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Deep Learning Approach for Image-Based Garbage Classification System

Anita Markam[1], Kavita Verma[2], Anurag Shrivastava[3]

Research Scholar, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, NIIST, Bhopal (M.P.), India[1]
Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, NIIST, Bhopal (M.P.), India[2]
Associate Professor & Head, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, NIIST, Bhopal (M.P.), India[3]
***Email**: vishal.918432@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization and population growth have significantly increased the volume of solid waste generated worldwide, particularly in developing countries such as India. Traditional waste management systems largely rely on manual segregation, which is time-consuming, labor-intensive, and often inefficient when handling large quantities of waste. To address these challenges, this study proposes an automated garbage classification system using Deep Learning techniques. The proposed system employs a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) trained on the TrashNet dataset to classify waste images into predefined categories in real time. The objective is to reduce human effort, improve segregation efficiency, and support sustainable waste management practices. The system incorporates image preprocessing, feature extraction, and classification to accurately identify different types of waste materials. Experimental results demonstrate that the proposed model achieves high classification accuracy and effectively distinguishes between various waste categories. The developed solution offers a practical approach for smart waste management systems and can contribute to cleaner environments, enhanced recycling processes, and the development of smart cities.

1. Introduction

Waste generation has become one of the most significant environmental challenges faced by modern society. Rapid population growth, urbanization, industrialization, and changing consumer lifestyles have led to a substantial increase in the volume of solid waste generated worldwide. Improper disposal and inadequate management of waste contribute to environmental pollution, public health risks, and the depletion of natural resources. Therefore, efficient waste segregation and recycling have become essential components of sustainable waste management systems.

Effective waste segregation is crucial for maximizing recycling efficiency and reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills. Waste materials are commonly categorized into different groups such as plastic, paper, cardboard, glass, cloth, and general trash. Proper classification ensures that recyclable materials can be processed efficiently while minimizing contamination. However, conventional waste sorting methods primarily depend on manual labor, which is time-consuming, labor-intensive, unhygienic, and prone to human errors. As the volume of waste continues to increase, manual segregation becomes increasingly impractical and inefficient [1].

Recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and Deep Learning (DL) have provided innovative solutions for automating waste classification. Among these technologies, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have demonstrated remarkable performance in image recognition and classification tasks. CNN-based models can automatically learn and extract complex features from images, enabling accurate identification of different waste categories without the need for manual feature engineering.

This research focuses on developing an intelligent garbage classification system using deep learning techniques to automatically classify waste materials from images. The study considers six major waste categories: glass, paper, cloth, trash, cardboard, and plastic. A carefully curated image dataset is utilized to ensure sufficient diversity and representation of all waste classes. The proposed system employs CNN-based architectures to analyze visual characteristics of waste materials and accurately classify them into their respective categories [2].

The implementation of an automated garbage classification system can significantly improve recycling efficiency, reduce human intervention, and support smart waste management initiatives. By automating the segregation process, the proposed approach can contribute to cleaner environments, reduced operational costs, and enhanced sustainability. The findings of this study highlight the potential of deep learning-based waste classification systems in addressing modern waste management challenges and promoting environmentally responsible waste disposal practices.

2. Garbage Classification and Its Approaches

Garbage classification is the process of categorizing waste materials into meaningful groups based on their material composition, such as plastic, paper, glass, metal, cardboard, cloth, and other waste types. Proper classification is essential because each category requires a different method of recycling, treatment, or disposal. Effective waste segregation helps improve recycling efficiency, reduces environmental pollution, and promotes sustainable waste management practices.

With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), waste classification can now be performed automatically using image-based systems. In such systems, images of waste materials are analyzed by trained models that identify visual characteristics and classify the waste into predefined categories. This automated approach is faster, more reliable, and less dependent on human intervention than traditional manual methods.

Accurate garbage classification ensures that recyclable materials are correctly sorted, minimizing contamination and improving the quality of recycled products. Furthermore, efficient segregation reduces the volume of waste sent to landfills, conserves natural resources, and supports environmental sustainability. Therefore, intelligent garbage classification systems have become an important component of modern smart waste management solutions.

