

# MRI Brain Image Segmentation Algorithm Using Watershed Transform and Kernel Fuzzy C-Means Clustering on Level Set Method

Tara.Saikumar

Asst. Professor, Dept of Electronics and Communication Engineering  
CMR Technical Education Society Group of Institution, School of Engineering  
Medchal, Hyderabad, India

B. Shashidhar

Asst. Professor, Dept of Mathematics,  
CMR Technical Education Society Group of Institution, School of Engineering  
Medchal, Hyderabad, India

V. Harshavardhan

Asst. Professor, Dept of Physics,  
CMR Technical Education Society Group of Institution, School of Engineering  
Medchal, Hyderabad, India

Kotha. Shobha Rani

Asst. Professor, Dept of Electronics and Communication Engineering  
Malla Reddy College of Engineering for Women  
Qutbullapur, Hyderabad, India

**Abstract**— A new method for image segmentation is proposed in this paper, which combines the watershed transform, KFCM and level set method. The watershed transform is first used to presegment the image so as to get the initial partition of it. Some useful information of the primitive regions and boundaries can be obtained. The kernel fuzzy c-means (KFCM) was used to generate an initial contour curve which overcomes leaking at the boundary during the curve propagation. KFCM algorithm computes the fuzzy membership values for each pixel. On the basis of KFCM the edge indicator function was redefined. Using the edge indicator function of a MRI image was performed to extract the boundaries of objects on the basis of the presegmentation. Therefore, the proposed method is computationally efficient. Moreover, the algorithm can localize the boundary of the regions exactly due to the edges obtained by the watersheds. The efficiency and accuracy of the algorithm is demonstrated by the experiments on the MR brain images. The above process of segmentation showed a considerable improvement in the evolution of the level set function.

**Keywords**- Image segmentation, Watershed transform, level set method, KFCM, MR brain image. Introduction

## I. INTRODUCTION

Image segmentation is plays an important role in the field of image understanding, image analysis, pattern identification. The foremost essential goal of the segmentation process is to partition an image into regions that are homogeneous (uniform) with respect to one or more self characteristics and features. Clustering has long been a popular approach to un tested pattern recognition. The fuzzy c-means (FCM)[1] algorithm, as a typical clustering algorithm, has been utilized in a wide range of engineering and scientific disciplines such as medicine imaging, bioinformatics, pattern recognition, and data mining. Given a data  $X = \{x_1, \dots, x_n\} \subset R^p$ , the original FCM algorithm partitions X into c fuzzy subsets by minimizing the following objective function

$$J_m(U, V) \equiv \sum_{i=1}^c \sum_{k=1}^n u_{ik}^m \|x_i - v_i\|^2 \dots \dots \dots (1) \quad \text{Where } c \text{ is the number of cluster and selected as a}$$

specified Value in the paper,  $n$  the number of data points,  $u_k$ , the member of  $x_k$  in class  $i$ , satisfying  $\sum_{i=1}^c u_{ik}$ ,  $m$  the quantity controlling clustering fuzziness and  $v$  is set of control cluster centers or a prototypes ( $v_i \in R^p$ ). The function  $J_m$  is minimized by the famous alternate iterative algorithm. Since the original FCM uses the squared-norm to measure inner product with an appropriate 'kernel' function, one similarity between prototypes and data points, it can only be effective in clustering 'spherical' clusters. And many algorithms are resulting from the FCM in order to cluster more general dataset. Most of those algorithms are realized by replacing the squared-norm in Eq (1) the object function of FCM with other similarity trial (metric) [1-2]. In this paper, a kernel-based fuzzy c-means algorithm (KFCM) is projected. KFCM adapt a new kernel-induced metric in the data space to restore the original Euclidean norm metric in FCM. By replacing the inner product with an appropriate 'kernel' function, one can absolutely perform a nonlinear mapping to a high dimensional feature space without increasing the number of parameters.

The level set method is [4-7] based on geometric deformable model, which translate the problem of evolution 2-D (3-D) close curve(surface) into the evolution of level set function in the space with higher dimension to obtain the advantage in managing the topology changing of the shape. The level set method has had great success in computer graphics and vision. Also, it has been widely used in medical imaging for segmentation and shape recovery [8-9]. However, there are some insufficiencies in traditional level set method.

