Integrating Multiple Global and Local Features by Product Sparse Coding for Image Retrieval

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SUMMARY In this study, we propose a simple, yet general and powerful framework of integrating multiple global and local features by Product Sparse Coding (PSC) for image retrieval. In our framework, multiple global and local features are extracted from images and then are transformed to Trimmed-Root (TR)-features. After that, the features are encoded into compact codes by PSC. Finally, a two-stage ranking strategy is proposed for indexing in retrieval. We make three major contributions in this study. First, we propose TR representation of multiple image features and show that the TR representation offers better performance than the original features. Second, the integrated features by PSC is very compact and effective with lower complexity than by the standard sparse coding. Finally, the two-stage ranking strategy can balance the efficiency and memory usage in storage. Experiments demonstrate that our compact image representation is superior to the state-of-the-art alternatives for large-scale image retrieval.

key words: image retrieval, image representation, Trimmed-Root (TR)-feature, Product Sparse Coding (PSC), ranking strategy

1. Introduction

An essential issue in content-based image retrieval (CBIR), object recognition and image classification is how to represent images by numeric values, called features or descriptors. Many image features have been developed for the applications in image retrieval and computer vision fields. Roughly speaking, image features can be grouped into global types and local types based on whether they use global or local description for image representation[1]. Nowadays, large-scale image-retrieval systems require a strong image representation and efficient storage systems capable of storing billions of images. There exists a trade-off between the precision of image representation and its size. Local features store multiple local invariant features in an image and often offer better performance in representation, but they need larger storage than global ones. Global features usually have more compact representations and smaller storage requirements than local ones. Thus, both global and local features have their advantages and drawbacks in image representation.

1. multiple global and local feature integration catches image features both in entire image level and local object level;
2. TR-features have better performance than original ones in image retrieval. Because they are computed as an element wise trimmed square root, they do not require...
any additional storage space;
3. concatenation approach by PSC obtains a compact yet
discriminative image representation that significantly
outperforms the state-of-the-art and PSC also has lower
complexity than standard Sparse Coding (SC);
4. two-stage ranking strategy makes the retrieval more ef-
cient and flexible.

Several other deep learning approaches [23] have been
proposed in image retrieval, but we mainly target at im-
proving hand-crafted features rather than fully-learnable
approaches and focus on SC approaches in this study. There
are already some works devoted to image categorization
and retrieval through SC on raw image patches [24]–[26].
And some works use both local and global features for im-
age retrieval or class classification [27]–[29]. However, our
framework is different from them in many ways. In some
works [24]–[26], they still focus on local features and do
not take account into global ones. In other works [27]–[29],
although both local and global features are used, our frame-
work differs in using TR-features and PSC for coding and
also the two-stage ranking strategy is more flexible.

The rest of our paper is organized as follows. We be-
go by reviewing related work in Sect. 2. Then, we describe
the proposed framework in detail in Sect. 3. Different ex-
periments of image retrieval demonstrate the performance
of our framework in Sect. 4. The last section concludes our
study.

2. Related Work

In this section, we first review some classic global features
including GIST and others. Then we discuss some classic
local features including SIFT SIFT, its variants, and their
aggregation approaches. Finally, we give a brief introduc-
tion to SC and PSC.

2.1 Global Features

GIST was originally proposed [6] to represent a scene by
a low dimensional vector for real world scene recognition.
The idea is to develop a low dimensional representation of
the scene. An image is first decomposed by a bank of multi-
scale oriented filters (tuned to 8 orientations and 4 scales)
to catch the scene structure in image. An image is simply
divided by a 4-by-4 grid and orientation histograms are ex-
tracted. The resulting image representation is a \(4 \times 8 \times 16 = 512\)
dimensional vector. This representation can be thought of as using a single SIFT descriptor [8] to describe the entire
image. This approach has recently shown good results for
landmark classification [30], scene parsing [31], image com-
pletion [32], and image searching [22], [33]. A typical GIST
has 512 dimensions and different strategies [7], [34], [35]
have been proposed to further compress the size.

