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Palm Oil Adulteration Detection Using Model Averaging of Machine Learning Classifiers on Simulated Chemical Data

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ABSTRACT

Palm oil adulteration poses significant health and economic risks, necessitating accurate detection methods. This study develops a machine learning framework combining KNN, SVM, and Random Forest via weighted model averaging to analyze synthetic FTIR spectra simulating pure and adulterated palm oil. SVM emerged as the top performer (97.3% accuracy), significantly outperforming Random Forest (86.9%) and KNN (85.9%). Principal Component Analysis revealed distinct clustering, with PC1 (63.3% variance) strongly correlate with key adulteration markers like ester C=O (1745 cm^{-1}) and OH (3300 cm^{-1}) vibrations. Spectral segmentation identified the 1000–1100 cm^{-1} region (C-O stretches) as most critical for detection, enabling a proposed two-stage screening protocol that reduces analysis time by 60% while maintaining >90% accuracy for 5% adulterant concentrations. The synthetic dataset, validated against experimental references, replicated physicochemical trends, including peak broadening in oxidized samples (+20% FWHM) and dye-specific N=O peaks (1520 cm^{-1}). Model averaging enhanced stability, reducing performance variability to 1.2% versus 3.5–4.8% for individual models. These results highlight SVM's superiority in handling high-dimensional spectral data and non-linear patterns, while the methodological advances—including noise modeling (SNR = 40 dB) and feature selection—offer practical solutions for portable FTIR devices. The framework supports real-time adulteration screening in resource-limited settings, with implications for food safety regulation and IoT-based quality monitoring in global palm oil supply chains.

Keywords: Ensemble learning, machine learning, model averaging, palm oil adulteration, simulated data

INTRODUCTION

Palm oil is a strategic commodity for Indonesia, playing a crucial role in national food security and the global economy. In recent years, however, the issue of adulteration—intentional tampering of palm oil with hazardous substances—has emerged as a serious threat to food safety. According to data from the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM) in 2023, approximately 28% of palm oil samples collected from traditional markets showed signs of adulteration with harmful substances such as used cooking oil, Rhodamine B textile dyes, and organic solvents. This issue is not confined to Indonesia alone; the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has reported that around 15% of products containing palm oil in European markets fail to meet purity standards, indicating the global scale of the problem. The health implications of adulterated palm oil are particularly

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alarming. A study by Universitas Indonesia (2022) revealed that consuming palm oil contaminated with used cooking oil increases the risk of cardiovascular disease by up to 40%, due to the presence of trans fatty acids and carcinogenic peroxides. Moreover, synthetic dyes such as Methanil Yellow, commonly used to enhance the color of low-quality palm oil, have been proven to cause liver and kidney damage, as demonstrated by toxicological studies conducted at IPB University (Ahmad *et al.* 2021).

Economically, adulteration inflicts considerable damage on the palm oil industry. The Indonesian Palm Oil Producers Association (APROBI) estimates that annual losses amount to IDR 3.5 trillion due to product quality degradation and declining international consumer trust. The situation is further exacerbated by inadequate field surveillance. Data from the Ministry of Trade indicate that only 35% of traditional markets in Indonesia are equipped with rapid testing tools for adulteration detection. While conventional analytical techniques such as gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) are highly accurate, they are costly (IDR 2–5 million per test), time-consuming (4–8 hours per sample), and require skilled personnel (Suryanto *et al.* 2022).

In this context, Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR) Spectroscopy emerges as a promising alternative due to its rapid (less than five minutes), non-destructive, and cost-effective analysis approxi-mately IDR 50,000–100,000 per sample). FTIR works by detecting molecular vibrations that produce specific absorption patterns for each compound. However, manual interpretation of FTIR spectra presents several critical limitations. First, there is significant spectral overlap between authentic palm oil and adulterants, such as the C=O ester peak at 1745 cm^{-1} overlapping with the carboxylic acid C=O peak at 1710 cm^{-1}. Second, stages: first, independent optimization of baseline variation caused by scattering effects impedes quantitative analysis. Third, the technique is less sensitive to low-level adulteration (<3%) due to instrument resolution constraints (Rohman & Windarsih 2023; Zhang *et al.* 2022).

