Improving Text Extraction Accuracy with Image Preprocessing

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***Abstract* - Digitization allows us to immortalize a physical entity by creating a digital representation of it on our devices. It saves us time in manually sifting through physical storage units such as albums and notebooks and provides us with programs to manage and secure our data. We often take images of Receipts or Invoices, Identity Cards, and nutritional labels to save a copy of their details. This can be taken a step further by automating the process of information extraction and documentation.**

Advancements in computer vision have provided us with the expertise to create tools for text detection and extraction. But it is still an ongoing challenge because documents with unstructured layouts, poor image quality, and noise around the text yield very low accuracy in text extraction results. Conquering this challenge would require the image to be highly enhanced through preprocessing techniques such as Brightness Correction, Contour Detection, Skewness Correction, Morphology, and Binarization. A mechanism made from the best combination of image preprocessing techniques prior to text extraction can improve text accuracy to a large extent.

Keywords – Computer Vision, Image preprocessing, Text extraction.

I. Introduction

In today's day and age, an increase in demand for digitization has fueled a massive growth in technology and communication and the use of printed materials such as books and papers has significantly reduced. Also, it is easier to organize digitized data and analyze them for various purposed with many advanced techniques like artificial intelligence etc. To translate physical and handwritten documents into digital copies, optical character recognition (OCR) has come into the sight of researchers and since its first advent it has undergone significant changes in methodology and made considerable progress towards its goal.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is used to recognize printed text in paper documents, handwritten characters, and text elements in the physical environment, such as license plate numbers, street signs, and street numbers.

Historical OCR engines have their accuracy lying between 70-80% for a high-quality image at page level. That means in a page of 100 words 70-80 words are accurate. This will lead to significant inaccuracies if used on a large volume of sensitive documents.

This paper summarizes the research in OCR. The paper is structured as follows: Section II describes the overall architecture of text recognition system and provide a brief overview of the existing work carried out in the field of image preprocessing and text recognition.

II. Literature Review

Many researchers had contributed and proposed their concepts on text extraction from an image and retrieving the information. Each solution has its own pros and cons that are discussed in this subsection.

Rishabh Mittal and Anchal Garg [1] introduced and explained the concept of OCR and the process of extraction by grouping it into majorly six steps: image acquisition, pre-processing, segmentation, feature extraction, classification, and post-processing. The paper reveals that the modern OCR system's preprocessing pipeline is restricted to spatial image filtering, thresholding, noise-removal, and skew detection/correction. Improving components like Scan goals, filtered picture quality, type of printer utilized whether inkjet or laser, the nature of the paper, phonetic complexities, the lopsided brightening, and watermarks can impact the precision of OCR. Hence work can be done on improving the precision of OCR.

Sanjeev Kumar, Mahika Sharma, Kritika Handa, Rishika Jaiswal [2] proposed a novel adaptive algorithm to improve ocr accuracy with advanced image preprocessing using machine learning. Their focus was to reduce the noise of the image solely by scaling the original source image to around 300 DPI which has helped to eliminate the single biggest obstacle of the Tesseract, i.e., Tesseract's computation time of reading images with the highest character dimensions above 20 pixels. However, their algorithm does not cover images with uneven brightness, watermarks, or different fonts.

Sahana K Adyanthaya put forward a paper [3] that presents the various steps taken to recognize text from images. The steps addressed in this paper were Image Preprocessing, Segmentation, Feature Extraction and Classification. The author highlights that the noise present in an image has a major role to play in successful text recognition and that noise removal increases the probability of accurate text recognition and generates more 6 accurate outputs. The paper mentions that Gaussian filter and mean filter can be used for noise removal, that normalization should be done to ensure uniformity followed by binarization to convert the gray image into a binary image.

Naveen Sankaran and C.V Jawahar [4] proposed a neural network-based framework that operates based on BLSTM-Bidirectional Long Short-Term Memory that allows OCR to work at the word level. It leads to over 20% better results when compared to a regular OCR framework. It uses a method that does not require segmentation, that is one amongst the foremost common reasons for the error. Also, it found an over 9% decrease in character error compared to the more widely available OCR framework.

Work by S. Akopyan, O.V. Belyaeva, T.P. Plechov and D.Y. Turdakov [5] is based on a text extraction pipeline which is used to extract text from varied quality of images obtained from social media. Their work mainly focuses on dividing the input images into various classes and then preprocessing is done depending on the classes. This is followed by text recognition using the OCR engine. The dataset collected from social media is made use of in this work.

