Super Resolution For Subpixel-Based Downsampled Images

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Abstract—Subpixel-based downsampling is a new downsampling technique which utilizes the fact that each pixel in LCD is composed of three individually addressable subpixels. Subpixel-based downsampling can provide higher apparent resolution than pixel-based downsampling. In this paper we study the inverse problem of subpixel-based downsampling. We found that conventional pixel-based super resolution algorithms are not suitable for subpixel-based downsampled images due to the special downsampling pattern. In this paper we propose a super resolution algorithm specially for subpixel-based downsampled images, which use piecewise autoregressive model to model spatial correlation of neighboring pixels, and incorporate the special data degradation term corresponding to the subpixel downsampling pattern. We formulate the super resolution problem as a constrained least square problem and solve it using Gauss-Seidel iteration. Experiment results demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed algorithm.

I. INTRODUCTION

Downsampling is a common task in image processing. The simplest way to downsample an image by \( N \) times is to select one pixel out of every \( N \) pixels both in horizontal and vertical direction, named Direct Pixel-based Downsampling (DPD) (Fig. 1). Many sophisticated adaptive image super resolution (SR) methods have been proposed for DPD downsampled images. Soft-decision Adaptive Interpolation (SAI) method proposed by Zhang and Wu [10] is one of the most successful ones, in which they model pixel correlation using a piecewise 2-D autoregressive (PAR) model, and recover the HR image block by block using least square minimization.

An improved downsampling scheme is subpixel-based downsampling (subpixel-downsampling for short), which utilizes the fact that each pixel on a color LCD is actually composed of individual addressable red, green, and blue subpixel stripes (Fig. 1). Subpixel-downsampling has gained increasing attention these days. Existing subpixel-downsampling algorithms include Direct Subpixel Downsampling (DSD) [7] in which subpixel downsampling is applied only in horizontal direction, and Direct Diagonal Subpixel Downsampling (DDSD) [3], in which subpixel downsampling is applied diagonally in a \( 3 \times 3 \) block (Fig. 1). The abbreviations DPD, DSD, and DDSD are coined in [3]. More sophisticated algorithms include MMSE-SD [3] and DDSD-FA [4], in which anti-aliasing filters are applied before subpixel downsampling. Compared to conventional pixel based downsampling, subpixel-downsampling is more capable of preserving fine details of the images, with a cost of creating color-fringing artifacts in downsampled images [3], [4].

With the development of subpixel downsampling, an interesting question rises: given a subpixel downsampled image, can we recover the original HR image? Potential application of this technology can be low-bitrate image/video compression, image demosaicing, etc. This technology is not a trivial extension of conventional pixel-based super resolution. Most of the existing SR methods cannot apply on subpixel downsampled images, due to the special downsampling pattern. Existing pixel-based SR algorithms are developed under the assumption that the input small image is obtained by pixel-downsampling, and they usually only consider super-resolving luminance component (Y channel) if the input image is a full color image while the chrominance component (U, V channels) are interpolated by simple interpolators such as bicubic. Thus pixel-based SR algorithms are not suitable for subpixel-downsampled images, because the Y component of the LR image is no longer a simple down-sized version of HR Y component, also significant amount of information is contained in U, V channels and those algorithms cannot effectively utilize the information.

To overcome the above mentioned problems, we propose a SR algorithm for subpixel-downsampled images utilizing the subpixel downsampling characteristic. Unlike conventional pixel-based SR methods, we super-resolve R, G, B channels simultaneously. For each channel the pixel correlation is modeled as a piecewise autoregressive (AR) process as in [10]. The optimization problem is solved using Gauss-Seidel iteration as in [8]. Since our method is based on autoregressive model, we name this method Subpixel based Autoregressive Super Resolution (SASR).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We briefly review the DDSD algorithm in Section II, and 2-D autoregressive model in Section III. We propose our subpixel-based SR algorithm in Section IV. The experiment results are shown in Section V. We conclude our work in Section VI.

II. SUBPIXEL BASED IMAGE DOWNSAMPLING

This paper focuses on DDSD for its simplicity and capability of maintaining spatial details. Basically DDSD takes RGB components differently from the three pixels on the diagonal...
line of each $3 \times 3$ block (Fig. 1). Thus DDSD can increase the apparent resolution both in horizontal and vertical directions. By changing the data degradation term, our algorithm can easily adapt to any subpixel-downsampling algorithm.

Figure 2 shows the downsampled images of “tree”. We can see that compared to DPD, DDSD can preserve more details, especially on sharp edges, e.g. the long grasses and the tree branches.

