MULTIMODAL GENERATIVE AI FOR STORY POINT ES-TIMATION

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the application of Multimodal Generative AI to enhance story point estimation in Agile software development. By integrating text, image, and categorical data using advanced models like BERT, CNN, and XGBoost, our approach surpasses the limitations of traditional single-modal estimation methods. The results demonstrate good accuracy for simpler story points, while also highlighting challenges in more complex categories due to data imbalance. This study further explores the impact of categorical data, particularly severity, on the estimation process, emphasizing its influence on model performance. Our findings emphasize the transformative potential of multimodal data integration in refining AI-driven project management, paving the way for more precise, adaptable, and domain-specific AI capabilities. Additionally, this work outlines future directions for addressing data variability and enhancing the robustness of AI in Agile methodologies.

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1 INTRODUCTION

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Story points (SP) are a key metric in Agile methodologies used to estimate the size, complexity, 029 and effort for each user story, which is a brief description of a software feature from the end user's perspective, outlining their needs and reasons. They are also employed to estimate the remain-031 ing useful life of software products (Islam & Sandborn, 2021, 2023, 2024). Agile teams typically use subjective methods such as planning poker to estimate these points, but this process often ex-033 hibits inconsistency and variable accuracy (Jorgensen, 2001 & Usman et al., 2014). The inherent 034 complexity of software development within Agile frameworks demands more precise and adaptable techniques for estimating story points (Menzies et al., 2006). Recent advancements in Generative AI, particularly multimodal models that integrate various data formats such as text, images, graphs, 036 and categorical data, present a groundbreaking solution to these challenges (Devlin et al., 2019; He 037 et al., 2016). Deep learning architectures in these models process and integrate multimodal inputs, enabling a more nuanced analysis of text-based data and resulting in predictions that are both more accurate and consistent (Radford et al., 2021). Multimodal Generative AI exploits the synergistic 040 potential of diverse data types, uncovering complex relationships among textual descriptions, visual 041 elements, historical data, and categorical features. This comprehensive approach not only improves 042 the accuracy of story point estimation, aligning with Agile principles, but also enhances the re-043 sponsiveness and adaptability of the development process (Vaswani et al., 2017). Integrating these 044 models within software development workflows reduces human bias and shortens project timelines, leading to substantial cost savings by minimizing delays and avoiding unnecessary rework (Lin et al., 2014). 046

This paper proposes a novel framework that uses state-of-the-art multimodal machine learning tech niques, including Ordinal Encoding, BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transform ers), CNN (Convolutional Neural Networks), XGBoost (Extreme Gradient Boosting), and other
 models, to refine the task of story point estimation. Through empirical analysis, we aim to show
 how multimodal Generative AI can significantly advance Agile software development by effectively
 addressing the complexities associated with story point estimation. Our findings support the adoption of these technologies to foster more reliable, consistent, and adaptable development practices, setting a new benchmark for future advancements in the field.

2 RELATED WORK

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Researchers have extensively studied the field of story point estimation within Agile software development, with traditional approaches predominantly relying on expert judgment, historical data analysis, and machine learning techniques such as regression models and decision trees. While useful, these methods often struggle with inconsistencies and inaccuracies due to their reliance on single-modal data inputs, such as text descriptions of user stories (Friedman, 2001). Recent advances in machine learning, particularly with the advent of deep learning and natural language processing (NLP), have introduced more sophisticated approaches. However, even these advanced techniques face limitations in integrating the diverse data types often present in software development processes.

064 One significant development in machine learning has been the adoption of Generative AI models, 065 particularly those based on transformer architectures, to enhance the accuracy of story point esti-066 mation. Models like BERT (Devlin et al., 2019) and GPT (Brown et al., 2020) have demonstrated 067 promise in processing textual data and capturing the nuances of user stories with a level of detail previously unattainable. However, these models typically focus solely on textual analysis and do 068 not fully exploit the potential of multimodal data integration, limiting their effectiveness in contexts 069 where visual or categorical data are also relevant. Multimodal learning has emerged as a promising 070 approach to overcome these limitations by integrating various data formats such as text, images, 071 graphs, and categorical data. Research in this domain has shown that multimodal models can cap-072 ture more complex relationships between different types of data, leading to improved performance 073 in tasks like image captioning (Radford et al., 2021), sentiment analysis (Wang & Deng, 2018), and 074 medical diagnosis (Wang et al., 2020). Despite these advancements, applying multimodal learning 075 to story point estimation in Agile software development remains underexplored. Our work builds 076 upon these foundations by introducing a Multimodal Generative AI approach that integrates not 077 only textual but also visual and categorical data, thereby creating a more comprehensive and accurate estimation model. Unlike previous single-modal methodologies, our framework leverages the strengths of multimodal integration, offering a holistic perspective of user stories and their inher-079 ent complexities. This approach promises a significant improvement over traditional methods by 080 providing a deeper understanding of the multifaceted aspects of story points. 081

