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Review of Challenges and Innovations in Occluded Facial Recognition in Disguise and Crowd

Abhay Kumar Singh[1], Abhimanyu Singh[2], Hemant Sirohi[3], Nitesh Bhardwaj[4]
Faculty of Communication Engineering, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract: Facial recognition technology is critical in modern security and identification systems, yet it faces significant challenges when dealing with occluded faces, whether due to disguises or in crowds. This review explores the complexities of occluded facial recognition, highlighting the obstacles presented by partial or complete obstruction of facial features by various elements like clothing, accessories, or other people in crowded spaces. These occlusions, intentional or otherwise, complicate the identification process, rendering traditional recognition systems less effective.

Recent advancements in machine learning, particularly through Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), have ushered in innovative solutions that enhance the system's ability to recognize faces even when significant portions are obscured. These developments signify a move towards more adaptable and precise occluded facial recognition technologies, essential for real-world applications where occlusions are unpredictable. The paper discusses ongoing challenges and innovations considerations, various occluded system performance metrics and conclude with way ahead for Researchers and Practioners.

Keywords: Occlusion , Disguise, Crowd, Convolutional Neural Networks , Generative Adversarial Networks.

I. INTRODUCTION

Facial recognition technology, particularly when faced with occlusions from disguises or crowded settings, plays a crucial role in the domain of modern security and surveillance. This literature review ventures deep into the myriad of challenges and recent innovations within the field of occluded facial recognition, emphasizing the dynamics and complexities introduced by crowds and individuals in disguise. As these technologies advance, they increasingly intersect with complex privacy issues, necessitating sophisticated algorithms capable of effectively recognizing faces that are partially hidden under diverse environmental conditions. The challenges of occluded facial recognition are significant, ranging from reduced visibility of facial features to the variability in occlusion types caused by accessories, other people, or environmental factors. These challenges necessitate robust solutions that can perform accurately in dynamic, uncontrolled settings. Recent studies have explored various aspects of occluded facial recognition, including advanced detection techniques in crowded environments and the development of neural architectures tailored for obscured facial features (Ara et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2021). This review is designed to provide a foundational understanding of the current technologies and methods employed in facial recognition, followed by an in-depth exploration of both the technological hurdles and the cutting-edge innovations that have been developed to address these challenges. (Qiu et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2021).

II. METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approaches in Occluded Facial Recognition:

The sophistication of occluded facial recognition systems hinges significantly on advanced methodological approaches that address the multifaceted challenges posed by occlusions. These methodologies span from the initial data capture to the application of complex machine learning algorithms for data interpretation and real-time response execution.

Advanced Data Acquisition Techniques. The first step in an effective facial recognition system involves capturing high-quality data. This process is particularly challenging in environments with occlusions. Advanced camera technologies and imaging techniques have been developed to capture clearer images under various conditions. High-resolution cameras equipped with capabilities to adjust dynamically to changes in light and shadow can significantly mitigate common issues associated with poor image quality. Techniques such as High Dynamic Range (HDR) imaging and infrared sensors are now commonly employed to improve the visibility of facial features in suboptimal lighting conditions, ensuring that the data acquisition phase collects the most usable data possible (Huang et al., 2021)

Sophisticated Preprocessing Methods. Once data is captured, preprocessing becomes crucial in standardizing input data before it undergoes more complex analysis. This stage involves adjusting images for scale and orientation, normalizing brightness and contrast, and employing advanced filtering techniques to enhance facial feature definition. These preprocessing steps are vital for reducing variability in the input data, which helps in minimizing errors during the feature extraction phase. For example, edge detection algorithms and morphological filters can enhance the outlines of facial features, making them more distinct and easier to identify despite partial occlusions (Tan et al., 2006; Xue & Ren, 2022)

Robust Feature Extraction Algorithms. The core of occluded facial recognition systems lies in their ability to extract and utilize features from partially obscured faces. Techniques have evolved from simple geometric analyses to more sophisticated methods that can isolate key identifiers from highly incomplete data. Local feature-based approaches such as Local Binary Patterns (LBP) or Histogram of Oriented Gradients (HOG) are particularly effective in this respect. These methods focus on small, distinctive areas of the face, enabling the system to gather valuable data even from limited visible features. Moreover, the integration of deep learning technologies, such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs), has significantly advanced the field (Polisetty et al., 2023; Schroff et al., 2015)

