ONCE-FOR-ALL: CONTROLLABLE GENERATIVE IMAGE COMPRESSION WITH DYNAMIC GRANULARITY ADAPTION

Anonymous authors
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ABSTRACT

Although recent generative image compression methods have demonstrated impressive potential in optimizing the rate-distortion-perception trade-off, they still face the critical challenge of flexible rate adaption to diverse compression necessities and scenarios. To overcome this challenge, this paper proposes a **Control**lable **G**enerative **I**mage **C**ompression framework, termed **Control-GIC**, the first capable of fine-grained bitrate adaption across a broad spectrum while ensuring high-fidelity and generality compression. **Control-GIC** is grounded in a VQGAN framework that encodes an image as a sequence of variable-length codes (*i.e.* VQ-indices), which can be losslessly compressed and exhibits a direct positive correlation with the bitrates. Drawing inspiration from the classical coding principle, we correlate the information density of local image patches with their granular representations. Hence, we can flexibly determine a proper allocation of granularity for the patches to achieve dynamic adjustment for VQ-indices, resulting in desirable compression rates. We further develop a probabilistic conditional decoder capable of retrieving historic encoded multi-granularity representations according to transmitted codes, and then reconstruct hierarchical granular features in the formalization of conditional probability, enabling more informative aggregation to improve reconstruction realism. Our experiments show that **Control-GIC** allows highly flexible and controllable bitrate adaption where the results demonstrate its superior performance over recent state-of-the-art methods.

1 INTRODUCTION

Lossy image compression complies with the rate-distortion criterion in Shannon's theorem (Shannon et al., 1959), which aims to pursue minimal storage of images without quality sacrifice. Traditional standardized codecs (Wallace, 1990; Taubman & Marcellin, 2001; Bellard) adhere to a typical hand-crafted "transforming-quantization-entropy coding" rule, showing substantial performance on generic images. Learnable compression algorithms (Ballé et al., 2017; 2018; Minnen et al., 2018; Minnen & Singh, 2020) follow a similar pipeline that parameterizes it as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) operating on latent variables with end-to-end R-D optimization. Recent works (Santurkar et al., 2018; Tschannen et al., 2018; Agustsson et al., 2019; Mentzer et al., 2020) leverage generative adversarial networks (GANs) (Goodfellow et al., 2014) to deal with the compression task, known as generative image compression, which minimizes the distribution divergence between original and reconstructed images, producing perfect perceptual quality. However, these methods train the models separately for specific R-D points with Lagrange multiplier (λ)-weighted R-D loss, each corresponding to an individual λ. In this way, multiple fixed-rate models are necessitated to vary bitrates, leading to dramatic computational costs and inefficient deployment to cater to diverse bitrates and devices. Some CNN-based models propose to learn scalable bitstreams (Johnston et al., 2018; Toderici et al., 2017; Bai et al., 2021; Mei et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024; Jeon et al., 2023b) or truncated quantization parameters to control the bitrates (Toderici et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2021; Cui et al., 2021). On the one hand, these models typically support a limited range of bitrates with substantial variance distribution, thus constraining their adaptability to finer bitrate adjustments. On the other hand, they mostly quantify the distortion using mean square error (MSE), which is inconsistent with human perception and often yields implausible reconstruction, particularly at low

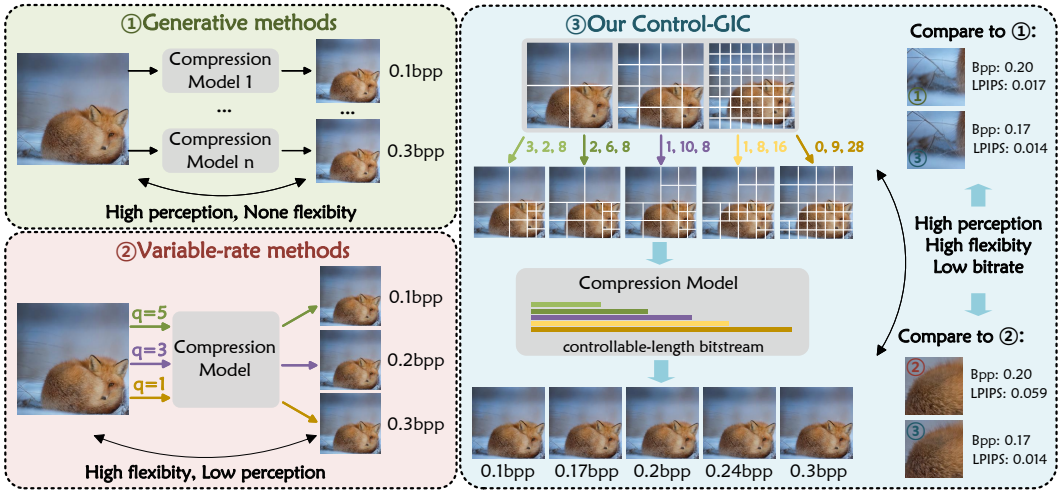

Figure 1: Illustration of the key motivation behind our approach. ① Generative methods train separate models for each distinct compression ratio, which achieves promising perceptual quality but overlooks the flexibility. ② Variable-rate methods modify the compression model by introducing truncated quantization parameters, which only support a limited range of bitrates and cannot balance the perceptual quality and compression efficiency. ③ Our proposed **Control-GIC** enables the generation of a controllable-length bitstream following different granularity decisions of image patches, which achieves an excellent trade-off among flexibility, perceptual quality, and compression efficiency.

bitrates (Blau & Michaeli, 2019; Mentzer et al., 2020). Several methods introduce scalable (Iwai et al., 2024) or variable-rate (Guo et al., 2023) designs into generative models. While achieving remarkable improvements in perceptual quality, they are still constrained by finite compression rates (see Figure 1).