Addressing a critical gap in existing research, our study specifically tailors multimodal learning 083 to the unique challenges of Agile methodologies, which require rapid iteration and adaptability. 084 This customization ensures that our model integrates seamlessly into Agile workflows, delivering real-time, adaptive story point estimates. By extending multimodal learning techniques to Agile 085 story point estimation, our paper advances the state of the art, overcoming previous limitations and 086 illuminating new ways to incorporate diverse data types for more accurate and efficient software 087 development practices. Our research presents a novel framework for integrating multimodal data 088 into Agile software development, paving the way for more reliable, consistent, and adaptable prac-089 tices. This framework makes a significant contribution to the field, offering a robust solution to the 090 longstanding challenges of story point estimation. 091

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3 OUR APPROACHES

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3.1 DATA COLLECTION

096 For this research, we engaged in a comprehensive data collection process from Bugzilla¹, an open-097 source bug tracking system, to estimate story points in Agile software development. We chose 098 Bugzilla for its opensource nature, which provides access to a vast record of historical user stories focused exclusively on fixes, enhancements, and tasks related to Bugzilla itself. This includes 100 release-wise data and associated image data, such as wireframes and screenshots of errors. Addition-101 ally, Bugzilla offers relevant historical comments from multiple users. This rich data set provides the 102 diverse and detailed information necessary for our analysis, making Bugzilla an ideal choice for this 103 project. The data we collected was diverse, encompassing textual descriptions of user stories, histor-104 ical data on story points previously assigned to similar user stories, and various visual aids such as 105 UI/UX mockups, system architecture diagrams, screenshots of errors, and other relevant images like UI screenshots and flowcharts (Table 1). We collected categorical data encompassing variables such 106

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¹https://www.bugzilla.org/releases/

109	Table 1: User Stories with Severity and Story Points				
110	USER STORY	SEVERITY	SP	SCREENSHOT	
111	Bugzilla cannot connect to Oracle 11G	2	2		
112	RAC				
113	Typing something like "P1-5" in the	2	5	\$	
114	quicksearch box				
115	Users who had passwords less than 6	1	2		
116	characters long couldn't log in.	-	_	_	
117	A regression in Bugzilla 443 due to	1	2		
118	CVE-2014-1517	-	-		
119	Undate $MySOI$ $y555-1037$ -	1	3		
120	MariaDB1:10 3 7+maria jessi	1	5		
121	Remove product and component from	1	2		
122	LINSUPPORTED FIELDS	1	2		
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as severity levels (e.g., high, medium, low). Our proposed model classifies story points (SP) using
the Fibonacci sequence, a widely adopted system known for its scalability and intuitive handling
of task complexity and size in project management and software development. In this research, we
used the industry-standard sequences of 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8, but additional sequences can be seamlessly
integrated if needed. We also organized the collection of historical story point data for individual
user stories as part of our comprehensive data gathering process.

We meticulously sourced the text data from Bugzilla repositories, involving the extraction and clean-132 ing of raw textual descriptions of bugs and feature requests. Historical story points data provided 133 insights into the assessment trends and valuation of similar past stories. We curated the image data 134 from associated repositories to ensure a thorough compilation of visuals that contextualize the user 135 stories, including system architecture, wireframes, UI/UX design wireframes, screenshots, and oth-136 ers. For the categorical data, we included attributes like severity levels to facilitate feature engineer-137 ing and enhance the model's accuracy. To manage and streamline the workflow, we consolidated all 138 collected data-text, graphs, images, and categorical inputs-into a unified dataset. Additionally, 139 we utilized Pinecone, a vector database, to store and process the embedded data, ensuring organized 140 storage and efficient handling of complex queries for subsequent analysis and modeling stages.

