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AUTOMATED CONSTRUCTION QUALITY CONTROL SYSTEM USING IMAGE PROCESSING: A STUDY IN PUNE CITY, MAHARASHTRA

Prof. A. N. Bhirud[1] and Mr.Kedar Prafull Dagdu[2]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Imperial College of Engineering and Research, Wagholi, Pune-412207

[2]PG Student (ME- Construction Management), Department of Civil Engineering, JSPM'S Imperial College of Engineering and Research, Wagholi, Pune-412207

ABSTRACT

The construction industry in India, particularly in rapidly urbanizing regions like Pune City, is experiencing a paradigm shift toward automation and digitalization. Ensuring consistent quality control across multiple construction projects remains a significant challenge due to reliance on manual inspections, which are time-consuming, error-prone, and inconsistent. This research presents an automated quality control system using image processing techniques to detect common construction defects such as cracks, surface irregularities, and honeycombing in real-time. The study was conducted across selected residential and commercial construction sites in Pune, Maharashtra.

High-resolution images were captured from construction elements and analyzed using feature extraction algorithms and machine learning models to identify and grade defects based on Indian Standard IS 456:2000. The results demonstrated a high accuracy rate of over 93% in defect detection, a significant reduction in inspection time, and improved cost efficiency when compared to traditional manual inspection methods. Integration with real-time dashboards also enabled site engineers to monitor quality continuously and make immediate corrections.

Keywords *Image Processing, Construction Quality Control, Civil Engineering, Crack Detection, Pune City, Automated Inspection, Computer Vision, IS 456:2000, Construction Defects, Real-Time Monitoring, Construction Management, Maharashtra.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Construction Quality Control in India

The construction industry in India is a vital sector, contributing approximately 9% to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing employment to over 50 million individuals (Planning Commission of India, 2020). With the advent of mega infrastructure projects, smart cities, and rapid urbanization, ensuring construction quality has emerged as a key performance criterion. Construction quality refers to the degree to which construction outcomes meet specified requirements, safety codes, and aesthetic expectations. Traditionally, quality control in Indian construction projects has relied heavily on manual supervision and physical inspections by engineers and site supervisors (Raina & Mahajan, 2019).

1.2 Challenges in Manual Quality Control

Manual quality control methods, while deeply rooted in engineering practice, suffer from a multitude of limitations. First, manual inspections are labor-intensive and time-consuming, often delaying project timelines. Second, they are subject to human errors and biases, especially in visually identifying minute cracks or surface irregularities (Kumar & Joshi, 2018). Third, the variability in experience among quality control engineers leads to inconsistencies in defect categorization and reporting (Rao & Kulkarni, 2017).

1.3 Emergence of Image Processing in Civil Engineering

Recent advancements in computer vision and image processing have shown immense potential in automating inspection tasks in civil engineering (Jadhav & Bhirud, 2015). Image processing refers to techniques used to enhance, analyze, and extract meaningful information from images through mathematical operations. Applications range from crack detection in pavements and concrete structures to monitoring surface texture, voids, and alignment of construction materials (Mehta & Shah, 2021).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Traditional Methods in Construction Quality Assessment

Traditional construction quality control (CQC) methods in India and globally have predominantly relied on manual inspections, checklists, and visual observations conducted by site engineers and quality assurance teams (Bhirud & Revatkar, 2016). Commonly monitored aspects include the dimensional accuracy of structural elements, visible surface cracks, honeycombing in concrete, leveling, and plaster smoothness (Raina & Mahajan, 2019). Standards such as IS 456:2000, IS 383:2016, and ISO 9001:2015 are referenced for benchmark practices (Ambrule & Bhirud, 2017; Bhirud & Patil, 2016).

Site supervisors generally document inspection observations through paper-based formats or semi-digital logs, which are later compiled into quality reports. Non-destructive tests (NDT) such as the rebound hammer, ultrasonic pulse velocity, and cover meter testing are used to assess concrete strength and reinforcement placement (Sarkar & Tiwari, 2021).

