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# Exploring Face Recognition under Complex Lighting Conditions with HDR Imaging

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## Abstract

*Applying image processing applications under complex or harsh lighting conditions can be a difficult challenge. In particular, face recognition can be prone to such limitations due to the uncontrolled nature of the applications to which it is applied. One of the conventional ways used to resolve this concern is by capturing images under controlled light or pre-processing the affected images, which can change the perception of the resultant images. One of the primary issues with this is the lack of information present in the original images due to over-exposed and under-exposed pixels. High Dynamic Range (HDR) imaging offers an alternative due to its capability of handling natural lighting. This paper explores the use HDR imaging for face recognition (FR). A training and testing set of HDR images under different harsh lighting conditions was created. Traditional low dynamic range methods were compared with using the full range and applying HDR methods to a traditional face recognition method. Results demonstrate that adapting HDR captured images for use with traditional face recognition methods via a tone mapping provides sufficient improvement and enables traditional algorithms to cope well with harsh lighting scenarios.*

*Keywords:* face recognition, dynamic range, high dynamic range image, tone mapping

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## 1. Introduction

Face recognition (FR) systems have found application in a number of areas, particularly, in security and surveillance and have achieved success under controlled lighting conditions. It is possible to achieve a false rejection rate (FRR) of 0.008 at a false acceptance rate (FAR) of 0.001 [PSO\*07, BBD\*10] with images under controlled light. However, FR performance tends to drop in more realistic and uncontrolled lit scenes, thus making most of the conventional approaches inapplicable without additional tasks. The performance reported for images under uncontrolled light, such as indoor or outdoor setting is FRR of 0.12 at an FAR of 0.001 [BBD\*10].

Low performance under uncontrolled lighting conditions can be due to expression, pose, gender, image resolution, illumination etc. [LHK05, BJ11]. Amongst these, illumination is considered one of the fundamental characteristics capable of reducing performance. Thus, images of the same person can appear different to computer algorithms under a changing light as shown in figure [BJ11]. However, HDR techniques [BADC11] present an alternative to the traditional low (or standard) dynamic range (LDR) imaging methods. While LDR imaging suffers from over or under-exposed pixels when handling scenarios with a wide dynamic range, HDR can capture, process and present the entire range of natural lighting.

This work explores whether HDR can benefit FR systems. In order to demonstrate the benefit, a new modest HDR databases of faces has been created under three complex lighting scenarios. Using a traditional FR method for LDR data, FR rates were com-

pared across a number of conditions. The main conditions were, LDR dataset deploy for FR, LDR input pre-processed with traditional methods to reduce illumination issues, and finally HDR input converted to LDR using a traditional HDR tone mapping method. Results demonstrate that traditional methods struggle to recognise faces under the complex lighting conditions presented here. However, the use of straightforward HDR techniques, by just capturing in HDR and tone mapping presents successful performance. Crucially, this approach does not require the development of new FR systems but can be used on already functioning methods without modification.



**Figure 1:** Sample images of the same person under different light.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows:

## 2. Related Work

Facial recognition under harsh lighting conditions has received some attention in the research domain. The traditional approaches for dealing with this issue can be broadly described in categories. For example, appearance based, normalisation based and feature based methods. The appearance based approach, where training examples are defined under different lighting conditions and directly used without undergoing lighting pre-processing are used to learn possible illumination variations [TT10]. Such are then generalised to the variations present in the images. This approach that involves direct learning has been reported [LHK05] to make few assumptions and requires large samples of training images but yields expressive feature set.

With the normalised based approach, images are reduced to a canonical form in a way to suppress the lighting variations [TT10]. For example in a face, naturally occurring incoming lighting distributions have information predominantly as low spatial frequency and soft edges, such that the high frequency information in the image are mainly signal (inherent facial appearance). In [JRW97], the Multiscale Retinex (MSR) method of Jobson was used to cancel the low frequency information, the images were smoothed and used to divide the smooth version of itself. In a similar way, Self Quotient Image (SQI) was used in [GB03] with a different local filter. The authors in [CYZ\*06] improved the SQI with the Logarithmic Total variation (LTV) smoothing. Recently, a comparative analysis was conducted by [SKM04] on the above and related methods, they concluded on the normalised based approach as been effective but limited in there ability to handle spatially non-uniform lighting variations, which is our main focus in this paper.

