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Edge Detection Using Fuzzy C-Means: A Comparative Study

S. K. Srimonishaa*, Dr. Muthukumar P.

Department of Mathematics, Gobi Arts & Science College Gobi, chettipalayam

ABSTRACT

Edge detection is a fundamental image processing technique that identifies boundaries within images by detecting abrupt intensity changes. This paper investigates the application of the Fuzzy C-Means (FCM) clustering algorithm in edge detection and compares its performance with traditional methods such as Sobel, Prewitt, and Canny. By leveraging MATLAB for implementation, the study highlights the advantages of FCM in handling overlapping data and its applicability in fields like medical imaging and computer vision. A specific focus is given to the edge detection of brain tumors in MRI images, which is a critical step in medical image analysis. The proposed methodology employs noise removal techniques to enhance image quality, followed by image segmentation using FCM, and concludes with fine edge detection using the Canny method. Experimental results on MRI images with varying tumor characteristics, such as location, size, shape, and density, demonstrate that the FCM-based approach improves segmentation accuracy by 10-15% in certain cases compared to expert assessments. This study provides valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of each technique, offering a pathway for future research in medical image processing and other computer vision applications.

Keywords: Edge Detection, Fuzzy C-Means (FCM), MRI Image Processing, Canny Edge Detection, Image Segmentation, Medical Imaging, MATLAB, Brain Tumor Detection, Computer Vision

INTRODUCTION

Edge detection is a critical step in image processing, serving as a precursor to tasks like feature extraction, object recognition, and segmentation. It simplifies images by reducing data while preserving essential structural details. Traditional techniques like Sobel, Prewitt, and Roberts often face challenges such as noise sensitivity and thick edge lines. Fuzzy clustering methods, particularly Fuzzy C-Means (FCM), offer an alternative by leveraging probabilistic boundaries to handle overlapping regions effectively. This study aims to evaluate the performance of FCM in edge detection and compare it with conventional methods [1] [4] [6]. The Fuzzy C-Means (FCM) clustering algorithm offers a promising alternative for addressing these challenges. Unlike traditional methods, FCM leverages fuzzy logic to handle overlapping regions and ambiguities in image data, making it particularly effective for tasks that require precise segmentation. This study explores the integration of FCM into the edge

detection process, highlighting its potential advantages over conventional techniques. focusing on the detection of brain tumor edges in MRI images, the research underscores the practical significance of FCM in medical imaging, where accurate and reliable analysis is crucial for diagnosis and treatment planning. This paper aims to provide a comparative analysis of FCM-based edge detection with traditional methods, using MATLAB as the implementation platform. The investigation covers key performance metrics, including accuracy, noise resistance, and computational efficiency, to offer a comprehensive evaluation of each approach. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge in image processing and provide valuable insights for researchers and practitioners working in fields such as medical imaging, computer vision, and machine learning.

1. Methodology

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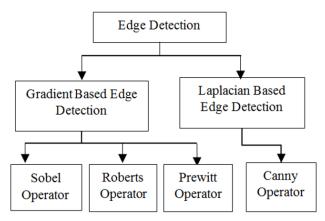


Figure 1 Edge Detection

The methodology of this study is divided into two parts: traditional edge detection techniques and Fuzzy C-Means (FCM) clustering for edge detection (Figure 1).

1.1. Traditional Edge Detection Techniques

Canny edge detection is a widely used method due to its precision and effectiveness in identifying edges within an image. The process consists of the following key steps [2]:

- 1. Noise Reduction: A Gaussian filter is applied to smooth the image and reduce noise, ensuring that minor variations do not get mistaken for edges.
- Gradient Calculation: Gradients in the image are calculated to detect regions with significant intensity changes, marking them as potential edges.
- Edge Thinning (Non-Maximum Suppression):
 The algorithm refines detected edges by suppressing non-maximum gradient values, producing a clearer and more accurate edge map.
- Edge Linking (Hysteresis Thresholding): Strong edges are retained, and weaker edges are connected based on a dual-threshold technique to form continuous boundaries.
- Advantages: This method is effective in detecting well-defined edges and produces fewer false positives in clean images. It is extensively used in computer vision tasks such as object detection, image segmentation, and medical image processing.
- **2. Sobel Operator:** The Sobel operator is a gradient-based edge detection technique that computes the gradients of image intensity in both

