

On using Support Vector Machines for the Detection and Quantification of Hand Eczema

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Abstract: Hand eczema is one of the most frequent skin diseases affecting up to 14% of the population. Early detection and continuous observation of eczemas allows for efficient treatment and can therefore relieve symptoms. However, purely manual skin control is tedious and often error prone. Thus, an automatic approach that can assist the dermatologist with his work is desirable. Together with our industry partner swiss4ward, we devised an image processing method for hand eczema segmentation based on support vector machines and conducted several experiments with different feature sets. Our implementation is planned to be integrated into a clinical information system for operational use at the University Hospital Zurich. Instead of focusing on a high accuracy like most existing state-of-the-art approaches, we selected F_1 score as our primary measure. This decision had several implications regarding the design of our segmentation method, since all popular implementations of support vector machines aim for optimizing accuracy. Finally, we evaluated our system and achieved an F_1 score of 58.6% for front sides of hands and 43.8% for back sides, which outperforms several state-of-the-art methods that were tested on our gold standard data set as well.

1 INTRODUCTION

Hand eczema is one of the most frequent dermatoses, affecting up to 14% of the population, and more than 20% have moderate-to-severe disease requiring intensive treatment (Hald et al., 2008). It can occur in all ages, commonly follows a chronic course and persists 10-15 years after onset (Meding et al., 2005). Hand eczema manifests by redness of the skin, scaling, fissures, pain, itching, papules and blisters, as well as clear discharge and sometimes bacterial infection with subsequent pustules. Although the area it usually affects is small, it still can have grave consequences for the patient, leading to impairment or disability to work in many professions. Hand eczema ranks among the most prevalent occupational diseases (Diepgen, 2003) and can be caused by e.g. exposure to contact allergens and irritants (Hald et al., 2008). Costs caused by such occupational contact diseases (OCD) consist of direct medical costs and indirect costs associated with lost workdays and loss of productivity. Data on the economic impact of OCD reveals that in the US alone, annual direct costs for physicians, clinic services and prescription drugs were as high as USD 1.6 billion, with indirect costs of ap-

proximately USD 566 million for lost productivity (Meding et al., 2005). In Europe, OCD constitute up to 30% of all occupational diseases, for which compensation is payable with an average incidence rate of 0.5 to 1.9 cases per 1000 full-time workers per year (Diepgen, 2003). Since these figures originate from registries, they may even underestimate the actual number of cases as registries are known to be incomplete due to under-diagnosis and under-reporting of diseases (Diepgen, 2003). British studies reported an estimate of approximately 4 million working days to be lost every year resulting from work related skin diseases. The costs for these lost days were estimated to be approximately GBP 200 million per year (English, 2016).

If hand eczema cannot be prevented, e.g., by changing profession, early detection of exacerbation is key to an effective treatment (Diepgen, 2003). Moisturizers and gloves are often used as secondary prevention to avoid relapses. However, these have weak adherence rates by affected patients. More severe cases require the application of topical steroids or other drugs for a few days to reduce disease activity. In this process, dermatitis patients rely on their own perception whether their skin condition is sta-

ble or worsening and therefore they often miss the point in time when early treatment of a relapse would be efficacious to prevent full-edged eczema. Active drugs against eczema cannot be used indefinitely due to costs and side-effects such as skin thinning, tendency to bruising, local suppression of the immune system resulting in danger of cancer and infection, as well as systemic side effects.

Eczema of the hand is a well-defined disease that can be driven by allergic and toxic-irritative effects on the skin, most often by both. The ability to measure eczema severity in a reproducible manner is crucial for management of treatment. Hence, much effort has gone into creating and validating scores for eczema (Johansen et al., 2011). Once physicians are trained to use scores, studies have shown good agreement in the assessment of the overall extent of eczema. However, these scores need to take into account the many clinical subtypes, namely chronic dry fissured hand eczema, palmar hyperkeratotic hand eczema, vesicular hand eczema, nummular hand eczema and pulpitis (Johansen et al., 2011). Thus, grading of hand eczema currently still is a time-consuming manual process and in urgent need of improvement. As an example, the most widely used Hand Eczema Severity Index (HECSI) takes a dermatologist about 10 minutes to fill in. Considering this situation, establishing a (semi-) automatic way to objectively quantify eczematous skin changes to support diagnostic and therapeutic decisions by physicians as well as patients is of utmost importance.