Deep Learning and Neural Network Adaptations. Deep learning models offer significant advantages in occluded facial recognition due to their ability to learn from large datasets and identify nuanced patterns that may not be immediately apparent. Neural networks, especially those designed for deep learning, have layers that simulate the way the human brain processes information, making them exceptionally effective for complex image recognition tasks. Training these models often involves not just thousands, but millions of images, allowing the systems to learn from a broad range of facial orientations, expressions, and occlusion types. This training enables the models to predict and recognize faces with a high degree of accuracy even under challenging conditions. Generative adversarial networks (GANs), a specific type of neural network, have been particularly impactful. They improve the robustness of facial recognition systems by generating new training data that simulates various occlusion scenarios, thereby allowing the recognition systems to adapt and respond to real-world occlusions more effectively (Qiu et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2014)

Real-Time Processing and System Integration. In practical applications, especially in security or crowd management scenarios, the ability to process information in real-time is crucial. Advances in hardware acceleration, such as the use of GPUs and specialized processors, have enabled these systems to perform complex calculations at high speeds. This capability is essential for situations where immediate recognition and response are critical. Furthermore, integrating these systems into larger security networks has expanded their utility, allowing for coordinated responses across multiple platforms and environments. The continuous improvement in computational efficiency and system integration represents a critical advancement in making occluded facial recognition technologies practical and effective in real-world applications (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020)

III. INNOVATIONS AND ADVANCES IN OCCLUDED FACIAL RECOGNITION

Development of Advanced Neural Architectures. Recent breakthroughs have led to the development of sophisticated neural network architectures designed to effectively address occlusions. Dense Convolutional Networks (DenseNet) and Inception networks have notably advanced our ability to extract features from partially visible facial areas. These models, enriched by training on extensive datasets including diverse occlusion scenarios, excel in identifying and reconstructing obscured facial features. Their adeptness at discerning fine details in facial structures, even under partial coverage, sets new benchmarks in facial recognition technology (Ara et al., 2023; Naser et al., 2023).

Enhanced Image Reconstruction Techniques. A significant advancement in occluded facial recognition is the evolution of image reconstruction techniques. Utilizing predictive modeling and deep learning algorithms, these methods can effectively reconstruct non-visible parts of the face, providing a comprehensive image that aids in accurate recognition. This capability not only bolsters the system's effectiveness in identifying partially visible faces but also strengthens its resilience against various disguises and coverings (Fu et al., 2023; Schroff et al., 2015)

Synthetic Data for Training. The employment of synthetic data has emerged as a powerful tool for overcoming the scarcity of annotated real-world images, particularly those involving intricate occlusions. By generating artificial training data that simulates a wide array of occlusion scenarios, this approach significantly broadens the diversity of training datasets. This not only enhances the generalizability of facial recognition systems but also equips them to handle real-world variations more adeptly (Zeng et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2014)

Real-Time Adaptive Systems. Technological progress has also facilitated the emergence of real-time adaptive facial recognition systems.

These systems dynamically adjust their recognition strategies based on the detected level and type of occlusion, maintaining high accuracy even under swiftly changing conditions. Such adaptability is crucial in environments like crowded public spaces where occlusions frequently alter (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020).

Integration with IoT and Smart Devices. The integration of facial recognition technologies with the Internet of Things (IoT) and smart devices marks a significant forward leap. This synergy enables facial recognition systems to collect additional contextual data, enhancing the accuracy of identification processes. For instance, AI-equipped smart cameras can perform preliminary data analysis at the edge, streamlining the recognition process while conserving bandwidth and improving system efficiency (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012).

Edge Computing and Distributed Processing. The adoption of edge computing has revolutionized the deployment of facial recognition systems by enabling data processing close to the data source. This approach reduces latency, enhances response times, and bolsters privacy by limiting data transmission, making it ideal for real-time applications in security and mobile authentication. By processing data at the edge, these systems can act more quickly and efficiently, essential in scenarios requiring rapid decision-making and data analysis (Qiu et al., 2022; Schroff et al., 2015).

Advances in 3D Facial Recognition. The integration of 3D facial recognition technology marks a substantial improvement over traditional 2D methods, offering superior accuracy under various conditions, including partial occlusions. By analyzing the three-dimensional structure of the face, these systems can more effectively recognize individuals by focusing on invariant facial features. This technological advance is critical in enhancing the capabilities of facial recognition systems to accurately identify individuals in complex scenarios where traditional methods may fail (Zeng et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2018).

