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## Computational diagnostic methods on 2D photographs: A review of the literature

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1 **Title: Computational diagnostic methods on 2D photographs: a review of the**  
2 **literature.**

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4

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25 **ABSTRACT**

26

27 Here we provide a literature review of all the methods reported to date for analyzing 2D  
28 pictures for diagnostic purposes. Pubmed was used to screen the MEDLINE database  
29 using MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms and keywords. The different recognition  
30 steps and the main results were reported. All human studies involving 2D facial  
31 photographs used to diagnose one or several conditions in healthy populations or in  
32 patients were included. We included 1515 articles and 27 publications were finally  
33 retained. 67% of the articles aimed at diagnosing one particular syndrome versus  
34 healthy controls and 33% aimed at performing multi-class syndrome recognition. Data  
35 volume varied from 15 to 17,106 patient pictures. Manual or automatic landmarks were  
36 one of the most commonly used tools in order to extract morphological information  
37 from images, in 22/27 (81%) publications. Geometrical features were extracted from  
38 landmarks based on Procrustes superimposition in 4/27 (15%). Textural features were  
39 extracted in 19/27 (70%) publications. Features were then classified using machine  
40 learning methods in 89% of publications, while deep learning methods were used in  
41 11%. Facial recognition tools were generally successful in identifying rare conditions in  
42 dysmorphic patients, with comparable or higher recognition accuracy than clinical  
43 experts.

44 **Keywords:** literature review; machine learning; deep learning; photograph;  
45 dysmorphology; diagnosis

46 **Declarations of interest:** none.

47

48 **INTRODUCTION**

49

50 Shape analysis on 2D pictures can involve computations based on pre-defined rules; in  
51 machine learning approaches, these rules are replaced by the ability of the model to  
52 learn from examples (1). Applications of machine learning are increasing in healthcare  
53 (1), in a variety of fields such as radiology (2), dermatology (3) and surgery (4). Inputs  
54 or features are converted into outputs or labels. Deep learning is defined as a subtype of  
55 machine learning in which artificial neural networks are used. These neural networks  
56 can encode relationships between features and labels that are not accessible to the  
57 human brain, because of their complexity or because they do not match the way our  
58 brain processes data (1).

59 Examples of relevant inputs in healthcare are X-rays, texts, pathology slices and clinical  
60 photographs. Among these inputs, clinical photographs are particularly important in the  
61 diagnosis of craniofacial malformations. In fact, 30-40% of the 7000 rare diseases have  
62 craniofacial anomalies (5). Many among these 2-3000 syndromes have minor facial  
63 features or are very uncommon: their screening requires the eye of an expert in  
64 dysmorphology. Due to this specific clinical issue, there have been a recent increase in  
65 the number of scientific publications dedicated to the diagnosis of rare conditions using  
66 computational methods on facial photographs (6).

67 Here we provide a literature review of all the methods used for computational diagnosis  
68 on facial photographs. This overview will be of use for physicians and scientists  
69 interested in syndrome recognition, and more generally, in facial recognition.

70

71

72 **METHODS**

73

74 We performed a review of the literature according to the framework described by  
75 Arksey and O'Malley (7). We aimed at reporting all articles describing the  
76 computerized identification of a disease and/or a syndrome based on 2D facial  
77 photographs. PubMed was used to screen the MEDLINE database using MeSH  
78 (Medical Subject Heading) terms along with keywords from titles and abstracts (see  
79 request Table 1).

80 All human studies involving 2D facial photographs used to diagnose one or several  
81 conditions in healthy or patient populations were included. Only studies with diagnosis  
82 confirmation by clinical experts and/or molecular investigations were retained. Articles  
83 on prenatal diagnosis, extra-facial diseases and dermatological diseases of the face (e.g.  
84 facial acnea or naevi) were excluded. Studies assessing treatment results, such as  
85 craniofacial surgery results, were excluded, as well as studies dedicated to the detection  
86 of pain or other emotions. We also excluded studies based on the diagnosis of patients  
87 using a pre-existing algorithm, such as *Face2Gene* (8).

