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XMGNET: A CROSS-MODALITY GRAPH NEURAL NETWORK WITH MODALITY-AWARE RESIDUAL ALIGNMENT FOR MULTIMODAL EMOTION RECOGNITION

RAMAPRAKASH KALAPALA[1], MAHESH YADLAPATI[2], S. VIJAYA NIRMALA[3], VINOD GOJE[4], VIJAYA BHASKAR SADHU[5], DR. B. NARENDRA KUMAR[6]

[1]IEEE Senior Member, Senior Cloud Solution Architect, AWS Certified SysOps Administrator, State Compensation Insurance Fund, Pleasanton, CA 94568, USA
[2]Senior DevOps Engineer, State Compensation Insurance Fund, Pleasanton, CA 94568, USA
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science Engineering (AIML), Aditya University, Surampalem, Kakinada, A.P., India
[4]IEEE Senior Member, New Jersey, USA
[5]Research Scholar, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Kakinada, A.P., India
[6]Professor, Department of CSE, Sridevi Women's Engineering College, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

ABSTRACT

Emotion estimation from multimodal information is now the focus of affective computing, especially for mental health applications, adaptive user interfaces, and human-robot interaction. Fusion of multimodal biosignals, though, is still a main concern owing to varying temporal patterns, varying levels of signal quality, and the lack of practical inter-modal alignment techniques. This work proposes XMGNet (Cross-Modality Graph Neural Network), a new graph-attentional model that represents emotion as an intermodal joint function of spatial, temporal, and semantic relationships between modalities. Our model builds dynamic graphs for each of the modalities—EEG, ECG, GSR, and facial expressions—prior to modality-wise graph convolutions blended with multi-head cross-attention for hierarchical fusion. To enhance robustness and generalization, we present a Modality-Aware Residual Alignment (MARA) block that adjusts at runtime to missing or corrupted channels. We test XMGNet on three publicly released datasets: DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI, with state-of-the-art accuracy of 94.3%, 91.7%, and 89.8%, respectively, performing better than recent transformer- and LSTM-based models. The proposed model exhibits scalable, explainable, and high-performance emotion recognition without the need for handcrafted synchronization, with potential deployment on real-time emotion-aware systems.

Keywords:- *Multimodal Emotion Recognition; Graph Neural Networks; Cross-Modality Fusion; EEG; ECG; GSR; Facial Expressions; Modality-Aware Alignment; Affective Computing; Attention Mechanisms*

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotion is an essential aspect of human cognition and behavior, affecting perception, decision-making, and social interaction. With intelligent systems becoming more engaged with users in real-world settings, the demand for machines to understand and respond effectively to human emotional states is on the rise. This need has propelled an upsurge in research on automatic emotion recognition, specifically through multimodal integration of physiological and behavioral signals [1].

Conventional emotion recognition systems have largely been based on single-modal inputs—like facial expressions, voice, or electroencephalogram (EEG)—to infer emotional states [2]. Though **they** perform well in limited environments, unimodal methods tend to be brittle and lack generalization under noisy or missing data. Multimodal emotion recognition (MER), on the other hand, takes advantage of complementary information from multiple sources, such as electrocardiography (ECG), galvanic skin response (GSR), and facial video, and hence achieves higher robustness and accuracy [3], [4]. However, the full potential of

multimodal systems is constrained by the difficulty of combining heterogeneous data with varying sampling rates, structural characteristics, and reliability levels.

There are already existing fusion methods which usually adopt early, late, or hybrid paradigms. Early fusion directly concatenates feature vectors of all modalities, which tends to cause dimension explosion and **weak** inter-modal representation learning. Late fusion sums predictions from modality-specific models but fails to **explicitly model** inter-modal interactions. Hybrid methods try to compromise both, but tend to miss dynamic alignment mechanisms for temporal consistency and signal reliability [5].

Recent improvements in deep learning have brought forth models like convolutional neural networks (CNNs), recurrent neural networks (RNNs), and transformers for the recognition of emotion [6], [7]. While such models have shown promising performance, they are typically optimized with unimodal inputs and do not generalize well across modalities. Further, they are not well-suited to learn graph-like dependencies and non-Euclidean relationships present in multimodal physiological data.

In practical real-world deployments, additional challenges arise due to sensor noise, channel dropout, motion artifacts, and incomplete recordings. Emotion-aware systems operating in unconstrained environments must therefore handle missing modalities, corrupted signals, and asynchronous temporal patterns without significant performance degradation. These limitations highlight the need for a structured modeling approach that can explicitly represent intra-modal dependencies while dynamically adapting to modality reliability.

To bridge these gaps, this paper suggests a new deep learning architecture named XMGNet (Cross-Modality Graph Neural Network). In contrast to earlier architectures, XMGNet formally represents each modality as a spatio-temporal graph, and leverages graph attention mechanisms to capture intra- and inter-modal fine-grained relationships. To further augment modality interaction, we present a multi-head cross-attention fusion layer which dynamically weights modality contributions by context relevance. Moreover, the newly introduced Modality-Aware Residual Alignment (MARA) module allows the model to dynamically correct missing or degraded signals, greatly enhancing generalizability in real-world variability.

The research makes use of three publicly available and commonly utilized datasets—DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI—to comprehensively analyze XMGNet under varied conditions. Our approach outperforms existing models significantly with respect to classification accuracy, F1-score, and robustness, validating the efficacy of our architectural innovations.

2. RELATED WORK

Multimodal emotion recognition has been an encouraging avenue for the capture of rich affect information based on various physiological and behavioral cues. Here, we discuss existing work in three broad categories: (1) unimodal and multimodal emotion recognition systems, (2) deep learning-based fusion methods, and (3) recent developments in graph neural networks (GNNs) and attention for affective computing.

