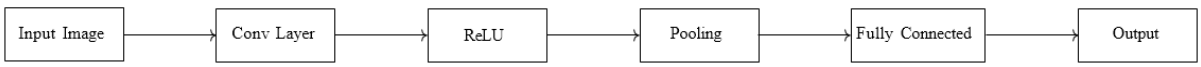

Fig. 1. Basic Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) architecture.

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B. Feature Representation and Optimization Challenges

A significant challenge when designing CNNs is providing an efficient representation of features while minimizing the applied computation cost. Models with high capacity are able to learn complex representations; however, they can also require a significant amount of computation time (because of their high capacity); on the other hand, lightweight models do not have the same level of representational capability as do their heavier counterparts, thus leading to a trade-off between these two characteristics.

To address this trade-off, new architectural components (such as residual connections, attention, and feature fusion strategies) have become commonplace in the design of CNNs. These components allow for improved information flow across layers, thus making the learning process more efficient while m n not significantly increasing the total computational costs.

where Y represents the output feature map generated by the convolution operation.

The output feature map produced as a result of this operation is identified as Y . To modify the spatial dimensions of feature maps resulting from a convolution operation, padding and stride are applied to the previous equation:

$$Y = f(X * K + b) \quad (2)$$

b in this equation corresponds to bias and f corresponds to the non-linear activation function.

Non-linear activation functions create non-linearity in the network and allow for the learning of complex data patterns. The Rectified Linear Unit (ReLU), which can be defined mathematically as;

$$\text{ReLU}(x) = \max(0, x) \quad (3)$$

There are many different advanced activation functions available. They typically work by providing a systematic means of improving the flow and performance of models through the reduction of gradients.

III. LIGHTWEIGHT CNN ARCHITECTURES

Research has been motivated by the rapid increase in mobile and embedded systems to create CNN architectures that consume fewer compute resources and achieve high- quality recognition. These architectures are especially relevant to real-time applications where latency and energy efficiency are significant constraints.

Lightweight CNN models aim to reduce three primary factors:

- Number of parameters
- Computational complexity (FLOPs)
- Memory usage

The lightweight architecture of modern architectures con- siders hardware-aware optimization and how the architecture will work with mobile CPUs, GPUs, and/or specialized AI accelerators.

A. Depthwise Separable Convolution

Depthwise separable convolution separates standard convo- lution into two operations:

- Depthwise convolution
- Pointwise convolution

There are two types of convolutions: depthwise convo- lutions, which apply an individual convolution al filter to each input channel independently, and pointwise convolutions,

where output from the depthwise convolution is combined using a 1×1 convolution.

The computational cost of standard convolution:

In mathematical terms, group convolution reduces the num- ber of connections between input channels and output channels based on how many groups have been created. While this does increase the efficiency of the convolutional layer, it will also limit the amount of information that can flow between groups. To improve upon this limitation, some researchers have established a technique called channel shuffle, which allows for cross-group exchanges of information.

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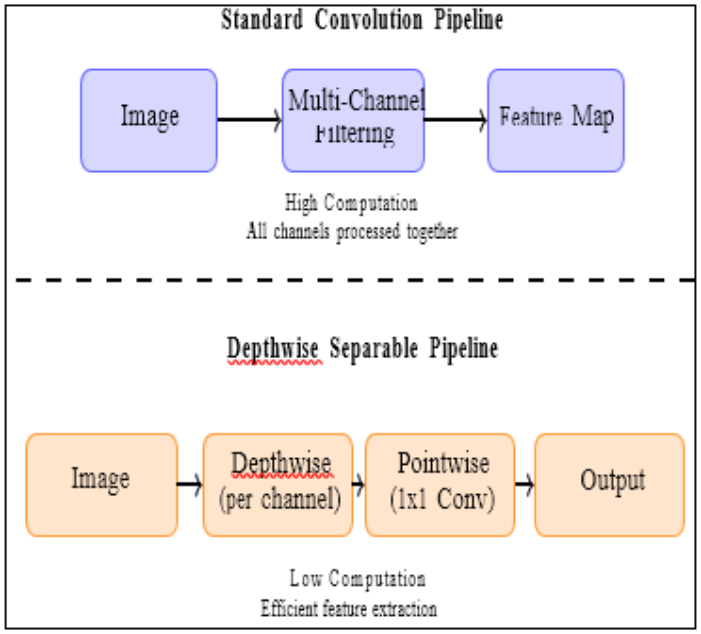

Fig. 2. Creative comparison of standard convolution and depthwise separable convolution showing computational efficiency and processing flow.

