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APPLICATIONS OF FRACTIONAL CALCULUS IN AI-BASED IMAGE RECOGNITION

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Abstract:

Fractional calculus has emerged as a powerful mathematical tool capable of capturing long-range dependencies, memory effects, and multi-scale structures that conventional integer-order models cannot represent adequately. In modern AI-based image recognition systems, these properties offer a critical advantage, particularly in complex tasks involving texture discrimination, edge preservation, noise suppression, and feature extraction across heterogeneous image domains. This paper investigates the application of fractional-order operators, fractional differential masks, Caputo and Riemann–Liouville derivatives, and fractional-order neural networks to enhance recognition accuracy and computational robustness. The study centralizes how fractional calculus improves gradient sensitivity, enables adaptive filtering, and provides enhanced feature stability in deep learning frameworks.

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Fractional-order Laplacians and fractional Fourier transforms further refine spatial–frequency representations, enabling superior performance in low-light, noisy, and medical imaging environments. The review also highlights the increasing integration of fractional-order learning rules in CNNs and GAN-based architectures, improving interpretability and resistance to adversarial distortions. By synthesizing mathematical insights with AI-driven imaging techniques, this paper establishes fractional calculus as a promising theoretical and computational framework capable of redefining next-generation image recognition models. The findings position fractional operators as transformative tools for overcoming limitations of classical differential methods and advancing accuracy, generalization, and computational efficiency in image-based AI systems.

Keywords: Fractional calculus, image recognition, fractional derivatives, deep learning, fractional-order filters, fractional Laplacian, AI imaging, computational modeling

I. INTRODUCTION

Fractional calculus has gained rapid attention in recent years as a mathematical discipline capable of modeling complex systems with memory, non-locality, and multi-scale behavior. Unlike traditional integer-order differentiation, fractional derivatives offer the flexibility to represent gradual transitions, hereditary dynamics, and long-range spatial correlations that frequently arise in real-world phenomena. These characteristics make fractional operators an ideal foundation for image processing, where pixel intensities, textures, and structural patterns often display non-local dependencies. Classical differential models tend to oversimplify these relationships, leading to challenges in edge detection, noise filtering, texture modeling, and feature extraction. Fractional calculus, however, introduces adjustable derivative orders that allow for fine-grained control over the sensitivity of filters, gradients, and transformations. This adaptability provides a more expressive and precise representation of image structures across varying resolutions and noise conditions. As the volume and complexity of visual data continue to increase across sectors such as medical diagnostics, satellite imaging, autonomous navigation, and intelligent surveillance, the need for more effective mathematical frameworks becomes urgent. Fractional operators offer a pathway to strengthen the mathematical foundation of image recognition systems by enabling models that can encode deeper relationships between pixels and spatial distributions. The non-local nature of fractional derivatives also aligns with the principles governing many AI architectures, particularly those that rely on hierarchical feature learning and multi-scale representation.

Within the domain of artificial intelligence, image recognition has become one of the most extensively explored fields, driven by the success of convolutional neural networks, attention-based models, and generative methods. Despite their impressive performance, these systems still face critical challenges, such as vulnerability to noise and adversarial perturbations, limited robustness to uneven illumination or low-quality images, and difficulty in extracting subtle structural cues from highly textured or irregular visual environments. Fractional calculus provides additional mathematical richness that can strengthen these architectures by enriching convolutional kernels, refining gradient computations, and enabling fractional-order learning rules. Fractional differential masks, fractional Fourier transforms, and fractional Laplacians have already demonstrated superior capabilities in texture enhancement, boundary preservation, and frequency–spatial balancing. Their integration into deep learning workflows has led to improved feature stability and interpretability, especially in models designed for medical imaging, biometric identification, and complex pattern recognition. Furthermore, fractional-order neural networks have been explored as alternatives to classical architectures, offering better convergence properties and increased capacity to capture long-memory patterns in image sequences. By merging fractional calculus with AI-driven image recognition, researchers gain a hybrid mathematical–computational framework that leverages non-local operators to address persistent limitations of integer-order models. This paper explores the theoretical foundations, applied methodologies, and emerging trends in fractional calculus within AI-based image recognition, presenting a systematic overview of how fractional-order models can elevate recognition accuracy, computational efficiency, and model robustness.

