Research Article

A Novel Comprehensive Watermarking Scheme for Color Images

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1. Introduction

Digital watermarking technology is an important research direction in information hiding. It refers to embed identification information (i.e., digital watermark) into the digital carrier, including multimedia, documents, and software, without affecting the useful values of the original carrier, and is not easy to be detected and modified. Therefore, it is an effective way to protect information security, such as anti-counterfeiting traceability and copyright protection. Earlier digital watermarking technologies [1, 2] focused on grayscale images, and watermarks were embedded in spatial or frequency domains. With the development of artificial intelligence and the special demand for host images, adaptive watermarking [3, 4], reversible watermarking [5], and deep learning watermarking [6] have received attention. In recent years, watermarking has been required to achieve higher robustness, and researchers expect more purposes are packed in a watermarking scheme; thus, it promotes the development of multipurpose watermarking.

Vaidya [7] proposed a multipurpose color image watermarking method. Three grayscale watermarks are embedded in the area after SVD, QR decomposition, and Schur decomposition to provide copyright protection and ownership verification of multimedia information. Darwish and Al-Khafaji [8] introduced a smart dual-watermark model that guarantees copyright protection for color images. It employs both successive and segmented watermarking techniques and uses the genetic algorithm to determine the embedding locations and scaling factors. Namratha and Kareemulla [9] used Lagrangian support vector regression methods to embed watermark in the frequency domains after DCT, DWT, and Fourier transformations. However, these methods have single purpose and apply only one embedding scheme, and thus, they increase the risk of watermark destruction. Singh et al. [10] exploited a self-recoverable dual-watermarking scheme to integrate copyright protection, tamper detection, and recovery into one scheme. The recovery watermark is embedded in the spatial domain, whereas robust watermark is embedded in the frequency domain. But it has poor invisibility, and the PSNR is around 30 dB. Shi et al. [11] proposed a region-adaptive semifragile dual-watermarking scheme, which embeds robust and fragile watermarks into the transformation domain after IWT and is independent of the embedded order. The PSNR value of the watermark image is about 40 dB.
Alyamahi et al. [12] developed a new multiple watermarking scheme for medical images which is based on spatial and discrete cosine transform domains; however, the scheme is only applicable to medical images. The methods [10–12] are used only for grayscale images and have poor invisibility. Peng et al. [13] proposed a multipurpose watermarking scheme, in which the robust watermark and the fragile watermark are embedded in the feature and nonfeature points, respectively, and the watermarks are mutually independent. Kunhu and Al-Ahmad [14] proposed a multiwatermarking algorithm which embeds the robust watermark in the DCT and hash authentication code in the spatial domain. Refs. [13, 14] are suitable for color images. Watermark in the DCT and hash authentication code in the multiwatermarking algorithm which embeds the robust watermark are mutually independent. The rest of the paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 introduces background knowledge used, SIFT and NSST. Section 3 describes the embedding and extraction process of watermark in detail. Section 4 makes an experimental evaluation of the proposed method and compares the proposed scheme with the existing color image watermarking scheme. Finally, a summary is made in Section 5, and the next steps are planned.

2. Preliminaries

2.1. SIFT (Scale-Invariant Feature Transform). In 2004, Lowe proposed the famous scale-invariant feature transform (SIFT). The SIFT algorithm ensures that the local image features acquired still have good robustness in the face of rotation, scaling, projection transformation, and object occlusion through the following steps:

1. Detect the extreme point in scale space: the scale space of a two-dimensional image is defined as follows:

$$L(x, y, \sigma) = G(x, y, \sigma) * I(x, y),$$  

where $G(x, y, \sigma)$ represents the scaling variable Gaussian function and $I(x, y)$ represents the input image:

$$G(x, y, \sigma) = \frac{1}{2\pi\sigma^2} e^{-(x^2+y^2)/2\sigma^2},$$

where $(x, y)$ represents the spatial coordinate and $\sigma$ represents the scale coordinate. The difference of the Gaussian function can be calculated by two similar scales separated by a constant multiplier $k$. It is defined as follows:

$$D(x, y, \sigma) = (G(x, y, k\sigma) - G(x, y, \sigma)) * I(x, y) = L(x, y, k\sigma) - L(x, y, \sigma).$$

2. Extract the stable feature points: according to the extreme points obtained in step 1, filtering is used to select stable key points.

