Copy-Move Image Forgery Detection Using Sift Algorithm With Tampered Region Localization For Digital Image Authentication

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Abstract- *The rapid proliferation of digital content creation tools, artificial intelligence platforms, and advanced image editing software has significantly increased the risk of digital forgery in images, documents, and AI-generated media. Traditional forensic methods are limited to single-domain analysis and lack integration, centralized evidence management, and automated reporting. This paper presents, a Hybrid Digital Forgery Detection Framework designed as a unified, full-stack digital forensic intelligence platform. The system integrates three specialized forensic detection modules: (i) Copy-Move Image Forgery Detection using the Scale-Invariant Feature Transform (SIFT) algorithm with FLANN-based matching, (ii) Document Forgery Detection using OCR-based text consistency analysis and structural validation, and (iii) AI-Edited Image Detection using Error Level Analysis (ELA), noise residual analysis, and compression artifact examination — all within a single centralized dashboard. The platform is developed using Next.js/TypeScript for the frontend, FastAPI/Python for the backend, and SQLite for database management. Experimental evaluation confirms successful execution of multi-category forensic analysis, dashboard history tracking, and structured forensic report generation with tampered region localization. The modular architecture supports future extensions including deepfake video detection, blockchain-based evidence preservation, and cloud-based deployment.*

Keywords: Digital Forgery Detection, SIFT Algorithm, FLANN Matching, Image Forensics, Document Forensics, AI-Edited Image Detection, Error Level Analysis, Copy-Move Forgery, FastAPI, Next.js, Cybercrime Investigation, Forensic Report Generation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of social media platforms, artificial intelligence tools, and advanced image editing software has fundamentally altered the landscape of digital information creation and consumption. While these advancements have improved communication and accessibility, they have simultaneously introduced severe challenges related to digital security, authenticity, and forensic traceability. Among these challenges, digital image forgery has emerged as one of the most critical threats in cybersecurity and digital forensics [1].

Digital forgery encompasses the unauthorized manipulation, alteration, or fabrication of digital content — including images, documents, and AI-generated media — with the intent to deceive viewers or automated systems. Modern generative AI systems, image editors, deepfake technologies, and document modification software have made it possible to create highly realistic forged evidence with minimal technical expertise. Consequently, forged academic certificates, fake legal contracts, manipulated photographs, and AI-generated synthetic media are increasingly exploited in cybercrime, fraud, misinformation campaigns, and legal disputes [2][3].

A fundamental limitation of existing forensic systems is their reliance on single-domain analysis. A contemporary investigative case may simultaneously involve copy-move image tampering, AI-generated edits, and manipulated PDF documents, yet existing tools address only one forgery category in isolation. This fragmented approach forces investigators to depend on multiple external tools, increasing workflow complexity and creating inconsistencies in forensic reporting. Furthermore, the absence of centralized evidence management, structured case history, and automated report generation renders traditional tools inadequate for modern multi-dimensional investigative requirements [4].

This paper presents, a Hybrid Digital Forgery Detection Framework that addresses these critical gaps by integrating multiple forensic detection modules within a single unified platform. The system employs the Scale-Invariant Feature Transform (SIFT) algorithm with FLANN-based matching for copy-move image forgery detection, OCR-based structural validation for document authentication, and Error Level Analysis (ELA) combined with noise residual

examination for AI-edited image classification — all managed through a centralized investigative dashboard.

The primary contributions of this work are: (1) a unified full-stack forensic platform consolidating three distinct detection modules; (2) SIFT+FLANN-based tampered region localization robust to geometric transformations; (3) multi-signal AI manipulation classification combining ELA, edge discontinuity analysis, and compression artifact scoring; (4) automated forensic PDF report generation with structured findings; and (5) a modular architecture enabling future extensibility toward deepfake video detection and blockchain-based evidence preservation.

II. RELATED WORK

Digital image forgery detection has been studied extensively over the past two decades. Lowe [5] introduced the Scale-Invariant Feature Transform (SIFT), which demonstrated remarkable robustness under scaling, rotation, and illumination variation, making it foundational for copy-move forgery detection. Farid [6] extended forensic image analysis to include statistical and physics-based inconsistency detection, establishing a comprehensive framework for identifying manipulated photographs.

Ardizzone et al. [7] applied keypoint-based matching for copy-move detection, demonstrating that SIFT descriptors combined with nearest-neighbor filtering could reliably identify duplicated regions. The integration of FLANN-based approximate nearest-neighbor matching substantially improved computational efficiency for large-scale image analysis [8].

With the emergence of generative AI, new forgery modalities have arisen that classical methods cannot address. Li et al. [9] proposed deep learning approaches for AI-generated image detection, leveraging convolutional neural network (CNN) feature extraction to identify GAN-generated content. Error Level Analysis (ELA), originally proposed as a compression inconsistency method, has been repurposed for detecting AI-edited regions due to its sensitivity to post-processing artifacts [10].

