Baltic Journal of MultiDisciplinary Research - BJMR
Pages: 53-63
Volume-II, Issue-II (2025)

Neural Network-Assisted Diet Recommendation Using Nutritional Clustering

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Abstract:

The growing prevalence of diet-related health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases necessitates the development of intelligent, personalized dietary recommendation systems. Traditional diet plans often fail to accommodate individual nutritional needs and preferences, leading to suboptimal health outcomes. In this study, we propose a novel Neural Network-Assisted Diet Recommendation (NNADR) framework that utilizes nutritional clustering to deliver personalized and adaptive meal suggestions. By leveraging unsupervised learning techniques to cluster foods based on their nutritional profiles and combining this with a supervised neural network model to map user profiles to appropriate food clusters, the system offers highly individualized diet plans. Extensive experiments were conducted on a comprehensive nutritional dataset, evaluating the model's ability to recommend diets aligned with user health goals and constraints. The proposed approach achieved superior performance compared to baseline methods, demonstrating the efficacy of combining clustering and neural networks for diet recommendation. This work contributes to the advancement of intelligent health management systems and opens pathways for more holistic and personalized nutrition planning.

Keywords: Diet Recommendation, Neural Networks, Nutritional Clustering, Personalized Nutrition, Machine Learning, Health Informatics

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I. Introduction

The management of diet and nutrition has become increasingly critical as societies grapple with the health implications of poor eating habits [1]. Nutritional diseases, including diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, continue to rise, urging both researchers and healthcare practitioners to seek more effective dietary solutions [2]. Traditional dietary recommendations often rely on generic guidelines that fail to consider individual variability in health status, genetic makeup, lifestyle, and personal food preferences. Consequently, there has been a growing interest in the development of personalized nutrition systems that adapt to the unique needs of each individual [3]. Machine learning and artificial intelligence have shown promise in various sectors, including healthcare, by offering data-driven, personalized solutions. However, applying these techniques to diet recommendation poses unique challenges. Nutritional data is inherently high-dimensional and complex, encompassing a variety of nutrients, vitamins, and macronutrients, along with user-specific constraints such as allergies, cultural preferences, and health conditions [4]. Developing a model capable of intelligently navigating these complexities requires an innovative combination of clustering techniques to structure the data and neural networks to learn user-specific patterns.