Firstly, as using the local marginal information of the image, it is difficult to obtain a perfect result when there's a fuzzy or discrete boundary in the region, and the leaking problem is unescapably appeared; Secondly, solving the partial differential equation of the level set function requires numerical processing at each point of the image domain which is a time consuming process; Finally, if the initial evolution contour is given at will, the iteration time would increase greatly, too large or too small contour will cause the convergence of evolution curve to the contour of object incorrectly. Therefore, some modification has been proposed to improve the speed function of curve evolution [10-12]. In the paper, based on the new variational level set method, the edge indicator function was weighted to improve the ability of detecting fuzzy boundaries of the object. At the same time, the KFCM algorithm [13-14] was applied to obtain the appropriate initial contour of evolution curve, so as to get the accurate contour of object and reduce the evolution time.

## II. WATERSHED ALGORITHM

In geography, a watershed is the ridge that divides areas drained by different river system. The watershed transform is a morphological gradient-based segmentation technique. The gradient map of the image is considered as a relief map in which different gradient values correspond to different heights. If we punch a hole in each local minimum and immerse the whole map in water, the water level will rise over the basins. When two different body of water meet, a dam is built between them. The progress continues until all the points in the map are immersed. Finally the whole image is segmented by the dams which are then called watersheds and the segmented regions are referred to as catchment basins. A catchment basin is the geographical area draining into a river or reservoir. The watershed algorithm applies these ideas to gray-scale image processing in a way that can be used to solve a variety of image segmentation problem. Watershed algorithm, a segmentation method in mathematics morphology, was firstly introduced to the image division area by Beucher and Meyer.[20] It bases its concept on the restructure of measured lines in geodesy.[21 22] In detail, it regards the image as the topological terrain in geodesy. In the image, the gray level value of every pixel stands for the altitude of a certain spot and different areas of gray level value correspond to different geological features. The calculating process with this algorithm can be likened a submerging process by a flood. Firstly, the flood submerges the lowest point in the image and gradually the whole valley. When the water level reaches a certain height, it will overflow at a certain place where the dam can be built. Repeat the process until all the spots in the image. At this moment, the series of completed dams will be the watershed separating every basin. Direct application of the watershed algorithm to a gradient image usually leads to over segmentation due to noise and other local irregularities of the gradient. The resulting problems can be serious enough to render the result virtually useless. A practical solution to this problem is to limit the number of allowable regions by incorporating a preprocessing stage designed to bring additional knowledge into the segmentation procedure.[23]. An approach used to control over segmentation is based on the concept of controlled marker, which is proposed by Meyer and Beucher [20]. This approach is based on the idea that a machine vision system knows from other sources the location of the objects to be segmented. Therefore, before segmentation we must indicate which objects are to be segmented and which one is the background.

III. KERNEL FUZZY C-MEANS CLUSTERING (KFCM):

Define a nonlinear map as  $\phi: X \rightarrow \phi(x) \in F$ , where  $x \in X$ .  $X$  denotes the data space and  $F$  is the transformed feature space with higher even infinite dimensions. KFCM minimized the following objective function:  $J_m(U, V) \equiv \sum_{i=1}^c \sum_{k=1}^n u_{ik}^m \|\phi(x_i) - \phi(v_i)\|^2 \dots\dots\dots (2.2)$

Where  $\|\phi(x_i) - \phi(v_i)\|^2 = K(x_k, x_k) + K(v_i, v_i) - 2K(x_k, v_i) \dots\dots\dots (2.3)$

Where  $K(x, y) = \phi(x)^T \phi(y)$  is an inner product of the kernel function. If we adopt the Gaussian function as a kernel function,  $K(x, y) = \exp(-\|x - y\|^2 / 2\sigma^2)$ , then  $K(x, x) = 1$ . according to Eq. (2.3), Eq. (2.2) can be rewritten as

$$J_m(U, V) \equiv 2 \sum_{i=1}^c \sum_{k=1}^n u_{ik}^m (1 - k(x_k, v_i)) \dots\dots\dots (2.4)$$

