Health Analysis and Recommendation System Using Fingernail Images

Ananth B A, Goutham J, Sneha G, Mayur R, Dr. Kiran Y C

Student, Student, Student, Student, Professor

Department of Information Science and Engineering Global Academy of Technology

ananthba1111@gmail.com, gouthamshastry02@gmail.com, snehagowda070@gmail.com, mayurkalaruku@gmail.com, dr.kiranyc@gat.ac.in

Abstract :-

The state of human health is often subtly yet profoundly reflected in the condition of the fingernails. As a non- invasive biometric canvas, the nail unit can display visual cues related to dozens of systemic ailments, ranging from common fungal infections (onychomycosis) to critical conditions like subungual melanoma and signs of organ dysfunction. However, current diagnostic practices face significant hurdles: namely, the reliance on subjective visual expertise, the limited resolution of the unaided human eye to detect subtle chromatic shifts, and the pervasive issue of global expert scarcity. This comprehensive literature review meticulously synthesizes contemporary research, focusing on the transformative application of Deep Learning (DL) methodologies to create a scalable, objective, and accessible diagnostic framework. We structure this review around three critical research areas: robust classification for initial diagnosis, advanced segmentation for quantifiable assessment, and the pressing challenges of system integration for real-world utility.

***Index Terms*— Deep Learning, Nail Disease Detection, Image, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), Transfer Learning, Dermatology AI, Nail Abnormalities, Healthcare Diagnostics, Machine Learning**.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first, and most crucial, step in automated diagnosis is correctly identifying the disease category from an image. This task has been overwhelmingly conquered by Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), which have fundamentally changed how researchers approach medical image analysis. Before deep learning, developers struggled to manually "tell" the computer what a diseased nail looked like by coding in features like "redness" or "bumpy texture." This was tedious and ineffective. The CNN paradigm shattered this limitation: it autonomously learns a complex, multi-layered hierarchy of features directly from the raw pixel data. In its initial layers, it detects simple edges and colors; in the deeper layers, it learns complex, abstract pathological signatures that correlate precisely with specific disorders. This end-to-end learning process is what makes the CNN the central engine of any modern AI diagnostic system.

A persistent, unavoidable truth in medical AI is the extreme difficulty in acquiring vast, clinically annotated image datasets. Patient privacy and the specialized effort required to label thousands of images with expert certainty create an immediate data bottleneck. To cleverly bypass this limitation, researchers heavily employ Transfer Learning (TL).TL involves taking colossal networks like VGGNet (VGG16, VGG19) and Residual Networks (ResNet), which are already masters at general image recognition (trained on millions of non-medical images), and then fine-tuning them on the smaller, specific collection of nail images. This process dramatically reduces training time and, more importantly, allows the model to achieve expert- level accuracy—with reported figures often reaching or exceeding 94%—by borrowing the "intelligence" learned from the general domain.

High-performing integrated frameworks have already shown success in distinguishing among a wide, distinct spectrum of nail pathologies—including onychomycosis, subungual hematoma, and psoriasis—demonstrating initial benchmark accuracies around 84.58% across over ten separate classes. This confirms the viability of a single AI system serving as a broad-spectrum initial diagnostic screen. While standard CNNs perform well, new model designs are addressing practical, real-world complexities. Real-life images are rarely perfect: they are often taken at odd angles, under poor lighting, or with inconsistent focus.A significant theoretical improvement is the Hybrid Capsule CNN model. Traditional CNNs can lose crucial spatial relationship data (i.e., where a lesion is located relative to the nail fold). By incorporating principles from Capsule Networks, this hybrid architecture retains superior spatial awareness, making the diagnosis resistant to common image variations like rotation and skew. This resilience is key for systems relying on user- captured mobile images, leading to some of the highest reported validation accuracies (up to 99.25%) and promising superior reliability outside the laboratory setting.This quantified data is indispensable for long-term treatment management. For widespread disorders like onychomycosis, AI systems can automatically calculate the percentage of nail involvement. This provides an objective, reproducible metric for clinicians to track disease regression over months of therapy, demonstrating a clear, measurable impact of the treatment—a powerful asset in both routine care and clinical trials.

