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An Efficient Approach for the Detection of New Vessels in Diabetic Retinopathy Images

B. Ramasubramanian, G. Anitha

Abstract*— Diabetic Retinopathy is a major cause of blindness. It is mainly due to the development of abnormal new blood vessels in the retina. In this approach, we propose an efficient method to detect the abnormal new blood vessels. The retinal images are pre-processed using Contrast Limited Adaptive Histogram Equalization (CLAHE) and the blood vessels are enhanced by applying Morphological operation. Features based on shape, brightness, position and contrast are extracted from the enhanced image and classified as normal or abnormal using Support Vector Machine (SVM) Classifier. The performance was evaluated on DRIVE and MESSIDOR database and an accuracy of 96.5% was obtained.

Index Terms— **Diabetic Retinopathy (DR), Morphological operation, SVM Classifier, Moment Invariants.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Diabetic retinopathy is one of the major causes of legal blindness in the working age population around the world. The International Diabetes Federation reports that over 50 million people in India have this disease and it is growing rapidly (IDF 2009a) [2]. In [5], it is estimated that the number of people with diabetes is likely to increase to 366 million by the year 2030 from 171 million at the turn of century. In India, there will be 79 million people with diabetes by 2030 making it the diabetic capital of the world. Although DR is not a curable disease, Laser photocoagulation can prevent major vision loss. Therefore the timely diagnosis and referral for management of diabetic retinopathy can prevent 98% of severe visual loss.

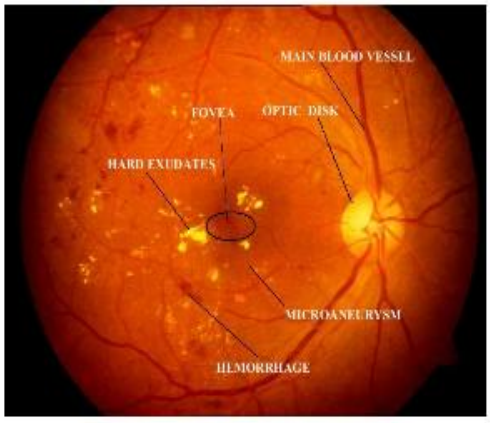

Fig. 1. A Typical Retinopathy Image

Diabetic Retinopathy is mainly caused by the changes in the blood vessels of the retina due to increased blood glucose level. People with diabetic retinopathy, blood vessels may swell, leak fluid, abnormal new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina. Digital Color fundus images are widely used by ophthalmologists for diagnosing Diabetic Retinopathy. DR also causes numerous abnormalities like microaneurysm, hemorrhages, cotton wool spot,, neo-vascularization and in later stages, retinal detachment. Fig.1 shows a typical retinal image labeled with feature components of Diabetic Retinopathy. Microaneurysms are small saccular pouches caused by local distension of capillary walls and appear as small red dots. This may also lead to big blood clots called hemorrhages. Hard exudates are yellow lipid deposits which appear as bright yellow lesions. The bright circular region from the blood vessels emanate is called the optic disk. Macula is the centre portion of the retina and has photoreceptors called cons that are highly sensitive to color and responsible for perceiving fine details. It is situated at the posterior pole temporal to the optic disk. The fovea defines the centre of the macula and is the region of highest visual acuity.

II. STATE OF ART

J.J.Staal *et al.*[1], described that the system is based on extraction of image ridges, which coincide approximately with vessel centerlines. The ridges are used to compose primitives in the form of line elements. With the line elements an image is partitioned into patches by assigning each image pixel to the closest line element. M.Mendonca *et al.*[9] proposed a method to extract vessel centrelines, which are used as guidelines for the subsequent vessel filling phase. The outputs of four directional differential operators are processed in order to select connected sets of candidate points to be further classified as centreline pixels using vessel derived features. The final segmentation is obtained using an iterative region growing method that integrates the contents of several binary images resulting from vessel width dependent morphological filters. E.Ricci *et al.* [3], evaluated the average grey level along lines of fixed length passing through the target pixel at different orientations. Two segmentation methods, first uses the basic line detector whose response is threshold to obtain unsupervised pixel classification. As a further development, it employs two orthogonal line detectors along with the grey level of the target pixel to construct a feature vector for supervised classification using a support vector machine. In the method presented in [13], blood vessel-like objects were extracted by using Laplacian operator and noisy objects were pruned according to centerlines, detected by means of the normalized gradient vector field. Martinez *et al.* [12], proposed a method based upon multiscale feature extraction. The local maxima over scales of the gradient magnitude and

