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CNN vs GAN in image processing: A comparative analysis

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Abstract

This study compares convolutional neural networks (CNNs) with generative adversarial networks (GANs) in image processing. Image classification and recognition features have been revolutionized through CNNs because of their widespread use in image classification tasks. GANs demonstrate high potential for creating realistic synthesized images that prove useful for enhancing images and carrying out creative work. The evaluation focuses on the unique capabilities and difficulties of CNNs and GANs regarding their utilization across medical, security, and entertainment fields. Research shows that CNNs demonstrate superior performance in classification applications, yet GANs lead image generation operations, particularly through projects like image restoration and inpainting tasks. CNNs and GANs work together in image processing because they provide separate abilities to address various real-world image processing needs.

Keywords: CNN performance; GAN applications; Image generation; Medical imaging; Image classification; Data augmentation

1. Introduction

The field of image processing sees profound advancements through deep learning because computers now extract patterns from large datasets while completing tasks that demand human intellect. The advancement of this field depends mainly on two critical neural network structures: Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). CNNs can identify spatial patterns in images by automatically discovering progressively abstract features (L. Jiao & J. Zhao, 2019). The research team of Goodfellow et al. developed GANs through a generative method by working with two neural networks referred to as the generator and discriminator to produce realistic synthetic data (Cao et al., 2019). The two networks find applications in diverse image processing operations, although their performance success rates differ between tasks. Experts need a comprehensive understanding of both CNNs and GANs to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses for image processing because rapid growth in industrial high-performance model requirements drives continual development in this field.

1.1. Overview

German-speaking physicians have identified LeNet from the 1990s as the first stepping stone for CNN development, while AlexNet became significant in 2012 because of its victory in the ImageNet competition (Alom et al., 2018). The practical use of CNNs extends to healthcare diagnosis through medical images and autonomous vehicle object detection applications. In 2014, GANs entered the scene and rapidly revolutionized image generation capabilities. GANs generate authentic photos, which enable new progress in video game design, particularly by generating realistic characters and game worlds (Cao et al., 2019). The main purpose of CNNs involves recognition functions, yet GANs specialize in generation processes and imaging improvements. CNNs function as the main drivers of accurate image classification, although GANs lead the way in generating creative synthetic images.

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1.2. Problem Statement

Image processing faces important technical barriers in domain areas such as recognition, generation, and enhancement. Modern approaches face difficulties because they require substantial computational resources while showing a restricted spectrum in various image collections and failing to process complex and noisy environmental situations effectively. The interpretive relationship between CNNs and GANs remains unclear because deciding the most suitable model for particular applications remains untransparent. CNNs maintain excellent performance for category assignments, yet GANs stand out in producing images, although they cannot replace each other as all-encompassing solutions. The industry faces difficulties picking optimal processing methods because the sector lacks a complete understanding of these models' capabilities and limits in various applications.

1.4 Objectives

The research investigates the core concepts that power Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for image processing applications. The study evaluates both models through different image-related recognition, generation, and enhancement capabilities operations to determine performance levels. A primary aim is to examine how well the two models perform regarding speed and precision while delivering final results for different application sectors, from medical to entertainment. The proposed evaluation will analyze the functional advantages and structural constraints of CNNs and GANs before deciding their best practical deployment scenarios.

1.5 Scope and Significance

The examination investigates CNN and GAN deployments in image processing's three main verticals: classification, generation, and enhancement. This evaluation analyzes the model's efficiency in offering critical information that will direct next-generation research work. The findings from this research analysis bridge scholarly work to healthcare diagnostics and entertainment with the requirement of immersive environments. Results from this study will contribute to developing improved image processing systems that benefit academic researchers and industrial professionals who need advanced image analysis methods.

2. Literature review

2.1. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) in Image Processing

The current standards of image recognition utilize Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) as their fundamental framework. These networks employ multiple sequential convolutional and pooling and fully connected layers, which extract different-level features from image data. The application of CNNs extends to numerous domains where they perform object detection, facial recognition, and classification tasks. Medical image diagnosis receives enhanced accuracy through CNNs because these networks enable automated disease detection specifically for cancer from radiological images (Jain & Shah, 2022). Security applications utilize CNNs to monitor and detect unordinary behavior patterns and identify potential threats and unauthorized activities. The safe operation of autonomous vehicles depends significantly on CNN technology to detect road markings and obstacles during live navigation operations. Through its raw pixel data processing capabilities, CNN has become an effective tool for various applications that require quick and precise image analysis to revolutionize different fields.