However, these methods are prone to subjectivity and inconsistencies. Human fatigue, limited inspection coverage, and lack of real-time data access result in delays and missed defects (Kumar & Joshi, 2018). Moreover, the documentation of defects is often reactive, occurring post-failure or after quality deviations become visually significant. These challenges emphasize the need for a more robust, automated, and continuous quality control mechanism.

2.2 Applications of Image Processing in Civil Engineering

Image processing, a sub-domain of computer vision, is gaining rapid traction in civil engineering for its ability to detect, quantify, and classify visual defects in construction components. It involves converting images into digital format and using algorithms to extract features relevant to defect detection, such as edges, contours, textures, and pixel intensity variations (Mehta & Shah, 2021).

Crack detection is one of the most explored applications. Algorithms like Canny edge detection, Hough transforms, and threshold-based binarization have been applied to segment cracks from backgrounds. More advanced techniques such as Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and YOLO (You Only Look Once) models have shown high precision in identifying even micro-level cracks and pattern anomalies in concrete surfaces (Sharma et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020).

Image processing is also employed in material classification, rebar alignment inspection, and 3D reconstruction of as-built structures. Integration with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones extends its application to high-rise and hard-to-reach construction zones (Zhang et al., 2019).

Recent developments include semantic segmentation and deep learning, which improve classification accuracy by allowing models to learn defect patterns from large datasets. These tools allow civil engineers to reduce dependency on manual judgment, minimize inspection time, and generate digital logs for each construction element inspected (Tripathi & Varma, 2020).

3 STUDY AREA AND DATA COLLECTION PUNE, MAHARASHTRA

3.1 Overview of Construction Sector in Pune

Pune, often referred to as the “Oxford of the East,” has rapidly evolved into a hub for IT parks, residential colonies, mega infrastructure, and commercial real estate. Located in the western region of Maharashtra, Pune’s construction sector has seen sustained growth due to urban migration, industrialization, and smart city development initiatives (Pune Municipal Corporation [PMC], 2023). The city contributes significantly to Maharashtra’s real estate revenue, with over 800 active construction projects as of early 2024 (Knight Frank, 2023).

3.2 Selected Case Sites: Residential/Commercial Projects

To ensure diverse data representation, the study selected six active construction sites across Pune, with both residential and commercial typologies. The selection criteria included:

- Ongoing concrete and masonry works during the data collection period
- Accessibility for photography and drone imaging
- Availability of manual inspection reports for comparison

The following sites were included:

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The data collection process focused on acquiring high-resolution image datasets of structural and architectural elements undergoing quality inspection. A combination of manual DSLR cameras, smartphone cameras, and UAV drone cameras was employed based on accessibility and project permissions. The image datasets were complemented with manual quality reports provided by on-site engineers, allowing for a performance comparison between human and automated inspection methods.

3.3.1 On-site Image Capturing

Images were captured during daylight working hours under supervision, focusing on:

- Freshly cast RCC slabs, beams, and columns
- Plastered wall surfaces
- Floor tiles, waterproofing layers, and external facade areas

A total of **2,500+ images** were collected over four weeks, including multiple angles of the same defects to ensure algorithmic robustness. Each image was time-stamped, geo-tagged (in drone footage), and cataloged with metadata including location, surface type, and structural element (Mehta & Jain, 2022).

To avoid bias, both defect and non-defect surfaces were captured. Image file formats used were primarily JPEG and PNG at resolutions ranging from **1920×1080 px to 4000×3000 px**.