Minimizing Eq. (2.4) under the constraint of,  $u_{ik}, m > 1$ . We have

$$u_{ik} = \frac{(1/(1 - K(x_k, v_i)))^{1/(m-1)}}{\sum_{j=1}^c (1/(1 - K(x_k, v_j)))^{1/(m-1)}} \dots\dots\dots (2.5)$$

$$v_i = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^n u_{ik} K(x_k, v_i) x_k}{\sum_{k=1}^n u_{ik}^m K(x_k, v_i)} \dots\dots\dots (2.6)$$

Here we now utilize the Gaussian kernel function for Straightforwardness. If we use additional kernel functions, there will be corresponding modifications in Eq. (2.5) and (2.6).

In fact, Eq.(2.3) can be analyzed as kernel-induced new metric in the data space, which is defined as the following

$$d(x, y) \triangleq \|\phi(x) - \phi(y)\| = \sqrt{2(1 - K(x, y))} \dots\dots\dots (2.7)$$

And it can be proven that  $d(x, y)$  is defined in Eq. (2.7) is a metric in the original space in case that  $K(x, y)$  takes as the Gaussian kernel function. According to Eq. (6), the data point  $x_k$  is capable with an additional weight  $K(x_k, v_i)$ , which measures the similarity between  $x_k$  and  $v_i$  and when  $x_k$  is an outlier i.e.,  $x_k$  is far from the other data points, then  $K(x_k, v_i)$  will be very small, so the weighted sum of data points shall be more strong.

The full explanation of KFCM algorithm is as follows:

**KFCM Algorithm:**

- Step 1: Select initial class prototype  $\{v_i\}_{i=1}^c$ .
  - Step 2: Update all memberships  $u_{ik}$  with Eq. (2.5).
  - Step 3: Obtain the prototype of clusters in the forms of weighted average with Eq. (2.6).
  - Step 4: Repeat step 2-3 till termination. The termination criterion is  $\|V_{new} - V_{old}\| \leq \epsilon$ .
- Where  $\|\cdot\|$  is the Euclidean norm.  $V$  is the vector of cluster centers  $\epsilon$  is a small number that can be set by user (here  $\epsilon = 0.01$ ).

IV. THE MODIFICATION TO THE LEVEL SET METHOD

The level set method was invented by Osher and Sethian [4] to hold the topology changes of curves. A simple representation is that when a surface intersects with the zero plane to give the curve when this surface changes, and the curve changes according with the surface changes. The heart of the level set method is the implicit

representation of the interface. To get an equation describing varying of the curve or the front with time, we started with the zero level set function at the front as follows:

$$\phi(x, y, t) = 0, \text{ if } (x, y) \in \Gamma \dots\dots\dots (3.1)$$

Then computed its derivative which is also equal to zero

$$\frac{\partial \phi}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial x} \cdot \frac{\partial x}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial y} \cdot \frac{\partial y}{\partial t} = 0 \dots\dots\dots (3.2)$$

Converting the terms to the dot product form of the gradient vector and the  $x$  and  $y$  derivatives vector, we go

$$\frac{\partial \phi}{\partial t} + \left( \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial x} \cdot \frac{\partial x}{\partial t} \right) \bullet \left( \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial y} \cdot \frac{\partial y}{\partial t} \right) = 0 \dots\dots\dots (3.3)$$

Multiplying and dividing by  $\nabla \phi$  and taking the other part to be  $F$  the equation was gotten as follows:

$$\frac{\partial \phi}{\partial t} + F |\nabla \phi| = 0 \dots\dots\dots (3.4)$$

According to literature [9][11], an energy function was defined:

$$E(\phi) = \mu E_{\text{int}}(\phi) + E_{\text{ext}}(\phi) \dots\dots\dots (3.5)$$