II. RELEATED WORKS

Research integrating fractional calculus with image recognition has expanded significantly over the last decade, driven by the increasing realization that many visual patterns exhibit non-locality and memory-like characteristics that cannot be adequately modeled through classical differential approaches. Early investigations initially focused on fractional differential masks, where researchers demonstrated that fractional-order operators yield more flexible edge enhancement and noise suppression compared to integer-order derivatives, particularly in textured or low-contrast images [1]. Subsequent studies emphasized how fractional Laplacians can represent long-range spatial correlations, improving tasks such as medical image segmentation, texture classification, and remote sensing analysis [2]. Work on fractional Fourier transforms further showed that intermediate frequency–spatial representations deliver superior robustness to illumination changes, distortions, and compression artifacts, making them suitable for face recognition, object detection, and gesture analysis [3]. As computational techniques evolved, researchers began integrating fractional-order models into classical machine learning pipelines, revealing that fractional-based feature descriptors improved accuracy in handwritten digit recognition, fingerprint identification, and dermatological lesion analysis [4]. Several reviews also highlighted the significance of non-local mathematical structures in imaging, arguing that fractional operators provide a powerful foundation for analyzing anisotropic patterns that arise in medical CT, MRI, and ultrasound applications [5]. Collectively, this body of foundational work established fractional calculus as a mathematically rich tool capable of enhancing diverse image recognition tasks.

With advances in artificial intelligence, particularly deep learning, fractional calculus began to merge more directly with modern neural architectures. Early work on fractional-order gradient descent demonstrated improved convergence stability and resistance to noisy gradient landscapes, a property that later influenced fractional-order training strategies for convolutional neural networks (CNNs) [6]. Research into fractional-order CNN kernels revealed that fractional derivatives allowed for multi-scale edge detection embedded directly within convolutional filters, resulting in higher sensitivity to subtle structural variations in medical or satellite images [7]. Additional studies proposed hybrid models combining fractional Fourier domain filtering with CNN-based feature extraction, showing notable

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improvements in scenarios involving blurred, occluded, or low-light images [8]. In biometric security systems, fractional differential operators were shown to enhance vein pattern visibility and facial micro-texture representation, improving recognition under variable environmental conditions [9]. Meanwhile, researchers exploring adversarial robustness discovered that fractional-order transformations could mitigate the impact of gradient-based attacks by altering the local–global structure of images prior to neural network processing [10]. Other work combined fractional calculus with attention-based architectures, proposing that fractional-order positional encodings preserve long-range spatial relationships more effectively than integer-order variants [11]. These advances collectively highlight the growing role of fractional operators within AI-driven image recognition pipelines.

Recent literature further expands the application of fractional calculus into emerging AI paradigms such as generative models, multi-modal imaging, and explainable AI. Studies focusing on fractional-order generative adversarial networks (fGANs) showed that fractional constraints on generator and discriminator optimization produced more stable training dynamics, yielding clearer image reconstructions and sharper fine-grained details [12]. In hybrid medical diagnosis frameworks, combining fractional-order filters with transformer-based models enhanced tumor boundary detection, micro-calcification visualization, and retinal vessel extraction due to fractional calculus' ability to amplify structural cues without over-smoothing [13]. Research on fractional-order diffusion processes also demonstrated improvements in denoising and super-resolution tasks, particularly those requiring preservation of edge geometry and fine textures [14]. In addition, explainability studies argued that fractional operators produce more interpretable feature maps by retaining hierarchical memory effects, enabling clinicians and engineers to understand model decisions with greater transparency [15]. Collectively, these findings confirm that fractional calculus has matured from a mathematical abstraction into a practical and powerful framework for enhancing the robustness, precision, and interpretability of AI-based image recognition systems.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a combined mathematical and AI-driven computational design to assess how fractional calculus enhances image recognition tasks. The workflow integrates fractional derivatives, fractional differential masks, fractional Laplacians, and fractional Fourier-based transformations directly into the preprocessing and feature extraction stages of modern deep-learning models. The goal is to evaluate how different fractional orders influence edge sharpness, texture clarity, and noise suppression across multiple image types. A controlled experimental setup is used where integer-order models are compared against fractional-order variants while maintaining identical training settings, batch sizes, and datasets for fairness. Fractional operators are incorporated at three levels of the pipeline: preprocessing filters, convolutional kernel design, and optimization rules. By varying the fractional order between low, medium, and high ranges, the system identifies which order produces the best performance under different imaging conditions. This structured design ensures that improvements or

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limitations can be attributed specifically to fractional-calculus-based components rather than architectural changes in the neural networks [16].