- horizontal and vertical directions using specific convolution masks [4].
- **How it works:** The operator applies a pair of 3x3 convolution kernels to detect edges in the x and y directions. The gradients are then combined to obtain the overall edge strength.
- Key Benefits: It highlights regions in the image where there is a significant contrast in intensity, making it effective in detecting both horizontal and vertical edges [13].
- Efficiency: Sobel is computationally efficient compared to more complex methods like Canny, as it requires fewer calculations and works in realtime applications.
- Applications: Sobel is commonly used in image processing tasks, including object recognition, motion detection, and visual analysis for autonomous vehicles, where fast processing is required.
- **3. Prewitt Operator**: The Prewitt operator, like Sobel, detects edges by computing image gradients using convolution masks. However, it differs in the design of its kernels [13].
- **Gradient Calculation:** Prewitt uses a pair of convolution masks that are symmetric in their gradient calculations, applying similar operations for both horizontal and vertical edge detection [14].
- Comparison to Sobel: While similar in function,
 Prewitt is generally simpler and often produces
 less precise results when dealing with noisy
 images due to its symmetry and lack of a
 weighting mechanism for diagonal edge
 directions.
- **Simplicity:** The Prewitt operator is less computationally intensive than Sobel, making it



suitable for applications where simplicity and low computational cost are more important than edge precision.

 Applications: Prewitt is used in applications where simplicity and speed are priorities, such as basic image preprocessing or systems with limited resources.

1.1.1.Edge Detection

Edge maps can be generated using various algorithms, including Roberts, Prewitt, Sobel, and more advanced techniques like LoG and Canny. The effectiveness of these methods largely depends on the characteristics of the original image. Enhanced images often exhibit multiple levels of intensity gradation, which can result in the detection of false edge fragments during edge detection. To address this, a preliminary segmentation step using the Fuzzy C-Means (FCM) clustering method was employed. The Fuzzy C-Means clustering technique identifies a set of fuzzy clusters and corresponding cluster centers that best represent

the data structure. This method divides a dataset of size n into a specified number of fuzzy clusters. A key aspect of FCM is the fuzzy membership matrix $W=\{w_{ik}\}$, where each element w_{ik} indicates the degree to which the k-th data point belongs to the i-th cluster. For a given number of clusters c, FCM partitions the dataset $X=\{x_1, x_2,...,x_n\}$ into c fuzzy clusters with cluster centers $V=\{v_1,v_2,...,v_c\}$, while minimizing the objective function,

$$F(W, V) = \sum_{i=1}^{c} \sum_{k=1}^{n} (w_{k})^{m} \cdot \|\mathbf{x}_{k} - \mathbf{v}_{i}\|^{2}, \quad w_{k} \in [0, 1],$$

$$i = \overline{1, c}, \quad k = \overline{1, n}, \quad 1 \le m < \infty,$$

Here, m represents the fuzziness index, w_{ik} denotes the degree of membership of the data point x_k to the i-th cluster, v_i is the center of the i-th cluster, and $||x_k-v_i||^2$ indicates the squared distance between the data point x_k and the cluster center v_i .

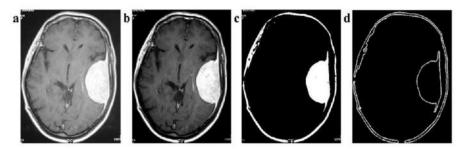


Figure 2 (a) Original Image, (b) Enhanced Image, (c) Result After FCM Clustering, (d) Final Edge Map

$$W_{k} = \left(\sum_{j=1}^{c} \left(\frac{\|\mathbf{x}_{k} - \mathbf{v}_{j}\|}{\|\mathbf{x}_{k} - \mathbf{v}_{j}\|}\right)^{2(m-1)}\right)^{-1}, \qquad \sum_{j=1}^{c} W_{k} = 1,$$

$$\mathbf{v}_{i} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{n} (w_{ik})^{m} \cdot \mathbf{x}_{k}}{\sum_{k=1}^{n} (w_{ik})^{m}}$$