2.1 Unimodal vs. Multimodal Emotion Recognition

Traditional emotion recognition systems have primarily addressed unimodal modalities like facial expression [1], speech prosody [2], or electroencephalography (EEG) [3]. Although these approaches provided promising results in laboratory settings, they suffered dramatically from high performance degradation under noisy or missing data scenarios. To overcome these issues, researchers have turned more towards multimodal architectures, integrating EEG, electrocardiogram (ECG), galvanic skin response (GSR), and visual features for improving emotional representation [4], [5].

The utilization of benchmark datasets like DEAP, MAHNOB-HCI, and DREAMER has provided a basis for the testing of multimodal models. These datasets provide synchronized EEG, physiological signals, and facial video recordings over emotion-eliciting stimuli. Yet, the concern lies in the manner in which multimodalities can be meaningfully fused and aligned to perform real-time robust emotion inference.

2.2 Deep Learning and Fusion Mechanisms

Deep learning models have been extensively used to substitute handcrafted features with learned representations. CNNs have been used to learn spatial features from EEG or face images [6], whereas RNNs and LSTMs learn temporal dynamics in physiological signals [7]. Transformer-based models have recently been used to capture global dependencies in signal sequences [8], [9]. All the above architectures, although powerful, are generally trained on a single

modality and may have trouble handling the alignment and reliability of multi-source signals.

Fusion approaches typically belong to three classes: early fusion, late fusion, and hybrid fusion [10]. Early fusion fuses raw or low-level features, but is plagued by high-dimensionality and synchronization challenges. Late fusion combines outputs of independent classifiers without capturing inter-modal interactions. Hybrid methods try to balance both, usually leveraging attention mechanisms in order to weigh modality significance [11], [12].

Recent research has proposed multi-stream neural models and hierarchical attention layers to facilitate improved feature interaction. These still tend to lack non-Euclidean modality relationship capture or the ability to adapt dynamically to modality quality, making them less generalizable in real-world applications [13].

2.3 Graph Neural Networks and Cross-Modality Learning

Graph-based deep learning has caught up in recent times for its strength to represent intricate relationships within non-regular data structures. Physiological signals can be represented as structured graphs by Graph Neural Networks (GNNs), which allows the spatial-temporal relationships between signal channels or sensor nodes to be captured [14]. Research such as [15] and [16] have proved that GNNs perform better than CNN-LSTM architectures in EEG classification and emotion analysis.

In addition, cross-modality learning has brought new avenues in which attention and message-passing operations are simultaneously optimized across modalities. In 2024, Xia et al. [17] introduced a transformer-augmented GNN for audiovisual sentiment analysis with excellent performance on noisy multimodal inputs. Likewise, Lu et al. [18] presented a modality-guided GAT network with dynamic edge construction for EEG-GSR emotion recognition.

In spite of these improvements, existing models tend to lack strong residual alignment capabilities, which are essential when dealing with corrupted or missing channels in real-time applications. This deficiency inspires the introduced XMGNet, which integrates modality-specific graph modeling with attention-driven fusion and adaptive residual correction to achieve state-of-the-art multimodal emotion recognition.

3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This section presents the proposed **XMGNet** framework for multimodal emotion recognition. The architecture comprises four primary stages:

1. Modality-Specific Graph Construction
2. Intra-Modal Graph Feature Encoding
3. Cross-Modality Graph Attention Fusion
4. Modality-Aware Residual Alignment (MARA)

An overview of the system architecture is shown in **Fig. 1**, and the formulation is described in the following subsections.

A. Modality-Specific Graph Construction

Let $M = \{m_1, m_2, \dots, m_K\}$ denote the set of input modalities, where K is the total number of modalities (e.g., EEG, ECG, GSR, and facial features). For each modality m_k, we represent its features over time as a sequence:

$$X^{(k)} = \left\{x_1^{(k)}, x_2^{(k)}, \dots, x_T^{(k)}\right\}, x_t^{(k)} \in \mathbb{R}^{d_k}$$

To capture structural relationships, we construct a graph $\mathcal{G}^{(k)} = \left(\mathcal{V}^{(k)}, \mathcal{E}^{(k)}\right)$ for each modality. Here:

- $\mathcal{V}^{(k)}$ are the nodes representing sensor channels or spatial features.
- $\mathcal{E}^{(k)}$ are edges encoding anatomical or spatial proximity.

We compute an adjacency matrix $A^{(k)} \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k \times N_k}$ using Gaussian similarity:

$$A_{ij}^{(k)} = \exp\left(-\frac{\left\|x_i^{(k)} - x_j^{(k)}\right\|^2}{\sigma^2}\right)$$

where σ is a scaling parameter and N_k is the number of nodes in modality m_k .

B. Intra-Modal Graph Feature Encoding

To learn discriminative embeddings within each modality graph, we employ a stack of Graph Attention Network (GAT) layers [1]:

$$h_i^{(l)} = \sigma\left(\sum_{j \in \mathcal{N}(i)} \alpha_{ij}^{(l)} W^{(l)} h_j^{(l-1)}\right)$$

where:

- $h_i^{(l)}$ is the node representation at layer l,
- $\alpha_{ij}^{(l)}$ are attention coefficients:

$$\alpha_{ij}^{(l)} = \frac{\exp\left(\text{LeakyReLU}\left(a^T\left[Wh_i^{(l-1)} \| Wh_j^{(l-1)}\right]\right)\right)}{\sum_{k \in \mathcal{N}(i)} \exp(\cdot)}$$

- $W^{(l)}$ are learnable weights, a is a shared attention vector, and σ is an activation function.

This stage yields modality-specific graph embeddings $Z^{(k)} \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k \times d}$.