The popular approach involving the extraction of insensitive illumination feature sets directly in a presented image, such as geometric features, image derivative, edge maps, Local Binary Patterns (LBP), local autocorrelation filter, Gabor wavelet, etc. [AHP06, PYL08, ZSCG07], perform great with raw gray images, but are limited in resistance to the harsh lighting variations present in the real world scenes.

Accordingly, the LBP features have proved to be effectively invariant to monotonic global gray-level transformation [TT10], yet it degrades in performance easily under harsh changes of lighting directions and shadows, and similar performance drop also applies to other features discussed earlier.

## 3. Methodology

This section describes the overall motivation of this work and the steps taken to achieve the results. Furthermore, the creation of the HDR dataset and its capture are described.

### 3.1. Motivation

For FR to be used "in anger" is must be capable of being used in harsh lighting conditions exhibited in the natural world. Unfortunately, traditional imaging methods perform poorly in such environments, particularly when detailed information for an application such as FR are required. HDR data provides the ability to handle content beyond the traditional 8 bits per colour channel attributed

to LDR imaging, by storing floating point values per colour channel per pixel. However, a broad number of applications have been designed based on LDR content. The motivation behind this work is to establish whether HDR can benefit FR with the minimum possible intrusion. In this work the use of capturing with HDR content is proposed and the straightforward HDR method of tone mapping used to attempt to maintain as much data as possible from the original captured scenario that can be used by a traditional FR system. In order to study this proposal three harsh lighting scenarios are contemplated one with a bright light source behind the face, one to the side producing harsh shadows across the face and a similar one at an angle producing shadows at an alternative angle.

### 3.2. HDR capture

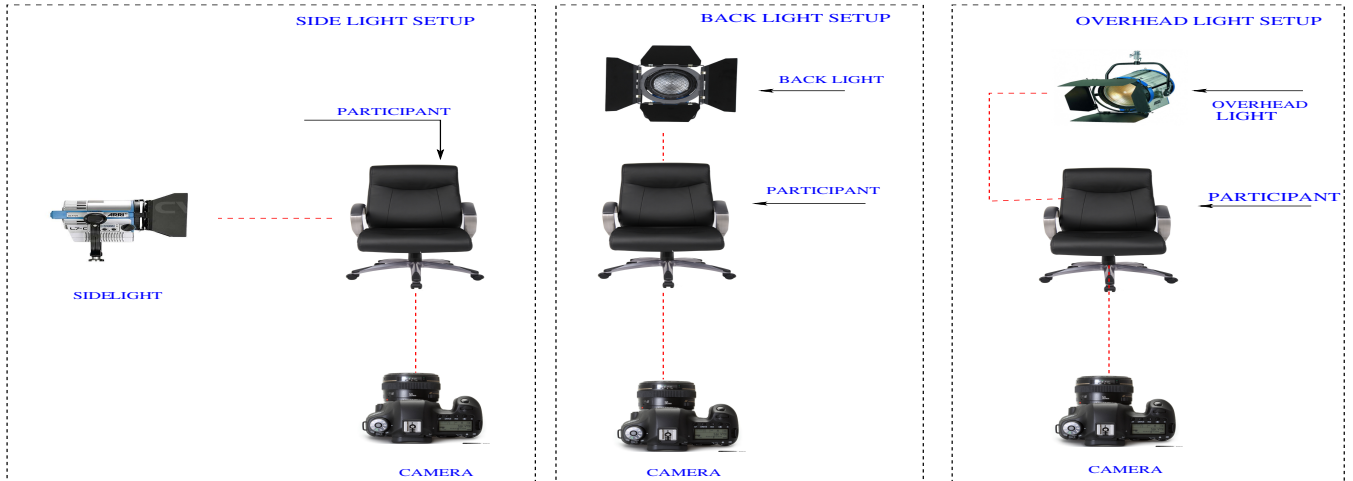
In this work, we capture high quality LDR images under three different artificially created harsh lighting conditions via the process of bracketed exposure of LDR images to create an HDR image. In order to obtain the HDR image, seven LDR images were bracketed within the range of  $R \in [-8, +8]$  Ev with an interval of 2.42 Ev (exposure compensation value) between each LDR exposure. Since the exposure compensation values were changed, the sensor sensitivity/film speed (ISO setting) of the camera was fixed to 1600 and the base ( $0^{\text{th}}$ ) exposure was fixed to a relative aperture of  $f/5.6$ . The shutter-speed was allowed to vary to obtain the required exposure. The capture details are given as below:

- Camera body: Canon EOS 5D Mark III
- Lens: Canon EF 24-105 f/4.0
- ISO: 1600
- Aperture:  $f/5.6$  (base exposure)
- Bracketing range: -8 to + 8 Ev
- Number of exposures: 7
- Bracketing interval: 2.42 Ev
- Capture format: .cr2 (14 bits/pixel/channel)

The illumination setup was created with the help of an ARRI studio lamp [Gro] with a peak luminance value of  $\approx 2000 \text{ cd/m}^2$  where the lamp was placed at three different positions relative to the subject i.e. a) to the right, b) behind and c) overhead. Such a setup ensured that the artificially induced harsh-lighting conditions with prominent illumination edges on the subject's face cannot be captured with a single exposure and significant details would be lost in either the low or high luminance regions of the image. The camera settings were unchanged throughout the capture session. Figure 2 illustrates the illumination setup. The HDR dataset contains 21 subjects with ages between 23-50 years comprising of 17 males and 4 females. The average dynamic range of the images is 15 ( $\log_2$ ). The LDR images were visually inspected and out of focus/blurry (due to motion) images were discarded. Subsequently, the candidate images from each of the sessions were merged into HDR images, cropped at the facial region and resized to a resolution of  $150 \times 150$  pixels. The resultant HDR images were stored in the .exr format [FKH] for further processing.

### 3.3. HDR tone-mapping

Face identification/recognition and feature detection algorithms such as Speeded Up Robust Features (SURF) and Scale-invariant

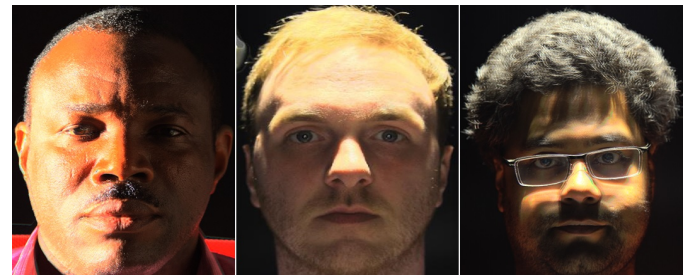


**Figure 2:** Schematic diagram of the illumination setup.

Feature Transform (SIFT) typically operate on LDR images wherein the luminance pixel values accepted by the algorithms are in the normalised range of  $RGB_{(x,y,z)} \in [0, 1]$ . In order to take advantage of traditional methods the captured HDR data is converted to the detection algorithm suitable format while keeping the overall appearance/tone of the scene as similar as possible to the reference HDR. Such a task is usually accomplished by either choosing one of the exposures (typically the base 0<sup>th</sup> exposure) or by using a tone-mapping operator (TMO) to map the HDR to its corresponding LDR representation. Analogous to the display driven data characteristics, the tone-mapped image is gamma corrected and passed to the feature detection algorithm. However, there are two major issues. Significant amount of details are unavailable in the base exposure and there is a plethora of TMOs which perform equally well for various requirements which presents a challenge of definitively choosing one. Since the goal in this work was maximal tone preservation, we chose the Display Adaptive TMO proposed by Mantiuk et al. [MDK08] since it has been classified as a Scene Reproduction Operator (SRO) [EWMU13] and has performed well in previous evaluations [MBDC15, UMM\*10].

The goal of the SRO is to preserve the appearance of the original HDR scene including contrast, sharpness and colours by adjusting the image with the pre-notion of the ambient illumination and capabilities of the target display. The authors demonstrate that this can be defined as a non-linear optimisation problem which when simplified by reducing the degrees of freedom results in the introduction of a mapping technique with adjustable parameters. The SRO employs a piecewise linear tone-curve to map the HDR luminance to its corresponding LDR luminance. Given a particular display characteristics, the TMO produces the least distorted image in terms of visible contrast distortions (measured in Just Noticeable Difference (JND) steps) which when weighed by an HVS model accounts for luminance masking, spatial contrast sensitivity and contrast masking. Moreover, the SRO also uses chroma preservation techniques introduced by Schlick [Sch95] to preserve accurate chroma information. This SRO was chosen over many other candi-

dates because it reproduces the reference HDR scene with minimal visible distortions and, as mentioned above, has performed well in previous evaluations



**Figure 3:** Sample tone mapped faces from our HDR dataset captured under different light.

#### 4. Face Recognition (FR)

This section describes the adopted FR approach. Furthermore, the chosen method for illumination pre-processing for LDR is presented.