Where  $E_{\text{ext}}(\phi)$  was called the external energy, and  $E_{\text{int}}(\phi)$  was called the internal energy. These energy functions were represented as:

$$E_{\text{int}}(\phi) = \int_{\Omega} \frac{1}{2} (\nabla \phi - 1)^2 dx dy \dots\dots\dots (3.6)$$

$$E_{\text{ext}}(\phi) = \lambda L_g(\phi) + \nu A_g(\phi) \dots\dots\dots (3.7)$$

$$L_g = \int_{\Omega} g \delta(\phi) |\nabla \phi| dx dy \dots\dots\dots (3.8)$$

$$A_g = \int_{\Omega} g H(-\phi) dx dy \dots\dots\dots (3.9)$$

$$g = \frac{1}{1 + |\nabla G_{\sigma} * I|} \dots\dots\dots (3.10)$$

Where  $L_g(\phi)$  was the length of zero level curve of  $\phi$ ; and  $A_g$  could be viewed as the weighted area;  $I$  was the image and  $g$  was the edge indicator function. In conventional(traditional) level set methods, it is numerically necessary to keep the evolving level set function close to a signed distance function[15][16]. Re-initialization, a technique for occasionally re-initializing the level set function to a signed distance function during the evolution, has been extensively used as a numerical remedy for maintaining stable curve evolution and ensuring desirable results.

From the practical viewpoints, the re-initialization process can be quite convoluted, expensive, and has subtle side effects [17]. In order to overcome the problem, Li et al [9] proposed a new variational level set formulation, which could be easily implemented by simple finite difference scheme, without the need of re-initialization. The details of the algorithm are in the literature [9]. However, because only the gradient information was imposed in the edge indicator function, Li's method has a little effect on the presence of fuzzy boundaries.

In the paper, a innovative method was proposed to modify the algorithm. The original image was partitioned into some sub images by KFCM. The fuzzy boundary of each sub image was weighted by  $\alpha$ , the edge indicator function was redefined:

$$g' = g + \alpha \cdot g_2 \dots\dots\dots (3.11)$$

Where  $g_2 = \frac{1}{1 + |\nabla G_{\sigma} * I_1|}$

$I_1$  Was the image after clustering. The iterative equation of level set functional was:

$$\frac{(\phi^{n+1} - \phi^n)}{\tau} = \mu \left[ \Delta \phi - \text{div} \left( \frac{\nabla \phi}{|\nabla \phi|} \right) \right] + \lambda \delta(\phi) \text{div} \left( g \frac{\nabla \phi}{|\nabla \phi|} \right) + v g \delta(\phi) \dots \dots \dots (3.12)$$

Taking  $g' = g + \alpha \cdot g_2$  into 3.12

$$\phi^{n+1} = \phi^n + \tau \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \mu \left[ \nabla \phi - \text{div} \left( \frac{\nabla \phi}{|\nabla \phi|} \right) \right] \lambda \delta(\phi) \text{div} \left( g \frac{\nabla \phi}{|\nabla \phi|} \right) \\ + v g \delta(\phi) + \alpha \left[ \begin{array}{l} \lambda \delta(\phi) \text{div} \left( g_2 \frac{\nabla \phi}{|\nabla \phi|} \right) + \\ v g_2(\phi) \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right\} \dots \dots \dots (3.13)$$

Where  $\alpha \in [0,1]$ . When processing images of weak boundary or low contrasts, a bigger  $\alpha$  was taken; otherwise, a smaller  $\alpha$  was taken.

V. THE GENERATION OF INITIAL CONTOUR CURVE

On the basis of KFCM clustering [3] in image segmentation, the over segmentation usually exists. In this paper, the result of KFCM was used as initial contour curve, and the automated initialization of twist model was finished.

For all the pixels in each cluster i.e. white matter, if 4 neighborhoods included the heterogeneous pixel, the pixel was regarded as candidate boundary point. Some pixels, such as noise points, might be included in the candidate boundary points. So the algorithm of curve tracing [18] was proposed. The exterior boundary of the cluster was tracked in the candidate boundary points. Finally, the closed curve was obtained. The candidate boundary points, whose Euclidean distances to the origin coordinates were shortest, were chosen as initiation points of curve tracing. The steps of image segmentation with adapted level set method were as follows:

- Step1.** Set the number of clusters, then the original image was processed with KFCM, and calculate the  $g_2$ .
- Step2.** Choose one cluster, evaluate the inside area with  $-\rho$  and the outside area with  $+\rho$ ,  $\rho$  is a plus constant. The boundary of the area is set to 0. The region of interest is defined initial contour.
- Step3.** Minimize the overall energy functional with 3.13 formula.

