Flexible Neural Image Compression via Code Editing

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Abstract

Neural image compression (NIC) has outperformed traditional image codecs in rate-distortion (R-D) performance. However, it usually requires a dedicated encoder-decoder pair for each point on R-D curve, which greatly hinders its practical deployment. While some recent works have enabled bitrate control via conditional coding, they impose strong prior during training and provide limited flexibility. In this paper we propose Code Editing, a highly flexible coding method for NIC based on semi-amortized inference. And we further improve our Code Editing via adaptive quantization. We demonstrate our method under various conditions and we show that our code editing surpass existing variable-rate methods through experiment. Our work is a new paradigm for variable bitrate NIC, and it is the first to achieve continuous bitrate control, ROI coding and perception-distortion trade-off with a single decoder.

1 Introduction

Lossy image compression is a fundamental problem of computer vision. In a simplified setting, the aim of lossy compression is to minimize rate-distortion cost $R + \lambda D$, with λ as the Lagrange multiplier controlling R-D trade-off. Traditional compression algorithms (e.g. JPEG, JPEG2000 and BPG [Bellard, 2018]) utilize regularity of natural statistics, which assumes the sparsity of images in transform domain. They first perform a linear transformation (e.g. DCT, wavelet transform) and then quantize the transformed coefficients for compression. On the other hand, lossy neural image compression (NIC) methods have outperformed traditional codecs in recent years [Xie et al., 2021, He et al., 2022]. These methods implement powerful non-linear transformation with a neural network, and therefore achieve better R-D performance. However, in order to realize R-D trade-offs, we need to optimize multiple networks towards different losses with different λs. In other words, the existing neural image compression methods cannot achieve flexible bitrate control.

To enable NIC models with bitrate control ability, several works adopt conditional networks [Choi et al., 2019, Cui et al., 2021, Sun et al., 2021] . They use λ as condition and feed it into the encoder and decoder. During training, they sample λ from a pre-defined prior and optimize the $\mathbb{E}_{p(\lambda)}[R+\lambda D]$ via Monte Carlo. Due to the capacity of conditional networks, most of them use simple prior and very limited sets of λ, such as a uniform distribution over only $5-10$ discrete λs [Choi et al., 2019, Cui et al., 2021]. And additional effort is required to interpolate the discrete λs to achieve continuous R-D curve [Choi et al., 2019, Cui et al., 2021, Sun et al., 2021], which limits the flexibility of variable bitrate model. On the other hand, traditional image codecs achieve flexible R-D trade-off naturally by controlling the quantization step. This control is fine grain (e.g. 100 levels for JPEG). Moreover, they support flexible spatial bits-allocation for ROI-based (region of interest) coding. For example, the H.264 allows 64 level quantization step control for each 16×16 block of images. And the user need only one decoder for all those flexibility.

In this work, we intend to give neural image compression methods the flexibility of traditional codecs: the continuous rate-distortion trade-off with arbitrary spatial bits-allocation by one decoder. It is

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a meaningful task for practical NIC considering the growing size of neural decoders and the need for fine-grain rate control. In order to achieve this, we propose Code Editing, a semi-amortized inference [Kim et al., 2018] approach for flexible R-D trade-off. Although previous works have adopted semi-amortized inference to improve R-D performance [Johnston et al., 2018, Yang et al., 2020], we are the first to discover its potential for flexible bitrate control. Specifically, we edit the latent code directly to change the optimization target at inference time based on desired λs and ROIs. However, we find that naïve Code Editing has limited bitrate control ability. We further analyze and address the problem via quantization step size adaptation, and enhance its speed-performance trade-off. Surprisingly, we find that our Code Editing can achieve not only flexible continuous bitrate control and ROI-based coding, but also perception-distortion trade-off, all with one decoder.

To wrap up, our contributions are as follows:

- We propose Code Editing, a new paradigm for variable bitrate NIC based on semi-amortized inference. It supports continuous bitrate control with a single decoder and outperforms previous variable bitrate NIC methods. To the best of knowledge, we are the first to consider semi-amortized inference for variable bitrtae NIC.
- We resolve the performance decay of Code Editing by combining it with adaptive quantization step size. And we further improve the speed-performance trade-off of Code Editing.
- We demonstrate the potential of Code Editing in flexible spatial bits-allocation and distortion-perception trade-off, which is beyond the flexibility of traditional codecs.