Several approaches have been developed for waste classification, ranging from manual methods to advanced deep learning techniques.

A. Traditional Approach

The traditional approach relies on human workers to manually inspect and separate waste materials according to their type. Although this method is widely used, it suffers from several limitations. Manual segregation is time-consuming, labor-intensive, and exposes workers to potentially hazardous and unhygienic conditions. Moreover, the accuracy of classification depends heavily on human judgment, which can lead to inconsistencies and errors.

Key Characteristics:

- Entirely manual process.
- Slow and labor-intensive.
- High risk to worker health and safety.
- Susceptible to human errors and inconsistencies.

B. Sensor-Based Approach

Sensor-based waste classification systems utilize devices such as infrared sensors, ultrasonic sensors, moisture sensors, and metal detectors to identify specific material properties. These systems can effectively detect certain types of waste; however, they often struggle with complex objects that exhibit varying shapes, colors, and textures. Additionally, the installation and maintenance costs of sensor-based systems can be relatively high.

Key Characteristics:

- Uses hardware-based sensing technologies.
- Suitable for identifying selected materials.
- Limited capability for complex waste classification.
- High installation and maintenance costs.

C. Machine Learning Approach

Machine Learning (ML) approaches classify waste materials by first extracting handcrafted features such as color, texture, shape, and edge information from images. These features are then used to train classification algorithms such as Support Vector Machines (SVM), Random Forests, and Decision Trees. While ML-based systems generally outperform traditional manual methods, their performance depends significantly on the quality of manually designed features and domain expertise.

Key Characteristics:

- Relies on manually extracted features.
- Provides moderate classification accuracy.
- Effective for relatively simple image datasets.
- Requires domain knowledge for feature engineering.

D. Deep Learning Approach

Deep Learning represents the most advanced approach to garbage classification. Unlike conventional machine learning methods, deep learning models automatically learn relevant features directly from raw image data. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are particularly effective for image classification tasks due to their ability to capture complex spatial patterns and visual characteristics.

In this study, a CNN-based model is employed to classify waste images into predefined categories. The model automatically extracts hierarchical features and learns distinguishing patterns associated with different waste types. This capability enables high classification accuracy even in challenging scenarios involving complex backgrounds, varying lighting conditions, and diverse object appearances.

Key Characteristics:

- Eliminates the need for manual feature engineering.

- Automatically learns features from image data.
- Achieves high classification accuracy.
- Performs effectively on complex and diverse datasets.
- Provides fast and reliable predictions for real-time applications.

3. Literature Review

The rapid growth of municipal solid waste and the increasing need for efficient recycling systems have motivated researchers to develop intelligent waste classification techniques using Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and Deep Learning (DL). Recent advancements in computer vision and deep learning have significantly improved the ability of automated systems to identify and classify waste materials accurately.

Chhabra et al. (2024) proposed an intelligent waste classification system based on an improved multi-layered Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) for automated waste segregation. The study emphasized that recent advances in GPU computing and the availability of large image datasets have enabled the successful application of deep learning techniques in image classification tasks. The authors discussed conventional waste segregation methods such as Trommel separators, Eddy current separators, and X-ray-based sorting systems, highlighting their limitations in handling diverse waste categories.

The researchers evaluated several deep learning architectures, including DenseNet121 and InceptionResNetV2, using the TrashNet dataset. Experimental results showed that DenseNet121 achieved an accuracy of 95%, while InceptionResNetV2 achieved 94% accuracy after fine-tuning. Although the proposed approach demonstrated promising performance, the study identified challenges related to limited dataset size and reduced effectiveness in real-world environments [3].

Kumar et al. (2022) proposed a transfer learning-based garbage classification framework utilizing ResNet-50 and EfficientNet architectures. The study reported that transfer learning models outperformed conventional CNN architectures in terms of accuracy, convergence speed, and generalization capability. The authors emphasized that deep learning-based waste classification systems can play a significant role in improving recycling efficiency and reducing environmental pollution [4].