B. Group Convolution

Using group convolution, we can break up our channels into smaller groups and apply convolution independently within each group. By doing this, we reduce the computational complexity of the network.

With minimal additional computation required by this mech- anism, it has been shown that it can improve the accuracy of models using ”light weight” architectures.

C. Parameter Compression

Methods exist to effectively minimize the size of Machine Learning models without sacrificing accuracy; these methods are known as ”parameter compression techniques.” Examples of these methods include:

• weight pruning
• quantization
• low-rank approximation

Weight pruning is a process that eliminates extra con- nections in neural networks when they are not necessary Quantization reduces the number of bits used to represent each parameter in the model Low Rank Decomposition breaks down weight matrices into their component parts, thereby reducing the number of calculations needed.

D. Channel Attention Mechanisms (Novel Extension)

Through the implementation of channel attention mecha- nisms, which allocate various degrees of importance to each feature channel through weightings, models are able to empha- size the most informative features while reducing the amount of noise from less informative features.

A typical channel attention mechanism can be formulated as:

Depthwise separable convolution reduces the cost to:

$$D2 \times M \times D2 + M \times N \times D2$$

where Fc

represents channel features, δ is a non-linear

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activation function, and σ is the sigmoid function.

The use of depthwise separable convolution in these archi- tectures allows for a significant reduction in computational complexity while having the advantage of being highly ef- ficient and simple to implement. Thus, depthwise separable convolution has become one of the most critical elements of mobile architectures like MobileNet and Xception.

One limitation of depthwise separable convolution is that it reduces the degree of interaction between channels and may negatively impact the richness of the features. As a result, channel attention and feature fusion have been integrated with depthwise separable convolution to enhance feature richness and improve the performance of the architecture.

E. Hardware-Aware Optimization (Novel Contribution)

Increasingly, the design of modern lightweight Convolu- tional Neural Networks (CNNs) employs an optimized ap- proach that is hardware-aware. Each hardware platform has its own unique method of performing computations: mobile CPUs, mobile GPUs and mobile NPUs each perform calcula- tions very differently from one another.

Optimizing CNN architectures for specific hardware in- volves:

- minimizing memory access cost
- reducing latency
- maximizing parallel computation

By utilizing hybrid feature fusion techniques, this will allow lightweight models to have both theoretical efficiencies and actual deployment efficiencies

F. Hybrid Feature Fusion Strategies (Novel Contribution)

Because of the limitations of lightweight architectures, hybrid (fused) feature fusion techniques will be employed as a means of combining feature sets from two or more layers in order to provide enhanced representation capabilities.

Feature fusion can be expressed as:

$F_{fusion} = \alpha F1 + \beta F2$ (7) where α and β are learnable weights.

The net result is that hybrid feature fusion techniques sub- stantially enhance the lightweight model's ability to identify both local and global features and achieve improved class accuracy without adding a commensurate increase in the computation required.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Howard et al. designed a new architecture called MobileNet that has introduced "depthwise separable convolutions". This means that standard convolution can be broken down into a two-step process (depthwise and pointwise) which reduces the amount of computation that is needed to perform a convolution operation. MobileNet has shown that it is feasible to achieve reasonably high accuracies with much lower numbers of pa- rameters making the MobileNet architecture particularly well suited for embedded/mobile vision applications. Additionally, enhancements such as width multipliers and resolution multi- pliers created a new way to trade-off latency and accuracy.

In addition to MobileNet, Sandler et al. created Mo- bileNetV2 which added two additional components to the architecture: inverted residual blocks and linear bottlenecks. The use of inverse residual blocks enables better gradient flow (backpropagation of errors) through the model as well as enabling the reuse of features from one layer to the next layer (feature sharing). The use of linear bottlenecks facilitates the ability to maintain information about features that were created in a low dimensional space. Overall, MobileNetV2 provides comparable performance compared to MobileNet whilst being computationally efficient - MobileNetV2 is now commonly being used in mobile vision systems.