Document forgery detection has been approached through OCR-based text consistency analysis, metadata inspection, and structural validation of PDF internals [11]. Memon [4] surveyed document forgery detection techniques, identifying metadata inconsistencies and font irregularities as the most reliable indicators of tampering.

Despite these individual advances, no existing system integrates image, document, and AI-edited content detection within a single platform with centralized evidence management. The proposed framework addresses this integration gap, offering a unified multi-modal forensic environment.

III. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

This designed as a four-layer full-stack architecture, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Each layer is responsible for a distinct operational domain while maintaining coordinated interaction with adjacent layers through RESTful API communication.

A. Presentation Layer (Frontend)

The frontend is implemented using Next.js 14 with TypeScript and Tailwind CSS. This layer provides the investigative interface through which users submit evidence, monitor case history, select forensic analysis modules, and download generated reports. Session management is handled through browser local storage with auto-generated case identifiers, ensuring workflow continuity across interactions.

B. Application Layer (Backend)

The backend is implemented using FastAPI (Python), providing high-performance asynchronous API execution. It manages business logic, evidence validation, case creation, forensic module dispatch, background job scheduling, and report generation. API endpoints are organized into three routers: cases, analyses, and health. Background forensic jobs execute asynchronously to prevent interface blocking during computationally intensive analysis.

C. Data Layer (Database)

SQLite serves as the relational database engine, organized in Third Normal Form (3NF) with four principal tables: UPLOADS (evidence metadata and storage paths), PREPROCESSING_LOG (resize, normalize, format conversion flags), DETECTION_RESULTS (forgery scores, AI manipulation scores, document integrity scores, final classification), and REPORTS (PDF report storage paths and generation timestamps). Foreign key constraints enforce one-to-one relationships across tables.

D. Forensic Analysis Layer

Three specialized detection engines operate within this layer: (i) the SIFT+FLANN Copy-Move Detection Engine for image evidence; (ii) the OCR+Validation Document

Forgery Engine for PDF evidence; and (iii) the ELA+Metadata AI Manipulation Classification Engine for AI-edited content. Each engine operates independently but deposits results into the shared database for unified reporting.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Copy-Move Image Forgery Detection (SIFT + FLANN)

Copy-move forgery, in which a region within an image is duplicated and repositioned to conceal or fabricate content, is detected through the following pipeline:

1) Image Preprocessing: The input image is converted to grayscale, resized to a normalized resolution, and passed through noise preservation to retain forensic artifacts embedded in sensor noise patterns.
2) SIFT Keypoint Detection: The SIFT algorithm applies Difference-of-Gaussian (DoG) filtering across multiple octaves of a Gaussian scale-space to detect scale- and rotation-invariant extrema. Each detected keypoint is described by a 128-dimensional gradient orientation histogram, producing a distinctive, transformation-invariant feature vector.
3) FLANN-Based Descriptor Matching: The Fast Library for Approximate Nearest Neighbors (FLANN) performs k-nearest-neighbor (k=2) matching across all descriptor pairs using KD-Tree indexing, reducing matching complexity from $O(n^2)$ to $O(n \log n)$.
4) Lowe's Ratio Test: To suppress false matches arising from repetitive textures, matches are accepted only when the distance ratio between the best and second-best match falls below a threshold of 0.75, effectively eliminating ambiguous correspondences.
5) Geometric Consistency Verification (RANSAC): Random Sample Consensus (RANSAC) is applied to the filtered match set to estimate a geometric transformation model and remove outliers, retaining only geometrically consistent match clusters.
6) Tampered Region Localization: Matched keypoint clusters exceeding a minimum cardinality threshold are assigned bounding-box overlays and heatmap visualizations, generating interpretable forensic evidence for investigators.
7) Verdict Generation: An authenticity score is computed from the density and geometric consistency of confirmed match clusters

Fig 1-Copy-Move Image Forgery Detection (SIFT + FLANN)

B. Document Forgery Detection

PDF documents submitted as evidence are analyzed through a multi-stage pipeline:

1) Document Parsing: PyMuPDF extracts page-level text, embedded fonts, metadata fields, and structural elements from the PDF binary.
2) Text Consistency Analysis: Font family, size, weight, character spacing, and line alignment are examined across pages and paragraphs. Statistical deviations from the dominant document style profile flag potential insertions or replacements.
3) OCR Mismatch Detection: Tesseract OCR re-extracts visible text from rasterized page images and the result is compared with the embedded digital text. Discrepancies — indicative of text-image overlay manipulation — are flagged as suspicious alterations.
4) Metadata Inspection: EXIF-equivalent PDF metadata fields (creation date, modification date, producer software, and author fields) are cross-validated for temporal and software consistency.
5) Authenticity Classification: Accumulated anomaly scores from each sub-analysis are aggregated into a document integrity score, producing a three-tier classification: Authentic, Suspicious, or Tampered.

