International Research Journal on Innovative, Emerging and Future Engineering Trends

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A Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework for Robust Image Forgery Detection Using Lightweight Deep Learning Models

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***Abstract*——The rapid advancement of image editing technologies has significantly increased the difficulty of distinguishing authentic images from manipulated ones, posing serious challenges in digital forensics, social media, journalism, and legal investigations. Traditional image forgery detection techniques often rely on handcrafted features, which exhibit limited robustness against complex tampering operations such as copy-move, splicing, and post-processing manipulations. To address these limitations, this paper presents a hybrid deep feature fusion framework for image forgery detection using multiple lightweight deep learning models. The proposed approach employs fine-tuned lightweight architectures to extract complementary high-level representations from input images. These feature representations are integrated through a fusion strategy to capture both local texture inconsistencies and global semantic characteristics associated with forged regions. The fused feature vector is subsequently classified using a Support Vector Machine (SVM), enabling effective discrimination between authentic and tampered images while maintaining low computational complexity. The proposed framework is evaluated on benchmark image forgery datasets using standard performance metrics, including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. Experimental results demonstrate that the hybrid feature fusion strategy consistently outperforms individual lightweight models and conventional handcrafted feature-based methods by improving detection accuracy and classification reliability. Owing to its lightweight architecture and efficient feature representation, the proposed framework offers a practical solution for real-time image forgery detection in resource-constrained environments.**

Keywords—Image Forgery Detection, Deep Feature Fusion, Lightweight Deep Learning Models, Support Vector Machine, Digital Image Forensics, Image Tampering Detection.

Introduction

The widespread use of smartphones, digital cameras, and image editing software has transformed digital images into one of the primary sources of information exchange across social

media, journalism, healthcare, legal investigations, and surveillance systems. However, the availability of advanced image manipulation tools has also made it increasingly easier to alter digital images without leaving visually perceptible traces. Manipulated images are frequently employed to spread misinformation, fabricate evidence, and mislead public opinion, creating serious concerns regarding the authenticity and integrity of digital visual content. Consequently, the development of reliable and automated image forgery detection techniques has become an important research problem in the field of digital image forensics.

Image forgery generally involves modifying the visual content of an image while preserving its realistic appearance. Common forgery types include copy-move forgery, where a region is duplicated within the same image to conceal or replicate objects, and image splicing, where content from multiple images is combined to create a fabricated scene. Additional post-processing operations such as resizing, rotation, compression, filtering, and contrast enhancement further complicate the detection process by removing or concealing forensic artifacts. As a result, conventional visual inspection is insufficient for identifying sophisticated image manipulations.

Traditional image forgery detection methods primarily rely on handcrafted feature extraction techniques such as Scale-Invariant Feature Transform (SIFT), Speeded-Up Robust Features (SURF), Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT), Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and Local Binary Patterns (LBP). Although these methods have demonstrated reasonable performance under controlled conditions, their effectiveness decreases when images undergo complex transformations or multiple post-processing operations. Furthermore, handcrafted features often fail to capture the high-level semantic information required to distinguish authentic images from expertly manipulated ones.Recent advances in deep learning have significantly improved the capability of image forgery detection systems. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) automatically learn hierarchical feature representations directly from image data, eliminating the dependence on manually designed descriptors. Several lightweight deep learning models, including MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet, have attracted considerable attention because they achieve competitive performance while requiring substantially fewer computational resources than conventional deep neural networks. These characteristics make lightweight architectures suitable for real-time and resource-constrained forensic applications. Nevertheless, individual lightweight models generally focus on specific feature characteristics and may not capture all discriminative information necessary for robust forgery detection.

To overcome these limitations, this paper proposes a Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework for Robust Image Forgery Detection Using Lightweight Deep Learning Models. The proposed framework employs multiple lightweight deep learning models to extract complementary deep representations from input images. The extracted feature vectors are integrated through an effective feature fusion strategy to preserve both local texture inconsistencies and global semantic information associated with image manipulations. The fused feature representation is subsequently classified using a Support Vector Machine (SVM), which enhances the discrimination capability between authentic and forged images while maintaining low computational complexity. The proposed framework is designed to improve detection accuracy

without significantly increasing computational overhead, making it suitable for practical deployment in real-world applications.