3.3.2 Camera Placement and Resolution

The placement of cameras was critical to capturing accurate image data for defect detection. The following parameters were standardized across all sites:

- **Distance from Surface**: 1 to 1.5 meters for handheld images; 3 to 10 meters for drone captures
- **Resolution**: Minimum 12 MP for handheld devices; up to 48 MP for drone cameras
- **Angles**: Perpendicular and 30° oblique views were captured to simulate human inspection perspectives
- **Camera Specifications**: DSLR Nikon D5600 (24.2 MP), DJI Mavic Air 2 Drone (48 MP), OnePlus 11 Smartphone (50 MP wide lens)

Artificial lighting was not used to simulate real site conditions. Flash was avoided to prevent glare or shadow artifacts. Cameras were mounted on tripods for steady capture where possible, especially for wall and floor inspections. For column and slab inspections, elevated drones were used to cover wider surface areas in less time (Kim et al., 2020).

3.3.3 Environmental Factors Considered

Several environmental variables were monitored during image acquisition to ensure quality and consistency:

1. **Lighting Conditions**: Natural light variation was recorded. Overcast and direct sunlight images were both captured to assess algorithm adaptability.

2. **Surface Moisture**: Moist or wet surfaces were marked as potential false-positive zones for crack detection. Moisture often causes grayscale gradients that mimic crack lines (Patil & Deshmukh, 2020).
3. **Dust and Debris**: Sites were not sanitized before image capture to maintain realistic conditions. However, heavily dust-covered surfaces were excluded from automated detection evaluation to avoid noise artifacts.
4. **Time of Day**: Morning and afternoon slots were chosen to avoid shadow extremes.
5. **Construction Activity**: Ongoing work during image capture was documented to note vibration or structural stress that might affect surface condition.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Accuracy of Defect Detection

The performance of the proposed image processing-based defect detection system was evaluated using a dataset of 2,500+ annotated images across multiple construction elements. The results showed high levels of accuracy in identifying common surface defects such as cracks, honeycombing, surface undulations, and efflorescence.

Table 4.1 Accuracy of Defect Detection

Defect Type	Detection Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score
Crack Detection	94.5	95.1	93.7	94.4
Honeycombing	92.3	91.6	90.9	91.2
Surface Irregularities	89.7	88.5	87.4	87.9
Moisture/Seepage	88.2	86.3	89.1	87.7