2 Code Editing: Flexible Neural Image Compression

2.1 Background

The general optimization procedure of NIC methods can be concluded as follows: 1) given an image $\boldsymbol{x}$, an encoder network produces latent parameter $\boldsymbol{y} = f_\phi(\boldsymbol{x})$. 2) $\boldsymbol{y}$ goes through unit scalar quantization (rounding) and produces discrete code $\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil$. 3) An entropy model $p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$ is used to evaluate the likelihood of discrete latent code, and encode it into bitstreams. During this process, we obtain the bitrate $-\log p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$. 4) Then $\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil$ is feed into decoder network to obtain reconstruction image $g_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$, and $d(.,.)$ is used to compute the distortion between reconstruction and original image. 5) the encoder parameter ϕ, decoder and entropy model parameter θ are optimized to minimize the R-D cost $R + \lambda D$, where $R = -\log p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$ and $D = d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil))$. This procedure can be described by Eq. 1 and Eq. 2. As the rounding operation $\lfloor . \rceil$ is non-differentiable, some works of NIC adopt additive uniform noise (AUN) to relax it [Ballé et al., 2017, 2018, Cheng et al., 2020], some use straight through estimator (STE) [Toderici et al., 2017, Johnston et al., 2018], and some attempts annealing base approaches [Guo et al., 2021].

$$\theta^*, \phi^* = \arg\max_{\theta,\phi} \mathcal{L}_{\theta,\phi} \tag{1}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &\mathcal{L}_{\theta,\phi} = -(R + \lambda D) = \mathbb{E}_{p(\boldsymbol{x})}[\underbrace{\log p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)}_{\text{-rate}} - \lambda \underbrace{d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil))}_{\text{distortion}}] \\ &\text{with} \quad \boldsymbol{y} = f_\phi(\boldsymbol{x}) \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Among all those methods, the most adopted one is the framework proposed by Ballé et al. [2017]. It relaxes NIC as a probabilistic graphic model $\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}} \rightarrow \boldsymbol{x}$, where $\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}}$ are continuous relaxed latent codes. Then the encoding process is connected to sampling from the variational posterior $q_\phi(\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}}|\boldsymbol{x}) = \Pi\mathcal{U}(\boldsymbol{y}^i - 0.5, \boldsymbol{y}^i + 0.5)$. This factorized uniform distribution is used to simulate the quantization noise. And the decoding process is connected to compute the likelihood $p_\theta(\boldsymbol{x}|\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}})$, which is equivalent to distortion evaluation. Finally, the prior $p_\theta(\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}})$ is connected to bitrate. Under such formulation, the evidence lower bound (ELBO) is directly connected to the negative R-D cost of compression (Eq. 3). Then, minimizing $R + \lambda D$ is relaxed into maximizing $\mathcal{L}^{train}_{\theta,\phi}$.

$$\mathcal{L}^{train}_{\theta,\phi} = -(R + \lambda D) = \mathbb{E}_{p_\theta(\boldsymbol{x})}[\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi(\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}}|\boldsymbol{x})}[\underbrace{\log p_\theta(\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}})}_{\text{- rate}} + \underbrace{\log p_\theta(\boldsymbol{x}|\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}})}_{\text{- distortion}} \underbrace{- \log q_\phi(\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}}|\boldsymbol{x})}_{0}]] \tag{3}$$

The above process of encoding is also known as fully amortized variational inference, as for each new image $\boldsymbol{x'}$, its variational posterior is fully determined by amortized paramters ϕ. Those parameters are called amortized parameters as they are global parameters shared by all data points. The adoption of fully amortized inference is time efficient but can also lead to inference sub-optimality. This phenomena is known as amortization gap [Cremer et al., 2018].

2.2 Code Editing Naïve

Different from previous methods in variable bitrate NIC, we propose a new paradigm of controlling R-D trade-off by semi-amortized inference, named Code Editing. Consider now we have a pair of parameters $\theta_{\lambda_0}, \phi_{\lambda_0}$ optimized for a specific R-D trade-off parameter λ_0. Then, for a new Lagrangian multiplier λ_1, we encode by editing the code. To be specific, given an image $\boldsymbol{x}$, we first initialize the unquantized latent parameters $\boldsymbol{y} \leftarrow f_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\boldsymbol{x})$. Note that now $\boldsymbol{y}$ is exactly the same as the latent with R-D trade-off λ_0. Next, we iteratively optimize $\boldsymbol{y}$ to maximize the target $\mathcal{L}_{\boldsymbol{y}}$ as Eq. 5. In other words, we directly edit the code $\boldsymbol{y}$ to adapt to different R-D trade-offs. During the optimization process, the decoder and entropy parameter θ_{λ_0} remains the same. This process of encoding is known as semi-amortized inference [Kim et al., 2018], as it utilizes the initial value of amortized inference, and optimizes latent for each data point afterwards.