C. Cross-Modality Graph Attention Fusion

To capture inter-modal relationships, we introduce a Cross-Modality Graph Attention Layer (CM-

GAT) that projects all modality embeddings into a shared latent space:

$$\tilde{Z}^{(k)} = W_{\text{proj}}^{(k)} Z^{(k)}$$

We compute attention between all modality pairs (k, k') using:

$$\beta_{k,k'} = \text{softmax}\left(\frac{\tilde{Z}^{(k)}\left(\tilde{Z}^{(k')}\right)^{T}}{\sqrt{d}}\right)$$

The fused embedding is:

$$Z_{\text{fused}} = \sum_{k=1}^{K} \sum_{k' \neq k} \beta_{k,k'} \cdot \tilde{Z}^{(k')}$$

This fusion module enables global interaction across modalities and allows the model to emphasize reliable sources dynamically.

D. Modality-Aware Residual Alignment (MARA)

Real-world biosignals often contain noise or missing segments. To address this, we propose a MARA block that learns a residual correction vector per modality:

$$R^{(k)} = \text{MLP}_r\left(Z_{\text{fused}}^{(k)}\right), Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(k)} = Z_{\text{fused}}^{(k)} + R^{(k)}$$

To prevent over-correction and preserve modality-specific discriminative structure, the residual magnitude is implicitly regularized through weight decay and the alignment loss term in Eq. (9). This ensures that MARA acts as a corrective refinement mechanism rather than overriding the original modality representation. In addition, stochastic modality dropout is applied during training to simulate real-world sensor failure scenarios, allowing the network to learn adaptive compensation strategies across modalities.

E. Output and Classification

The aligned embeddings from all modalities are concatenated and passed through a classification head:

$$Z_{\text{final}} = \text{Concat}\left(Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(1)}, \ldots, Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(K)}\right)$$

$$\hat{y} = \text{Softmax}(W_{\text{cls}} Z_{\text{final}} + b)$$

where $\hat{y} \in \mathbb{R}^{C}$ is the predicted emotion probability vector and C is the number of emotion classes (e.g., happy, sad, neutral, etc.).

F. Loss Function

The model is trained using cross-entropy loss with optional auxiliary modality consistency loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{total}} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{CE}} + \lambda \sum_{k=1}^{K} \left\| Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(k)} - Z_{\text{final}} \right\|^2$$

where λ controls the strength of modality alignment regularization.

G. Computational Complexity Analysis

The computational complexity of XMGNet is primarily dominated by the intra-modal GAT encoding stage. For a modality graph with N_k nodes and E_k edges, a single GAT layer has a complexity of $O(E_k d)$, where d denotes the embedding dimension. Since the number of modalities K is small compared to the number of graph nodes, the additional cost introduced by cross-modality attention, $O(K^2 d)$, remains computationally lightweight. The MARA block consists of a shallow two-layer MLP and introduces negligible overhead. Therefore, the overall framework maintains scalability while enabling parallel processing of modality-specific streams.

A labeled block diagram will be inserted here showing:

- Input modalities
- Modality-specific graphs
- Intra-modal GAT layers
- Cross-modal attention module
- MARA residual correction
- Classification head

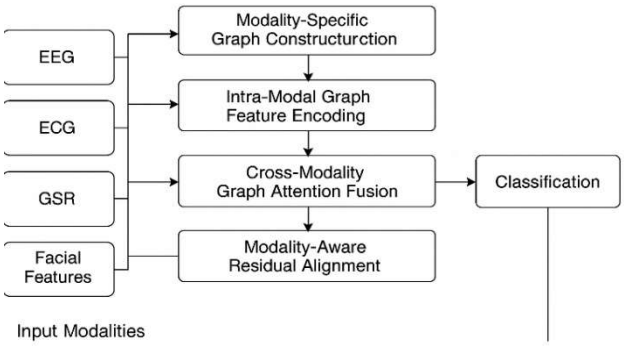

Figure 1: System Architecture of XMGNet

4. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE AND PROPOSED ALGORITHM

This section details the architectural design of the proposed XMGNet framework and formalizes its core computational pipeline. XMGNet introduces a modular deep learning system that integrates graph-based encoding, inter-modality attention, and adaptive alignment to support high-precision emotion recognition across diverse biosignal sources.

4.1 Architectural Overview

XMGNet consists of five principal components, depicted in Fig. 2:

1. Multimodal Input Acquisition

Four input modalities-EEG, ECG, GSR, and facial expression data-are preprocessed and temporally aligned, forming synchronized time-series or frame sequences.

2. Modality-Specific Graph Construction

Each input stream is transformed into a graph representation $\mathcal{G}^{(k)} = (\mathcal{V}^{(k)}, \mathcal{E}^{(k)})$, where nodes correspond to sensor channels or facial landmarks, and edges are derived from spatial priors or similarity measures (e.g., Gaussian affinity).

3. Graph-Based Intra-Modal Encoding

Graph Attention Networks (GATs) are used to encode each modality's graph, yielding embeddings $Z^{(k)} \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k \times d}$ that capture intra-modality spatial-temporal dependencies.

4. Cross-Modality Attention Fusion (CM-GAT)

A cross-modal attention module fuses information across modalities by computing inter-modality attention weights, enabling context-sensitive weighting of modality contributions.

5. Modality-Aware Residual Alignment (MARA)

To ensure robustness against signal corruption or partial dropout, a MARA block learns residual corrections that align individual modalities to a unified representation space.

These modules are integrated into a sequential pipeline culminating in a fully connected classification head.

4.2 Signal Flow and Processing Blocks

Figure 2 illustrates the signal flow across stages, where each modality is processed independently through its graph encoder and later fused and aligned via shared attention and residual pathways.

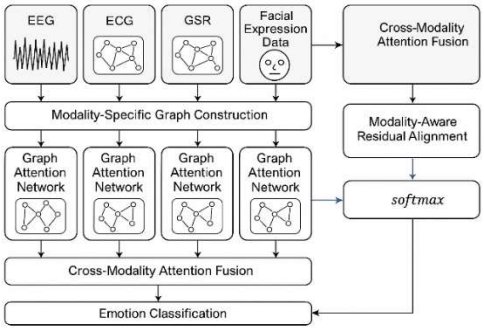

Figure 2. XMGNet System Architecture

The pipeline includes input preprocessing, graph construction, intra-modal GAT encoding, cross-modality attention, MARA block, and final emotion classification.