Our ultimate project goal consists of an objective detection and quantification of hand eczema for automated computation of clinical scores, monitoring and documentation of the disease process. When brought to mobile devices, the same application further allows patients to react early on worsening disease states and physicians to use tele-dermatology on a novel level. In (Suter et al., 2014), we presented first results from a supervised statistical learning algorithm built on textons and nearest neighbor classification. In this paper, we show that Support Vector Machines (SVMs) using a revised and extended feature set and preceding complex data cleaning yields superior results in comparison to our previous work and the current literature.

2 LITERATURE

The following literature review is limited to approaches that either segment eczema affected skin regions from healthy skin or categorize skin diseases into several classes including eczema. (Nisar et al., 2013) determine eczema affected areas by clustering

the image with features from different color models. Besides the analysis of color distributions, the use of texture recognition methods has proven very useful. (Mittra and Parekh, 2011) introduce an approach for image categorization that detects several skin diseases by means of gray level co-occurrence matrices over specific image areas, whose entries are taken as texture features. (Malik et al., 2001) describe a system for segmenting image regions by contour and texture properties built on filter responses. (Cula et al., 2004) extend this approach using a series of special lighting conditions to derive a so-called *bidirectional feature histogram*. They have applied this technique to detect psoriasis, carcinoma, cases of urticarial vasculitis and other skin defects. (Varma and Zisserman, 2005) claim superior results in texture classification using a texture method from single images using rotationally invariant filters. In this method, a texture is represented by a histogram of *textons*, and a *texton* is represented by the centroid of a cluster of filter bank responses over all pixels of the current input image patch. Based on this approach we derived a classifier for eczema quantification based on textons (Suter et al., 2014). (Varma and Zisserman, 2009) modified their previous approach for material classification from 2005 to use pixel neighborhood patches instead of filters. They conclude that this can outperform filter bank based classification. Another statistical approach presented by (Sparavigna and Marazato, 2010) quantitatively evaluates color and coarseness differences in skin. Using a concept called *coherence length*, they can detect skin defects and also compare changes over time. In addition to image features, (Yasir et al., 2014) incorporate data from patients and medical investigations such as liquid type, liquid color, elevation, feeling, sex and age.

In several approaches, image filters are applied prior to classification or segmentation or as a post processing step to refine the results. (Amarathunga et al., 2015) increase the contrast of the image and additionally employ a median and Gauss filter to reduce the effect of noise or small hairs. After all feature values are determined, they are typically combined by a supervised machine learning approach to a single outcome. (Yasir et al., 2014) as well as (Abdul-Rahman et al., 2012) use an artificial neural network for classification. (Amarathunga et al., 2015) tested several different machine learning approaches, in particular AdaBoost, Bayes Networks, decision trees, multilayer perceptrons and Naive Bayes, where multilayered perceptrons performed best in their study. (Nisar et al., 2013) employ an unsupervised approach (i.e. k-means clustering) for lesion segmentation. The *texton*-based eczema recognition approach

(Suter et al., 2014) exploits nearest neighbor search to determine the feature vector (and its associated class label) most correlated to the input feature vector measured in terms of chi-square. (van der Maaten and Postma, 2007) describe several generally usable advanced texture recognition approaches, which are presumably useful for eczema recognition, in particular frequency histograms, complex wavelet transform, spin images and polar Fourier features. Finally, (Liu and Fieguth, 2012) employed random projections of the high dimensional texture patch vectors with the goal to compress data without losing the ability to distinguish between texture classes.

The reported evaluation results of the individual approaches are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Reported evaluation results for eczema categorization (C) and segmentation (S).