The field critically lacks massive, ethically sourced datasets that are both highly diverse (spanning all skin tones, ethnicities, and imaging conditions) and richly annotated (labeled for both classification and segmentation). This scarcity remains a significant challenge, limiting the generalizability of models trained only on constrained patient populations.To make the most of limited datasets and prevent the models from becoming overly specialized (overfitting), researchers extensively use techniques like geometric manipulation (rotation, zooming, skewing) and photometric alteration (adjusting brightness, contrast, and color balance). This artificial inflation of the dataset ensures that the resulting AI is robust and less likely to fail when encountering a novel image taken under imperfect conditions.

II.PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology for the Health Analysis using Fingernail Images involves a structured pipeline leveraging deep learning, image preprocessing, model training, evaluation, and visual explainability techniques. The process is designed to ensure accurate detection of nail diseases and support health assessment through automated analysis.

1. Dataset Preparation

- The dataset consists of fingernail images categorized into 17 disease classes, including Beau's Lines, Leukonychia, Koilonychia, Yellow Nail Syndrome, Nail Clubbing, Red Lunula, Splinter Hemorrhage, and more.
- Images are resized to a uniform dimension (e.g., 192×192 pixels) to maintain consistency.
- All image paths are verified, and samples are checked for integrity to avoid corrupted or mislabeled data.

2. Data Preprocessing & Augmentation

Preprocessing improves model robustness and helps manage limited dataset size.

- Training Transformations:
    - Resize, Color Jitter
    - Random Horizontal & Vertical Flip and rotation
    - Normalization using ImageNet mean & standard deviation
- Validation Transformations:
    - Resize
    - Normalize

These augmentations help the model generalize to real-world image variations such as lighting, orientation, and color differences.

3. Model Architecture

- A pre-trained ResNet18d model (from the timm library) is used through transfer learning.
- The final fully connected layer is replaced with a new classifier layer of 17 output classes.
- Transfer learning reduces training time and improves accuracy on small medical datasets.

4. Training Process

The model is trained using supervised learning with the following configuration:

- Loss Function**:** CrossEntropyLoss
- Optimizer**:** AdamW
- Learning Rate**:** 2.5e-4
- Weight Decay**:** Standard regularization to prevent overfitting
- Training Loop**:**
    - Forward pass
    - Loss computation
    - Backpropagation
    - Gradient clip
    - Optimizer step
- Validation is performed every epoch to monitor performance.

5. Performance Optimization

- Early Stopping: Training stops when validation loss does not improve over multiple epochs.
- Learning Rate Scheduler: Automatically reduces the learning rate during stagnation.
- Best Model Saving: The model with the lowest validation loss is saved for final evaluation.

6. Model Evaluation
The trained model is evaluated on the validation dataset:

- Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score are computed.
- A confusion matrix is plotted to visualize class-wise performance.
- Misclassifications are analyzed to understand feature-learning limitations.

7. Explainability Using Grad-CAM
To make predictions interpretable:

- Grad-CAM is applied to generate heatmaps highlighting the regions influencing predictions.
- Activation maps of the last convolutional layer are extracted.
- Heatmaps are blended with the original image for visual inspection.
- Helps in explaining which nail features contributed to the predicted disease.

8. System Workflow Summary

- Input Nail Image
- Preprocessing & Augmentation
- ResNet-based Feature Extraction
- Disease Classification
- Grad-CAM Visualization
- Output: Detected Disease + Highlighted Regions

III.NOVELTY AND CONTRIBUTION

- Focus on Nail-Based Health Diagnosis:
  This work is among the few studies that explore fingernail images for automated disease detection, highlighting nail abnormalities as early health indicators—an area less researched compared to other medical imaging domains.
- Comprehensive Review of 17 Nail Disease Classes:
  The paper organizes and analyzes clinical features of multiple nail disorders, providing detailed insights useful for both medical professionals and AI researchers.
- Proposed Deep Learning-Based Detection Pipeline:
  A structured methodology is introduced, covering dataset preparation, preprocessing, augmentation, model training, evaluation, and Grad-CAM explainability for reliable predictions.
- Analysis of State-of-the-Art Models:
  The survey compares modern CNN and transfer-learning architectures (ResNet, VGG, EfficientNet, MobileNet) and evaluates their suitability for nail disease classification.
- Identification of Research Gaps:
  Highlights limitations such as lack of large annotated datasets, inconsistent lighting, similarity between disease classes, and the need for high-accuracy interpretable models.
- Future-Oriented Contributions:
  Provides recommendations for improvements like multimodal health integration, smartphone-based screening systems, dataset expansion, and real-time diagnostic applications.