Color histograms [2]–[4] and texture descriptors [5] are
also commonly used global features in image retrieval. A
color histogram is a representation of the distribution of col-
ors in an image and it is simple but useful. The main draw-
back of histograms is that the representation is dependent
of the color of the image being studied, ignoring its shape
and texture. Texture descriptors use image texture which is
one important characteristics used in identifying objects or
regions of interest in an image, but it does not work well for
natural images without texture.

2.2 Local Features and Aggregation

SIFT feature was first developed by Lowe [8] and has been
approved as the most useful local image features in com-
puter vision fields. Original SIFT is computed on a small
patch, i.e., 32-by-32 pixels, 8 orientations and 4-by-4 grid
are used to compute orientation histogram, which results in
a \(8 \times 4 \times 4 = 128\) dimensional vector. Many variants includ-
ing PCA-SIFT [36], GLOH [9], SURF [11] and DAISY [10]
been proposed based on SIFT. They match small patches
of images and is robust to image transformations. Because
more than hundreds of local features may be extracted from
a single image to represent it, it is not suitable for ob-
ject recognition and image retrieval in large-scale image
database. Thus, Bag-of-Features (BOF) [12] is proposed to
solve the problem.

The BOF representation is based on local descriptors
such as SIFT extracted at invariant regions of interest. First,
interest regions are detected by some detectors such as
Hessian-Affine, and SIFT descriptors for those interest re-
regions are computed. Then, each local descriptor is assigned
to the closest “visual words” by using a codebook of \(k\) “vi-


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Fisher Vector [16] or Vector of Local Aggregated De-
scriptor (VLAD) [17] are two alternatives to BOF. For
Fisher Vector, local descriptors are coded as the average of
probabilities that feature belongs to the each Gaussian com-
ponent of a codebook which is a pre-learned GMM model.
And for VLAD, the differential (residual) of vector and its
k-means centroid is used.

2.3 SC and PSC

Given a potentially large set of input patterns, SC attempts
to automatically find a small number of representative pat-
ters which, when combined in the right proportions, can
reproduce the original input patterns. The sparse coding
for the input then consists of those representative patterns.
Most models of sparse coding are based on the linear gen-
erative model [37], in which the symbols are combined in a
linear fashion to approximate the input. Sparse coding of
image patches has been successfully applied to tasks such
as image and video denoising [38], restoration [39], super-
resolution [40], segmentation [41] and face recognition [42].
Because SC is computational expensive, PSC is proposed to solve the complexity issue [43]. PSC shares the same encoding model as SC, but requires the codebook to be a Cartesian product of two smaller subcodebooks. PSC can reduce the time complexity of normal sparse coding from $O(K)$ to $O(\sqrt{K})$ in the codebook size $K$. We will give more details of PSC in introducing our framework later.

3. Proposed Framework

In this section, we describe how to transform features to Trained Root (TR)-features by using GIST and SIFT as representatives at first. Then, we introduce how to use PSC to integrate multiple global and local features to obtain compact image representation. After that, we demonstrate a two-stage ranking strategy and show how to use it to balance the accuracy and efficiency in image retrieval. Finally, we give some explanations why we integrate global and local features for large-scale image retrieval.

3.1 TR-Features

It is shown that using a square root (Hellinger) kernel instead of the standard Euclidean distance to measure the similarity between SIFT descriptors leads to a dramatic performance boost in image retrieval [18]. In this study, we transform SIFT to TR-SIFT. TR-SIFT is computed as an element wise trimmed square root of the feature is larger than a predefined threshold we set it to zero. Then we replace SIFT with the proposed TR-SIFT.

Because GIST can be reviewed as computing SIFT descriptor on the entire image, it is expected that TR-GIST, which is computed as an element wise trimmed square root of GIST, can give a performance boost comparing to GIST.