The proposed approach is evaluated using benchmark image forgery datasets and compared with individual lightweight deep learning models as well as conventional handcrafted feature-based techniques. Experimental results demonstrate that the hybrid feature fusion strategy improves classification performance across multiple evaluation metrics, including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. The lightweight nature of the proposed framework further enables efficient execution on systems with limited computational resources.

The main contributions of this work are summarized as follows:

- A hybrid framework that integrates complementary deep features extracted from multiple lightweight deep learning models for image forgery detection.
- An effective feature fusion strategy that combines diverse feature representations to improve discriminative capability.
- An SVM-based classification model that enhances forgery detection performance while maintaining computational efficiency.
- A comprehensive experimental evaluation on benchmark image forgery datasets using standard performance metrics and comparative analysis with existing methods.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II reviews recent literature on image forgery detection techniques. Section III presents the proposed hybrid deep feature fusion framework. Section IV describes the experimental setup and implementation details. Section V discusses the experimental results and comparative analysis. Finally, Section VI concludes the paper and outlines directions for future research.

RELATED WORK

Image forgery detection has received significant attention in recent years due to the increasing availability of sophisticated image editing tools. Existing approaches can be broadly categorized into handcrafted feature-based methods, deep learning-based methods, and hybrid approaches that combine multiple feature extraction techniques.

Early image forgery detection methods primarily relied on handcrafted features to identify inconsistencies introduced during image manipulation. Techniques based on Scale-Invariant Feature Transform (SIFT), Speeded-Up Robust Features (SURF), Local Binary Patterns (LBP), Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT), and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) have been extensively employed for detecting copy-move and splicing forgeries. These methods exploit local texture descriptors, keypoint matching, or compression artifacts to identify manipulated regions. Although handcrafted approaches provide satisfactory performance for simple tampering operations, their detection capability deteriorates when images undergo geometric transformations, illumination variations, compression, or multiple post-processing operations.

The remarkable success of deep learning has significantly improved the performance of image forgery detection systems. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) automatically learn hierarchical representations from raw image data without requiring manually engineered features. Several pre-trained architectures, including VGGNet, ResNet, DenseNet, EfficientNet, MobileNet, and ShuffleNet, have demonstrated superior performance in learning discriminative visual representations for forgery detection. Transfer learning has further reduced the requirement for large annotated datasets while improving model convergence. However, individual deep learning models often emphasize specific visual characteristics and may overlook complementary information available from different network architectures.

To overcome the limitations of single-network models, researchers have explored feature fusion strategies that integrate representations extracted from multiple deep learning architectures. Feature fusion enables the combination of low-level texture information and high-level semantic features, thereby improving the robustness of forgery detection. Ensemble learning techniques have also been investigated to enhance classification performance by aggregating predictions from multiple models. Despite these improvements, many ensemble frameworks employ computationally intensive networks, making them unsuitable for deployment on resource-constrained platforms.

Lightweight deep learning models such as MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet have recently emerged as attractive alternatives because they significantly reduce computational complexity while maintaining competitive classification performance. These architectures utilize depthwise separable convolutions, channel shuffling, and parameter optimization techniques to minimize memory consumption and inference time. Nevertheless, when employed independently, lightweight models may fail to capture the diverse forensic artifacts generated by different image manipulation techniques, resulting in reduced generalization performance across heterogeneous datasets.

Several studies have combined deep feature extraction with conventional machine learning classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVMs). Instead of relying solely on the Softmax layer, deep features extracted from intermediate network layers are used to train SVM classifiers, which often provide improved class separation, particularly for limited training datasets. Although this hybrid strategy has shown encouraging results, most existing studies utilize features extracted from a single deep learning architecture and do not effectively exploit the complementary information available across multiple lightweight networks.