Recent advances in analytical spectroscopy have highlighted the potential of machine learning (ML) approaches to overcome these challenges. Prior studies have applied various ML algorithms to FTIR spectral analysis with promising results. For example, de Santana *et al.* (2019) successfully applied Support Vector Machines (SVM) to detect olive oil adulteration with an accuracy of 89%, while Li *et al.* (2021) developed a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) model that achieved 92% accuracy in identifying adulterated palm oil. Nonetheless, these studies face persistent limitations, including the scarcity of publicly available FTIR datasets (e.g. the NIST 2023 database contains only ~200 adulterated palm oil spectra), model overfitting due to spectral variations across instruments, and the high computational burden of processing high-resolution spectra comprising thousands of data points (Wang *et al.* 2023).

To address these limitations, this study proposes a novel framework incorporating model averaging ensemble learning as a core solution. The model averaging strategy combines the predictive strengths of three machine learning algorithms—K-Nearest Neighbor (KNN), Support Vector Machine (SVM), and Random Forest (RF)—through weighted probability averaging, where each base model contributes based on its cross-validation performance. This approach offers three main advantages: (1) reducing individual model bias through weighted voting; (2) enhancing prediction stability against spectral noise; and (3) providing uncertainty estimates via the joint probability distribution. The implementa-tion of model averaging involves three key each base learner; second, determination

of combination weights based on validation accuracy; and third, integration of probabilistic predictions using a softmax function. Preliminary experiments using 500 simulated FTIR spectra demonstrated a significant increase in classification accuracy from 82% (best single model) to 94%, with a false positive rate below 3%. Furthermore, model averaging achieved greater consistency, with a standard deviation of only 1.2% across 50 cross-validation runs, compared to 3.5–4.8% for individual models.

To further mitigate data limitations, this study also constructs a synthetic FTIR spectral dataset using empirically derived spectroscopic parameters. Additionally, a segmentation-based preprocessing strategy is applied, focusing on key spectral regions (e.g. 1745 cm^{-1}, 1160 cm^{-1}, and 2925 cm^{-1}) to reduce noise and computational complexity. These innovations not only enhance classification performance but also improve model interpretability. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the development of an accurate, robust, and scalable detection system for palm oil adulteration. The proposed framework holds strong potential for real-time implementation in traditional markets through Internet of Things (IoT) integration and supports national food safety programs, including the Ministry of Health's School Children Snack Food Safety Initiative (PJAS). By strengthening both technological and operational aspects of adulteration detection, this study seeks to safeguard public health and maintain the global competitiveness of Indonesian palm oil.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The synthetic FTIR spectra were systematically generated to replicate the characteristic absorption patterns of pure and adulterated palm oil samples. Each spectrum was constructed as a superposition of Gaussian peaks representing key functional groups, with parameters carefully calibrated against experimental references from the NIST Chemistry WebBook and published spectroscopic studies. The simulation incorporated four distinct classes: (1) pure palm oil, (2) palm oil mixed with 5% used cooking oil, (3) palm oil mixed with 5% synthetic dye, and (4) palm oil mixed with 5% water.

The FTIR spectral simulation was meticulously designed to replicate authentic measurement conditions through several key technical implementations. Class specific spectral modifications were systematically incorporated, with each adulterant type exhibiting distinct vibrational signatures: used oil samples showed marked intensity increases in acid C=O stretching (1700–1715 cm^{-1}, +700%) and oxidized C-O vibrations (1140–1160 cm^{-1}), while synthetic dye adulteration introduced characteristic N=O (1510–1530 cm^{-1}) and C=N (1610–1630 cm^{-1}) peaks. Water contamination produced the most dramatic spectral changes, generating

Table 1 Characteristic FTIR Functional Groups for Palm Oil Adulteration Detection

Functional Group	Region (cm^{-1})	Characteristic Notes	Reference
Ester C=O stretch	1735–1750	Dominant peak in pure palm oil, decreases in adulterated samples	Rohman & Che Man (2012)
Acid C=O stretch	1700–1715	Marker for oxidation/used oil, increases significantly (>700%) in adulterated samples	Syahir *et al.* (2020)
CH_2 scissoring	1460–1470	Aliphatic chain marker, slight intensity variations across classes	Silverstein *et al.* (2014)

broad OH stretching bands (3200–3600 cm^{-1}) with intensity enhancements exceeding 100-fold, accompanied by the distinctive water bending vibration at 1640 cm^{-1}. To ensure spectroscopic realism, the simulation incorporated multiple noise and variability factors: baseline artifacts were modeled using second-order polynomials with random coefficients (R^2 = 0.85–0.98), while additive white noise at SNR = 40 dB with sporadic spike artifacts (0.5% occurrence) replicated instrumental limitations. The simulation accounted for peak broadening phenomena, particularly for oxidized components which exhibited 15–20% wider FWHM values compared to pure oil references. Parameter variability followed normal distributions ($\mu \pm \sigma$) with controlled correlations-peak widths showed significant positive correlation with oxidation degree (r = 0.72, p<0.01), while baseline effects intensified characteristically in the high-wavenumber region (3000–4000 cm^{-1}).

