

Face Tracking Using Robust Statistical Estimation

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Abstract

This paper presents a statistics-based method for estimating the position and size of a face in complex background. Face position and size are estimated based on robust statistical measurements which are derived from two one-dimensional histograms obtained by projecting the result of skin color filtering. The proposed algorithm also utilizes a linear Kalman filter and a simple nonlinear filter to perform smooth tracking and remove jitter. The algorithm has been implemented and tested under a wide range of real-world conditions. It has consistently provided performance which satisfies the following requirements: 1) able to automatically determine the initial position and size of a face and track it in complex background; 2) insensitive to partial occlusions and shadows; 3) insensitive to face orientation and scale changes; 4) insensitive to lighting condition changes; and 5) computationally simple enough to be executed in real-time.

1. Introduction

Robust real-time face tracking has many applications in perceptual human computer interfaces and communication. A perceptual interface device may use face tracking technique to direct the computer's attention to a user even when the user moves. Continuously locating the position of the user's face may be necessary or at least helpful for the computer to accomplish tasks such as recognizing the user's facial expressions, gestures, or speech. A handheld visual communication device may also use face tracking technique to maintain the user's face on the screen and reduce communication bandwidth by transmitting only the fraction of a video frame which contains the user's face.

Face tracking has been studied by many researchers in the past. Existing algorithms include those which are based on 1) elliptical moving region detection [2]; 2) modified correlation by explicitly modeling different illumination conditions via basis images [4]; 3) front-view face detection in moving regions [5]; and 4) skin color filtering

[1, 6, 8]. To the best of our knowledge, no existing face tracking algorithm satisfies the following conditions completely: 1) able to automatically determine the initial location and size of a face and track it in complex background; 2) insensitive to partial occlusions and shadows; 3) insensitive to face orientation and scale changes; 4) insensitive to lighting condition changes; and 5) computationally simple enough to be executed in real-time. In this paper, we present a face tracking algorithm to accomplish the above requirements. The proposed algorithm has been implemented on different platforms and its performance has been confirmed under a wide range of real-world conditions.

In Section 2, we first present an overview of our face tracking algorithm. We then describe each individual step. Emphasis will be given to the procedures which locate and track a face using the results of skin color filtering. In Section 3, we describe our experiments and present an example of our results. We also describe the memory requirement and computational cost of our implementation. Finally in Section 4, we discuss certain aspects of our algorithm and state our immediate future work.

2. Color-Based Face Tracking

Our algorithm locates and tracks a face in a color video sequence based on skin color information. Given an input frame, the algorithm first extracts skin pixels by color filtering. Based on the result from color filtering, it constructs two one-dimensional (1D) histograms which represent the distributions of the skin pixels in two orthogonal directions, respectively. The instantaneous center position and size of the tracked face are estimated based on statistical measurements derived from the histograms. The estimated values of the face center position and size are then fed into a tracking mechanism which consists of a linear Kalman filter and a simple nonlinear filter. Finally the output values from the tracking module are used as the tracked center position and size of the face. Figure 1 shows a block diagram of our algorithm.

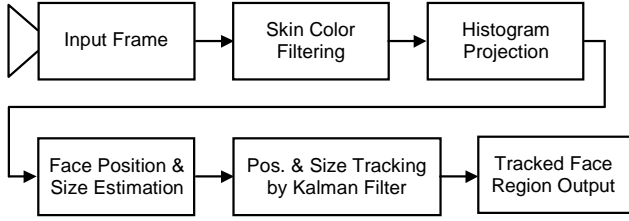


Figure 1. Block diagram of the proposed real-time face tracking algorithm.

2.1. Skin color filtering

Researchers have discovered that human skin colors even from different races tend to cluster in a compact region in certain transformed two-dimensional (2D) color spaces such as 1) (R_g, R_y) in the log-opponent color space [3]; 2) the chromaticity space (r, g) ; and 3) (U, V) in the YUV color space. The purpose of employing the transformed color spaces is to reduce the dependency on intensity or brightness, so that skin colors of different darkness or under different lighting intensity are drawn close to each other after they are mapped into the transformed color spaces. In general, the log-opponent transformation and the chromaticity transformation achieve better reduction of intensity dependency than the YUV transformation. In our algorithm, we use the chromaticity transformation because it is computationally simpler than the log-opponent transformation. For a given pixel (R, G, B) , the chromaticity transformation is defined as: $r = R / (R+G+B)$ and $g = G / (R+G+B)$.