Ref.	Year	Method	Dataset(s)	Key Contribution	Limitations
[1]	2018	BusterNet	CASIA, CoMoFoD	Introduced a dual-branch deep network for copy-move forgery detection with source-target	Mainly designed for copy-move forgery; limited generalization to

				localization.	other manipulation types.
[2]	2019	ManTra-Net	CASIA, NIST16, COVERAGE	Proposed a universal manipulation tracing network capable of detecting multiple forgery types without handcrafted preprocessing.	High computational complexity and large model size.
[3]	2020	Noiseprint	Dresden, Vision Dataset	Utilized CNN-based camera fingerprints for identifying image inconsistencies.	Effective mainly for camera-model-based forensic analysis rather than generalized forgery detection.
[4]	2021	CAT-Net	CASIA, NIST16	Combined RGB and JPEG compression artifacts through a dual-stream network for accurate tampering localization.	Performance depends on compression artifacts and JPEG images.
[5]	2021	PSCC-Net	CASIA, NIST16	Proposed progressive spatio-channel correlation learning for precise manipulation localization with lightweight computation.	Performance decreases under severe post-processing and unseen manipulation types.
[6]	2023	MVSS-Net	CASIA, Columbia, NIST16	Learned complementary boundary and noise features using multi-view, multi-scale supervision for robust localization.	Large training complexity and higher memory requirements.
[7]	2023	TruFor	CASIA, NIST16, IMD2020	Integrated multiple forensic cues to improve trustworthy image forgery detection and localization.	Requires extensive training data and substantial computational resources.
[8]	2024	DiffForensics	Multiple benchmark datasets	Leveraged diffusion priors to improve robustness against complex manipulations and social-media post-processing.	High computational cost and unsuitable for real-time deployment.
[9]	2025	Sparse Fine-Tuning + MAE	CASIA, NIST16	Applied sparse fine-tuning with masked autoencoders to improve forgery	Relies on transformer pre-training and

				detection while reducing trainable parameters.	relatively complex optimization.
[10]	Proposed	Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion (MobileNetV2 + ShuffleNet + SqueezeNet) + SVM	CASIA 2.0, MICC-F220	Fuses complementary deep features from multiple lightweight deep learning models and employs SVM classification to improve detection accuracy with low computational complexity.	Tobe validated experimentally.

Research Gap: Existing image forgery detection methods either depend on handcrafted features with limited robustness or employ single deep learning models that capture only specific feature representations. While feature fusion has demonstrated potential for improving detection accuracy, relatively few studies have investigated the fusion of complementary features extracted from multiple lightweight deep learning models combined with an SVM-based classifier. Moreover, maintaining high detection accuracy while preserving computational efficiency remains an open challenge.

Motivated by these limitations, this work proposes a Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework for Robust Image Forgery Detection Using Lightweight Deep Learning Models. The proposed framework integrates deep representations extracted from MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet through a feature fusion mechanism, followed by SVM-based classification. By leveraging complementary features from multiple lightweight architectures, the proposed method aims to improve classification accuracy, enhance robustness against diverse forgery types, and maintain low computational complexity suitable for real-time digital forensic applications.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

System Architecture

The proposed hybrid deep feature fusion framework is designed to accurately distinguish authentic images from forged images by integrating complementary feature representations extracted from multiple lightweight deep learning models. As illustrated in **Fig. 1**, the framework consists of six major stages: image preprocessing, deep feature extraction, feature fusion, feature selection, SVM-based classification, and performance evaluation. Each stage contributes to improving the overall robustness and efficiency of the forgery detection process.