In light of the preceding discussion, this work proposes an innovative generative image compression paradigm, dubbed **Control-GIC**, which accommodates highly flexible and fine-grained controls on a broad range of bitrates and perceptually realistic reconstruction with solely one set of optimized weights. Motivated by that VQ-based models (Esser et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2022) enable to encode images into discrete codes representing the local visual patterns, **Control-GIC** hybridizes the classical coding principle in the architecture with VQGAN to relax the typical R-D optimization and provide a controllable unified generative model. Specifically, **Control-GIC** first characterizes the inherent information density and context complexity of local image patches as the information entropy. We devise the granularity-informed encoder that determines the granularity of these patches based on their entropy values. These are further represented by sequential variable-length codes (*i.e.*, VQ-indices) based on learned codebook prior. One can flexibly control the statistics of the granularities to adjust the VQ-indices of patches dynamically adapting to diverse desirable bitrates. As correlated to the regional information of images, the VQ-indices are spatially variant to adapt to the local contents. We then develop a no-parametric statistical entropy coding module, which captures the code distribution in the codebook prior across a large-scale natural dataset to approximate a generalized probability distribution. This enables lossless and more compact encoding of VQ-indices during inference, improving the compression efficiency. On top of entropy coding, a probabilistic conditional decoder is further developed, which formalizes the reconstruction of granular features in a conditional probability manner with historic encoded multi-granularity representations given entropy-decoded indices. Our comprehensive experimental results demonstrate the outstanding adaption capability of **Control-GIC**, which achieves superior performance from perceptual quality, flexibility, and compression efficiency over three types of recent state-of-the-art methods including generative, progressive, and variable-rate compression methods using only a single unified model.

The main contributions of this work are three-fold:

- We propose **Control-GIC**, a unified generative compression model capable of variable bitrate adaption across a broad spectrum while preserving high-perceptual fidelity reconstruction. To our knowledge, this is the first that allows highly flexible and controllable bitrate adaption.

- We propose a granularity-inform encoder that represents the image patches of sequential spatially variant VQ-indices to support precise variable rate control and adaption. Besides, a non-parametric statistical entropy coding is devised to encode the VQ-indices losslessly.
- We design a probabilistic conditional decoder, which aggregates historic encoded multi-granularity representations to reconstruct hierarchical granular features in a conditional probability manner, achieving realism improvements.

2 Related Work

Neural Image Compression Transformation, quantization, and entropy coding are three key components in neural image compression (NIC). Since Ballé *et al.* (Ballé et al., 2017) propose the pioneering learnable NIC method using convolutional neural network (CNN), later methods make improvements in transformation to learn a more compact and exact representation with efficient architecture designs (Cheng et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2022). Some researchers are dedicated to improving the entropy coding by designing hyperprior and context models (Ballé et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2022) with entropy model, which can capture more precise spatial dependencies in the latent, helping probability distribution estimation. In recent years, the integration of generative models like GANs (Goodfellow et al., 2014) and Diffusion Model (DM) (Ho et al., 2020) into NIC has shown promising results. For instance, Agustsson *et al.* (Agustsson et al., 2019) uses GAN loss along with R-D loss to achieve end-to-end full-resolution image compression while giving dramatic bitrate savings. Mentzer *et al.* (Mentzer et al., 2020) incorporates GAN with compression architecture systematically and generates robust perceptual evaluation. Yang *et al.* (Yang & Mandt, 2024) propose an end-to-end DM-based compression framework and reconstruct images through the reverse diffusion process conditioned with context information, outperforming some GAN-based methods. VQGAN (Esser et al., 2021)-based techniques (Mao et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2024) have demonstrated strong codebook priors for discrete visual feature representation in image synthesis, offering new insights for compression. Mao *et al.* (Mao et al., 2023) introduce VQ-indices compression for simple yet efficient compression, markedly improving the compression ratio. Building on these findings, we aim to harness the potential of VQ and customize VQGAN designs for controllable generative compression across various bitrates with a unified model.