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the maximum principal curvature of the Hessian tensor were used in a multiple pass region growing procedure. Perfetti and Ricci [3] used a support vector machine (SVM) for pixel classification as vessel or non-vessel. They used two orthogonal line detectors along with the y-level of the target pixel to construct the feature vector. A back propagation multilayer Neural Network for vascular tree segmentation is proposed by Gardener et al [19]. After Histogram Equalization, smoothing and edge detection, the image was divided into 20X20 pixels squares. The Neural Network was then fed with the values of these pixel windows for classifying each pixel into vessels or not. Niemeyer et al [20] implemented a K-nearest neighbor (kNN) classifier. The feature vector was constructed with the Gaussian and its derivatives up to order 2 at 5 different scales, augmented with the gray level from the Green channel of the original image.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Image Acquisition

To evaluate the performance of this method, the digital retinal images were acquired using Topcon TRC-50 EX non-mydriatic camera with a 50˚ field of view at Aravind Eye hospital, Coimbatore. Also, the proposed algorithm were tested and evaluated on DRIVE and MESSIDOR databases. The image set contains both normal and abnormal (pathological) cases.

B. Pre-processing

Pre-processing stage equalizes the uneven illumination associated with fundus images and also removes the noise present in the image. Color fundus images often show important lighting variations, poor contrast and noise. In order to detect the abnormalities associated with fundus images, a pre-processing comprising the following steps is applied: 1) Green Component Extraction. 2) Median Filtering 3) Contrast Enhancement. 4) Blood Vessel Enhancement using Morphological operation.

1) ***Green Component Extraction***: The blood vessels usually have lower reflectance compared with the background retina, the green color plane was used in the analysis and it shows the best contrast between the vessels and the background retina.

2**) *Median Filtering*:** To reduce the distortions due to media decay (e.g. astigmatic blur, defocusing, color shift, uneven magnification, scratches) the image of fig was pre-processed by 5x5 median filters. The pre-processed image is shown in Fig. 2(a).

3) ***Contrast enhancement*:** Fundus images often contain background intensity variation due to non-uniform illumination. Consequently, background pixels may have different intensity for the same image. To normalize and to enhance the contrast of an image, Contrast Limited Adaptive Histogram Equalization (CLAHE) is used. The contrast enhanced image is shown in Fig. 2(b).

4) ***Blood Vessel Enhancement Using Morphological Operation*:** This step generates a blood vessel enhanced image using Top-hat and Bottom-hat transforms, which proves to be more suitable for the classification of Blood vessels. Top-hat and Bottom-hat transform [7] is an operation that extracts small elements and details from given images. To enhance the blood vessels, the original image is added with the top-hat transformed image and the result is subtracted with the bottom-hat transformed.