We model the cluster of skin colors in the chromaticity space as a 2D Gaussian distribution $p(\mu_r, \mu_g, \sigma_r, \sigma_g)$. The parameters $(\mu_r, \mu_g, \sigma_r, \sigma_g)$ are obtained by either automatic training or interactive calibration using skin color samples. The skin color filtering process maps an input color image into a color filtering map in which most of the skin pixels are marked toward 1 and most of the non-skin pixels are marked toward 0. For a given pixel (R, G, B) , the skin color filter is defined as follows:

$$f_{CF}(R, G, B) = \exp \left[-\frac{(r - \mu_r)^2}{2\sigma_r^2} - \frac{(g - \mu_g)^2}{2\sigma_g^2} \right],$$

where (r, g) are the chromatic colors of the pixel as defined earlier. To reduce noise effect, the color filtering result may be further processed by a morphological filter.

2.2. A Statistics-based method for estimating face position and size

Based on the result from skin color filtering, our algorithm constructs two 1D histograms by projecting the filtering map along its x and y direction, respectively. In other

words, the color filtering scores of all the pixels in the input frame are summed up along the x and y direction to form two separate 1D histograms. The histograms, therefore, represent the spatial distributions of the skin pixels along the corresponding axes. Figure 2 illustrates an ideal skin color filtering map where there is only one face in the input image, and the corresponding projection histograms.

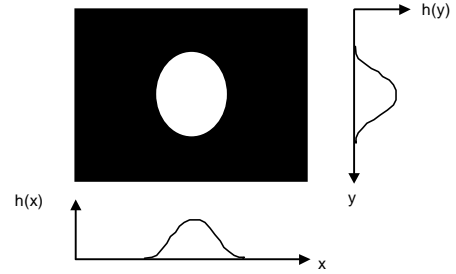


Figure 2. Two 1D histograms constructed by projecting the skin color filtering map along the x and y direction, respectively.

The instantaneous center position and size of a face in the image can be estimated based on statistical measurements derived from the two 1D projection histograms. For example, a simple method estimates the center position and size of a dominant face in an input image using the sample means and standard deviations of the distributions. More specifically, let $h_x(i)$, $i = 0, 1, \dots$, and $h_y(i)$, $i = 0, 1, \dots$, denote the elements in the projection histograms along the x and y direction, respectively. Then the face center position (x_c, y_c) and face width and height (w, h) may be estimated as:

$$x_c = \frac{\sum_i x_i h_x(i)}{\sum_i h_x(i)}, \quad y_c = \frac{\sum_i y_i h_y(i)}{\sum_i h_y(i)},$$

$$w = \alpha \left[\frac{\sum_i (x_i - \mu_x)^2 h_x(i)}{\sum_i h_x(i)} \right]^{1/2}, \quad h = \beta \left[\frac{\sum_i (y_i - \mu_y)^2 h_y(i)}{\sum_i h_y(i)} \right]^{1/2},$$

where α and β are constant scaling factors.

However, the face center position and size derived from the sample means and standard deviations may be biased in the cases where other faces and/or skin-color-like objects appear in the scene. It is therefore necessary to develop a more robust procedure to address this problem. In this paper, we propose to use robust statistical estimation routines to achieve robust measurements for face center position and size [7]. More specifically, the center position of a dominant face in an input image is estimated based on the robust (trimmed) means of the two 1D projection histograms in the x and y directions. The

routine for estimating the center position in either x or y direction is as follows. Figure 3 illustrates such a process.

- Step 1. Compute sample mean μ and sample standard deviation σ based on all the samples of the distribution.
- Step 2. Let $\mu_t(0) = \mu$ and $\delta = \max(a * \sigma, b * \text{sample-space-width})$ where a and b are scaling factors, e.g., $a = 1.0$ and $b = 0.2$, and sample-space-width is the image-width and image-height in the x and y direction, respectively.
- Step 3. Compute trimmed mean $\mu_t(k+1)$ based on the samples within the interval $[\mu_t(k) - \delta, \mu_t(k) + \delta]$.
- Step 4. Repeat Step 3 until $|\mu_t(k+1) - \mu_t(k)| < \varepsilon$ where ε is tolerance, e.g., $\varepsilon = 1.0$. Denote the converged mean as μ^* .
- Step 5. Set center-position = μ^* .