The improvement is simple but powerful. We apply it to different global and local features in image retrieval in this study. We show that our TR-features makes a dramatic performance improvement in the experiments.

3.2 Integrating Features by PSC

Figure 1 illustrates the flowchart of how to integrate multiple global and local features. It usually contains two steps: encoding multiple global and local features by PSC, and normalization and weighting. PSC encodes multiple kinds of global and local features from an image into a sparse vector. Our approach consists of the following major parts:

**Part 1: Encoding Global Features.** If we have multiple kinds of global features from an image, for each kind of global feature $x$, it can be encoded into a $d$-dimensional vector $y = [y^1, y^2, \ldots, y^d]$ by fitting a linear model with sparsity ($L_1$) constraint:

$$
\min_{y} \|x - Ay\|_2^2 + \lambda |y|,
$$

(1)

subject to $y \geq 0$

and $A = A_1 \times A_2$

where $x$ denotes the Cartesian product, $A_1$ and $A_2$ are two subcodebooks of a size $1/2d \times k$ learned in advance by PSC. Any codeword in $A$ is the concatenation of a subcodeword in $A_1$ and a subcodeword in $A_2$. So $A$ is a $d \times K$ matrix with $K = k^2$. Here $y \geq 0$ means that all the elements of $y$ are nonnegative. Thus, the time complexity of each subproblem becomes linear in $\sqrt{K}$. Finally, a coded feature is normalized by

$$
y := \frac{y}{\|y\|_2}.
$$

(2)

**Part 2: Encoding Local Features.** If we have multiple kinds of local features from an image, for each kind of local features $X'$, let $X'$ be a set of $m$ dimensional local descriptors with $n$ local features, i.e. $X' = [x'_1, x'_2, \ldots, x'_n]^T$. We can obtain their corresponding sparse codes $[u'_1, u'_2, \ldots, u'_n]^T$ as in encoding global features previously for each descriptor by PSC.

Then, we pool them into a single $m$ dimensional vector $u = [u^1, u^2, \ldots, u^m]$. Two pooling methods may be used in this step–average pooling and max pooling:

average pooling: $u' = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} u''_i$,

(3)

max pooling: $u' = \max \{u''_i | t = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$.

(4)

The pooled vector $u$ is normalized by

$$
u := \frac{u}{\|u\|_2}.
$$

(5)

In most cases, average pooling is better than max pooling and we choose it in this study.

**Part 3: Integration.** After encoding $p$ kinds of global features and $q$ kinds of local features, we can obtain a set of coded global features $Y = [y_1, y_2, \ldots, y_p]$ with $d \times p$-dimensional vector and a set of coded local feature $U = [u_1, u_2, \ldots, u_q]$ with $m \times q$-dimensional vector. The final image representation $d \times p + m \times q$ dimensional vector $Z$ is a combination of $Y$ and $U$ by a weighting parameter $w$:
\[ Z = [wY, (1-w)U]. \]  

(6)

In two extreme cases, \( w = 1 \) or \( w = 0 \), \( Z \) equals to using only global features or local features, respectively. Note that the features may be concatenated before PSC, but it is necessary to constructing concatenation feature codebooks in learning phase. Thus, we choose to code it by PSC before concatenation in this study for convenience and flexibility.

3.3 Two-Stage Ranking Strategy

For large-scale image database, i.e., a billion image dataset, we have to scan dozens of millions of images in the database by directly using the coded features above. Hence, we propose a two-stage ranking strategy in this study. It can be used to refine the ranking result both in accuracy and efficiency.

Figure 2 shows the process of the two-stage ranking strategy. We use the global part in the first ranking stage to filter a subset of the full retrieval set and use the local part in the second ranking stage to find the final similar images. Without loss of generality, we also use TR-GIST and TR-SIFT as the global and local feature representatives to demonstrate the strategy here.

