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Enhancing Diagnostic Visualization of Ultrasound Images Using Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement

Deepak Kumar Gupta[1], Ranjeet Singh[2], Neha[3]

[1]*Assistant Professor in CSE Dept., IIMT University Meerut UP, India.*
[2]*Assistant Professor in CSE Dept., IIMT University Meerut UP, India.*
[3]*Assistant Professor in School of Comp. Science and Application, IIMT University Meerut UP, India.*

Abstract

Digital images play a vital role in various domains, serving as crucial sources of information. From medical science to transportation management, their applications are diverse and extensive. However, ensuring consistently high-quality images poses a significant challenge due to various acquisition factors. In this study, we address the issue of image enhancement, focusing on contrast enhancement techniques. While histogram equalization has been a popular choice, we introduce Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement (GACE) as an advanced method for improving image quality. Ultrasound imaging often suffers from low-quality images due to equipment limitations or improper setup. Such images pose challenges in interpretation and analysis. To tackle this, we propose utilizing GACE to enhance ultrasound images effectively. Unlike traditional methods, GACE offers adaptive contrast enhancement, which adjusts to the local characteristics of the image. This approach ensures superior results, especially in scenarios where traditional methods may fall short. Through our research, we demonstrate the efficacy of GACE in enhancing ultrasound images, providing clearer and more interpretable results. Additionally, we conduct a comparative analysis with existing techniques, highlighting the advantages of GACE in image processing. By leveraging advanced techniques like GACE, we aim to not only improve image quality but also enhance the capabilities of operators, radiologists, and other stakeholders in various domains reliant on digital image data.

Keywords; Image Processing, contrast-enhanced ultrasound, interventional procedures, ultrasound guidance, utility, GACE, Deep Learning Technique, CNN.

INTRODUCTION

Ultrasound images are captured in real-time, making it imperative to employ sophisticated machinery or skilled ultrasonologists for optimal image quality. Digital images are constructed from pixels, with each pixel representing a distinct colour or greyscale value. They find widespread utility in various applications, including websites, social media, digital art, and scientific medical research.

The acquisition of a digital image refers to the process of capturing or obtaining an image through a digital device. It's worth nothing that digital devices have inherent limitations in terms of performance. Similarly, ultrasound devices, which operate in real-time based on sound waves, can yield slightly varying results due to differences in patient characteristics and device operations. Nonetheless, the overarching goal remains achieving precision and accuracy in image acquisition.

There can be several reasons for low quality ultrasound images

Inadequate Transducer Positioning: Incorrect placement of the ultrasound probe can result in suboptimal image quality.

Patient Body Habitus: Obesity or excessive body tissues can make it challenging to obtain clear images.

Motion Artifacts: If the patient or the operator moves during the scan, it can lead to blurry images.

Acoustic Shadowing: Certain structures or tissues may block the sound waves, creating shadowing and obscuring nearby structures.

Sound Waves Attenuation: Sound waves may lose their strength as they travel through different tissues, leading to reduced image resolution.

Equipment Limitations: Older or malfunctioning ultrasound machines may produce lower quality images.

Operator Experience: Inexperienced operators may struggle to optimize settings and obtain high-quality images.

Patient Factors: Conditions like bowel gas and surgical dressings can interfere with the ultrasound waves and affect image quality.

Low Contrast Images: Low contrast images typically exhibit minimal differences between the lightest and darkest areas, resulting in a dull or washed-out appearance. Improving contrast, as discussed in reference [12], can render finer details more visible and enhance overall image quality, as noted in reference [1].

Ultrasound Imaging: In ultrasound scans, the grayscale levels among various structures or tissues often display minimal variations, leading to a lack of contrast that makes distinguishing between different structures challenging. This can diminish image visibility and clarity. Enhancing the contrast of ultrasound images through various techniques and image processing tools, as described in reference [4], can significantly improve the visualization of internal structures, aiding in more accurate diagnosis and treatment planning.