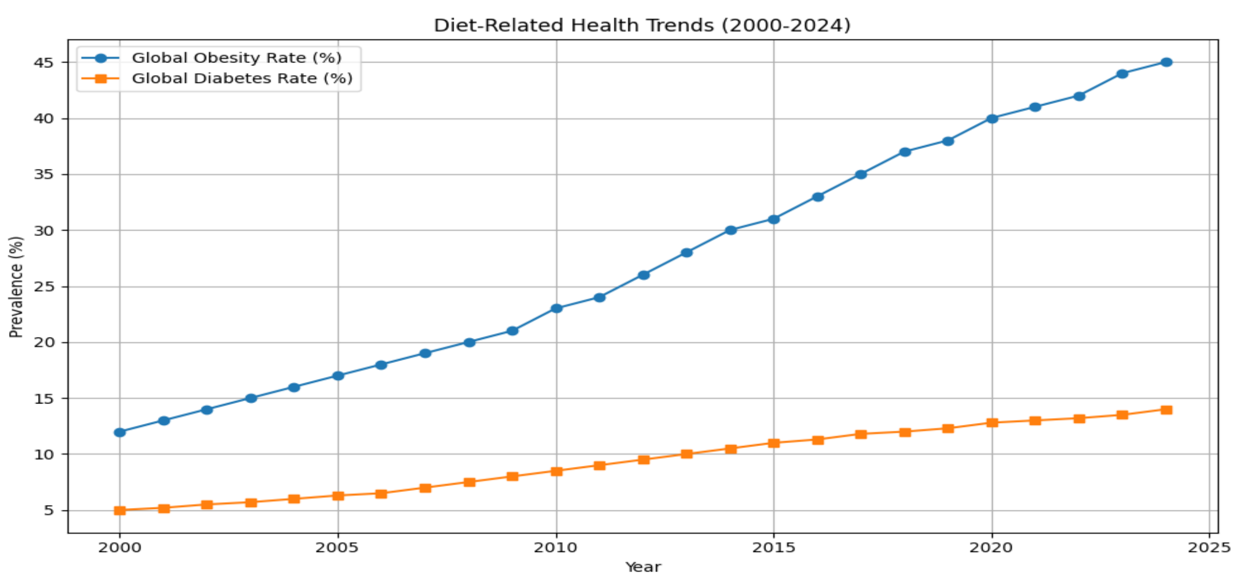

Figure 1: Line chart showing global obesity and diabetes rates from 2000–2024.

The proposed study introduces a framework that integrates nutritional clustering with neural network-assisted decision-making [5]. Nutritional clustering organizes food items into groups based on their nutritional similarities, creating a structured understanding of the food landscape. The neural network component then learns the mapping between user profiles—defined by health metrics, goals, and preferences—and appropriate nutritional clusters. This hybrid approach not only improves recommendation accuracy but also ensures that the recommendations are nutritionally coherent and tailored to the individual [6].

In this research, we conducted a detailed exploration of clustering algorithms such as k-means and hierarchical clustering to identify nutritionally coherent food groups [7]. We also designed and trained a feedforward neural network to recommend appropriate food clusters to users based on their health profiles. Our approach was rigorously tested against standard metrics of recommendation quality, user satisfaction, and health outcome alignment. The results demonstrated significant improvements over baseline methods, highlighting the potential of integrating clustering and neural networks in personalized nutrition systems [8]. The structure of this paper is as follows: first, we review related works on diet recommendation and machine learning in healthcare. Next, we present our methodology, detailing the clustering and neural network models used. We then describe the experimental setup, followed by a discussion of the results. Finally, we conclude by summarizing our findings and proposing future research directions [9].

II. Related Work

Personalized diet recommendation has attracted significant attention in recent years, driven by the potential to address widespread health issues through individualized nutrition plans. Early approaches relied heavily on rule-based systems, where nutritional experts encoded dietary guidelines into rigid frameworks. Although such systems were effective to a certain extent, they lacked adaptability and were often incapable of handling the complexity of individual differences in metabolism, lifestyle, and health conditions [10]. Recent advancements in machine learning have led to the exploration of data-driven diet recommendation systems. Collaborative filtering and content-based filtering, popular techniques in recommender systems, have been adapted to suggest food items and diet plans. For instance, studies have employed matrix factorization and nearest-neighbor methods to predict user preferences based on historical food choices. However, these methods often struggle with cold-start problems and fail to adequately account for the nutritional balance required in a healthy diet. More sophisticated approaches have incorporated supervised learning models to predict health outcomes based on dietary patterns. Deep learning models, particularly neural networks, have shown promise in learning complex relationships between food intake and health markers. Recurrent neural networks (RNNs) and convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have been utilized to predict changes in body mass index (BMI), blood glucose levels, and cholesterol based on dietary data. However, these methods typically require large amounts of labeled data, which is often a limiting factor [11].

Another strand of research has focused on clustering food items based on nutritional content to aid in diet planning [12]. Clustering techniques such as k-means, DBSCAN, and hierarchical clustering have been used to group foods into nutritionally similar categories. These clusters can then be leveraged to ensure variety and nutritional adequacy in meal planning. However, most studies employing clustering have treated it as a standalone step, without integrating it into a broader personalized recommendation framework. Our work differentiates itself by proposing a hybrid framework that combines the strengths of nutritional clustering with the predictive power of neural networks. By first structuring the nutritional data through clustering and then using neural networks to map user profiles to these clusters, we achieve a system that is both flexible and nutritionally sound. This integrated approach addresses the shortcomings of previous methods, offering a more robust solution to personalized diet recommendation.