Dan Sporici, Elena Cușnir and Costin-Anton Boiangiu [6] underlined Tesseract 4.0 flaws, highly related to the segmentation procedure and proposed an adaptive image preprocessing step guided by a reinforcement learning model, which attempts to minimize the edit distance between the recognized text and the ground truth. This approach has boosted the character-level accuracy of Tesseract 4.0 from 0.134 to 0.616 and the F1 score from 0.163 to 0.729. The model adjusts samples with the purpose of maximizing the overall recognition efficiency without requiring external guidance or knowledge which has a direct benefit of including kernels, which can generate samples that might look unnatural. From a qualitative point of view, the changes are substantial yet not optimal since a reinforcement learning approach does not guarantee that local optimums will be avoided each time and hence the algorithm can get stuck on kernel configurations which will provide inferior results if not enough exploration is performed.

Dr. PL Chitra, and P Bhavani [7], in this paper have studied various images to remove unwanted noise and performed enhancement techniques such as contrast limited adaptive histogram equalization, Laplacian and Harr filtering, unsharp masking, sharpening, high boost filtering and color models then the Clustering algorithms are useful for data logically and extract pattern-analysis, grouping, decision-making, and machine-learning techniques and Segment the regions using binary, K-means and OTSU segmentation algorithm. It classifies the images with the help of SVM and K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) Classifier to produce good results for those images.

Anupriya Shrivastava, Amudha J.Deepa Gupta and Kshitij Sharma [8] in their work have developed a system based on Convolutional Neural Network and Long ShortTerm Memory. The developed model identifies the texts from images which are horizontal, curved or oriented style. The model has four components. The first component performs feature extraction at the low level. The second component uses a shared convolution approach to extract high level features. Irrelevant features are ignored by the third component. The fourth component predicts the character sequences.

K. Karthick, K.B. Ravindrakumar, R. Francis and S.Ilankannan [9] have discussed the various steps in text detection in detail highlighting the different techniques used for the same. They have also emphasized on handwritten text recognition which is one of the complex fields. From their study it has been found that best results can be had with reduced computation time, and it is possible to segment multilingual characters and enhance the character recognition rate.

Sai Abhishikth Ayyadevara, P N V Sai Ram Teja, Rajesh Kumar M [10], this paper deals with two different proposals of machine learning techniques. The first one was a new feature extraction technique, including the feature of three different existing feature extraction techniques. While the second one includes the analysis of the performance of three different neural networks for two different feature techniques-geometric and gradient. After doing all the survey, they concluded that the Convolutional neural network is most efficiently absorbed through the Levenberg-Marquardt algorithm.

Kukich[11] suggested using a n-gram dictionary or method based on the errors and returning the possible word to the dictionary using mathematical steps. These methods may reduce the total number of OCR errors in standard language names, but it is possible that the words may be correctly identified that are not in the dictionary of geographical names.

Yang Zhang and Hao Zhang HaoranLi [12] described in their paper, an information extraction pipeline used for event flyers. The major steps in the pipeline include image capture and upload, image preprocessing, text detection, OCR and NLP information extraction. The paper lists several situations where a raw image could cause inaccurate results. The OCR engine would assume the picture is taken from a perpendicular upright view, but images taken from a handheld camera could contain distortions. The illumination of the image not being uniform throughout and an image containing multiple blocks of text of different sizes and colors could also affect the output. The image preprocessing methods included were edge detection, geometric correction(transformation), and Binarization.

Lavanya Bhaskar and R Ranjit [13] discuss an event planner for the brochure images, that implements text extraction by convolution followed by MSER feature extraction and Stroke width method. The event planner then directly links the event text to the google calendar for scheduling the events. However, the algorithm is not tested for event information taken from handwritten images and complex font text present in the images.

Brijesh Kumar Y. Panchal, and Gaurang Chauhan [14] proposed an implementation on the Android Application to extract using Tesseract OCR in which the following concepts are used, which are Adaptive Thresholding, Connected Component, Fine Lines, and Recognize Word. Using this Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Technology. The Application generates text, which is printed on a clean, B/W or colorful background and then can be converted into a computer readable form ASCII. With the help of this Android

Application using Tesseract OCR, the system has two ways for Text Extraction. The first one is to capture a photo while the second one uploads an image from the gallery. After that the system can proceed as per the user requirement which portion of the image they want to crop or edit. After editing the picture, it converts into the text. This Android Application is for two languages, English and Hindi.

Salvador España-Boquera, Maria J. C. B., Jorge G. M., and Francisco Z. M. [15], this paper outlines the hybrid Hidden Markov Model (HMM) is used to conceive the unconstrained offline handwritten texts. The main characteristics of the recognition systems is to produce a new way in the form of preprocessing and recognition which are both based on ANNs. The preprocessing is used to clean the images and to enhance the non-uniform slant and slope correction. Whereas the recognition is used to estimate the emission probabilities.

