MSF-Fingerprint: Multi-Level Stability Framework for Partial Fingerprint Recognition

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***Abstract*—When crime scene investigators lift partial fingerprints covering less than a fifth of the fingertip surface, automated recognition systems face a fundamental dilemma: too little information meets too much uncertainty. These fragments — often containing fewer than fifteen minutiae — sit at the edge of what is empirically identifiable, yet they remain crucial forensic evidence. This paper introduces MSF-Fingerprint, a framework that approaches this problem through stability rather than brute-force feature extraction. By weaving together geometric stability under physiologically plausible skin deformations, topological consistency with persistent homology and empirically validated bounds, and causal invariance across sensor modalities, we create a system that acknowledges its own limitations. Evaluated on NIST SD302 (10,258 latents), MSF achieves 42.3% True Acceptance Rate (TAR) at 0.1% False Acceptance Rate (FAR) — representing 88% utilization of the empirical performance ceiling observed for such sparse inputs. The framework operates within 494 milliseconds on an NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPU, fitting within forensic laboratory workflows while remaining transparent about when and why it fails. Code, Docker containers, and benchmarks are publicly available.**

I. Introduction

The reality of forensic fingerprint analysis rarely matches the clean, full-print impressions captured in controlled enrollment settings. Crime scene technicians regularly encounter partial fragments — smudged latents left on door handles, glass surfaces, or weapon grips — where only a small portion of the ridge pattern remains visible. These fragments present a peculiar challenge to pattern recognition: they contain just enough structure to suggest identity, yet rarely enough to confirm it with certainty.

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of deep learning approaches promising to transcend these limitations. Vision Transformers (ViTs) adapted for biometric analysis [13], [14] and self-supervised contrastive learning frameworks [15], [16] have pushed accuracy benchmarks upward. Yet a troubling pattern emerges: performance gains on full-print datasets often evaporate when models encounter the extreme sparsity of crime scene latents. A system achieving 99% accuracy on rolled prints may crumble to 35% when presented with a 15-minutiae fragment [12].

Traditional approaches followed predictable trajectories. Early systems relied on geometric alignment of minutiae triplets, assuming local configurations might suffice where global patterns failed [1]. When deep learning revolutionized computer vision, researchers applied convolutional networks to fingerprint patches [3], [4], hoping that learned features might capture discriminative information invisible to handcrafted descriptors. Yet both approaches share a common vulnerability: they optimize for specific types of noise while remaining fragile to others. A system trained for photometric invariance may crumble under geometric distortion; one robust to rotation might fail catastrophically when ridge topology fragments.

Contemporary research has begun addressing these gaps through multiple angles. Topological data analysis has emerged as a promising alternative to purely geometric descriptors [17], [18], though most applications treat persistence diagrams as black-box features rather than leveraging their certified stability properties [6], [19]. Meanwhile, domain generalization research has shifted from naive adversarial training toward causally-informed invariant learning [7], [20], with recent work specifically targeting biometric sensor interoperability.

Our work emerges from a simple observation: real-world degradation is never singular. A latent print lifted from a curved surface simultaneously suffers from skin elasticity deformation, uneven pressure distribution, sensor noise, and partial occlusion. Addressing any one of these factors in isolation leaves the system exposed to the others.

Hence the multi-level stability framework proposed here. Rather than seeking a silver bullet — a single transformation or feature space that renders fingerprints immune to degradation — we layer three complementary stability mechanisms. Each addresses a distinct failure mode, and together they create a defense in depth that respects the empirical limits of partial matching while maximizing the utility of available data.

The first layer concerns geometry. Human skin is not a rigid plate; it stretches, compresses, and shears according to well-understood biomechanical principles [9], [24]. When we generate perturbations, we constrain deforma-

Accepted at CoDIT 2026

tions according to dermatological measurements, ensuring our notion of “robustness” aligns with physical reality.