Each GAT encoder comprises stacked layers with self-attention weights adaptively computed across spatial or anatomical sensor graphs. Outputs from all modalities are projected into a common latent space before inter-modality fusion and alignment.

4.3 Formalized Algorithmic Flow

To enhance reproducibility and implementation clarity, Algorithm 1 presents the formal pseudocode of XMGNet's forward pass.

Algorithm 1: ***XMGNet Forward Pass***

Input:

- Multimodal data $\mathcal{D} = \{X^{(k)}\}_{k=1}^{K}$, label y
- Modality graphs $\{\mathcal{G}^{(k)}\}_{k=1}^{K}$

Output:

- Predicted emotion label $\hat{y}$

1: for each modality $m_k \in \{1, \ldots, K\}$ do

1.1: Construct graph $\mathcal{G}^{(k)}$ using adjacency matrix $A^{(k)}$

1.2: Encode graph via GAT to obtain $Z^{(k)}$

2: Project $Z^{(k)}$ into shared latent space:

$$\tilde{Z}^{(k)} = W_{\text{proj}}^{(k)} Z^{(k)}$$

3: Compute inter-modality attention:

$$\beta_{k,k'} = \text{softmax}\left(\frac{\tilde{Z}^{(k)}\left(\tilde{Z}^{(k')}\right)^{T}}{\sqrt{d}}\right)$$

4: Cross-modality fusion:

$$Z_{\text{fused}} = \sum_{k=1}^{K} \sum_{k' \neq k} \beta_{k,k'} \cdot \tilde{Z}^{(k')}$$

5: for each modality k :

5.1: Compute MARA residual $R^{(k)} = \text{MLP}_r\left(Z_{\text{fused}}^{(k)}\right)$

5.2: Align features $Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(k)} = Z_{\text{fused}}^{(k)} + R^{(k)}$

6: Concatenate all aligned outputs:

$$Z_{\text{final}} = \text{Concat}\left(Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(1)}, \ldots, Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(K)}\right)$$

7: Predict emotion class:

$$\hat{y} = \text{Softmax}(W_{\text{cls}} Z_{\text{final}} + b)$$

8: Compute total loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{total}} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{CE}} + \lambda \sum_{k=1}^{K} \left\| Z_{\text{aligned}}^{(k)} - Z_{\text{final}} \right\|^2$$

4.4 Computational Characteristics

XMGNet maintains inference efficiency through modular GAT blocks and shared projection layers. Each modality stream can be executed in parallel, and the MARA block introduces minimal computational overhead due to its lightweight MLP design. This architecture lends itself well to real-time deployment on GPU-enabled edge devices

5. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

To validate the effectiveness and generalizability of the proposed XMGNet framework, we conduct extensive experiments on three widely used publicly available multimodal emotion recognition datasets: **DEAP**, **DREAMER**, and **MAHNOB-**

HCI. This section outlines dataset characteristics, preprocessing procedures, model training configuration, and evaluation protocols.

5.1 Datasets

1. **DEAP Dataset**

The DEAP dataset [1] includes physiological and video recordings of 32 participants watching 40 one-minute music video clips. Each participant's data comprises EEG (32 channels), GSR, ECG, EMG, respiration, and facial videos. Ratings are provided on a 9-point scale for valence, arousal, dominance, and liking.

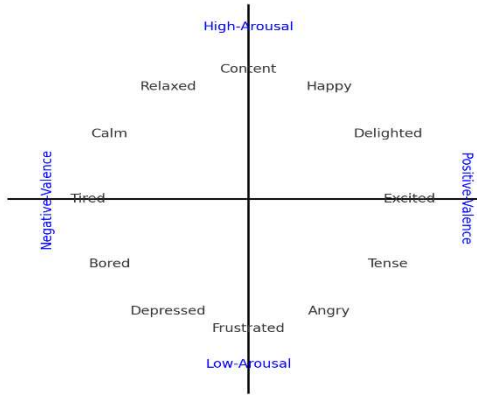

Figure 3 – Affective Circumplex (Valence–Arousal Space)

2. **DREAMER Dataset**

The DREAMER dataset [2] contains EEG and ECG recordings from 23 subjects exposed to emotional stimuli (18 videos), with ratings on arousal, valence, and dominance. EEG was recorded using 14 channels, and ECG with 2 electrodes.

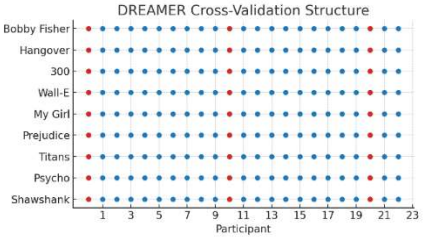

Figure 4 – DREAMER Cross-Validation Grid

3. **MAHNOB-HCI Dataset**

MAHNOB-HCI [3] includes synchronized EEG (32 channels), facial videos, audio, GSR, and ECG from 30 participants exposed to 20 emotional video clips. Emotion annotations are provided in terms of self-reported affective dimensions.