VI. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The segmentation of image takes an important branch in the surgery navigation and tumor radiotherapy. However, due to medical imaging characteristics, the low contrast and fuzzy boundary is usually occurred in the images. In the experiment, The image data from the IBSR(Internet Brain Segmentation Repository) are included to test the accuracy and efficiency of the proposed algorithm. The output of watershed transformation algorithm figure 1 is as shown below. Firstly the original MRI brain image is as shown in figure (a) is transformed to a proposed watershed algorithm is that a superimposed image of ridge lines and original binary image, note the over segmentation.

The approximate contour of white matter was got by KFCM algorithm shown in Figure h of figure 2. The snooping of regions else appear as a result of the in excess of segmentation. The initial evolution curve was obtained by the automated initialization. Because of the improved edge indicator function, the curve regularly evolved to the object boundaries in the process of evolution. The result established that the improved algorithm can extract the contour of object enhanced.

With the enhanced method, the curve was successfully evolved to the hollow white matter boundaries, but only to the approximately white matter boundaries with Li's method. At the same time, because the curve has been converged to the narrow region the object boundaries extraction could not be implemented with Li's method. But the enhanced method solved this problem better. On the similar computing proposal, under a 3.0GHz Pentium iv PC with 1 GB RAM on board, the average processing time of improved method was 9.6s, and that was 30.3s with Li's method. The evolution time was greatly reduced.

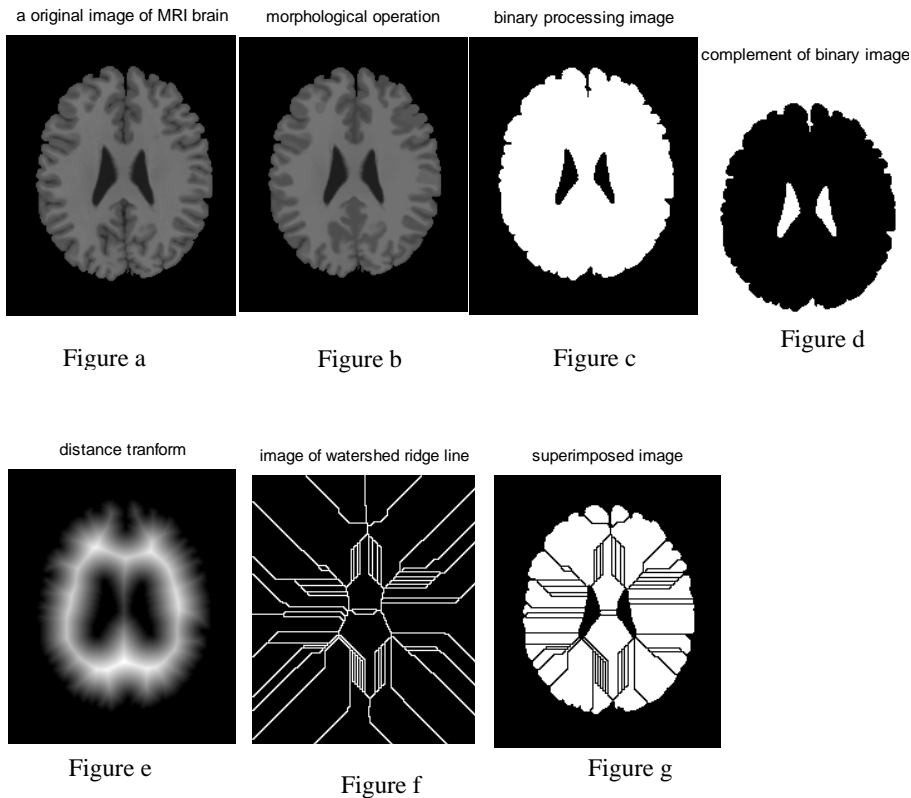


Figure : 1

Figure a is the **original test images** (MRI Image)  
 Figure b is the **morphological operation**,  
 Figure c is the **binary processing image**,  
 Figure d is the **Complementary of binary image**  
 Figure e is the **distance transform**,  
 Figure f is the **image of watershed ridge line**,  
 Figure g is the **superimposed image of ridge lines and original image**.