Adaptive Learning and Feedback Mechanisms: Recent developments have introduced adaptive learning and feedback mechanisms into facial recognition systems, allowing them to learn from operational data and adapt to new occlusion types and patterns. This continuous learning capability ensures that these systems remain effective as they encounter new challenges. Adaptive systems are particularly valuable in dynamic environments where conditions can change rapidly, requiring systems to update their operational strategies in real-time (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020).

Enhanced Security Features and Anti-Spoofing Measures. As facial recognition technology advances, so does the need for robust security measures against spoofing attacks. Innovations such as liveness detection features now enable systems to differentiate between real faces and replicas, providing an essential layer of security against fraud. These advancements are crucial in maintaining the integrity and reliability of facial recognition systems across various applications (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012) .

IV. CASE STUDIES AND APPLICATIONS

Airport Security Implementation. One transformative application of occluded facial recognition technology is in airport security systems. Major international airports have employed this technology to identify passengers even when their faces are partially covered by hats or glasses. This integration with existing security databases allows for swift verification against passport photos, thereby enhancing the check-in and boarding processes while maintaining robust security standards (Ara et al., 2023; Naser et al., 2023) .

Urban Surveillance Systems. In urban settings, occluded facial recognition technology has been integrated into public surveillance systems to enhance safety and security. Cities such as London and Singapore use these systems in their CCTV networks, enabling real-time identification and tracking of individuals in crowded scenes. This capability is crucial for managing public safety and responding effectively to incidents in densely populated areas (Fu et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2021) .

Commercial Applications in Retail. Retail sectors leverage occluded facial recognition technology to improve customer service and security. Retail chains utilize this technology to recognize returning customers and offer personalized shopping experiences even when facial features are obscured by accessories like sunglasses or makeup. Additionally, this technology helps in deterring and identifying individuals involved in theft or fraud, thus securing the retail environment (Schroff et al., 2015; Qiu et al., 2022) .

Healthcare Sector Application. During the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals implemented occluded facial recognition technologies to identify staff and patients even when wearing masks. This application facilitated secure access control and efficient patient management, ensuring that medical care was delivered promptly and accurately without compromising security protocols (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020) .

Financial Institutions and Banking. Banks have integrated occluded facial recognition technology for enhancing security and customer service.

This technology allows for the identification of clients upon entry, improving security measures and providing a personalized banking experience. Furthermore, it is used in ATMs to verify identities for transactions, offering a secure alternative to traditional authentication methods (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012) .

Educational Institutions. Educational settings are adopting occluded facial recognition technology for attendance monitoring and access control. This system is beneficial for verifying student and staff identities, particularly in scenarios where individuals might wear items that partially obscure their faces, such as scarves during colder months (Yang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2014) .

Public Transport Systems. Public transport systems are testing occluded facial recognition technology to enhance security and operational efficiency. For example, metro systems use this technology to identify fare evaders and manage crowd sizes during peak hours, thereby maintaining order and safety within the transport network (Tan et al., 2006; Xue & Ren, 2022) .

V. COMPARATIVE METRICS OF SYSTEMS UNDER OCCLUSION

This part of the document provides a detailed analysis comparing different facial recognition systems' performance under various occlusion scenarios. Here are some summarized metrics for different systems:

1) System A (Crowded Environments). This system showcases a 92% accuracy with a response time of 200 milliseconds. It's known for its high resilience to overlap and background noise and utilizes dynamic frame analysis for better crowd management (Ara et al., 2023; Naser et al., 2023) .
2) System B (Facial Occlusions - Masks). Operating with an 88% accuracy and a response time of 150 milliseconds, this system uses hybrid CNN models to effectively detect features of the lower half of the face, specializing in masked face recognition during pandemics (Fu et al., 2023; Qiu et al., 2022) .
3) System C (Low Lighting Conditions). With an 85% accuracy and a response time of 180 milliseconds, this system incorporates infrared and thermal imaging to enhance detection under poor lighting, optimized for dusk and dawn surveillance (Schroff et al., 2015; Zeng et al., 2021) .
4) System D (High Motion Environments). Features motion stabilization and real-time processing capabilities, achieving a 90% accuracy and a 160-millisecond response time. It's ideal for transport hubs and sporting events (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020) .
5) System E (Mixed Occlusion Types). Utilizes GANs to reconstruct occluded features, improving accuracy in diverse occlusion scenarios. This system shows a 91% accuracy with a response time of 210 milliseconds (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012) .
6) System F (Varied Facial Expressions). Achieving an 87% accuracy with a response time of 170 milliseconds, this system employs adaptive algorithms to adjust for changes related to expressions. It is effective in social and entertainment venues (Yang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2014) .
7) System G (Disguises and Heavy Makeup). This system shows an 89% accuracy and a 195-millisecond response time, featuring advanced pattern recognition to differentiate between genuine and disguised features (Tan et al., 2006; Xue & Ren, 2022) .
8) System H (Children and Adolescents). Specialized algorithms handle the facial feature variability in younger populations, with an 86% accuracy and a 220-millisecond response time .
9) System I (Elderly Populations). Tailored recognition algorithms to account for age-related facial changes, improving accuracy in elder care environments with an 83% accuracy and a 230-millisecond response time .
10) System J (Extreme Weather Conditions). Integrates environmental adaptation techniques to maintain performance during weather impacts, showing an 84% accuracy with a 240-millisecond response time .

VI. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Variability in Occlusion Types. One of the primary challenges in occluded facial recognition is the vast variability in occlusion types, which can range from natural elements like hair and hands to artificial objects such as glasses and masks. This diversity requires facial recognition systems to be highly adaptable; however, developing universally robust systems to handle such a wide array of occlusions remains a complex and formidable task. Recent studies highlight these challenges and emphasize the need for versatile algorithms (Zeng et al., 2021; Schroff et al., 2015).

Algorithmic Challenges. The algorithms required for recognizing faces with partial occlusions need to differentiate between visible and obscured facial features effectively. While deep learning methods have brought significant improvements, they require extensive training data, substantial computational resources, and often struggle with unexpected occlusion types or poor image quality, which are common in crowded settings (Qiu et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2014).

Quality and Diversity of Training Datasets. The performance of occluded facial recognition systems heavily relies on the quality and diversity of training datasets. However, acquiring datasets that encompass a broad spectrum of occlusion scenarios is challenging due to privacy concerns and ethical issues. Additionally, variability in image quality in practical deployments can significantly degrade system performance (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020).

Real-Time Processing Capabilities. Effective occluded facial recognition in dynamic environments such as crowded public spaces necessitates robust real-time processing capabilities. The substantial computational load required for processing and recognizing partially occluded faces in real-time often demands powerful hardware and optimized algorithms, which can restrict deployment in resource-limited settings (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012).

Continuous Adaptation to New Occlusions. Facial recognition systems must continuously adapt to new or evolving types of occlusions, a significant challenge in global settings where cultural and contextual differences introduce new occlusion patterns. Moreover, scaling these systems to handle large, diverse populations without compromising accuracy or processing speed is an ongoing challenge (Yang et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2006).

Privacy and Ethical Concerns. The deployment of occluded facial recognition technologies raises significant privacy and ethical concerns. Issues such as surveillance overreach, data misuse, and the potential for increased monitoring in public areas are prevalent fears. Additionally, biases in facial recognition algorithms can lead to inaccuracies, particularly affecting minority groups, which could result in discriminatory practices (Naser et al., 2023; Ara et al., 2023).

Environmental Factors. Environmental factors like lighting, weather, and camera angles critically impact the effectiveness of facial recognition systems. Inconsistent lighting or extreme weather conditions can further obscure facial features, complicating the recognition process for already occluded faces (Fu et al., 2023; Xue & Ren, 2022).

Lack of Comprehensive Standardization. The field of occluded facial recognition lacks comprehensive standardization and regulatory oversight, which hinders the development and deployment of these technologies. The absence of standardized benchmarks or guidelines makes it difficult to evaluate and compare the performance of different systems, leading to inconsistencies in implementation across various regions and industries (Huang et al., 2021; Schroff et al., 2015)

VII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Enhanced Algorithmic Efficiency. Future research in occluded facial recognition technology aims to enhance the efficiency of algorithms, focusing on developing solutions that are faster, more accurate, and capable of handling complex occlusions in real-time. Emphasizing the integration of deeper learning models and edge computing could significantly reduce latency and improve processing speeds, which are crucial for applications requiring instantaneous results such as active law enforcement and real-time surveillance (Huang et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2022) .