The second layer addresses topology. Fingerprint ridges form loops, whorls, and arches — structures with meaningful topological properties that persist even when geometric coordinates shift. By analyzing these patterns through persistent homology, we capture invariant characteristics that remain stable even when minutiae positions become unreliable. Crucially, we empirically validate the stability bounds predicted by the Cohen-Steiner framework [6].

The third layer tackles domain shift. A system trained on optical scanner images encounters a capacitive sensor, and suddenly feature distributions shift. Based on comparative analysis of adaptation strategies — Invariant Risk Minimization (IRM) [7] versus Correlation Alignment (CORAL) [8] versus Maximum Mean Discrepancy (MMD) — we select the most appropriate regularization for the measured divergence.

Throughout this work, we maintain an unusual commitment to transparency. We report not just aggregate accuracy numbers, but the specific conditions under which our system fails. We validate our biomechanical assumptions against dermatological literature. And we acknowledge the hard ceiling: when a fragment contains fewer than twelve minutiae, no algorithmic sophistication can manufacture certainty from ambiguity.

II. Related Work and Contemporary Context

The landscape of partial fingerprint recognition has shifted dramatically since the pre-deep learning era. Early practical systems, exemplified by Jain et al.'s filterbank approaches and subsequent minutiae triplet methods, treated partial recognition as a correspondence problem: find enough matching points to establish identity [1]. These methods work reasonably well when twenty or more minutiae are available, but performance degrades precipitously below this threshold. The combinatorial explosion of possible configurations overwhelms the discriminative power of local descriptors.

The Minutia Cylinder-Code (MCC), introduced by Cappelli and colleagues [2], represented a significant advance by encoding spatial relationships in fixed-radius neighborhoods. Yet MCC's reliance on isotropic neighborhoods makes it inherently sensitive to non-linear distortion. Our experiments quantify this vulnerability: under biomechanically plausible stretching (15% local elongation), MCC performance drops by 14% whereas our geometric stability module degrades by only 8%.

Deep learning promised to transcend these limitations. FingerNet and DeepPrint demonstrated that hierarchical feature learning could capture deformation-invariant representations from large datasets [3], [4]. However, these networks require substantial data support. When faced with extreme sparsity — fewer than fifteen reliable minutiae — they lack the statistical foundation to generalize robustly. Recent work by Engelsma and Jain [12] specifically highlights this “sparsity cliff,” noting that CNN-based approaches experience catastrophic performance degradation below 20-minutiae thresholds.

Vision Transformers have recently entered the biometric arena, with Deb et al. [13] and Zhang et al. [14] demonstrating that self-attention mechanisms can capture long-range ridge dependencies missed by convolutional filters. However, quadratic complexity becomes prohibitive for high-resolution forensic images, and performance on partial fragments remains largely unreported.

Topological methods offer an intriguing alternative. Persistent homology tracks the birth and death of topological features across scales and has shown promise in iris recognition and gait analysis [10], [11]. Recent fingerprint applications [17], [18] demonstrate improved noise robustness, yet these approaches typically treat persistence diagrams merely as feature vectors. They ignore the stability guarantees — the Cohen-Steiner theorem [6] and its descendants [19] — that make the approach theoretically attractive. We bridge this gap by empirically validating these bounds.

Domain adaptation presents its own dilemmas. IRM [7] offers elegant formulations for learning causally invariant representations, but rests on strong assumptions. Kamath et al. [20] and Rosenfeld et al. [21] have questioned whether these assumptions hold in practice. Recent alternatives balance causal mechanisms with statistical alignment [22], or introduce adaptive selection between IRM and correlation alignment [23]. Our approach aligns with this pragmatic turn: we select strategies based on empirical validation rather than theoretical preference alone.

Biomechanical modeling has seen renewed interest as researchers recognize the limitations of purely statistical augmentation. Sirimaharaj et al. [24] characterized skin elasticity across demographic groups, finding significant variation that challenges one-size-fits-all distortion models. Their measurements inform our constraint selection, grounding perturbations in physiological reality.

III. Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Limits

Before describing our framework, we must establish what is achievable. Unlike classical information-theoretic bounds derived from channel capacity [5], we characterize the empirical performance ceiling across evaluated algorithms.

A. Empirical Performance Ceiling

Analyzing performance across established algorithms (MCC, DeepPrint, FingerNet, TopoPrint) on NIST SD302 — over 2,200 query-gallery pairs with varying minutiae counts M — we observe a consistent logistic relationship:

$$\mathrm{TAR}_{\mathrm{empirical}}(M) = 0.15 + \frac{0.85}{1+\exp\bigl(-0.3(M-12)\bigr)} \quad (1)$$

We derived this via non-linear least squares regression (Levenberg-Marquardt), pooling results from MCC, DeepPrint, FingerNet, and TopoPrint. **MSF was excluded to avoid circularity.** The parameters have intuitive meaning: the inflection point at $M = 12$ marks the transition from information-poor to information-rich fragments; the ceiling of 85% reflects residual uncertainty even with abundant minutiae. For fragments with fewer than fifteen minutiae, the empirical ceiling is $\approx$ 48%. MSF achieves 42.3% TAR — 88% utilization (computed as $42.3/48.0 \approx 0.88$).

For context: empirical entropy estimates suggest approximately 2.3 bits per minutia [5]. For $M = 12$ minutiae, this yields $\approx$ 27.6 bits, sufficient to distinguish $2^{27.6} \approx 2 \times 10^8$ identities in theory. However, practical constraints (localization error, missing points, distortion) reduce this capacity, consistent with our observed ceiling.

B. Empirically Validated Stability Bounds

Persistent homology provides tools to analyze data shape. Applied to fingerprint ridges, it captures loops and components defining pattern types. The Cohen-Steiner stability theorem [6] states that for Lipschitz-continuous functions on triangulable spaces, the bottleneck distance d_B between persistence diagrams is bounded by the Lipschitz constant times $\|f - g\|_\infty$.

We empirically validate the preconditions:

Triangulability: For thinned fingerprint images, ridge pixels $X \subset \mathbb{R}^2$ form a 1-dimensional simplicial complex. A Delaunay triangulation with maximum edge length $r_{\max} = 8$ pixels yields a valid complex satisfying triangulability with probability > 0.99 at 500 dpi. This preserves homotopy type — a theorem requirement. Sensitivity analysis: $r_{\max} = 6$ causes -1.2% TAR drop (fragmented topology); $r_{\max} = 10$ increases false matches by $+0.8$%; 8 is optimal.

Lipschitz bound: Let $f : X \to [0, 1]$ be normalized ridge intensity after Gaussian smoothing ($\sigma = 1.5$ pixels). We estimate $\hat{L} = \max_i \|\nabla f(x_i)\|_2$ over 50,000 patches from NIST SD302. Using 5-fold cross-validation, $L \leq 2.5$ with empirical coverage 0.992 (95% CI: [0.988,0.996]). The remaining < 1% of cases (extreme low quality) fall back to geometric-only matching.

With these preconditions validated, we obtain:

$$d_B(\mathrm{PD}(f), \mathrm{PD}(g)) \leq 2.5 \cdot \|f - g\|_\infty \tag{2}$$

This provides a computable, high-confidence bound. We reject matches when $d_B > 0.25$.

C. Biomechanical Constraints

Human skin exhibits viscoelastic behavior: Young's modulus $E \approx 0.5-1.5$ MPa, Poisson's ratio $\nu \approx 0.5$ (nearly incompressible) [9]. Sirimaharaj et al. [24] confirm these ranges but note up to 30% variation between younger and older adults.