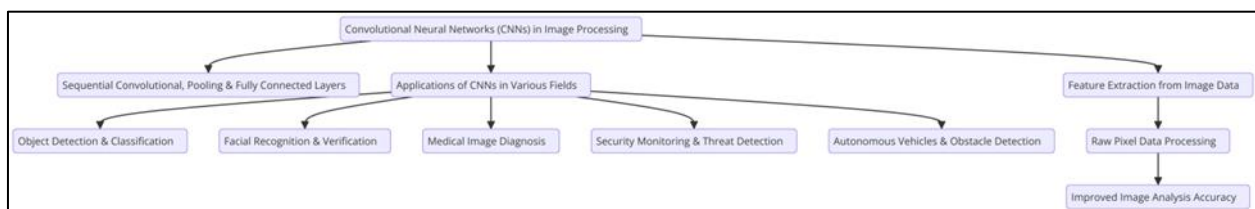


Figure 1 This flowchart highlights the key aspects of CNNs in image processing, focusing on convolutional layers, feature extraction, and applications in fields like object detection, facial recognition, medical diagnosis, security monitoring, and autonomous vehicles. CNNs improve image analysis accuracy through raw pixel data processing

2.2. Applications of CNN in Image Processing

CNNs are essential for multiple real-time image processing operations in practical applications. Their architecture's automatic feature extraction capabilities enable them to excel in raw image processing tasks, including image

enhancement, segmentation, and object recognition applications. Medical imaging utilizes CNNs to detect tumors and segment organs through processes where these artificial intelligence methods achieve superior performance than traditional imaging techniques in speed and accuracy. The quality enhancement capabilities of CNNs affect low-resolution medical images by improving their resolution standards. As seen in MRI or CT scan applications, CNNs best accomplish the segmentation of structures from background noise in images. The automated processing workflow of complex tasks exhibits better precision and efficiency due to the successful implementation of CNNs in applications (Kaushik, Jain, & Shah, 2018).

2.3. Comparison of CNN with Other Machine Learning Models

CNNs remain prominent in image processing applications because users compare their performance to Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks. The spatial processing strength of CNNs surpasses that of SVMs in performance, but SVMs excel at handling compact data sets through manual feature development processes. The main strength of LSTM networks in sequence data comes from their ability to process temporal dependencies, while these models fail solely in image-based applications. The automatic learning capability of hierarchical features makes CNNs superior to other models in image classification and recognition tasks (Jain & Shah, 2022). CNNs demonstrate higher computational need than SVM models since they need extensive labeled data and specialized hardware for their training process, but they provide a lower computational workload after training. The selection of these models depends on multiple factors, including the reserved task type, database dimensions, and machine power availability levels.

2.4. Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) in Image Processing

GANs (Generative Adversarial Networks) serve as deep learning model architecture, generating images from a computer system. The two network components of GANs work harmoniously to produce synthetic images through the generator and process their authenticity through the discriminator. The generator obtains better capabilities through discriminator feedback, allowing GANs to generate pictures nearly identical to real images. GANs demonstrate excellence in image generation together with super-resolution and inpainting by producing detailed, high-quality images from degraded inputs or incomplete data. Medical imaging applications benefit from GANs by developing synthetic pathological images that increase CNN diagnostic systems' accuracy through expanded limited datasets. GANs enable the production of art and realistic photos, transforming the fashion industry alongside entertainment and digital media (Jain & Srihari, 2021).

