Kalman Filtering for Robust Identification of Face Images with Varying Expressions and Lighting Conditions

Horst Eidenberger
Vienna University of Technology, Interactive Media System Group
Favoritenstrasse 9-11, 1040 Vienna, Austria

Abstract

We propose a novel algorithm for the identification of faces from image samples. The algorithm uses the Kalman filter to identify significant face features. We employ the Kalmanfaces approach on a database of face images that show a variety of different expressions and were recorded under varying lighting conditions. Kalmanfaces show robustness against distortion and outperform the classic Eigenfaces approach in terms of identification performance and algorithm speed.

1. Introduction

Face recognition is one of the classic areas of pattern recognition [6]. Applications are manifold ranging from video surveillance to content-based retrieval. Face recognition research focuses on two problem areas: detection of faces in visual media objects and identification of detected faces.

We propose a novel approach for face identification from image samples that uses a simplified Kalman filter [2, 4] to detect invariant face features. The Kalman filter is frequently employed in face recognition for face detection in video sequences. However, the author is not aware of proposals to use the powerful linear data processing capabilities of the Kalman filter for the extraction of face features.

We employ the Kalman filter on a dataset of face images that were recorded under varying lighting conditions and show a variety of facial expressions. These data are distinguished by a high variance of location and shape of the typically considered face features (eyes, mouth, etc.). The Kalman filter considers variances in the data analysis process. Hence, we expect it to be an advantageous element of an algorithm for robust face identification under such circumstances.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 explains the Kalmanfaces extraction process. Section 3 discusses experiments and results. Section 4 sketches related work in face recognition and Kalman filter application.

2. The Kalmanfaces Approach

2.1 Kalmanfaces Extraction

The Kalmanfaces approach identifies the most likely face class for an image by feature similarity. It expects every face class (person) to be represented by a sequence of examples. The number of inputs should not be smaller than 3-5 for reasonable application of the Kalman filter. Each face class is represented by a single feature vector that is extracted as follows:

1. *Image normalization*. All face images are transformed to luminance matrices of the same size (for example, just three by three pixels).
2. *Averaging*. An average face is computed from the normalized images by a Kalman filter ("Kalmanface").
3. *Feature extraction*. Only those regions (pixels) of the Kalmanface are considered as features that are sufficiently invariant. The luminance variance of a region must not exceed a certain threshold.

The Kalman filter is applied in the second step to compute a class average that represents the facial traits adequately. Figure 1 shows an example. The face class consists of the ten images on the left (*a*). Element *b* shows the mean image, element *c* shows the Kalman-averaged image. As can be seen, the Kalman-averaged image contains more of the high-frequency information of the examples than the average image. The properties of the Kalman filter cause that variances in expression are preserved and varying lighting conditions are almost absorbed (the mean image has a light grey background).

Kalmanface averaging is performed as follows. We assume the class samples to be a temporal sequence and compute the Kalman estimate *for each pixel*:

$$x_t = x_{t-1} + k_t\left(x_{t-1} - l_t\right) \qquad (1)$$

x_t is the estimate of the pixel average at time t (the tth example image), l_t is the luminance value and k_t is

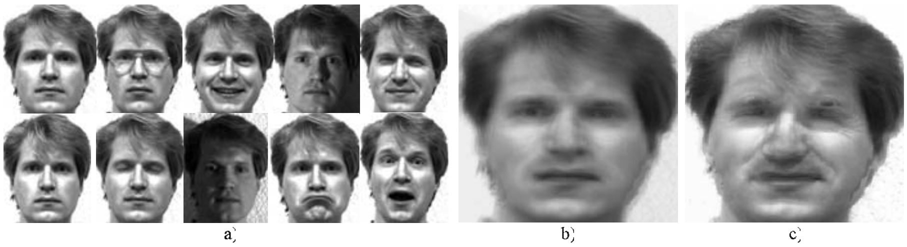

Figure 1. Kalmanface example. Kalmanface *c* is constructed of face class *a* (*b* is the mean image).

the Kalman weighting factor (depending on the luminance variances at times *t* and *t-1*):

$$k_t = \frac{\sigma_{t-1}}{\sigma_{t-1} + \sigma_t} \qquad (2)$$

Weight k_t is the crucial factor in this simplified version of the Kalman filter that does not consider complex noise models. k_t approaches zero if the variance increases, i.e. if the luminance of a pixel changes from sample to sample. In this case, the Kalman filter trusts on the earlier estimate and disregards l_t. In contrast, k_t approaches *1* if the variance decreases. In this case, the Kalman filter trusts on the luminance. The short time behaviour of the Kalman filter is to eliminate variances. In the long term Kalman filtering results in an average that preserves the properties of input sequence (see Figure 1). It processes all information that is provided [2].

In the third step, features are extracted from the Kalman-averaged face. We select those pixels as face features that have a luminance variance σ_t below a certain threshold. Hence, the face feature vector consists only of those traits that are relatively invariant over the samples. The threshold is an endogenous variable (Section 3 discusses approximations).

