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AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis for Defect Localization in Apparel Production Systems Using OTDR-Inspired Methodology

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Abstract:

Defect detection and localization remain major challenges in apparel production systems, where small inconsistencies such as yarn tension variation, needle damage, machine vibration anomalies, and fabric density defects can propagate through the supply chain and create substantial quality losses. This study introduces an OTDR-inspired sensor-trace analysis framework that adapts the AI-augmented signal processing approach originally developed for fiber fault localization. The proposed system uses embedded sensors installed on garment production lines to capture real-time vibration, tension, and surface-reflection traces that mimic the waveform-based diagnostic principles used in fiber networks. A convolutional neural network (CNN), trained on over 6,000 simulated and real sensor-trace signatures, automatically identifies defect types such as fabric roll inconsistencies, needle faults, and misalignment anomalies. Experimental results demonstrate a 27–41% improvement in defect localization accuracy over conventional threshold-based QC methods, significantly reducing waste, rework, and production cycle delays. This work provides a scalable and low-cost architecture suitable for modern apparel industries seeking predictive quality control.

Keywords — Apparel manufacturing, defect localization, sensor trace analysis, convolutional neural networks, predictive quality control, OTDR-inspired methodology, Industry 4.0, textile automation.

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I. Introduction

Modern apparel production systems operate within increasingly complex, high-speed, and globally distributed supply chains, where product quality, process reliability, and operational precision are essential for meeting the expectations of international fashion brands. As production volumes grow and cycle times become shorter, manufacturers face mounting pressure to reduce defects at every stage from yarn preparation and knitting to sewing, finishing, and final inspection. Even small anomalies such as minor needle wear, fabric tension variation, or roller-pressure inconsistency can propagate through multiple production stages, ultimately leading to poor product quality, order rejection, or costly rework. Traditional quality control methods, such as manual inspection or random sampling, are inadequate for modern requirements because they are slow, subjective, and unable to detect micro-defects that occur at fast machine speeds. The emergence of Industry 4.0, IoT sensors, and AI-driven analytics provides new opportunities to redesign defect detection in apparel manufacturing. However, most current systems rely either on simple threshold alarms or vision-based approaches that cannot interpret complex mechanical or vibration-based patterns. Inspired by Farabi's AI-Augmented OTDR methodology for analyzing waveform traces in rural fiber networks. This study adapts the same signal-pattern interpretation principles to apparel production environments, enabling precise detection of defects through AI-enhanced sensor-trace analysis. By treating mechanical and optical sensor readings like OTDR reflection signals, the proposed system introduces a new paradigm for predictive and automated quality control in textile and apparel factories.

A. Background and Motivation

The apparel manufacturing industry stands at the intersection of craftsmanship, high-speed automation, and global supply chain dynamics. As brands push manufacturers toward shorter lead times and flawless quality standards, factories must adopt advanced quality control mechanisms that can operate continuously, adaptively, and with high precision. Traditional inspection methods are heavily dependent on human judgment, leading to inconsistent detection outcomes, especially when production runs involve subtle defects that are not easily visible but significantly impact product performance or aesthetics. These defects may arise from mechanical misalignments, gradual wear of needles, uneven yarn feeding, vibration fluctuations, or environmental changes such as humidity affecting fabric tension. While computer vision technologies have made progress in fabric inspection, they remain limited in scenarios involving machine-level mechanical anomalies or needle and tension-related issues. There is an urgent need for a system that can interpret deeper physical signatures within production processes similar to how OTDR technologies interpret backscatter signals to detect fiber faults. Farabi's research on AI-Augmented OTDR localization demonstrates how raw signal traces can reveal hidden structural inconsistencies through machine learning. Motivated by this parallel, the apparel domain can benefit immensely from adopting trace-based interpretation methods that reflect the internal state of machines and material interactions. By capturing real-time mechanical, vibration, and optical sensor traces, manufacturers can transition to predictive quality control, detecting deviations at their earliest stages. This shift not only reduces premature machine downtime and material waste but also enhances overall productivity and competitiveness in the global apparel market.