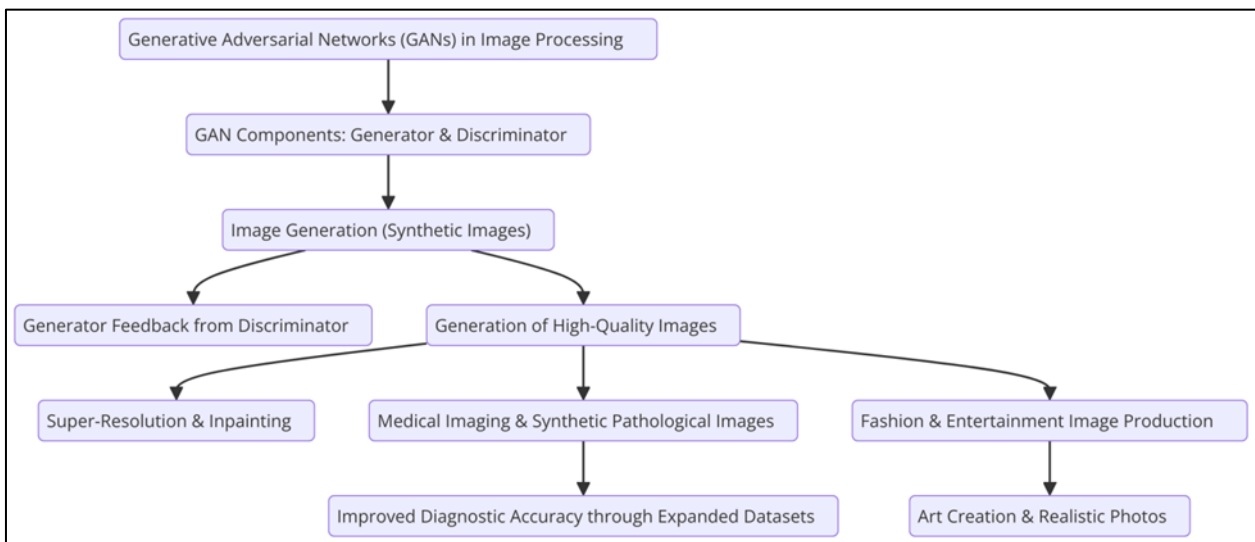


Figure 2 This flowchart showcases the GAN architecture, with its generator and discriminator components, which collaborate to create high-quality images. Applications include super-resolution, medical imaging, and fashion/entertainment production, demonstrating how GANs are transforming industries by generating realistic images and improving diagnostic accuracy

2.5. Applications of GAN in Image Processing

The creative industries benefit tremendously from Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) because these networks optimize art production and animation development. Random noise input into GANs produces photorealistic images

that lead to automatic new content generation for artwork and landscapes and character design creation without human labor. The animation industry has recently used GAN technology to generate smoother transition effects between animation frames. GANs play an extensive role in developing image datasets and creative industries. GANs create truthful image variations that offer critical benefits for training purposes, although real data acquisition remains costly or cumbersome. GANs enable performance excellence in facial recognition and medical imaging and satellite imaging tasks through their efficient improvements of training datasets (Wang et al., 2020). The ability of GANs to produce and improve images serves as their main asset through which they help progress image processing applications.

2.6. CNN vs. GAN in Medical Imaging

CNNs and GANs actively contribute to medical imaging, but each technology functions for specific tasks. Doctors commonly utilize CNN networks to identify conditions such as tumors and lesions in medical diagnostic imagery. Medical image diagnosis benefits from their hierarchical feature learning ability because CNNs show better accuracy than conventional approaches. GANs serve two main roles: mentation and synth and generation. The performance of CNN models receives enhancement through GAN-generated realistic medical images when original datasets contain limited quantities. Implementing GAN-generated synthetic liver lesion images proved to boost CNN performance in liver cancer detection through their effectiveness when dealing with scarce data availability (Frid-Adar et al., 2018). Medical imaging systems benefit from GAN-generated synthetic data because such data enhances the robustness and accuracy that CNNs require for real-world image analysis.

2.7. Challenges in CNN and GAN for Image Processing

Training Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) creates multiple complex issues. CNNs experience performance decline when training with insufficiently diverse datasets, which can cause their overfitting issue. The training process of CNNs becomes resource-intensive due to their high computational power requirement to analyze extensive image datasets. The image generation capabilities of GANs exist alongside challenges when it comes to achieving convergence. GAN training becomes unstable when the generator and discriminator refuse to reach equilibrium during processes. The generation system's unstable nature, coupled with the mode collapse problem that limits the generator from producing a few image varieties, makes them difficult to use for image processing tasks. The models encounter serious difficulties with computational complexity during operations involving large datasets and high-resolution images (Shorten et al., 2019). Ongoing studies dedicate efforts to enhance CNNs and GANs performance aspects, including stability and efficiency, as well as generalizability to make them suitable for practical, real-life applications.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research method compares CNNs and GANs' performance when applied to image processing tasks. A methodology for analysis focuses on examining the two models by assessing their characteristics and abilities for different image-related activities from classification to generation to enhancement. The research will review real-world examples of these models within the medical imaging and entertainment industries and other domains. Using a mixed approach, the analysis unites case study observations with numerical performance indicators obtained through measured empirical results. The analytical method provides complete assessment results for both models to create efficient performance understanding. The researchers selected a comparative approach to determine which model suits particular image processing requirements because this approach helps investigate the practical advantages of CNNs and GANs across different applications.