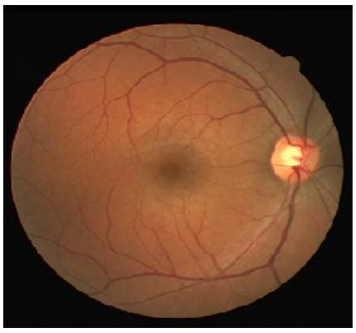

Fig. 2. (a) Input image

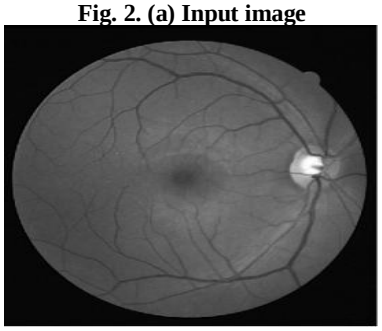

Fig. 2. (b) Green component of image

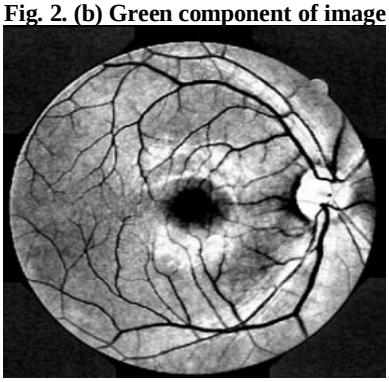

Fig. 2. (c) Contrast Enhanced image

C.*Feature Extraction*

The process of defining a set of features, or image characteristics, which will most efficiently or more meaningfully represent the information that is important for analysis and classification. In our approach, features based on shape, position, contrast and brightness are calculated.

The features are discussed below:

1) Gradient: The mean gradient magnitude along the segment is calculated using Gauss Gradient Operator.

2) Gradient variation: The standard deviation of the Gauss gradient along the segment. This feature is based on the observation that abnormal vessels are less homogeneous with more contrast variation than normal vessels.

3) Gray Level: The normalized mean segment grey level

$$g_{norm} = \frac{1}{G_{max} - G_{\min}} \left[\left(\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} g_i \right) \right] - G_{\min} \quad (6)$$

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Where g_i is the grey level of the i^{th} segment pixel. G_{max} and G_{min} are the maximum and minimum grey level values in the original image, respectively.

4) ***Gray Level Coefficient Of Variation:*** This measure was based on the observation that new vessels appear less homogeneous than normal vessels. It is calculated as the ratio of the mean to the standard deviation of the segment grey level values.

5) ***Moment Invariants- Based Features:*** The vasculature in retinal images is known to be piecewise linear and can be approximated by many connected line segments. For detecting these quasi-linear shapes, which are not equally wide and may be oriented at any angle, shape descriptors invariant to translation, rotation may play an important role. Moment invariants proposed by Hu provide an attractive solution and are included in the feature vector. They are computed as follows. Given a pixel (x,y) of vessel enhanced image, a sub-image is generated by taking the region defined by $S^{17}_{x,y..}$

Where $S^{17}_{x,y}$ stands for the set of co-ordinates in a 17x17 sized square window centered on the middle of a wide vessels. The sub image includes an approximately equal number of vessels and nonvessels. The 2-D moment of order (p+q) is defined as

$$m_{pq} = \sum_i \sum_j i^p j^q I_{VE}^{S^{17}_{x,y}}(i,j) \quad p,q = 0,1,2,\ldots.$$

(7)

Where summations are over the values of the spatial coordinates i and j spanning the sub image. The corresponding central moment is defined as

$$\mu_{pq} = \sum_i \sum_j (i-\bar{\imath})^p (j-\bar{\jmath})^q I_{VE}^{S^{17}_{x,y}}(i,j)$$

(8)

Where

$$\bar{\imath} = \frac{m_{10}}{m_{00}}, \qquad \bar{\jmath} = \frac{m_{01}}{m_{00}}$$

(9)

are the coordinates of the centre of gravity of the subimage. The normalized central moment of order (p+q) is defined as

$$\eta_{pq} = \frac{\mu_{pq}}{(\mu_{00})^{\gamma}} \qquad p,q = 0,1,2,\ldots..$$

(10)

Where

$$\gamma = \frac{p+q}{2} + 1: \qquad (p+q) = 2,3,\ldots..$$

(11)

A set of seven moment invariants under size, translation, and rotation, known as Hu moment invariants, can be derived from combinations of regular moments. Among them, our tests have revealed that only those defined by

$$\Phi_1 = \eta_{20} + \eta_{02}$$

(12)

$$\Phi_2 = (\eta_{20} + \eta_{02})^2 + 4\,\eta_{11}^2$$

(13)

Constitute the combination providing optimal performance in terms of average accuracy. The following descriptors were considered to be the part of the feature vector of a pixel located at (x,y).

$$f_6(x,y) = |\log(\emptyset_1)|$$

(14)

$$f_7(x,y) = |\log(\emptyset_2)|$$

(15)

6) ***Tortuosity:*** Tortuosity is the twisted part or bent of blood vessels and estimated using arc-chord ratio. It is the ratio between lengths of the curve to the distance between ends of it.