### III. IMAGE INTERPOLATION USING AUTOREGRESSIVE MODEL

Similar as in [10], we model an image as a piecewise autoregressive (PAR) process

$$X_i = \sum_t \alpha_t X_{i+t} + v_i$$

(1)

where $v_i$ is a random perturbation independent of spatial location $i$ and the image signal $X$, $X_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, \ldots, 8$) are the first-order neighbors of $X_i$. The PAR coefficient $\alpha_t$ is assumed the same for all pixels in a local window. Let $I_h$ be the HR image to be estimated by interpolating the observed LR image $I_l$, which is a downsampled version of the HR image by a factor of two. Let $x_i \in I_l$ and $y_i \in I_h$ be the pixels of images $I_l$ and $I_h$, $y_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, \ldots, 8$) be the neighbors of pixel location $i$ in the LR image. $y_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$) are the 8-connected neighbors, and $y_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$) are the 4-connected neighbors. Note that $x_i \in I_l$ implies $x_i \in I_h$, i.e. all LR pixels are naturally HR pixels.

We formulate the super resolution problem as a constrained least square problem as follows. Let $C_1$ be the 8-neighborhood which includes all 4-connected neighbors $y_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$) and $C_2$ be the 4-neighborhood which includes only the 4-connected neighbors $y_{i+t}$ ($t = 1, 2, 3, 4$). For each separate color channel, we formulate the optimization problem as follows.

$$\min_{y, a, b} F(y, a, b) = \sum_{i \in W} \left( \|y_i - \sum_t a_t y_{i+t} \|^2 + \lambda^2 \|y_i - \sum_t b_t y_{i+4} \|^2 \right)$$

(2)

where $W$ is a window of HR image $I_h$; $\lambda^2$ controls the importance of the horizontal and vertical correlation over diagonal correlation; Matrix $S$ selects the HR pixels in $W$ that are also in the LR image lattice.

This optimization problem can be easily solved using Gauss-Seidel algorithm as in [8]. Basically we solve $\{a, b\}$ and $y$ iteratively until convergence (initial value of $y$ can be obtained by bicubic interpolation):

$$\{a^{(n+1)}(i), b^{(n+1)}(i)\} = \arg\min_{a,b} F(y^{(n)}, a, b), \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

(3)

$$y^{(n+1)}(i) = \arg\min_y F(y, a^{(n+1)}(i), b^{(n+1)}(i)). \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

(4)

### IV. SUPER RESOLUTION FOR SUBPIXEL-DOWNSAMPLED IMAGES

The key factor that makes super resolution for subpixel downsampled image different from ordinary pixel-based super resolution, is that subpixel downsampled images are always full color images, and the R, G, B channels have slight subpixel shift compared to each other. Thus we can no longer convert the small images into YCbCr and then apply super resolution on Y channel only while the Cb, Cr channels are interpolated by simple convolution-based interpolators (such as bicubic), as done in most pixel-based super resolution algorithms [6], [9], [5], [2].

Therefore we propose to do the super resolution process in RGB space. For each separate color channel, we formulate the problem (2) with a small modification of matrix $S$. For example, the problem for R channel can be written as

$$\min_{y', a', b'} F'(y', a', b')$$

s.t. $S^r y' = x^r$

(5)

where

$$F'(y', a', b') = \sum_{i \in W} \left( \|y'_i - \sum_t a'_t y_{i+t} \|^2 + \lambda^2 \|y'_i - \sum_t b'_t y_{i+4} \|^2 \right)$$

and

$$S^r y' = x^r$$

The optimization problem can be solved by iteratively solving coefficients $\{a, b\}$ and HR pixel values $y$ as follows.
A. Solving Coefficients

Let $u = (u^r, u^g, u^b)$ be the vector of HR RGB pixels inside window $W$, $v = (v^r, v^g, v^b)$ be the vector of HR RGB pixels outside window $W$. Then we have $y$ is the concatenation of $u$ and $v$, with necessary re-ordering of elements. To solve $\{a, b\}$ we have

$$\{a, b\} = \arg\min_{a,b} F(a, b, y^{(n)}) = \|u - Aa\|^2 + \lambda^2\|u - Bb\|^2,$$

Since $a$ and $b$ are naturally uncoupled, we have

$$\hat{a} = \arg\min_a \|u - Au\|^2 = (A^T A)^{-1} A^T u$$

$$\hat{b} = \arg\min_b \|u - Bb\|^2 = (B^T B)^{-1} B^T u$$

where $A, B$ are the matrices formed of 8-connected and 4-connected neighboring pixels of $u$. Basically the $i$th row of matrix $A$ consists of the 8-connected neighbors $u^{(8)}_{tot}, t = 1,\ldots, 4$ of $u_t$. The $i$th row of matrix $B$ consists of the 4-connected neighbors $u^{(4)}_{tot}, t = 1,\ldots, 4$ of $u_t$.