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3.2 DATA PRE-PROCESSING AND FEATURE ENGINEERING

144 We meticulously pre-processed the raw data for this project to prepare it for use in machine learning 145 models. We refined the text data by removing extraneous details, normalizing the language, and 146 tokenizing the content, while pre-processing the image data involved resizing, normalization, and 147 feature extraction to ensure effective representation of the visual and textual content in the form of embeddings. Our entire corpus consists of 113 observations. For feature extraction and embedding, 148 we utilized BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) for text data and CNN 149 (Convolutional Neural Networks) for image data. We chose BERT for its ability to understand the 150 context within user stories, making it ideal for tasks requiring deep semantic comprehension, such 151 as classification or sentiment analysis (Table 2). We selected CNNs for their exceptional ability to 152 process and analyze visual data. Additionally, we applied ordinal encoding to categorical data such 153 as severity and story points, leveraging the inherent order within these categories to enhance model 154 interpretability. We used Fibonacci sequencing to estimate story points. Ordinal encoding is particu-155 larly valuable for encoding categorical features that follow a natural sequence or hierarchy, ensuring 156 that the encoded data accurately reflects the structured relationships inherent in the project's cate-157 gories. We integrated these processed features into a multimodal dataset ready for machine learning 158 in the final step. This fusion combined cleaned text, image features, and encoded categorical data into a unified format. To facilitate effective model training, we flattened multi-dimensional arrays 159 into one-dimensional formats and normalized these to ensure a consistent scale across all data types, 160 thereby optimizing the performance of subsequent algorithms. This comprehensive approach to 161 data preparation is crucial for accurately predicting and categorizing story points in our models. We

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163	Table 2: Embedded Data				
164	USER STORY	IMAGE FEATURE	SEVERITY	SP	
165	[-2.21136838e01	[-5.24738908e01	2	2	
166	9.56352428e02]	2.34980389e01]			
167	[-4.05773252e01	- [-5.08334517e-01	2	1	
168	1.53721854e01]	2.26934329e-01]			
169	[-5.83501697e01	- [4.55121100e01	3	2	
170	4.14541990e01]	1.26431987e01]			
170	[-2.50783592e01	- [-5.24738908e01	2	2	
1/1	1.19310036e01]	2.34980389e01]			
172	[-2.49652594e01	- [-5.03451347e01	3	1	
173	1.48752362e01]	2.49840632e01]			
174	-	-			

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177 conducted a correlation analysis to explore hidden relationships among individual parameters, incorporating the calculation of the mean of embeddings into a single numeric metric. We took this 178 approach to reduce the dimensionality of complex data, allowing us to identify patterns more effec-179 tively and improve the interpretability of the correlation results. The correlation analysis reveals that 180 the Severity Encoded feature has a strong positive correlation (0.55) with StoryPoint Encoded when 181 included (Figure 2). In contrast, both Story Embedding Mean and Image Feature Embedding Mean 182 exhibit low correlations with StoryPoint Encoded (around 0.06 in Figures 1 and 2), indicating a 183 weaker relationship with the target variable. Despite these differences, XGBoost effectively handles 184 both correlated and non-correlated data (Chen & Guestrin, 2016). Notably, the Story Embedding 185 Mean and Image Feature Embedding Mean are average values representing the embedded features 186 from text data (story descriptions) and image data (visual elements),





245 respectively. These means help capture the overall characteristics of the stories and images, aiding in 246 more accurate story point estimation. Without the Severity Encoded feature, the correlations among the other features remain consistent and relatively low, suggesting that these features are largely in-247 dependent and do not strongly influence the story points on their own. The introduction of Severity 248 Encoded does not significantly alter the relationships between the other features but highlights its 249 importance in the model. Therefore, including Severity Encoded in the model may enhance its pre-250

dictive accuracy, while the embeddings provide additional, albeit weaker, contributions. However, incorporating severity could also introduce added complexity, which may prevent any noticeable

3.3 MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

improvements in accuracy.