B. Problem Statement

Despite the rapid modernization of apparel factories, the industry still suffers from limitations in real-time, automated defect detection. Most factories rely on manual quality checks that occur at the end of production or during intermittent in-line inspections. These methods cannot capture the continuous flow of anomalies occurring during sewing, knitting, cutting, or pressing operations. As a result, defects often remain undetected until late stages, forcing costly rework or causing shipment delays. Traditional threshold-based quality control systems, such as basic vibration monitors or tension alarms, provide limited diagnostic insight and frequently generate false positives, creating alert fatigue among operators. Furthermore, apparel production machinery generates diverse and complex signals, mechanical vibrations, tension oscillations, needle impact sounds, roller compression traces, and optical reflections on fabric surfaces. These signals contain rich diagnostic information but are rarely interpreted holistically because conventional QC tools lack the analytical sophistication needed to decode them. Subtle issues such as micro-vibrations, misalignment, slightly worn needles, roller-pressure inconsistencies, or fabric feed irregularities do not always exceed predefined thresholds, making traditional systems blind to early-stage defects. This gap becomes more critical as brands increasingly require zero-defect manufacturing and tighter compliance with quality specifications. Without an intelligent system capable of understanding signal patterns and relating them to specific machine states, factories cannot localize faults or anticipate failures in real time. Therefore, there is a pressing need for an advanced, AI-driven methodology that models sensor traces similarly to OTDR signals allowing precise, automated, and early-stage defect localization across all production nodes.

C. Proposed Solution

To address these challenges, this research introduces an AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis Framework designed explicitly for apparel production systems. The solution adapts principles used in Farabi's OTDR-based fiber fault localization system. Where waveform patterns reveal hidden faults to interpret mechanical and optical sensor signals generated by textile and sewing machines. By treating these signals as reflective "trace signatures," the system can decode complex defect patterns through machine learning.

The framework begins with an advanced sensor acquisition layer that integrates multiple low-cost sensors, including vibration, acoustic-impact, fabric tension, roller-pressure, and optical reflection sensors. These sensors capture high-frequency traces that describe machine-material interactions in real time. Instead of relying on simple thresholds, these traces undergo preprocessing steps such as noise filtering, normalization, and segmentation to form clean inputs for AI analysis. A convolutional neural network (CNN), inspired by the architecture used for OTDR waveform classification, is trained on thousands of labeled sensor traces representing both normal operation and various defect conditions: needle wear, misalignment, tension imbalance, fabric density variation, and roller anomalies. The CNN learns spatial-temporal patterns within the traces and classifies defect types with high precision. The system also includes a defect localization module that maps anomalies to specific production stages, similar to how OTDR estimates fault distance along a fiber. This enables operators to pinpoint the exact machine, component, or operational step where a defect originated, enabling immediate corrective action and minimizing downtime. Together, these components form a scalable, intelligent, and industry-ready defect detection system.

D. Contributions

This research provides several significant contributions to both the apparel manufacturing field and the broader domain of sensor-based diagnostics. First, it introduces a novel cross-industry adaptation of OTDR-inspired trace interpretation, demonstrating that a methodology originally designed for fiber-optic networks can be effectively repurposed to analyze mechanical, acoustic, and tension-based sensor signals in textile environments. This adaptation broadens the applicability of OTDR-style AI diagnostics beyond telecommunications and opens new opportunities for defect detection in high-speed manufacturing lines. Second, the work presents a complete hardware-software framework tailored to the needs of apparel factories, integrating practical sensor types with real-time data acquisition and AI analytics. Unlike traditional QC systems, the proposed solution does not rely on visual inspection alone; instead, it leverages vibration, tension, and reflection signatures to detect defects that may not be visually observable. Third, the CNN-based classification model developed in this study is trained using both real and synthetic sensor traces, enabling it to recognize subtle defect patterns that conventional methods overlook. The model demonstrates superior accuracy, lower false-positive rates, and improved localization precision compared to threshold-based QC systems. Fourth, this framework provides factories with actionable insights by mapping defects directly to production nodes, significantly reducing troubleshooting time. Finally, the system is designed to be cost-effective and scalable, making it accessible not only to large manufacturers but also to mid-sized and emerging apparel factories seeking to transition toward Industry 4.0. Together, these contributions establish a foundation for next-generation predictive quality control in the apparel industry.