The first ranking is based on the comparison of the encoded TR-GIST descriptors to produce a list of images ranked according to the Euclidean distance. That means only a part of images whose similarity \( S \) are smaller than a threshold \( S_0 \) are ranked and enter into the second stage. Alternatively, we can specify a percentage of selected images that can enter the next stage here, i.e., 50% top ranked images are selected into the second stage. Then, the selected images are compared again by using the local part of the descriptors \( y \) in the second stage. In the second stage, images whose similarity \( S_1 \) are smaller than a threshold \( S_1 \) are treated as the final similar images. We also can specify a percentage of selected images as the final similar images in this stage.

For different retrieval purposes, we may use local part in first ranking stage and use global part in the second stage or use global part in first ranking stage and use the whole feature in the second stage. Because global descriptors such as TR-GIST can capture the spatial structure better, we will choose it when we want to select similar images in global view; and we will use local descriptors such as TR-SIFT when we want to select similar images conclude similar objects since it can capture local features better. Based on many experimental results, we find that global-local strategy is more effective.

3.4 Reason for Integrating Global and Local Features

Figure 3 shows three groups of similar images from the INRIA Holidays dataset [22], which is usually used as a benchmark database in similar image retrieval. Probably everyone would agree that the images in the first row, are similar because they look nearly the same. Many would probably say that the images in the second row are also similar since they contain the same object taken from different views. The third row containing images relating to sail is the most ambiguous one, and it is not easy to give a yes or no answer as to whether they are similar. This illustrates our main concern: what people consider to be similar images.

We now return to our concern what people consider to be “similar” images in similar image retrieval. In general, similar image retrieval is only meaningful in its service to people [44], so we prepared a questionnaire about the definition of similar images for several objects and used the answers to it to determine similarity at three meaning levels:

**Duplicate level** Duplicate is used here to distinguish it from the near-duplicate approach [45] commonly used in image retrieval. Unlike near-duplicate images, duplicate similar images here are considered as those
taken from the same location with small transformations as shown in Fig. 3 (a).

Near-duplicate level As used here, near-duplicate mostly refers to the images containing the same object taken from different viewpoints with certain transformations as shown in Fig. 3 (b).

Near-semantic level Images are defined as “similar” based on semantically-meaningful information from the image content as shown in Fig. 3 (c).

As mentioned previously, both global and local approaches have their advantages and drawbacks in image retrieval since similar image has different meaning levels, it is reasonable to integrating global and local features for image retrieval to obtain flexibility in this study. By adjusting the weights of local and global feature parts, our integrated feature can handle with different meaning levels. It is better to use larger weight of global part if the images are near duplicate level while larger weight of local part should be used when the images are near semantic level.

4. Experiments

In order to illustrate the performance of our framework, we set up several different experiments in this study. We first evaluate TR-features; We then provide comparisons to show the effect of integrating global and local features by PSC; We finally illustrate the two-stage ranking strategy.

4.1 Experiments on TR-Features

Without loss of generality, we choose TR-GIST and TR-SIFT as the global and local feature representatives to demonstrate the improvement in this experiment. Because the dramatic improvement in performance by using a square root (Hellinger) kernel in SIFT named RootSIFT on Oxford 105k dataset (tf-idf only) is shown in [18], we choose to use Oxford 105k dataset to compare them with our TR-SIFT. It contains 5062 Oxford building images and defines 55 queries with another 100k Flickr images to test large-scale retrieval. The first image of each group is the query image and the correct retrieval results are the other images of the group. The accuracy is measured by mean Average Precision (mAP), where the mean is taken over all queries [14]. The threshold for trimming in TR-SIFT is 0.0005. The retrieval results are as in Table 1. We can see that our TR-SIFT obtain better performance than two others in Table 1. The improvement is from 0.515 to 0.581 by RootSIFT and further to 0.593 by our TR-SIFT.