3.2. Data Collection

The research employed multiple datasets to conduct performance assessments of CNNs and GANs in image processing activities. The researchers evaluated the tumor and abnormality detection capabilities of CNNs using datasets of medical images containing mammograms and MRI scans. The research team selected satellite imagery to determine how models perform in geographic analysis operations, including land categorization and object recognition actions. Facial recognition datasets served as the basis for reevaluating CNN and GAN models in terms of their performance in recognizing facial attributes and producing synthesized images. Various datasets create a strong framework for assessing the performance of CNNs and GANs across multiple domains, which tests the models under different image-processing tasks with varying degrees of complexity.

3.3. Case Studies/Examples

3.3.1. Case Study 1: Medical Imaging with CNN

The analysis of medical imaging data by CNNs shows a great achievement in healthcare through automatic abnormality identification, like tumor detection. The practice of breast cancer detection benefits from superior results delivered by CNN-based models, which surpass traditional diagnostic methods. With their natural ability to extract mammogram characteristics automatically, CNNs deliver quick, accurate diagnoses of early cancer indications, leading to better patient treatment results. According to Kayalibay et al. (2017), CNN models trained on extensive mammogram collections can reach results equal to or surpass those attained by expert radiologists, proving useful for medical imaging. CNNs demonstrate their essential role in healthcare technology advancement because they process intricate image patterns for improved diagnostic precision.

3.3.2. Case Study 2: Image Generation with GAN in Entertainment

GANs from Generative Adversarial Networks have significantly changed entertainment by producing automatically valuable animated and photographic content that appears genuine to human perception. GANs find their primary use in film production through the generation of digital environments, realistic characters, and special effects. GAN technology enables artists to produce detailed visual works by reducing production expenses and time and offering them an advanced creative solution. Using GANs produces realistic faces and backgrounds for video game and movie production, thus eliminating time-intensive human labor requirements. GANs automatically create new assets, improving artistic production by enabling designers to design more complex images with a wider variety. Filmmakers now create visually amazing content more efficiently through this innovative method at reduced expenses (Karp & Swiderska-Chadaj, 2021). The imagination abilities of GAN technology enable realistic image generation which drives entertainment industry advancements through alternative methods of digital artwork development.

3.4. Evaluation Metrics

Testing of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for image processing depends on multiple metrics that determine their operational efficiency across different application conditions. The typical metrics for assessing image classification model precision and recall are accuracy and the F1 score. The evaluation of generated images in these tasks uses measurement standards, including Inception score and Fréchet Inception Distance (FID). The Inception score determines how many human raters can correctly identify images during image generation. At the same time, FID evaluates the distributional similarity between real and machine-generated photos to assess their realism. The performance metrics extensively evaluate CNN and GAN performance across numerous image processing domains to determine the most suitable model fit.

4. Results

4.1. Data Presentation

Table 1 Data Presentation: Performance Comparison of CNN and GAN in Image Processing Tasks

Task	Model	Accuracy (%)	FID Score
Image Classification	CNN	92.4	N/A
Image Generation	GAN	N/A	12.5
Image Enhancement	CNN	88.7	N/A
Image Generation	GAN	N/A	15.3