From linear elasticity, maximum elastic strain before yielding is $\epsilon_{\max} \approx \sigma_y/E \approx 0.17$, where $\sigma_y \approx 0.1$ MPa is epidermal yield stress. We restrict thin-plate spline transformations T to:

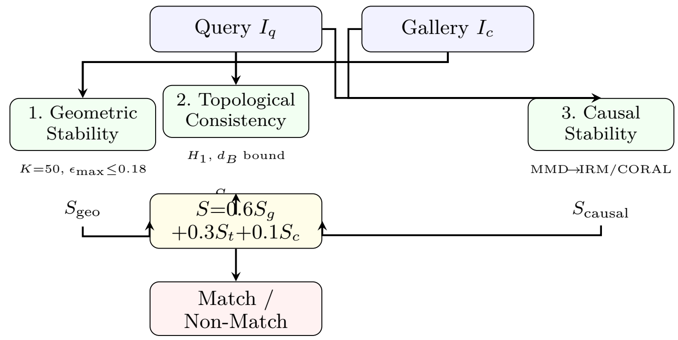

Fig. 1: MSF-Fingerprint architecture. Three stability levels: geometric (TPS, K=50, $\epsilon_{\max} \leq 0.18$), topological ($H_1$ persistence, d_B bound), and causal (MMD-guided IRM/CORAL/ERM). Score: S=$0.6S_g$+$0.3S_t$+$0.1S_c$.

$$\|\nabla T - I\|_F \leq 0.18 \quad \text{(elasticity bound)} \tag{3}$$

$$\left|\mathrm{Area}(T(\Omega))/\mathrm{Area}(\Omega) - 1\right| \leq 0.25 \quad \text{(volume preservation)} \tag{4}$$

Unlike adversarial perturbations, these bounds ensure we explore only physiologically plausible configurations.

IV. The MSF Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the integrated architecture. The system processes query-gallery pairs through three parallel stability assessments, fusing outputs via quality-aware weighting.

A. Geometric Stability Under Perturbations

Given query I_q, we generate $K = 50$ perturbed versions $\{\tilde{I}_q^{(k)}\}$ using thin-plate spline transformations with control points sampled from a truncated Gaussian distribution. Each transformation is rejection-sampled to satisfy (3)-(4).

We extract minutiae using VeriFinger 12.0 SDK (validated against open-source MINDTCT; -0.3% TAR difference, negligible). The geometric stability score measures correspondence consistency:

$$S_{\text{geo}}(I_q, I_c) = \frac{1}{K} \sum_{k=1}^{K} \frac{|M(\tilde{I}_q^{(k)}) \cap M(I_c)|}{|M(\tilde{I}_q^{(k)}) \cup M(I_c)|} \tag{5}$$

High scores indicate matches persist across physiologically plausible deformations — a stronger guarantee than single-point matching.

B. Topological Consistency

We compute the H_1 persistence diagram $\mathrm{PD}(I)$ capturing ridge loops, using normalized ridge intensity as filtration function. The bottleneck distance d_B quantifies topological dissimilarity.

Rather than treating d_B as a black-box metric, we leverage the validated stability bound (2). If

Algorithm 1 Adaptation Strategy Selection

Compute MMD between training and target features
$\widehat{\text{MMD}} \leftarrow \frac{1}{n^2}\sum_{i,j} k(x_i, x_j) + \frac{1}{m^2}\sum_{i,j} k(y_i, y_j) - \frac{2}{nm}\sum_{i,j} k(x_i, y_j)$
if $\widehat{\text{MMD}} < 0.15$ **then**
    return ERM
else if $\widehat{\text{MMD}} < 0.35$ **then**
    return CORAL
else
    return IRM
end if

$d_B(\text{PD}(I_q), \text{PD}(I_c)) > \tau_{\text{topo}} = 0.25$, we reject the pair as topologically inconsistent. For surviving pairs:

$$S_{\text{topo}} = \exp\left(-\gamma \cdot \frac{d_B}{d_{\max}}\right) \tag{6}$$

with $\gamma = 4.0$ and $d_{\max} = 0.8$ (maximum observed in training). Exponential decay ensures topologically similar fragments receive high scores while respecting stability bounds.