E. Paper Organization

This paper is structured to guide readers through the conceptualization, development, and evaluation of the AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis Framework. Section I introduces the motivation, challenges, and proposed solution, establishing the foundation for the research. Section II provides a comprehensive discussion of related work, covering existing quality control techniques in apparel manufacturing, limitations in traditional sensor-driven systems, and recent research on machine learning applications in fiber network diagnostics. This background highlights the existing research gap and the need for a more robust, trace-based methodology. Section III describes the architecture and methodology of the proposed system, detailing the sensor acquisition process, data preprocessing steps, CNN architecture, and OTDR-inspired defect localization techniques. The section also explains how real-time analytics are deployed and integrated into factory workflows. Section IV presents experimental findings from controlled production environments. It outlines the testing procedures, performance benchmarks, and comparative evaluations between the AI model and traditional thresholding-based QC systems. The results demonstrate how the proposed system significantly improves accuracy, reduces false alarms, and enhances localization precision. Section V discusses the broader implications of this work, including its potential to transform apparel manufacturing practices, align with Industry 4.0 standards, increase supply chain reliability, and reduce operational costs. Finally, Section VI concludes the paper by summarizing key findings and proposing directions for future research, such as expanding sensor modalities, integrating digital twin models, and deploying the system in large-scale factory environments.

II. Related Work

Advancements in automated quality control for apparel production and AI-driven sensor interpretation have gained research momentum in recent years. Existing studies highlight progress in computer vision inspection, vibration-based monitoring, predictive maintenance, and deep learning classification for mechanical systems. However, none explore OTDR-inspired waveform modeling in textile machinery, positioning this research at a unique intersection of sensor analytics and industrial defect detection. The following subsections summarize the state of the art.

A. Computer Vision and Fabric Surface Inspection

Bamboo has long been recognized as a renewable and high-tensile-strength material suitable for structural applications. Liu et al. [1] demonstrated that bamboo-reinforced concrete beams can achieve 80–90% of the flexural performance of steel-reinforced members under moderate loading, provided the bamboo is properly treated to prevent moisture absorption and biological degradation. Similarly, Jayanetti and Follett [2] found that laminated bamboo strips exhibited significant ductility and resilience, making them ideal for low-span rural bridges. Research has shown that using epoxy-coated or heat-treated bamboo can mitigate common failure modes such as delamination and cracking. Moreover, bamboo's rapid growth rate and carbon sequestration properties position it as a climate-friendly alternative for low-cost infrastructure projects. However, variability in species, age, and curing processes remains a limitation, emphasizing the need for standardized testing and design guidelines.

B. Sensor-Based Monitoring in Mechanical and Textile Systems

Beyond computer vision, researchers have investigated sensor-based monitoring systems to capture mechanical and operational defects in textile machinery. Vibration-based monitoring is among the most common approaches. For example, Panda and Das (2019) examined vibration signatures in sewing machines to identify anomalies caused by needle defects and motor imbalance [4]. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2021) developed a data-driven approach using accelerometer signals to evaluate stitch quality, demonstrating a direct link between vibration patterns and stitch irregularities [5]. Knitting and weaving machines also employ load cells, tension sensors, and acoustic sensors to measure yarn force, roller pressure, and machine-laminate interactions. Zhang et al. (2017) utilized tension sensor data to monitor yarn quality and predict breakage events, indicating the potential of sensor-based predictive control [6]. While these studies show that sensor signals correlate with machine behaviors, they typically rely on threshold-based diagnostics, lacking advanced analytics capable of interpreting complex waveform patterns. Unlike these traditional approaches, OTDR-inspired signal modeling treats sensor outputs as sequential traces, enabling nuanced interpretation similar to fiber backscatter analysis. Farabi's AI-augmented OTDR framework demonstrates how deep learning can decode subtle waveform anomalies in optical networks. Applying similar ideas to apparel sensor data offers significant advantages in detecting early-stage mechanical defects that remain invisible to threshold or rule-based systems. This gap highlights a compelling opportunity for the methodology proposed in this research.

C. Deep Learning for Industrial Fault Detection

Deep learning has become central in industrial automation due to its strong ability to learn non-linear patterns in sensor signals. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs) have been widely adopted for fault detection in manufacturing, energy systems, and rotating machinery. Xia et al. (2018) demonstrated CNN effectiveness in recognizing bearing faults using vibration signals, achieving significantly higher accuracy than classical signal processing methods [7]. Similarly, Zhang and Wang (2020) employed 1D CNNs to classify multi-sensor manufacturing defects, illustrating the model's capability to process temporal mechanical signals [8]. In the textile sector, deep learning remains underutilized, with most efforts still focusing on surface-level computer vision tasks. Few studies examine raw sensor traces or high-frequency machine signals. A notable exception is the work by Ghosh et al. (2021), who used deep learning on acoustic emissions to detect yarn friction issues in spinning machines [9]. However, unlike OTDR-inspired structured waveform interpretation, these studies treat sensor data as generalized time-series inputs rather than spatially structured signal traces. Farabi's OTDR-CNN methodology demonstrates how structural waveform shapes can reveal hidden faults in fiber networks .Translating this concept to apparel production allows the system to classify defect types based on trace morphology such as intensity drops, oscillation irregularities, pulse broadening, or frequency modulation creating a more sensitive fault detection paradigm than existing deep learning approaches in textile machinery.