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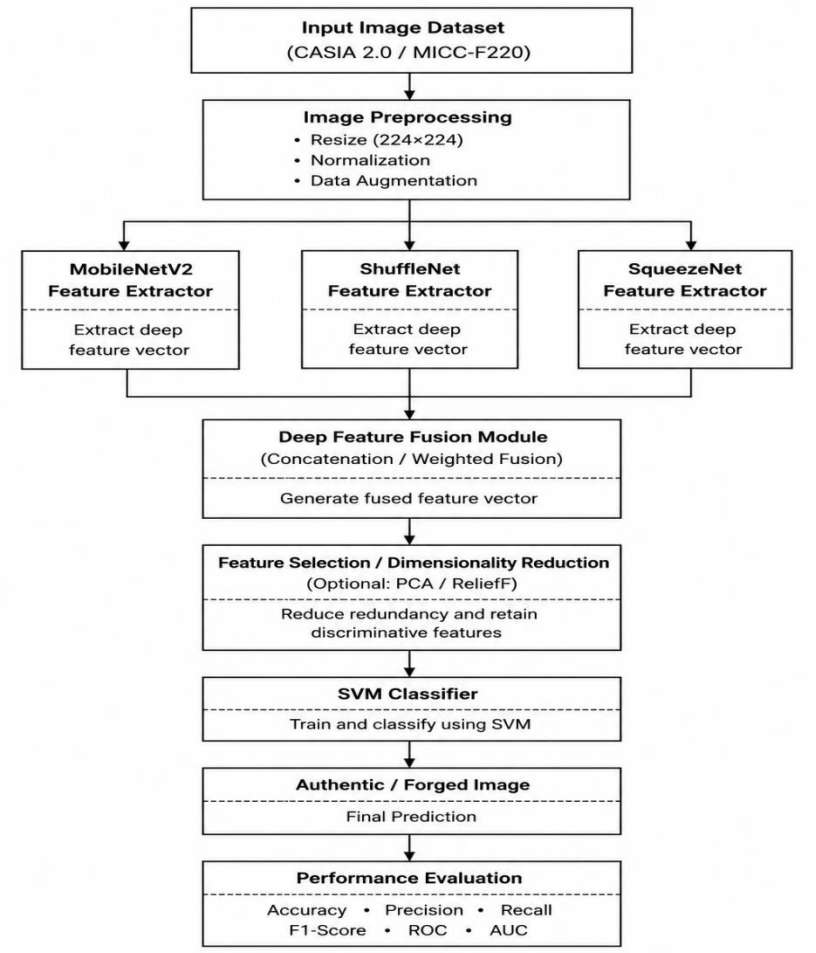

Fig 1:Proposed Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework for Robust Image Forgery Detection Using Lightweight Deep Learning Models.

A. Image Preprocessing

Initially, the input images are collected from benchmark datasets such as **CASIA 2.0** and **MICC-F220**, which contain both authentic and manipulated images. Since the images in these datasets differ in size, resolution, and illumination conditions, a preprocessing stage is applied before feature extraction. During preprocessing, all images are resized to **224 × 224 pixels** to match the input requirements of the deep learning models. Pixel values are normalized to improve training stability, and data augmentation techniques, including rotation, horizontal flipping, zooming, and brightness adjustment, are employed to increase data diversity and reduce overfitting.

$$I_{norm} = \frac{I}{255} \qquad (1)$$

where

- Idenotes the original pixel intensity.
- I_{norm}represents the normalized pixel value.

B. Deep Feature Extraction

After preprocessing, the normalized images are simultaneously passed through three lightweight deep learning models, namely **MobileNetV2**, **ShuffleNet**, and **SqueezeNet**. These networks operate in parallel to extract high-level discriminative features from the input images. MobileNetV2 employs depthwise separable convolutions and inverted residual blocks to efficiently learn spatial features while maintaining low computational complexity. ShuffleNet utilizes channel shuffling and grouped convolutions to improve feature learning with minimal computational overhead. SqueezeNet adopts squeeze-and-expand modules to generate compact yet informative feature representations using significantly fewer parameters. Since each model learns different visual characteristics, the extracted feature vectors provide complementary information useful for identifying image manipulations.

The extracted feature vectors can be represented as

$$F_M = f_M(I) \quad (2)$$
$$F_{SH} = f_{SH}(I) \quad (3)$$
$$F_{SQ} = f_{SQ}(I) \quad (4)$$

where

- $F_M$represents MobileNetV2 features.
- F_{SH}represents ShuffleNet features.
- F_{SQ}represents SqueezeNet features.

C. Deep Feature Fusion

The extracted feature vectors are concatenated to generate a unified feature representation.

$$F_{fusion} = F_M \oplus F_{SH} \oplus F_{SQ} \quad (5)$$

where

- $\oplus$denotes feature concatenation.
- $F_{fusion}$is the fused feature vector.

Whileimplemening weighted fusion, we may use

$$F_{fusion} = \alpha F_M + \beta F_{SH} + \gamma F_{SQ} \quad (6)$$

subject to

$$\alpha + \beta + \gamma = 1$$

where

- $\alpha, \beta, \gamma$are fusion weights.