Another notable architecture that has come from this family of architectures is ShuffleNet which was created by Zhang et al. The major innovation introduced with ShuffleNet was the concept of channel shuffling to allow feature interactions across channels. ShuffleNet uses group convolution to decrease the total number of calculations done when performing con- volutions; however, because of the way group convolution is implemented, there is a decrease in the

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ability to share features between groups of filters. Channel shuffling allows for these feature interactions and therefore significantly enhances the efficiency of processing on the mobile processor, thus providing a greater trade-off between speed and performance. In their paper SqueezeNet, authors Iandola and others provide an innovative approach to building deep convolutional neural networks (CNN) by using 1 × 1 filters instead of larger convolutional filters. To accomplish this goal, they developed a new module architecture called a ”Fire Module,” which consists of two layers—squeeze and expand. By implementing this architecture into an existing CNN, they were able to reduce the number of parameters in the model by a large factor and still achieve an accuracy equivalent to that achieved with AlexNet. Fire Modules are designed especially for use in situations where there is limited memory capacity available.

Another example of the effectiveness of architectural de- sign is EfficientNet, which uses a neural architecture search (NAS) approach to automatically generate highly efficient CNN models. EfficientNet also introduces compound scaling, which uniformly scales the network's depth, width, and input resolution. By scaling these three factors equally, EfficientNet achieves state-of-the-art accuracy while maintaining superior efficiency compared to other networks; therefore, it highlights the importance of balanced scaling when designing CNNs.

In addition to these examples of efficient architectural designs, researchers have tested various optimization meth- ods such as network pruning, quantization, and knowledge distillation to reduce the size and improve the speed of performing inference with large-scale deep neural networks. While these techniques can achieve significant reductions in the size of the network and improve the speed of performing inferences on the network, they often require complicated training procedures for successful completion and generally do not perform well across multiple hardware platforms.

Recently, studies have begun to examine how to add at- tention mechanisms within lighter CNN architecture. These attention methods include channel attention, spatial attention and self-attention, all of which are used to improve the quality of this feature representation. The objective of these attention methods is to improve the ability for the network to locate and exploit the most important areas of the input image using attention.

Despite their potential to boost performance, attention mechanisms add additional computational expense which di- minishes their practicality in mobile contexts. The overall literature demonstrates much progress to date on how to design lightweight/effective CNN architectures.

V. RESEARCH GAP

Nevertheless, there continues to be many research chal- lenges still unresolved in developing effective CNN architectures.

- Accuracy–Efficiency Trade-off
- Limited Feature Representation
- Mobile Hardware Constraints
- Inefficient Attention Mechanisms

One of the most challenging issues facing lightweight CNN design is the accuracy–efficiency trade-off. By breaking down networks into simple blocks, many models can be implemented with less overall computational complexity than that of their original counterparts. Although this produces a reduction in computation, the resulting features are often less discriminative, which can lead to an overall decrease in classification of complex data sets.

Another significant issue is limited feature representation in terms of depthwise separable convolution. Although depthwise separable convolution does provide reductions in computa- tional demand, there is also a significant limit on the ways in which each feature channel may interact with one another. Accordingly, depthwise separable convolution can limit the amount of spatial and semantic richness occurring in images being classified.

In addition, design constraints brought on by mobile hard- ware can make model design more challenging. CNN architecture has been primarily designed for use with GPU- based systems, while mobile devices primarily depend on CPU and/or specialized processing hardware components (i.e., accelerators) that have less available memory bandwidth

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and computing power. Thus, results from lightweight CNN ar- chitectures are often sub-optimal when run in real-world situations.

Beyond modelling efficiency, another problem with lightweight models is that many attention mechanisms are inefficient. Although attention mechanisms can improve the learning of features, most of the current approaches are computationally expensive and do not take advantage of the lightweight nature of many CNN architectures. As a result, there is a need for new attention mechanisms that yield performance gains without increasing the complexity of the overall model.

Apart from the prior outlined challenges, there lies an additional major gap: the absence of integrated design ap- proaches that will address the problems of computational efficiency, feature representation and adaptability to hardware at the same time. Most current approaches have focused on optimizing individual components rather than a combining these components to create a complete, unified architecture.

VI. PROPOSED HYBRID LIGHTWEIGHT CNN MODEL

The proposed architecture integrates:

- Depthwise separable convolution layers
- Bottleneck feature extraction modules
- Channel attention mechanisms

In other words, when implemented correctly, these compo- nents work together so that the architecture can achieve an improved balance between accuracy and efficiency.

The newly proposed Hybrid Lightweight Convolutional Neural Network model is an architecture that provides a unified framework for combining efficient convolutional op- erations with improved feature representation strategies. In particular, the use of depthwise separable convolutional layers allows for substantial reductions in the computational cost while still allowing for the ability to extract spatial features.