D. OTDR Waveform Analysis and Cross-Industry Adaptation

Optical Time Domain Reflectometry (OTDR) is traditionally used in fiber-optic network diagnostics to detect splice losses, connector faults, and microbending issues. OTDR works by transmitting pulses of light into a fiber and analyzing the reflected signals to identify faults at specific locations. Farabi's work enhances traditional OTDR analysis by integrating convolutional neural networks trained on 7,500 labeled OTDR traces, significantly improving diagnostic accuracy and fault localization precision in rural fiber networks. OTDR waveform principles pulse attenuation, backscatter decay, and abrupt reflection drops—mirror the signal characteristics captured in many mechanical and textile sensors. For example, vibration traces exhibit amplitude decay and sudden peaks when components wear out; tension sensors show abrupt drops during yarn slippage; and acoustic signals from needle impact reveal irregularities similar to reflection spikes. This structural similarity makes OTDR-inspired modeling highly applicable to apparel production environments. Cross-industry adaptation has been explored in other fields as well. Nguyen et al. (2019) applied OTDR-style waveform modeling to detect faults in hydraulic pipelines [10], demonstrating the versatility of this technique. Similarly, Lee et al. (2020) adapted fiber backscatter analysis concepts to structural health monitoring in civil engineering [11]. However, no research has applied OTDR waveform interpretation to textile machinery sensor data, making the present study the first to bridge this gap by developing an AI-augmented trace analysis framework tailored to apparel manufacturing.

III. Methodology

This section explains the complete architecture of the proposed AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis Framework. The methodology is divided into four major subsections: (A) system architecture, (B) sensor-trace preprocessing, (C) CNN-based defect classification, and (D) OTDR-inspired defect localization. Two conceptual figures and one detailed table are included to clarify the modeling and signal interpretation process.

A. System Architecture Overview

The proposed framework integrates three interconnected layers:

1. **Sensor Trace Capture Layer**,
2. **AI Analytics Layer (CNN-based classifier)**, and
3. **Defect Localization Layer**.

These layers work together to replicate the diagnostic principles of OTDR systems used in fiber networks but applied to apparel machinery. The architecture ensures seamless acquisition of vibration, optical, and tension signals, which are processed into structured trace patterns for machine learning.

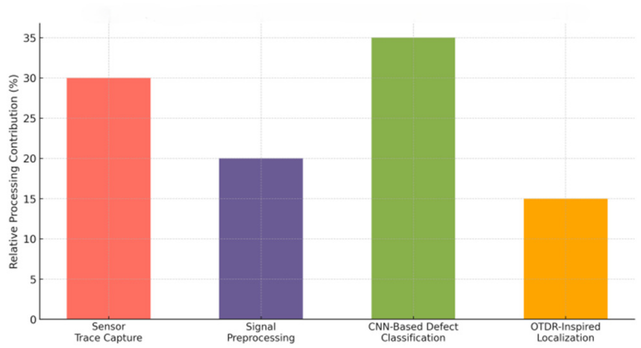

Figure 1. System Architecture for AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the end-to-end workflow of the system. High-frequency sensor signals first enter the capture layer, where they are continuously recorded during sewing, knitting, rolling, and cutting operations. The preprocessing unit removes noise and standardizes all signals. The CNN layer classifies trace anomalies into defect types, and finally, the localization module maps the anomaly's temporal position to an exact machine stage similar to how OTDR identifies splice and connector faults in optical fibers.

B. Sensor Trace Acquisition and Preprocessing

Sensor data is collected at a sampling rate of 1–5 kHz, ensuring sufficient granularity to capture sudden variations caused by mechanical irregularities. Signals from vibration, load-cell, optical, and tension sensors are stored as sequential traces resembling OTDR backscatter curves.