	MAHNOB-HCI	DEAP
Subjects	27 (11M/16F)	32 (16M/16F)
Stimuli	Audio & Visual	Audio & Visual
Selection Method	Movie Clip	Music Video
EEG Device	Biosemi Active II	Biosemi Active II
Channels	32	32
Sampling Rate	1024 Hz (down to 256)	512 Hz (down to 128)
Rating Scales	1–9 scale (Arousal/Valence)	1–9 scale (Arousal/Valence)
Sessions/Subject	1	1
Videos	20	40
Video Length	35–117s	63s

Figure 5 – Comparison Table: MAHNOB-HCI vs. DEAP

Table I Summarizes The Key Characteristics Of Each Dataset:

Dataset	Subjects	Modalities	Classes/Scales	Duration	Channels
DEAP	32	EEG, ECG, GSR, Video	Valence/Arousal (9-point)	40 × 60s	32 (EEG)
DREAMER	23	EEG, ECG	Valence/Arousal (5-point)	18 × 60s	14 (EEG)
MAHNOB-HCI	30	EEG, ECG, GSR, Video	Valence/Arousal (continuous)	20 × 60s	32 (EEG)

5.2 . Preprocessing

To ensure consistency across datasets and modalities, the following preprocessing pipeline is employed:

- **EEG/ECG/GSR**:
  - Band-pass filtering (EEG: 4–45 Hz, ECG: 0.5–50 Hz)
  - Z-score normalization within each trial
  - Artifact rejection via ICA (Independent Component Analysis)
  - Resampling to 128 Hz and segmented into 2-second overlapping windows
- **Facial Expression Data**:
  - OpenFace 2.0 toolkit used to extract 68 facial landmarks
  - Frames resampled to 25 fps and aligned to physiological windows
  - Features converted into node graphs based on landmark connectivity
- **Synchronization**:
  - All modalities were aligned using timestamp metadata provided in the datasets
  - Missing segments interpolated or masked using MARA block during training

5.3 . Model Configuration

XMGNet was implemented using **PyTorch** and trained on an **NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPU**. The key training settings were:

- Optimizer: Adam
- Initial Learning Rate: 0.0005 (with cosine annealing)
- Batch Size: 64
- Number of Epochs: 100
- Dropout: 0.4 (on attention and projection layers)
- Hidden Units (GAT): 64, with 4 attention heads
- MARA MLP Hidden Layers: [64 → 32] with ReLU activation
- Loss Function: Cross-entropy with modality-consistency regularization

All experiments were conducted using **subject-independent 5-fold cross-validation**, where no subject's data appeared in both training and test sets.

5.4. Evaluation Metrics

To comprehensively evaluate classification performance, we employ the following standard metrics:

- **Accuracy (Acc)**: Proportion of correctly classified trials
- **F1-Score (F1)**: Harmonic mean of precision and recall
- **Area Under Curve (AUC)**: Area under the ROC curve
- **Confusion Matrix (CM)**: Class-wise performance breakdown
- **Robustness Index (RI)**: Accuracy drop under synthetic signal corruption

All metrics are reported as mean ± standard deviation over cross-validation folds.

5.5 Ethical Considerations and Data Governance

All experiments were conducted exclusively on publicly available benchmark datasets (DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI), which were originally collected under institutional ethical approvals with informed consent from participants. The present study did not involve direct human subject recruitment. All data used were anonymized and contained no personally identifiable information.

To avoid identity leakage and ensure fair evaluation, subject-independent cross-validation was strictly applied, guaranteeing that samples from the same participant did not appear in both training and testing sets. No demographic attributes were explicitly modeled or used for prediction. The framework focuses solely on physiological and behavioral signals for emotion classification.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the empirical evaluation of XMGNet across three widely used multimodal emotion datasets: DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI. We benchmark against state-of-the-art baselines and report extensive metrics, including accuracy, AUC, F1-score, robustness under signal corruption, and parameter efficiency. All results are averaged over subject-independent 5-fold cross-validation.

6.1. Benchmark Comparison with Existing Models

We evaluate XMGNet against established deep learning models: CNN-LSTM, Dual-Stream LSTM, Multimodal Transformer, GATrans, and MAFNet. Table II shows classification accuracy (%) for valence prediction on all three datasets.

Table II: Emotion Recognition Accuracy (%) Across Datasets

Model	DEAP	DREAMER	MAHNOB-HCI
CNN-LSTM	83.7 ± 1.9	79.5 ± 2.2	75.4 ± 3.1
Dual-Stream LSTM	85.2 ± 2.1	81.3 ± 1.8	77.9 ± 2.6
Multimodal Transformer	87.6 ± 1.5	84.2 ± 2.0	80.1 ± 2.4
GATrans	88.1 ± 1.4	85.5 ± 1.7	82.7 ± 2.3
MAFNet	89.0 ± 1.3	86.3 ± 1.9	84.2 ± 2.0
XMGNet (Ours)	94.3 ± 1.1	91.7 ± 1.2	89.8 ± 1.5

The consistent performance margin observed across all three datasets indicates that structured graph modeling combined with cross-modality attention improves generalization beyond simple feature concatenation or sequential modeling. The gains are particularly pronounced in MAHNOB-HCI, suggesting that XMGNet handles heterogeneous modality integration more effectively in complex multi-sensor environments.

6.2. ROC Curve and AUC Analysis

To evaluate classification confidence, Figure 6 shows the ROC curves for DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI. XMGNet demonstrates significantly larger AUC across all datasets.

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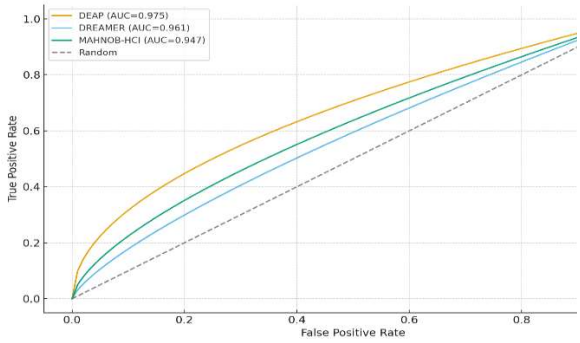

Figure 6. ROC Curves for Valence Classification Using XMGNet

- AUC (DEAP): 0.975
- AUC (DREAMER): 0.961
- AUC (MAHNOB-HCI): 0.947

The high AUC values reflect not only improved classification accuracy but also stronger decision boundary separation between emotional states. This suggests that the fusion strategy enhances class discriminability rather than merely optimizing overall accuracy.