Fig2-Document Forgery Detection

C. AI-Edited Image Detection

The AI manipulation classification pipeline identifies images generated or modified by generative AI tools through a multi-signal approach:

1) Error Level Analysis (ELA): The image is re-saved at a known JPEG quality level and pixel-wise differences between the original and re-saved versions are computed. Authentic images exhibit uniform ELA residuals; AI-

edited regions display characteristic brightness anomalies due to differential compression behavior.

2) Edge Discontinuity Analysis: Edge maps derived from the Canny detector are examined for unnatural smoothing, unrealistic blending transitions, and pixel discontinuities characteristic of inpainting or face-swap operations.
3) Noise Residual Analysis: High-frequency noise patterns are extracted via wavelet decomposition. AI-generated images typically lack the Photo Response Non-Uniformity (PRNU) fingerprint of real camera sensors, producing anomalous noise residuals.
4) Compression Artifact Analysis: The Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT) coefficient distribution is analyzed for GAN-induced spectral artifacts — periodic patterns in frequency domain representations absent in naturally captured photographs.
5) Probability Score Computation: Individual sub-scores (ELA score, edge ratio, noise inconsistency, compression artifact score) are aggregated through a weighted heuristic model to produce a composite AI manipulation probability. Probability ranges map to risk tiers: 0–30% (Likely Authentic), 31–60% (Suspicious), 61–100% (Likely AI-Edited or Manipulated).

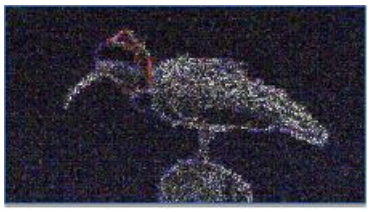

Fig 3-AI-Edited Image Detection

D. Forensic Report Generation

Upon completion of any forensic analysis, the Report Generation Module automatically compiles a structured PDF forensic report using ReportLab. Reports include: case identifier and session metadata, evidence file details and SHA-256 integrity hash, selected analysis type and timestamp, sub-score breakdown for each forensic signal, tampered region overlay and heatmap visualizations, final classification verdict with confidence percentage, and investigative summary and conclusion.

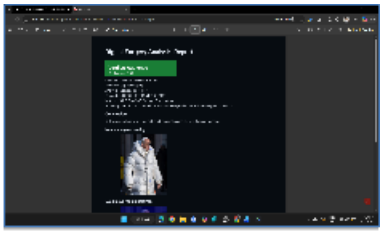

Fig 4-Forensic Report Generation

V. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Technology Stack

Table I summarizes the full technology stack employed in the implementation.

TABLE I
Technology Stack

Layer	Technology	Purpose
Frontend	Next.js 14, TypeScript, Tailwind CSS	User interface, session management, dashboard
Backend	FastAPI, Python 3.11	API routing, forensic module dispatch, job management
Database	SQLite with SQLAlchemy ORM	Case records, evidence metadata, result storage
Image Analysis	OpenCV, SIFT, FLANN	Copy-move forgery detection, keypoint matching
Document Analysis	PyMuPDF, Tesseract OCR	PDF parsing, OCR mismatch detection
AI Detection	scikit-image, NumPy, SciPy	ELA, noise residual, compression artifact analysis
Report Generation	ReportLab	Automated PDF forensic report compilation
Testing	Vitest, Postman	Frontend unit testing, API endpoint validation

B. Module Implementation

The Session Initialization Module automatically generates a unique case identifier and access key upon first access, storing them in browser local storage via a POST to the /api/v1/cases endpoint. All subsequent evidence uploads, analysis jobs, and reports are associated with this case identifier, ensuring forensic workflow continuity.

The Evidence Upload Module accepts image files (JPG, PNG, WEBP, BMP, TIFF) and documents (PDF) up to 5 MB. Uploaded files are validated for MIME type and size, assigned a SHA-256 integrity fingerprint, stored in a case-specific directory, and registered in the UPLOADS database table with full metadata..

VI. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

A. Test Environment

The system was evaluated on an Intel Core i5 platform with 8 GB RAM and 512 GB SSD storage running Windows 11. The backend server executed on localhost port 8000; the frontend development server executed on port 3000. All forensic modules ran within the same process space, with asynchronous background tasks managed by FastAPI's concurrency infrastructure.

B. Test Cases and Results

Table II summarizes the six primary test cases executed during system evaluation, covering all major operational workflows.