256 After integrating BERT text embeddings, CNNextracted image features, and encoded categorical 257 data, we trained a multimodal generative AI model for story point estimation. To assess the signifi-258 cance of severity data in the estimation process, we trained the model both with and without including severity data. The model was designed to learn patterns across the multimodal data—text, im-260 ages, and categorical values—corresponding to predefined Fibonacci sequence story point classes. We approached the task as a classification problem. We used TensorFlow, a Pythonbased opensource machine learning framework, for all our modeling efforts. For the final estimation of story 262 points, we utilized XGBoost, a powerful ensemble learning algorithm known for its efficiency and 263 performance (Equation 1).

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 $\hat{y}_i = \sum_{k=1}^{K} f_k(x_i)$ (1)

Where:

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271	Table 3: User Stories with Severity and Story Points					
272 273	PARAMETER	DEFAULT VALUE	FINE-TUNED VALUE	COMMENTS		
274	n _e stimators	100	75	Reduced to prevent over-fitting due to		
275				the small dataset.		
276 277	$\max_d epth$	6	4	Lowered to simplify the model and re- duce complexity.		
278	$learning_rate$	0.3	0	Reduced for gradual learning, balancing		
279 280	subsample	1	1	Introduces randomness to reduce over-		
281	colsample <i>utree</i>	1	1	Helps reduce overfitting by adding fea-		
282	consumprenger oo	1	1	ture selection randomness.		
283	gamma	0	1	Increased to make the model more con-		
284				servative with splits.		
285 286	$\min_c hild_w eight$	1	3	RIncreased to avoid splits that add little value.		
287	$early_s topping_round$	ls N/A	15	Used to prevent overfitting by stopping		
200				training early.		
205						
291	• \hat{u}_{i} is the pred	icted value for	the <i>i</i> -th observation	2		
292	• y_i is the predicted value for the <i>i</i> -th observation.					
293	• K is the total number of trees (boosting rounds).					
294	• $f_k(x_i)$ is the prediction from the k-th tree for the i-th observation.					
295 296 297 298 299	XGBoost was trained on a labeled dataset, with 80 percent of the data used for training and 20 percent reserved for testing to ensure exposure to diverse examples during training. A total of 113 observations were utilized in this process. We adjusted XGBoost parameters for fine-tuning (Table 3).					
300 301	3.4 MODEL EVALU	ATION AND VA	ALIDATION			

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After training, we thoroughly evaluated and validated the XGBoost model. We conducted comprehensive verification and validation by comparing the model's predictions with the actual story points assigned by Agile teams. We included evaluation metrics such as precision, recall, F1 score, accuracy, and other relevant measures to ensure a robust assessment of the model's performance.

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4 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

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3104.1INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

When we compare the model's performance with and without severity data, several key trends emerge. The precision, recall, and F1 scores for story point categories 1 and 3 remain consistently high in both models, indicating strong performance in predicting these categories (Figure 3-5). However, excluding severity data leads to a noticeable improvement in overall model accuracy, which increases from 0.63 to 0.77 (Table 4). This improvement is also reflected across the macro and weighted averages, showing more balanced performance across categories.

Story point category 8, which represents more complex or rare story points, shows significant differences. With severity data included, the model fails to effectively predict this category, resulting in a precision, recall, and F1 score of 0.00 (Figure 3). However, excluding severity data, the model's recall for story point category 8 improves to 1.00 (Figure 5), and the F1 score reaches 0.5 (Table 4), though precision remains low at 0.33 (Figure 4). This indicates the model's ability to identify more complex cases, albeit with some inaccuracies. This comparison suggests that while severity data might add complexity, removing it allows the model to generalize better across different categories, particularly improving its performance on rare or complex story points.



Figure 3: F1 Scores with Severity (left) and without Severity (right)

While the model performed well on simpler categories of story points (1 and 3) in both scenarios, the inclusion of severity data seemed to introduce more complexity than the model could handle effectively, leading to a decrease in overall accuracy and performance balance. The comparison suggests that while severity data may offer additional insights, it also increases the model's complexity, potentially hindering its ability to generalize across all categories.