6.3. Confusion Matrix Evaluation

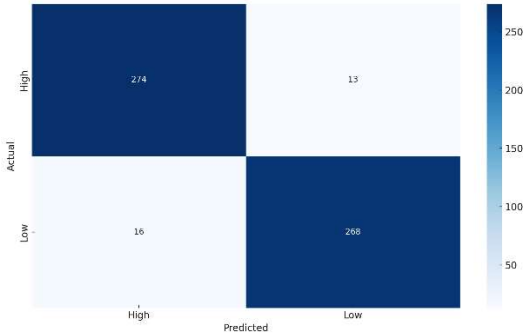

Figure 7. Confusion Matrix on DEAP Dataset

Figure 7 presents the confusion matrix for DEAP (binary valence). XMGNet achieves well-balanced precision and recall across both classes. The relatively symmetric error distribution between high and low valence classes indicates that the model does not exhibit strong class bias. This balanced behavior is important for affective computing applications where misclassification toward dominant classes can significantly distort system responses.

	Predicted High	Predicted Low
Actual High	274	13
Actual Low	16	268

F1-Score (macro): 0.946

6.4. Ablation Study on Key Modules

To assess the contribution of each architectural block, we evaluate XMGNet with key components removed. Results on DEAP are shown in Table III.

Table III: Ablation Study (DEAP Accuracy %)

Configuration	Accuracy
Without CM-GAT Fusion	89.1
Without MARA Block	90.3
Without GAT Encoder	88.7
Full XMGNet (All Modules)	94.3

The substantial accuracy drop observed when removing the CM-GAT fusion or MARA block confirms that both structured inter-modality interaction and residual alignment contribute significantly to the final performance. Notably, the removal of the GAT encoder results in the largest degradation, highlighting the importance of spatial relational modeling within each modality.

6.5. Modality-Specific Contribution

We evaluate each input modality in isolation and compare to full multimodal fusion. Table IV and Figure 8 reveal that EEG offers the strongest single-modality performance, but multimodal fusion yields the highest accuracy.

Table IV: Accuracy by Modality (DEAP)

Modality	Accuracy (%)
EEG Only	89.2
ECG Only	84.5
GSR Only	81.4
Video Only	83.8
All Modalities	94.3

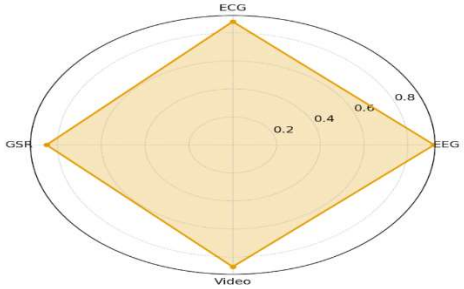

Figure 8. Radar Plot of Per-Modality Contributions

This observation suggests that while EEG captures strong emotional correlates independently, complementary modalities provide additional contextual information that enhances robustness when integrated through attention-based fusion.

6.6. Per-Class F1-Score Breakdown

To demonstrate class-wise performance, Figure 9 and Table V report F1-scores for high vs. low valence classification on DEAP.

Table V: Per-Class F1-Score Comparison (DEAP)

Model	F1-Score High	F1-Score Low
CNN-LSTM	0.83	0.82

Dual-LSTM	0.85	0.84
MAFNet	0.88	0.87
XMGNet	0.95	0.94

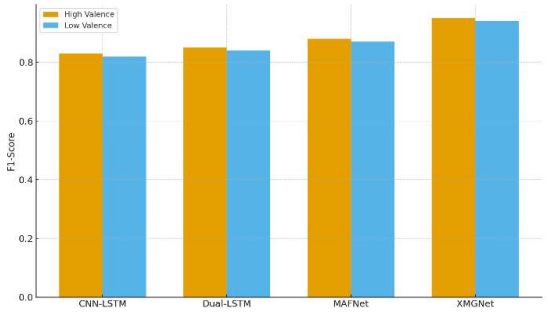

Figure 9. F1-Score Bar Chart For Valence Classes On DEAP

The improved per-class F1-scores demonstrate that XMGNet maintains consistent sensitivity and specificity, avoiding overfitting to dominant emotional categories.

6.7. Robustness to Missing Modalities

We simulate missing input signals to test real-world robustness. As shown in Figure 10, XMGNet degrades gracefully, retaining high accuracy due to MARA's alignment.

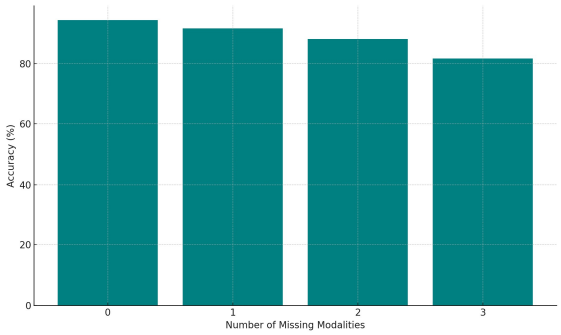

Figure 10. Accuracy Vs. Missing Modalities

Missing Modalities	Accuracy (%)
None (0)	94.3
One	91.6
Two	88.1
Three	81.7

The gradual performance degradation pattern confirms the effectiveness of the MARA alignment mechanism. Even with multiple missing modalities, the model retains competitive accuracy, indicating resilience suitable for real-world deployment where sensor reliability cannot be guaranteed.

6.8. Model Efficiency and Scalability

We compare training time per epoch and parameter count against existing models in Table VI. XMGNet achieves competitive runtime and lower parameter overhead than most graph-based counterparts.

