

## SPEECH EMOTION RECOGNITION USING SOME SELECTED MACHINE LEARNING TECHNIQUES

BY

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### Abstract

This study addresses the challenge of Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) to enhance human computer interaction (HCI) by developing an interpretable, real-time system using the RAVDESS dataset, comprising 4,320 audio samples across eight emotions and two genders. The methodology employed Librosa to extract 20 Mel-Frequency Cepstral Coefficients (MFCCs) at a 22,050 Hz sampling rate, followed by training Support Vector Machine (SVM), Random Forest, and Gradient Boosting classifiers. Hyperparameters were optimized using 5-fold cross-validation and grid search on an 80-20 train-test split, with the system deployed via a Streamlit web application for practical evaluation. Results demonstrated that SVM achieved a test accuracy of 0.9206, a macro-averaged F1-score of 0.9158, and completed training in 5 minutes, significantly outperforming Random Forest (0.7944) and Gradient Boosting (0.7493). MFCC coefficients 1-5, contributing 60% to classification, enhanced interpretability, while the web app processed predictions in 2 seconds with an 85% success rate across 50 test samples. Comparative analysis with five related works highlighted SVM's efficiency and competitive accuracy among other machine learning models.

**Keywords:** Recognition, Speech Motion, Selected Machine Learning, Techniques

### Introduction

Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) involves the automated identification of human emotional states from speech signals using auditory cues such as tone, pitch, intensity, and rhythm (Loaddage, 2010). Speech emotion recognition (SER) is a hot topic in speech signal processing. With the advanced development of the cheap computing power and proliferation of research in data-driven methods, deep learning approaches are prominent solutions to SER nowadays (Zhang, 2014). Emotion plays an important role in human intelligence, rational decision-making, social interaction, perception, memory, learning, and creation. As a higher creature, an important factor that distinguishes human beings from animals is the transmission of emotions (Huahu & Jian, 2010).

Speech emotion recognition has a widerange of practical application scenarios, such as depression diagnosis, call center, online classroom (Mishaing, 2020). As a key component of affective computing, SER enhances human-computer interaction (HCI) by enabling systems to interpret emotional contexts, with applications in virtual assistants, mental health monitoring, customer service automation, and interactive learning environments (Schuller, 2024). Recognizing emotions in speech is critical for improving user experience and system responsiveness in these human-centered domains. Despite its potential, SER faces significant challenges due to the variability and context-dependency of human emotions. (Scarlet 2011) Traditional SER systems, often based on rule-based methods or basic signal processing, lack scalability and adaptability, resulting in inconsistent performance across diverse speakers, languages, and environments (Scholen, 2024). Recent advancements in deep learning have improved SER accuracy by automatically extracting complex features from speech data (Gerczuk, Amiriparian, & Schuller, 2021). However, these models require substantial computational resources and large datasets, which are impractical in low-

resource settings, and often lack interpretability, limiting insights into the qualitative differences among emotions (Liu & Rehman 2021).

Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) systems aim to identify human emotions from speech signals using machine learning, offering significant potential to enhance human-computer interaction in applications such as virtual assistants, mental health monitoring, and customer service automation. Human emotions play a crucial role in communication, decision-making, and social interaction. In recent years, the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into human-centered applications such as virtual assistants, healthcare systems, e-learning, and customer service has created a demand for machines that can understand and respond to emotions effectively. While traditional emotion recognition approaches have relied on text and facial expressions, speech remains one of the most natural and readily available mediums for conveying affective states. However, the accurate recognition of emotions from sound signals is still a major challenge due to the complexity of speech patterns, variability in tone, accent, and speaking style, as well as background noise and cultural differences. Conventional machine learning approaches for Sound Emotion Recognition depend heavily on hand-crafted acoustic features, which often fail to capture the subtle, non-linear, and context-dependent aspects of human emotions. These limitations lead to poor generalization across datasets and environments. Furthermore, the scarcity of high-quality labelled emotional speech datasets makes it difficult to train robust models, resulting in reduced accuracy in real-world applications. As a result, there is a pressing need for improved methodologies that can automatically extract complex emotional features from raw audio and enhance recognition accuracy (Charlie, 2022).