K.Gaurav, Bhatia P. K. [16] , this paper deals with assorted pre-processing techniques used for handwritten recognition which consists of different images starting from a simple handwritten document and extending its radius to complex background and diverse image intensities. The pre-processing techniques that were included are contrast stretching, noise removal techniques, normalization, and segmentation, binarization, morphological processing techniques. They concluded that no technique for preprocessing can single handedly be used to produce an image. All the techniques go hand in hand. Even though after applying all the said techniques, the accuracy of the image is not up to the mark.

III. Methodology

A text recognition has gained a lot of prominence in recent years as it has entered into a large arena of applications, and it is a field which is driven by the need to preserve and have access to the information containing documents in an easier and quicker way. One of the convenient ways to transfer the information from the paper or books is to scan them which convert the information into an image thus preventing reuse of the scanned information in the form of a text. One of the popular techniques used for text recognition is Optical Character Recognition. It converts scanned images of text into editable format. The process of text recognition starts with capturing the image of the required document, preprocessing it to acquire the desired portion and then segmenting it to extract the text content present in it.

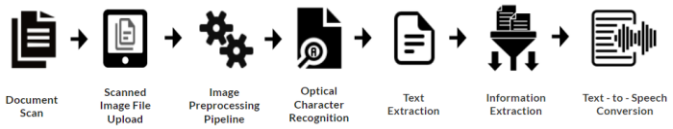

Figure 1: Steps towards text extraction

A. Document Scan and Upload

User scans their document and uploads it to the system interface. Documents include invoices, receipts, nutrition labels, book covers etc.

B. Image Preprocessing Pipeline

Scanned documents undergo the best combination of image preprocessing techniques for maximum image text enhancement. Image Preprocessing Techniques include

a. Lighting Correction

Lighting correction corrects light variation produced by surface relief or document curvature. When a thick book is scanned, the shadow of the binding will appear on the image. This technique allows obtaining light uniformity and eliminate such shadows, whether vertical or horizontal.

b. Contour Detection

Contours can be explained simply as a curve joining all the continuous points along the boundary, having the same color or intensity. The contours are a useful tool for shape analysis and object detection and recognition. For better accuracy, binary images are used.

c. Scaling of Image

Ensure that the images are scaled to the right size which usually is of at least 300 Dots Per Inch. Keeping DPI lower than 200 will give unclear and incomprehensible results while keeping the DPI above 600 will unnecessarily increase the size of the output file without improving the quality of the file. Thus, a DPI of 300 works best for this purpose.

d. Skewness Correction

When the optical axis of the camera is not perpendicular to the text plane, Perspective distortion occurs. Text boundaries lose rectangular shapes and characters distort, decreasing the performance of recognition models trained on undistorted samples.

e. Noise Removal

Noise can drastically reduce the overall quality of the OCR process. It can be present in the background or foreground and can result from poor scanning or the poor original quality of the data.

f. Binarization

This step converts a multicolored image (RGB) to a black and white image. There are several algorithms to convert a color image to monochrome image, ranging from simple thresholding to more sophisticated zonal analysis.

g. Contrast Correction

Low contrast can result in poor OCR. Increase the contrast and density before carrying out the OCR process. Increasing the contrast between the text/image and its background brings out more clarity in the output.

C. Text Extraction

The image goes through an Optical Character Recognition (OCR) engine that's been built to recognize printed text in paper documents, handwritten characters, and text elements in the image.

D. Information Extraction

Information Extraction involves extracting meaningful information from raw text data into a structured format.

E. Text-to-Speech Conversion

To assist the visually impaired, the extracted text will be converted into an audio file.

IV. Result

The word "data" is plural, not singular. In American English, periods and commas are within quotation marks, like "this period." A parenthetical statement at the end of a sentence is punctuated outside of the closing parenthesis (like this). (A parenthetical sentence is punctuated within the parentheses.) A graph within a graph is an "inset," not an "insert." The word alternatively is preferred to the word "alternately" (unless you mean something that alternates). Do not use the word "essentially" to mean "approximately" or "effectively." Be aware of the different meanings of the homophones "affect" and "effect," "complement" and "compliment," "discreet" and "discrete," "principal" and "principle." Do not confuse "imply" and "infer." The prefix "non" is not a word; it should be joined to the word it modifies, usually without a hyphen. There is no period after the "et" in the Latin abbreviation "et al." The abbreviation "i.e." means "that is," and the abbreviation "e.g." means "for example." An excellent style manual for science writers is [7].

Acknowledgment

The preferred spelling of the word "acknowledgment" in America is without an "e" after the "g." Try to avoid the stilted expression, "One of us (R. B. G.) thanks …" Instead, try "R.B.G. thanks …" Put sponsor acknowledgments in the unnumbered footnote on the first page.

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