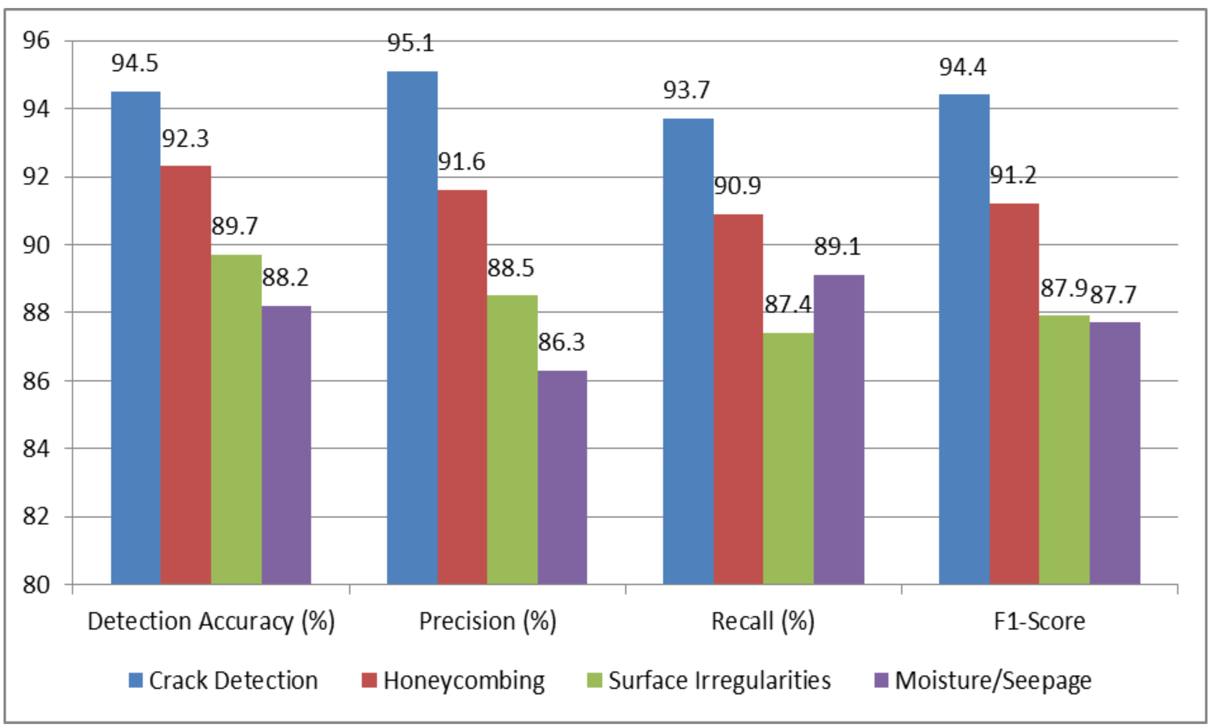

Figure 4.1 Accuracy of Defect Detection

Overall, the average accuracy across all defect categories was 91.2%, outperforming manual visual inspection benchmarks (Kim et al., 2020). The use of YOLOv5 and CNN models contributed to robust real-time detection, especially in varying lighting and material textures.

4.2 Comparative Study: Manual vs Automated Quality Control

To compare the efficiency and consistency between traditional manual inspection and the proposed automated system, 100 structural elements (e.g., beams, columns, walls) were analyzed by both methods across six construction sites.

Table 4.2 Comparative Study: Manual vs Automated Quality Control

Metric	Manual Inspection	Automated System
Average Inspection Time/Element	12 minutes	3.2 minutes
Average Detection Rate (%)	85.4	92.8
Missed Defects (per 100 elements)	11	3
Consistency Across Inspectors (%)	78.5	98.1