Image Enhancement Techniques: Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement (GACE) represents a cutting-edge image enhancement technique designed to address the complexities of contrast enhancement in digital images. Unlike traditional methods, GACE incorporates adaptive algorithms that intelligently analyse local image characteristics, allowing for precise adjustments tailored to each pixel's context. By guiding the enhancement process based on the image's inherent features, GACE ensures optimal contrast enhancement while preserving important details and avoiding artifacts. This approach not only improves the overall visual quality of images but also enhances their interpretability and utility across various applications. GACE stands at the forefront of image enhancement techniques, offering a sophisticated solution for enhancing digital images in fields ranging from medical imaging to remote sensing and beyond.

Advantages of GACE: Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement (GACE) offers several distinct advantages within the realm of image processing systems. Firstly, its adaptive nature allows it to intelligently adjust contrast levels based on the local characteristics of each image, resulting in more natural and visually pleasing enhancements. Unlike traditional techniques, which may apply uniform adjustments across the entire image, GACE preserves important details while enhancing visibility, leading to superior overall image quality. Additionally, GACE's guided approach ensures that enhancement decisions are informed by the specific content of the image, leading to more accurate and contextually relevant results. This not only improves the interpretability of images but also enhances their utility across various applications, from medical diagnosis to satellite imagery analysis. Moreover, GACE is highly versatile and can be seamlessly integrated into existing image processing pipelines, making it a valuable tool for researchers, practitioners, and developers seeking to enhance the capabilities of their systems. Overall, GACE represents a significant advancement in image processing technology, offering enhanced performance and superior results compared to traditional enhancement techniques.

Optimal Image Enhancement: Determining the optimal image enhancement in Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement (GACE) involves finding the balance between improving image contrast while preserving important details and minimizing artifacts. This balance can vary depending on the specific characteristics of the image and the requirements of the application.

In GACE, the optimal enhancement is typically achieved through adaptive adjustment of contrast levels based on the local characteristics of the image. This means that areas with different textures, brightness levels, or structures may require different levels of enhancement to achieve the best visual result.

One common strategy for optimizing GACE is to experiment with different parameter settings, such as the strength of the guidance filter, the size of the local neighbourhoods used for contrast adjustment, and the degree of smoothing applied to the final enhanced image. These parameters can be adjusted based on the specific characteristics of the image dataset and the desired outcome.

Additionally, subjective evaluation by human observers can provide valuable feedback on the perceived quality of the enhanced images. This feedback can help fine-tune the parameters of GACE to achieve the best balance between contrast enhancement and preservation of image details.

Overall, the optimal image enhancement in GACE involves a combination of adaptive contrast adjustment, parameter optimization, and subjective evaluation to achieve the best visual result for a given image or set of images.

ALGORITHM FOR MEDICAL IMAGE ENHANCEMENT USING GUIDED ADAPTIVE CONTRAST ENHANCEMENT (GACE)

Input: Medical image (in grayscale or color)

Output: Enhanced medical image

Parameters

Guidance filter strength (α): Controls the strength of the guidance filter. Higher values lead to more aggressive contrast enhancement but may introduce artifacts. [2]

Neighbourhood size (N): Specifies the size of the local neighbourhood used for contrast adjustment. Larger neighborhoods can capture more image details but may increase computation time. [3]

Smoothing factor (β): Determines the degree of smoothing applied to the final enhanced image. Higher values result in smoother output images but may blur fine details. [4]

Algorithm Steps

Preprocessing

If the input image is in color, convert it to grayscale.

Optionally, apply noise reduction techniques such as Gaussian smoothing to improve image quality. [5]

Initialization

Initialize an empty array for the enhanced image.