##### 4.1. SURF using BOF Technique

SURF algorithm using BOF techniques is discussed in this section as the next step following the image processing stage.

##### SURF

SURF (Speeded-Up Robust Features) is an invariant detector and descriptor using image interest points [BETVG08]. The most important SURF property is the ability to repeat interest points, which goes to define how reliable and robust the detector is in finding the same interest points under different lighting conditions, as in our case. Thus, the interest points are detected at distinctive image locations, such as corners, blobs and T-junctions.

Given a single channel image,  $I_0$  with pixel intensity  $I_0(x, y)$  at a given point  $X = (x, y)$ , if we apply the central difference method, the first-order difference achieve no response when applied to unchanging signals. To check for any changes in intensity, we express the second derivatives of  $I_0(x, y)$  as:

$$\frac{\delta^2 I_0(x, y)}{\delta x^2} = I_0(x+1, y) - 2I_0(x, y) + I_0(x-1, y) \quad (1)$$

If we consider the case that  $I_0$  corresponds to another image  $I_u$ , with an unknown lighting condition. And if we assume that the diagonal-offset models the two images ( $I_0$  and  $I_u$ ) as related by a linear transformation determined by a scalar constant  $\alpha$  and an offset  $\beta$ . The pixel intensity can simply be modelled such that  $I_u(x, y)$  of the image  $I_u$  at the same point  $X = (x, y)$  is given as:

$$I_u(x, y) = \alpha I_0(x, y) + \beta \quad (2)$$

Now, from equation 2, we can conclude that obtaining the second derivative of  $I_u(x, y)$  with respect to  $x$ , that, equation 2 can be expressed as:

$$\frac{\delta^2 I_u(x, y)}{\delta x^2} = \frac{\alpha \delta^2 I_0(x, y)}{\delta x^2} \quad (3)$$

Similarly, we can apply the same principle to the second derivatives in  $y$  and  $XY$ , where the offset term  $\beta$  is cancelled out in the computation of the derivatives, without effect on the final result. But when the illumination is varied with a scalar  $\alpha$ , there will be a proportional variation in the second derivatives with the scalar.

Typically, localising feature with SURF algorithm involves - interpolations, discarding low-contrast key points below a given threshold, (e.g. threshold can be fixed at 0.03) and eliminating edges to increase key point stability. The challenge is, if a detector suffer from varying response to changing light, a feature (key-point) for instance in a bright image region may not be detected in the corresponding image with lower lighting levels. Therefore, SURF detector response  $R_u(x, y)$  of a given pixel  $I_u(x, y)$  is given by the determinant of the Hessian matrix:

$$R_u(x, y) = \frac{\delta^2 I_u(x, y)}{\delta x^2} \frac{\delta^2 I_u(x, y)}{\delta y^2} - \left( \frac{\delta^2 I_u(x, y)}{\delta xy} \right)^2 \quad (4)$$

Therefore, in order to compute SURF response, we substitute 3 into 4, so that the filter response  $R_u$  can be represented as  $R_o(x, y)$  of the  $I_o$  and summarised into 5

$$R_u(x, y) = \alpha \frac{\delta^2 I_0(x, y)}{\delta x^2} \alpha \frac{\delta^2 I_0(x, y)}{\delta y^2} - \left( \alpha \frac{\delta^2 I_0(x, y)}{\delta xy} \right)^2 = \alpha^2 R_0 \quad (5)$$

In 5, because of the degree of  $\alpha^2$ , even with small variation in scene light, there can be significant variations in the size of the detector response.

### BOF

A Bag Of Feature (BOF) [FFP05] algorithm is used in the study to build feature dictionary. Like most modern approaches to category-level object detection, this algorithm attempts to use intensity features as input in both training and testing tasks. In this case, each image is represented as a collection of detected patches over a facial patch of 8x8 grid used to generate 500 visual BOF, where images are characterized by their illumination-invariant regions, along with

their SURF descriptors. Quantisation is carried out through clustering to construct the image's signature formed by the centers of the clusters and their relative sizes into a more manageable size. The centroids is then used to provide an encoding method for counting feature frequency in each image, where each image membership is used to build a histogram of length  $k$  where the  $i'$ th value is the frequency of the  $i'$ th dictionary feature. Multi-class SVM is used to train on the objects categories and used for image classification.