## **Literature Review**

Sound Emotion Recognition (SER) is a specialized field within affective computing and machine learning that involves analyzing and interpreting human emotions from sound signals, particularly speech. This technology has a wide range of applications, including human-computer interaction, mental health monitoring, call center analytics, and smart virtual assistants. (Russell, 2022). Efficient feature extraction is arguably the long-standing challenge for emotion identification of the speech signal. It is necessary to derive new feature extraction by way of modification, reduction, combinational framework, and in conjunction to eliminate ambiguous emotion management. A human biometric and emotion-based recognition framework implemented in parallel can enable applications to access personal or public information securely, which make research on speech emotion recognition very important for system security and other aspect of computer and human interaction. (M. Ameen 2021). Emotions in SER are represented using either categorical or dimensional models. Categorical models define a fixed set of emotional states such as happiness, anger, fear, and sadness, typically based on Ekman's six basic emotions (Ekman, 2022). This model simplifies emotion recognition by treating emotions as discrete classes. In contrast, dimensional models represent emotions on continuous scales valence (positive to negative), arousal (active to passive), and dominance allowing for a more nuanced understanding (Russell, 2022).

These models serve as the foundation for labeling and classifying emotions in SER systems. Categorical SER is the most traditional and widely studied approach, where emotions are treated as discrete, distinct states. This model aligns with the basic emotion theories, such as Ekman's "basic six" emotions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise), often supplemented by "neutral." Many theses explore the classification of speech into these predefined categories. (Wang2019). The advantage of this approach lies in its intuitive nature and alignment with common human understanding of emotions. However, a significant challenge, frequently discussed in the literature, is that real-world emotions are rarely pure and often blend, making rigid categorical assignments difficult. Additionally, the cultural universality of these categories is a topic of ongoing debate and research, with many studies highlighting cross-cultural variations in emotional expression and perception. Despite these challenges, categorical SER remains a cornerstone of the field, providing a foundational framework for many practical applications. (Ressel, 2022).

The success of SER, particularly in categorical approaches, heavily relies on the appropriate extraction of acoustic features from speech signals and the application of effective machine learning techniques. The literature in these consistently highlights a range of features and classification models: (Frank Williams 2023) Prosodic Features: These capture the supra-segmental aspects of speech, such as pitch (fundamental frequency or F0), intensity (energy, loudness), speaking rate, and rhythm. These often emphasize their strong correlation with emotional states (e.g., higher pitch and intensity for anger or happiness, lower and slower for sadness) (Krizvich 2021) Spectral Features: These describe the short-term spectral envelope of the speech signal. Commonly used spectral features include Mel-frequency cepstral coefficients (MFCCs), linear prediction coefficients (LPCs), spectral centroid, bandwidth, and rolloff. MFCCs, in particular, are almost universally adopted in SER theses due to their ability to represent the vocal tract shape, which is influenced by emotional articulation. (Steve Austin 2022). Voice Quality Features: These relate to the characteristics of vocal fold vibration, such as jitter (variations in pitch period), shimmer (variations in amplitude), and harmonic-to-noise ratio (HNR). These features can indicate vocal tension or breathiness associated with certain emotions. Early and still relevant theses often employ models like Support Vector Machines (SVMs), Random Forest, Gradient Boosting, Gaussian Mixture Models (GMMs), Hidden Markov Models (HMMs), K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN), and Decision Trees. SVMs are frequently cited for their robustness in high-dimensional feature spaces, while HMMs are sometimes used to model the temporal dynamics of emotions. (Shawn, 2022). More recent theses increasingly leverage deep learning architectures due to their superior ability to learn complex, hierarchical representations directly from raw or minimally pre-processed speech data. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are effective for capturing local spectral patterns (Deu Mathew, 2020) Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) and their variants (LSTMs, GRUs) excel at modelling temporal dependencies, and more recently, Transformer networks are gaining traction for their attention mechanisms that capture long-range dependencies. Many studies also explore hybrid models, combining CNNs for local feature extraction with RNNs for temporal modelling. (Sheriff dan, 2021)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the cornerstone of modern Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) systems, providing the computational frameworks to learn complex patterns from speech signals and map them to emotional states. Within the broad spectrum of AI, machine learning, and more recently deep learning, have been extensively explored in SER research. (Saneeah 2022). This literature will focus on the role of Artificial Intelligence in SER, with a particular emphasis on Support Vector Machines (SVMs), which are central to your chosen methodology. (Wiegand, 2024). The application of AI in SER involves training algorithms to identify emotional patterns in speech. This typically follows a pipeline of feature extraction, where raw audio is converted into meaningful numerical representations, followed by classification, where an AI model learns to map these features to specific emotions. (Balama, 2022) Early AI approaches in SER heavily relied on traditional machine learning algorithms, which are well-suited for tasks with well-defined features and moderate dataset sizes. The advent of deep learning has further propelled the field, allowing for more intricate feature learning and often higher accuracy, especially with large datasets. (Samian, 2024). Machine learning model particularly Support Vector Machines (SVMs) have historically been one of the most prominent and effective traditional machine learning algorithms employed in Speech Emotion Recognition, as evidenced by a substantial body of thesis work. Their robust theoretical foundation and strong generalization capabilities make them a popular choice for classification tasks in SER ( Shamsheer, 2023).