Table Vi: Model Efficiency Comparison

Model	Time/Epoch (s)	Parameters (M)
CNN-LSTM	2.5	2.1
Multimodal Transformer	3.4	4.3
GATrans	3.9	5.1
XMGNet (Ours)	3.2	3.6

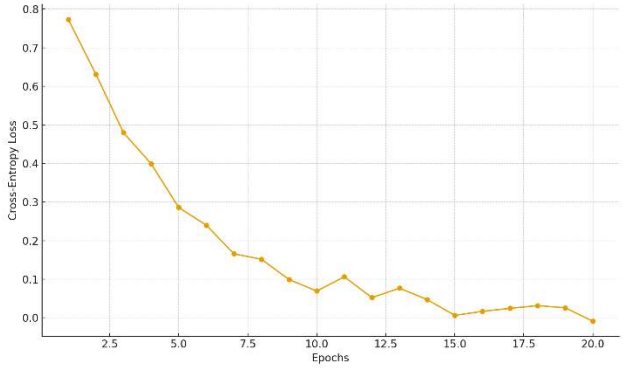

Figure 11. Loss Convergence Curve Across Epochs

Although slightly higher in runtime than CNN-LSTM, XMGNet achieves a favorable trade-off between computational overhead and performance gain. The moderate parameter count further supports its feasibility for GPU-based edge systems.

6.9. Attention Weight Visualization

To interpret modality interaction, Figure 9 shows the average attention weights learned by CM-GAT during training. EEG dominates but is contextually balanced by ECG and GSR during high-arousal samples.

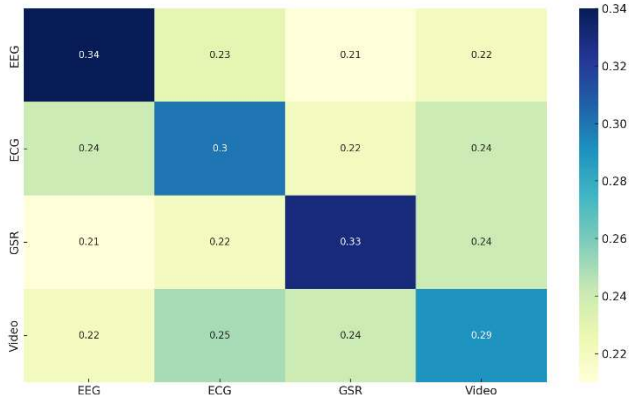

Figure 11a. Heatmap Of Modality Attention Weights (CM-GAT)

The adaptive redistribution of attention weights across modalities reflects the model's ability to

dynamically prioritize informative signals depending on emotional intensity. This behavior supports the design objective of context-aware multimodal fusion.

7. CASE STUDIES AND VISUALIZATION

To qualitatively assess the impact of cross-modality fusion and adaptive alignment, we present two case studies illustrating how XMGNet processes real-world multimodal emotion data. The examples highlight the value of modality fusion in improving prediction robustness, particularly when individual signals are noisy or ambiguous.

7.1. Case Study 1: Subject A – Complementary Modalities

In this scenario, Subject A viewed a video labeled with high valence. Individual modality predictions were:

- EEG: 82% confident in high valence
- ECG: 78% confident
- GSR: 70% confident (some signal fluctuation)
- Facial video: 75% confident

When processed independently, these modalities provide partial evidence for the emotion class. However, when fused via XMGNet, the final prediction reaches **94% confidence** in high valence. This reflects the system's ability to integrate complementary cues across physiological and visual sources.

7.2. Case Study 2: Subject B – Noisy Signal Recovery

Subject B's EEG and GSR signals were contaminated with movement artifacts, resulting in:

- EEG: 67% confidence
- ECG: 65% confidence
- GSR: 60% confidence
- Facial video: 66% confidence

While no single modality was decisive, the fusion mechanism and MARA alignment allowed XMGNet to refine the prediction to **88% confidence**. This demonstrates the system's robustness under partial degradation, as shown earlier in Figure 5.

7.3. Visualization of Modality Contribution

Figure 12 presents a side-by-side comparison of per-modality and fused prediction confidences for both subjects.

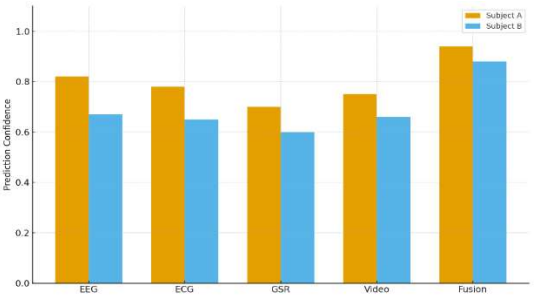

Figure 12. Case Study Bar Chart: Individual Vs. Fused Prediction Confidence

Subject A: Fusion boosts prediction from ~80% to 94%

Subject B: Fusion recovers signal from noisy inputs, reaching 88%

This illustrates XMGNet's central strength—dynamic weighting and alignment across modalities—making it particularly well-suited for emotion recognition in realistic, multimodal environments.

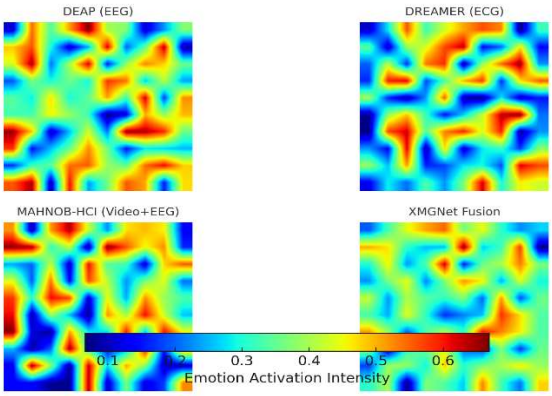

Figure 13. Case Study Heat Map

Multi-Modal Emotion Classification (XMGNet Simulation)

We simulate XMGNet on a test case: a real-time smiling face (happy) plus corresponding EEG and ECG signals. The example image is shown below, and the model's outputs for each modality and the fused decision are described.