Method	Measure	Goal	Value
(Mittra and Parekh, 2011)	Accuracy	C	96.6%
(Yasir et al., 2014)	Success Rate	C	88.0%
(Amarathunga et al., 2015)	Accuracy	C	85.0%
(Suter et al., 2014)	Accuracy	S	78.0%
(Nisar et al., 2013)	Accuracy	S	76.6%

3 TRAINING DATA

In our previous work, we had access to photographs of hands showing eczema patches of different size and degrees of severity labeled by a single dermatologist who created an overlay bit-mask for every image to point out eczema regions, see Figure 1. Training and evaluation was done on a per-pixel basis, being fully aware that manual labeling can never be done with such precision. In fact, some issues with data quality, such as labeled areas beyond the edges of hands, could be sorted out algorithmically, and some machine learning algorithms are known to cope with a certain degree of noise in training data. However, retrospectively this issue was largely underestimated.

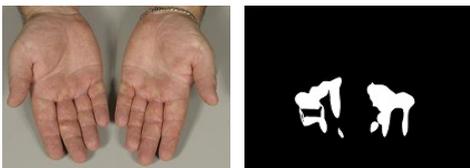


Figure 1: Image with eczema overlay mask.

In daily routine, dermatologists use to focus on the most expressive and thus clinically relevant eczema

patches. Not surprisingly, small patches were therefore considered clinically relevant on some images but not on others, and false positive diagnoses of classifiers were later assessed to correctly show eczema patches that, in comparison to other areas on the same image, were just not expressive enough for the labeling dermatologist. This made statistical evaluation of classifiers nearly impossible. In order to weaken this human bias in our data, we strived for obtaining labeled images that represent a consensus diagnosis among a group of experts. For this purpose we developed an online platform, where each invited dermatologist was asked to label a random sample of images from our corpus, and derived a consensus diagnosis per image through majority voting, see Figure 2.

Table 2: Performance of baseline classifiers on front-side hand images; area error is reported in percentage points.

Classifier	Accuracy (%)	Recall (%)	Precision (%)	Specificity (%)	F ₁ score (%)	Area error (pp)
Coin Flip	50.00	49.99	12.73	50.00	20.30	37.26
Majority Class	87.26	0.00	n/a	100.00	n/a	12.74
Minority Class	12.74	100.00	12.74	0.00	22.60	87.26

Table 3: Performance of baseline classifiers on back side hand images; area error is reported in percentage points.

Classifier	Accuracy (%)	Recall (%)	Precision (%)	Specificity (%)	F ₁ score (%)	Area error (pp)
Coin Flip	49.99	49.99	7.07	49.99	12.39	42.94
Majority Class	92.93	0.00	n/a	100.00	n/a	7.07
Minority Class	7.07	100.00	7.07	0.00	13.21	92.93

A second important observation regarding training and evaluation data concerns the intrinsic class imbalance of eczema detection. Our available data exposes an average ratio of 1:8 on front side and 1:15 on back side hand images between eczema and healthy skin pixels. As shows in Tables 2 and 3, a trivial classifier that always outputs the majority class label (i.e. healthy skin) would reach an accuracy of 87% or 93%, respectively. Classifier optimization and evaluation based on accuracy (and similar measures) as reported by the competing approaches in the literature (see Table 1) is therefore not an option. Instead, we subsequently report F₁ score measurements for clas-



Figure 2: Consolidated diagnosis of at least 30%, 50%, 70% and 99% of the involved experts.

sifiers (see Section 5). High recall is reached when most, ideally all, eczema pixels are correctly predicted; high precision, on the other hand, is reached when most, ideally all, healthy skin pixels are correctly predicted. The F_1 score as the harmonic mean between recall and precision takes these two often contradictory goals into account.

4 METHODS

A Support Vector Machine (SVM) is used for classification with a variety of different input features. The features are described in this section followed by the different combinations employed in our experiments.

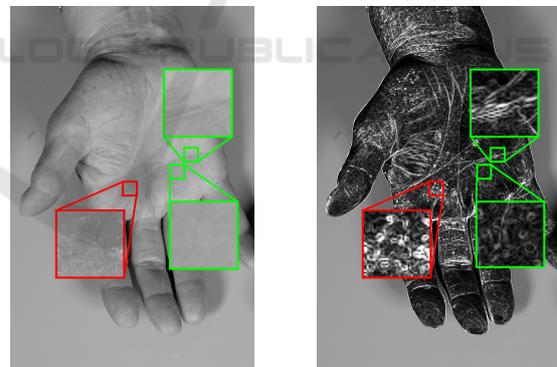
In contrast to the state-of-the-art eczema detection and segmentation methods, we strive to reach a high F_1 score and not necessarily the best possible accuracy. Optimizing for F_1 score presents a challenge, since almost all SVM implementations target accuracy. One of the rare systems actually able to optimize for the F_1 score, SVMPerf (Joachims, 2005) performed very slowly on our dataset and therefore had to be ruled out. Instead, we opted to use the (accuracy optimizing) SVM implementation LIBSVM (Chang and Lin, 2011) and boosted the F_1 score by the following measures:

- We oversampled our training data and removed Tomek links, see Section 4.2. Oversampling normally improves the F_1 -Score obtained for imbalanced data sets for the following reason: Since the SVM model reflects the distribution of the data, the majority class will usually be predicted more often by the SVM than the minority class. However, the F_1 -Score usually focuses on the minority class (this is also the case in our scenario). So the precision will be quite high but the recall poor. Strongly deviating precision and recall values result in a low F_1 -Score (harmonic mean of precision and recall). By oversampling the values in the minority class, the values of recall and precision draw closer together and therefore the F_1 -Score increases (see also (Liu, 2004)).
- False positives and false negatives were weighted

differently inside the quadratic optimization process conducted by the SVM. For determining the optimal weights, we applied a grid search to the training set and chose the combination of weights and regularization parameters that led to the highest F_1 score on a held out set, see Section 4.3.

4.1 Features

We masked out the image background and calculated all features from pixels showing skin only. To calculate the features, a pixel's neighborhood of 41×41 pixels is considered. Figure 3 highlights some differences between textures of eczematous and healthy skin; the red square shows an eczematous region, the green squares two healthy regions (the lower shows smooth skin, the upper skin with hand lines, respectively), and their magnification.



(a) Grayscale image.

(b) Gradient magnitude from grayscale image (Sobel operator).

Figure 3: Difference between eczematous and healthy skin.

4.1.1 Filters and Textons

Filter sets have a long history in image processing and were inspired by models of processing in the early stages of the primate visual system. Often they are modeled using radially symmetric and odd- and even-symmetric filters at different resolution (Malik et al., 2001). In (Varma and Zisserman, 2005) a set of 38

filters is used, which are combined into 8 filter responses (MR8) by calculating the maximum across multiple orientations. The filters include a Gaussian, a Laplacian of a Gaussian and first and second derivative filters at six orientations and three scales. More recently (Mellor et al., 2008) uses combinations of filters to achieve more invariance with respect to contrast, rotation and scale. While filter responses contain a rich detail of the pixel neighborhood, they might not be a very efficient representation of the relevant features of a class. Therefore, they are often aggregated from all the responses of a single class and clustered. The resulting cluster centers called textons form a dictionary. In this work, the MR8 filter set is used together with other features, see Section 4.1.4.

4.1.2 Gray Level Co-occurrence Matrix

Another popular approach to capture the texture properties of a patch is the *gray level co-occurrence matrix (GLCM)* introduced by (Haralick et al., 1973). The GLCM measures how often a specific combination of a pixel value and the value of a neighboring pixel in a specific direction occurs in the patch. All channels of all color spaces take values between 0 and 255, thus resulting in GLCMs of dimension 256×256 . The matrix can be calculated using different spacings to the neighboring pixel, often called *stride*, and in different directions. For this work, we use a stride of one and average over the 4 principle directions to yield a rotational invariant description. Moreover, we calculate the GLCMs once on the grayscale images, once on the CIE Lab L* channel, as suggested by (Gebejes and Huertas, 2013), and once on the magnitude of the gradient of the grayscale images to accentuate certain eczema structures like fissures. Following (Haralick et al., 1973) and (Gebejes and Huertas, 2013), we calculate several features from the GLCM, namely entropy, energy, homogeneity, contrast and dissimilarity, see Equations (1). $p(i, j) \in \mathbb{R}$ denotes the $(i, j)^{\text{th}}$ component in the GLCM.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Entropy} &= -\sum_{i,j} p(i, j) \log p(i, j) \\
 \text{Energy} &= \sum_{i,j} p(i, j)^2 \\
 \text{Homogeneity} &= \sum_{i,j} \frac{p(i, j)}{1+|i-j|} \\
 \text{Contrast} &= \sum_{i,j} (i-j)^2 p(i, j) \\
 \text{Dissimilarity} &= \sum_{i,j} |i-j| p(i, j)
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

According to (Gebejes and Huertas, 2013), these features are connected to each other; they emphasize the following aspects:

- **Entropy** aims to capture spatial disorder. Random distributions would gain high entropy,

whereas solid tone images result in zero entropy.