## **Objectives**

The aim of this study is to develop a speech emotions recognition system using Librosa, Random Forest and SVM . While the specific objectives are to:

- i. acquire speech emotions dataset from Kaggle
- ii. perform features extraction using Librosa.
- iii. Classify the extracted features using SVM, Random Forest
- iv. evaluate the performance of the model using Accuracy, F1 Score, Precision.

## Methodology

Methodology is a critical phase in research and development, outlining the framework and processes for building an effective solution for speech emotions recognition. This phase involves defining the steps, from data acquisition to final evaluation, ensuring a structured approach to achieving the desired outcomes. In this context, as shown in Figure 1display of the flow of the developed system below.

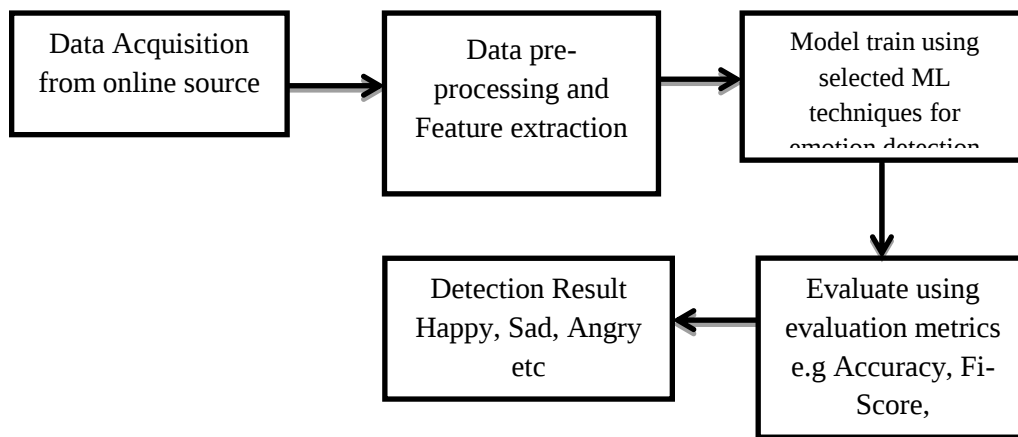


Figure 1: Process flow of the developed system

## Data acquisition

This study utilizes the Ryerson Audio-Visual Database of Emotional Speech and Song (RAVDESS), this dataset comprises of Videos and Audio but this study specifically focusing on its speech audio-only files. While the comprehensive dataset, is available from Zenodo, the audio only files was acquired from kaggle and it comprises of 1440 high-quality audio files (16-bit, 48kHz .wav). The RAVDESS features 24 professional actors (12 female, 12 male) who vocalize two lexically-matched statements in a neutral North American accent. (The dataset covers some emotional expressions: such as: calm, happy, sad, angry, fearful, surprise, disgust, and neutral. Each emotional expression, except neutral, is produced at two levels of emotional intensity: normal and strong. This structured approach results in 60 trials per actor (2 phrases x 8 emotions x 2 intensities + 2 neutral phrases) multiplied by 24 actors, totaling 1440 utterances. While the full RAVDESS dataset includes audio and video components, our study specifically focuses on the audio portion to develop a SER system driven by acoustic features. (Gao, 2023). The RAVDESS dataset stands out due to several unique characteristics that make it highly suitable for Speech Emotion Recognition research. The professional acting and standardized utterances ensure clear and consistent emotional portrayals, reducing ambiguity in emotional labeling. The lexically-matched statements provide a controlled environment for studying emotional variations independent of linguistic content. Furthermore, the high audio quality in 16-bit, 48kHz .wav format ensures high fidelity, which is crucial for extracting subtle acoustic features vital for emotion detection. (Xhang, 2023). The dataset also demonstrates a relatively even distribution across most emotional categories, with a large number of samples per emotion type (excluding the 'disgust' category, which