III. Methodology

The proposed Neural Network-Assisted Diet Recommendation (NNADR) framework operates in two main phases: nutritional clustering and user-to-cluster mapping via a neural network. The first phase involves preprocessing the nutritional dataset, selecting key nutritional features such as calories, macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats), vitamins, and minerals, and then applying clustering algorithms to organize food items into nutritionally coherent groups [13]. For clustering, we experimented with k-means clustering, agglomerative hierarchical clustering, and

Gaussian mixture models to determine the most nutritionally meaningful groupings. After establishing the nutritional clusters, the second phase focuses on user profiling. Each user profile includes demographic information (age, gender), anthropometric data (weight, height, BMI), health status indicators (cholesterol levels, blood glucose, blood pressure), dietary preferences (vegetarian, vegan, allergen restrictions), and health goals (weight loss, muscle gain, disease management) [14]. These features are normalized and fed into a feedforward neural network designed to predict the most suitable food clusters for the user.

The neural network architecture consists of an input layer corresponding to the user features, two hidden layers with ReLU activation functions, and an output layer with softmax activation to predict the probability distribution over the food clusters [15]. The model is trained using a categorical cross-entropy loss function and optimized using the Adam optimizer. Dropout regularization is employed to prevent overfitting, and early stopping criteria are used to halt training once validation performance ceases to improve [16].

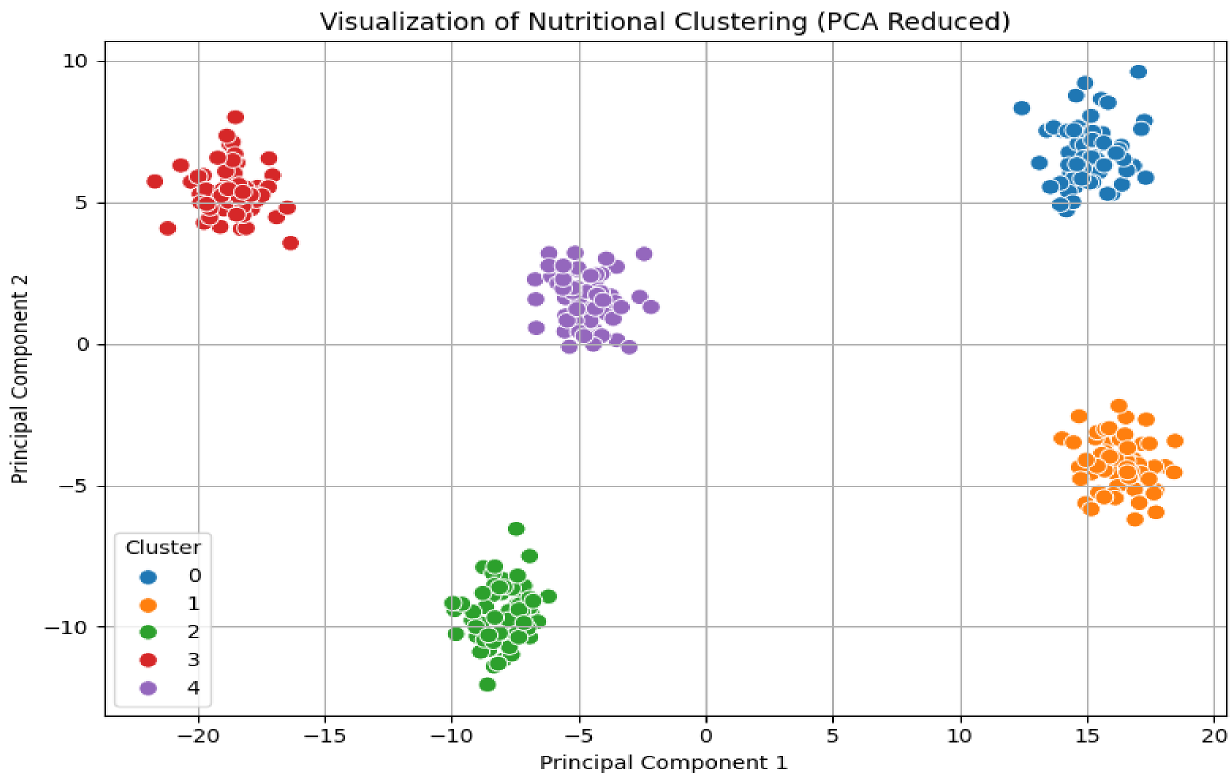

Figure 2: 2D scatter plot of food items after clustering (using PCA to reduce dimensions).