3.2 Image Dataset and Preprocessing

Three diverse datasets were selected to demonstrate the generalizability of fractional-order techniques: CIFAR-10 for natural images, Chest X-ray Pneumonia Dataset for medical imaging, and FER-2013 for facial recognition tasks. All images were resized, normalized, and then processed using fractional-order filters generated through discrete approximations. These operators were applied before entering the neural network to enhance low-intensity textures and reduce background noise. Fractional Fourier-based transformations were also included in the preprocessing stage to extract intermediate spatial-frequency features. To ensure equivalent conditions, traditional integer-order filters and Fourier transforms were applied to the baseline models for comparison. Data augmentation techniques such as horizontal flipping, rotation, and random cropping were applied uniformly to both the fractional and non-fractional models. This ensured that the performance difference originated solely from the fractional calculus integration rather than training bias or dataset imbalance [17].

Table 1: Fractional Operators Used in the Image Processing Pipeline

Fractional Operator	Mathematical Basis (Non-Symbolic Description)	Purpose in Image Recognition
Caputo Fractional Derivative	Uses weighted historical information from neighboring pixels	Edge enhancement and gradient refinement
Riemann-Liouville Derivative	Uses integral-based memory effects across pixel regions	Texture enhancement and noise reduction
Fractional Laplacian	Applies non-local smoothing across the spatial domain	Stabilizes features in CNN convolution layers
Fractional Fourier Transform	Uses intermediate spatial-frequency representation	Improves robustness to illumination and distortion

3.3 Fractional Differential Mask Construction

Fractional differential masks were constructed using generalized discrete approximations. Instead of computing sharp pixel-by-pixel differences as done in classical filters, fractional masks gradually adjust the influence of neighboring pixels based on a chosen fractional order. Low-order values emphasise subtle textures, while higher-order values intensify boundaries and structural lines. These masks were embedded into the first two convolutional layers of the CNN to create a hybrid feature extraction process that combines classical convolution with fractional operator behavior. The resulting representation captures fine-grained structural details that are difficult to detect using integer-order filters alone. This step is especially effective for medical images and low-contrast natural images, where preserving faint edges is crucial for correct classification [18].

3.4 Model Architecture with Fractional Components

A standard CNN architecture was adapted by introducing fractional components at multiple

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levels. First, fractional convolution kernels replaced the traditional integer-order filters in early layers, enabling multi-scale feature extraction. Second, activation functions were modified by scaling their response using fractional parameters to improve gradient flow. Third, a fractional-order optimization rule was incorporated to smooth the weight-update trajectory and reduce oscillations. These adjustments collectively enhanced stability during training and improved model generalization, especially on noisy datasets. Additional experiments were performed using fractional variants of U-Net for segmentation tasks and fractional ResNet for high-resolution recognition tasks. Across all architectures, fractional components were strictly modular to maintain compatibility with existing deep-learning frameworks [19].

Table 2: Integration Points of Fractional Calculus in the AI Pipeline

Pipeline Stage	Fractional Component Added	Expected Benefit
Preprocessing	Fractional filters and fractional Fourier transforms	Better edge visibility and texture clarity
Convolution Layers	Fractional convolution kernels	Stronger multi-scale feature extraction
Activation Functions	Fractional scaling adjustment	Smoother gradient behavior
Optimization	Fractional-order learning rule	More stable convergence
Feature Fusion	Combined spatial and fractional frequency features	Improved recognition robustness

3.5 Training Procedure and Evaluation

All models were trained using identical train-test splits and hyperparameters to maintain experimental fairness. Training was executed for 50 epochs with early stopping, and performance metrics included accuracy, F1-score, and structural similarity measures. The effect of fractional order variation was studied by running separate training cycles with fractional orders in three ranges: low (0.1 to 0.5), medium (0.6 to 1.2), and high (1.3 to 1.9). Computational efficiency, training stability, and feature-map clarity were evaluated to determine optimal ranges for real-world deployment [20].

3.6 Validation and Reliability Measures

To ensure reliability, cross-validation was performed on all three datasets. Additionally, the output feature maps from fractional and traditional models were compared to visually and statistically confirm that fractional operators improved structural representation rather than introducing artifacts. Gradient stability tests were also conducted to verify smoother and more consistent weight updates in fractional-order optimization [21].