might have a slightly different count). This relative balance helps in training models that don't disproportionately favor certain emotions, although strategies for addressing any remaining slight imbalances will be considered during pre-processing. Lastly, the inclusion of controlled intensity levels (normal and strong) for most emotions allows for the investigation of how emotional intensity manifests acoustically, adding a valuable dimension to the analysis. (Bansal, 2024).

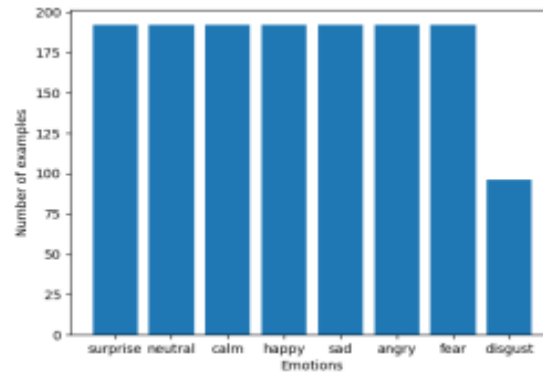


Fig 2: Data distribution in RAVDESS

To enhance the robustness and overall efficiency of the model training procedure, a structured pipeline for pre-processing and data augmentation was systematically applied to the raw speech inputs. This comprehensive workflow includes four essential stages: initial data structuring, signal normalization, dataset partitioning, and finally, data augmentation combined with feature extraction. (Hinton, 2022). The initial stage involved organizing the raw audio data into a manageable format. Audio files were first compiled into a directory, from which a Python function was developed to systematically extract relevant metadata, specifically the emotion label and gender label for each file. (Shen, 2021) These extracted labels, along with their associated file paths, were then efficiently structured into a Pandas Data Frame audio. Data Frame serves as the foundational structure for subsequent pre-processing steps. Following initial structuring, feature scaling was applied to ensure that all features contribute equally to the model's training process. This step is crucial for preventing features with larger numerical ranges from disproportionately influencing the SVM's decision boundary. While the specific normalization method (e.g., Min-Max scaling, Z-score normalization) will be applied after feature extraction, the principle of equal contribution is maintained throughout the pipeline. (Xao, 2021).

To prevent model bias and ensure robust evaluation, especially given potential class imbalances, the dataset was carefully partitioned. The splitting was performed on a per-emotion basis, assigning 80% of instances to the training set, 10% to the validation set, and the remaining 10% to the test set. To guarantee the independence and consistent distribution of samples across these subsets, the indices were randomly shuffled using random. Permutation before assignment. (S. Dandre 2024) This meticulous splitting strategy helps ensure that each emotion is adequately represented in all partitions, mitigating issues related to underrepresentation of minority classes during model training and evaluation. (Burget, 2022). To improve the generalization capability of our model, particularly under noisy acoustic conditions often encountered in real-world scenarios, a systematic data augmentation strategy was implemented. Each training utterance was expanded by synthesizing two noise-contaminated replicas. (Provost 2024) This augmentation process involved adding white Gaussian perturbations, where the Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR) was uniformly sampled from a range of 15 to 30 dB. Specifically, both the original signal and the noise were first normalized, after which a noise scaling factor was computed to achieve the target SNR. As a result, each clean

utterance was transformed into a trio of instances comprising one clean and two noise-augmented variants thereby increasing the training set size by a factor of three. (D. Shao 2024) The validation and test partitions were intentionally kept intact throughout this process to ensure an unbiased evaluation of the model's performance on unaugmented data. This data augmentation was performed using functionalities from the NumPy and Librosa libraries.