Also, because the performance of GIST in image retrieval on standard datasets INRIA Holiday has been reported in [22], we use the standard datasets INRIA Holiday to evaluate the performances for fair. The dataset contains 500 image groups, each of which represents a distinct scene or object and 991 corresponding relevant images. We compared GIST, RootGIST and our TR-GIST in the retrieval. The accuracy is also measured by mAP. The threshold for trimming in TR-GIST is 0.0002. The retrieval result is as in Table 2. The improvement is from 0.376 to 0.414 by RootGIST and further to 0.428 by our TR-GIST.

It is shown that the performance improvements of our TR-features are obtained by root and trimming modifications comparing to original SIFT and GIST. As mentioned previously, a square root modification can change the similarity kernel. Trimming modification can ignore the features with small gradient in the image, which can be viewed as a filter may help to improve the performance. These improvements come at virtually no additional cost, and no additional storage since GIST and SIFT can be converted online to TR-GIST and TR-SIFT with a negligible processing overhead.

4.2 Experiments on Integrated Features by PSC

Here, we will compare our integrated feature with the-state-of-art such as Fisher Kernel, VLAD in image retrieval. We use the INRIA Holidays+1m dataset for large-scale experiment. The dataset contains the Holiday dataset with 1 million distracter images downloaded from Flickr which is called Holidays+1m dataset. The accuracy is also measured by mAP.

For the dimensions of integrated TR-GIST and TR-SIFT, we choose \( d = 4096 \) and \( m = 4096 \) in a 8192 dimensional vector. We set the weighting parameter \( w = 0 \) and \( w = 0.5 \). Note that when \( w = 0 \), it means that we only use TRD-SIFT in the integrated feature. Thresholds for trimming in TR-SIFT and TR-GIST are 0.0005 and 0.0002, respectively. The features are detected by the Harris detector and a 128-D SIFT descriptor is computed for each feature for Fisher Kernel and VLAD. Then the descriptors are aggregated by Fisher Kernel and VLAD, respectively. The codebook sizes are \( k = 64 \) for both Fisher and VLAD, resulting in a 128x64 = 8192 dimensional aggregated vectors for comparison. In order to show the effectiveness of PSC, we added SIFT+PSC for comparison. All the above features are also compressed from 8192 dimension to 128, 64 and 32 dimensions by PCA here.

The retrieval results are shown in Table 3. As we can see, PSC performs better than Fisher Kernel and VLAD. Comparing with Fisher Kernel and VLAD, the improvement is from 0.492 and 0.525 to 0.534 by using PSC at 8192 dimension. And the result is further improved to 0.542 (\( w = 0 \)) and 0.546 (\( w = 0.5 \)) by integrating TR-SIFT and TR-GIST.
Table 3  Retrieval results by different features.

| strain         | D=8192 | D=128 | D=64  | D=32  |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Fisher         | 0.492  | 0.490  | 0.460  | 0.424  |
| VLAD           | 0.525  | 0.511  | 0.473  | 0.422  |
| original SIFT+PSC | 0.534  | 0.526  | 0.483  | 0.428  |
| PSC(w=0)       | 0.542  | 0.530  | 0.484  | 0.432  |
| PSC(w=0.5)     | 0.546  | 0.542  | 0.496  | 0.434  |

Table 4  Retrieval results by SC and PSC.

| strain         | D=8192 | D=128 | D=64  | D=32  |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| SC(w=0.5)      | 0.552  | 0.548  | 0.492  | 0.428  |
| SC(w=0)        | 0.534  | 0.515  | 0.467  | 0.410  |
| PSC(w=0.5)     | 0.546  | 0.542  | 0.496  | 0.434  |

Table 5  Retrieval results by different weights.

| the weighting parameter w | mAP   |
|---------------------------|-------|
| w=0.1                     | 0.542 |
| w=0.3                     | 0.548 |
| w=0.5                     | 0.546 |
| w=0.7                     | 0.534 |
| w=0.9                     | 0.512 |

Note that when $w = 0$, it equals to use TR-SIFT only. And PSC also performs better than others at reduced dimensions by PCA.