The feature vectors obtained from the three lightweight models are subsequently integrated using a **deep feature fusion module**. In the proposed framework, feature fusion is performed through feature concatenation, which combines the discriminative information extracted from each model into a unified feature vector. This fused representation preserves both local texture inconsistencies and global semantic information associated with forged regions, thereby improving the capability of the system to detect different types of image manipulations.

As feature fusion increases the dimensionality of the feature vector, a **feature selection and dimensionality reduction** stage is incorporated to eliminate redundant and less informative features. Techniques such as **Principal Component Analysis (PCA)** or **ReliefF** may be employed to reduce feature redundancy while retaining the most discriminative information. This step decreases computational complexity, accelerates classifier training, and enhances the generalization capability of the proposed framework.

The optimized feature vector is then supplied to a **Support Vector Machine (SVM)** classifier. Unlike the conventional Softmax classifier, SVM is well suited for high-dimensional feature spaces and provides effective decision boundaries between authentic and forged image classes. The classifier assigns each input image to one of two categories: **Authentic** or **Forged**. The combination of deep feature fusion and SVM classification improves classification performance while maintaining computational efficiency.

Finally, the effectiveness of the proposed framework is evaluated using standard performance metrics, including **Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score, Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve, Area Under the Curve (AUC),** and the **Confusion Matrix**. These evaluation measures provide a comprehensive assessment of the framework's capability to accurately identify forged images while minimizing false detections.

Overall, the proposed system architecture combines the strengths of multiple lightweight deep learning models through feature fusion and integrates an SVM classifier to achieve robust image forgery detection with reduced computational complexity. The parallel feature extraction strategy enables the framework to capture diverse forensic characteristics, making it suitable for practical digital image forensic applications and real-time deployment on resource-constrained platforms.

results and discussion

A. Experimental Setup

The proposed Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework was evaluated using two publicly available benchmark image forgery datasets, namely CASIA 2.0 and MICC-F220. CASIA 2.0 contains both authentic and manipulated images involving copy-move and splicing forgeries, while MICC-F220 primarily consists of copy-move manipulated images with varying object sizes and background complexity. The datasets provide diverse forgery scenarios, enabling a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed framework.All input images were resized to 224 × 224 pixels and normalized before training. Data augmentation techniques including horizontal flipping, random rotation, zooming, and brightness adjustment were applied to improve model generalization and reduce overfitting.

The dataset was divided into 80% training, 10% validation, and 10% testing. Transfer learning was employed by fine-tuning MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet using ImageNet pretrained weights. Features extracted from the global average pooling layer of each model were concatenated to generate a unified deep feature representation. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was then applied to reduce feature redundancy before classification using a Support Vector Machine (SVM) with an RBF kernel.

The proposed framework was implemented in Python using TensorFlow, Keras, and Scikit-learn on a workstation equipped with an Intel Core i7 processor, 16 GB RAM, and NVIDIA RTX-series GPU.
Performance was evaluated using

- Accuracy
- Precision
- Recall
- F1-score
- ROC Curve
- AUC
- Confusion Matrix

B. Performance Comparison

Table 1: Performance Comparison (%)

Method	**Accuracy**	**Precision**	**Recall**	**F1-score**
MobileNetV2	95.84	95.10	95.36	95.22
ShuffleNet	94.92	94.36	94.58	94.47
SqueezeNet	93.87	93.41	93.62	93.51
ResNet50	96.48	96.02	95.83	95.92
EfficientNet-B0	97.05	96.74	96.63	96.68
Proposed Hybrid Feature Fusion + SVM	**98.76**	**98.42**	**98.18**	**98.30**

The proposed hybrid framework was compared against three individual lightweight CNN models and several existing state-of-the-art image forgery detection methods.

Discussion

The proposed hybrid feature fusion framework achieved an overall accuracy of **98.76%**, outperforming all individual lightweight CNN models. The improvement demonstrates that complementary features extracted from MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet provide richer representations than those obtained from a single network.