355 The confusion matrices further illustrate the model's performance, highlighting that misclassifica-356 tion predominantly occurred in categories with fewer data points, such as category 8. In the first 357 confusion matrix (with severity data), the model shows a tendency to misclassify categories 2 and 3 358 into one another, but it generally predicts these categories with a reasonable level of accuracy, likely 359 due to the higher number of examples in these categories during training (Figure 6). In contrast, in the second confusion matrix (without severity data), the model displays an improved ability to cor-360 rectly classify category 3, evidenced by fewer misclassifications, and a better overall performance 361 across categories, especially in handling category 8 (Figure 7). These confusion matrices reflect the 362 challenge the model faces when dealing with imbalanced data, where categories with fewer exam-363 ples, like category 8, are harder to predict accurately. Additionally, while severity is an influential 364 factor in story point estimation, the improved performance without severity data suggests that other features might be more critical in driving accurate predictions, as severity alone does not account 366 for the complexity of the task. Table 5 compares actual and predicted story points (SP) for 22 user 367 stories, focusing on predictions made with and without considering severity. Notably, certain user 368 stories feature actual and predicted estimations that are very close. In real-life scenarios, develop-369 ment teams often accept estimations as accurate when they fall within a close range. If we applied 370 this approach to the current model, the accuracy would increase to 0.82 when considering severity, and to 0.95 when not considering severity. However, we could still improve the accuracy of these 371 models by training them with a larger dataset, enhancing data preprocessing, and exploring other 372 advanced methodologies. 373

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4.2 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

First, the limited size of the corpus and the imbalance in the dataset, particularly with fewer examples in the higher story point categories, likely contributed to the model's reduced performance in



Figure 5: Recall with Severity (left) and without Severity (right)

409 these areas. This imbalance challenges the model's ability to grasp the nuances of more complex 410 stories, leading to misclassification. Another challenge arises from the integration of multimodal 411 data. Although the combination of text, image, and categorical data provided a more comprehensive 412 feature set, the varying quality and relevance of the image data posed difficulties. Some images, such as architectural diagrams, may not have directly contributed to the estimation process, leading 413 to noise in the data. Moreover, the reliance on BERT embeddings for text representation, while 414 powerful, may have limitations in fully capturing the domain-specific language used in Bugzilla 415 user stories. This limitation could affect the model's ability to generalize beyond the specific dataset 416 used in this study 417

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4.3 FUTURE WORK AND IMPROVEMENTS

Future research should address data imbalance by incorporating techniques such as data augmen-421 tation or synthetic data generation to provide more examples for underrepresented categories. Ad-422 ditionally, researchers should explore advanced image preprocessing techniques, such as attention 423 mechanisms, to better leverage visual data and reduce the impact of irrelevant images. Another 424 potential improvement involves fine-tuning BERT on domain-specific corpora related to software 425 development and bug tracking. This fine-tuning could enhance the model's understanding of the 426 unique language used in these contexts, potentially improving performance across all story point 427 categories. Additionally, exploring alternative machine learning models or ensemble methods that 428 better handle the complexity and variability of story point estimation could lead to more accurate 429 and reliable results. Integrating these approaches with the current multimodal framework could further enhance the model's robustness and applicability in real-world Agile development settings. 430 Future work should also explore multimodal models such as ViLBERT, CLIP, LXMERT, Visual-431 BERT, MMT, and others. A larger corpus of pre-processed data is necessary to evaluate how the



487	Table 5: Estimation of User Stories with and without Severity				
488			PREDICTED SP	PREDICTED SP	
489	USER STORY#	SP	WITH SEVERITY	WITHOUT SEVERITY	
490	1	3	3	3	
491	2	2	2	8	
492	3	2	2	2	
493	4	3	8	3	
494	5	3	2	3	
495	6	2	2	2	
496	7	3	2	2	
/07	8	3	3	3	
400	9	5	5	5	
490	10	1	1	1	
499	11	2	3	3	
500	12	2	2	2	
501	13	2	2	2	
502	14	3	3	3	
503	15	3	3	3	
504	16	2	3	3	
505	17	8	2	8	
506	18	3	8	3	
507	19	1	1	1	
508	20	3	3	3	
500	21	5	2	8	
203	22	2	2	2	
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5 CONCLUSION

514 This research demonstrated a novel approach to story point estimation in Agile software develop-515 ment by leveraging a Multimodal Generative AI framework. The integration of text, image, and 516 categorical data using advanced machine learning techniques such as BERT for text embeddings, 517 CNN for image processing, and XGBoost for classification has shown potential to improve the ac-518 curacy and consistency of story point predictions. The study's main findings highlight that while 519 the model performs well in estimating simpler story points, it faces challenges with more complex 520 categories, particularly due to data imbalance and the varying quality of image inputs.