$$\boldsymbol{y}^* = \arg\max_{\boldsymbol{y}} \mathcal{L}_{\boldsymbol{y}} \tag{4}$$

$$\mathcal{L}_{\boldsymbol{y}} = -(R + \lambda_1 D) = \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil) - \lambda_1 d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)) \tag{5}$$

Similar to NIC, one challenge remains is that the rounding operation $\lfloor . \rceil$ is not-differentiable. It is not possible to adopt gradient based optimization approach directly. Learning from Yang et al. [2020], we adopt stochastic gumbel annealing (SGA) in lieu of rounding to obtain a surrogate ELBO. As shown in Sec. 4.2, adopting SGA here achieves better R-D performance than AUN. After that, we use standard gradient based optimization methods with temperature annealing to optimize latent $\boldsymbol{y}$. And we call this method Code Editing Naïve.

2.3 Code Editing Enhanced

Empirically, we find that Code Editing Naive can only achieve continuous R-D trade-off within a narrow range (e.g. ± 0.1 bpp). Out of this range, the R-D performance falls rapidly (See Sec. 4.2). One possible reason is the train-test mismatch of the entropy model $p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\boldsymbol{y})$. Naturally, $\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil$ grows sparser as bitrate decreases. And this causes an obvious gap between latent distribution optimized for λ_0 and λ_1 (See Fig. 2). Thus, the entropy model fitted to latent distribution at λ_0 might perform poorly in estimating latent density of other λs. More specifically, the mismatched bitrate is $\mathbb{E}_{p(\boldsymbol{x})}[\mathbb{E}_{q(\boldsymbol{y}^*|\boldsymbol{x})}[\log p_{\theta_{\lambda_1}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil) - \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil)]]$. Under the assumption that the variational posterior is the true posterior, this mismatch equal to $D_{KL}(p_{\theta_{\lambda_1}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil) || p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil))$, which is just the distance between two distributions.

In NIC, the probability mass function (pmf) $p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$ over quantized $\boldsymbol{y}$ is computed via differentiating cumulative distribution function. In other words, $p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil)$ is not directly computed. Instead, it is approximated by $\prod \int_{\boldsymbol{y}^i - \Delta/2}^{\boldsymbol{y}^i + \Delta/2} p_\theta(\boldsymbol{y}^i) d\boldsymbol{y}^i$, with $\Delta = 1$. The Δ is the quantization step size. In original NIC, the quantization operation is simply rounding, and its step size is 1. We note that we could control the pmf by controlling the quantization step Δ, and this results in an augmented prior $p_\theta(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil, \Delta)$. Controlling Δ results in significant different pmf without changing the underlying continuous density $p_\theta(\boldsymbol{y})$. Then, we can optimize the Δ augmented ELBO to find the optimal code y^* and quantization step size Δ^* as Eq. 6 and Eq. 7.

$$\boldsymbol{y}^*, \Delta^* = \arg\max_{\boldsymbol{y}, \Delta} \mathcal{L}_{\boldsymbol{y}, \Delta} \tag{6}$$

$$\mathcal{L}_{\boldsymbol{y}, \Delta} = -(R + \lambda_1 D) = \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil, \Delta) - \lambda_1 d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \Delta \boldsymbol{y} \rceil / \Delta)) \tag{7}$$

Empirically, we find that jointly optimizing $\boldsymbol{y}$ and Δ via gradient based approaches brings significant performance decay (See Appendix). Instead, we determine quantization step for each R-D trade-off

by grid search (See Appendix) and optimize $\boldsymbol{y}$ via gradient descent. In fact, similar idea of controlling Δ has been adopted in Choi et al. [2019]. It implements continuous R-D trade-off within small bitrate range (e.g. ± 0.2 bpp) by controlling Δ. However, we show that a large range of continuous R-D trade-off (e.g. $0.1 - 1.1$ bpp) can be achieved by combining the quantization step size control and semi-amortized inference.