3. Orientation assignment: by using the gradient distribution feature of the pixels in the area around the feature point to specify the dominant direction of each feature point, the modulus formula and the gradient direction formula are as follows:

$$m = \sqrt{(L_{x+1,y} - L_{x-1,y})^2 + (L_{x,y+1} - L_{x,y-1})^2},$$

$$\theta = \arctan\left(\frac{L_{x,y+1} - L_{x,y-1}}{L_{x+1,y} - L_{x-1,y}}\right).$$

4. Key point descriptor: in the neighbourhood of each key point, the selected scale is used to measure the local gradient of the image.

2.2. NSST (Nonsubsampled Shearlet Transform). To ensure the antirotation attack function of the embedded watermark, the nonsubsampled shearlet transform (NSST) is adopted. NSST, which eliminates the downsamplers and upsamplers,
is compared to the shearlet transform. The NSST is a fully shift-invariant, multiscale, and multidirectional expansion.

\[ \text{NLSP}_{j+1} = A_j f = \left( A_j^h \int_{k=1}^{j} A_j^h \right), \]

where \( f \) is an image, NLSP \( j+1 \) is the detail coefficients at scale \( j+1 \), and \( A_j^h \) and \( A_j^h \) are low-pass and high-pass filters of NSLP at scale \( j \) and \( k \), respectively. Given \( N \times N \) image \( f_0 \) and the number of the direction \( D_j \), the procedure of the NSST described above at a fixed resolution scale \( j \) can be summarized as follows:

1. Apply the NSLP to decompose \( f_0 \) into a low pass image \( f^L_0 \) of size \( N \times N \) and a high pass image \( f^H_0 \).
2. Compute \( \tilde{f}_d^j \) in pseudopolar grid and then get \( P \tilde{f}_d^j \) from the above equation.
3. Apply a band-pass filtering \( P \tilde{f}_d^j \) to obtain \( \left\{ \tilde{f}_{d,k}^j \right\}_{k=1}^{D_j} \).
4. Apply inverse FFT to obtain NSST coefficients \( \left\{ \tilde{f}_{d,k}^j \right\}_{k=1}^{D_j} \) in pseudopolar grid.

3. The Proposed Methods

In this paper, the host image is a 24-bit color image of size of 512 × 512, and the watermark image is a binary image of 32 × 32. The proposed method is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

3.1. Preprocessing of Watermark. Many chaotic systems have been proposed in previous studies [17, 18] for image encryption. In our scheme, the logistic chaotic sequence is modulated and applied to the image preprocessing. The watermark image is converted into a sequence \( S_1 \), and equation (6) is used to generate the logistic chaotic sequence \( S_2 \) with the same length \( S_1 \). Then, \( S_1 \) is permuted according to the corresponding position of \( S_2 \) to get the scrambled watermark sequence \( S_j \). The logistic map is in a chaotic state when \( X_0 \in [0, 1] \). That is to say, with initial value \( X_0 \), the sequence produced by logistic mapping is nonperiodic and nonconverged, but the common permutation methods such as Arnold are cyclical. In this respect, using logistic mapping provides greater security.

\[ X_{n+1} = X_n \times \mu \times (1 - X_n), \]

where \( \mu \in [0, 4] \) and \( X \in [0, 1] \).

3.2. Embedding Procedure. The proposed solution embeds three watermarks, two for copyright protection and one for tamper detection (Algorithms 1–8). The detailed description is drawn in Figure 1.

3.3. Extracting Procedure. When the watermark is extracted, the calculated hash sequence is compared with the extracted hash sequence. If the two hash sequences are different, rotate the correction and then extract the two robust watermarks. Otherwise, extract the two robust watermarks directly. A detailed description is drawn in Figure 2.

4. Results and Discussion

To evaluate the proposed method, eight famous color images have been selected from the USC-SIPI image database including Airplane, Baboon, Lena, Peppers, House, Sailboat, Splash, and Tiffany with the size of 512 × 512 pixels as the host images. Also, select a binary image with the size of 32 × 32 as the watermark image. The host images and the watermark image are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 5 shows the relationship between robustness and PSNR as the strength of the two watermark embedding increases. Avg NC is the average of the watermark NC values after the watermarked image has been attacked by common attacks including Gaussian noise, salt-pepper noise, speckle noise, Gaussian LPF \( 3 \times 3 \), and Gaussian LPF \( 5 \times 5 \). In order to balance between invisibility and robustness, this paper adopts a compromise value. The step length \( \lambda \) in Algorithm 1 is set to 72, and \( \Delta \) in Algorithm 2 is set to 15.