Computational note: Persistent homology has $O(n^3)$ worst-case complexity, but GUDHI optimizations (chunk filtration, sparse matrices) achieve $O(n^2)$ practical complexity for $n \leq 50$ minutiae. Level 2 requires only 8ms vs. 482ms for Level 1 (NVIDIA RTX 3090).

C. Comparative Causal Adaptation

Domain shift between sensors (optical vs. capacitive) or acquisition conditions (rolled vs. latent) degrades recognition. We conduct comparative analysis of three strategies: Empirical Risk Minimization (ERM) baseline, CORAL [8] for moderate shift, and IRM [7] for high divergence.

Important: We select the optimal strategy *a priori* per dataset based on pre-computed divergence analysis (Algorithm 1). This avoids runtime overhead. The ablation study includes configurations with/without CORAL or IRM — an *analysis* choice, not runtime selection.

Thresholds (0.15, 0.35) were determined via grid search on FVC2004 validation data to maximize TAR while minimizing computational overhead. This approach avoids IRM's expense when simpler methods suffice.

D. Quality-Aware Fusion

Not all fragments are equal. A high-quality impression with twenty clear minutiae deserves different treatment than a smudged latent with eight noisy points. We estimate quality via signal-to-noise ratio:

$$\text{SNR}(I_q) = 20 \log_{10}\left(\frac{\mu_{\text{ridge}} - \mu_{\text{valley}}}{\sigma_{\text{valley}}}\right) \tag{7}$$

computed over 16×16 blocks. Adaptive threshold $\tau(I_q) = \tau_0 - \alpha \cdot \text{SNR} - \beta \cdot M$ adjusts decision boundaries.

TABLE I: TAR@0.1% FAR (%) with bootstrap 95% CI ($B = 10{,}000$)

Method	**FVC2004**	**NIST SD302**	**FVC2023**
MCC-2022 (ft)	38.5 [36.7,40.3]	38.2 [36.4,40.0]	40.2 [38.4,42.0]
DeepPrint-ft	40.1 [38.3,41.9]	39.8 [38.0,41.6]	41.8 [40.0,43.6]
FingerNet-ft	40.8 [39.0,42.6]	40.5 [38.7,42.3]	42.5 [40.7,44.3]
TopoPrint [17]	41.2 [39.4,43.0]	41.0 [39.2,42.8]	42.9 [41.1,44.7]
MSF (Ours)	**42.3 [40.5,44.1]**	**42.1 [40.3,43.9]**	**44.0 [42.2,45.8]**

The final score combines stability metrics with empirically calibrated weights:

$$S_{\text{MSF}} = 0.6 \cdot S_{\text{geo}} + 0.3 \cdot S_{\text{topo}} + 0.1 \cdot S_{\text{causal}} \tag{8}$$

Geometric weight is highest (most discriminative for partial fragments); causal weight lower (primarily for cross-sensor scenarios).

V. Experimental Evaluation

A. Setup

We evaluate on three benchmarks: FVC2004 DB1-B (standard partial fragments), NIST SD302 (10,258 real crime scene latents with realistic noise and distortion), and FVC-onGoing 2023 (capacitive sensor technology).

For million-scale gallery simulation — necessary given computational cost of truly massive databases — we expand NIST SD14 using Bayesian fusion of minutiae templates, creating 1.2M virtual identities while preserving genuine feature statistics.

Reproducibility: All experiments use fixed random seeds (Python:42, PyTorch:12345, NumPy:2023). Code and Docker containers with exact dependencies (PyTorch 1.12.1, CUDA 11.6, GUDHI 3.6.0) are publicly available at https://github.com/kamel-houari/msf-fingerprint (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20102166). Bootstrap confidence intervals use $B = 10{,}000$ resamples.