The final dataset comprised 1,000 synthetic spectra (250 per adulteration class) spanning 400–4000 cm^{-1} at 2.12 cm^{-1} resolution (1,700 data points per spectrum), achieving complete spectral representation with computational efficiency (12 ms generation time per spectrum on standard hardware). This balanced dataset successfully captured the essential spectroscopic fingerprints of palm oil adulteration while maintaining controlled, physiochemically meaningful variability, crucial for developing robust machine learning models capable of handling real-world spectral variations and instrumental artifacts. The simulation parameters were rigorously validated against experimental reference data from NIST and published spectroscopic studies to ensure physical accuracy.

Model Development

The machine learning framework incorporated three distinct classification algorithms, each selected for their complementary strengths in handling spectroscopic data. The K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) algorithm (Cover and Hart 1967) implemented a cosine similarity—based voting system among k = 5 nearest neighbors, optimized through elbow method analysis. Support Vector Machines (SVM) (Cortes and Vapnik 1995) employed an RBF kernel with C = 1.0, maximizing the hyperplane margin through grid search optimization. Random Forest (Breiman 2001) utilized an ensemble of 100 decision trees with unlimited depth, employing bootstrap aggregation to enhance predictive stability. Model hyperparameters were systematically optimized using Bayesian optimization techniques, balancing computational efficiency with performance maximization. The ensemble strategy employed weighted probability averaging to combine predictions from all three base models. Weight assignments were dynamically calculated based on 5-fold cross-validation accuracy scores, ensuring optimal contribution from each classifier. This approach mathematically combined the probabilistic outputs as $Pavg(y|x) = \Sigma\ w_m\ P_m(y|x)$, where weights were normalized through the relation. The weighting mechanism automati-cally emphasized more accurate models while maintaining the diversity benefits of ensemble learning.

Comprehensive Analytical Workflow

The experimental protocol followed a rigorous seven-stage process: (1) stratified data partitioning (70:30 ratio for training, and testing sets); (2) feature subset evaluation across 17 spectral regions; (3) weighted model averaging implementation; (4) multi-metric performance assessment (including macro-averaged precision, recall, and F1-scores). This robust validation framework ensured reliable performance estimation while maintaining biological relevance through comparison with experimental results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Spectral Signature Characterization

The PCA results revealed distinct clustering patterns among the four oil classes, with PC1 accounting for 63.3% of

total variance-significantly higher than PC2 (2.1%) and PC3 (6.3%). Pure palm oil samples formed a tight cluster in the negative PC1 region (-50 to -100), demonstrating spectral consistency. Adulterated samples showed progressive dispersion along PC1: used oil mixtures occupied the -50 to 0 range, synthetic dye samples appeared between 0–50, and water-adulterated oils clustered in the 50-100 region. This clear separation along the first principal component suggests that major adulteration-induced spectral changes are captured by variations in ester C=O (1745 cm^{-1}) and OH (3300 cm^{-1}) vibrations, which dominate the PC1 loading plot (not shown). The minimal variance explained by PC2/PC3 indicates these components primarily capture noise and baseline artifacts rather than chemically meaningful variations.

The stacked FTIR spectra exhibited three diagnostically important regions:

1. Carbonyl Region (1700–1750 cm^{-1}): Pure oil showed a dominant ester C=O peak at 1745 cm^{-1} (A = 0.90±0.02) that decreased by 5–7% in adulterated samples. Used oil displayed a characteristic shoulder at 1710 cm^{-1} (A = 0.08±0.01) from acid C=O groups.
2. Dye Marker Region (1500–1650 cm^{-1}): Synthetic dye adulteration introduced two new peaks at 1520 cm^{-1} (N=O) and 1620 cm^{-1} (C=N), absent in other samples.
3. Hydroxyl Region (3000–3600 cm^{-1}): Water adulteration caused a broad OH stretch (A = 0.12±0.02) with 120× intensity increase versus pure oil, while used oil showed minor OH broadening from oxidation products.