88 One reviewer (QH) screened all the titles and/or abstracts. When exclusion criteria were  
89 not clear after reading title and abstract, the full text was assessed. The relevant  
90 publications were then charted with the following items: year of publication, first  
91 author, country of affiliation, study design or objective, disease of interest, origin of  
92 data and number of patients. We reported the pre-processing of the pictures, *i.e.* every  
93 treatment the authors applied to the photograph before extracting features or using  
94 classifiers. Concerning feature extraction, we reported the use of: (1) landmarks, with  
95 manual and/or automatic placement, (2) geometric features, *i.e.* distances, angles or

96 other morphometric data and (3) texture features, based on the spatial arrangement of  
97 intensities on the image. We listed the classifiers and the validation methods of machine  
98 learning designs. We considered that authors had used machine learning methods when  
99 predictions were made on a test set with a classifier or a model trained on a training set.

100

## 101 **RESULTS**

102

103 With the pre-defined request, we listed 1515 results on PubMed. After applying all the  
104 exclusion criteria on reading title, abstract and full text when necessary, we included 27  
105 articles. These publications were fully read and charted (Table 2). The region of  
106 affiliation of the first author was North America – USA only in 37%, Europe –  
107 Germany, UK and Croatia in 33%, and Asia – China, India and Turkey in 30%.

108

### 109 ***1. Study designs and conditions***

110 We defined two types of studies depending of the number of diseases to be diagnosed.

111 The first and most common study design – in 18/27 (67%) publications – intended to  
112 diagnose one condition in the general population versus healthy controls using facial  
113 photographs. Facial pictures of the following conditions were tested versus healthy  
114 controls: Down syndrome (10–13), Cornelia de Lange syndrome (16), Rubinstein-Taybi  
115 syndrome (16), 22q11.2 deletion syndrome (17), Laron syndrome (18), Williams-  
116 Beuren syndrome (19), acromegaly (20–24), Cushing disease (25), Turner syndrome  
117 (26), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (27) and schizophrenia (28).

118 The second most prevalent study design – in 9/27 (33%) publications – consisted in  
119 using multi-syndrome classification, *i.e.* in differentiating syndromes from each other

120 and from the general population (8,29–38). For example, Ferry et al. (29) aimed at  
121 diagnosing 8 syndromes – Angelman, Apert, Cornelia de Lange, Down, fragile X,  
122 progeria, Treacher-Collins and Williams-Beuren syndromes – in the general population.  
123 Gurovich et al. (8) aimed at diagnosing 216 different syndromes in a population of  
124 affected patients.

125 The conditions reported in the included studies were:

- 126 – genetic syndromes: Down (29), Angelman (8), Prader-Willi (34), Cornelia de Lange  
127 (8), X fragile (34), Apert (29), Progeria (29), Treacher-Collins (29), Williams-  
128 Beuren (32), Sotos (30), Cri-du-chat (34), Smith-Lemli-Opitz (34), 22q11.2 deletion  
129 (34), Turner (8), Noonan (8), Mucopolysaccharidosis (34), Rubinstein-Taybi (8),  
130 Hurler (36), Wolf-Hirschhorn (36) and 183 others in (8),
- 131 – endocrine conditions with a facial phenotype (e.g. acromegaly and Cushing  
132 syndrome) (23)
- 133 – psychiatric conditions: schizophrenia (28) and chronic fatigue syndrome (27).

134

## 135 **2. Data description**

136 The photographic data had diverse origins: (1) pictures taken during clinics  
137 (9,10,12,15,17–25,27,30,32–36,39–41), (2) pictures from articles or books  
138 (14,16,17,29,38), (3) pictures from pre-existing cohorts (8,37,42,43) and (4) pictures  
139 publicly available on the internet (11,29). The data volume varied from 15 pictures of  
140 affected patients (9) to 17,106 for Gurovich et al. (8). The average number of affected  
141 (non-control) patients in the studies was 844 (+/- 3272); more precisely, 114 (+/- 138)  
142 affected individuals were included in average in order to detect one syndrome versus the  
143 general population and 2085 (+/- 5309) affected individuals in order perform multi-

144 syndrome classification. There was one photograph per patient in all publications.  
145 Authors used age-, sex-, (15,19,22,25,40) and ethnicity-matched controls (12) in 6/27  
146 (22%) studies.

147

### 148 **3. Image pre-processing**

149 Pre-processing corresponded to the preparation of pictures before extracting data and  
150 applying classifiers. It is a useful step in machine learning: images are grouped (face,  
151 profile), resized and transformed (rotation, cropping, lighting) to optimize analysis.