### 4.2. Face Classification

SVMs (Support Vector Machines) are a widely used supervised learning algorithm for data analysis and pattern recognition [ZTC14]. SVM implementation is adopted for this problem. A RBF (Radial Basis Function) kernel was used to map the inputs to a higher dimensional space. This has been successfully used previously for face recognition [GJ10]. For instance, given a pair of faces, the SVM is trained to determine whether faces belong to the same or different subjects. The SVM was trained using the encoded histogram represented in the form of feature vector from the 21 subjects of the HDR-tone mapped dataset (80% randomly generated) and tested with remaining 20% randomly generated pairs. As previously mentioned, we implement three induced harsh lighting conditions in our dataset to create three different representations, see figure 2. Based on this, we decided to implement disjoint lighting conditions for training and testing. This means, we presented different input to the SVM for training and different input for testing.

### 4.3. Normalised Discrete Cosine Transform (NDCT)

One of the methods explored in the results section employs the use of pre-processing of the LDR image to remove aspects of the harsh lighting. The chosen method for pre-processing adopted for this work is normalised discrete cosine transform (NDCT). The authors in [IDC16] compared four popular pre-processing methods for solving illumination problems used for image enhancement for emotion recognition, which shares similar characteristics to FR. It was found that the NDCT approach performed well above the other methods for the pre-processing methods. Also in [GNV11], the authors report lowest error rate with DCT even with down sampling coefficients.

The NDCT transform image representation as a sum of sinusoids of varying magnitudes and frequencies. Most salient information exists in low frequency coefficients. Unfortunately sometimes, the region where illumination varies are present in coefficients with low frequencies. Typically, illumination variations are reduced by setting the low-frequency DCT coefficients in logarithmic domain to zero [FN09]. In frequency domain, it is widely believed that illumination changes mainly in the low-frequency band, and research [GNV11] has shown that illumination changes slowly in the facial region. This means that, in order to obtain robust facial features under harsh light, the recovery of reflectance characteristics is important. Therefore, for illumination compensation, setting the DCT coefficient to zero is equivalent to subtracting the DCT basis image product and the corresponding coefficients from the original



image. Setting the  $n$  low frequency DCT coefficients to zero gives:

$$F'(x, y) = \sum_{\mu=0}^{M-1} \sum_{\nu=0}^{N-1} E(\mu, \nu) - \sum_{i=1}^n E(\mu_i, \nu_i) \quad i = F(x, y) - \sum_{i=1}^n E(\mu_i - \nu_i) \quad (6)$$

$$\text{where } E(\mu, \nu) = \alpha(\mu)\alpha(\nu)C(\mu, \nu)\cos\left[\frac{\pi(2x+1)\mu}{2M}\right]\cos\left[\frac{\pi(2y+1)\nu}{2N}\right]$$

And the illumination component term can be regarded as  $\sum_{i=1}^n E(\mu_i, \nu_i)$ .

## 5. Results and Discussion

This section presents a series of results. The different experimental conditions are meant to validate the performance of HDR on the FR algorithm used in this paper. To demonstrate this, results are presented across the three different induced lighting representations (back, side and overhead) both individually and as a whole.

For these results, the accuracy of the algorithm in learning a set of faces from training images and then correctly recognising the same people from a test set of different images is evaluated. For these tests, both the training and testing sets contain the same people. To achieve this, tests are carried out based on 80% training and the rest on testing. This setup was repeated five times and the recognition rates averaged over the five trials. Due to limitations in the data set size a procedure known as cross-validation was adopted. This separates the data set ( $N = 21$ ) into two parts leaving one part to be unknown, such that the prediction accuracy obtained from the “unknown” set more precisely reflects the performance on the classification of an independent data set.

To prevent data over-fitting the  $k$ -fold cross-validation was used [ZTC14], whereby the training set is divided into  $k$  subsets of equal size. Thus, one subset is tested using the classifier trained on the remaining  $k - 1$  subsets. Where each instance of the whole training set is predicted once, consequently the cross-validation accuracy is the percentage of data that is correctly classified. Our classification problem falls into the category of the mutually exclusive one (multivalued classification). Wherefore, a decision on one class leaves all options open for the other classes. Thus, in a sense the classes are supposed to be independent of one another, but the classes are rarely statistically independent. So multi-class SVM classifiers are learnt and applied on each training set. Finally, the decisions of all classifiers is set as the recognition rate.