2.4 Speed-Performance Trade-off

Optimizing $\boldsymbol{y}$ over Eq. 7. from $f_{\phi_0}(\boldsymbol{x})$ for each $\boldsymbol{x}$ is time-consuming. Naturally, we can accelerate Code Editing by reducing the iteration of optimization, and the R-D performance would drop accordingly. In practice, we find that reducing the number of iterations to 10% of full convergence achieves reasonable results for low bitrate regions (with 0.4 db PSNR drop). However, the R-D performance in the high bitrate range degrades severely. We propose to enhance the amortized encoder by finetuning at a high bitrate R-D objective. Then the finetuned encoder can predict a better initial $\boldsymbol{y}$ for a high bitrate range, and thus makes computationally scalable Code Editing possible.

2.5 Extension of Code Editing

With code editing, we can empower NIC with more flexible coding capabilities out of continuous bitrate control. By extending the optimization target for code editing, we can achieve different coding requirements. In this work, we explore the potential of code editing in ROI-based coding and distortion-perception trade-off.

ROI-based Coding. The need of ROI-based coding stems from the fact that different pixels in an image have different levels of importance. So that spatially different bitrate should be assigned according to regions of interest (ROI) during compression. When performing ROI-based coding, a quality map $\boldsymbol{m} \in \mathbb{R}^{H,W}$ is provided to the encoder in addition to the input image $\boldsymbol{x}$, which indicates the importance of each pixel. Here we use a bounded continuous-valued quality map within $[0, 1]$, where 0 and 1 represent the least and the most important pixel respectively. To make Code Editing support ROI-based coding, we extent the objective in Eq. 7. Specifically, we weight the per-pixel distortion with ROI map $\boldsymbol{m}$ to obtain the optimization target $\mathcal{L}^{ROI}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta}$, where $\circ$ represents element-wise product.

$$\mathcal{L}^{ROI}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta} = \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil, \Delta) - \lambda_1 \underbrace{\boldsymbol{m} \circ d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \Delta \boldsymbol{y} \rceil / \Delta))}_{\text{ROI weighted distortion}} \tag{8}$$

Note that different from existing ROI-based coding works for NIC [Song et al., 2021], our approach imposes no prior on the shape of ROI during training. And thus our ROI control is more flexible (See results in Sec. 4.5)

Distortion-Perception Trade-off. When compressing an image, sometimes we want to optimize the fidelity (measured in MSE), sometimes we want to optimize the subjective quality (measured in perceptual loss), and sometimes we want a balanced trade-off between them. However, the fidelity and perceptual quality are in odds to each other, and they share similar relationship as R-D trade-off [Blau and Michaeli, 2018, 2019]. For conventional NIC, we can add another perception loss term in Eq. 7 to optimize θ, ϕ for a specific weights between rate, distortion and perception. However, just like R-D trade-off, distortion-perception trade-off also requires multiple, or even infinite number of decoders to achieve. And it is very annoying for practical deployment.

Again, our Code Editing can achieve the distortion-perception trade-off by extending the objective in Eq. 7. Specifically, we optimize towards $R + \lambda_d D + \lambda_p P$, where D is the distortion measure $d_d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil))$, P is the perception divergence measure $d_p(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil))$ and λ_d, λ_p are parameters controlling the trade-off. The extended target is as Eq. 9. Similarly, we can achieve this target by optimizing $\boldsymbol{y}$ and Δ to maximize $\mathcal{L}^{DP}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta}$.

$$\mathcal{L}^{DP}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta} = \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil, \Delta) - \lambda_d \underbrace{d_d(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \Delta \boldsymbol{y} \rceil / \Delta))}_{\text{distortion loss}} - \lambda_p \underbrace{d_p(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \Delta \boldsymbol{y} \rceil / \Delta))}_{\text{perception loss}} \tag{9}$$

Moreover, it is theoretically possible to achieve a trade-off between multiple loss metrics by extending the target as Eq. 10. For example, we can let d_1 be the MSE , d_2 be the VGG loss, d_3 be the style loss and d_4 be the adversial loss. Then, we can optimize our latent code to achieve the sophisticated photo-realistic effect described in Sajjadi et al. [2017]. And it is so flexible that we do not even need to know what those loss functions are during training. However, we have not conducted empirical study on $\mathcal{L}^{MUL}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta}$ as it is a much less common scenario in practice.

$$\mathcal{L}^{MUL}_{\boldsymbol{y},\Delta} = \log p_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil, \Delta) - \sum \lambda_i d_i(\boldsymbol{x}, g_{\theta_{\lambda_0}}(\lfloor \Delta \boldsymbol{y} \rceil / \Delta)) \tag{10}$$