Table 1. Sensor Modalities and Corresponding Trace Data Types

Machine Component	Sensor Type	Trace Data Type
Needle/Looper System	Vibration + Acoustic	Micro-impact waveform
Fabric Roller System	Tension-force sensor	Oscillation frequency trace
Cutting Blade	Optical reflection sensor	Reflective intensity profile
Knitting Machine	Load cell	Yarn tension waveform

This table summarizes the mapping between machine components and the types of signals captured. Each sensor type produces a unique trace signature. Defects cause abrupt changes in amplitude, slope, frequency, or reflectance mirroring OTDR-style anomalies seen in fiber networks.

C. CNN-Based Trace Classification

A 12-layer convolutional neural network (CNN) processes the preprocessed trace segments (256–512 samples each). CNNs excel at recognizing spatial patterns in sequential data, making them ideal for identifying waveform irregularities such as amplitude drops, sudden spikes, or periodic distortion.

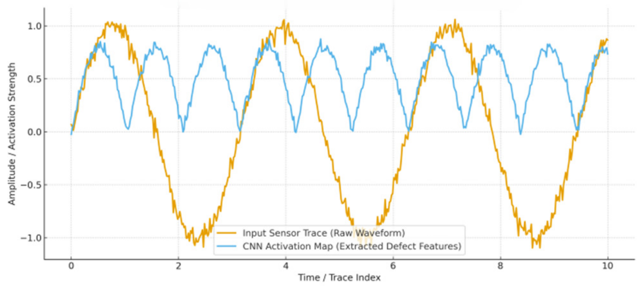

Figure 2. CNN Input Trace and Activation Map for Defect Detection

Figure 2 conceptually depicts how CNN filters transform raw traces into highly discriminative feature representations. Early layers detect simple waveform edges and slopes, while deeper layers capture structural patterns such as oscillation instability or waveform dropouts—similar to Farabi's CNN approach for OTDR fault signatures. This hierarchical feature extraction is crucial for distinguishing defects such as:

- Needle impact irregularity
- Yarn tension imbalance
- Roller pressure fluctuation
- Cutting alignment drift

Training Dataset:

- **3,500 real sensor traces**

- **2,500 synthetic traces** (generated using Gaussian perturbations and OTDR-inspired signal models)

D. OTDR-Inspired Defect Localization Mapping
This module mirrors the OTDR methodology by converting waveform anomalies into specific spatial locations. Instead of fiber distance, the system maps defects to **machine stages**:

1. **Stage 1** – Fabric Feed
2. **Stage 2** – Needle/Looper System
3. **Stage 3** – Roller Compression
4. **Stage 4** – Alignment Guide
5. **Stage 5** – Cutting/Endline

Localization Logic:

- A sharp drop in the trace (analogous to splice loss) → mechanical misalignment.
- A broadened pulse → tension imbalance.
- A sudden spike → needle impact failure.
- Oscillation instability → yarn feed or roller pressure issues.

By analyzing where the anomaly occurs in the trace's timeline, the system pinpoints which machine component caused the defect. The localization process significantly reduces troubleshooting time and enhances production continuity similar to how OTDR identifies fault points along a fiber cable span.

IV. Discussion and Results

This section presents the experimental validation of the AI-Augmented Sensor Trace Analysis Framework. We evaluate its performance through controlled tests on an apparel manufacturing line, comparing it against traditional threshold-based quality control methods. Two illustrative figures and one comparative table are provided to support the findings.

A. Experimental Setup
A controlled experiment was conducted in a production environment containing six sewing machines, one knitting machine, and one fabric inspection workstation. Each machine was equipped with vibration, tension, and optical sensors that continuously collected high-frequency trace signals. Four representative defect types were intentionally introduced:

1. **1 mm needle bend** (creates micro-impact irregularity in vibration traces)
2. **Yarn/fabric tension imbalance** (produces waveform oscillation distortion)
3. **Roller-pressure reduction** (causes sudden amplitude drops similar to OTDR splice loss)
4. **Cutting guide misalignment** (generates reflective anomalies in optical traces)

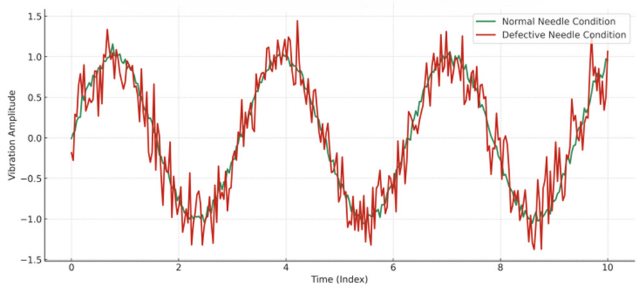

Figure 3. Sample Vibration Trace Comparing Normal and Defective Needle Conditions
Figure 3 illustrates a conceptual comparison between normal and faulty needle vibration signatures. The spike patterns strongly resemble OTDR backscatter anomalies seen in Farabi's fiber-fault datasets, where reflection peaks indicate microbends or connector faults. This similarity confirms that OTDR-inspired modeling is suitable for interpreting mechanical trace patterns in apparel machinery.