- **Energy** is a measure of local homogeneity, thus constituting the opposite of entropy. More homogeneous images correspond to high energy, constant images expose an energy of 1.
- **Homogeneity** measures the uniformity of the non-zero entries and is equal to 1 when the image exposes no variation.
- **Contrast** captures the variation in the GLCM. If neighboring pixels are similar in their value, contrast is low. Constant images correspond to a contrast of zero.
- **Dissimilarity** measures variation of gray level pairs, similarly to contrast, but contrast grows quadratically. Constant images expose a dissimilarity of zero.

4.1.3 Color

Images tend to be available in the RGB color space. However, this space is not optimal for image processing as the channels are highly correlated, are psychologically non-intuitive and non-uniform in respect to the perceived differences between colors. As the training data is labeled by experts who might rely on color differences, this cannot be neglected. Our calculation are performed in the CIE Lab color space, which has the advantage of being an absolute color space that uses perceptual uniformity. Additionally we use the HSI (Hue, Saturation, Intensity) color space for a more intuitive description of color and better separation of the color tone values as for example *redness* might be an influential property for distinguishing eczema.

For the detection of eczema it seem to be a valid hypothesis that color provides additional information, and thus several texture properties should be calculated using color. In order to describe the neighborhood of a pixel, we calculate several color moments (Stricker and Orengo, 1995), namely the mean, the empirical standard deviation, the skewness and the kurtosis on each channel of the RGB, the CIE Lab and the HSI color spaces, see Equations (2). $p(j) \in \mathbb{R}$ denotes the color channel value of the j^{th} pixel in the considered neighborhood of $N \in \mathbb{N}$ pixels.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Mean } (\mu) &= \frac{1}{N} \sum_{j=1}^N p(j) \\
 \text{Standard Dev.} &= \sqrt{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{j=1}^N (p(j) - \mu)^2} \\
 \text{Skewness} &= \sqrt[3]{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{j=1}^N (p(j) - \mu)^3} \\
 \text{Kurtosis} &= \sqrt[4]{\frac{1}{N} \sum_{j=1}^N (p(j) - \mu)^4}
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Table 4: Correlation coefficients of selected features with class label.

Feature	PCC
GLCM grayscale dissimilarity	0.30
GLCM grayscale+Sobel entropy	0.29
CM CIELab std. dev.	0.24
CM RGB kurtosis	0.21
MR8 T40 texton #9	0.18
MR8 T40 texton #17	-0.14
CM HSI mean	-0.18
GLCM Sobel homogeneity	-0.27

4.1.4 Feature Combinations

We conduct several experiments with different feature sets, of which the most interesting results were obtained by the following settings:

- **T40:** Histograms of 40 textons calculated from the filter responses of the MR8 filter bank. No color moments or GLCMs are used.
- **CM1/GLCM1:** Color moments in RGB space and GLCM on grayscale image.
- **T40/CM1/GLCM2:** 40 textons, color moments on CIE Lab space, GLCM on CIE Lab L* channel, GLCM on grayscale images with Sobel operator.
- **T40/CM3/GLCM3:** Like T40/CM1/GLCM2 but with additional color moments on RGB and HSI space, and an additional GLCM calculated on the grayscale image.
- **T40/CM3/GLCM3/TL/S:** T40/CM3/GLCM3 with the removal of Tomek links with subsequent oversampling via SMOTE (see Section 4.2).
- **CM3/GLCM3/TL/S:** T40/CM3/GLCM3/TL/S but without the texton features.

We calculate the *Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PCC)* for all features with respect to the corresponding class for each example and found that features from the GLCMs show the highest $|PCC|$, followed by the color moments, followed by the texton histogram features. A high PCC magnitude indicates (linearly) discriminating features. Table 4 shows a selection of features from one image with their PCC value.