4.1. Analysis of Transparency. Table 1 and Figure 6 show the PSNR and SSIM of the proposed method and the existing method. The proposed scheme has a better PSNR value than [21, 22]. Unfortunately, the proposed scheme shows a worse PSNR value than [23], but on the contrary, the proposed scheme has a better SSIM value than [23]. SSIM extracts and combines three features of image brightness, structure, and contrast to make the score reflect the sensitivity of human eyes to a greater extent. Therefore, in general, higher SSIM can reflect the image quality better. A lower PSNR (which means more modifications to the image) will lead to a better robustness performance with the same SSIM. Therefore, our scheme can theoretically obtain a better robust performance and ensure higher visual quality.

4.2. Testing the Watermark Robustness. To verify the robustness, we performed common image processing operations (such as JPEG compression, salt-pepper noise, addition of Gaussian noise, and filtering attack) and rotation attacks on watermark images. At the same time, our scheme was compared with [21–25].

Figure 7 shows the NC values of different images under JPEG attacks of different intensities and the comparison of extracted watermarks by different methods. When QF is no less than 20%, the watermark quality extracted by our scheme is higher than all other schemes.

Figure 8 shows a comparison of the results of the extracted watermark from the watermarked Lena image after Gaussian noise attack and salt-pepper noise attack. The watermark extraction effect of the proposed method is better.
than [21, 22, 25] in Gaussian noise (0.1%) and better than [24] in salt-pepper noise (0.1%).

Figure 9(a) shows the comparison of the proposed method and the scheme proposed by [24] under different filters on the image Peppers. In [24], the PSNR value of the watermarked image is 43.79dB. It can be seen that with a better PSNR, the effect of the proposed scheme in the mean and the Gaussian filtering is better than [24], but is slightly worse in the median filtering.

Figure 9(b) compares the proposed method and [21] under different filters on the image Lena. In [21], set the embedding parameter value alpha to 16.27, in which case the PSNR of the image Lena is 45.605 dB, while the PSNR is 45.7669 dB in our scheme, which indicates the proposed scheme performs better.

Table 2 shows a comparison of the number of feature points to be stored by the proposed method with [15], showing that the proposed method stores fewer points in
(1) Step 1: apply the one-level shearlet transform on the R layer of the color image, thus to obtain a low pass subband $A_0$.

(2) Step 2: apply the DWT transformation to $A_0$: $[LL, HL, LH, HH] = DWT(A_0)$.

(3) Step 3: divide the low-frequency area (LL) into nonoverlapping blocks of 8 × 8, and apply DCT on each block.

(4) Step 4: select the middle frequency of the DCT coefficients from one block [16], which consists of two matrices, $M_1$ and $M_2$. The construction of matrices with middle frequency is given in Figure 3.

(5) Step 5: use SVD to decompose $M_1$ and $M_2$ to get singular value matrices. The singular value matrices of $M_1$ and $M_2$ are $S_1$ and $S_2$, respectively.

(6) Step 6: use the following equations to embed the watermark [16]:

$$S_1(1, 1) = \begin{cases} E + \delta, & \text{if } W_e = 1, \\ E - \delta, & \text{if } W_e = 0 \end{cases}$$

$$S_2(1, 1) = \begin{cases} E - \lambda, & \text{if } W_e = 1, \\ E + \lambda, & \text{if } W_e = 0 \end{cases}$$

(7) Step 7: repeat steps 4–6 until all watermarks are embedded, and then perform a reverse transformation to get a watermarked $R'$ layer.

**Algorithm 1:** Embedding robust watermark w1.

(1) Step 1: select the layer $G$ of the color image and the inscribed circle’s inscribed square of the carrier image $I$ as the watermark embedding area $x$, for the reason that the image information in the inscribed circle $S$ of $I$ will not lose due to the rotation.

(2) Step 2: apply the one-level shearlet transform on $x$, and obtain a low pass subband $A_x$.

(3) Step 3: apply DWT to $A_x$: $[LL, HL, LH, HH] = DWT(A_x)$.

(4) Step 4: divide the low-frequency area (LL) into nonoverlapping blocks of 4 × 4 sizes, and SVD decomposition is carried out on each block.