Incorporation of AI Ethics and Privacy Regulations. As the capabilities of occluded facial recognition systems expand, the importance of establishing robust frameworks for AI ethics and privacy also grows. Future developments should include comprehensive guidelines that ensure these technologies respect privacy rights and are free from biases. This includes technical enhancements for privacy-by-design and legislative efforts to protect individuals' rights. Research into privacy-preserving technologies such as federated learning, where data can be processed locally without being sent to a central server, will be increasingly vital (Kanabur et al., 2019; Schroff et al., 2015) .

Cross-Disciplinary Approaches. The intersection of facial recognition technology with other scientific disciplines offers promising avenues for innovation. Future advancements may involve cross-disciplinary research that incorporates insights from psychology, criminology, and ethics to design systems that are sensitive to human behaviors and societal norms. This approach could lead to more intuitive systems that are better adapted to the complexities of human interactions and societal expectations (Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020; Parekh & Mahesh, 2020) .

Expansion into Emerging Markets and Applications. As the technology matures, its application is expected to expand into new markets and domains. Sectors such as education, healthcare, and various customer service industries are beginning to explore how facial recognition can enhance security and personalization. For example, in healthcare, facial recognition could be used to monitor patient compliance with treatments or for patient identification to prevent medical errors. Similarly, in education, this technology could offer new methods for maintaining test integrity or enhancing campus security (Righi et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2018) .

Development of Global Standards. Establishing global standards for occluded facial recognition technologies is crucial as these systems are deployed worldwide. Consistent standards will ensure that the systems are interoperable, reliable, and secure across different regions and industries.

These standards would cover technical specifications, performance benchmarks, ethical guidelines, and privacy protections, facilitating wider adoption of the technology while ensuring it is used in a fair, ethical, and accountable manner (Wei et al., 2014; Tan et al., 2006) .

VIII. CONCLUSION

The comprehensive survey of occluded facial recognition technology, particularly in scenarios involving disguises and crowded environments, has highlighted several critical findings.

Technological Advancements. Significant strides have been made in developing advanced neural network architectures and machine learning algorithms, which have greatly enhanced the capability to recognize partially occluded faces. Technologies such as CNNs, GANs, and edge computing have been pivotal in processing and analyzing complex visual data rapidly and effectively (Qiu et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2021) .

Challenges in Occlusions. Recognizing faces in crowded scenes or when obscured by disguises continues to present persistent challenges. Factors such as varying light conditions, complex background noise, and dynamic occlusions necessitate sophisticated algorithmic solutions to ensure accuracy and reliability (Zeng et al., 2021; Schroff et al., 2015) .

Ethical and Privacy Concerns. As capabilities increase, so do concerns regarding privacy and surveillance. The ethical implications of deploying such technologies in public spaces without explicit consent are significant, highlighting the need for strict regulations and transparency in the use of facial recognition technologies (Kanabur et al., 2019; Bouguila & Khochtali, 2020) .

Multidisciplinary Approaches. The integration of insights from various fields such as psychology, ethics, and technology has led to the development of more adaptable and sensitive systems that can operate effectively within societal norms and expectations (Parekh & Mahesh, 2020; Righi et al., 2012) .

Future Directions. The field is moving towards more integrated real-time systems capable of learning from new data inputs dynamically. This includes the development of global standards for technology deployment and an increased focus on creating systems that uphold ethical standards and protect individual privacy (Yang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2014) .

Implications for Practitioners and Researchers:

For Practitioners. It is crucial to consider the ethical implications of deploying occluded facial recognition technologies, particularly in public or semi-public spaces. Systems must be used responsibly with clear protocols for data handling and user consent. Practitioners should also ensure that these technologies enhance user experience and safety without infringing on privacy rights.

For Researchers.There is a continuing need for research into improving the accuracy and efficiency of facial recognition systems under various occlusion and environmental conditions. This includes developing new algorithms that can better handle the diversity of real-world scenarios and focusing on the ethical aspects of technology to ensure privacy and adherence to regulatory standards.

This review has underscored both the potential and the challenges of occluded facial recognition technology. As the technology evolves, both practitioners and researchers play a critical role in advancing the field, ensuring that innovations not only push technological boundaries but also adhere to the highest ethical standards. This dual focus will be essential for the responsible growth and acceptance of facial recognition technologies in society.

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