4.2 Data Preprocessing

Since the available data is imbalanced, in our most successful experiments, the minority (i.e. positive)

class is oversampled by applying the *Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMOTE)* algorithm developed in (Chawla et al., 2002). For each example of the positive class, SMOTE determines its K nearest positive neighbors with respect to the Euclidean distance. Then, one of those neighbors is selected randomly, and a new data instance is created at a randomly chosen position on the line segment between the original data example and the selected neighbor. We set $K = 5$ and repeatedly apply SMOTE until the minority are majority classes are of similar size.

There are some potential issues when applying SMOTE, e.g., its application might amplify existing problems such as outliers or noise, and it assumes the neighborhood of a positive example is also positive (Batuwita and Palade, 2013; Wu and Chang, 2003). One strategy to mitigate these issues is the application of data cleaning techniques such as the removal of *Tomek links*. Given two examples E_i and E_j belonging to different classes with distance $d(E_i, E_j)$ between E_i and E_j : A pair (E_i, E_j) is called a Tomek link if there is not an example E_l , such that $d(E_i, E_l) < d(E_i, E_j)$ or $d(E_j, E_l) < d(E_i, E_j)$ (Batista et al., 2004)¹. We search the data examples for Tomek links and remove their negative class example only to not further diminish the positive class examples. This is repeated until no further Tomek links exist.

For the features x barely correlated to the class ($|PCC| < 0.1$), we calculate a number of transformations like \sqrt{x} or $\ln|x|$. If the $|PCC|$ of the transformed feature is increased, we provide the transformed feature instead of the original to the SVM.

Due to runtime considerations, a subset of up to 1 % (about 10^4 examples) is sampled in a randomized, stratified fashion from the available training data and used to train the SVM.

4.3 Evaluation

The available image material consists of a total of 48 hand photographs of a size of 1-2 megapixels, of which 24 show front sides, and the other 24 show back sides of hands. For each photography, there are between 1 and 11 associated expert labels which are consolidated to the final label, the experts' consensus diagnoses. The hands are separated from the background and only pixels displaying skin are used as data examples. We evaluate our approach for images of front and back sides separately. This accounts for the presumed differences in the skin's structure (e.g. wrinkles) as well as in specific skin features (e.g. hair density) between the front and back sides of hands,

¹Please note that in the literature there exist several non-equivalent definitions of Tomek links.

as previous work suggests (Suter et al., 2014). Since our corpus is comparatively small, we evaluate using a 9-fold cross-validation. From the 24 images, those 6 with the least number of expert’s labels are held out to serve as test set for the SVM’s hyperparameter search for each fold, leaving 18 images, of which for each fold 2 are evaluated. A single confusion matrix is calculated on all folds’ results. From this matrix, we report accuracy, precision, recall, the F_1 score and an absolute area error, see Equations (3) (T/F = true/false, P/N = positives/negatives). The area error is reported because it is a contributing factor for the HECSI score as mentioned in Section 1.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Accuracy} &= \frac{TP+TN}{TP+FN+TN+FP} \\
 \text{Precision} &= \frac{TP}{TP+FP} \\
 \text{Recall} &= \frac{TP}{TP+FN} \\
 \text{Specificity} &= \frac{TN}{TN+FP} \\
 F_1 \text{ Score} &= 2 \cdot \frac{\text{Precision} \cdot \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}} \\
 \text{Area Error} &= \left| \frac{(TP+FN)-(TP+FP)}{TP+FN+TN+FP} \right|
 \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

For all our experiments, we utilize the LIBSVM implementation (Chang and Lin, 2011) of an SVM, together with the Gaussian radial based function (RBF) kernel and different error costs for the two classes (reflecting the ratio of the number of negative to positive training examples as proposed by (Ben-Hur and Weston, 2010)). For each fold, we conduct a grid search over the SVM’s hyperparameters C (the weight of the optimization objective’s regularization term, i.e. the misclassification cost) and γ (the free parameter of the RBF kernel, $\gamma = (2\sigma^2)^{-1}$), using the fold’s training examples to train the SVM and the held out examples to evaluate its performance. The SVM with the hyperparameters yielding the highest F_1 score is retained and the fold’s 2 unseen images are predicted.