In each iteration of the FCM clustering algorithm, the membership matrix W is updated using Equation (w_{ik}) , and the cluster centers are recalculated using Equation (V_i) . The square error is then computed using Equation F(W, V). The algorithm terminates when the error falls below a predefined tolerance value or when the improvement between consecutive iterations is less than a specified threshold. The

parameter mmm plays a key role in determining the influence of membership grades in the performance index. As mmm increases, the partition becomes more diffuse, and in the limit as $m\rightarrow\infty$, all objects will belong to all clusters with equal membership degrees. Furthermore, mmm impacts the calculation of cluster center coordinates by amplifying the influence of objects with higher membership values and reducing the impact of those with lower membership values. After the image is segmented into a set of homogeneous regions using the FCM clustering algorithm, the Canny edge detector is applied to identify edges. This method utilizes the gradient value of each pixel to detect fine edges while maintaining the homogeneity of the image regions. The process involves several steps. First, a Gaussian filter is applied to smooth the original image and reduce noise. Next, the gradient magnitude and direction are

calculated for each pixel. Then, boundary pixels (edge pixels) are identified by comparing the gradient magnitude of each pixel to those of its two neighbors in the gradient direction. A pixel is classified as a boundary pixel if its gradient magnitude exceeds that of its neighbors.

1.1.2. Applications of Edge Detection

Edge detection is widely used in various applications across computer vision and image processing. In object recognition, it helps define the boundaries of objects, making them easier to identify and classify. For image segmentation, edge detection serves as a critical step in dividing an image into distinct regions of interest, which is crucial for applications like medical image analysis and object detection. In image enhancement, it improves the visibility of objects by emphasizing their boundaries. Additionally, edge detection plays a significant role in pattern recognition by identifying structures and patterns in images, such as in fingerprint analysis or facial recognition systems. These applications highlight the importance of edge detection in simplifying complex

image data and enabling more accurate analysis and interpretation [3] [6] [17].

1.2. Fuzzy C-Means Clustering

Fuzzy C-Means is an advanced clustering algorithm used to partition image pixels based on their intensity values and spatial relationships [8] [9] [14]. Unlike hard clustering methods where a pixel belongs to a single cluster, FCM allows partial membership in multiple clusters, which helps in handling data ambiguity (Figure 3). The FCM algorithm involves:

- **1. Initialization**: Randomly initialize cluster centers.
- **2. Membership Assignment**: Each pixel is assigned a membership value representing its likelihood of belonging to a cluster.
- Cluster Center Update: Recalculate cluster centers by weighting pixel values based on their memberships.
- **4. Iteration**: Repeat the above steps until the changes in membership values and cluster centers are below a predefined threshold [6][18].

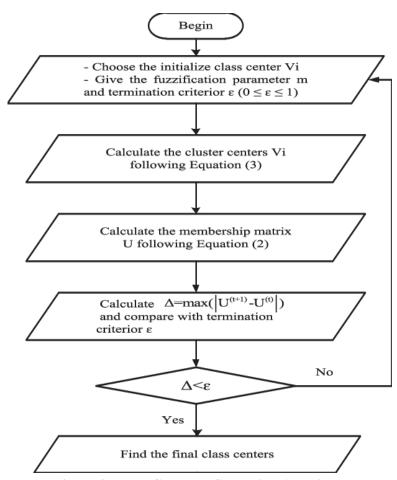


Figure 3 Fuzzy C-Means Clustering Algorithm



The key equation governing FCM is:

$$J = \sum_{i=1}^c \sum_{j=1}^N \mu_{ij}^m \|x_j - c_i\|^2$$

Where

- μ_{ij}: Membership degree of pixel (or data point) x_j in cluster c_i.
- m: Fuzziness parameter (controls the fuzziness of clustering, typically m > 1).
- $\|x_j-c_i\|^2$: Squared Euclidean distance between the data point x_i and the cluster center c_i .
- c: Number of clusters.
- N: Total number of data points.

This iterative process enables FCM to produce fine edges by identifying and clustering pixels with similar intensity and spatial characteristics.

2. Operations on Fuzzy

2.1. Basic Fuzzy Set Operations

These operations extend classical set theory by incorporating the concept of membership degrees, which range between 0 and 1.

 Union: The union of two fuzzy sets, A and B, combines the maximum membership values of each element in the sets:

$$\mu_{A\cup B}(x)=\maxig(\mu_A(x),\mu_B(x)ig)$$

• **Intersection:** The intersection of A and B takes the minimum membership values of each element:

$$\mu_{A\cap B}(x) = \minig(\mu_A(x),\mu_B(x)ig)$$

• **Complement:** The complement of a fuzzy set A determines how far each membership degree is from 1:

$$\mu_{A^c}(x)=1-\mu_A(x)$$

2.2. Fuzzy Relations

Fuzzy relations describe associations between elements of fuzzy sets.