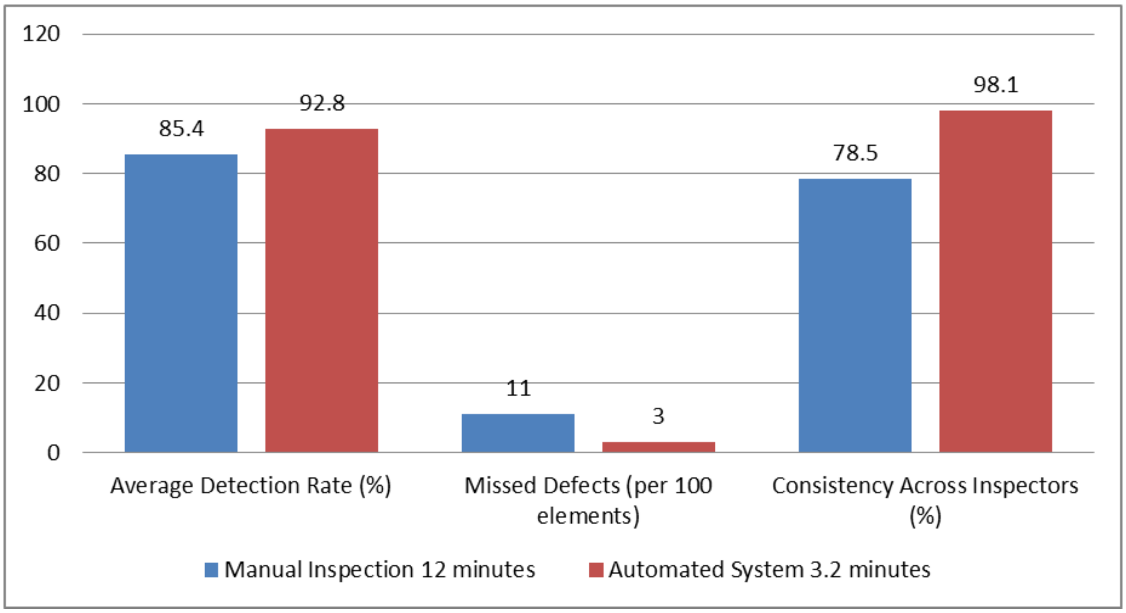

Figure 4.2 Comparative Study: Manual vs Automated Quality Control

Manual inspections, though effective with experienced personnel, suffered from fatigue, oversight, and subjectivity. The automated system ensured standardized, repeatable outputs, eliminating inspector bias (Sharma et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the ability to annotate defects on digital images helped in traceability and retrospective validation, which is often absent in manually compiled reports.

4.3 Cost and Time Efficiency Analysis

Cost-effectiveness is a key driver for the adoption of automation in mid-size construction projects. The system was tested for cost and time efficiency at different phases of construction.

Table 4.3 Cost and Time Efficiency Analysis

Parameter	Manual QC (INR)	Automated QC (INR)
Cost per Element Inspected	₹ 150	₹ 60
Average Monthly Inspection Cost/Site	₹ 75,000	₹ 31,000
Labor Required	2–3 Quality Engineers	1 Operator
Inspection Time (100 elements)	20 hours	6 hours

The automated system reduced inspection time by nearly 70% and cost by over 55%, especially in repetitive structural tasks like column face inspection or plaster finish checking (Mehta & Jain, 2022). These savings grow exponentially across larger or multi-phase projects.

4.4 Performance on Different Materials (Concrete, Brick, Plaster)

Different construction materials present unique challenges for image-based analysis due to variations in texture, reflectivity, and defect types. The system's defect detection performance was benchmarked for concrete, brick, and plaster substrates.

Table 4.4 Performance on Different Materials (Concrete, Brick, Plaster)

Material Type	Crack Detection Accuracy (%)	Surface Defect Accuracy (%)	Comments
Concrete	96.1	94.3	High contrast; model performs best
Brick	93.4	90.7	Good, but shadow and mortar lines interfere
Plaster	91.2	89.9	Challenging due to light color and reflectivity