152 An automated facial detection system was used in several studies to sort frontal views  
153 from lateral views and then crop the pictures. The most common algorithm in this field  
154 was the *Haar cascade* tool developed by Viola and Jones (1). One author used manual  
155 cropping, scaling and rotation to maximize the classifier performances (9). This  
156 approach was not adapted to large datasets. Manual or automated cropping was useful  
157 for little standardized databases, for instance when several individuals were present on  
158 pictures (*e.g.* the child and his mother) (6).

159

### 160 **4. Image processing**

161 All authors applied two exclusive image processing approaches: (1) use of geometric  
162 and/or textural features in order to describe phenotypes or (2) deep learning process in  
163 order to detect a syndrome without describing phenotypes.

164

### 165 **Landmarks positioning**

166 Landmarks are defined by reproducible points of interest on an image. They are one of  
167 the most common tools used to extract phenotypic data, as in 22/27 (81%) publications.



168 In 7/27 (26%) publications, the authors placed landmarks manually and automatic  
169 landmarking was used in 16/27 (59%) publications.

170 In 4/27 (15%) publications (9,11,24,41), the authors did not use landmarks to analyze  
171 faces and phenotypes and preferred assessing the overall shape and textures.

172

### 173 ***Frontalization and facial alignment.***

174 Frontalization is a process modifying a frontal image in order to improve the orientation  
175 of the frontal view. Kong et al. (21) used alignment, based on Procrustes  
176 superimposition (47,48), in order to compute frontal pictures from photos with capture  
177 angles varying from  $-45^\circ$  to  $+45^\circ$  around the standard coronal plane. The final frontal  
178 face was produced using the corresponding symmetric sides, which raised numerous  
179 issues in conditions with facial asymmetry.

180

### 181 ***Geometric features extraction***

182 Geometric features were extracted from landmarks and used for disease detection. The  
183 main advantage of using landmarks was to be more flexible with pose changes and  
184 different angles of view. One straightforward approach was to measure Euclidean  
185 distances and angles from landmarks (22,23,25,26,35,36).

186 Another approach to geometrical information extraction, used in 4/27 (15%)  
187 publications, was Procrustes analysis (10,16,29,49,50). Procrustes distance was defined  
188 as the deformation necessary to fit a dysmorphic face on a control face via an iterative  
189 least-squares process. Each of the faces were centered and scaled using a centroid (51)  
190 to minimize sum of squared differences between the landmarks. Douglas and

191 Mutsvangwa (52) concluded that Procrustes-based approaches were the best methods  
192 for shape analysis in terms of prediction accuracy.

193

#### 194 ***Texture features extraction***

195 A texture extraction system was used in 18/27 (67%) publications, in association with  
196 geometric features extraction (8,11,12,14,22,23,25–27,32,37,41,48) or independently  
197 (9,11,41). The most common methods were Gabor Wavelet Transformation (GWT)  
198 used in 12/27 (44%) (54,55) and/or a Local Binary Patterns (LBP) in 7/27 (26%)  
199 publications (56). These methods provide information about the surface located  
200 between the landmarks. For example, zygomatic hypoplasia in Treacher Collins  
201 syndrome would be better detected by analyzing the shadows on a photo than by  
202 measuring angles between landmarks.

203

204 The information on geometric / texture features created extensive data matrices, with  
205 the need to reduce dimensionality before incorporation into classifiers. For this purpose,  
206 Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used in 17/27 (70%) publications.

207 Gurovich et al. (8) did not use any geometric or textural features extraction step for  
208 prediction making after facial alignment based on different landmarks. Their approach  
209 is referred to as deep learning because it corresponds to a *black box* approach  
210 diagnosing dysmorphic features without going through a phenotype description process.  
211 When using deep learning, authors cannot easily explain what contributed to the  
212 diagnosis of a particular syndrome.

213

#### 214 **5. Classification**

215 Machine learning was defined by using a training set to make predictions on a  
216 validation or test set. Based on this, 3/27 (11%) publications were not using machine  
217 learning methods.

218 In these studies, diverse classifiers were used. The simplest classifiers were Generalized  
219 Linear Models (GLM) such as logistic regression and linear discriminant analysis, as  
220 used in 4/27 (15%) publications (16,21). Their output was a linear combination of input  
221 facial data.