Kishan et al. (2021) proposed a deep learning-based garbage classification and detection system to support efficient urban waste management and promote cleaner smart cities. The study utilized Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) along with comparative analysis using SVM and Faster R-CNN on both a publicly available dataset and a self-collected dataset containing over 700 waste images. Performance was evaluated using confusion matrices and ROC curves to assess classification effectiveness. The experimental results demonstrated that CNN-based models achieved reliable garbage detection and classification, highlighting their potential for real-time waste monitoring and automated urban waste management applications [5].

Patil et al. (2021) developed a CNN-based application for automatic waste classification. The system enabled efficient waste segregation through a user-friendly interface, reducing manual effort and improving classification accuracy. The results demonstrated the effectiveness of deep learning in supporting sustainable waste management and recycling practices [6].

Ferronato et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive review of global waste management challenges and their impact on environmental sustainability. The study highlighted the importance of efficient waste collection, treatment, and segregation systems for reducing pollution and supporting sustainable development goals. The authors emphasized the need for intelligent technologies to improve waste management practices worldwide [7].

4. Methodology

The proposed garbage classification system employs deep learning techniques to automatically identify and classify waste materials from images. The methodology consists of dataset preparation, image preprocessing, model development, training, evaluation, and deployment. The overall workflow begins with collecting garbage images, followed by preprocessing and data augmentation. The processed images are then used to train deep learning models for classifying waste into predefined categories. Finally, the trained model is integrated with a user interface to enable real-time waste classification.

4.1 Dataset Description

The dataset used in this study was obtained from the Kaggle Garbage Classification Dataset. It contains images belonging to six waste categories: cardboard, glass, metal, paper, plastic, and trash. The dataset was organized into separate folders corresponding to each class, facilitating supervised learning and model training.

A preliminary analysis was conducted to examine class distribution, image quality, and dataset diversity. The dataset contains images captured under varying lighting conditions, backgrounds, viewing angles, and object positions, thereby reflecting real-world waste disposal scenarios. Such diversity enhances the model's ability to generalize to unseen data and practical environments.

4.2 Data Preprocessing

Data preprocessing plays a crucial role in improving model performance and ensuring consistent input quality. Initially, all images were loaded and resized to a fixed resolution suitable for deep learning architectures. Image normalization was then applied to standardize pixel values and facilitate stable model training.

To improve generalization and reduce overfitting, data augmentation techniques were employed. These included image rotation, horizontal and vertical flipping, zooming, shifting, and brightness adjustments. Data augmentation artificially increased dataset variability and exposed the model to different visual conditions, thereby enhancing its robustness.

4.3 Dataset Partitioning

The dataset was divided into three subsets: training, validation, and testing. Approximately 70% of the data was allocated for training, 15% for validation, and 15% for testing. The training set was used to learn image features, while the validation set was employed for hyperparameter tuning and monitoring model performance during training. The test set was reserved for final performance evaluation on unseen data.

4.4 Model Development

Two deep learning architectures were implemented and evaluated in this study: a Custom Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) and a ResNet50-based transfer learning model.

A. Custom CNN

A custom CNN architecture was developed from scratch to perform garbage classification. The network consists of multiple convolutional layers followed by batch normalization, activation functions, pooling layers, and fully connected layers. Convolutional layers extract hierarchical image features, while pooling layers reduce spatial dimensions and computational complexity. Dropout regularization was incorporated to minimize overfitting and improve model generalization.

B. ResNet50 Transfer Learning Model

In addition to the custom CNN, the ResNet50 architecture was utilized through transfer learning. ResNet50 is a deep residual network pretrained on the ImageNet dataset and is capable of extracting highly discriminative visual features. By leveraging pretrained weights, the model achieves improved classification accuracy while reducing training time and computational requirements.