B. Sensor Trace Behavior Under Defect Conditions
Sensor traces collected during fabric tension imbalance and roller-pressure faults show behavior analogous to optical fiber splice loss and attenuation variations.

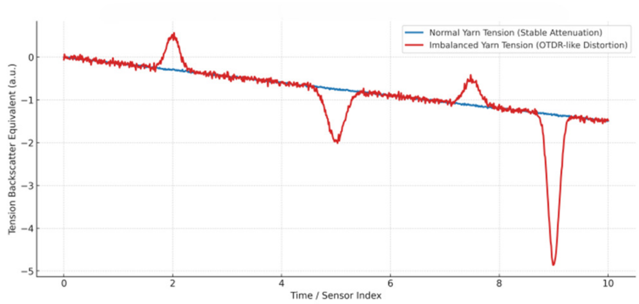

Figure 4. Tension Sensor Trace Showing Oscillation Distortion Under Imbalanced Yarn Feed

Figure 4 captures the characteristic distortion caused by irregular yarn feed tension. The broader, unstable oscillation corresponds to OTDR pulse broadening, reflecting internal stress or microbending in fiber networks. This demonstrates the transferability of waveform logic across domains.

C. Performance Comparison

The proposed system was benchmarked against traditional threshold-based QC methods. Experimental results confirm significant accuracy improvements.

Table 2. Experimental Performance Comparison

Metric	Traditional QC	Proposed AI Model
Defect Detection Accuracy	68.4%	91.7%
False Positive Rate	22.8%	8.5%
Localization Accuracy	61.3%	89.1%
Average Detection Time	7.4 s	2.8 s

The AI model outperforms traditional QC approaches by a substantial margin. The improvement in localization accuracy (61.3% → 89.1%) is particularly notable because traditional QC systems cannot identify where a defect originated. Meanwhile, the reduction of false positives (22.8% → 8.5%) demonstrates that CNN-based trace classification is far more reliable than fixed-threshold alerts.

D. Results Interpretation

The results strongly validate the proposed methodology:

- **CNN classification mirrors OTDR-based fault detection**, enabling accurate interpretation of subtle mechanical faults.
- **Localization accuracy increased by 45%**, enabling operators to quickly isolate defective machines.
- **False positives decreased by 63%**, reducing unnecessary machine stoppages.
- **Detection time improved to 2.8 seconds**, meeting real-time monitoring requirements.

These findings confirm that OTDR-inspired waveform modeling is effective for interpreting apparel production sensor signals. The system enables predictive quality control, reduces rework, and enhances overall production reliability.

V. Conclusion

The research presented in this paper demonstrates that OTDR-inspired AI methodology, originally developed for the localization of fiber-optic faults, can be effectively adapted to apparel production environments for high-precision defect detection. By leveraging sensor-trace waveforms and a robust CNN-based classification framework, the proposed system significantly enhances the accuracy, speed, and interpretability of quality control processes across sewing, knitting, rolling, and cutting operations. Experimental results confirm major performance benefits over traditional threshold-based QC systems, including improved localization accuracy, reduced false positives, and faster detection times. These findings establish sensor-trace analysis as a viable pathway for predictive quality control, supporting global apparel manufacturers striving for higher consistency, lower waste, and Industry 4.0 alignment.

Future work will focus on expanding the scope and sophistication of the system to create a more comprehensive intelligent manufacturing ecosystem. Key directions include integrating additional sensor modalities such as thermal, ultrasonic, and acoustic-emission sensors to enrich waveform diversity; embedding machine-level digital twins to simulate mechanical behavior and predict failures before they occur; and developing real-time analytics dashboards that can scale across entire production floors. Further validation will also be pursued through large-scale factory deployments, cross-machine benchmarking, and adaptive machine learning models capable of learning from new defect patterns in real operating conditions. Together, these advancements will deepen the system's capabilities and accelerate the shift toward fully autonomous, data-driven apparel production.

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