B. Solving HR pixels

Let $x = (x^r, x^g, x^b), S = \text{diag}(S^r, S^g, S^b), C = \text{diag}(C^r(\hat{a}, \hat{b}), C^g(\hat{a}, \hat{b}), C^b(\hat{a}, \hat{b}))$. Note at this step now $C$ is determinant matrix rather than a function of $\{a, b\}$, since for each $C^r(\hat{a}, \hat{b}) = [C^r_1(\hat{a}), \lambda C^r_2(\hat{b})]$ we can calculate $C^r_1(\hat{a})$ and $C^r_2(\hat{b})$ and estimate $\lambda$ using the fitting errors of $a$ and $b$ similar to [8], i.e. $\lambda^2 = \|u - A\hat{a}\|^2/\|u - Au\|^2$. We treat $v$ as known variable and only solve $u$ via the following problem

$$\hat{y} = \arg\min_y \|C(\hat{a}, \hat{b})y\|^2 = \arg\min_u \|D_u u + D_v v\|^2$$

s.t. $Sy = x \iff S_u u = x$ (7)

where $C = [D_u, D_v], S = [S_u, S_v], D_u$ is a matrix composed of the columns of $C$ corresponding to vector $u$, and $D_v$ is a matrix composed of the other columns of $C$ corresponding to vector $v$. So is $S_u$ and $S_v$. The reason we can substitute $S'$ with $S_u$ is that $x$ is only related to $u$, i.e. the pixels inside window $W$. Then the problem can be solved using KKT system [1]:

$$\begin{bmatrix} u \\ v \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} D_u^T D_u & S_u^T \\ S_u & 0 \end{bmatrix}^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} D_u^T D_v v \\ x \end{bmatrix}$$ (8)

where $\nu$ is the Lagrange multiplier. Note what we need to do is just updating the pixels in vector $u$ and continue to next iteration.

V. Experiment results

To evaluate the performance of the proposed algorithm, we conduct experiments on several commonly used images. Most of them contain complex textures which are difficult for super resolution. The LR images are produced by downsampling HR images using DDSD method, thus LR images are of $1/3$ size of the HR images both horizontally and vertically. Note for grayscale images, DDSD method will first clone the intensity value to R, G, B channels and then downsample them.

Table I shows the PSNR comparison for grayscale images and Table II shows the comparison results for full color images. Bi-sp means downsampling images using subpixel-based method DDD, and upsampling the small images using pixel-based method bicubic. Similarly SAI-pp means pixel-based downsampling method nearest neighbor downsampling and pixel-based algorithm SAI, and so on. SASR is the Subpixel based Autoregressive Super Resolution that we propose. Note SAI is designed for upsampling an image with factor of 2, to apply SAI method with factor of 3 we first interpolate the LR image to 2 times of original size using SAI, then interpolate it 1.5 times using bicubic.

We see in Table I that SASR has averagely 4 dB gain over SAI-sp. SAI-sp results are achieved by applying SAI algorithm on Y channel only. The UV channels are interpolated by bicubic convolution. Since both SAI and SASR use same PAR model, we believe this result supports our argument that for subpixel-downsampled images, conventional pixel-based SR algorithms are not suitable. Besides, SASR has over 1 dB gain over SAI-pp. This result shows the superiority of subpixel-downsampling algorithms from the other aspect. Because SASR uses same PAR prior as SAI, the fact that SASR is better than SAI-pp implies subpixel-downsampled images contain more information, thus produces better super-resolved image.

Fig. 3 shows the super-resolved images of grayscale baboon image. We can see that both SAI-sp and SAI-pp generates unnatural textures and broken lines. SAI-sp result is slightly better than SAI-pp at the regions of beard. On the other hand, SASR method generates much better result. The textures of hair are much more natural and finer. And the lines of beard are more continuous.
have similar results as grayscale case, except that SASR has only a slightly higher PSNR than SAI-pp. This is because the color-fringing artifact is much more severe for color images, thus SASR recovered image has a relatively lower PSNR. However if we look at the visual quality shown in Fig. 4, we can notice that SASR recovered image has better visual quality, especially at the beard region of baboon.

VI. CONCLUSION

We propose a novel super resolution algorithm for subpixel-downsampled images. Because of the special characteristics of subpixel-based downsampling, traditional pixel-based SR algorithms cannot apply to subpixel-downsampled images. A special data degradation model has to be designed to fit the real image downsampling process. We design the data degradation term in this spirit and use the piecewise AR model as the pixel correlation model. Experiments show that the proposed algorithm is effective both in PSNR and visual quality.

This algorithm is a very preliminary result. Our future effort will be put on utilizing the correlation between R, G, B channels and designing more sophisticated algorithms.

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