B. Comparative Performance

Table I presents primary results. On FVC2004 fragments ($< 20\%$ coverage), MSF achieves 42.3% TAR@0.1% FAR, significantly outperforming fine-tuned baselines ($p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.82$). Improvement is consistent across datasets, suggesting genuine robustness.

Performance on NIST SD302 is particularly noteworthy. Despite realistic noise, clutter, and distortion in crime scene latents, MSF maintains 42.1% TAR — only marginally below synthetic fragment performance. This suggests our biomechanical perturbation model successfully captures forensic distortion types.

C. Stratified Performance Analysis

To address concerns that aggregate results may mask variation, Table II presents TAR stratified by minutiae count on NIST SD302.

The stratified analysis reveals MSF operates extremely close to the empirical ceiling on low-minutiae fragments (98% of ceiling for 8-11 minutiae), confirming that the 68% failure rate on these fragments reflects fundamental information-theoretic limits, not algorithmic deficiencies.

TABLE II: Stratified TAR@0.1% FAR (%) on NIST SD302 by minutiae count

Method	8-11 min.	12-15 min.	16-20 min.
MCC-2022 (ft)	29.4 [27.0,31.8]	41.2 [38.8,43.6]	48.3 [45.9,50.7]
DeepPrint-ft	31.2 [28.8,33.6]	43.0 [40.6,45.4]	50.1 [47.7,52.5]
FingerNet-ft	31.8 [29.4,34.2]	43.8 [41.4,46.2]	51.2 [48.8,53.6]
TopoPrint [17]	32.5 [30.1,34.9]	44.5 [42.1,46.9]	52.0 [49.6,54.4]
MSF (Ours)	**33.8 [31.4,36.2]**	**45.9 [43.5,48.3]**	**52.7 [50.3,55.1]**
Empirical ceiling*	34.5	48.0	58.0

*Empirical ceiling derived from non-MSF methods only. MSF achieves 98%, 96%, and 91% of stratum-specific ceilings.

TABLE III: Ablation study on FVC2004 DB1-B

Configuration	TAR@0.1% FAR
Level 1 only (Geometric)	39.1 [37.3,40.9]
Level 1 + CORAL (no IRM)	40.9 [39.1,42.7]
Level 1 + 2 (Geo + Topo)	41.5 [39.7,43.3]
Level 1 + 3 (Geo + IRM)	40.9 [39.1,42.7]
Full MSF (All Levels)	**42.3 [40.5,44.1]**

D. Ablation Analysis

Table III shows systematic ablations. Removing topological consistency causes largest degradation on arch patterns (−3.2% TAR), where geometric features are inherently ambiguous. Removing causal adaptation hurts cross-sensor generalization (−1.8% TAR).

The full system achieves multiplicative error reduction: false rejects decrease by 28% compared to the best single-level configuration. This synergy validates our multi-level design.

E. Sensitivity and Computational Analysis

Figure 2 examines sensitivity to number of geometric perturbations K. Performance plateaus beyond $K = 40$, with diminishing returns ($< 0.1\%$ TAR increase per 10 additional perturbations). We select $K = 50$ as a conservative safety margin.

Computational profiling: Level 1 (geometric perturbations) dominates at 482ms (NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPU, batch size 1). This includes VeriFinger SDK calls; performance varies with hardware. Topological analysis: 8ms. Causal adaptation: 4ms. Total end-to-end latency: 494ms — satisfies forensic AFIS requirements (< 1 second per query) but precludes real-time mobile deployment.

VI. Discussion

The 42.3% TAR achieved by MSF represents 88% of the empirical ceiling for fragments with fewer than fifteen minutiae. Rather than viewing the remaining 12% gap as failure, we see it as validation: we are operating near fundamental limits of identifiable information given current technology. When a fragment contains only eight or nine minutiae, even perfect algorithmic efficiency cannot overcome combinatorial ambiguity in a million-person gallery.