5 RESULTS

In this section, we present the results of the experiments selected and described in Section 4.1.4. The keys to the visualizations are provided in Figure 4 indicating the colors and symbols used in the plots.

Figure 5 shows the best results obtained over all experiments for the front and back sides sets, respectively. Their individual F_1 scores reach a satisfactory level. This objective measurement corresponds to the intuitive impression conveyed by the images. From the visualization, it is obvious that the predicted



(a) Colors key.

(b) Experiments key.

Figure 4: Keys to visualizations in this section.

classes form connected regions, and not e.g. scattered pixels all across the image. We conclude that the features chosen capture the differences between eczematous and healthy skin quite well.



(a) Best front side image with $F_1 = 91.97\%$.



(b) Best back side image with $F_1 = 86.75\%$.

Figure 5: Results with highest F_1 score of all experiments.

Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the experiments for front and back sides of hands, respectively. All experiments clearly outperform the baseline classifiers introduced in Section 3 with respect to the F_1 score – not necessarily with respect to accuracy, area error or other metrics, which again puts emphasis on the

Table 5: Summary of experiments: front sides of hands.

Experiment	Accuracy (%)	Recall (%)	Precision (%)	Specificity (%)	F ₁ score (%)	Area error (pp)
T40	74.50	55.73	26.33	77.24	35.77	14.83
CM1/GLCM1	83.01	50.69	37.61	87.73	43.18	7.77
T40/CM1/GLCM2	86.33	48.00	46.46	91.92	47.22	8.15
T40/CM3/GLCM3	85.88	68.69	46.33	88.38	55.34	6.68
T40/CM3/GLCM3/TL/S	86.53	67.92	47.97	89.25	56.23	7.39
CM3/GLCM3/TL/S	89.29	59.54	57.69	93.63	58.60	4.60

Table 6: Summary of experiments: back sides of hands.

Experiment	Accuracy (%)	Recall (%)	Precision (%)	Specificity (%)	F ₁ score (%)	Area error (pp)
T40	80.71	52.49	18.90	82.86	27.80	13.31
CM1/GLCM1	77.39	55.90	16.86	79.02	25.91	18.04
T40/CM1/GLCM2	86.27	58.13	27.63	88.41	37.46	9.97
T40/CM3/GLCM3	88.20	65.14	33.04	89.95	43.84	8.38
T40/CM3/GLCM3/TL/S	86.22	71.43	30.06	87.35	42.32	10.55
CM3/GLCM3/TL/S	88.17	63.48	32.68	90.05	43.15	8.26

necessity to focus on metrics like the F₁ score when evaluating classification performance on imbalanced data.

The T40 experiment, conducted by utilizing texton frequencies as features for the SVM only, shows the worst results with respect to all measurements except recall on the front sides. The results are comparable to previous work (Suter et al., 2014) with a simpler classifier, which suggests that texton frequencies alone are not sufficient to provide satisfactory results for detecting hand eczema.

When enriching the texton features with color moments and features calculated from GLCMs, even when abstaining from using texton features at all, the classification performance improves considerably. Table 5 shows continuous improvements with respect to the F₁ score the more features are used, culminating in the best performance when additionally oversampling of the training examples and data cleaning is conducted. Clearly, improvements in precision allowed for improvements in the F₁ score as well. For the back sides of hands shown in Table 6, similar observations hold. However, here the final CM3/GLCM3/TL/S experiment lead to a slightly worse precision. This can

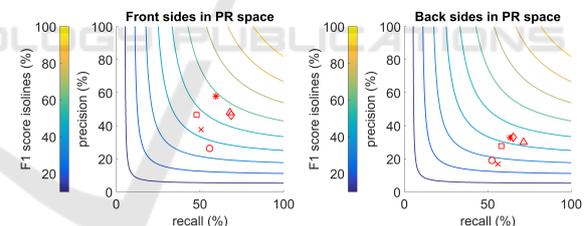
be caused by differences with respect to skin features (e.g. hair density), or the different ratio between eczema and healthy skin pixels as observed in Section 3. Further research will be necessary to definitively isolate this effect.

For a particular image, Figure 6 opposes the best result (experiment CM3/GLCM3/TL/S from Figure 5) to the worst (experiment T40). Observe in particular the big difference in precision. Moreover, Figure 6b provides several insights on difficulties for the classifier, e.g., fingernails are often detected as false positives, and wrinkles pose another challenge.