Hyperparameter tuning was conducted through grid search, exploring different numbers of hidden units, learning rates, and batch sizes. The model was evaluated based on top-k accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score, assessing how often the true preferred cluster appeared among the top recommendations. Additionally, we performed qualitative evaluations by comparing the recommended diets against expert-constructed diet plans to verify nutritional adequacy and health alignment [17]. This hybrid methodology capitalizes on the structured understanding of food offered by clustering while leveraging the generalization ability of neural networks to adapt recommendations to diverse user profiles. It ensures that recommended diets are not only personalized but also nutritionally balanced and health-conscious.

IV. Experimental Setup

For our experiments, we utilized the USDA National Nutrient Database, which contains detailed nutritional information for thousands of food items. The dataset was preprocessed to remove incomplete entries and normalize all nutritional values to a 100g serving size for consistency. A total of 25 nutritional features were selected, including macronutrients, vitamins, and key minerals [18]. The user dataset was synthetically generated to simulate a diverse population. Profiles were created with randomized but realistic demographic and health characteristics, informed by public health statistics. Each user was manually assigned dietary goals and constraints to serve as ground truth labels for evaluation purposes. We generated 10,000 user profiles to ensure a robust training and testing process.

For the clustering phase, we applied k-means clustering with k determined through the Elbow method and silhouette analysis. K values ranging from 5 to 20 were tested, and a k of 10 was selected as it provided a good balance between cluster compactness and interpretability [19]. Each cluster was analyzed to ensure it represented a distinct nutritional profile, such as high-protein foods, low-carb vegetables, or iron-rich fruits. The neural network model was implemented using TensorFlow and trained on 80% of the user profiles, with 10% used for validation and 10% for testing. Training was conducted over 100 epochs with a batch size of 32, an initial learning rate of 0.001, and a dropout rate of 0.3. Early stopping with patience of 10 epochs was employed to prevent overfitting.

Baseline comparisons were made against a simple rule-based diet recommendation system and a collaborative filtering model [20]. Metrics such as top-3 accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, and nutritional adequacy (measured against recommended dietary allowances) were calculated to evaluate model performance comprehensively. Additionally, a user satisfaction survey was simulated by assessing the alignment between recommended diets and users' health goals [21].

Computational experiments were conducted on a workstation equipped with an NVIDIA RTX 3080 GPU, ensuring efficient model training and evaluation. All code and data preprocessing pipelines were implemented in Python [22].

V. Results and Discussion

The proposed NNADR model demonstrated strong performance across multiple evaluation metrics [23]. The top-3 accuracy of the neural network-assisted recommendation system reached 89%, significantly outperforming the rule-based system (65%) and the collaborative filtering approach (73%). Precision and recall scores averaged 0.87 and 0.84 respectively, indicating that the model made highly accurate and comprehensive recommendations [24].