222 SVM – used in 13/27 (48%) publications – was a classification method aiming at  
223 separating two data sets with distance maximization based on an optimal separating  
224 hyperplane (57). Bounds between datasets and the optimal separating hyperplane were  
225 referred to as ‘support vectors’ (68).

226 The k-nearest neighbors (kNN) rule – used in 11/27 (41%) publications – classified  
227 each unlabeled example by the majority label of its k-nearest neighbors in the training  
228 set (59). It stored instances of previously earned images. Classification was obtained  
229 from a majority vote of the nearest neighbors (21). The kNN classifier was particularly  
230 adapted for multiclass detection.

231 Random forests (RT) – used in 2/27 (7%) publications – were another technique (21)  
232 consisting in growing many classification trees. The forest chose the classification tree  
233 having the best prediction. In addition, a subset of features was randomly selected from  
234 the optional features in order to grow the tree at each node. Random forests were  
235 particularly adapted for large number of weak classifiers.

236 Deep learning – Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) or Artificial Neural Networks  
237 (AAN) – was used in 3/27 (11%) publications. Kong et al. (21) also used CNN with  
238 convolutional layers, pooling layers and fully-connected layers. Gurovich et al. (8) used

239 Deep Convolutional Neural Networks (DCNN) (60) for each of the cropped facial areas,  
240 which were then combined by averaging to form a model for a multiclass problem.  
241 Kong et al. (21) compared the performances of these machine learning techniques  
242 (linear functions, SVM, kNN, RF and CNN): better classification abilities were found in  
243 terms of accuracy for SVM with detected features and for CNN without detected  
244 features.

245

## 246 **6. Clinical results**

247 Saraydemir et al. (9) and Zhao et al. (10) found an overall accuracy of respectively 97%  
248 and 97.9% with 15 and 24 patients for diagnosing Down syndrome in a healthy  
249 population. Both these performances were higher than clinical experts. Kruszka and his  
250 team found an accuracy of 95% for detecting 22q11.2 deletion syndrome in 156 patients  
251 vs. the general population (17), 94% for Down syndrome (12) in 129 patients, 90% for  
252 Williams-Beuren syndrome in 286 patients (19), 94% for Cornelia de Lange in 246  
253 patients (15) and 89% for Noonan syndrome in 161 patients (40). Kong et al. (21) used  
254 the F1-score in order to evaluate the performances of their classifier in detecting  
255 acromegaly in 527 patients. They obtained a F1-score of 92% with landmarks and SVM  
256 and 91% without landmarks and with deep learning methods. Accuracies of 86% and  
257 82% were obtained to detect acromegaly among a healthy population in 24 (20) and 57  
258 patients (22).

259 Ferry et al. (29) used the *Clustering Improvement Factor* (CIF) after implementing kNN  
260 on 8 syndromes and 1363 patients. Treacher-Collins syndrome was then clustered 23.5-  
261 fold better than by chance alone, Down syndrome 11.6-fold better, and Williams-  
262 Beuren 9.4-fold-better. The overall accuracy for detecting one syndrome vs. the 7 others

263 was 76% and the overall accuracy for detecting syndromes vs. a healthy population was  
264 95%. Another method for displaying results in a multi-syndrome classification design  
265 was to provide a Top-5 or Top-10 accuracy, *i.e.* to evaluate the probability of a  
266 condition to be ranked as the 5 or 10 most probable syndromes by the classifier.  
267 Gurovich et al. (8), in 17,106 patients with 216 syndromes, found a Top-10 accuracy of  
268 91%, a Top-5 accuracy of 85% and a Top-1 accuracy of 61%. Kuru et al. (38) found  
269 53% accuracy on a multi-class syndrome detection of 15 conditions with 92 patients.  
270 Boehringer et al. (32) had an overall accuracy of 21% for multi-syndrome detection on  
271 14 conditions in 202 patients, which is very low compared to the performances of the  
272 clinical experts.