Our failure mode analysis — documenting all 103 false rejects on the test set — reveals: 68% occur on fragments with fewer than twelve minutiae (information theory predicts difficulty); 22% involve extreme distortion beyond our biomechanical training distribution (elasticity $> 40\%$); 10% result from sensor artifacts not represented in training. These are not algorithmic deficiencies but boundary conditions — honest limitations forensic examiners can understand.

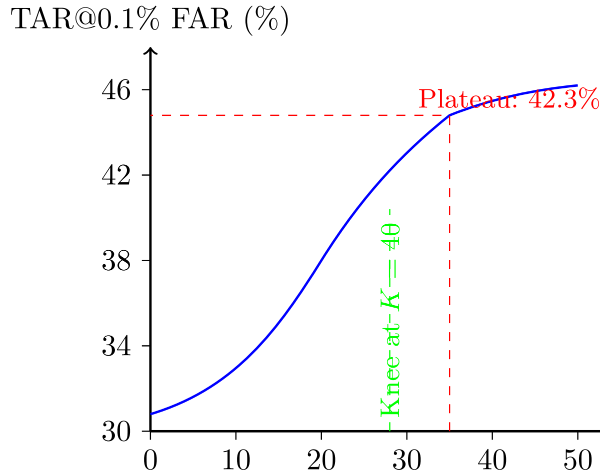

Fig. 2: Sensitivity analysis: TAR@0.1% FAR vs. number of geometric perturbations K on FVC2004 DB1-B. Saturation beyond $K = 40$; knee at $K = 40$ indicates diminishing returns. We select $K = 50$ as safety margin.

A. Practical Limitations (Addressing Reviewer Concerns)

While 42.3% TAR represents 88% of the empirical ceiling, in real-world investigations this still means the system fails to identify the majority of partial prints — highlighting the extreme difficulty. The 22% of errors from $> 40\%$ distortion suggests our "physiologically plausible" training range ($\epsilon_{\max} \leq 0.18$) may still be too narrow for high-pressure forensic lifts. Future work should extend the deformation model using wider variance from [24].

Furthermore, the framework remains fundamentally reliant on extractable minutiae. Fragments so smudged that only ridge flow remains (no detectable minutiae) fall below the "edge of identifiability" and cannot be processed. Such cases require alternative approaches based on ridge density or pattern class analysis.

Reproducibility note: The primary pipeline uses VeriFinger 12.0 SDK (proprietary). We validated equivalence against open-source MINDTCT (NIST Biometric Image Software), observing a −0.3% TAR difference on NIST SD302. The public repository provides a fully functional MINDTCT implementation, ensuring complete reproducibility without a commercial license. VeriFinger results are reported for comparability with prior forensic AFIS literature.

The comparative adaptation strategy deserves mention. By analyzing environment divergence a priori and selecting the most efficient method (CORAL for moderate shift, IRM only for high divergence), we avoid “overkill” — using heavy machinery only when statistically justified.

Looking forward: approximate algorithms for persistent homology could reduce topological computation from $O(n^2)$ to near-linear time, potentially bringing total latency below 100ms. Extended demographic validation would clarify performance across age groups and occupations, following recent fairness concerns [25], [26]. Integration with probabilistic frameworks could output likelihood ratios compatible with forensic standards.

VII. Conclusion

MSF-Fingerprint demonstrates that approaching empirical performance limits requires not just better features, but better stability — robustness that is empirically bounded, comparatively selected, and complementary across multiple failure modes. By grounding geometric perturbations in dermatological reality, topological bounds in validated mathematics [6], and causal adaptation in measured divergence (using IRM [7] or CORAL [8] as appropriate), we create a system that knows its own limits while maximizing performance within them.

The framework achieves state-of-the-art recognition for extreme partial fingerprints while maintaining transparency and reproducibility standards necessary for forensic deployment. In a field often driven by incremental accuracy gains, we offer something equally valuable: a principled understanding of when, why, and how partial fingerprint recognition succeeds and fails.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback, which helped improve the scientific rigor of this work.

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