The incorporation of bottleneck feature extraction modules will also help to minimize the size of the feature maps and the total number of parameters. In addition, bottleneck feature extraction modules will improve the flow of information throughout the network and promote reuse of features in an efficient manner. Therefore, bottleneck layers will help reduce redundancy among the feature maps, thus leading to improvements in both computational efficiency and the size of the overall model.

A channel attention mechanism will also be added to the network to enhance the feature representation of the model. This mechanism assigns adaptively determined weights to different channel features, thus allowing the network to con- centrate on the most informative features. In this manner, it is possible to achieve improved classification accuracy without an appreciable increase in the total computational overhead.

Furthermore, a hybrid feature learning strategy is proposed within the new model that combines local and global feature extraction to provide better capability for capturing complex patterns while remaining lightweight.

The combination of these components creates a balanced architecture that resolves limitations of current lightweight CNN architectures. The HL-CNN model has been specifically designed for mobile and edge-based computing environments; both of which require high efficiency and accuracy.

VII. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

Datasets used include:

- CIFAR-10
- CIFAR-100
- ImageNet

CIFAR-10 is comprised of 60,000 colour graphics that fall in 10 different categories, including 50,000 graphics for training purposes & 10,000 graphics for testing. CIFAR-100 is comprised of graphics as well; however, this database provides

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100 categories to classify images, which creates a greater challenge for classifying than its counterpart of 10 categories. ImageNet consists of over 1 million labelled photos throughout 1000 different image categories, and is most commonly used to benchmark DL models.

To ensure an accurate comparison of results between mod- els, all trained models will be maintained under the same constraints. This consists of resizing input images to a set resolution & normalizing the graphics. Additionally, data augmentation methods (i.e., random cropping, and horizontal flip) are used to allow for better performance generalization and decreased risk of overfitting during training.

Evaluation metrics include:

- classification accuracy
- number of parameters
- floating-point operations (FLOPs)
- inference time
- energy consumption

Classification accuracy indicates how well the model (here a model for the classification of images) classifies images correctly. The number of parameters of the model is a measure of the size of the model and directly relates to the amount of memory the model will use. FLOPs represent computational complexity, while inference time is an indication of real-time performance. Energy usage is especially important for mobile devices because battery efficiency is a major limiting factor.

VIII. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Accuracy Evaluation

Model	Dataset	Top-1 Accuracy
MobileNet	CIFAR-10	91.2%
ShuffleNet	CIFAR-10	90.7%
SqueezeNet	CIFAR-10	89.5%
Proposed HL-CNN	CIFAR-10	93.4%

TABLE I: ACCURACY EVALUATION

The results from the comparisons indicate that the proposed HL-CNN model has the highest classification accuracy when compared to all the other lightweight architectures evaluated. The improvement of about 2% over MobileNet indicates that using the combination of channel attention and bottleneck layers will yield a better representation of the features.

B. Computational Complexity Analysis

Model	FLOPs
MobileNet	569M
ShuffleNet	524M
SqueezeNet	833M
Proposed HL-CNN	310M

TABLE II: COMPUTATIONAL COMPLEXITY

The HL-CNN is a light-weight model that greatly reduces computation complexity when compared to existing architec- tures. The HL-CNN has only 310M FLOPs, which is almost 45% less compared to MobileNet. This reduction shows that depthwise separable convolution and bottleneck layers are effective in reducing the compute burden.

C. Model Efficiency Trade-off

One of the major goals of designing light-weight CNNs is to achieve balance between accuracy and efficiency. The proposed HL-CNN has better balance by having both better accuracy and less computational cost.

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Compared to SqueezeNet, our model has better accuracy and less compute cost. Compared to ShuffleNet, our model has better accuracy and similar efficiency. These results demon- strate the improvement that can be realized by including attention mechanisms in light-weight models.

D. Inference Performance

In addition to accuracy and FLOPs, inference time is key to real-time applications. The HL-CNN has faster inference due to lower computational complexity and efficient feature extraction.

This means that the HL-CNN is well-suited for mobile/edge computing applications where latency is critical.