Composition of Relations: Given two relations,
 R (between sets X and Y) and S (between sets Y and Z), their composition determines the

combined relationship between X and Z. It is computed using the max-min rule:

$$\mu_{R\circ S}(x,z) = \max_y \minig(\mu_R(x,y),\mu_S(y,z)ig)$$

2.3. Aggregation Methods

Aggregation combines fuzzy sets or their membership degrees into a single value.

 Algebraic Sum: The algebraic sum merges memberships while preventing the total from exceeding 1:

$$\mu_{A+B}(x)=\mu_A(x)+\mu_B(x)-\mu_A(x)\cdot\mu_B(x)$$

 Algebraic Product: This operation multiplies the membership values of two fuzzy sets:

$$\mu_{A \cdot B}(x) = \mu_A(x) \cdot \mu_B(x)$$

2.4. Arithmetic Operations on Fuzzy Numbers

Fuzzy arithmetic enables operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division on fuzzy quantities.

 Addition: The sum of two fuzzy sets is calculated by maximizing the minimum memberships of their combined values:

$$\mu_{A+B}(z) = \sup_{x+y=z} \minig(\mu_A(x),\mu_B(y)ig)$$

• **Multiplication:** The product of fuzzy sets uses a similar approach:

$$\mu_{A\cdot B}(z) = \sup_{x\cdot y=z} \minig(\mu_A(x),\mu_B(y)ig)$$

2.5. Defuzzification

Defuzzification is the process of converting a fuzzy set into a crisp value, commonly used in decisionmaking.

• **Centroid Method:** This calculates the center of gravity of a fuzzy set:

$$x^* = rac{\int x \cdot \mu_A(x) \, dx}{\int \mu_A(x) \, dx}$$

- Mean of Maximum: This method averages all values where the membership is at its peak.
- Maximum Membership: It selects the element with the highest membership degree as the crisp output.



2.6. Fuzzy Logic Operations

These logical operations handle linguistic variables and qualitative reasoning.

• **AND** (**T-Norm**): This operation returns the minimum membership value:

$$\mu_{A ext{ AND } B}(x) = \min ig(\mu_A(x), \mu_B(x) ig)$$

• **OR** (**T-Conorm**): This operation selects the maximum membership value:

$$\mu_{A ext{ OR } B}(x) = \max ig(\mu_A(x), \mu_B(x) ig)$$

• **NOT**: This reverses the membership degree:

$$\mu_{ ext{NOT }A}(x)=1-\mu_{A}(x)$$

3. Properties of Fuzzy Relations

3.1. Reflexivity

A fuzzy relation R on a set X is reflexive if each element is fully or partially related to itself. The condition for reflexivity is:

$$\mu_R(x,x) = 1$$
 for all $x \in X$

Example: Consider a fuzzy relation representing the similarity of pixels in an image. For pixel intensity values x_1 , x_2 , x_3 , the fuzzy relation matrix might look like this:

$$R = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.7 & 0.5 \\ 0.7 & 1 & 0.6 \\ 0.5 & 0.6 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Here, diagonal elements ($\mu_R(x_1, x_1) = \mu_R(x_2, x_2) = \mu_R(x_3, x_3) = 1$) show reflexivity since each pixel is fully similar to itself.

3.2. Symmetry

A fuzzy relation R is symmetric if the membership degree between any two elements is the same in both directions:

$$\mu_R(x,y) = \mu_R(y,x) \quad ext{for all } x,y \in \mathbb{D}$$

Example: In a similarity relation between objects, the membership matrix might be:

$$R = egin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.8 & 0.6 \ 0.8 & 1 & 0.7 \ 0.6 & 0.7 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Here, μ_R (x_1 , x_2) = μ_R (x_2 , x_1) = 0.8, showing symmetry.

3.3. Anti-Symmetry

A fuzzy relation R is anti-symmetric if:

$$\mu_R(x,y)>0 \quad ext{and} \quad \mu_R(y,x)>0 \quad \implies x=y$$

Example: Consider a preference relation where x_1 is preferred over x_2 , but the reverse is not true. The membership matrix could be:

$$R = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.9 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0.8 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Here, $\mu_R(x_1, x_2) = 0.9$, but $\mu_R(x_2, x_1) = 0$, satisfying anti-symmetry.