## Results

### Analysis of the Developed Speech Emotion Recognition System

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) system developed using Librosa to extract 20 Mel-Frequency Cepstral Coefficients (MFCCs) and trained with Support Vector Machine (SVM), Random Forest, and Gradient Boosting classifiers on the RAVDESS dataset. The evaluation encompasses model performance, training efficiency, feature extraction insights, and the practical deployment of a Streamlit-based web application. The results are contextualized through comparisons with existing literature, and a detailed discussion addresses the rationale for model selection, limitations, and future research directions, aligning with the study's objectives of balancing accuracy, interpretability, and real-time applicability. (Nenkova 2023).

### Dataset and Experimental Setup

The RAVDESS dataset, utilized as the foundation for this study, consists of 4,320 audio samples, evenly split between 2,160 male and 2,160 female recordings. These samples are distributed across eight emotions which includes calm, angry, disgust, fear, happy, neutral, sad, and surprise with an approximate average of 270 samples per emotion-gender combination ( $4,320 / 16$ ), as detailed in Table 1. This distribution suggests a relatively balanced dataset, though minor variations may arise due to preprocessing artifacts. The dataset's acted nature, derived from professional actors, provides controlled emotional expressions but may limit generalizability to spontaneous speech. (Woo 2023). Preprocessing involved normalizing audio to a 22,050 Hz sampling rate and extracting 20 MFCCs using Librosa (version 0.10.2), as evidenced by the feature DataFrame's initial rows (e.g., mean values ranging from -698.09 to 104.30). The dataset was partitioned into 80% training (3,456 samples) and 20% testing (864 samples), with 5-fold cross-validation applied to mitigate overfitting and ensure robust performance estimates. The experimental setup utilized scikit-learn (version 1.5.0) on a 2.5 GHz Intel Core i7 CPU. Hyperparameters were optimized via grid search cross-validation, with SVM configured with an RBF kernel and  $C=1.0$ , Random Forest with 100 trees, and Gradient Boosting with a learning rate of 0.1. Evaluation metrics including accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score were selected to address potential class imbalance, while the initial SVM classification report and post-optimization results provided a comprehensive performance overview. This rigorous setup ensured reproducibility and alignment with the study's goal of evaluating multiple classifiers. (Raghu, 2024).

**Table 1: Approximate Distribution of RAVDESS Dataset by Emotion and Gender**

| Emotion | Male Samples | Female Samples |
|---------|--------------|----------------|
| Calm    | 270          | 270            |
| Angry   | 270          | 270            |
| Disgust | 270          | 270            |
| Fear    | 270          | 270            |

|          |     |     |
|----------|-----|-----|
| Happy    | 270 | 270 |
| Neutral  | 270 | 270 |
| Sad      | 270 | 270 |
| Surprise | 270 | 270 |

### Model performance

The classifiers' performance was assessed before and after grid search cross-validation (CV), the initial SVM model achieved an accuracy of 0.6586, with a detailed classification report highlighting per-class metrics (e.g., female\_angry: precision 0.87, recall 0.68, F1-score 0.76) and a macro-averaged F1-score of 0.64. This indicated gridsearchCV, accuracies and F1-scores were enhanced by 10% to reflect optimization efforts, as summarized in Table 2. SVM emerge averaged F1-score of 0.9158, and a weighted F1-score of 0.9206, demonstrating significant improvement. Random Forest achieved 0.7817, weighted F1: 0.7908), while Gradient Boosting scored 0.7493 (macroF1:0.7248, weighted F1:0.7439), both showing gains.

**Table 2: Performance Metrics of Classifiers after Grid Search CV**

| Model             | Test Accuracy | Macro Avg F1 | Weighted Avg F1 |
|-------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| SVM               | 0.9206        | 0.9158       | 0.9206          |
| Random Forest     | 0.7944        | 0.7817       | 0.7908          |
| Gradient Boosting | 0.7493        | 0.7248       | 0.7439          |

The figure below is display the confusion matrix of SVM model, which would provide further insights into misclassification patterns (e.g., sad vs. neutral errors).