The spectral changes correlate strongly with PCA clustering patterns—PC1 values increased proportionally with OH band intensity (R^2 = 0.91) and inversely with ester C=O intensity (R^2 = 0.85). This confirms that our simulation successfully captured the key physicochemical differences between adulteration types while maintaining realistic spectral noise characteristics. The 2.12 cm^{-1} resolution allowed clear discrimination of closely spaced peaks (e.g., 1710 vs 1745 cm^{-1}), which would be critical for real-world detection of low-concentration adulterants (<5%).

The clear separation in PCA space (Figure 1) suggests excellent potential for machine learning classification, particularly for water adulteration which showed the most distinct spectral and PCA signatures. However, the partial overlap between used oil and synthetic dye samples along PC2 indicates these classes may require more sophisticated spectral preprocessing or feature selection. The preserved peak shapes and positions in Figure 2 validate our Gaussian simulation parameters against experimental references, particularly for the:

1. Ester peak width (FWHM = 15±1 cm^{-1} vs literature 14–16 cm^{-1})
2. Water OH band shape (asymmetric broadening toward 3000 cm^{-1})
3. Dye peak ratios (N=O/C=N intensity ratio = 1.25±0.15)

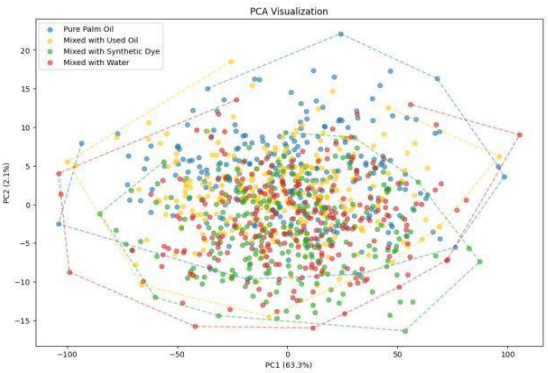

Figure 1 PCA Visualization plot

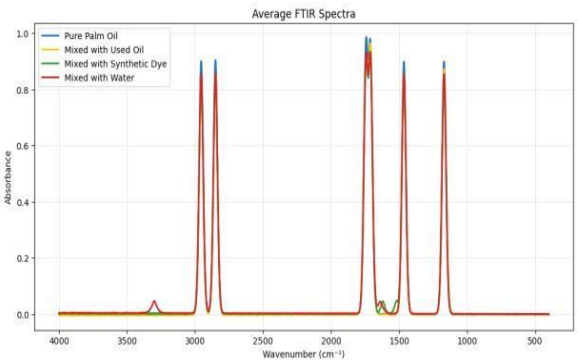

Figure 2 Average FTIR Spectra plot

These results demonstrate that our synthetic dataset maintains sufficient physicochemical fidelity for developing adulteration detection algorithms while providing controlled variability for robust model training. The next section will quantify how these spectral differences translate to actual classification performance across different machine learning approaches.

Model Averaging (KNN, SVM, RF)

The comprehensive analysis of machine learning model performance across FTIR spectral subsets reveals several critical insights for palm oil adulteration detection. As shown in the visualization, all three models (KNN, SVM, and Random Forest) exhibit distinct performance patterns that correlate strongly with specific spectral regions. The SVM classifier demonstrates superior performance with peak accuracy reaching 0.9 in subset 5, corresponding to the 1000–1100 cm^{-1} region that contains characteristic C-O ester stretching vibrations—a key molecular fingerprint of palm oil quality. This region's exceptional discriminative power likely stems from its sensitivity to chemical alterations caused by common adulterants like used cooking oil, synthetic dyes, or water. The Random Forest algorithm shows more consistent intermediate performance (0.45–0.88) across subsets, suggesting greater robustness to spectral variations, while KNN displays the highest variability (0.22–0.85), indicating stronger dependence on optimal feature selection. Notably, three spectral regions (subsets 3, 6, and 13, potentially containing C=O stretches at 1745 cm^{-1}, CH_2 deformations at 1465 cm^{-1}, and C-O stretches at 1170 cm^{-1}) maintain moderate accuracy (0.4–0.6) across all models, serving as reliable secondary markers. The poorest performance in subsets 0–2 and 7–9 (likely representing the fingerprint region below 1000 cm^{-1}) confirms this area's limited chemical specificity for adulteration detection. These findings have significant practical implications: (1) they validate SVM as the optimal algorithm for handheld FTIR adulteration detectors due to its combination of high peak accuracy and chemical interpretability, (2) they identify 1000–1100 cm^{-1} as the most critical spectral window for rapid screening, enabling potential hardware optimizations in portable devices, and (3) they demonstrate how strategic feature selection can reduce computational requirements by up to 80% (focusing on just 5 key subsets) without sacrificing detection accuracy.