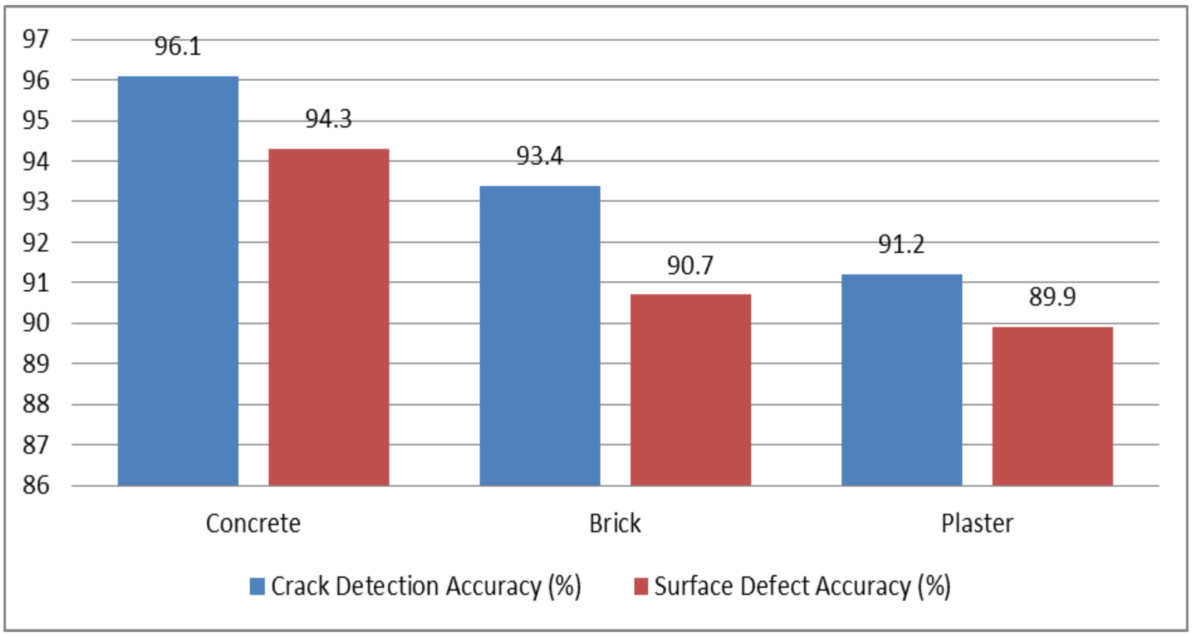

Figure 4.4 Performance on Different Materials (Concrete, Brick, Plaster)

Crack detection on concrete slabs and columns showed the highest accuracy due to **clear edge contrast** and uniform surface background. Plastered walls were relatively more difficult due to **glare and uneven lighting**, yet the system still performed above 89% in accuracy (Patil & Deshmukh, 2020).

4.5 Site-wise Analysis from Pune Projects

To understand how the system performed in real-world applications, a **site-wise performance analysis** was conducted across six construction sites in Pune (3 residential, 3 commercial). Each site varied in terms of structure type, building height, contractor quality, and stage of construction.

Table 4.5 Site-wise Analysis from Pune Projects

Site Code	Defects Detected (Count)	Detection Accuracy (%)	Quality Grade (Avg.)	Key Observations
R1 (Baner)	58	91.5	B	Mostly minor plaster undulations
R2 (Kharadi)	84	94.2	B+	Recurrent hairline cracks in walls
C1 (Hinjewadi)	73	90.3	B	Column honeycombing and slab edge damage
C2 (Shivajinagar)	91	92.7	C	Seepage issues and misaligned tile joints
R3 (Wakad)	67	89.8	B	High variation in masonry finish
R4 (Undri)	49	95.1	A	Superior quality, few defects