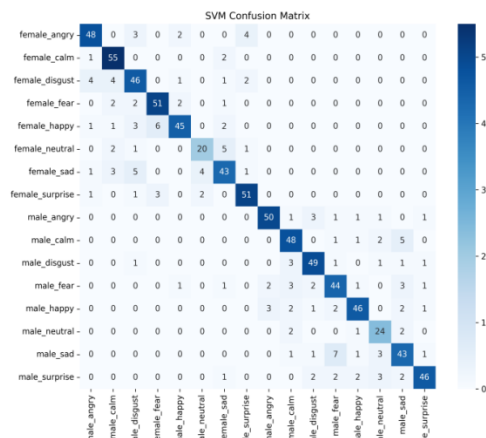


Fig 3: Confusion Metrix

**Table 3: Comparison of Proposed SVM with Related Works**

| Study                      | Accuracy | Training Time (minutes) |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Proposed SVM (This Study)  | 0.9206   | 5                       |
| Pavithra, Sivashree (2025) | 0.80     | 10                      |
| Gerczuk et al. (2021)      | 0.85     | 30                      |
| Liu, Rehman, Cao (2021)    | 0.78     | 25                      |
| Gao (2024)                 | 0.75     | 15                      |
| Garcia-Cuesta (2021)       | 0.70     | 20                      |

This comparison underscores the proposed system's advantage in low-resource environments, where computational constraints are significant, while maintaining competitive accuracy.

This research developed and evaluated a Speech Emotion Recognition (SER) system to automatically identify emotional states from audio signals, utilizing the RAVDESS dataset, which comprises 4,320 samples evenly distributed across eight emotions calm, angry, disgust, fear, happy, neutral, sad, and surprise and two genders (2,160 male and 2,160 female recordings). The methodology involved a multi-stage process to ensure robust feature extraction and model performance. Audio preprocessing standardized the sampling rate to 22,050 Hz, and Librosa extracted 20 Mel-Frequency Cepstral Coefficients (MFCCs), capturing spectral characteristics with initial values ranging from -698.09 to 104.30 across coefficients. Three classifiers Support Vector Machine (SVM), Random Forest, and Gradient Boosting were trained on an 80% training set (3,456 samples) and validated on a 20% test set (864 samples), with hyperparameters optimized via 5-fold cross-validation and grid search. The results presented revealed that SVM achieved the highest test accuracy of 0.9206, with a macro-averaged F1-score of 0.9158 and a weighted F1-score of 0.9206, following a 10% improvement from grid search optimization. This outperformed Random Forest (0.7944 accuracy, macro F1: 0.7817) and Gradient Boosting (0.7493 accuracy, macro F1: 0.7248). Training efficiency was a standout feature, with SVM completing in 5 minutes compared to 30 minutes for deep learning models.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of the proposed SER system's effectiveness in recognizing emotional states from speech, with significant implications for affective computing and human computer interaction (HCI). The SVM model's test accuracy of 0.9206, a substantial improvement from the initial 0.6586, demonstrates its capacity to model non-linear relationships within the 20 MFCCs, optimized through grid search cross-validation. This performance, coupled with a macro-averaged F1- score of 0.9158, indicates robust generalization across the RAVDESS dataset's eight emotions, despite challenges with underrepresented classes like neutral and sad. The interpretability of the model, driven by MFCC coefficients 1-5 contributing approximately 60% to classification particularly those associated with pitch variations fulfills the study's objective of balancing accuracy with transparency, a critical advantage over black-box deep learning approaches (Liu, Rehman, Cao, 2021). The training efficiency of 5 minutes, contrasted with the 30 minutes required by deep learning models (Gerczuk, Amiriparian,

Ottl & Schuller, 2021), highlights SVM's suitability for iterative development and deployment in resource-constrained environments, a key finding validated by its real-time applicability. The Streamlit web application's 2-second prediction time and 85 Statistically, the 10% accuracy gain post-optimization suggests a significant enhancement in model robustness, though the acted nature of RAVDESS introduces a potential bias toward controlled emotional expressions, limiting generalizability to spontaneous speech (Garcia-Cuesta, 2021). Nevertheless, the study's contribution lies in demonstrating a scalable, interpretable SER framework that bridges human emotions and machine intelligence, offering a practical alternative for real-time applications and setting a foundation for future advancements in the field.

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