2.6 Hierarchical Latent Case

Most of the sota NIC methods [Minnen et al., 2018, Minnen and Singh, 2020, Cheng et al., 2020, He et al., 2022] are based on the hierarchical latent framework proposed by Ballé et al. [2018], which has graphic model $\tilde{\boldsymbol{z}} \to \tilde{\boldsymbol{y}} \to \boldsymbol{x}$. In this framework, $\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}}, \tilde{\boldsymbol{z}}$ are relaxed latent code and $\boldsymbol{x}$ is image. To simplify notation, in this section we base our analysis upon 1 level latent framework by Ballé et al. [2017] with graphic model $\tilde{\boldsymbol{y}} \to \boldsymbol{x}$. We note that all the formulas in this section can be easily extended to the hierarchical latent framework.

3 Related Works

3.1 Variable Bitrate and ROI-based control for NIC

The pioneers of NIC [Toderici et al., 2016, 2017, Johnston et al., 2018] use recurrent neural networks to implement progressive coding. They achieve coarse rate control by growing the number of residuals. On the other hand, Theis et al. [2017] learns the scaling vector of latent code for each bitrate on a pre-trained compression model to control the bitrate. However, their R-D performance is surpassed by Ballé et al. [2017]. More recently, based on the framework by Ballé et al. [2017, 2018], Choi et al. [2019], Cui et al. [2021], Sun et al. [2021] uses the one-hot encoded λ as conditional input to the auto-encoder where λ is sampled from uniform discrete prior with limited support during training. And additional efforts are required to interpolate the R-D curve for continuous rate control. Cui et al. [2021] improves Theis et al. [2017] with asymmetrically scaled vectors trained jointly with the auto-encoder. More recently, Song et al. [2021] inserts Spatial Feature Transform (SFT) module into the auto-encoder to make the input map modulate the intermediate feature. However, to the best of knowledge, we are the first to explore semi-amortized inference based variable bitrate model.

For ROI-based control, Agustsson et al. [2019] distinguishes images into important and unimportant regions, and use a GAN to generate the unimportant regions. Cai et al. [2020] supports bit allocation by applying different losses to ROI and non-ROI regions. Song et al. [2021] uses ROI to modulate the intermediate features and recover the ROI implicitly from the hyperprior, and it claims that it support flexible ROI control. However, it requires complicated handcrafted ROI prior during training. Compared with above-mentioned methods, our Code Editing does not require any prior of ROI, nor data contains segmentation map during training.

3.2 Semi-amortized Inference for NIC

The semi-amortized variational inference is concurrently invented by Kim et al. [2018] and Marino et al. [2018]. The basic idea is that works following Kingma and Welling [2013] lose the good tradition of learning variational posterior parameters per datapoint. Instead they learn fully amortized parameters for the whole dataset. And this fully amortized inference might lead to sub-optimal posterior distribution. Cremer et al. [2018] refers to this phenomena as amortization gap and argues it is a major contributor to inference sub-optimality of VAE. The semi-amortized inference is to initialize the variational posterior's parameter with fully amortized parameters, and conduct stochastic optimization per data-point.

Although Kim et al. [2018], Marino et al. [2018] are alluring to apply, they require nested iterative optimization within the stochastic gradient descent loop. When adopting semi-amortized inference to NIC, Djelouah and Schroers [2019], Yang et al. [2020] simplify it into two stages: 1) training a fully amortized encoder-decoder pair 2) iteratively optimize latent which is initialized by amortized encoder. Although this simplification can lead to sub-optimal generative model (recall that now

the generative model is paired with sub-optimal inference model), it indeed makes semi-amortized inference practical for NIC. Our method follows Yang et al. [2020] as we explore semi-amortized inference for R-D trade-off instead of R-D performance.

4 Experimental Results

4.1 Experimental Settings

Following He et al. [2021], we train the baseline models on a subset of 8,000 images from ImageNet. For training, we use MSE as distortion. For each baseline method, we train models with 7 fixed R-D trade-off points, with $\lambda \in \{0.0016, 0.0032, 0.0075, 0.015, 0.03, 0.045, 0.08\}$. This setup is aligned with Cheng et al. [2020]. The baseline models' bitrate ranges from 0.1 to 1.0 bpp on Kodak dataset [Kodak, 1993]. All baseline models are trained using the Adam optimizer for 2000 epochs. Batchsize is set to 16 and the initial learning rate is set to 10^{-4}. More detailed setup can be found in Appendix.