(a) F₁ = 86.75%.(b) F₁ = 65.56%.

Figure 6: Same image in different experiments.

In Figure 7, we plot the F₁ score of the discussed experiments for front and back sides separately into precision-recall (PR) space. The hyperbolic isolines of the F₁ score are plotted in steps of 10 percentage points to provide for a better intuition of the PR space. This emphasizes another challenge for almost all classifiers, which is to reach a satisfactory precision level.



(a) Front sides.

(b) Back sides.

Figure 7: F₁ score in PR space with a number of isolines.

In Figure 8, we display the area error reached by our classifier. The visualization consists of a box plot of each expert's absolute area error (or deviation) with respect to the consensus diagnoses. We suggest to interpret this box plot as the baseline that should be reached by the predictions of a trained classifier. The arithmetic mean is plotted as a blue dot and the area errors of the experiments are displayed in the same figure, right to the central axis the box plot is aligned on. Disregarding outliers, human experts seem to differ from the consensus diagnoses by about 0 to 10 percentage points. Our best classifier for the front side of hands performs as well as the median of the experts' labels, which is a very satisfactory result with respect to the area error metric. The best classifiers for the

back sides of hands do not reach the median, but at least would not be considered outliers (like the worst classifiers) compared to the box plot. Again, this indicates that eczema detection on the back sides of hands is more challenging than on the front sides.

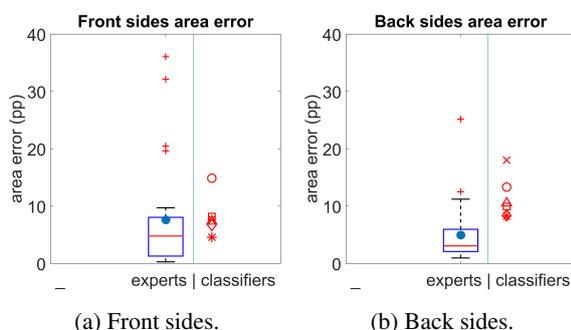


Figure 8: Area error as box plots.

For comparison, we have implemented the approach of (Varma and Zisserman, 2009) for eczema detection and obtained an accuracy of 81.2% for front and 86.63% for back sides of hands, while observing a surprisingly low F_1 score on our data set: 30.48% for front sides, 14.79% for back sides, respectively. In addition, we evaluated the unsupervised clustering-based segmentation of (Nisar et al., 2013), see Section 2. The highest F_1 score was achieved by clustering on the red channel of the RGB color space model (selecting adapt light compensate as preprocessing), i.e. F_1 score of 15.04% for front sides and 14.47% for back sides of hand.

6 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Our results demonstrate that a combination of different families of features enhanced with extensive data cleaning before being fed into a standard SVM classifier leads to superior results for distinguishing between healthy and eczematous skin as compared to several state-of-the-art techniques. We previously attempted (Suter et al., 2014) to integrate color with the MR8 features directly as suggested in (Varma and Zisserman, 2005), but were not able to reach a significant improvement compared to pure MR8 features without color information. We now show a much more successful integration of color features giving a major improvement over the previous results.

Results on the back side of the hand are currently not as good as on the front, presumably due to e.g. more hairs, other structures with finger nails and more prominent wrinkles on the joints. So, further challenges remain to still improve on the features or maybe use different learning strategies for different

parts of the hand.

One of the most crucial elements of any successful supervised learning approach is the quality of the input data. In our project, we have seen large differences between the labelling of the data from different dermatologists and have shown a way to mitigate this problem using a consensus diagnosis. Nonetheless, we aim to provide dermatologists with better tools for the labelling in order to get more homogeneous data.

Recently, deep learning has been very successful in image classification (Krizhevsky et al., 2012; Szegedy et al., 2015) and object detection (Szegedy et al., 2013; Ren et al., 2015). As Neural Networks aim to learn the complete image processing pipeline, the feature selection is done by the network, making it unnecessary to specify the feature combinations beforehand. We are going to investigate these approaches for eczema detection as well as some recent techniques that use neural networks either only for feature selection or only as a classifier.

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