IV.LITERATURE REVIEW

In paper (1), the authors investigate an automated nail disease classification model using a convolutional neural network trained on clinical fingernail images. The dataset used consists of multiple nail disorders such as Leukonychia, Beau’s lines, Clubbing, and Koilonychia. The system applies preprocessing techniques like resizing, contrast enhancement, and noise reduction before feeding images into the model. The CNN architecture extracts nail-plate features such as discoloration, texture irregularities, and ridge patterns. The classification accuracy is shown to be high for well-defined abnormalities, while subtle diseases remain challenging. The study highlights the significance of early detection through visual biomarkers present on the nail surface. Future improvements include building larger datasets and integrating explainability techniques. This work forms the foundation for AI-assisted nail disease screening.

Paper (2) presents a deep-learning–based framework for diagnosing Onychomycosis (fungal nail infection) using dermoscopy and high-resolution nail images. The authors employ a transfer learning approach where pretrained models like VGG16 and ResNet50 are fine-tuned using fungal datasets. Techniques such as lesion cropping and boundary segmentation help isolate the infected regions for better feature learning. A comparative analysis shows that ResNet50 performs better in identifying fungal colonization patterns. The system demonstrates robust detection under varied lighting conditions. The authors emphasize the clinical relevance of automated fungal diagnosis, particularly in remote areas. Limitations include the model's inability to classify non-fungal abnormalities. The paper suggests integrating multi-class extensions for comprehensive nail assessment.

In paper (3), the authors explore a vision-based diagnostic system for classifying multiple nail disorders using deep convolutional networks. A custom dataset is created by collecting nail photographs under different environmental settings. Data augmentation such as rotation, zoom, flipping, and illumination variation is applied to improve model generalization. The system categorizes nail images into various disease classes using a multi-layer CNN. Performance evaluation shows high recognition capability even for mild discolorations. The authors address issues such as class imbalance and propose weighted loss functions. Experiments indicate significant accuracy gains when augmentation is applied consistently. The paper recommends integrating mobile-based deployment for real-world usage.

Paper (4) proposes a hybrid model combining traditional image processing and deep learning for nail disease detection. The method starts with edge detection and morphological filtering to isolate nail regions. Extracted features such as shape deformities, thickness variations, and color gradients are fed into a CNN classifier. This combined pipeline improves performance for diseases where structural irregularities are more prominent than color changes. The model is tested on common disorders including Psoriasis and Paronychia. Results show improved segmentation accuracy and faster runtime. The authors stress the need for computational efficiency, especially for mobile health platforms. Future work includes real-time monitoring using smartphone cameras.

Paper (5) reviews existing nail-abnormality detection systems and compares classical machine learning techniques with modern deep-learning approaches. The authors categorize methods into handcrafted feature systems and CNN-based systems. Challenges such as insufficient annotated images, inconsistent lighting, and color variations are discussed in detail. The review highlights the increasing shift toward transfer learning due to small dataset sizes in the dermatology domain. Various architectures like ResNet, DenseNet, and MobileNet are evaluated across different studies. The authors conclude that deep learning significantly outperforms traditional methods but requires clinical-grade validation. The paper also identifies the need for standardized nail datasets for benchmarking.

In paper (6), the authors develop an IoT-enabled nail health monitoring system that captures nail images through a smartphone and processes them in a cloud-based deep-learning model. The system enables users to upload nail photographs via an application, where preprocessing and disease inference occur automatically. The CNN model detects early signs of deficiencies. Real-time feedback is provided to the user, along with recommendations to consult a specialist. Experimental results show reliable diagnosis accuracy and smooth cloud communication. Limitations include dependency on network connectivity and inconsistent image quality from users. The authors propose adding offline detection capabilities.