Compute Gradient Magnitude

Compute the gradient magnitude of the input image using Sobel or Prewitt operators to highlight edges and image features. [7]

Compute Guidance Image

Apply a Gaussian filter to the gradient magnitude image to generate a guidance image that emphasizes image structures. [9]

Contrast Adjustment

For each pixel in the input image:

Define a local neighbourhood around the pixel with size Compute the mean intensity of the pixels in the neighbourhood. Calculate the contrast adjustment factor based on the difference between the pixel intensity and the local mean. Adjust the pixel intensity using the contrast adjustment factor and the guidance image.[4]Clamp the pixel intensity to ensure it remains within the valid intensity range.

Smoothing

Apply bilateral or Gaussian smoothing to the enhanced image to reduce noise and artifacts introduced during contrast adjustment. Use the smoothing factor β to control the degree of smoothing. [14]

Output Enhancement

Optionally, perform additional post-processing techniques such as histogram equalization or gamma correction to further enhance image contrast and appearance. [15]

Output Generation

Generate the final enhanced medical image by combining the original image with the smoothed version obtained in the previous step. [11]

Parameter Optimization

Experiment with different values of α, N, and β to find the optimal settings for the specific medical imaging application.

Conduct subjective evaluations and quantitative analyses (e.g., using image quality metrics) to assess the visual quality and fidelity of the enhanced images.

Iterate the optimization process until satisfactory results are achieved. [16]

Conclusion

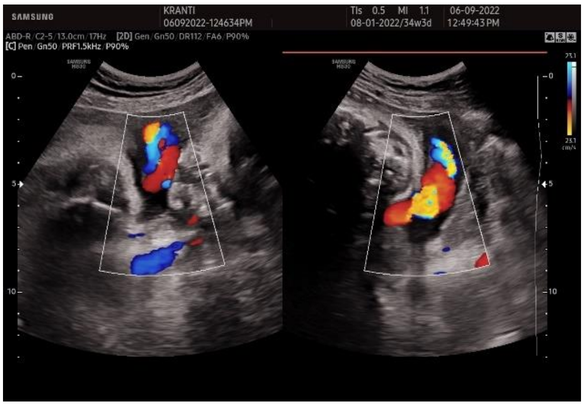
GACE offers a versatile and effective approach for enhancing medical images by adaptively adjusting contrast while preserving important image details. By carefully tuning the algorithm parameters, researchers can optimize the enhancement process to achieve superior visual quality and diagnostic accuracy in medical imaging applications.

METHODOLOGY

This entire process is grounded in image processing. Ultrasound images are typically captured by a radiologist. [16] During an ultrasound procedure, multiple images are acquired as needed. These images play a pivotal role in enabling medical professionals to assess the condition depicted. It is imperative that the images are of high quality and clarity, as this significantly influences the diagnostic accuracy. Here we are showing example and results of an Ultrasound Image of a patient.