521 The significance of this work lies in its contribution to the growing field of AI-driven software 522 project management and development tools. By demonstrating how multimodal data can be effec-523 tively integrated to provide more nuanced and accurate estimates, this research opens new avenues 524 for enhancing the efficiency of Agile workflows. The ability to more accurately estimate story points 525 has direct implications for project planning, resource allocation, and overall software development 526 efficiency, making this approach highly relevant to both academic research and industry practices. While this study shows promise, further exploration is needed. Addressing data imbalance, refining 527 multimodal inputs, and tailoring AI models to the language and context of software development are 528 key areas for advancement. Future work should focus on these aspects and extend the approach to 529 other project management domains, bringing us closer to fully realizing AI's potential in transform-530 ing Agile software development 531

532 ETHICS STATEMENT 533

534 This research on Multi-modal Generative AI for Agile software development addresses ethical con-535 siderations in AI-driven decision-making, emphasizing the importance of complementing, not re-536 placing, human judgment. Transparency and accountability in AI decisions are key to maintaining 537 trust within Agile teams. Public data from Bugzilla was carefully anonymized to protect privacy. The research also acknowledges potential biases in AI models, particularly regarding data distribu-538 tion across story point categories, and highlights the need for ongoing efforts to ensure AI tools are fair, transparent, and ethically sound.

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594 A APPENDIX

A.1 ALGORITHMS AND MODELS

BIDIRECTIONAL ENCODER REPRESENTATIONS FROM TRANSFORMERS(BERT)

BERT is a transformer-based model that processes text bidirectionally to understand the context of words by considering both preceding and following words. In our research, BERT generates embeddings from user story descriptions, providing rich contextual representations for the story point estimation model. It uses multi-head self-attention mechanisms and is trained on tasks like masked language modeling (MLM) and next sentence prediction (NSP). The equation for the attention mechanism is given below:

Attention
$$(Q, K, V) = \operatorname{softmax}\left(\frac{QK^T}{\sqrt{d_k}}\right)V$$
 (2)

where Q, K, and V are the query, key, and value matrices, and d_k is the dimension of the key.

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611 CONVOLUTIONAL NEURAL NETWORK(CNN)

CNNs are deep neural networks used to analyze visual data by extracting spatial features through
convolutional layers that detect edges, textures, and other visual elements. In our research, CNNs
extract features from images associated with user stories, such as wireframes or screenshots, to
enhance story point estimation accuracy alongside text embeddings. The core operation in a CNN
is the convolution, defined as (Equation 3):

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 $(I * K)(x, y) = \sum_{m} \sum_{n} I(x - m, y - n) K(m, n)$ (3)

where I is the input image, and K is the kernel or filter applied to the image to detect features.

623 624 XGBOOST (EXTREME GRADIENT BOOSTING)

KGBoost is an optimized distributed gradient boosting library designed to be highly efficient, flex ible, and portable. It implements machine learning algorithms under the Gradient Boosting frame work, which builds models sequentially, each new model attempting to correct the errors made by
 the previous ones. XGBoost is used in our research to handle categorical data and produce predic tions based on the combined inputs from text and image features.

631 A.2 FEATURE ENGINEERING TECHNIQUES

Feature engineering is the process of using domain knowledge to create features that make machine learning algorithms work. In our research, feature engineering involved encoding categorical variables, normalizing text and image features, and integrating them into a cohesive input for the multimodal model. This step is crucial for ensuring that the model can effectively learn from diverse data types.

- 638 Techniques Used:
- 639 640 Ordinal Encoding: Used for categorical variables where the categories have a meaningful order.
- Normalization: Applied to ensure that features are on a similar scale, particularly when combining data from different modalities.
- Embedding Techniques: Used to transform high-dimensional categorical data into lower dimensional continuous vectors.
- 646 A.3 CODE LISTING
 - The following Python code generates BERT embeddings for tokenized text (Figure 8):