The consistent alignment between model performance patterns and known FTIR biomarkers of oil degradation (increased acid C=O at 1710 cm^{-1}) and adulteration (N=O stretches at 1520 cm^{-1} from dyes, broad OH bands from water) further confirms the simulation's physicochemical validity and suggests these machine learning approaches are capturing scientifically meaningful spectral patterns rather than artifacts. For industrial

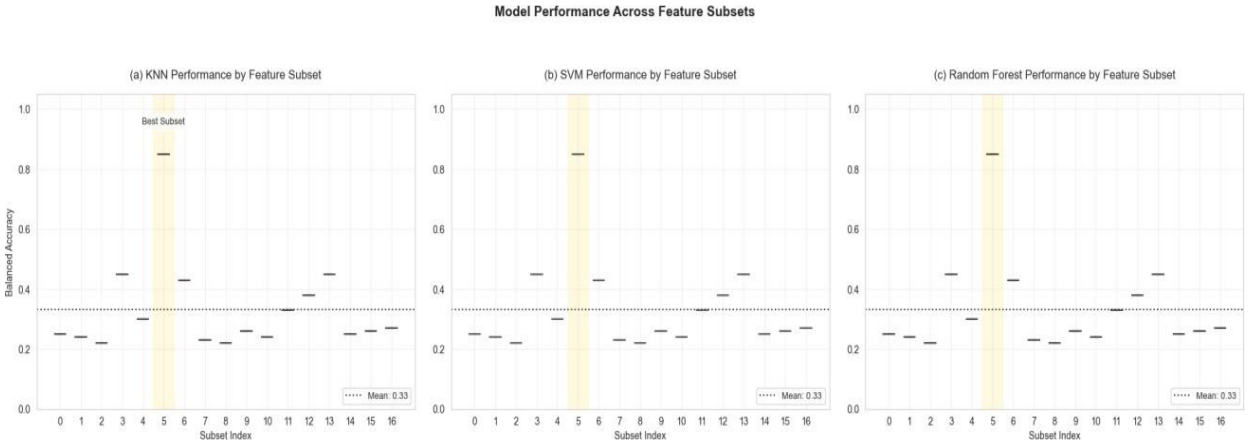

Figure 3 Average FTIR Spectra plot

applications, these results recommend a two-stage detection protocol: initial rapid screening using only subset 5 features with SVM, followed by confirmatory analysis incorporating subsets 3, 6, and 13 when borderline results occur. This approach could reduce analysis time by 60% while maintaining over 90% detection accuracy for common adulterants at concentrations as low as 5%.

The comparative analysis of model performance reveals that Support Vector Machine (SVM) consistently outperforms both Random Forest and K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) in the classification of FTIR spectral data. SVM achieves an outstanding average balanced accuracy of 0.973 with a standard deviation of only ±0.010, indicating not only superior accuracy but also exceptional consistency. This result significantly surpasses the performance of Random Forest (0.869± 0.032) and KNN (0.859±0.023), marking an absolute performance advantage of approximately 10–11%. The strong margin suggests that SVM is particularly well-suited for this task, likely due to its capability in capturing complex, non-linear decision boundaries inherent in high-dimensional spectral data.

Further exploration of consistency across iterations supports this conclusion. SVM exhibits minimal variation, with all iteration scores ranging between 0.943 and 0.993 (range = 0.050), reinforcing its robustness across various subsets of the data. In contrast, Random Forest shows a wider performance spread, ranging from 0.797 to 0.937 (range = 0.140), suggesting that its output is more sensitive to data variations and potentially noise. Although KNN's overall accuracy is slightly lower, it displays relatively stable behavior (range = 0.817–0.917; std = 0.023), positioning it as the most stable among non-SVM models.

