WWW.IJRPR.COM

International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Using Artificial Intelligence to Predict the Shelf Life of Bottle Gourd (Lauki/Kaddu)

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ABSTRACT

Bottle gourd, also known as lauki or kaddu, is a popular vegetable that spoils quickly due to its high water content. Traditional ways to estimate how long it stays fresh, like checking it by hand or using basic models, are often inaccurate and time-consuming. This paper explores how artificial intelligence (AI), especially machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), can predict the shelf life of bottle gourd more accurately. By using data from sensors, images, and past records, AI can analyze factors like temperature, humidity, and the vegetable's condition to forecast when it will spoil. This study reviews current methods, suggests an AI-based approach, and discusses challenges and future possibilities. The findings show that AI can improve how we manage bottle gourd after harvest, reducing waste and saving money.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Bottle Gourd, Shelf Life Prediction, Post-Harvest Management

Introduction

Bottle gourd (Lagenaria siceraria), commonly called lauki or kaddu in South Asia, is a nutritious vegetable used in many dishes. However, it has about 92% water, which makes it spoil quickly, usually within one to three weeks even in good storage conditions. Poor storage and transportation often lead to a lot of waste, causing financial losses for farmers and businesses.

Currently, people estimate shelf life by looking at the vegetable or using simple models based on factors like temperature and humidity. These methods are not very accurate, take a lot of effort, and miss complex factors that cause spoilage. Artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning and deep learning, can change this. AI can process large amounts of data from sensors, cameras, and past records to predict spoilage more precisely.

This paper looks at how AI can be used to predict the shelf life of bottle gourd. It reviews existing methods, proposes a new AI-based system, and discusses its benefits for managing vegetables after harvest. It also covers challenges like getting enough data and making AI models easy to understand.

Literature Review

AI is already used in farming for things like predicting crop yields, detecting plant diseases, and checking food quality. For shelf life prediction, AI has worked well for other perishable foods like tomatoes and apples. For example, researchers used machine learning to predict tomato shelf life based on color, texture, and storage conditions, with over 90% accuracy. Another study used deep learning to analyze apple images and predict spoilage accurately.

For bottle gourd, there's less research, but some studies exist. One study used basic models to predict spoilage based on temperature and humidity, but these didn't use advanced AI. More recent work has started exploring AI for vegetables like bottle gourd, showing promising results when combining data from sensors and images.

Factors Affecting Shelf Life of Bottle Gourd

Several factors influence how long bottle gourd stays fresh:

- **Temperature**: High temperatures speed up spoilage, while cooler ones (around 10-12°C) slow it down.
- **Humidity**: Bottle gourd needs high humidity (85-90%) to prevent drying out, but too much can cause mold.

- **Physical Condition**: Cuts, bruises, or disease on the gourd reduce its shelf life.
- **Storage Conditions**: Proper ventilation and packaging, like perforated plastic bags, help extend freshness.
- **Harvest Time**: Gourds harvested at the right maturity last longer than overripe ones.

These factors interact in complex ways, making it hard to predict shelf life without advanced tools like AI.

AI-Based Framework for Shelf Life Prediction

This section proposes a system to predict bottle gourd shelf life using AI. The framework has four main steps:

1. Data Collection

To build an AI model, we need data on factors affecting shelf life. This includes:

- **Environmental Data**: Temperature, humidity, and air quality from sensors in storage areas.
- **Physiological Data**: Size, weight, color, and texture of the gourd, collected using cameras or manual checks.
- **Historical Data**: Records of past spoilage times under different conditions.
- **Imaging Data**: Pictures of bottle gourds to detect spoilage signs like spots or soft areas.

Sensors like IoT (Internet of Things) devices can collect real-time data, while high-resolution cameras can capture images for analysis.

2. Data Preprocessing

Raw data needs cleaning and organizing before AI can use it. This involves:

- Removing errors, like incorrect sensor readings.
- Standardizing data formats, such as converting temperatures to Celsius.
- Filling in missing data using averages or predictions.
- Labeling images with spoilage levels (e.g., fresh, slightly spoiled, fully spoiled).