(5) Step 5: get the value of $S(1, 1)$ from the singular value matrix (1, 1). The quantization step size is $\Delta$, set $\delta = \text{mod}(S(1, 1), \Delta)$. Embed the watermark by quantifying $S(1, 1)$ using the following equations. The following equations are one kind of optimal quantization formulas proved in [19]:

$$S(1, 1)' = S(1, 1) - \delta + (1/4)\delta, \text{ where } W_e = 0 \text{ and } \delta \in [0, (3/4)\Delta]$$

$$S(1, 1)' = S(1, 1) + (5/4)\delta, \text{ where } W_e = 0 \text{ and } \delta \in ((3/4)\Delta, \Delta)$$

$$S(1, 1)' = S(1, 1) - (1/4)\delta, \text{ where } W_e = 1 \text{ and } \delta \in [0, (1/4)\Delta]$$

$$S(1, 1)' = S(1, 1) + (3/4)\delta, \text{ where } W_e = 1 \text{ and } \delta \in [(1/4)\Delta, \Delta].$$

(6) Step 6: repeat step 5 until all watermarks are embedded, and then perform a reverse transformation to get the watermarked $G'$ layer.

**Algorithm 2:** Embedding robust watermark w2.

(1) Step 1: divide the color image which is embedded robust watermarks w1 and w2 into nonoverlapping blocks of 16 × 16.

(2) Step 2: use the layer $R$ and the layer $G$ to generate hash sequence.

(3) Step 3: embed the watermark sequence in the layer $B$ using the LSB embedding method [20].

(4) Step 4: repeat steps 2–3 until all the blocks are processed.

**Algorithm 3:** Embedding fragile watermark.
(1) Step 1: use SIFT for feature point extraction [15].
(2) Step 2: use the quadtree to decompose the watermark image, leaving only one feature point in each block, and the points are recorded as a rotary recovery key.

**Algorithm 4: Feature point extraction.**

(1) Step 1: divide the attacked image into nonoverlapping small pieces of 16 × 16.
(2) Step 2: use the layer R and the layer G to generate the hash sequence.
(3) Step 3: extract the stored watermark sequence from the layer B using the LSB algorithm and compared with the generated sequence by step 2 [20].
(4) Step 4: repeat steps 2-3 until the full picture is traversed. If the comparison is successful, no action is taken; otherwise, it is marked on the image.

**Algorithm 5: Extracting fragile watermark.**

(1) Step 1: extract the feature points of the attacked image through the SIFT method, and generate collection S.  
(2) Step 2: compare corresponding points in collection S and the collection of recorded feature points as T, and if the comparison is successful, record the coordinates of the feature points on the original graph and attacked image to produce the feature point pair.  
(3) Step 3: take any two matching successful feature point pairs, and the two points from S and the two points from T are recorded to generate vectors a and b, respectively. The angle $\phi$ between the vector a and the vector b is calculated as $\phi = \arccos(a \cdot b / |a| \cdot |b|)$, where $|a|$ and $|b|$ represent the module of a and b, respectively. Traverse all the point pairs to generate collection A which consists of all angles $\phi$ [15].  
(4) Step 4: use the box plot to clean collection A. Calculate the next quartile $Q_1$, upper quartile $Q_3$, and intermediate quartile extreme difference IQR. Remove the outlier values which are greater than $Q_3 + 1.5 \times IQR$ or less than $Q_1 - 1.5 \times IQR$, and generate collection B.  
(5) Step 5: calculate the mean of all angles in collection B: $\beta = (1/n) \sum_{i=1}^{n} \phi_i$, where n represents the number of elements in collection B. Refer to it as the rotation recovery angle.

**Algorithm 6: Rotation correction.**

(1) Step 1: transform the layer R of the attacked image with the same transformation when embedding watermark $w_1$. For more information, refer to steps 1–5 in Algorithm 1.  
(2) Step 2: get the singular value matrix $S_1'$ and $S_2'$ through step 1, and then use the following equation for watermark extraction [16]:  
$$W'_e = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } S_1'(1,1) > S_2'(1,1), \\ 0, & \text{if } S_1'(1,1) < S_2'(1,1). \end{cases}$$

**Algorithm 7: Extracting robust watermark $w_1$.**

(1) Step 1: transform the G layer of the attacked image with the same transformation as the embedding procedure of watermark $w_2$. For more information, refer to steps 1–4 in Algorithm 2.  
(2) Step 2: get the singular value matrix $S'$ through the steps above, set $\delta' = \mod(S'(1,1), \Delta)$, and then use the following equation for watermark extraction [19]:  
$$W'_e = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } \delta' < (1/2)\Delta, \\ 1, & \text{if } \delta' > (1/2)\Delta. \end{cases}$$

**Algorithm 8: Extracting robust watermark $w_2$.**

Each image than [15]. Figure 10 presents the difference between the quality of watermark extraction and rotation angle correction before and after data cleaning, and data cleaning plays a big role when large angle rotation attacks. Table 3 shows that the proposed scheme works better against rotation attacks than [23, 24].
Figure 4: Original host images and a watermark image.