4.2 Ablation Study

We set Ballé et al. [2018] as the baseline of the ablation study. All experiments involving Code Editing are based on the model trained with $\lambda_0 = 0.015$. In ablation study, all the results are tested on Kodak dataset.

Adaptive Δ. To reduce the prior mismatch, we propose to control the quantization step Δ in addition to optimizing $\boldsymbol{y}$. To verify the effectiveness of this approach, we compare Code Editing Enhnanced (w/ adaptive Δ) with Code Editing Naïve (w/o adaptive Δ). As shown in Fig. 1, the R-D performance of Code Editing Naïve drops evidently when the bitrate changes out of a small range ($\pm$ 0.1 bpp). Further, we provide statistics of $\lfloor \boldsymbol{y} \rceil$ generated by Code Editing of different R-D trade-off on the Kodak dataset in Fig 2. It is shown that the distribution mismatch of Code Editing Naïve is more evident than Code Editing Enhanced.

On the other hand, we also show the result of controlling Δ alone. As Choi et al. [2019], we find that adjusting Δ can shift the bitrate in a limited range ($\pm$ 0.1 bpp). But out of this range, the R-D performance drops rapidly.

SGA vs. AUN. In Code Editing, we adopt SGA instead of additive uniform noise (AUN) as relaxation of discrete latent. To verify the effect of SGA, we optimize $\boldsymbol{y}$ for 2,000 iterations using SGA and AUN, respectively. As shown in Fig. 1, although Code Editing with AUN also outperforms the baseline, the SGA's R-D performance is significantly higher than AUN especially in high bitrate region. This is due to the fact that SGA closes the discretization gap [Yang et al., 2020] via soft to hard annealing.

Encoder Fine-tuning for Fast Inference. We show that we can control the computational complexity of Code Editing by early termination. We terminate Code Editing with $\{50, 100, 200\}$ iterations, which correspond to $\{2.5\%, 5\%, 10\%\}$ of full iterations. The results on the Kodak dataset are shown in Fig. 1. In low bitrate range, the R-D performance achieves a reasonable point within 10% of iterations. However, the R-D performance in the high bitrate region degrades severely. To solve this problem, we finetune encoder with $\lambda = 0.075$. The latent code predicted by the finetuned encoder is used as the initial value for Code Editing in the high bitrate range. With a stronger encoder in the high bitrate range, we can predict better initial codes and achieve a better R-D performance with very few iterations (marked with Encoder FT. in the Fig. 1).

4.3 Variable Rate Coding

First, we evaluate Code Editing Enhanced for continuous variable bitrate coding. We choose three established works [Ballé et al., 2018, Minnen et al., 2018, Cheng et al., 2020] as baselines. For each of the baselines, we set base model's R-D trade-off parameter $\lambda_0 = 0.015$, which results in a mid-range bitrate (around 0.5 bpp). For each image $\boldsymbol{x}$ to be compressed, we initialize $\boldsymbol{y} \leftarrow f_{\phi_{\lambda_0}}(\boldsymbol{x})$ and optimize $\boldsymbol{y}$ for 2,000 iterations using SGA, with the learning rate of 5e-5. This setting is aligned with Yang et al. [2020]. The Δ is determined by grid search. Fig. 3 shows the R-D performance of variable bitrate via Code Editing. It can be seen that Code Editing Enhanced can effectively achieve wide range continuous R-D trade-off with fixed decoder and entropy model trained at λ_0.

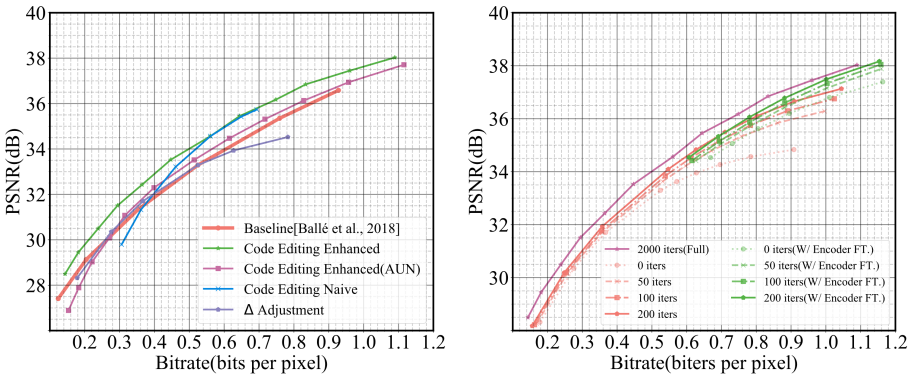

Figure 1: Results of ablation study. Left: Results of adaptive Δ and SGA. Right: Results of speed-performance trade-off.