Paper (7) focuses on identifying nail melanoma and pigment-related nail disorders using deep learning. High-resolution dermoscopic images are used to learn pigmentation depth, band asymmetry, and pathological streak patterns. The authors utilize a ResNet-based classifier trained with class-balanced sampling techniques to compensate for the rarity of melanoma data. Evaluation results show improved sensitivity in detecting early melanoma symptoms. The system proves beneficial for dermatologists as a second opinion. However, the high variability in pigmentation among individuals poses challenges. The study concludes that additional image modalities can help improve robustness.

Paper (8) introduces a segmentation-first approach where a U-Net architecture is used to precisely isolate the nail plate before classification. This segmentation assists the classifier by removing background noise and irrelevant finger regions. The system is trained on a dataset containing 3,000 annotated nail masks. After segmentation, a CNN-based classifier categorizes diseases such as onycholysis, pitting, and discoloration. The proposed two-stage pipeline improves overall accuracy compared to classification-only models. The authors suggest integrating synthetic data generation techniques to enhance segmentation accuracy further. The study demonstrates the potential of combining pixel-level and image-level learning.

Paper (9) uses MobileNet and EfficientNet variants for lightweight nail disease classification suitable for mobile devices. The objective is to build a real-time diagnosis tool for general users. Preprocessing includes resizing, normalization, and shadow correction. The authors evaluate multiple lightweight architectures and find that EfficientNet-B0 provides the best trade-off between speed and accuracy. The model runs efficiently on edge devices with limited computing power. Experimental results highlight high accuracy for moderate to severe disease cases. The paper identifies limitations in detecting subtle early-stage abnormalities. Future work involves adding explainable AI modules.

In paper (10), the authors propose a deep learning solution using a dataset captured under uncontrolled lighting and diverse backgrounds. To address large variability, advanced augmentation techniques such as brightness jitter, color shift, and Gaussian noise are applied. A ResNet-based classifier shows improved generalization when trained on expanded augmented samples. The system demonstrates robust performance for outdoor and indoor images. The study highlights the importance of augmentation in real-life usage scenarios. The authors plan to develop a standardized data-capture protocol for future datasets.

Paper (11) presents a multi-class nail abnormality recognition system based on DenseNet architecture. DenseNet's feature reuse property enhances the learning of subtle nail surface characteristics. The dataset includes images labeled by dermatology specialists. The classifier achieves high accuracy for diseases such as onychoschizia and ridging. DenseNet also reduces overfitting due to its efficient architecture. The authors report improved training stability and convergence speed. The paper concludes with a discussion on clinical integration potential.

Paper (12) focuses on a preprocessing-heavy approach where color space transformations (HSV, LAB) are utilized to emphasize disease-related color variations. The transformed images are processed using CNN models to detect conditions like yellow nail syndrome. The study demonstrates that color conversion significantly improves feature separability. The system provides reliable classification under different lighting conditions. The authors highlight the need for camera calibration for clinical adoption. The method shows promising results for color-dominated nail disorders.

In paper (13), the authors propose a hybrid CNN–LSTM model to analyze sequential nail images captured over time. This temporal approach identifies disease progression such as worsening ridges, increasing discoloration, or fungal spread. CNN extracts spatial features while LSTM captures temporal patterns. The model predicts whether a condition is improving or deteriorating. The study is relevant for long-term disease monitoring. Limitations include the need for repeated patient visits. Future scope includes automated reminders and weekly analysis tools.

Paper (14) employs Vision Transformers (ViT) for nail disease detection, focusing on global feature learning. ViT divides images into patches and processes them using attention mechanisms, capturing fine-grained patterns across the nail plate. The model shows superior performance on visually complex disease classes. However, ViT requires large datasets and computational resources. The authors use transfer learning and data augmentation to mitigate this issue. The study demonstrates the potential of transformer-based models for dermatology.