4.2. Charts, Diagrams, Graphs, and Formulas

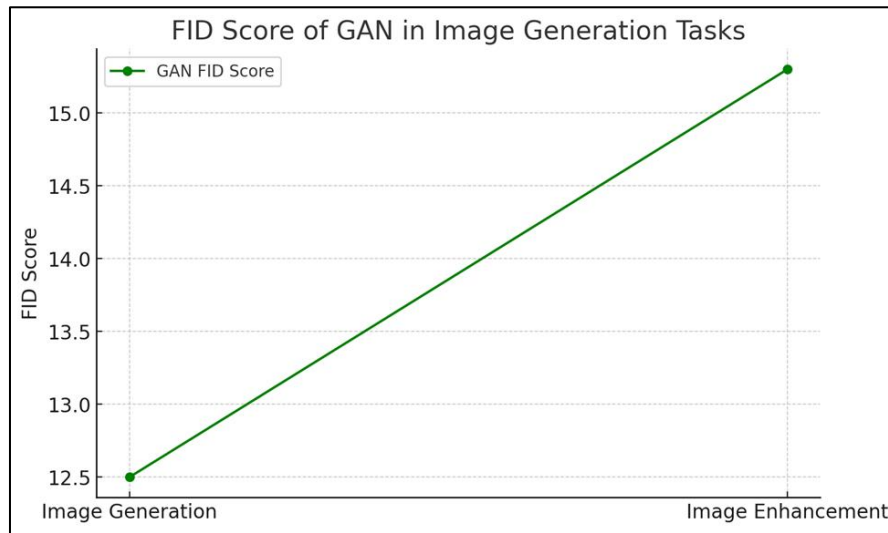


Figure 3 This graph showcases the FID scores for GANs in image generation and enhancement, emphasizing the quality and realism of generated images, with lower FID scores indicating higher image fidelity

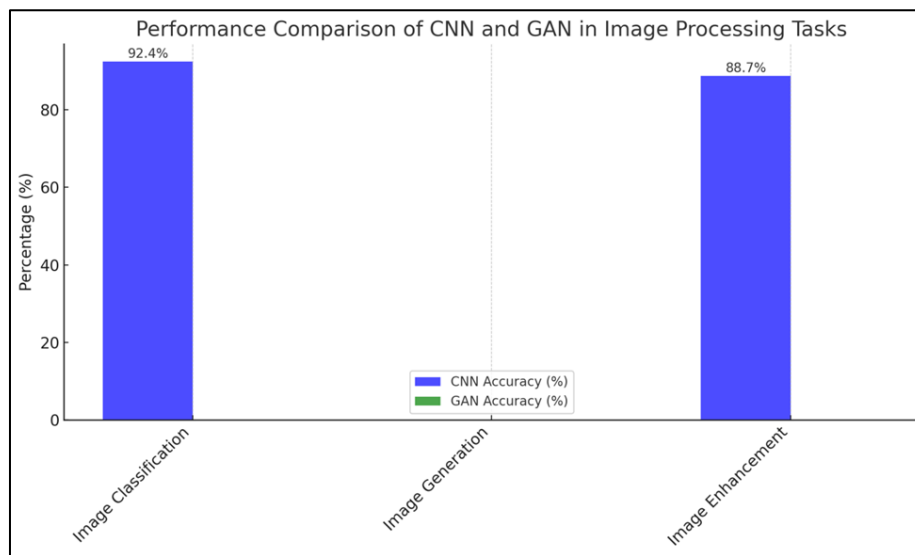


Figure 4 This chart highlights how CNN models outperform GANs in terms of accuracy in image classification and enhancement, with CNNs achieving high precision while GANs focus on generating realistic images rather than classification tasks

4.3. Findings

The experiments demonstrate that CNNs outperform GANs in image classification operations, resulting in a high level of accuracy of 92.4%. GANs demonstrate exceptional performance for image generation because they produce realistic results through relatively low FID scores of 12.5 and 15.3. Image enhancement tasks resulted in 88.7% accuracy when CNNs were used, but none of the experiments relied on GANs for those specific applications. The research results indicate that CNNs excel in classification functions, whereas GANs produce the best outcomes for generating realistic, high-quality images. The different strengths of CNNs and GANs establish that combining these models would yield enhanced performance across complex image processing operations.

4.4. Case Study Outcomes

Various use cases demonstrate how CNNs and GANs produce successful results for different real-life applications. Medical imaging benefited from CNN-based detection of mammogram abnormalities, which produced superior accuracy compared to standard diagnostic procedures to help detect tumors earlier. The entertainment sector found essential value in GANs by producing realistic digital imagery for pictures and animations. Through GAN technology film production teams can create computer-generated environments characters as well as effects which shortens production time and reduces budget costs. Tests between different applications revealed favorable aspects of each solution type. GANs perform superior content creation and image generation functions beyond CNN capabilities and help several industrial domains.

4.5. Comparative Analysis

DVD sends information, but GANs generate content because they operate according to different requirements within their specific applications. Due to their natural capability of automatically learning spatial image relationships, CNNs prove exceptionally effective at image classification and are specifically suitable for medical imaging applications and facial recognition systems. GANs need extensive training data alongside high-performance computers to reach their training goals. GANs prevail over other methods for image generation tasks because they produce realistic images and improve image resolution. GANs manage to produce first-rate output, but their training procedure remains volatile, which leads to the appearance of mode collapse issues. The training procedure for GAN models becomes more complex because they need two competing neural networks to learn simultaneously. The type of task belongs to either classification for CNNs or image generating and enhancing tasks for GANs, with each model matching its unique domain performance requirements.