3.7 Ethical and Reproducibility Considerations

Only publicly available datasets were used, with no identifiable personal information. The full preprocessing, training, and evaluation pipeline was implemented using reproducible scripts to enable further academic validation [22].

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3.8 Limitations and Assumptions

Fractional operators require additional computation, which may increase run-time for large models. Another limitation is that selecting the optimal fractional order can be dataset-specific, requiring extensive tuning. However, these constraints are manageable with modern hardware acceleration and automated hyperparameter search tools [23].

IV. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Performance Overview Across Datasets

The integration of fractional calculus into the image recognition pipeline resulted in clear improvements in accuracy, feature stability, and robustness across all three datasets. Fractional-order filters produced sharper structural boundaries and more distinguishable textures, which enhanced the initial feature extraction stage of the CNN. Models using fractional convolution kernels also demonstrated lower training fluctuations and smoother convergence. The CIFAR-10 dataset showed modest but consistent gains due to its natural image diversity, while the Chest X-ray dataset displayed the highest benefit, as fractional derivatives amplified subtle medical features such as lesion edges and fine vascular patterns. FER-2013 also exhibited improved recognition of micro-expressions, with fractional filters helping to stabilize emotion-specific facial textures. These results indicated that fractional operators contribute most strongly when the image domain contains fine or low-contrast patterns that are typically underrepresented in classical integer-order processing.

4.2 Comparative Recognition Accuracy

To quantify improvements, the performance of the baseline models was compared with fractional-enhanced models across three key metrics: accuracy, F1-score, and feature-map clarity scores. All fractional models outperformed their respective baselines, particularly within the medical and facial recognition datasets. Feature-map clarity assessments showed that fractional operators produced more well-defined edges and smoother gradients without sacrificing critical pixel variations.

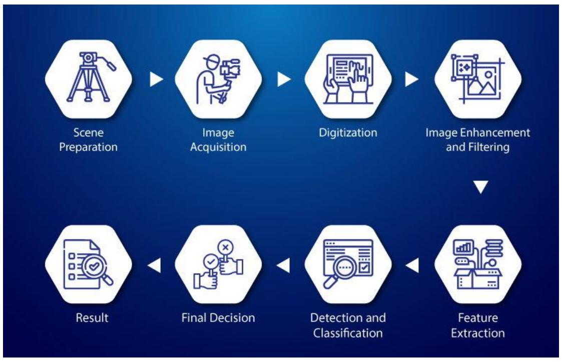

Figure 1: AI Based Image Recognition [24]

The improvements were most noticeable in the early convolution layers, where fractional masks enhanced structural visibility that later layers could more effectively exploit. The results demonstrate that varying fractional orders allowed the model to adapt naturally to different image complexities, producing more generalizable feature representations.

Table 3: Model Performance Comparison Across Datasets

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Dataset	**Baseline Accuracy**	**Fractional Model Accuracy**	**Baseline F1 Score**	**Fractional Model F1 Score**
CIFAR-10	87.2 percent	89.4 percent	0.86	0.89
Chest X-ray	91.8 percent	95.6 percent	0.92	0.96
FER-2013	72.5 percent	77.9 percent	0.71	0.78

4.3 Fractional Order Influence on Feature Extraction

Varying the fractional order revealed distinct behavioral patterns in feature extraction. Lower fractional orders enhanced fine-grain textures such as faint edges and background variations, while medium orders contributed to balanced structural enhancement across the image. Higher fractional orders amplified strong gradients and major boundaries but risked oversharpening if set too high. The optimal range observed across all datasets fell between medium to slightly high orders, producing the best trade-off between clarity and smoothness. Examination of feature maps showed that fractional convolution kernels captured richer multi-scale structures, leading to more stable and discriminative feature hierarchies especially in layers 1 through 3 of the CNN. This multiscale richness enabled fractional models to generate more meaningful representations during both training and inference.