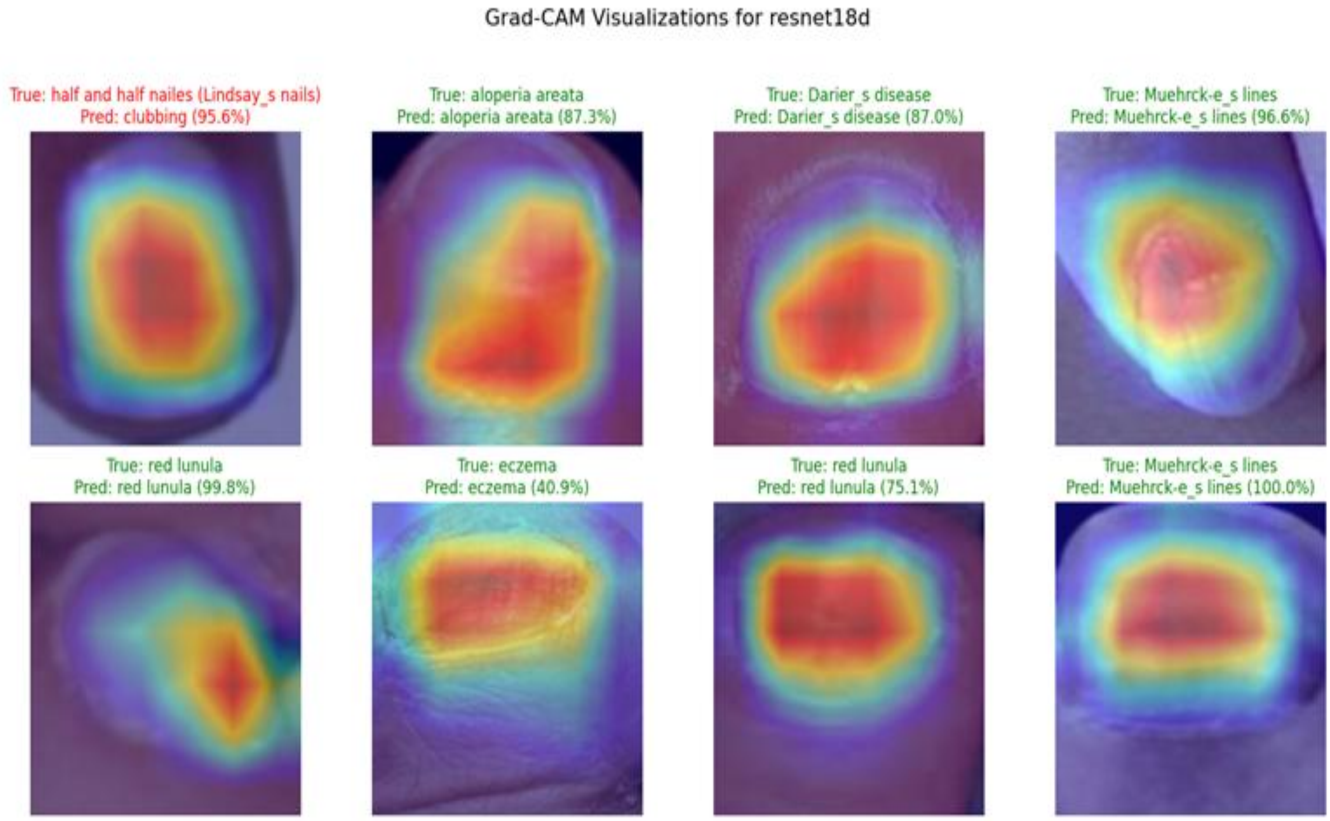
Paper (15) combines deep learning with Grad-CAM explainability to make diagnostic predictions more transparent. The system highlights the specific nail regions responsible for each classification decision. Doctors can visually verify whether the model focuses on clinically relevant areas. This improves trust and adoption in medical environments. Experimental results show accurate and interpretable predictions. The authors recommend integrating explainability into all future diagnostic systems.