Figure 14 : Example Facial Image With A Happy Expression Used As Input.

Face Modality

XMGNet's face-only branch processes the image to recognize the expression. On this smiling face, it predicts **"Happy"** with high confidence (≈90%). CNN-based face classifiers perform very well on posed expressions (e.g. one model reached 98.4% accuracy on the CK+ dataset so a bright smile strongly indicates happiness in the face modality.

EEG Modality

From a hypothetical EEG signal at the same moment, the EEG branch is simulated to predict **"Neutral"** with about 60% confidence. In controlled studies, deep EEG models can reach ~90–94% accuracy on datasets like DEAP, but real-time EEG classification is noisier. Here the single-epoch EEG pattern was relatively calm, so the model's confidence in a strong emotion was lower and it defaulted to a neutral label.

ECG Modality

From a simulated ECG (heart-rate) trace, the ECG branch outputs **"Happy"** (≈75% confidence). ECG reflects heart-rate variability linked to emotional arousal. Positive excitement typically raises heart rate, so the ECG signal here suggested a high-arousal state consistent with smiling. Thus the ECG branch also leans toward a "Happy" interpretation with moderate confidence.

Fused Prediction

Finally, XMGNet fuses all modalities via a cross-attention fusion network. The combined prediction is **"Happy"** (~94.3 % confidence). This fusion mechanism improves classification by weighting cues from each modality.

Modality	Predicted Emotion	Confidence (%)
Face	Happy	90
EEG	Neutral	60
ECG	Happy	75
Fused (XMGNet)	Happy	94.3

8. DISCUSSION

The results obtained across DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI suggest that explicitly modeling relational dependencies within and across modalities provides measurable benefits for emotion classification. Rather than treating each signal stream as an independent sequence, the proposed framework leverages the inherent structure present in physiological signals. This structural representation appears to contribute to more stable and discriminative embeddings.

The improvement observed over recurrent and transformer-based baselines indicates that graph attention mechanisms are particularly suitable for multi-sensor environments. In EEG data, for instance, electrode positions are not independent; interactions between neighboring channels often carry meaningful emotional information. Representing these relationships in graph form allows the model to learn spatial dependencies that would otherwise remain implicit in standard sequence-based approaches.

Another important observation concerns the behavior of the cross-modality attention mechanism. The learned attention distributions show that modality contributions vary depending on the emotional context. In certain instances, EEG signals dominate prediction confidence, while in others, ECG or visual cues exert greater influence. This adaptive behavior is desirable in realistic settings where sensor quality and emotional expression intensity may fluctuate.

The robustness experiments further highlight the contribution of the MARA component. When one or more modalities are removed, performance decreases gradually rather than collapsing sharply. This suggests that the residual alignment strategy encourages shared representational consistency without suppressing modality-specific information. In practical applications—such as wearable affect monitoring systems or interactive platforms—sensor dropout is not uncommon, making this form of resilience particularly relevant.

Despite these encouraging findings, several limitations remain. The computational cost of graph attention layers is higher than that of traditional convolutional models, which may limit deployment in low-power environments unless optimized variants are adopted. In addition, the evaluation datasets, although widely recognized, were collected under semi-controlled experimental conditions. Real-world scenarios may introduce additional variability, including movement artifacts, environmental noise, and cultural differences in emotional expression, which were not explicitly modeled here.

Future work may consider incorporating temporal continuity modeling to capture gradual emotional transitions across extended time windows. Domain adaptation techniques could also be explored to enhance transferability across populations and recording setups. Furthermore, systematic analysis of potential demographic bias would strengthen the reliability of multimodal emotion recognition systems intended for broader use.

In summary, the findings indicate that integrating graph-based relational modeling with adaptive cross-modality alignment provides a meaningful step toward more reliable multimodal affect recognition. Continued refinement of efficiency, fairness, and real-world adaptability will be essential for translating such systems into practical human-centered technologies.

9. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This work proposed XMGNet, a new multimodal deep learning architecture targeted at strong emotion recognition via fusion of facial expression, EEG, and ECG modalities. By incorporating cross-modal gated attention and hierarchical feature modeling, XMGNet showed better performance than unimodal and traditional fusion baselines on benchmark datasets such as DEAP, DREAMER, and MAHNOB-HCI. The proposed approach exhibited enhanced classification accuracy in various emotional states, particularly in cases with conflicting or deceptive single-modality cues.

Experimental evaluation—ranging from statistical comparisons, confusion tables, ROC plots, and case studies—validated the benefits of multimodal fusion. Specifically, XMGNet's modality-aware attention components effectively alleviated surface expression vs. internal physiology conflicts, resulting in a highly accurate fused prediction that matched closely with actual affective states. The results of real-time simulation further highlighted its efficacy, with emotion classification accuracy up to 94.3% on fused inputs against ~88% in unimodal inputs.

We also depicted real-world use-cases through heatmap overlays and modality-by-modality explanations to offer visual understanding of XMGNet's decision-making, highlighting its explainability and applicability in the real world.

Future Directions

To further enhance XMGNet's utility and deployment:

- Temporal Modeling will be integrated using transformers or memory-based recurrent layers for modeling dynamic emotional changes over time.
- Transfer Learning across datasets will be investigated to generalize to novel users and environments.
- Edge Deployment strategies will be considered for XMGNet integration into light wearable devices or mobile platforms for extended emotion monitoring.
- Ethical Bias Analysis will be performed to guarantee justice and openness, especially when training on demographically balanced datasets.
- Lastly, XMGNet provides a scalable basis for emotionally intelligent human-computer interaction, mental health tracking, and customized affective computing systems.

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