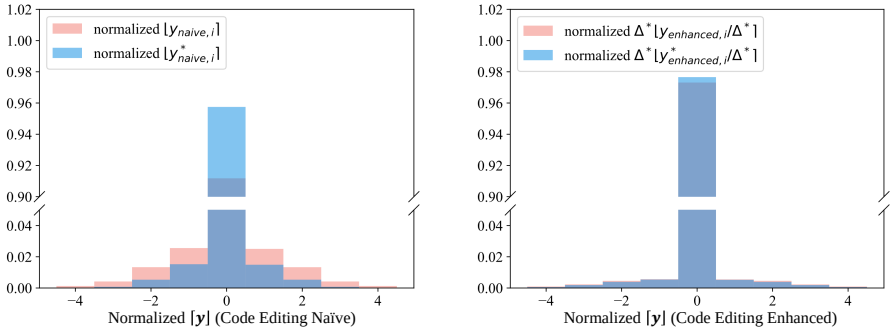

Figure 2: The distribution of normalized $\lfloor \boldsymbol{y}^* \rceil$ before and after Code Editing. The normalization parameter is μ, σ^2 from $p(\boldsymbol{y}|\boldsymbol{z})$. Left: Code Editing Naïve. Right: Code Editing Enhanced. The source $\lambda_0 = 0.015$, the target $\lambda_1 = 0.0016$.

Then, we compared Code Editing Enhanced with the sota variable code-rate methods [Theis et al., 2017, Cui et al., 2021, Song et al., 2021]. For fairness, we re-implement these methods on the baselines with the same setting as original papers. The results are shown in Fig. 3. Note that we only show the results of Song et al. [2021] on Ballé et al. [2018] as it produces NaNs on other models. As shown in Fig 3, Our proposed Code Editing outperforms existing variable bitrate methods with all three baseline. Theis et al. [2017] brings larger degradation in R-D performance, especially in the high bitrate region. Cui et al. [2021] achieves similar R-D performance as the original fix-bitrate model. The R-D performance of Song et al. [2021] on Ballé et al. [2018] exceeds the fix-bitrate model in the low bitrate range but is inferior to Code Editing Enhanced.

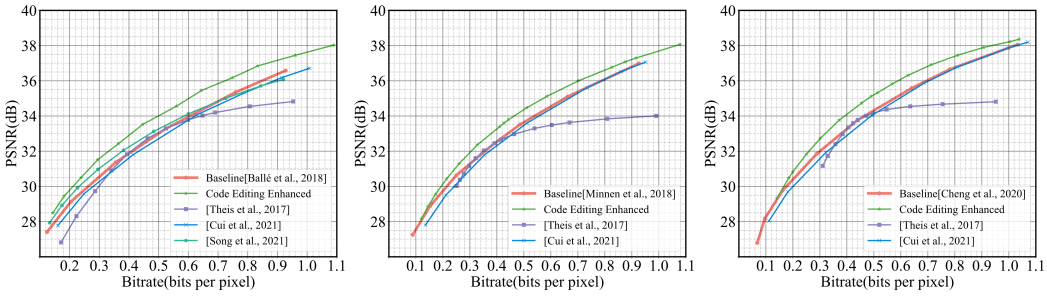

Figure 3: Results of Code Editing Enhanced on Kodak dataset. Left: Ballé et al. [2018] as baseline. Middle: Minnen et al. [2018] as baseline. Right: Cheng et al. [2020] as baseline.

4.4 Distortion-Perception Trade-off

Next, we explore the potential of Code Editing Enhanced in distortion-perception trade-off. For distortion metric $d_d(.,.)$, we choose standard MSE. For perception metric $d_p(.,.)$, we select LPIPS [Zhang et al., 2018], which is widely adopted as a metric for perceptual quality [Mentzer et al., 2020, Bhat et al., 2021]. The lower the LPIPS is, the better perceptual quality an image has. In our experiment, we select 3 distortion-perception trade-off points by controlling the perception loss weight $\lambda_p \in \{0.1, 0.5, 1.0\}$, respectively. We use the bitrate control scheme in Mentzer et al. [2020] to ensure the bitrate roughly remains the same (See Appendix for detail). Fig 4 shows the Distortion-Perception trade-off results based on Ballé et al. [2018] on the Kodak dataset. As λ_p increases, both LPIPS and PSNR decrease, implying better perception and worse distortion is achieved. Further, we show qualitative results in Fig. 5. We can see that as λ_p increases, the detail level of image increases, which indicates a better perceptual quality. Both quantitative and qualitative results show that our Code Editing can achieve flexible distortion-perception trade-off.