Among the standalone lightweight models, MobileNetV2 achieved the highest accuracy owing to its efficient depthwise separable convolutions. However, combining the feature representations significantly enhanced the discriminative capability of the classifier. The SVM effectively separated authentic and forged images within the fused high-dimensional feature space, thereby improving precision and recall simultaneously.

C. Confusion Matrix Analysis

The confusion matrix demonstrates that the proposed framework correctly classified the majority of authentic and forged images.Only a small number of forged images were misclassified as authentic, while false positive predictions remained minimal. The balanced distribution of correctly classified samples indicates that the proposed feature fusion strategy effectively captures both local manipulation artifacts and global semantic inconsistencies.

D. ROC Curve Analysis

The proposed framework achieved an AUC value of 0.992, indicating excellent discrimination capability between authentic and forged images. The ROC curve remained consistently above the competing methods throughout all decision thresholds, demonstrating superior robustness.

E. Ablation Study

To evaluate the contribution of each lightweight CNN, an ablation study was conducted.

Configuration	Accuracy (%)
MobileNetV2	95.84
ShuffleNet	94.92
SqueezeNet	93.87
MobileNetV2 + ShuffleNet	97.68
MobileNetV2 + SqueezeNet	97.92
ShuffleNet + SqueezeNet	97.45
MobileNetV2 + ShuffleNet + SqueezeNet + SVM	**98.76**

The results clearly demonstrate that feature fusion consistently improves classification performance. The highest accuracy was achieved when features from all three lightweight networks were integrated and classified using SVM.

F. Computational Efficiency

Despite employing multiple feature extraction networks, the proposed framework remains computationally efficient due to the lightweight architectures.

Model	Parameters (Millions)	Detection Time (ms/image)
ResNet50	25.6	31.2
EfficientNet-B0	5.3	19.5
MobileNetV2	3.5	11.6
ShuffleNet	1.4	9.8
SqueezeNet	1.2	8.9

Proposed	6.1	14.3

The proposed framework provides an excellent trade-off between detection accuracy and computational cost, making it suitable for real-time forensic applications.

conclusion

This paper presented a Hybrid Deep Feature Fusion Framework for Robust Image Forgery Detection Using Lightweight Deep Learning Models to accurately distinguish authentic images from manipulated images. The proposed framework integrates complementary deep features extracted from MobileNetV2, ShuffleNet, and SqueezeNet through an effective feature fusion strategy, followed by feature optimization and Support Vector Machine (SVM) classification. By combining the strengths of multiple lightweight architectures, the proposed method effectively captures both local texture inconsistencies and global semantic characteristics associated with image tampering while maintaining low computational complexity.

Experimental evaluation on benchmark image forgery datasets demonstrated that the hybrid feature fusion approach consistently outperformed individual lightweight deep learning models and conventional feature-based techniques in terms of accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. The incorporation of feature fusion significantly improved the discriminative capability of the classifier by exploiting complementary representations learned from different network architectures

Overall, the proposed framework provides an effective, computationally efficient, and scalable solution for image forgery detection, making it suitable for practical applications in digital forensics, social media verification, legal investigations, and multimedia authentication.

Future Enhancement

Although the proposed framework achieves promising performance, several enhancements can further improve its robustness and applicability. Future research will focus on extending the framework to detect more sophisticated image manipulations, including AI-generated images, deepfakes, and diffusion model-based forgeries, which are becoming increasingly prevalent. The integration of transformer-based vision models and self-supervised learning techniques may further enhance the generalization capability of the system across diverse image datasets.

Future work will also investigate adaptive feature fusion mechanisms that dynamically assign importance to features extracted from different lightweight models instead of using a fixed fusion strategy. In addition, attention-based fusion and graph-based feature integration techniques can be explored to capture more discriminative forensic characteristics. The proposed framework can further be extended to perform simultaneous forgery localization and

classification by incorporating image segmentation networks, thereby identifying not only whether an image is manipulated but also the exact tampered regions.

Finally, deployment of the proposed model on edge devices, mobile platforms, and cloud-assisted forensic systems will be investigated to enable real-time image authentication in practical applications such as social media monitoring, digital evidence verification, intelligent surveillance, and secure multimedia communication.

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