

SIGNAL PROCESSING

# IMAGE COMMUNICATION

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Theory, Techniques & Applications

A publication of the European Association for Signal Processing (EURASIP)



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## Inter-block filtering and downsampling in DCT domain<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The extensive use of discrete cosine transform (DCT) techniques in image coding suggests the investigation on filtering and downsampling methods directly acting on the DCT domain. As DCT image transforms usually operate on blocks, it is useful that the DCT filtering techniques preserve the block dimension. In this context the present paper first revises the intra-block filtering techniques to enlighten the limitations implied by small block dimensions. To overcome the artefacts introduced by this method and to satisfy the filtering design constraints which are usually defined in the Fourier domain, inter-block techniques are developed starting from the implementation of FIR filtering. Inter-block schemes do not exhibit any limitation but their computational cost has to be taken into account. In addition, hybrid techniques, using variable length FIR filters after the discard of low order DCT coefficients, are introduced to increase the computational efficiency; in this case, the introduced aliasing has to be kept at tolerable values. The amount of the tolerable aliasing strictly depends on the subsequent operations applied to the filtered and downsampled image. The numerical examples reported could form a basis for error estimation and evaluation of trade-off between performance and computational complexity.

**Key words:** Discrete cosine transform; Block operation; Filtering; Downsampling

### 1. Introduction

Filtering and downsampling of image signals are basic operations normally performed in image processing.

This is, for instance, the case of spatial scalability (e.g. MPEG High  $1440 \times 1152 \Rightarrow$  CCIR 601  $720 \times 576 \Rightarrow$  MPEG SIF  $352 \times 288$  [2, 6] and JPEG Progressive Hierarchical Mode [7]) as well as of chrominance downsampling (e.g. CCIR 4:4:4  $\Rightarrow$  CIR 4:2:2  $\Rightarrow$  MPEG 4:2:0 [2, 6]).

Filtering and downsampling are usually carried out in the space domain by means of FIR filters.

However, the extensive use of DCT techniques in image coding suggested the investigation on filtering and downsampling directly in the transformed (DCT) domain. As DCT image transforms usually

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operate on square blocks of small dimension (8, 16), DCT operations are usually intra-block oriented. In particular, the above mentioned operations can be realized as matrix products [1, 5, 8–10, 12, 13].

The possibility to combine into a unique operator (acting on spatial or transformed blocks) a series of block operations such as direct and inverse transforms, intra-block filtering and down-sampling was demonstrated in [1].

The matrix based operations allow to directly produce

- the DCT transform of a filtered or downsampled image from the original image,
- the DCT transform of a filtered or downsampled image from its DCT,
- a filtered or downsampled image from its DCT.

This paper presents a brief review of the intra-block filtering methods in DCT domain and discusses their performance.

Then, in order to overcome the intra-block technique drawbacks, an inter-block filtering method and some hybrid techniques are presented and discussed. The use of an inter-block technique is necessary to satisfy the filtering design constraints which are usually defined in the Fourier domain.

All the above-mentioned techniques are presented in a context that aims at preserving the transformed block dimension; this means that, manipulating image blocks of  $N \times N$  pixels, a transformed  $kN \times hN$  macroblock is considered as a set of  $(hk)$  transformed blocks of dimension  $N \times N$  and not as a single  $kN \times hN$  transformed block.

The paper is organized as follows. Sections 2 and 3 report a concise review of some basic concepts and definitions regarding spatial filtering, downsampling and DCT transform. Moreover, notation used in the following description is introduced. In Section 4 a method to perform spatial downsampling in DCT domain is presented. Section 5 presents a review of the intra-block filtering techniques in DCT domain and illustrates their performance. In Section 6, an inter-block filtering technique is proposed and its properties are discussed. Finally, in Section 7, hybrid methods to increase the computational efficiency of the inter-block technique are suggested and their performance are directly derived from the results illustrated in Sections 5 and 6.

## 2. Spatial filtering and downsampling

Image filtering is usually carried out in the space domain by means of FIR filters. Simple methods based on pixel averaging are reported in [6, 7].

The well established FIR design techniques allow to easily satisfy the frequency filtering constraints. As a matter of fact, these constraints are usually given in terms of templates in the Fourier domain. For instance, the template for insertion loss/frequency characteristic of the CCIR recommended low-pass filter for the  $4:4:4 \Rightarrow 4:2:2$  format conversion is reported in [2].

A usual method to perform spatial bidimensional 2:1 downsampling on an image is to serially operate on columns and on rows.

Executing a 2:1 column downsampling on a  $N \times 2N$  block  $[g]$  means essentially to assemble an  $N \times N$  matrix with the odd columns of  $[g]$ .

The assembly must be preceded by a low-pass filter on  $[g]$  rows to reduce aliasing effects on the downsampled image.

Similarly, a 2:1 row downsampling on a  $2N \times N$  block  $[g]$  means to assemble an  $N \times N$  matrix with the odd rows of  $[g]$ .

Obviously the choice of odd columns or rows is a conventional matter; the operations on the even components are totally equivalent.

## 3. DCT operator

Let  $g_{ij}$  be the  $ij$ -element of the  $N \times N$  image block  $[g]$  and  $G_{uv}$  the  $uv$ -element of the  $N \times N$  two-dimensional DCT  $[G]$ .

As well known,  $G_{uv}$  has the following expression [11]:

$$G_{uv} = 2 \frac{c(u)c(v)}{N} \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} \sum_{j=0}^{N-1} g_{ij} \cos \frac{(2i+1)u\pi}{2N} \times \cos \frac{(2j+1)v\pi}{2N}, \quad (1)$$

where

$$c(u), c(v) = \begin{cases} 1/\sqrt{2}, & \text{if } u, v = 0, \\ 1, & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

$$u, v = 0, \dots, N-1.$$

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