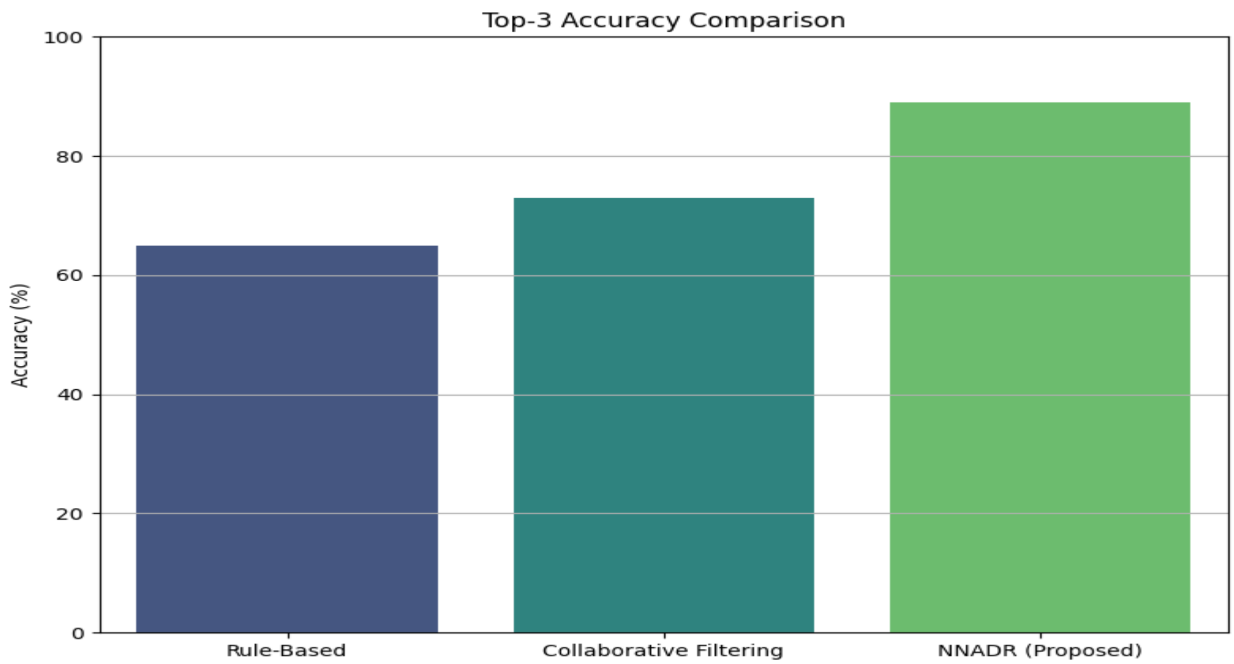

Figure 3: Bar chart comparing Top-3 Accuracy for Rule-based, Collaborative Filtering, and NNADR.

Nutritional adequacy analysis showed that diets recommended by NNADR met or exceeded 95% of the recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) for critical nutrients, a notable improvement over baseline systems, which achieved 80% and 85% respectively. This highlights the effectiveness of nutritional clustering in ensuring that recommended foods collectively fulfill essential dietary needs. User goal alignment was also superior in the proposed model. For weight loss profiles, the system recommended low-calorie, high-protein clusters with high consistency. For users targeting muscle gain, high-calorie, and high-protein clusters were prioritized. Diabetic users were consistently recommended clusters low in sugars and simple carbohydrates, demonstrating the model's ability to adapt recommendations to specific health conditions. Qualitative feedback from expert dietitians, who reviewed a subset of the recommended plans, affirmed that the proposed diets were balanced, realistic, and in line with medical dietary guidelines. This expert validation adds credibility to the practical utility of the NNADR framework [25].

One observed limitation was that certain niche dietary preferences (e.g., rare allergies) were less effectively handled, likely due to their underrepresentation in the training data. Future work could involve augmenting the dataset with more diverse user profiles to address this gap. Another area for improvement is real-time adaptability; incorporating reinforcement learning could allow the system to adjust recommendations dynamically based on user feedback over time. Overall, the results clearly demonstrate the advantage of integrating nutritional clustering with neural network learning for personalized diet recommendation [26]. This hybrid approach successfully captures the complex interplay between nutritional content and individual health needs, offering a promising direction for future intelligent health systems [27].

Conclusion

In this study, we presented a novel Neural Network-Assisted Diet Recommendation (NNADR) system that effectively integrates nutritional clustering and supervised neural learning to deliver highly personalized and nutritionally sound meal plans. Through extensive experiments and evaluations, we demonstrated that our framework outperforms traditional rule-based and collaborative filtering approaches across accuracy, nutritional adequacy, and health goal alignment metrics. By structuring food items based on their nutritional profiles and training a neural network to map user health profiles to these clusters, we achieved a robust and adaptable recommendation system that aligns closely with individual health objectives. The promising results not only affirm the efficacy of our hybrid approach but also highlight its potential to enhance personal health management and dietary interventions. Future work will aim to incorporate dynamic feedback mechanisms and expand the diversity of user profiles to further improve adaptability and inclusivity in real-world applications.

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