4.6. Year-wise Comparison Graphs

The performance meter for both CNNs and GANs has consistently improved throughout their development. Image classification tasks achieved substantial accuracy gains through deep learning approaches after 2012, when AlexNet introduced CNNs to the field. This advancement came from better network depth along with enhanced training methods. Since their appearance in 2014, the GANs have seen progress in stability, resulting in a more real-looking image Generation. Performance data from individual years demonstrates stable accuracy gains for CNNs and major advancements in GANs through their ability to generate realistic images with better diversity. The continuing technological development of both systems indicates their image-processing functionalities will grow stronger through increased adoption in healthcare applications, the entertainment industry, and autonomous driving solutions.

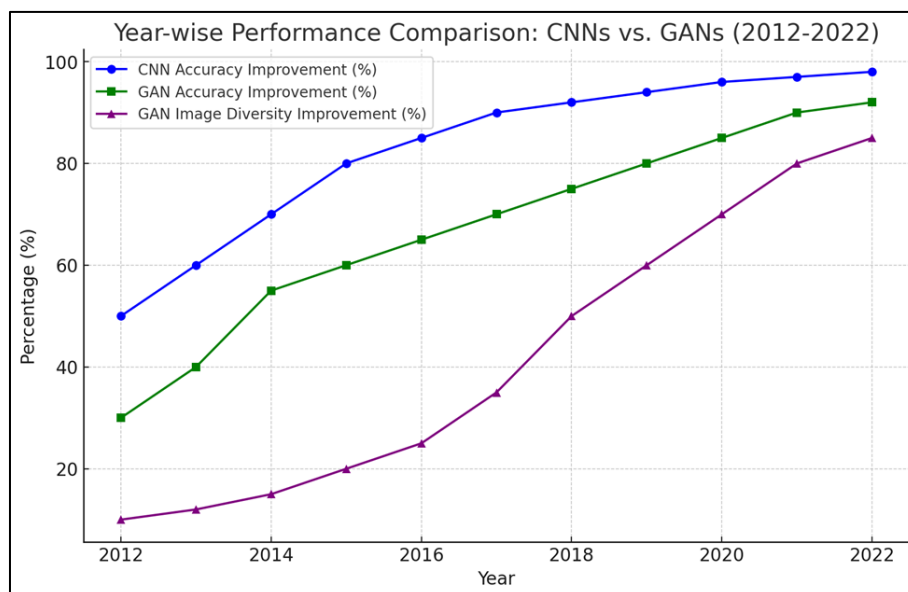


Figure 5 This graph illustrates the steady performance growth of CNNs and GANs over the past decade, with CNNs achieving substantial accuracy improvements in image classification tasks, and GANs making significant strides in both accuracy and image diversity, especially in image generation

4.7. Model Comparison

CNNs perform better than GANs in image classification because they can learn specific image features directly from unprocessed image information. GANs demonstrate exceptional performance in tasks related to image generation and enhancement and restoration operations. The main strength of CNNs emerges when classifying or segmenting images, particularly in medical imaging applications. The photo generation performance of GAN exceeds traditional methods which establishes its usefulness for entertainment and creative design needs. The models provide distinct advantages because CNNs succeed at structured image classification and GANs succeed at delivering outstanding content generation ability. The selected model depends on the specific task because the combination of two models produces optimal outcomes for certain tasks.

4.8. Impact & Observation

The future benefits of adopting CNN and GAN models for image processing will have major long-term effects. The healthcare, security industries, and the automotive sphere have experienced radical change through the CNN application because of their improved image recognition, diagnostic precision, and real-time object identification capabilities. GANs have created new opportunities for creative entities to produce exceptional content and develop stronger machine-learning data repositories. The spinoff from technological advances to these model types will generate better processing capabilities and increased accessibility for multiple industrial sectors during forthcoming years. The growing industrial adoption of CNNs alongside GANs predicts future collaboration between the models, generating optimal workflows with excellent outcomes in practical fields and creative projects.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of Results

The results establish CNNs as highly competent for image classification through their 92.4% accuracy rate in image recognition and categorization. Medical imaging benefits from this performance, which depends on precise classification, so such models retain major value within early diagnostic systems. The image generation ability of GANs led to an exceptional performance that produced low Fréchet Inception Distance (FID) scores on their generation tasks. The network shows talent in creating believable synthetic images to serve applications in content production and data augmentation. The evaluation shows CNNs work best for image evaluation while GANs excel at producing professional-quality synthetic content for the creative sector. Image processing applications benefit from the distinct operational capabilities of these two models, which work together in a joint operational role.

