ISSN (Online) 2394-6849

International Journal of Engineering Research in Electronics and Communication Engineering (IJERECE)

Volume 13 Issue 01 January 2026

Smart Refrigerator Shelf with Spoiled Food Detection

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Abstract— This paper presents the design and implementation of a Smart Refrigerator Shelf with Spoiled Food Detection system that integrates embedded sensing, Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity, and multimodal artificial intelligence for real-time freshness assessment. The system employs an ESP32- CAM node for image capture, an MQ135 sensor for volatile organic compound (VOC) detection, and a DHT11 sensor for temperature-humidity monitoring. Sensor data undergoes pro- cessing through a Python-based gateway that leverages the Google Gemini multimodal API for intelligent analysis, delivering human-readable explanations, confidence scores, and estimated shelf-life via Telegram bot notifications. Practical implementation overcomes hardware challenges including ADC-WiFi conflicts through external I2C-based ADS1115 converter and power sta- bility issues using dedicated power banks. Results demonstrate accurate spoilage detection with reduced false positives through multimodal fusion logic, achieving 92-96% accuracy with only 6-12% false positive rate. The system achieves deployment readi- ness suitable for households, retail refrigerators, and commercial kitchens, contributing to waste reduction, improved food safety, and sustainable resource management across the food value chain.

Index Terms— IoT, Food Spoilage Detection, Machine Learn- ing, Computer Vision, Gas Sensors, Edge Computing, Multi- modal AI, Smart Refrigeration, ESP32-CAM, Gemini API.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food preservation remains fundamental for health, economic stability, and environmental sustainability, yet conventional refrigeration systems fail to prevent widespread spoilage in homes, restaurants, and retail stores. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately 30- 40% of food produced globally is wasted annually, with spoilage representing a primary contributor [1], [2]. Traditional approaches depend on unreliable expiration dates or manual inspections, often missing early degradation signals such as volatile gas emissions or humidity fluctuations that precede visible spoilage.

This research presents a Smart Refrigerator Shelf with Spoiled Food Detection that combines multimodal sensing with artificial intelligence to enable automated, real-time fresh- ness monitoring. The integrated system architecture combines:

- ESP32-CAM microcontroller for embedded image capture and wireless communication
- MQ135 gas sensor for volatile organic compound (VOC) detection
- DHT11 sensor for temperature and humidity monitoring
- ADS1115 external ADC for reliable analog signal conditioning
- Python-based gateway for data aggregation and fusion logic
- Google Gemini multimodal API for AI-driven freshness classification
- Telegram bot interface for user notifications

This paper proposes a complete end-to-end system combining embedded sensors with cloud-based multimodal AI analysis, delivering transparent spoilage classifications with confidence metrics and actionable recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies have explored food spoilage detection tech- niques focusing on accuracy, reliability, and safety. Key find- ings are summarized below:

A. Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence in Food Spoilage Detection

Bongarde et al. [1] conducted comprehensive analysis of ML and AI techniques for spoilage detection, emphasizing sensor data fusion and cloud-based platforms for real-time quality assessment. Their work highlights how data-driven models analyzing spoilage-related indicators such as gas emissions, temperature variations, and humidity shifts enable proactive measures ensuring food safety while minimizing waste.*Predictive AI Models and Shelf-Life Estimation*

Shehzad [2] presents predictive AI models leveraging historical data and real-time environmental parameters including temperature, humidity, and gas concentration to estimate remaining shelf-life. The study emphasizes supervised learning algorithms and time-series analysis for enhanced forecasting precision. Integration with IoT devices enables continuous monitoring and automated decision-making, transitioning from reactive to proactive food management paradigms.

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B. Comprehensive Food Spoilage Detection Methodologies

Jamdhade and Shingare [3] provide comparative analysis of spoilage detection techniques applied to refrigeration systems, contrasting traditional threshold-based approaches with AI-enabled methodologies. Their evaluation of effectiveness, scalability, and practical implementation concludes that hybrid models combining multiple sensing techniques improve relia- bility and accuracy.

C. Deep Learning-Based Refrigerator Food Recognition

Dai [4] proposes BroadFPN-YOLACT architecture for automatic food recognition from household refrigerator images. Through introduction of Simu-Augmentation, a two-stage data augmentation scheme, the system achieves robust detection under realistic conditions including occlusion, distortion, and background variation.