2.2 Similarity Measurement

Kalmanfaces querying is a straightforward application of the vector space model. We assume an Euclidean feature space. The query example is normalized to the same number of pixels as the face classes and compared to all Kalmanfaces. That is, one distance measurement operation per individual in the database has to be performed. We suggest a first order Minkowski distance (city block distance) for dissimilarity measurement. It has to be noted that only those pixels are considered for distance measurement that satisfy the variance condition stated above. This feature selection may (and usually will) change from face class to face class.

2.3 Discussion

We propose the Kalmanfaces approach as a solution for face detection in environments with high variance (e.g. varying facial expressions, varying lighting). In particular, Kalmanfaces have the following advantages:

1. Face class information is easily extensible. One further iteration of the Kalman filtering process is sufficient to add a new face image of an already registered person.
2. The application of the variance condition leads to short feature vectors. Distance measurement of short vectors by a linear function allows for efficient querying.
3. The length of the feature vectors is generally independent of the number of individuals in the database. Effective discrimination will require longer feature vectors for larger databases. However, database size and feature vector length are not as closely linked as, for example, in the Eigenfaces approach. In classic Eigenfaces, the number of weights equals the number of face classes in the database [3].

3. Results

Below, we compare the performance of Kalmanfaces to the Eigenfaces approach [3] on the Yale dataset [5]. Every Eigenfaces class Ω_i is averaged over *all* class members (highest quality). The Yale dataset comprises of photographs showing individuals with varying facial expressions and under varying lighting conditions. The nearest neighbour function is used for image resizing. Kalmanfaces and Eigenfaces are implemented as Matlab function and can be downloaded from [1]. Kalmanface averaging is employed with the following approximation for all pixels of the first two faces (k_1 is always zero):

$$x_1 = \frac{l_0 + l_1}{2} \qquad (3)$$

3.1 Face Retrieval Performance

Figure 2 summarizes the face identification performance depending on the feature size, i.e. the frame length in pixels of the quadratic face images. Kalmanfaces that use all feature elements (variance threshold of 100%, depicted as “v=100%”) outperform

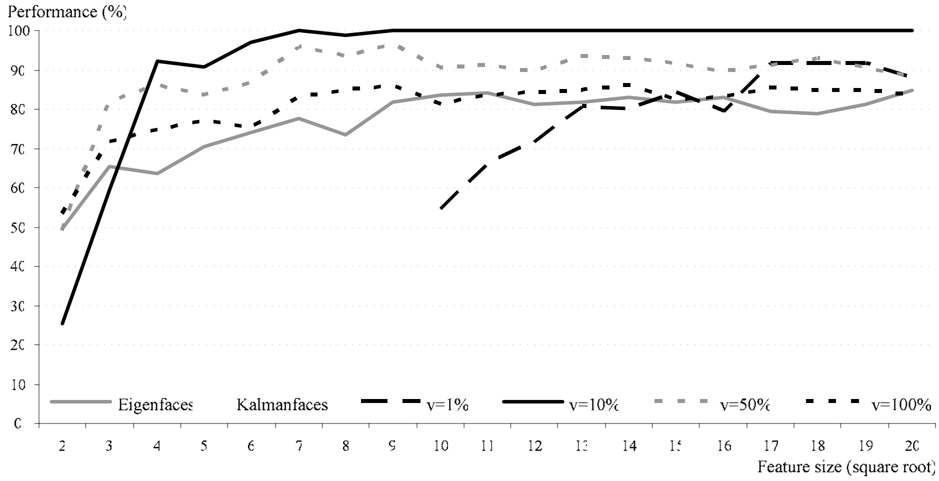

Figure 2. Performance comparison of Eigenfaces and Kalmanfaces at different variance threshold levels (not smoothed). "v=50%" means that the Kalmanfaces variance threshold is set to 50%.

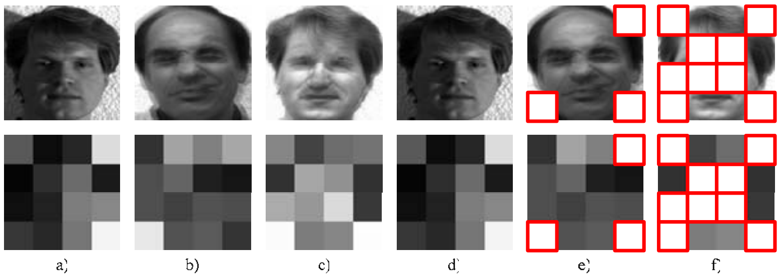

Figure 3. Misclassification example. If all features (bottom line, *a*-*c*) are considered, then face *a* is misclassified as element of *b* instead of *c*. If only features with a variance of at most 50% of the maximum are considered (*d*-*f*), then the face is correctly classified.