Initially the proposed FR method is validated against a traditional database. The Caltech 101 database [FFFP07], the de facto validation dataset for object recognition, containing images with large variations in light, pose and expression, was chosen for this test. In the comparative evaluation report of several recognition algorithms on Caltech 101 dataset conducted by [ZBMM06], the authors reported 65%, although their study was not limited to faces only. In this test a performance of 86% was achieved for the method presented in section 4; this result was limited to testing only images that were clearly faces.

### 5.1. Overall FR performance

FR on the HDR dataset is tested across four methods - 0th exposure (naive), 0th exposure with NDCT preprocessing (NDCT), optimal exposure (optimal) and tone mapping (TMO) with the type based lighting conditions - left light, side light and overhead light. The naive approach is based on the set consisting of the 0th exposure from the seven exposures captured within bracketing range ( $-8$  to  $+8$ ). Since the naive approach is unable to capture the full scene lighting for the HDR scenarios, NDCT [IDC16] described in section 4.3, was adopted and used as a pre-processing technique. This method would represent the LDR approach of dealing with harsh lighting. The optimal method is an HDR to LDR method that modifies the HDR data into an LDR by selecting the largest contiguous area in luminance space to fit into an LDR. The algorithm used here is based on Debattista et al.’s method [DBRS\*15]. The resulting outputs from this method are not dissimilar to what a camera sensor uses to attempt to fit the wider dynamic range of a scene that is being captured. TMO was based on the Mantiuk TMO, as discussed in section 3.3; this represents the state of the art of HDR to LDR methods.

Table 1 presents results for the four methods. The performance increases as expected naive (82%), NDCT (84%) optimal (87%) and TMO (93%). Naive under-performs as expected and NDCT does not improve much. Optimal is better but TMO does very well with an overall of 93% indicating that a robust TMO may be sufficient for general FR performance for scenarios with harsh lighting.

### 5.2. Comparison of FR performance with disjoint training and testing set

In this section, the performance when the data sets is separated across the three lighting conditions is presented.

Generally, with HDR imaging [MBDC15] there is the advantage of capturing wide range of available scene light. But when images are presented in a scene where the area of interest is away from the camera lens, the performance of such HDR imaging would be low. Therefore, we observe that using images captured under the left light for training or testing lead to a drop in performance as shown in table 2. Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the confusion matrices for the recognition. As can be seen here TMO performs best and is not producing many false positives.

**Table 1:** Face Recognition rates with naive, NDCT, optimal and TMO datasets (%).

Data instance	Recognition rate
Naive	82
NDCT	84
Optimal	87
TMO	93

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has presented the use of HDR in face recognition. Results demonstrate that HDR is beneficial for harsh lighting conditions. Results with the modest database presented show that TMOs

**Table 2:** Recognition rate base on individual lighting conditions. BL (back\_light), LL (left\_light), OL (overhead\_light) (%).

	BL	LL	OL
Naive	75	82	90
NDCT	76	86	89
Optimal	78	91	91
TMO	91	93	95

**Table 3:** FR based on Naive (0<sup>th</sup> exposure). Recognition rate 82%.

Data Instance	Bck_light	Lft_light	Ovh_light
Bck_light	<b>0.75</b>	0.08	0.12
Lft_light	0.07	<b>0.82</b>	0.12
Ovh_light	0.04	0.06	<b>0.90</b>

**Table 4:** FR based on NDCT. Recognition rate 84%.

Data Instance	Bck_light	Lft_light	Ovh_light
Bck_light	<b>0.76</b>	0.6	0.18
Lft_light	0.00	<b>0.86</b>	0.04
Ovh_light	0.00	0.02	<b>0.89</b>

**Table 5:** FR based on optimal exposure. Recognition rate 87%.

Data Instance	Bck_light	Lft_light	Ovh_light
Bck_light	<b>0.78</b>	0.10	0.12
Lft_light	0.01	<b>0.91</b>	0.08
Ovh_light	0.03	0.06	<b>0.91</b>

**Table 6:** FR based on tone mapping. Recognition rate 93%.

Data Instance	Bck_light	Lft_light	Ovh_light
Bck_light	<b>0.91</b>	0.00	0.09
Lft_light	0.07	<b>0.93</b>	0.00
Ovh_light	0.01	0.040	<b>0.95</b>

can provide a good method of using HDR data, therefore making it possible to make use of HDR on legacy FR systems without requiring complex changes to adapt the methods to HDR.

The dataset chosen however is relatively small and further work is required to consolidate these results. Further work will also investigate facial recognition under complex dynamic lighting as the challenges for quickly changing illumination are even broader and would require the use of more sophisticated HDR methods.

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