Input Images and Output Images are as follows

Case 1 Input Original Image

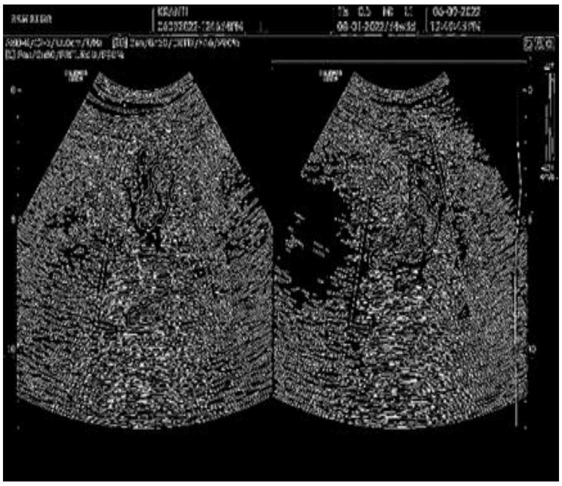


Case 1 GACE applied Output Image

Now we find a general view difference by detecting edges in each image

Case 1 Edges in Original Image

Case 1 Edges in Output Image

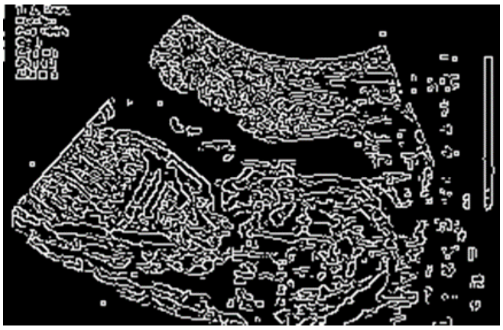


Case 2 Another Example Input Image

Case 2 Output Of given Image

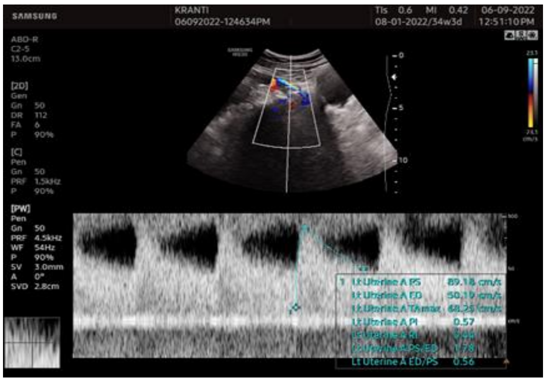
Case 2 Edges of Input Image

Case 2 Edges of Output Image

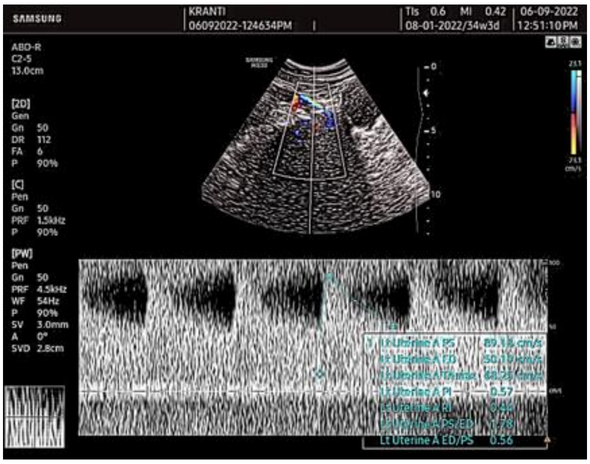


After changing the values of Radius and Epsilon of Image

Case 3 Original Input Image

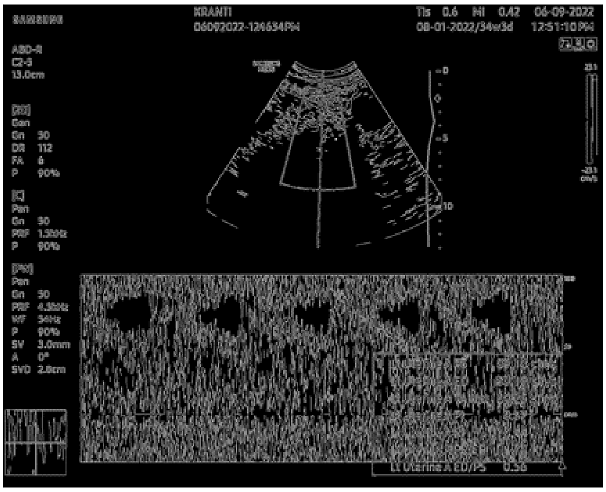


Case 3 Output Image

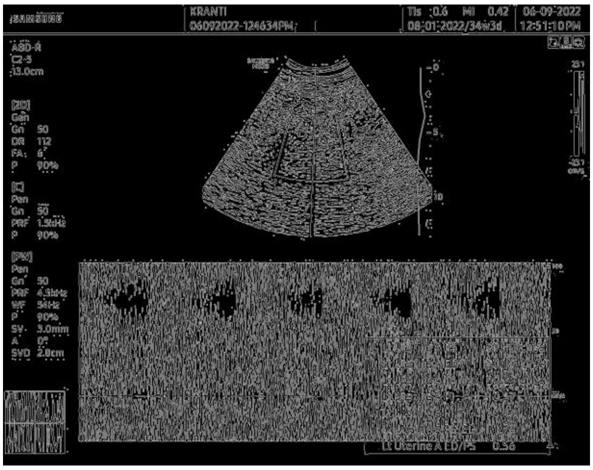


Now we find a general view difference by detecting edges in each image

Case 3: Edges of Input Image



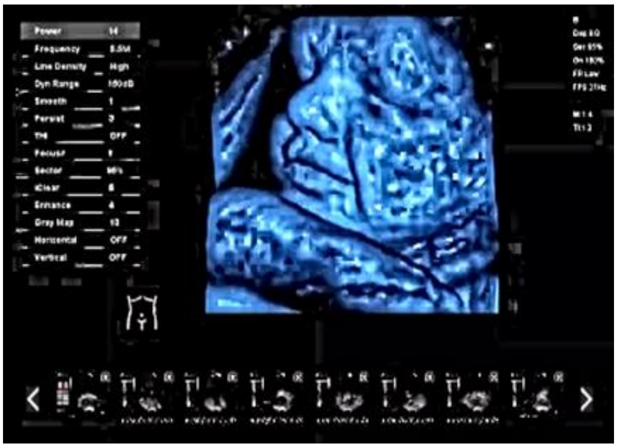
Case 3 Edges of Output Image



After changing the values of Radius and Epsilon of new Image

Case 4 Original Input Image

Case 4 Output Image



Now we find a general view difference by detecting edges in each image

Case 4 Edges of Input Image

Case 4 Edges of Output Image

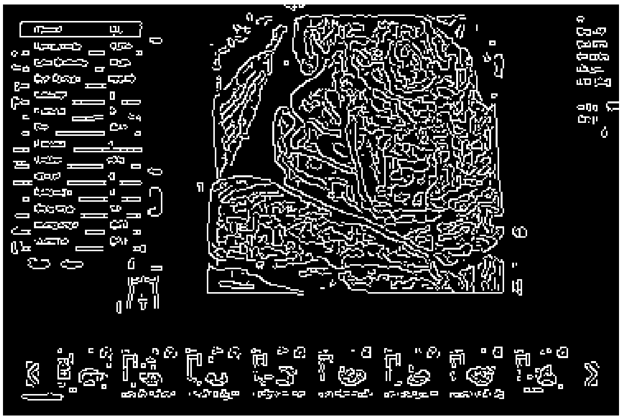


Table 1 Enhanced clarity leads to more informative results compared to less clear

Comparison of Different images with Original image					
	Radius	Epsilon	SNR	PSNR	SSIM
GACE case 1	15	0.1	5.97435	30.296	0.7474
GACE case 2 Edges	15	0.1	3.99629	28.812	0.5837
GACE case 3	10	0.05	1.83172	28.32	0.4848
GACE case 4 Edges	10	0.05	1.94172	28.321	0.3747

By the result of comparison of images and view of SSN (Soft Shadow Network), PSNR (peak signal-to-noise ratio), and SSIM (Structural Similarity Index), we can say that the images of Radius 15 and Epsilon 0.1 will be of high quality for both the doctor and the patient. Therefore, the results of both these images are confirming this fact.

CONCLUSION

The present study has successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the Guided Adaptive Contrast Enhancement (GACE) technique in enhancing the quality of ultrasound images. Our findings reveal that GACE produces ultrasound images with significantly improved quantitative metric features compared to the original images. This highlights the potential of GACE to address the challenges associated with low-quality ultrasound imaging, thereby enhancing diagnostic accuracy and clinical utility. Moving forward, there is considerable scope for further advancements in image enhancement by leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as deep learning techniques, including convolutional neural networks (CNNs). Integration of CNNs and other filtering techniques with GACE holds promise for identifying and capturing subtle image features, thereby unlocking new possibilities for enhancing ultrasound imaging in clinical practice and research.

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