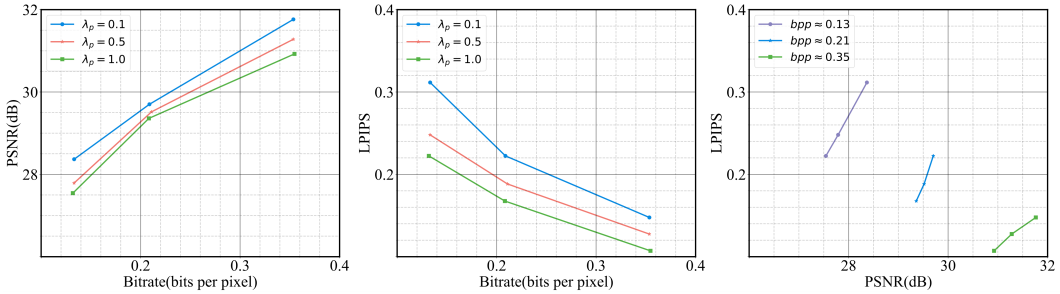

Figure 4: The quantitative distortion-perception trade-off results. Left: Bitrate-PSNR with different λ_ps. Middle: Bitrate-LPIPS with different λ_ps. Right: PSNR-LPIPS with different λ_ps, the bitrate are approximately the same.

Figure 5: The qualitative distortion-perception trade-off results. (x.a) is the original image, and (x.b)-(x.d) are reconstruction results of three images with different perception-distortion trade-off, which is controlled by λ_p.

4.5 ROI-based Coding

a. Original Image

b. ROI Map, black=0 (least bits), white=1 (most bits)

c. Reconstructed Image

d. Actual bits allocation, the unit is bits per pixel (bpp)

Figure 6: Results of Code Editing Enhanced‘s ROI-based coding.

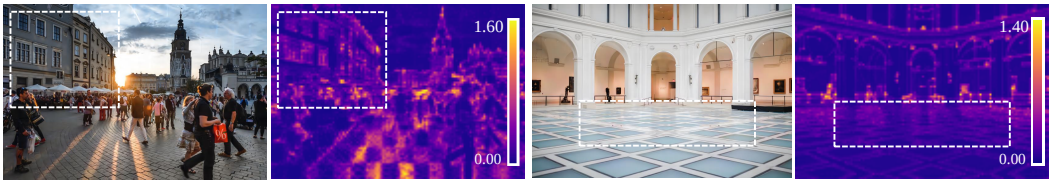

Figure 7: Results of Song et al. [2021]’s ROI-based Coding by using the same original image and ROI map of Fig. 6. The white rectangle indicates where ROI map is not effective.

This section shows the performance of Code Editing in terms of ROI-based coding. In order to verify the effectiveness of spatially adaptive R-D trade-off, we use various quality maps. We use Ballé et al. [2018] as the baseline model to verify the effectiveness of Code Editing in ROI-based coding on Kodak and CLIC2022 datasets [CLIC, 2022]. Fig. 6 illustrates these results. And our Code Editing can allocate bitrate spatially according to arbitrary-shape ROI maps, including checkerboard and alphabet shapes. Moreover, we compared our Code Editing ROI results with Song et al. [2021] which is trained with sophisticated prior in Fig. 7. It can be seen that Song et al. [2021]’s result suffers from ROI map diminishing issue. We can barely sense the effect of ROI map inside the region indicated by the white rectangle.

5 Conclusions

We propose Code Editing, a new paradigm for continuous variable bitrate NIC based on semi-amortized inference. It outperforms current variable bitrate NIC methods. Moreover, it achieves flexible spatial bits allocation and distortion-perception trade-off, all with one decoder. Limitations include that the efficiency of Code Editing could be improved, and that the empirical study on more compounded target mentioned as Eq. 10 should be addressed.

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Checklist

The checklist follows the references. Please read the checklist guidelines carefully for information on how to answer these questions. For each question, change the default **[TODO]** to [Yes] , [No] , or [N/A] . You are strongly encouraged to include a **justification to your answer**, either by referencing the appropriate section of your paper or providing a brief inline description. For example:

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