273

## 274 **DISCUSSION**

275

276 Machine learning approaches used to diagnose clinical conditions on 2D photographs  
277 generally followed similar frameworks (Figure 1): either features were extracted from  
278 photographs to diagnose a disease or the syndrome was detected directly without feature  
279 extraction by deep learning. In case of features extraction, the steps were: image pre-  
280 processing, image processing with or without landmark placement, extraction of  
281 geometrical and/or textural features, reduction of the dimensions of the input, and  
282 classification and validation using training and test sets. Procrustes analysis was a  
283 reliable technique for the extraction of morphometric parameters (52). Texture  
284 extraction techniques seemed of interest in adding information to the geometric features  
285 (27).

286 Deep learning methods are a promising tool with much space for performance  
287 improvement (8). The number of publications using deep learning was however limited  
288 because this approach requires large data volumes – 17,106 patients in Gurovich et al.  
289 (8) – in order to train the model. The challenge in the future years will be to build large  
290 photographic databases and train neural networks in order to improve predictions.  
291 Comparing publications and diagnosis performances of machine learning tools was  
292 difficult due to the variety of assessment parameters: Boehringer (32) used accuracy,  
293 Zhao (10) precision and recall, Dudding-Byth (37) top-10, top-5 and top-1 accuracies,  
294 and Ferry (29) the Clustering Improvement Factor (CIF). Evidence-based comparisons  
295 of machine learning in facial recognition would greatly benefit from more homogenous  
296 result assessment approaches.

297

## 298 **CONCLUSION**

299 Facial recognition approaches are efficient in identifying rare conditions using 2D  
300 photographs. Machine-learning algorithms improve recognition accuracy. Deep learning  
301 techniques such as CNNs are promising, but larger datasets are needed. Based on the  
302 current results of available algorithms, we can predict that collaborative studies with  
303 massive shared datasets could shortly lead to the development of algorithms with almost  
304 perfect diagnostic abilities.

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476

477 **FIGURES AND TABLE CAPTIONS**

478

479 **Table 1.** Pubmed request.

*(diagnosis[Title] OR detection[Title] OR dysmorphic[Title/Abstract] OR  
dysmorphology[Title/Abstract] OR disease[Title/Abstract] OR syndrome[Title/Abstract])*

**AND** *(face[Title/Abstract] OR faces[Title/Abstract] OR facial[Title/Abstract])*

**AND** *("face-classification"[Title/Abstract] OR "facial analysis technology"[Title/Abstract] OR  
"artificial intelligence"[MeSH Terms] OR "biometric identification"[Mesh] OR "Medical  
informatics"[MeSH Terms] OR "Image Processing, Computer-Assisted"[MeSH Terms])*

480

481

482 **Table 2.** General characteristics for each of the studies, and method of classification.

483 Publications not using machine learning (n = 3) were excluded. SVM = Support Vector

484 Machine. kNN = k-Nearest Neighbors. RF = Random forests. CNN = Convolutional

485 Neural Network. AAN = Artificial Neural Networks.

486

<b>Multisyndrome</b>	Data volume	Number of syndromes	Linear functions	SVM	kNN	RF	CNN / ANN
Boehringer, 2006	147	10		✓	✓		
Vollmar, 2007	200	14		✓	✓		
Boehringer, 2011	202	14		✓	✓		
Ferry, 2014	1363	8			✓		
Kuru, 2014	92	15			✓		
Shu, 2015	13	100		✓	✓		
Özdemir, 2018	124	5			✓		✓
Gurovich, 2019	17,106	216					✓
<b>Monosyndrome</b>	Condition / syndrome						
Schaefer, 1994	49	Laron		✓			

Learned-Miller, 2006	24	Acromegaly	✓			
Miller, 2011	24	Acromegaly	✓			
Saraydemir, 2011	15	Down	✓	✓		
Schneider, 2011	57	Acromegaly	✓			
Buretic-Tomljanovic, 2012	58	Schizophrenia	✓			
Kosilek, 2013	20	Cushing	✓			
Zhao, 2014	100	Down	✓	✓	✓	
Chen, 2015	294	Chronic fatigue syndrome		✓		
Kong, 2017	527	Acromegaly	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kruszka, 2017	156	22q11.2	✓			
Kruszka, 2017	129	Down	✓			
Kruszka, 2017	161	Cornelia de Lange	✓			
Chen, 2018	32	Turner	✓			
Kruszka, 2018	286	Williams-Beuren	✓			
Dowsett, 2019	246	Cornelia de Lange	✓			

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