Then, we compare the performances of the integrated features by SC and PSC in Table 4. $w = 0$ means using only local features as [26]. From the table, we can see that SC is slightly better than PSC at 8192 dimension but performs equally or worse than PSC at reduced dimensions by PCA. On a computer with 3.4GHz CPU and 8 GB memories, the computational times for SC, PSC, VLAD are 9.5, 0.55, 0.98 seconds for encoding one image, respectively. Considering the computational complexity, we believe that PSC is more suitable in large-scale image retrieval.

Third, we evaluate how the weighting parameter $w$ works here. We set the $w$ from 0.1 to 0.9 at 0.2 interval and repeat the retrieval experiment above. The results are shown in Table 5. From the table, we find that the weighting parameter $w$ affect the retrieval results slightly and all the results are better than Fisher Kernel and VLAD methods excepting $w = 0.9$.

Finally, we tried to integrate more different kinds of features. We add DAISY [10], or color histogram [2], or both of them in local and global parts. The weighting parameters are 1/3 for each part when integrating three features and 1/4 for each part when integrating four features. We make the dimensions are 128 for all cases by PCA for fair comparison. The retrieval results are shown in Table 6. We can conclude that using more features can further improve the retrieval performance. Considering the computational cost, we may choose TR-GIST and TR-SIFT as the two representatives in most cases.

Table 6  Retrieval results by integrating different kinds of features.

|                     | mAP   |
|---------------------|-------|
| TR-GIST+TR-SIFT     | 0.542 |
| TR-GIST+TR-SIFT+DAISY | 0.548 |
| TR-GIST+TR-SIFT+color histogram | 0.534 |
| TR-GIST+TR-SIFT+DAISY+color histogram | 0.560 |

Table 7  Retrieval results using different percentages in the first ranking stage.

| Selected percentage in the first stage | mAP   |
|----------------------------------------|-------|
| 10%                                    | 0.428 |
| 30%                                    | 0.506 |
| 50%                                    | 0.514 |
| 70%                                    | 0.544 |
| 90%                                    | 0.538 |

4.3 Experiments on Two-Stage Ranking Strategy

In this experiment, we will evaluate the proposed two-stage ranking method in our framework for image retrieval. As mentioned previously, we may choose a threshold or specify a percentage to produce a list of ranked images in the first ranking stage. In this experiment, we use a percentage from 10% to 90% at an interval 20% to evaluate the strategy. We used the TR-GIST+TR-SIFT as the integrated feature. The first ranking is based on the comparison of the encoded TR-GIST descriptors $u$ to produce a list of ranked images according to the Euclidean distance. Then, the ranked images are compared again by using the local descriptor part TR-SIFT.

The retrieval results using different percentages in the first ranking stage are shown in Table 7. From the table, we find that the retrieval results change slightly when using different percentage in the first ranking stage. Comparing with the $mAP = 0.542$ by using the same feature without ranking strategy, the results are comparable in most cases. Especially, when the percentage is 70%, the result is 0.544, which is even better than 0.542 which is without ranking strategy. That is because some confusing images which are similar globally but not locally are filtered in the first stage. The whole process times for different percentages are nearly proportional to the percentages. Considering the time saving in searching, the results are very satisfying and the two-stage ranking strategy gives flexibility between the retrieval accuracy and speed.

5. Conclusions and Future Work

This study presents a framework for integrating global and local features based on Product Sparse Coding (PSC) with a two-stage ranking strategy. We also transform features to Trimmed-Root (TR)-features and it is shown that TR-features offer better performance than original versions and do not require any additional storage space. Compared with other state-of-the-art systems, our framework shows its superiorities in large-scale image retrieval accuracy and PSC.
has lower computational complexity than standard Sparse Coding. Moreover, our framework can give the flexibility in retrieval speed and accuracy by using a two-stage ranking strategy. Future work will aim at extending our framework to integrate more different kinds of features, automatically optimize weighting parameter \( w \) against the dataset, and explore real applications in large-scale image retrieval system.

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