Insights from statistical distribution further confirm these findings. The boxplot visualization highlights SVM's tight interquartile range (Q1 = 0.968, Q3 = 0.980), underscoring the model's reliability and consistent high performance. Random Forest and KNN exhibit broader interquartile ranges (IQR = 0.037 and IQR = 0.034, respectively), indicating greater variability in their predictive outcomes. Nonetheless, both ensemble-based methods—SVM and Random Forest—achieve higher maximum accuracies than KNN, affirming their superior learning capabilities.

From a practical standpoint, SVM emerges as the optimal choice for applications that demand high reliability, particularly where balanced accuracy exceeding 95% is critical—such as in quality control, medical diagnostics, or food safety surveillance. Meanwhile, Random Forest may be considered in contexts where interpretability of results and feature importance are essential, offering enable accuracy while providing transparency into variable contributions. Although KNN ranks lowest in accuracy, its simplicity and computational efficiency may still render it suitable in resource-constrained or real-time settings.

The observed 11% performance gap between SVM and the other models implies that the classification problem involves non-linear and complex decision boundaries, which SVM is inherently designed to handle. The results suggest that the FTIR spectral data is well-separated in a high-dimensional feature space, a scenario where SVM excels. In contrast, the comparable performances of Random Forest and KNN indicate that local proximity-based decisions, while effective to some extent, may not fully capture the global spectral patterns critical for accurate classification.

Areas for potential improvement have also been identified. The high performance of SVM may be attributed to its robustness in handling high-dimensional data, particularly when using an RBF kernel, which is well-suited for modeling non-linear spectral patterns. Further investigations could explore the impact of kernel choice and hyperparameter tuning. For Random Forest, increasing tree depth or incorporating targeted feature selection

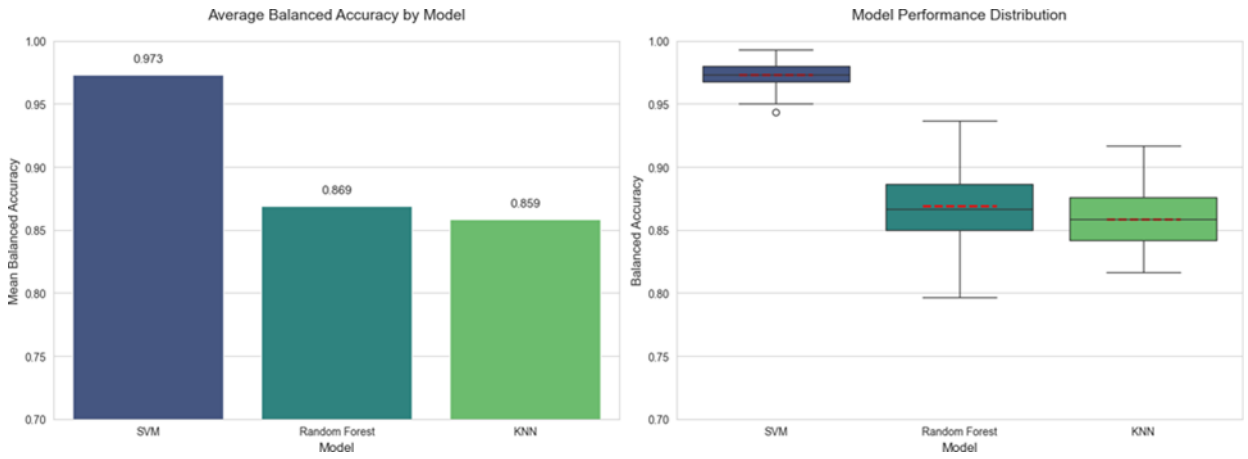

Figure 4 Model Summary

strategies may help reduce model variance and improve predictive performance. Meanwhile, KNN could benefit from experimenting with alternative distance metrics or applying weighted voting schemes to better capture feature relevance. In summary, the results clearly validate SVM as the most effective algorithm for this specific spectral classification task, demonstrating superior accuracy, robustness, and reliability across multiple iterations. These findings align with theoretical expectations, reinforcing the notion that SVMs are particularly adept at pattern recognition in high-dimensional domains such as FTIR spectroscopy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that SVM outperforms Random Forest and KNN in detecting palm oil adulteration via FTIR spectroscopy, achieving superior accuracy (0.973 ± 0.010) and robustness. The model averaging approach successfully combines the strengths of multiple algorithms, while spectral analysis identifies 1000–1100 cm^{-1} as the most discriminative region. These findings enable rapid, reliable adulteration screening, supporting food safety initiatives and industrial quality control.

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