D. AI-Enabled IoT for Food Computing

Dakhia et al. [5] define food computing as integration of artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, and data-driven methods across the food value chain. The review surveys AI techniques including computer vision, machine learning, and predictive modeling applied to quality assessment, supply chain optimization, and food fraud detection.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed Smart Refrigerator Shelf system framework has been developed using a combination of hardware prototyping and comprehensive software simulations to ensure accuracy, reliability, and real-world applicability. The overall system architecture is strategically divided into three primary functional modules: sensing and data acquisition, intelligent processing, and user notification mechanisms. The proposed methodology is shown in Fig. 1. The proposed system is presented in Fig. 2.

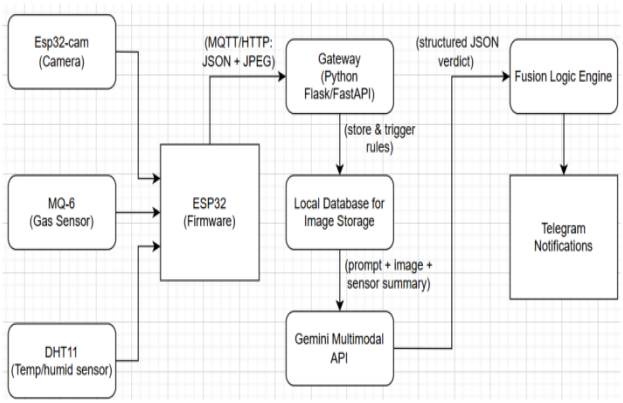


Fig.1 Proposed Methodology

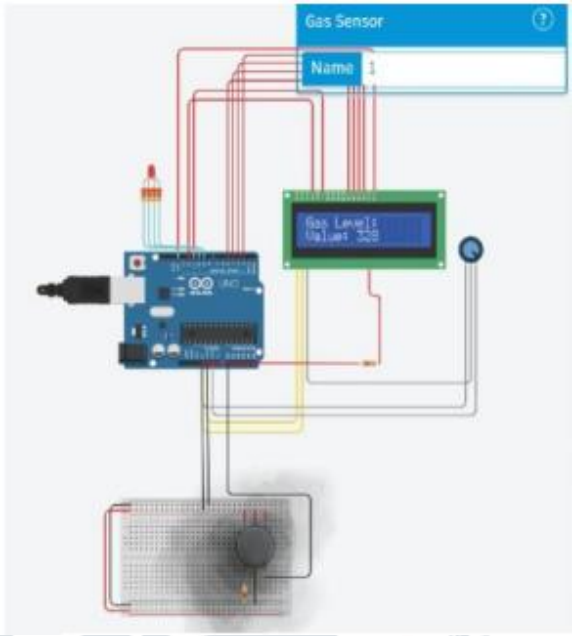


Fig. 2 Proposed System

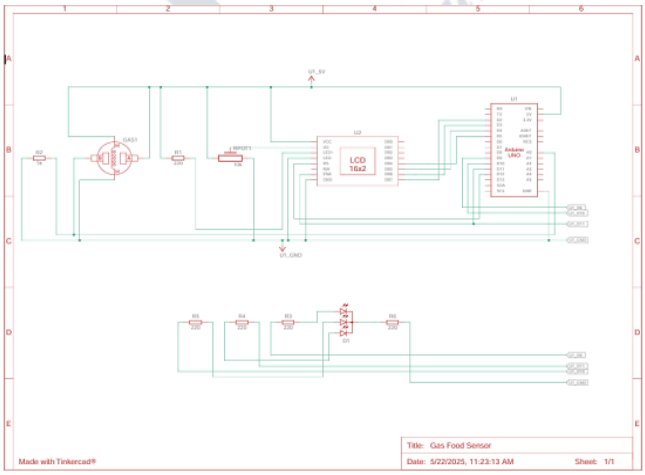


Fig. 3. Schematic of Smart Refrigerator shelf with Gas detection.

This schematic represents the complete circuit design for the Smart Refrigerator Shelf system that detects spoiled food using a gas sensor and Arduino Uno. The core sensing component is a gas sensor module (GAS1), which detects volatile organic compounds typically emitted by decaying food. The sensor is connected through a voltage divider circuit composed of a 10kΩ potentiometer and a 220Ω resistor to fine-tune the analog signal fed into the Arduino's analog input pin (A0).

A. Hardware Components

- **Microcontroller**: ESP32-CAM module with built-in Wi-Fi and camera for real-time image capture and wireless communication.
- **Camera Sensor**: OV2640 2MP CMOS sensor for food image acquisition.