4.5 Hyperparameter Configuration

Several hyperparameters were carefully selected to optimize model performance. The Adam optimizer was employed due to its adaptive learning rate mechanism and efficient convergence properties. The learning rate, batch size, and number of training epochs were determined experimentally based on validation performance.

A dropout rate of 0.5 was applied to reduce overfitting by preventing excessive reliance on individual neurons. Furthermore, ImageNet normalization statistics were adopted to ensure compatibility with the pretrained ResNet50 architecture and facilitate stable learning.

4.6 Classification Process

The classification phase represents the core component of the proposed system. During training, the CNN models automatically learn discriminative features from garbage images through a series of convolutional operations. Feature extraction, optimization, and classification are performed in an end-to-end manner without requiring manual feature engineering.

The Cross-Entropy Loss function was used to measure prediction error, while the Adam optimizer updated network parameters through back propagation. Batch normalization and dropout further enhanced model stability and generalization capabilities.

For final classification, a fully connected output layer combined with the Softmax activation function was employed. The Softmax function converts model outputs into probability scores for each waste category, and the category with the highest probability is selected as the final prediction.

4.7 Model Evaluation

The performance of the proposed models was evaluated using training, validation, and test datasets. Metrics such as classification accuracy, training loss, validation loss, confusion matrix analysis, and learning curves were used to assess model effectiveness. Comparative analysis between the Custom CNN and ResNet50 models was conducted to determine the most suitable architecture for garbage classification.

4.8 System Deployment

To demonstrate practical applicability, the trained model was integrated with a user-friendly interface. The system allows users to upload garbage images and receive instant predictions regarding the waste category. This deployment stage transforms the developed model into a functional smart waste management tool capable of supporting automated waste segregation and recycling initiatives.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 Performance Evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed garbage classification system, two deep learning models were implemented and compared: a Custom Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) developed from scratch and a pretrained ResNet50 model based on transfer learning. Both models were trained and tested on the garbage classification dataset containing six waste categories, namely cardboard, glass, metal, paper, plastic, and trash.

The Custom CNN served as a baseline model and demonstrated satisfactory classification performance. Its lightweight architecture enabled faster training and lower computational requirements. However, due to its limited depth, the model struggled to extract highly discriminative features from complex waste images, resulting in relatively lower classification accuracy and increased confusion among visually similar categories.

In contrast, the ResNet50 model achieved superior performance across all evaluation metrics. The pretrained architecture effectively leveraged knowledge learned from large-scale image datasets, enabling the extraction of rich and hierarchical image features. Consequently, ResNet50 exhibited better class separation, improved generalization capability, and higher classification accuracy than the Custom CNN.

Parameters	Custom CNN	ResNet-50
Architecture Type	CNN designed from scratch	Pretrained Deep Residual Network
Number of Layers	Few convolutional layers	50 layers with residual connections
Transfer Learning	No	Yes
Pretrained Weights	No	ImageNet pretrained weights
Loss Function	Cross Entropy Loss	Cross Entropy Loss
Optimizer	Adam	Adam
Learning Rate	0.001	0.001
Epochs	50	25

Table No.1:- Comparison of Model Architectures and Training Parameters

5.2 Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix analysis revealed significant differences between the two models. The Custom CNN correctly classified several waste categories but showed noticeable misclassification among visually similar classes. In particular, categories such as paper, cardboard, plastic, and trash exhibited overlapping features that occasionally confused the model. These results indicate the limitations of shallow architectures when dealing with complex image classification tasks.