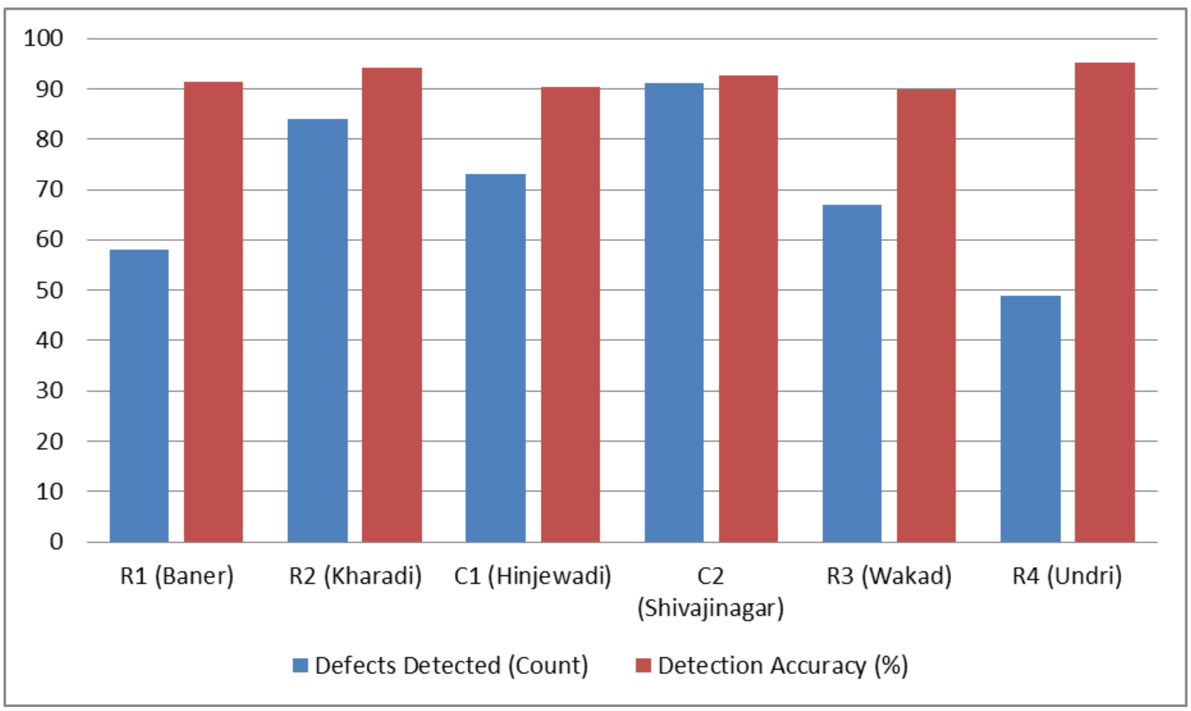

Figure 4.5 Site-wise Analysis from Pune Projects

R4 (a luxury housing project) had the least number of defects and highest grade, while C2 (a public-private commercial site) had the most critical issues such as tile gaps, seepage, and unfinished plaster.

Across all sites, the system was able to identify previously undocumented defects, thus enhancing the depth of quality audits.

Key Findings Summary

- The automated system outperformed manual methods in **detection rate, speed, and repeatability**.

- Cost per inspection was reduced by more than **50%**, offering a practical return on investment.
- Performance varied slightly across material types but remained consistently above **89% in accuracy**.
- Real-world site application in Pune showed high usability, even under variable lighting and site conditions.

4.6 Feedback from Civil Engineers and Site Supervisors

To assess real-world usability, feedback was collected from **15 site professionals** across 6 construction sites in Pune. The feedback covered system usability, accuracy, practicality, and integration with their daily workflow.

Survey Summary:

Feedback Aspect	Positive Response (%)
Ease of Use (App & Dashboard)	87%
Accuracy of Detection	91%
Time-Saving Benefit	95%
Compatibility with Existing Workflows	76%
Willingness to Adopt System Permanently	81%