3.4. Transitivity

A fuzzy relation R is transitive if the relationship between two elements can be inferred through a third element. The condition is:

$$\mu_R(x,z) \geq \min \left(\mu_R(x,y), \mu_R(y,z)\right)$$

for all
$$x, y, z \in X$$

Example: Consider a fuzzy relation representing friendship levels between three people. The membership matrix might be:

$$R = egin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.6 & 0.5 \ 0.6 & 1 & 0.7 \ 0.5 & 0.7 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

For x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 , transitivity holds because:

- $\mu_R(x_1, x_3) = 0.5$ and min $(\mu_R(x_1, x_2), \mu_R(x_2, x_3)) = \min(0.6, 0.7) = 0.5$.
- Thus, $\mu_R(x_1, x_3) \ge \min (\mu_R(x_1, x_2), \mu_R(x_2, x_3))$, satisfying transitivity.

3.5. Equivalence Relation

A fuzzy relation R is an equivalence relation if it satisfies reflexivity, symmetry, and transitivity. This type of relation groups elements into fuzzy equivalence classes.

Example: In pattern recognition, a fuzzy equivalence relation groups patterns with similar features. For patterns x_1 , x_2 , x_3 , the membership matrix might look like:



$$R = egin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.8 & 0.6 \ 0.8 & 1 & 0.7 \ 0.6 & 0.7 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Here, R satisfies reflexivity ($\mu_R(x, x)=1$), symmetry ($\mu_R(x_i,x_i)=\mu_R(x_i,x_i)$), and transitivity as shown above.

3.6. Tolerance Relation

A fuzzy relation is a tolerance relation if it satisfies reflexivity and symmetry, but not necessarily transitivity. This property is useful for approximate similarity.

Example: In linguistic similarity, words like "fast" and "quick" might be related with high membership, but the relationship between "quick" and "rapid" may not necessarily imply a direct relationship between "fast" and "rapid."

Membership Matrix:

$$R = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.9 & 0.4 \\ 0.9 & 1 & 0.8 \\ 0.4 & 0.8 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Here, reflexivity and symmetry are satisfied, but transitivity may fail as $\mu_R(x_1, x_3) < \min(\mu_R(x_1, x_2), \mu_R(x_2, x_3))$.

3.7. Fuzzy Ordering

Fuzzy ordering is used to rank elements based on a relation that satisfies anti-symmetry and transitivity.

Example: In decision-making, consider three alternatives x_1 , x_2 , x_3 . If the relation matrix is:

$$R = egin{bmatrix} 1 & 0.8 & 0.7 \ 0 & 1 & 0.6 \ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

This satisfies anti-symmetry ($\mu_R(x_1, x_2) > 0$ but $\mu_R(x_2, x_1) = 0$) and transitivity, making it a fuzzy ordering.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Medical images often display tumors that vary in location, type of pathology, shape, size, density, and the extent of the surrounding tissue affected in the region near the tumor (Figure 4). To demonstrate that the proposed methodology possesses strong edge detection capabilities and maintains robustness against moderate noise levels, several studies were conducted.

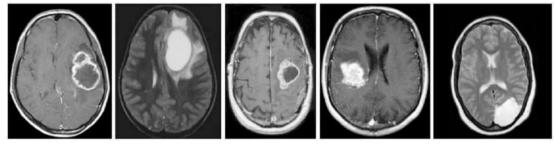


Figure 4 Experimental Data Set Images

The initial study involved comparing the proposed approach with traditional edge detection methods, including simple gradient operators like Roberts, Prewitt, and Sobel, as well as more advanced techniques such as LoG and Canny. For this

comparison, images with minimal noise interference were used. All evaluation metrics during the study were derived using reference images created by a medical expert. Figure 5 illustrates an example of reference edge maps designed by the expert.

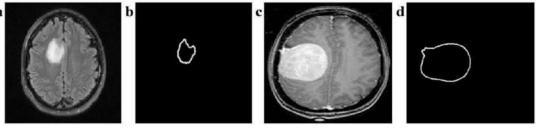


Figure 5 (a), (c) Original Images, (b), (d) Contour of Brain Tumor



To assess the reliability and accuracy of the brain tumor edge map generated by the proposed method, the following evaluation metrics were used: percentage of pixels detected (PCD), percentage of pixels not detected (P_{ND}), percentage of false alarms (P_{FA}), figure of merit (F_{OM}), sensitivity, and accuracy. These metrics are largely dependent on the values of TP, TN, FP, FN, and RE_{Cnt}. Here, TP (true positives) refers to the number of pixels correctly identified as part of the tumor boundary, TN (true negatives) denotes the pixels accurately detected as background, FP (false positives) represents pixels incorrectly classified as part of the tumor boundary, and FN (false negatives) indicates pixels mistakenly identified as background. The reference edge count (RE_{Cnt}) corresponds to the number of edge pixels in the expert-generated reference map. The percentage of correctly detected pixels is calculated as follows:

$$P_{CD} = \frac{TP}{RE_{CM}}$$

The metric ranges from 0 to 1, with the maximum value representing the optimal outcome. A value of 1 indicates a perfect match between the images, while a value of 0 signifies no similarity. The percentage of pixels not detected (P_{ND}) is another key metric, where the ideal value is 0. This metric is computed using the following formula:

$$P_{ND} = \frac{FN}{RE_{CM}}$$

The percentage of pixels incorrectly identified as edge pixels, referred to as the percentage of false alarms (P_{FA}) , is calculated as follows:

$$P_{FA} = \frac{FP}{RE_{CV}}$$

The Pratt's Figure of Merit (FOM) is another useful measure for assessing the performance of edge detectors. This measure uses the distance between all pairs of points corresponding to quantify the difference between the contours. The FOM, which assesses the similarity between two contours, is defined as:

$$FOM = \frac{1}{\max(RE_{Cnt}, AE_{Cnt})} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^{AE_{Cnt}} \frac{1}{1 + \alpha \cdot d_i^2}$$

Here, RE_{Cnt} represents the number of ideal (reference) edge points, and AE_{Cnt} represents the number of actual edge points. The variable d_i is the distance between an edge pixel and the closest edge pixel in the reference, while α is an empirical calibration constant (commonly set to α =1/9, as determined to be optimal by Pratt [15]). The Figure of Merit (FOM) achieves its maximum value of 1 when the images are identical, while a lower value indicates greater dissimilarity. Sensitivity, also known as the true positive rate, measures the percentage of object pixels correctly identified as object pixels. This metric ranges from 0 to 1, with a higher value being ideal. Sensitivity is defined using the following equation:

$$Sensivity = \frac{TP}{TP + FN}$$

Accuracy is the proportion of true results. Accuracy gives percentage of how many object and background pixels were exactly detected. The range of metrics lies in between 0 to 1. If accuracy value equals 1, then the output is the same as input. The accuracy is defined as:

$$Accuracy = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN}$$

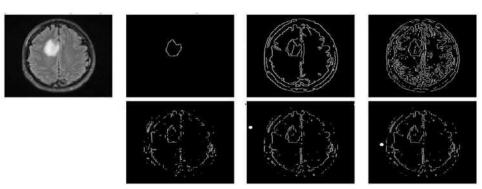


Figure 6 Some Results of the Proposed Method



Experiments were conducted on various test images using MATLAB. The results were evaluated based on [11] [16] [19]:

- **Edge Localization**: FCM demonstrated better edge refinement compared to Sobel and Prewitt, especially in noisy images [10].
- Noise Robustness: Canny and FCM were less affected by noise due to smoothing and probabilistic clustering.
- Computational Efficiency: Traditional methods outperformed FCM in speed, highlighting a tradeoff between accuracy and processing time [5] [7] [13].

APPLICATIONS

- **Medical Imaging**: FCM accurately delineated tumor boundaries in MRI scans [17] [18].
- Computer Vision: Canny provided better results for detecting structural edges in urban scenes [11] [12].

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the effectiveness of Fuzzy C-Means (FCM) for edge detection, emphasizing its superior ability to handle complex and noisy environments where traditional methods like Sobel and Prewitt may struggle. FCM's flexibility in assigning soft memberships to image pixels allows it to adapt to subtle transitions and fine details, making it particularly advantageous in fields such as medical imaging, texture analysis, and image segmentation. While Sobel and Prewitt remain valuable due to their computational simplicity and speed, FCM offers a more robust approach for challenging cases that involve intricate or overlapping structures. Future research can explore ways to enhance FCM's computational performance, especially for real-time applications, by combining it with advanced optimization techniques. Additionally, integrating FCM with cutting-edge machine learning algorithms may further improve its accuracy and efficiency, opening new avenues for its application in dynamic, large-scale image analysis tasks. [14] [18] [20].

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