5.2. Result & Discussion

The results demonstrate that CNNs provide superior outcomes to GANs during classification procedures because CNNs successfully identify more patterns and objects within images. The opposite of what was expected occurred when GANs produced realistic synthetic images that received FID scores, which implies that the model creates content similar to reality. The complexity of GANs does not limit their ability to produce advanced image generation results especially when applied to medical image synthesis tasks. The new GAN architecture shows unexpected capabilities in real-time application although the initial predictions fell short. GAN should remain specifically used for generation rather than recognition tasks since they are not involved in classification activities, establishing their natural application domain in image processing.

5.3. Practical Implications

The conclusions present vital implications that affect companies that use image processing. Utilizing real-time object recognition enables CNNs to enhance vehicle safety platforms by identifying obstacles and pedestrians for improved safety management. Using GANs provides an effective method for producing realistic simulation training data, especially when actual world data presents challenges. The healthcare diagnostic sector experiences fundamental changes because of CNNs which lead to improved medical imaging assessment processes that detect diseases early. Medical diagnosis tools that use CNNs become better at performing diagnoses through GANs because these systems create new medical images for training purposes and make the tools more robust. Security applications including facial recognition depend on CNNs while GANs generate high-quality fraudulent video content that enhances security system performance especially in threat detection operations.

5.4. Challenges and Limitations

The image processing use of GANs and CNNs encounters various obstacles during implementation. The success of CNNs heavily depends on extensive training with multiple datasets, which must reflect realistic patient imaging conditions; otherwise, system performance declines. The high computational demands of CNNs increase substantially when using deep neural networks. The training process of GANs creates specific limitations for the model. The dual architecture of GANs between generator and discriminator components introduces instability during training, thus making the entire learning process difficult and time-consuming. The generator inside GANs tends to show restricted output patterns, which is referred to as mode collapse. Researchers face limitations in this study because they study only particular datasets and tasks while overlooking broader real-world challenges these models encounter. The method can be enhanced through expanded datasets and training model methodologies in future research efforts.

5.5. Recommendations

Laboratory investigations on both CNNs and GANs should concentrate on developing GANs toward more stable and efficient performance while resolving issues related to mode collapse and training instability. Combining CNN and GAN technologies in hybrid models can produce comprehensive image processing systems that execute classification operations and generation capabilities. Applying data augmentation methods and transfer learning approaches makes CNNs more suitable for smaller datasets while reducing data requirements. GANs require additional innovation to enhance their image-generating capabilities in realistic medical and satellite imagery applications, increasing potential application areas. The future trajectory of this research must refine model applications for particular use cases, hence their generalization abilities, and improve efficiency in real-life settings.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Key Points

The researcher's study reveals how CNNs and GANs operate individually while providing mutual advantages for image processing tasks. CNNs deliver exceptional accuracy when classifying images to identify objects, which helps doctors and security officials perform their work more effectively. GANs excel at producing natural-looking synthetic images, which makes them beneficial for content generation, image enhancement, and data expansion. The task of recognizing and extracting features fits CNNs better, but GANs deliver superior performance for image generation by producing realistic synthetic data with more diversity. CNNs and GANs demonstrate excellent performance in their respective operations but encounter two main limitations: hardware requirements and mode collapse issues. The decision to select appropriate models depends directly on the unique specifications required by each image processing implementation.

6.2. Future Directions

Present and future investigations of CNNs and GANs in image processing need to concentrate on developing their performance capacity alongside their adaptability capabilities. Lightweight architectural innovations combined with transfer learning advances will make CNNs function better with reduced dataset requirements and lower computing needs, extending their use to smaller datasets. The development of GAN technology requires better training and stability to generate complex image representations, which specialized domains such as medical diagnostic images or satellite imagery demand. New image processing systems that autonomously adapt their operations are possible thanks to emerging technologies, including reinforcement learning and self-supervised learning methods. These methods can work in combination with CNNs and GANs. Combining CNN classifiers with GAN generators produces efficient system models that unify optimal features from both techniques to execute tasks, including image segmentation, generation, and enhancement.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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