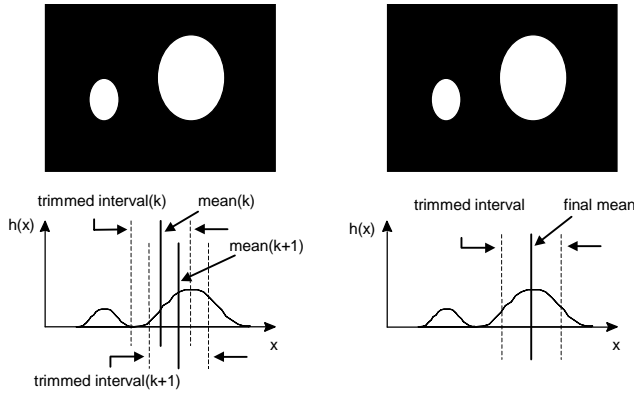


Figure 3. Robust mean estimation for locating the center position of a dominant face.

In addition to the robust estimation of face center position, we propose the following routine for robust estimation of face size. The method first re-projects the color filtering result in a neighborhood of the located center. It then derives the face size based on the robust(trimmed) standard deviation. Given the robust mean μ^* and δ obtained from the above robust estimation routine for center, the routine for estimation the size in either x or y direction is as follows.

- Step 1. Construct a clipped projection histogram \mathbf{H}^{clip} by projecting the color filtering map within the range $[\mu_{opp}^* - \Delta, \mu_{opp}^* + \Delta]$ in the opposite direction, where μ_{opp}^* is the robust mean in the opposite direction and Δ determines the number of samples used in the calculation.
- Step 2. Based on \mathbf{H}^{clip} , compute the trimmed standard deviation σ_t based on the samples within the interval $[\mu^* - \delta, \mu^* + \delta]$.

Step 3. If $h^{clip}(\mu^* + d * \sigma_t) \geq g * h^{clip}(\mu^*)$ or $h(\mu^* - d * \sigma_t) \geq g * h^{clip}(\mu^*)$ where, e.g., $d = 1.0$ and $g = 0.4$, then increase σ_t until the condition is no longer true.

Step 4. Set size = $c * \sigma_t$ where c is a scaling factor, e.g., $c = 2.0$.

2.3. Tracking face position and size using linear Kalman filter and nonlinear filter

In our face tracking algorithm, the estimated instantaneous face center position (x_c, y_c) and face size (w, h) are fed into a linear Kalman filter followed by a simple nonlinear filter. The Kalman filter is used to smooth the temporal trajectories of the face center position (x_c, y_c) and size (w, h) . It can also be used to predict the change of those quantities. The nonlinear filter is used to completely remove jitter due to image noise and lighting fluctuation. We model the temporal changes of face position (x_c, y_c) and size (w, h) as four independent piecewise-constant 2D translations within the image plane. Let $\mathbf{x}(t)$ denote the true four-dimensional velocity vector at time t , which is to be estimated. The system model for tracking is:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{x}(t+1) &= \mathbf{F}(t)\mathbf{x}(t) + \mathbf{w}(t), \\ \mathbf{z}(t+1) &= \mathbf{H}(t+1)\mathbf{x}(t+1) + \mathbf{v}(t+1), \end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbf{z}(t)$ is the observed instantaneous velocity vector, $\mathbf{w}(t)$, $\mathbf{v}(t)$ are white noise, and $\mathbf{F}(t) \equiv \mathbf{I}$, $\mathbf{H}(t) \equiv \mathbf{I}$ for piece-wise constant motion. The Kalman predictor is:

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{\mathbf{x}}(t+1|t) &= \mathbf{F}(t)\hat{\mathbf{x}}(t|t), \quad \hat{\mathbf{x}}(0|0) = 0, \\ \hat{\mathbf{z}}(t+1|t) &= \mathbf{H}(t+1)\hat{\mathbf{x}}(t+1|t). \end{aligned}$$

The Kalman corrector is:

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{\mathbf{x}}(t+1|t+1) &= \hat{\mathbf{x}}(t+1|t) + \mathbf{K}(t+1)\Delta\mathbf{z}(t+1|t), \\ \Delta\mathbf{z}(t+1|t) &= \mathbf{z}(t+1) - \hat{\mathbf{z}}(t+1|t), \end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbf{K}(t+1)$ is the Kalman gain. The Kalman gain is computed as:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{K}(t+1) &= \mathbf{P}(t+1|t)\mathbf{H}^T(t+1)[\mathbf{H}(t+1)\mathbf{P}(t+1|t)\mathbf{H}^T(t+1) \\ &\quad + \mathbf{R}(t+1)]^{-1}. \end{aligned}$$