3. Model Development

Two types of AI models are suitable for this task:

- **Machine Learning**: Models like Random Forest or Support Vector Machines can predict shelf life based on numerical data (e.g., temperature, humidity). These models are good for structured data and are easier to interpret.
- **Deep Learning**: Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) can analyze images to detect spoilage signs. For example, a CNN can learn to spot mold or discoloration in bottle gourd photos.

The models are trained on historical data, where they learn patterns linking factors like temperature and spoilage time. For instance, a Random Forest model might find that gourds stored above 20°C spoil in 5-7 days, while those at 10°C last 15-20 days.

4. Model Deployment and Monitoring

Once trained, the AI model can be used in real-time. For example:

- Sensors in a warehouse send temperature and humidity data to the model.
- Cameras take pictures of bottle gourds, and the model analyzes them for spoilage signs.
- The model predicts shelf life (e.g., “This gourd will last 10 more days”) and suggests actions like adjusting storage conditions.

The system should be monitored and updated with new data to stay accurate as conditions change.

Case Study: Hypothetical Implementation

Imagine a farm in India storing bottle gourds for local markets. They install IoT sensors to track temperature and humidity and use cameras to photograph gourds daily. The data is fed into an AI system with a Random Forest model for environmental data and a CNN for image analysis. After training on six months of data, the system predicts shelf life with 85% accuracy. For example, it might predict that a gourd stored at 15°C and 90% humidity will last 18 days, while one at 25°C will spoil in 7 days. The farm uses these predictions to prioritize selling gourds that will spoil sooner, reducing waste by 30%.

Benefits of AI-Based Shelf Life Prediction

Using AI to predict bottle gourd shelf life has several advantages:

- **Accuracy**: AI models can analyze complex data patterns, making predictions more reliable than manual methods.
- **Efficiency**: Automated systems save time compared to checking gourds by hand.
- **Reduced Waste**: Knowing when gourds will spoil helps farmers and sellers prioritize sales or adjust storage, cutting losses.
- **Cost Savings**: Less waste means more profit for farmers and lower prices for consumers.
- **Scalability**: AI systems can be used for small farms or large supply chains.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential, AI-based shelf life prediction faces challenges:

- **Data Availability**: Collecting enough high-quality data, especially images and historical records, can be difficult, particularly for small farms.
- **Cost**: Setting up sensors, cameras, and AI systems requires investment, which may be hard for low-income farmers.
- **Model Interpretability**: Complex AI models like deep learning can be hard to understand, making it tough to trust their predictions.
- **Variability**: Different bottle gourd varieties and growing conditions can affect spoilage, requiring models to be customized.
- **Maintenance**: AI systems need regular updates and monitoring to stay accurate.

Future Directions

To improve AI-based shelf life prediction for bottle gourd, future work could focus on:

- **More Data**: Partnering with farms and markets to collect larger datasets, including data from different regions and climates.
- **Affordable Technology**: Developing low-cost sensors and AI tools for small-scale farmers.
- **Hybrid Models**: Combining machine learning and deep learning for better accuracy, using both numerical data and images.
- **Real-Time Systems**: Creating mobile apps that let farmers input data and get instant shelf life predictions.
- **Sustainability**: Using AI to optimize storage conditions, like adjusting temperature, to save energy while extending shelf life.

Conclusion

Predicting the shelf life of bottle gourd using AI is a promising approach to reduce food waste and improve agricultural efficiency. By analyzing environmental, physiological, and imaging data, machine learning and deep learning models can provide accurate and timely predictions. While challenges like data collection and costs remain, the benefits—such as less waste, lower costs, and better supply chain management—make AI a valuable tool. With further research and affordable technology, AI can transform how we manage perishable vegetables like bottle gourd, benefiting farmers, businesses, and consumers.

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