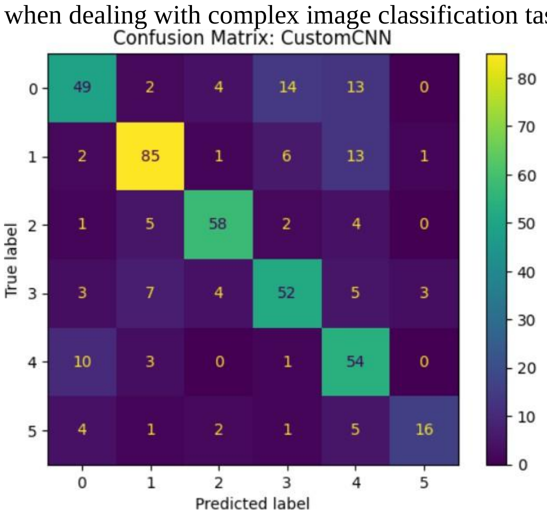

Fig No. 1:- Confusion Matrix of the Custom CNN Model

The ResNet50 model demonstrated considerably stronger performance, with most predictions concentrated along the diagonal of the confusion matrix. Misclassification rates were substantially lower, indicating that the model was able to learn more representative features and accurately distinguish between different waste categories. The improved performance highlights the effectiveness of transfer learning for garbage classification applications.

4.3 Dataset Partitioning

The dataset was divided into three subsets: training, validation, and testing. Approximately 70% of the data was allocated for training, 15% for validation, and 15% for testing. The training set was used to learn image features, while the validation set was employed for hyperparameter tuning and monitoring model performance during training. The test set was reserved for final performance evaluation on unseen data.

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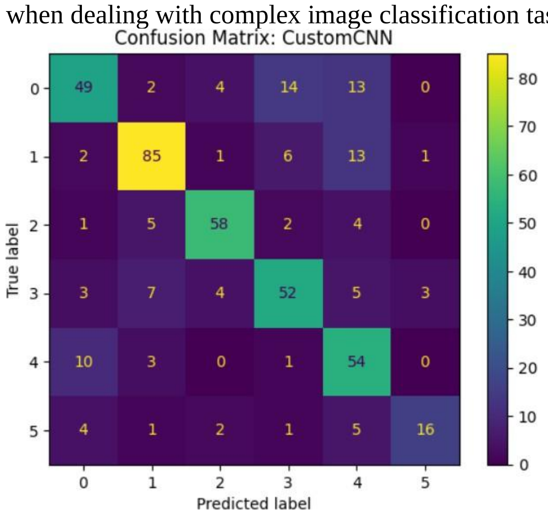

Fig No. 2:- Confusion Matrix of the Custom CNN Model

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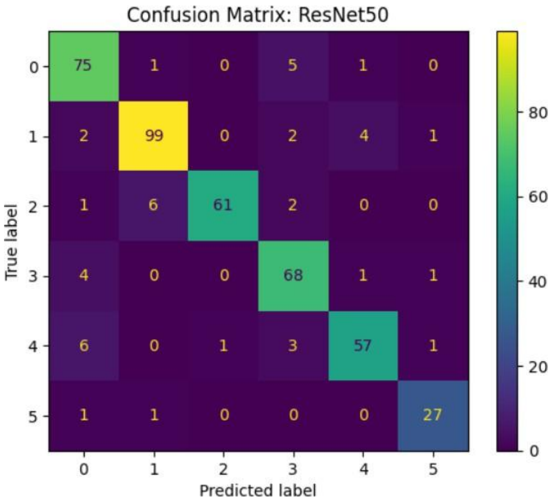