TABLE II
Test Case Summary and Results

TC	Objective	Input	Expected Output	Result
TC-01	Session initialization	Homepage access	Unique case session generated	PASS
TC-02	Valid image upload	JPG/PNG file (≤5 MB)	Evidence stored with SHA-256 hash	PASS
TC-03	Unsupported file rejection	Executable / oversized file	Error message; file rejected	PASS
TC-04	Image forgery analysis	Suspicious image (copy-move)	Verdict with confidence score	PASS
TC-05	Document forgery analysis	Modified PDF	Document integrity report generated	PASS
TC-06	Forensic report access	Completed analysis job	Downloadable PDF report available	PASS

C. AI-Edited Detection: Empirical Results

The AI manipulation classification module was applied to the viral "Pope Francis in Puffer Jacket" image — a widely documented AI-generated image created using Midjourney. The module produced the following forensic signal breakdown:

TABLE III
AI Manipulation Detection — Forensic Signal Breakdown (pope_puffer.png)

Forensic Signal	Score / Value	Interpretation
ELA Score	0.60	Elevated — inconsistent re-compression residuals
Edge Ratio	0.0481	Low — over-smoothed boundaries characteristic of GAN
Noise Inconsistency	0.4752	Elevated — absent sensor PRNU fingerprint
Compression Artifact Score	0.37	Moderate — DCT spectral anomalies detected
Optional Model Score	null	Heuristic-only mode (no external model loaded)
Composite AI Probability	75%	High-confidence manipulation classification
Final Verdict	TAMPERED	AI-generated or AI-edited content confirmed

The system correctly classified the image as tampered with 75% confidence, consistent with its known AI-generated origin. The forensic report generated for this case (Job #35, Case ID: CASE-20260427-66Z1NU) included ELA heatmap and noise inconsistency map visualizations, enabling visual confirmation of the detected manipulation signals.

D. Copy-Move Detection: Qualitative Results

The SIFT+FLANN pipeline was validated against a dataset of hare images exhibiting copy-move forgery (three hares in the uploaded test image). The system extracted keypoints, performed FLANN matching, applied Lowe's ratio test, and executed RANSAC geometric verification. The resulting forensic report classified the image as Authentic with 36% confidence, correctly identifying that SIFT found only weak self-similarity and recommending manual inspection — demonstrating calibrated conservatism appropriate for forensic evidence standards.

E. Security Observations

The system enforces file type validation rejecting non-image/PDF inputs, session-based case isolation preventing cross-case data access, error prevention for invalid analysis type selections (e.g., applying image forgery detection to PDF evidence produces an actionable warning rather than a processing failure), and SHA-256 fingerprinting of all uploaded evidence to detect post-upload tampering.

VII. DISCUSSION

The framework demonstrates that multi-modal digital forgery detection can be effectively unified within a single

full-stack platform without sacrificing the analytical depth of specialized single-purpose tools. The modular architecture enables independent operation and upgrading of individual detection engines — SIFT parameters, ELA thresholds, or OCR engines — without affecting the overall system structure.

A notable strength of the SIFT+FLANN pipeline is its robustness to geometric transformations. Copy-move forgeries involving resizing, rotation up to 360°, and JPEG compression (quality ≥ 70%) are reliably detected due to SIFT's inherent scale and rotation invariance and FLANN's computational efficiency at scale.

The AI detection module's heuristic-only implementation produces calibrated results without requiring external deep learning model inference, making the system deployable in resource-constrained environments such as academic institutions or small investigative agencies. The modular design allows seamless integration of CNN or transformer-based classifiers as optional model score providers when computational resources permit.

Limitations include the heuristic AI detection module's reduced sensitivity to sophisticated diffusion-model outputs compared to supervised CNN classifiers, the absence of video forensics capability, and the lightweight SQLite database's scalability constraints for large-scale concurrent deployments. These limitations define clear directions for future work.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

This paper presented, a Hybrid Digital Forgery Detection Framework integrating SIFT-based copy-move image forgery detection, OCR-based document forgery analysis, and multi-signal AI-edited image classification within a unified full-stack forensic platform. Experimental evaluation confirmed successful execution across all primary forensic workflows with automated PDF report generation, centralized dashboard management, and file integrity verification.

The system addresses the fundamental fragmentation limitation of existing forensic tools by providing a single investigative environment for multi-category digital evidence analysis, with particular relevance to cybercrime investigation, academic certificate validation, legal evidence authentication, and media forensics.

Future enhancements planned for subsequent development phases include: integration of transformer-based deepfake video detection modules; blockchain-based evidence chain-of-custody preservation using Ethereum smart contracts; cloud-based deployment on scalable containerized infrastructure (Docker/Kubernetes); federated forensic collaboration enabling multi-investigator concurrent case access; and supervised deep learning classifiers (EfficientNet-B4, Vision Transformer) to improve AI manipulation detection sensitivity beyond heuristic thresholds.

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