D. ***Classification***

The dataset obtained above are classified into normal or abnormal blood vessels using Support Vector Machine (SVM) Classifier. SVM classifier operate on the premises that classification of unknown instances can be done by relating the unknown to the known according to some distance or similarity function. To classify an unknown pixel x_q, choose the class of the nearest example in the training set as measured by a distance metric. In our experiments, a set of 50 images were selected, which includes 30 normal and 20 abnormal. For supervised classifiers, two sets are required; one for training and the other for testing. The training set contains 20 normal and 10 abnormal images. Feature parameters calculated above are given as input for SVM classifier. The testing set contains 20 images to test the performance of the classifier.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this approach, we proposed a method to automatically extract the blood vessels from fundus images. The color fundus images are enhanced using Morphological operation.. Features based on shape, contrast, brightness are calculated and classified as normal or abnormal blood vessels using Support Vector Machine (SVM) Classifier. The proposed method performs best by segmenting even smaller blood vessels. All the work are done using MATLAB version 7.9. Performance is verified by evaluating True Positive (TP, a number of abnormal pixels correctly detected), False Positive (FP, a number of normal pixels which are detected wrongly as abnormal pixels), False Negative (FN, number of abnormal pixels that are not detected), True Negative (TN, a number of normal pixels which are correctly identified as normal pixels). From these quantities, Sensitivity, Specificity are chosen as measurement of accuracy and are calculated using the following equation.

$$Sensitivity = \frac{TP}{TP+FP}$$

(16)

$$Specificity = \frac{TN}{TN+FP}$$

(17)

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP+TN}{TP+TN+FN+FP}$$

(18)

Table I gives a comparative analysis of performance of our method with our research work. Our method appears promising as it can detect very smaller blood vessels. The

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method is tested on DRIVE and MESSIDOR database. Performance is also evaluated on real time fundus images obtained from Aravind Eye Hospital, Coimbatore.

Table I: Comparison of Our Method with Some Different Vessel Segmentation Method

Method	Accuracy
Mendonca	0.9442
Staal	0.9442
Niemeijer	0.9417
Zana	0.9377
Xu and Luo	0.9328
Our method	0.9653

V. CONCLUSION

The image processing of color fundus images has a significant role in the early diagnosis of Diabetic Retinopathy. In this paper, a novel method is presented for the detection of abnormal new blood vessels from the color fundus images. The color fundus images are subjected to pre-processing followed by blood vessel enhancement using Top hat and Bottom Hat Transform. Finally the images are classified as normal and abnormal by the use of Support Vector Machine (SVM) Classifier. Accuracy and robustness of the method have been evaluated on different databases. The overall sensitivity, specificity and accuracy were 96.25%, 89.65% and 96.53% respectively.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

B.Ramasubramanian received his B.E Degree from Syed Ammal Engineering College, Ramanathapuram, TamilNadu, India in 2008 and M. Tech Degree from B. S. Abdur Rahman University, Chennai, TamilNadu, India in 2012. He is currently an Assistant Professor in Syed Ammal Engineering College, Ramanathapuram. His Research area includes medical image processing, Digital Signal Processing and Machine Learning.

G. Anitha received her M. Tech Degree from B.S. Abdur Rahman University, Chennai, and TamilNadu, India in 2011. She is presently working as an Assistant Professor in Sri Shakthi Institute of Technology, Coimbatore. Her Research area includes medical image processing,, Antenna Design and Signal Processing.