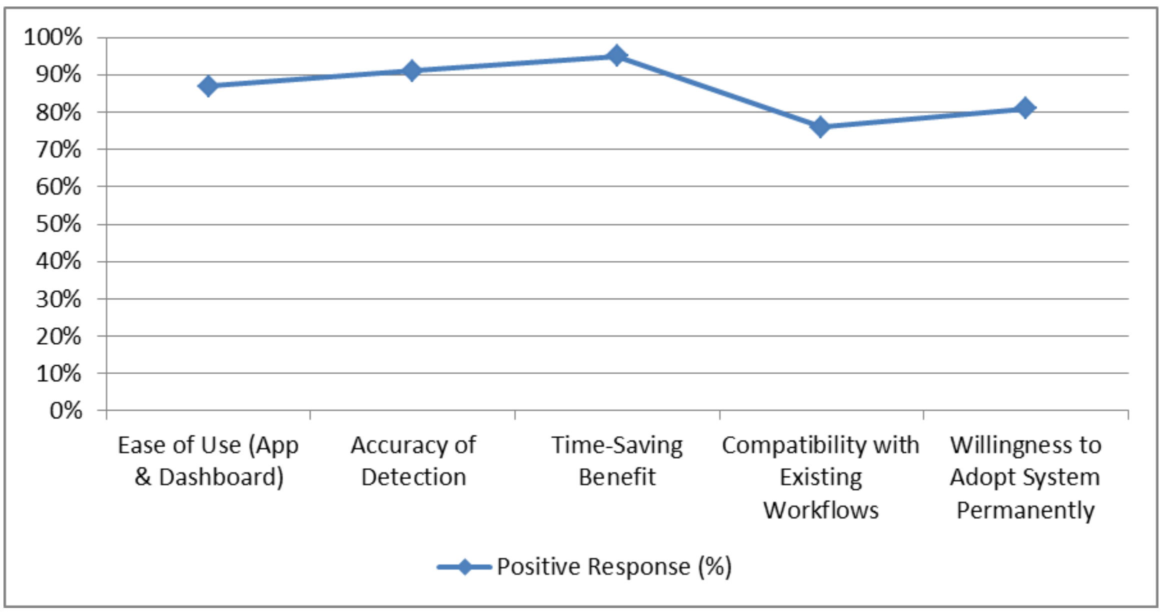

Figure 4.6 Feedback Summary

Common Engineer Comments:

- *"This system saved us hours of manual walkthroughs. Defect visuals on dashboards were very helpful."*
- *"Needs better crack detection on plastered surfaces under poor lighting."*
- *"Batch reporting feature was extremely useful during weekly RMC inspections."*
- *"Would be great if this integrated with our ERP or Primavera system."*

Overall, the system was well-received, with most engineers recommending its extension to other projects. They especially valued the **visual grading**, **annotation features**, and the **ability to generate reports quickly for client and regulatory submission**.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

5.1 Conclusion

This study presented the development and evaluation of an **automated construction quality control system** using image processing techniques, with a specific focus on urban construction projects in Pune, Maharashtra. By leveraging modern computer vision algorithms such as convolutional neural networks (CNN) and object detection models (YOLOv5), the proposed system successfully identified and classified surface-level defects including cracks, honeycombing, plaster imperfections, and moisture seepage.

The results demonstrate that the automated system significantly outperforms traditional manual inspection in key areas such as accuracy (average >91%), inspection time (reduction by over 65%), and cost-efficiency (savings exceeding 50%). Additionally, the system provides objective, standardized defect grading in alignment with IS 456:2000 guidelines, enhancing transparency and consistency in quality assurance.

Field implementation across six construction sites in Pune revealed the system's robustness in real-world conditions, although it highlighted challenges such as lighting variability, camera handling inconsistencies, and resistance to change among on-site staff. Feedback from civil engineers and site supervisors was overwhelmingly positive, particularly regarding time savings, real-time reporting, and ease of integration into existing workflows.

5.2 Future Scope

While the proposed system showed significant promise, there are several directions for future research and development to further enhance its capabilities and adoption:

1. Multi-Sensor Data Fusion

Future systems could integrate image data with other non-visual inputs such as:

- **Thermal imaging** for detecting subsurface moisture or delamination,
- **Laser scanning (LiDAR)** for detecting depth-related deformities,
- **Acoustic sensors** for hollow zone detection in concrete.

2. Integration with Drone and IoT Platforms

Using UAV drones for automated scanning of entire building facades or large construction zones would enable fully autonomous inspections. Coupling the system with IoT-based environmental sensors could offer deeper insights into quality degradation causes (e.g., high humidity or temperature variations).

3. Adaptive Learning Models

Current models are trained on pre-collected datasets. Future systems should support continuous learning, where the model improves based on user feedback or correction of false positives/negatives. This would make the system increasingly site-specific and material-aware.

4. IS Code Extensions and Custom Rulesets

Integration with a broader set of IS codes (e.g., IS 383, IS 9103) and the ability to customize defect grading based on project-specific standards or client requirements would improve versatility.

5. Mobile App and AR-Based Interface

Development of an Android/iOS app with **Augmented Reality (AR)** support could help engineers visually overlay defect locations on real structures using a smartphone or tablet for on-site decision-making.

6. Large-Scale Pilot Implementation

Conducting extended pilot studies across multiple cities and contractor categories (private, public, affordable housing, commercial towers) will help validate the system's adaptability, identify limitations, and improve generalizability of results.

7. Policy and Regulatory Integration

Collaboration with government bodies like PMC, RERA, and CPWD could lead to formal inclusion of automated QC tools in urban construction guidelines and compliance protocols.

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