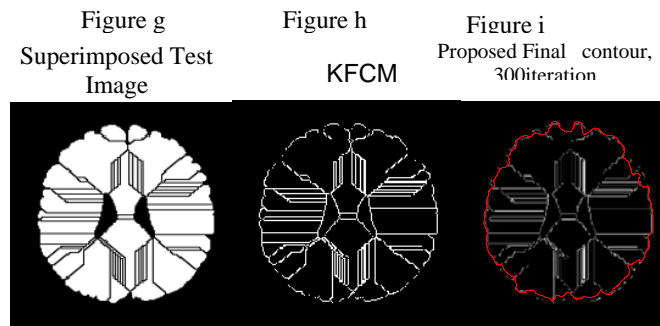


FIGURE : 2

Figure h are the **results of KFCM clustering** , to extracting the white matter.  
 Figure i are the **results of final contour with proposed method**.

## VII. DISCUSSIONS

The need of the re-initialization is completely eliminated by the proposal of Chunming Li, for pure partial differential equation driven level set methods, the variational level set methods. It can be easily implemented by using simple finite difference method and is computationally more efficient than the traditional level set methods. But, in this algorithm, the edge indicator has little effect on the low contrast image. So it is hard to obtain a perfect result when the region has a fuzzy or discrete boundary. Meanwhile, the initial contour of evolution needs to be determined by manual, and it has the shortcomings of time-consuming and user intervention.

In this paper, we projected a new method to transform the algorithm. The original image was partitioned with KFCM, and the controlled action of the edge indicator function was increased. The result of KFCM segmentation was used to obtain the initial contour of level set method. With the new edge indicator function, results of image segmentation showed that the improved algorithm can exactly extract the corresponding region of interest. Under the same computing proposal, the average time cost was lower. The iterative time of the KFCM algorithm is reduced compared to FCM algorithm. Alternatively the KFCM clustering is sensitive to noise; some redundant boundaries were appeared in the candidates. Consecutively to solve this problem, the algorithm of curve tracing was proposed.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we proposed a kernel-induced new metric to replace the Euclidean norm in fuzzy c-means algorithm in the original space and then derived the alternative kernel-based fuzzy c-means algorithm. The results of this paper confirmed that the mixture of KFCM with the level set methods could be used for the segmentation of low contrast images and medical images. The method has the advantages of no reinitialization, automation, and reducing the number of iterations. The validity of new algorithm was verified in the process of exacting details of images. In the future research, noise was added in images prior information on the object boundary extraction with level set method, such as boundary, shape, and size, would be further analyzed. At the same time, the performance of image segmentation algorithms would be improved by modernization of classic velocity of level set method.

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#### AUTHORS PROFILE



Tara. Saikumar, received his M.Tech, degree in Digital communication Engineering from Kakatiya Institute of Technology and Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal. He is the university topper in his M.Tech, KITS, Warangal and also received gold medal from Dr.D.N.Reddy vice-chancellor JNTUH in his B.Tech for his excellence2004-2008. Presently working as Asst Professor in ECE, CMR Technical Education Society, Group of Institutions, Hyderabad. He is a life member of IAENG,IACSIT.



B. Shashidhar Working as Assoc. professor in CMR Technical Education Society Group of Institution, Medchal., Department of Mathematics. He obtained B. Sc, M.Sc. B.Ed. and he has a vast experience in various Engineering college. Life member of ISTE.



V. Harshavardhan, received his M.Sc, Physics (Electronics) degree from Osmania University, Hyderabad. Presently working as Asst.Professor in Department of Physics, CMR Technical Education Society, Group of Institutions, Hyderabad. Presently pursuing Ph.D under the Guidance of Prof. Yellaiah in Osmania University



Kotha. ShobhaRani obtained B.Tech, (ECE), M.Tech from JNT University, Hyderabad Presently working as Asst.Professor in the Dept. of ECE, Malla Reddy College of Engineering for Women. She has vast experience in both Teaching and Industrial.