Fig No. 3:- Confusion Matrix of the ResNet-50 Model

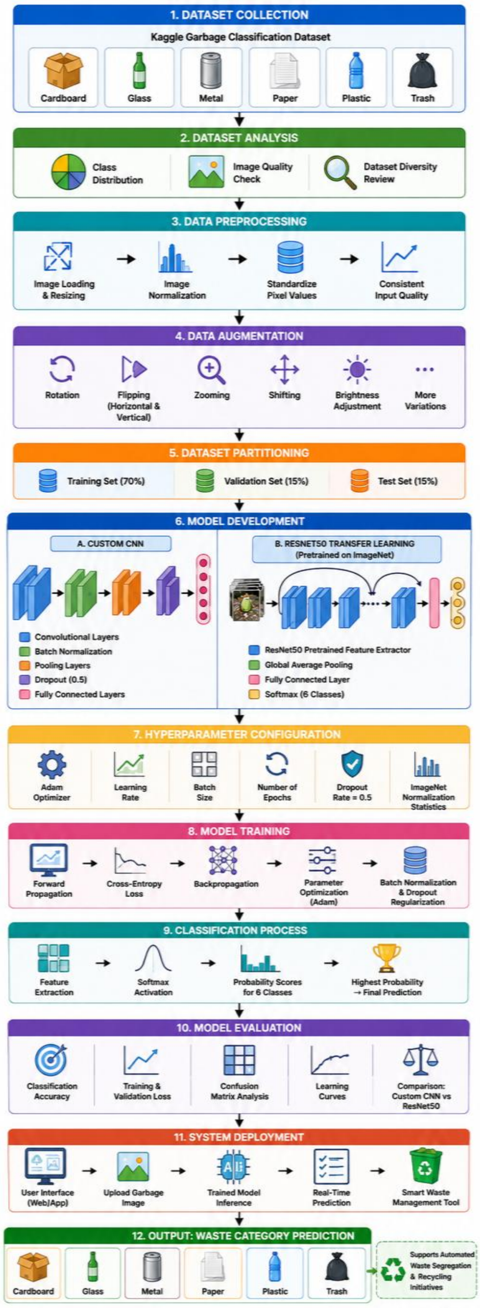

Fig No. 4:- Proposed Architecture of the Image-Based Garbage Classification System

5.3 Training and Validation Performance

Analysis of the training and validation curves further confirmed the superiority of ResNet50. The Custom CNN exhibited a rapid decrease in training loss during the initial epochs; however, validation performance fluctuated throughout training, suggesting limited generalization capability. Although the model achieved acceptable accuracy, its learning process eventually plateaued, indicating restricted representational capacity.

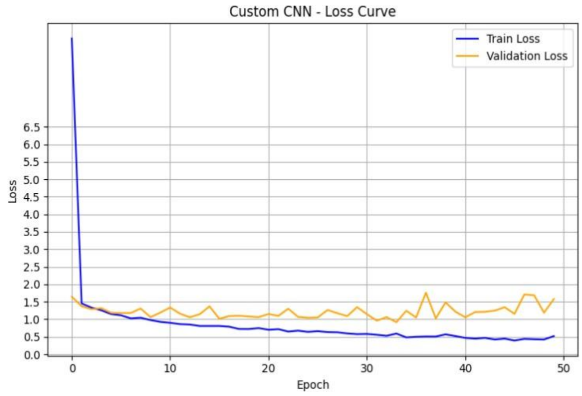

Fig No. 5:- Loss Curve Obtained for the Custom CNN Model

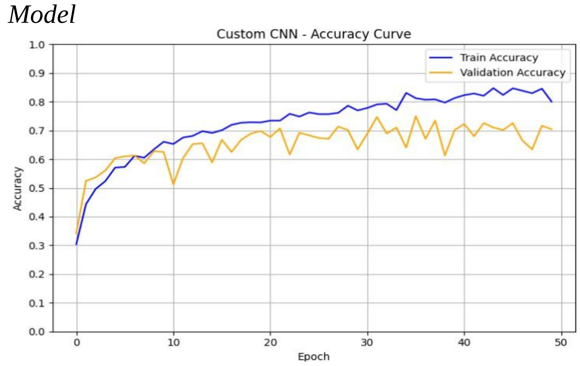

Fig No. 6:- Accuracy Curve Obtained for the Custom CNN Model

Conversely, ResNet50 showed stable convergence with a consistent reduction in both training and validation loss. The model achieved high training and validation accuracy within a relatively small number of epochs. The narrow gap between training and validation performance indicates minimal overfitting and strong generalization to unseen data.