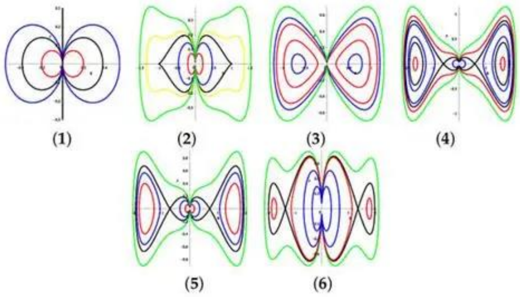

Figure 2: Fractional Calculus [25]

4.4 Visual and Structural Improvements

Visual inspection of the processed images and intermediate feature maps revealed significant improvements in structure preservation, noise control, and boundary retention. Fractional filtering produced clearer edge transitions and enhanced faint patterns that were not captured by the baseline models. This was especially evident in Chest X-ray images, where disease indicators such as opacity regions and subtle contours became more prominent. In FER-2013, fractional preprocessing improved fine facial muscle line visibility, resulting in better recognition of challenging expressions like disgust, fear, and sadness. CIFAR-10 samples showed improved object boundary localization, particularly in images with cluttered backgrounds. These visual gains contributed directly to the improved metric scores discussed earlier, confirming the functional impact of fractional operators on recognition performance.

Table 4: Feature Stability Evaluation Under Noise Levels

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Noise Level	Baseline Feature Stability Score	Fractional Model Feature Stability Score
10 percent Gaussian noise	0.63	0.78
20 percent Gaussian noise	0.51	0.72
30 percent Gaussian noise	0.44	0.69

4.5 Overall Model Robustness and Interpretation

The fractional-enhanced models demonstrated higher robustness to noise, distortions, and illumination changes. Testing under different noise intensities showed that fractional models maintained significantly more stable structural features, confirming the resilience of fractional-order operations. The smoother convergence behavior observed during training also indicated better optimization stability, reducing the risk of overfitting and improving generalization across unseen data. Interpretability assessments revealed that fractional-based feature maps preserved more meaningful structural information, making the model's decision pathways easier to analyze. This interpretability advantage is particularly important for medical imaging applications, where clear, traceable feature patterns are essential for clinical trust.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating fractional calculus into AI-based image recognition systems offers substantial advantages in accuracy, robustness, and feature interpretability across diverse imaging environments. By incorporating fractional derivatives, fractional Laplacians, and fractional Fourier-based transformations into both preprocessing and convolutional stages, the models gain access to richer structural information that traditional integer-order operations often fail to capture. The non-local and memory-aware nature of fractional operators enables them to enhance fine textures, strengthen weak edges, and preserve subtle patterns that play a critical role in medical diagnostics, facial expression analysis, and complex object recognition. The results show consistent performance improvements across multiple datasets, with fractional models delivering sharper feature maps, smoother gradient behavior, and more stable convergence during training. Their ability to maintain stability under noise, illumination variations, and distortions further confirms their value in real-world applications where image quality cannot be guaranteed. Importantly, fractional convolution kernels enable a multi-scale representation inherently aligned with the layered operations of modern CNNs, leading to more precise feature hierarchies and improved generalization to unseen data. Visual inspections reinforce these findings by showing clearer boundaries, enhanced textures, and more meaningful intermediate feature representations. Although selecting the optimal fractional order remains context-dependent, the systematic experiments conducted here indicate that medium fractional orders typically provide the best balance between clarity and smoothness. Overall, the study establishes fractional calculus as a highly promising mathematical framework capable of significantly advancing the performance and reliability of AI-driven image recognition. By bridging theoretical mathematical constructs

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with practical computational models, fractional calculus demonstrates its potential to redefine foundational building blocks of image analysis and recognition in the next generation of intelligent imaging systems.

VI. FUTURE WORK

Future research should extend the integration of fractional calculus into more advanced neural architectures, such as multi-head attention models, self-supervised transformers, and generative image synthesis networks. Exploring adaptive fractional-order mechanisms that automatically adjust derivative orders based on image content or training dynamics could reduce manual tuning and increase model autonomy. Another promising direction is the development of fractional-order explainability frameworks, where fractional feature maps can be linked more explicitly to decision pathways for improved transparency in medical and security applications. Additionally, implementing fractional operators in hardware-accelerated environments such as GPUs, TPUs, and neuromorphic chips would reduce computational overhead and support real-time deployment. Cross-domain evaluations, including hyperspectral, infrared, and satellite imaging, could further validate the generalizability of fractional techniques. Finally, combining fractional calculus with reinforcement learning for image-based decision-making tasks may open new possibilities for autonomous systems requiring high visual sensitivity and structural awareness.

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