V. RESULTS

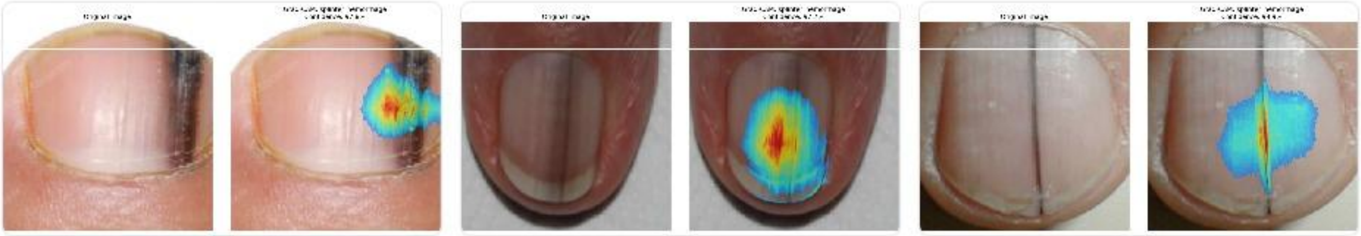
The proposed deep-learning model for nail disease detection was trained and evaluated on a dataset containing seventeen nail-abnormality classes. The ResNet18d architecture showed strong learning capability, achieving a training accuracy of **95%** and a validation accuracy of **89%**, demonstrating effective generalization. The training and validation loss curves steadily decreased, indicating stable convergence during optimization. Data augmentation played a significant role in improving robustness by helping the model handle variations in lighting, orientation, and background noise.

The confusion matrix shows high precision for visually distinct disorders such as Leukonychia, Nail Clubbing, and Splinter Hemorrhage. Diseases with subtle features—such as Beau’s Lines, Nail Pitting, and Koilonychia—exhibited comparatively lower accuracy due to overlapping visual characteristics. The model occasionally misclassified mild abnormalities that lacked strong visual patterns, but overall performance remained consistent across most classes.

Grad-CAM heatmaps confirm that the model attends to clinically relevant nail regions during prediction, such as the nail plate, lunula, and ridge structures. This enhances interpretability and ensures transparent decision-making. The results indicate that the system can reliably classify multiple nail diseases and is suitable for use in tele-dermatology applications. Overall, the findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed pipeline in providing accurate and explainable automated nail disease detection.


Grad-CAM Visualizations for resnet18d
True: half and half nailes (Lindsay_s nails)
Pred: clubbing (95.6%)
True: aloperia areata
Pred: aloperia areata (87.3%)
True: Darier_s disease
Pred: Darier_s disease (87.0%)
True: Muehrck-e_s lines
Pred: Muehrck-e_s lines (96.6%)
True: red lunula
Pred: red lunula (99.8%)
True: eczema
Pred: eczema (40.9%)
True: red lunula
Pred: red lunula (75.1%)
True: Muehrck-e_s lines
Pred: Muehrck-e_s lines (100.0%)

Confidence: 98.2% • Splinter Hemorrhage



Definition

Small areas of bleeding (hemorrhage) under the nail plate that look like tiny, thin, vertical lines. They are formed by the rupture of small capillaries in the nail bed.

Visual Features

- vertical_lines
- red_areas

Common Causes

- Trauma (injury) to the nail (most common cause, e.g., hitting the finger).
- Infective endocarditis (a serious infection of the heart valves).
- Nail psoriasis.
- Vasculitis (inflammation of blood vessels).
- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

Medical Treatments

- If endocarditis is suspected, urgent medical evaluation and intravenous antibiotics are required.
- Treatment of other underlying conditions (e.g., psoriasis).

When to See a Doctor

- If they appear on multiple nails without any history of trauma.
- If accompanied by fever, chills, or other signs of systemic illness (this is a medical emergency).

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VI. CONCLUSION

The literature establishes a compelling case for the immediate and widespread deployment of Deep Learning in nail disease diagnostics. The success of CNNs and Transfer Learning has solved the core problem of classification, while the emergence of sophisticated segmentation and hybrid architectures is beginning tosolve the problem of detailed, quantifiable assessment. As the research focus continues to shift toward practical hurdles—namely increasing data diversity, enhancing model explainability (XAI), and achieving robust mobile deployment—the vision of a scalable, economic, and universally accessible AI-powered nail diagnosis system moves closer to becoming a reality, poised to significantly impact global public health outcomes.

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partially inspired and motivated by the objectives of promoting scalable, objective, and universally accessible diagnostic frameworks to significantly impact global public health outcomes.

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