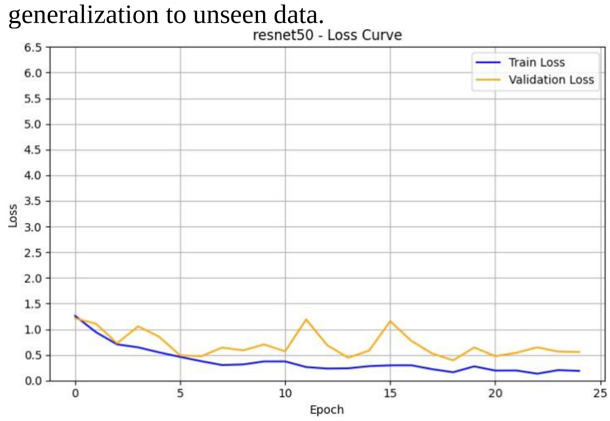

Fig No. 7:- Loss Curve Obtained for the Resnet-50 Model

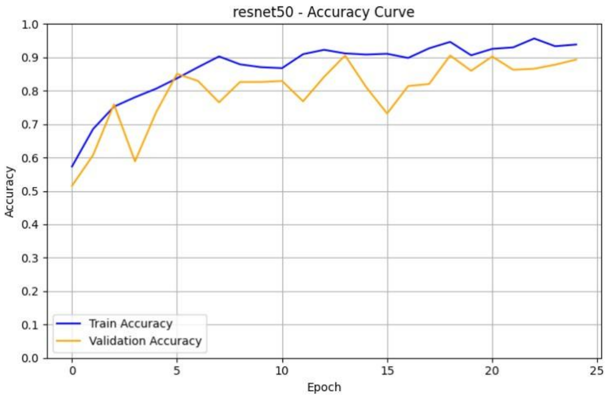

Fig No. 8:- Accuracy Curve Obtained for the Resnet-50 Model

5.4 Comparative Discussion

A comparative analysis demonstrates that ResNet50 significantly outperforms the Custom CNN in terms of classification accuracy, feature extraction capability, convergence speed, and robustness. The residual learning mechanism and pretrained weights enable ResNet50 to capture complex visual patterns more effectively than a shallow custom architecture.

Despite its lower accuracy, the Custom CNN offers advantages such as reduced computational complexity, faster inference, and lower memory requirements. Therefore, it may be suitable for resource-constrained environments or educational purposes. However, for practical smart waste management applications where classification accuracy is critical, ResNet50 provides a more reliable and scalable solution.

Overall, the experimental results confirm that deep transfer learning models are highly effective for automated garbage classification and can significantly enhance waste segregation efficiency. The proposed system demonstrates the potential of deep learning technologies to support intelligent waste management and sustainable recycling practices.

Metric	Custom CNN (%)	ResNet50 (%)
Accuracy	72.85	89.79
Precision	74.04	90.12
Recall	72.85	89.79
F1-Score	73.11	89.83

Table No.3:- Performance Comparison of Custom CNN and ResNet50

7. Conclusion

This study presented an automated garbage classification system based on deep learning techniques to improve waste segregation and support sustainable waste management. Two models, namely a Custom Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) and a pretrained ResNet50 model, were implemented and evaluated for classifying waste images into different categories.

The experimental results demonstrated that ResNet50 significantly outperformed the Custom CNN in terms of classification accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and overall generalization capability. ResNet50 achieved a test accuracy of 89.79%, whereas the Custom CNN attained 72.85%, highlighting the effectiveness of transfer learning for image-based waste classification. The confusion matrix analysis and learning curves further revealed that ResNet50 was able to distinguish between visually similar waste categories more effectively and exhibited stable learning behavior with minimal overfitting.

In contrast, although the Custom CNN provided a lightweight and computationally efficient solution, its limited depth restricted its ability to learn complex visual features, resulting in lower classification performance. Furthermore, ResNet50 achieved superior results with fewer training epochs, demonstrating faster convergence and improved learning efficiency.

Overall, the findings confirm that transfer learning using ResNet50 is a highly effective approach for automated garbage classification, particularly when training data and computational resources are limited. The proposed system can contribute to intelligent waste segregation, enhanced recycling efficiency, and smart waste management initiatives. The successful implementation of this model demonstrates the potential of deep learning technologies in addressing real-world environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development.

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