The covariances are updated as:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{P}(t+1|t) &= \mathbf{F}(t)\mathbf{P}(t|t)\mathbf{F}^T(t) + \mathbf{Q}(t), \quad \mathbf{P}(0|0) = \mathbf{P}_0, \\ \mathbf{P}(t+1|t+1) &= [\mathbf{I} - \mathbf{K}(t+1)\mathbf{H}(t+1)]\mathbf{P}(t+1|t), \end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbf{Q}(t) = E[\mathbf{w}(t)\mathbf{w}^T(t)]$, $\mathbf{R}(t) = E[\mathbf{v}(t)\mathbf{v}^T(t)]$ and $\mathbf{P}_0 = E[\mathbf{x}(0)\mathbf{x}^T(0)]$.

To completely remove jitter, the output of the Kalman filter is further fed into a simple nonlinear filter. The nonlinear filter zeros out any position and size changes of the tracked face which are smaller in magnitude than some prescribed thresholds. More specifically, for the estimated change of each of the four tracked quantities (x_c , y_c) and (w , h), the jitter removing filter is defined as:

$$f_{JR}(\hat{x}) = \begin{cases} \hat{x} & \text{if } \hat{x} > \lambda \\ 0 & \text{else} \end{cases}$$

where λ is a prescribed threshold.

3. Experiments

We have implemented the proposed face tracking algorithm on Sun workstations and on PCs. The resulting face tracking systems have then been tested in different locations with various backgrounds and lighting conditions on a large number of people (150+) with a wide range of skin tones. The systems have consistently provided performance which satisfies the requirements listed in the beginning of this paper. Figure 4 shows an example of the results in each step employed in our face tracking algorithm.

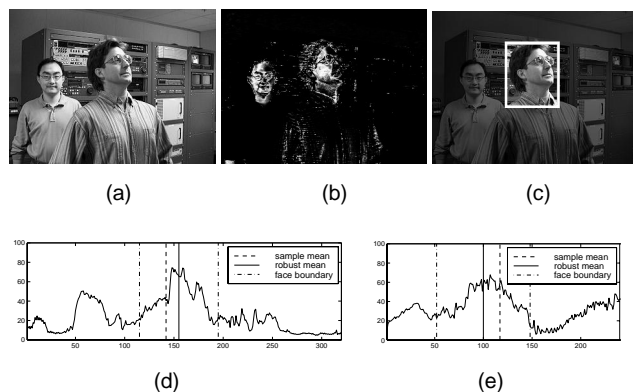


Figure 4. An example of the results in each step of the proposed face tracking algorithm. (a) Input image. (b) Skin color filtering result. (c) Tracked dominant face. (d) Projection histogram in the x direction and the estimated face center (robust mean) and face boundary. (e) Projection histogram in the y direction and the estimated face center (robust mean) and face boundary.

The proposed face tracking algorithm requires a very small amount of memory and a relatively small amount of computation. Its essential memory consumption is under 2K and 3K bytes for frame resolutions of 160×120 pixels and 320×240 pixels, respectively. Its computational cost is (34,000 additions + 20,000 multiplications) and (135,000 additions + 78,000 multiplications) per frame for frame resolutions of 160×120 pixels and 320×240 pixels, respectively. The actual frame rate of our system on a

168MHz Sun workstation or a 200Mhz PC is 30 and 20 frames per second for frame resolutions of 160×120 pixels and 320×240 pixels, respectively.

4. Discussion

One unique feature of the proposed algorithm is that it constructs two 1D histograms by projecting the color filtering results in two orthogonal directions. The projection histograms represent the spatial distributions of the skin pixels along the corresponding directions. The advantage of constructing such projection histograms is that it reduces the computational complexity of locating a face from a 2D problem to two 1D problems. It further allows robust statistical estimation routines to be applied to the two 1D distributions.

Because the proposed algorithm estimates the instantaneous location of a tracked face at every frame, it locks on a face for as long as the face is in the scene. The algorithm is also able to resume tracking of a face even when the face exits and re-enters the scene from a different location. Comparing with the method which detects the largest connected region, the proposed method has the following advantages: 1) computationally simpler; 2) no need for morphological filtering on the skin color filtering results; and 3) more robust against cracks or gaps within the face regions in the skin color filtering results.

Our immediate future work is to create a set of quantitative measures to evaluate the performance of the proposed face tracking algorithm.

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