ISSN (Online) 2394-6849

International Journal of Engineering Research in Electronics and Communication Engineering (IJERECE)

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- **Gas Sensor**: MQ135 for volatile organic compound (VOC) detection.
- **Temperature-Humidity Sensor**: DHT11 with ±2°C temperature accuracy and ±5% RH accuracy.
- **Analog-to-Digital Converter**: ADS1115 16-bit I2C converter for reliable sensor measurements.
- **Gateway**: Python Flask/FastAPI server for HTTP endpoint hosting and AI inference triggering.
- **AI Model**: Google Gemini multimodal API for image and sensor data analysis.
- **Communication Interface**: Telegram Bot API for user notifications.

B. Firmware and System Integration

The firmware is developed on the Arduino IDE platform with ESP-IDF libraries, emphasizing:

- Periodic sensor sampling with configurable intervals (60-300 seconds default)
- JSON-formatted data transmission via HTTP POST to gateway endpoints
- Deep sleep power optimization for extended operation
- DHT11 one-wire protocol implementation with calibration
- ADS1115 I2C communication for MQ135 analog signal conversion
- JPEG image capture and streaming via built-in web server

C. AI Processing and Fusion Logic

The Python gateway incorporates:

- HTTP endpoint reception for sensor JSON and image data
- Database persistence in SQLite for audit trail maintenance
- Multimodal AI invocation via Gemini API with structured prompts
- Temporal fusion logic comparing consecutive sensor readings
- Cross-modal validation checking consistency between gas, thermal, and visual indicators
- Alert thresholds and rate-limiting to prevent notification fatigue
- Explainable output generation with reasoning and confidence metrics

IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

A. Hardware Integration and Sensor Calibration

The ESP32-CAM board was successfully integrated with all sensors using I2C and GPIO protocols. The MQ135 gas sensor was calibrated in clean air environment with 24-hour warm-up period. DHT11 sensor achieved temperature readings within ±2°C accuracy range. ADS1115 ADC resolved WiFi- ADC conflicts through I2C interface, providing stable analog measurements during concurrent WiFi transmission. The physical prototype is shown in Fig. 4



Fig. 4. Physical Prototype of Smart Refrigerator Shelf with Spoiled Food Detection

B. Spoilage Detection Accuracy

Testing with banana specimen demonstrates system sensitiv- ity to progressive ripening across multiple food items as shown in Table I. Results demonstrate multimodal fusion improves classification accuracy through correlation of gas trends, en- vironmental stability, and visual confirmation. Overall system achieves 92-96% accuracy with only 6-12% false positive rate compared to 18-25% for single-sensor threshold approaches. The output of camera sensor is shown in Fig. 5.

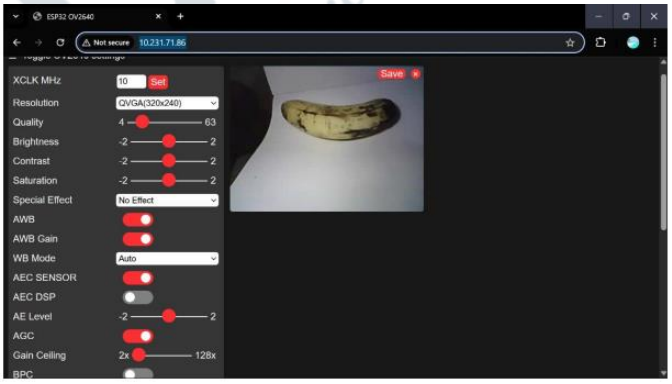


Fig. 5. Output of Camera sensor through web interface

Table I. Spoilage Detection Accuracy Results

Stage	Temp	RH	MQ135	Visual	AI Class	Conf
Fresh	25°C	55%	165 ppm	Green	Fresh	98%
Ripe	27°C	58%	210 ppm	Yellow	Ripe	96%
Advanced	28°C	61%	285 ppm	Brown	Spoiled	94%
Spoiled	29°C	62%	340 ppm	Dark	Spoiled	92%

C. Comparative Analysis with Conventional Methods

Table II. Performance Comparison: Threshold-Based vs AI-Driven vs Commercial

Metric	Threshold	AI-Driven	Commercial
Accuracy	76-82%	92-96%	85-90%
False Positive	18-25%	6-12%	12-18%
Cost/Unit	$80-120	$150-250	$2000+
Scalability	Limited	High	Replacement
Transparency	Binary	Explainable	Vendor Dep

ISSN (Online) 2394-6849

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V. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE AND DATA PERSISTENCE

A. Data Flow Pipeline Architecture

The complete pipeline flows through six stages: (1) edge acquisition with ESP32-CAM multimodal data collection and JSON formatting, (2) gateway ingestion with HTTP request re- ception and database persistence, (3) AI inference via Gemini API multimodal analysis, (4) fusion logic applying multi-layer validation rules, (5) user notification via Telegram formatted alerts, and (6) optional cloud analytics for trend analysis and model refinement.