Eigenfaces slightly. Especially for very small feature vectors such Kalmanfaces are superior over Eigenfaces. (A feature size of *2* results in a feature vector of four elements.) Interestingly, Eigenfaces and Kalmanfaces with a variance threshold of 50% or more (all features with at most 50% of the total variance are used) fail in reaching 100% face identification performance independently of feature size. Obviously, these parameterizations lead to feature vectors that contain partially misleading elements (those with high variance). Kalmanfaces with a variance threshold of 50% perform already significantly better than Kalmanfaces with a threshold of 100% (a constant gap of about 10% face identification performance).

However, the best performance can be observed for Kalmanfaces with a variance threshold of 10%. This parameterization soon reaches a face classification performance of 100%. Except for very short feature vectors it is always superior over Eigenfaces. Clearly, the variance threshold is the decisive parameter in the application of Kalmanfaces.

3.2 Relevance of the Variance Condition

The variance threshold determines which features are used for Kalmanfaces similarity measurement. Only those features of a face class are selected that have a variance σ_t below the threshold (given in percent of the maximum variance in the face class). That is, only sufficiently invariant features are considered. The application of variance thresholds causes no computational overhead, since the variances have to be calculated for Kalmanface averaging anyway.

Figure 3 shows a typical misclassification example (feature vector edge lengths of four pixels). If a threshold of 100% is used, face *a* is misclassified as member of face class *b* instead of *c*. If a threshold of 50% is employed, fewer regions are considered (depending on the face classes). Then, face *d* is correctly classified as a member of Kalmanface class *f*.

However, it has to be mentioned that the reduction of the feature vector to just seven elements in Figure 3f

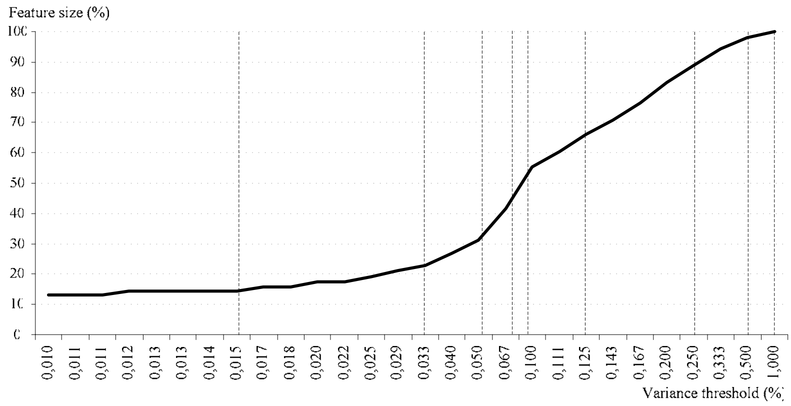

Figure 4. Variance and feature size. The feature size depends on the threshold value. The graph uses a double log scale at the intervals [0, 0.1] and [0.1, 1].

is not typical. Figure 4 gives the average relationship of variance threshold value and feature vector size (in percent to the Kalmanface class sizes). In average, a variance threshold of 50% leads to the elimination of just 3-5% of the features with highest variance.

We would like to close this section with a few considerations on the relationship of performance and feature vector length. A variance threshold of 10% means that approximately 50% of the features of each Kalmanface class are considered for similarity measurement. Hence, the best-performing Kalmanfaces in Figure 2 (v=10%) use feature vectors with 50% of the total feature size. The feature vectors of Eigenfaces are proportional to the number of face classes (Yale dataset: 15). A feature vector length of 15 elements is reached by Kalmanfaces of edge length 5 and v=10% (5^2*0.5~13). At this level, Kalmanfaces with a threshold of 10% outperform Eigenfaces by 20%.

4. Related Work

Face detection and face recognition have applications in a large number of domains (visual retrieval and surveillance, to name a few). Hence, it is not surprising that hundreds of new approaches are suggested every year (see, for example, [6]). The Kalman filter [2] is employed in a number of approaches to identify face locations in video streams. However, its beneficial properties are hardly exploited for face class description. This is surprising, since a large number of approaches depend on face class averaging (Principal Component Analysis, Linear Discriminant Analysis, Machine Learning approaches, etc.). Most of these approaches rely on the statistical mean, though the mean is for two reasons disadvantageous for this task. Firstly, it does not conform structurally to the original population. The mean can only under certain assumptions be interpreted with respect to the underlying data. Secondly, the application of the mean function has a blurring effect. Fragile high-frequency information (as the facial traits important for identification) gets lost.

5. Conclusions and Future Work

We propose a novel approach for face identification that uses the Kalman filter for face class averaging. Experimental evaluation shows that Kalmanfaces perform excellently on face images with a high fidelity of content. Classic Eigenfaces are outperformed by up to 20%. The Kalmanfaces approach scales well with increasing numbers of individuals and face examples. In future work, we will investigate its sensitivity to more/less-variant face classes and its performance on other face identification problems (e.g. camera angles) and databases (e.g. FERET).

7. References

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