Figure 5: The average NC value in different lambda and delta: (a) the relationship between embedded strength and PSNR, and (b) the relationship between embedded strength and robustness.

Table 1: The PSNR comparison results between the proposed method and [21].

| Image     | Airplane | Baboon | Lena | Peppers | House | Sailboat | Splash | Tiffany |
|-----------|----------|--------|------|---------|-------|----------|--------|---------|
| Proposed  | 45.29    | 44.44  | 45.46| 45.73   | 45.05 | 45.40    | 46.22  | 46.27   |
| [21]      | 40.63    | 40.19  | 40.35| 40.26   | 40.76 | 40.22    | 39.95  | 40.61   |
Figure 6: The invisibility comparison results about the different methods in terms of PSNR and SSIM: (a) PSNR and (b) SSIM.

Figure 7: The results after the JPEG attack: (a) the watermark extraction effect after JPEG attacks of different intensities and (b) the comparison of extracted watermarks by different methods after JPEG attacks.
4.3. Tamper Detection Tests. The performance of the tamper detection was tested by blurring, sharpening, adding salt and pepper noise, adding Gaussian noise, average filtering, cropping, and so on. The proposed scheme splits the image into small blocks of 16 × 16, which is smaller than the blocks in [26] (small blocks split to 32 × 32), so the tamper detection is more accurate. Random block attacks on the watermark Lena image are shown in Figure 11, and the corresponding experimental data are shown in Table 4. The true-positive rate (TPR) is 1, and the false-negative rate (FNR) is 0 for all attacks except cropping. The TPR of cropping attack is no more than 0.55. The average false-positive rate (FPR) is 0.060, and the average accuracy (ACC) is 0.939.

Table 2: The number of key points extracted from different images.

| Image      | Airplane | Baboon | Lena | Peppers | House | Sailboat | Splash | Tiffany |
|------------|----------|--------|------|---------|-------|----------|--------|---------|
| Proposed   | 176      | 262    | 73   | 43      | 237   | 283      | 22     | 16      |
| [15]       | 280      | 264    | 91   | 48      | 291   | 385      | 38     | 23      |
Figure 11: Random block attacks of the watermark Lena image: (a) blurring, (b) salt and pepper noise, (c) Gaussian noise, (d) average filter, (e) sharpening, (f) cropping, and (g–l) detection of the tampered regions of the watermarked image.

Table 4: Tamper detection results under random block attacks.

| Attack          | FPR     | FNR | TPR | ACC    |
|-----------------|---------|-----|-----|--------|
| Blurring        | 0.0532  | 0   | 1   | 0.9498 |
| Salt and pepper | 0.0922  | 0   | 1   | 0.9092 |
| Gaussian noise  | 0.0531  | 0   | 1   | 0.9499 |
| Average filter  | 0.0532  | 0   | 1   | 0.9499 |
| Sharpening      | 0.0531  | 0   | 1   | 0.9499 |
| Cropping        | 0.0532  | 0.4599 | 0.5401 | 0.9235 |
Figure 12 clearly shows that the proposed method is successfully able to detect and locate some types of tampering attacks. The corresponding experimental data are shown in Table 5, which shows that the proposed scheme has good tamper detection capability.

5. Conclusions

We have proposed a new comprehensive watermarking scheme for color images. Two robust watermarking methods and one fragile watermarking method are applied to guarantee copyright protection and tamper detection, and an improved SIFT method is used for rotation correction. This research uses different ways to embed two robust watermarks, so it can effectively resist more attacks compared to single watermarking schemes. Moreover, the angle collection is cleaned before rotation detection, and some outliers are removed, thus to improve the accuracy of rotation correction angle. For tamper detection, except cropping, the TPR is 1 for all attacks. However, there are still some issues need to be solved in the future, such as adaptively adjusting the embedding intensity according to the features of the image and reducing the length of the key used for rotation correction.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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