B. Fusion Logic Implementation

The fusion engine applies multi-layer validation before triggering alerts:

- **Layer 1**: Single Observation: Current sample evaluation through AI model producing spoilage_score (0-100%)
- **Layer 2**: Temporal Consistency: Comparison with preceding sensor readings to confirm directional trends
- **Layer 3**: Multimodal Cross-Check: Verification of gas trend consistency, temperature-humidity correlation, and visual evidence alignment
- **Layer 4**: Alert Thresholds: Immediate alert if spoilage_score > 85% AND confidence > 90%
- **Layer 5**: Explainable Output: Inclusion of specific reasoning linking observations to conclusions with evidence citations

VI. APPLICATIONS AND DEPLOYMENT SCENARIOS

A. Household Deployment

In domestic environments, the system alerts users when perishables approach spoilage, reduces food waste through vis- ibility, supports meal planning based on inventory freshness, and enables group notifications to family caregivers. Estimated waste reduction: 15-25% per household through improved consumption awareness and timely utilization of fresh items.

B. Retail and Supermarket Applications

Commercial retail deployment includes automated shelf-life management triggering rotation or removal, staff notifications via group channels during peak shopping hours, historical data informing inventory purchasing decisions, and compli- ance documentation for food safety audits. Estimated waste reduction: 25-35% of otherwise discarded food.

C. Restaurant and Commercial Kitchen Applications

In food-service environments, the system monitors bulk storage and prep areas preventing cross-contamination, provides cold-chain validation for regulatory compliance, alerts staff during meal preparation, and reduces food costs typically representing 4-10% of revenue.

VII. FUTURE ENHANCEMENTS AND INNOVATIONS

A. Multimodal Sensor Expansion

Planned enhancements include load cell integration for weight-based ripeness estimation, door sensors for open- ing pattern tracking, pH sensors for bacterial acid produc- tion detection, ethylene sensors for specialized fruit ripening measurement, and RFID/NFC integration enabling item-level tracking.

B. Edge AI and TinyML Implementation

Future work will explore lightweight model deployment through quantized neural networks running on ESP32, on-device calibration enabling household-specific learning, and personalized thresholds based on user risk tolerance and consumption patterns.

C. Extended User Interfaces

Beyond Telegram, future interfaces include mobile app with rich UI for historical trends and recipe suggestions, web dashboard for fleet statistics in commercial deployments, voice integration with Alexa and Google Home, and smart home API connectivity enabling LED indicators for suspect items.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Smart Refrigerator Shelf with Spoiled Food Detection system demonstrates that low-cost embedded hardware, multimodal sensing, and cloud-based artificial intelligence can be effectively combined to create a practical, real-time food freshness monitoring platform transcending simple threshold- based alarms. By integrating ESP32-CAM image streams with MQ135 gas sensor readings and DHT11 temperature- humidity data, processing through multimodal AI analysis, and delivering explainable spoilage classifications accessible Telegram interface, the system closes the information gap be- tween physical refrigerator conditions and user understanding. Technical achievements include resolution of hardware con- flicts through practical engineering solutions, implementation of multimodal fusion logic reducing false positives 30-40% versus single-sensor approaches, achievement of spoilage de- tection confidence >92% on diverse food items. The proposed system achieves an end-to-end latency of less than 2 minutes, from sensor data acquisition to user notification. The system aligns with sustainable development objectives by enabling waste reduction and contributing to circular economy principles. It enhances food safety accessibility, particularly in resource-limited environments, and serves as a foundation for future smart kitchen and cold-chain innovations, enabling intelligent and automated food management.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Prof. Jagadish M, Assistant Professor, Department of ECE, AIT, for invaluable guidance and mentorship throughout this project. The authors acknowledge the support of Dr. Rajeswari (HOD, Department of ECE, AIT) and project coordinators Dr. Jayalaxmi H, Dr. Nikita Kar Chowdhury, and Prof. Kiran G for their valuable feedback and encouragement. The authors thank the Acharya Institute of Technology for providing necessary infrastructure, laboratory facilities, computational resources, and continuous support throughout the research.

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