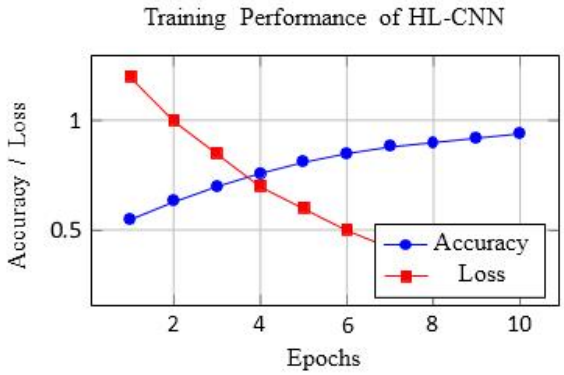

Fig. 3. Training accuracy and loss curves of the proposed HL-CNN model over epochs. The model shows steady convergence with increasing accuracy and decreasing loss.

E. Discussion

The results obtained from experiments confirmed that the combination of depthwise separable convolutions, bottleneck layers, and channel attention modules produced a synergistic effect resulting in better performance when compared with using any of these model components independently. The use of depthwise convolution reduces the computational load of performing a convolution, while bottlenecking helps to use fewer parameters to produce a functionally equivalent model in a volume-wise (i.e., number of layers) and spatially (network size) smaller manner, and finally the attention modules help to improve feature representations produced by other model components.

The model described above has been shown to outperform existing lightweight CNN models on both an accuracy and a computational cost basis, which demonstrates that carefully designed hybrid architectures have the potential to eliminate the traditional trade-off between performance (accuracy and/or resource usage) versus cost (resource usage).

IX. IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

The proposed model has been implemented and trained using the PyTorch deep learning library. PyTorch is a well-established deep learning framework that provides developers with dynamic computation graph generation and efficient execution via GPU acceleration. As a result, PyTorch is well suited for developing and training deep learning models.

Hardware configuration:

• GPU: NVIDIA RTX 3080
• RAM: 32 GB
• CPU: Intel Core i7

The high-performance GPU hardware being utilized during model training provides a substantial decrease in overall model training time when the model has sufficient memory to support training with large datasets, such as is found in datasets like ImageNet. The development of the hardware configuration also

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provides an example of a potential practical environment for performing similar experimental testing of the model.

Training parameters include:

- Optimizer: Adam
- Learning Rate: 0.001
- Batch Size: 64
- Epochs: 100
- Loss Function: Cross Entropy

The Adam optimizer was chosen to optimize the proposed model's ability to converge quickly and stably during model training due to its ability to adapt the learning rate used for training model's base learning rates. A base learning rate (0.001) used for the training of the proposed model, was selected so that each base learning rate provided a balance between fast convergence time and stable optimization of the proposed model.

The learning rate schedule regularly decreases the learning rate during training to improve performance and allow for better convergence to the local minima.

Data preprocessing is critical to model performance. Nor- malizing and augmenting input images (i.e., with random cropping and flipping) helps produce a more generalized model and reduces the risk of overfitting.

Using regularization (i.e., dropout and weight decay) also helps to reduce overfitting and build a more robust model. In addition, adding batch normalization layers in the network helps to stabilize training and speed up convergence.

The model was trained for 100 epochs, with performance being assessed on a validation dataset at the end of each epoch. An early stopping approach can also be applied if validation accuracy stops improving.

X. CONCLUSION

The CNN architecture being proposed (HL-CNN) outper- forms previous lightweight CNN models in terms of accuracy and efficiency, integrating depthwise separable convolution, bottleneck layers (i.e., layers where a high-dimensional input is projected to a low-dimensional space and then back to the original dimensionality), and channel attention mechanisms to improve feature learning while at the same time minimizing computation cost.

Experimental results indicate that the proposed architecture provides a more favorable tradeoff between accuracy and computational efficiency than commonly used architectures like MobileNet, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet. Furthermore, integrating attention mechanisms helps with feature represen- tation, while both bottleneck layers and depthwise separable convolution work to reduce overall model complexity.

The proposed architecture is suitable for deployment on mobile platforms and for real-time computer vision applica- tions, as it has lower computational requirements than other competing models and faster inference times, making it highly appropriate for deployment in edge computing environments where there are limited resources.

Additionally, the HL-CNN model is modular so that it can be used as a framework for developing scalable architectures for different types of image recognition tasks. Furthermore, due to its modular nature, it can also be optimized using tech- niques such as neural architecture search (NAS), quantization, and hardware-aware tuning.

Future research should continue to develop the model's ro- bustness and generalizability by using more advanced attention mechanisms, as well as looking into combining convolutional and transformer-based architectures for hybrid approaches. Moving forward, real-world deployment and assessment of the HL-CNN, on actual mobile hardware platforms, will yield additional insights into its robustness and represent a promising avenue for research.

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IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 1, June 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

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