Rate-Adaption NIC The aforementioned methods often face the challenge of deployment in resource-limited devices they are trained as separate models for specific bitrates, which increases the complexity overhead to support multiple bitrates. Current research solving such a rate adaption problem can be roughly divided into two categories: variable-rate compression (Chen & Ma, 2020; Lu et al., 2021; Cui et al., 2021; Guo-Hua et al., 2023) and progressive compression (Toderici et al., 2017; Mei et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022a; Jeon et al., 2023b; Zhang et al., 2024). Variable-rate methods, such as those by Theis *et al.* (Toderici et al., 2017) and Choi *et al.* (Choi et al., 2019), adjust scalar parameters or use conditional convolutions to adapt to different quality levels. Others, like Cai *et al.* (Cai et al., 2019) and Yang *et al.* (Yang et al., 2021), employ multi-scale representations or slimmable networks for content-adaptive rate allocation. Cui *et al.* (Cui et al., 2021) and Lee *et al.* (Lee et al., 2022b) introduce gain units and selective compression, respectively, to further refine bitrate control. Progressive compression(Toderici et al., 2017; Johnston et al., 2018) develops scalable bitstreams for bitrate flexibility. Zhang *et al.* (Zhang et al., 2024) propose to explore the receptive field with uncertainty guidance for both quality and bitrate scalable compression. Lee *et al.* (Lee et al., 2022a) propose to encode the latent representations into a compressed bitstream trip-plane to support fine-granular progressive compression. Jeon *et al.* (Jeon et al., 2023b) further improve it with context-based trit-plane coding, increasing the R-D performance. In contrast to these methods, this work leverages VQGAN, integrated with classical coding principle (Huffman, 1952), to design a controllable generative compression framework. Our method allows highly flexible and controllable bitrate adaption while generating plausible results with solely one optimized weight set.

3 Method

Our goal is to learn a unified generative compression model capable of compressing an image x for flexible and continuous bitrates while ensuring high perceptual fidelity. To this end, we propose **Control-GIC**, where the overview architecture is illustrated in Figure 2. **Control-GIC** contains three

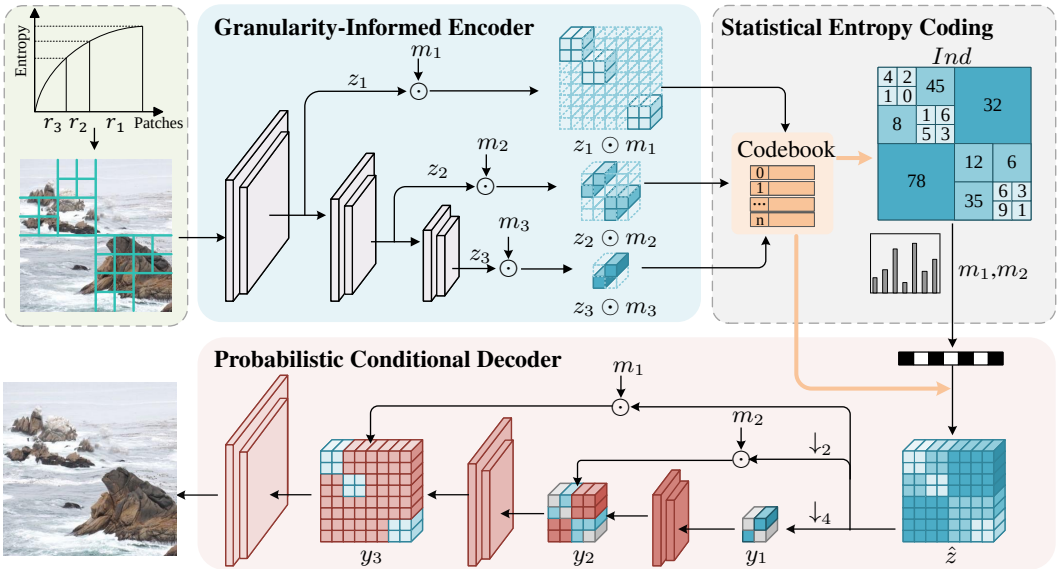

Figure 2: The overall framework of our Control-GIC. In the figure, all components cooperate for efficient compression with end-to-end training, and dashed lines represent the unparameterized entropy coding module. The symbols in the diagram are defined as: m: the binary mask; $(\cdot)_{\downarrow}$: average pooling operation; $\odot$: element-wise multiplication.

components: 1) granularity-informed encoder to encode the image into variable-length codes; 2) statistical entropy coding module for bitrate reduction; and 3) probabilistic conditional decoder to reconstruct perceptually plausible results.

3.1 Granularity-Informed Encoder

Given an input image $x \in \mathbb{R}^{H \times W \times 3}$, as illustrated in Figure 2, **Control-GIC** considers the entropy of local patches as the basis of the information density distribution (See Appendix A.2 for proof of correlation) of the image, and divides it into multiple non-overlapped patches sorted by their entropy value from low to high. Then, the granularity-informed encoder distills these patches into hierarchical features of three granularities: fine-grained $z_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{\frac{H}{4} \times \frac{W}{4} \times d}$, medium-grained $z_2 \in \mathbb{R}^{\frac{H}{8} \times \frac{W}{8} \times d}$, and coarse-grained $z_3 \in \mathbb{R}^{\frac{H}{16} \times \frac{W}{16} \times d}$. Supposing there is a target bitrate corresponding to the ratios $(r_1, r_2, r_3) \in [0, 1]$ of three granularities, each ratio specifies the proportion of elements with the lowest entropy to be retained from each $z_i (i = 1, 2, 3)$ and yield binary masks $m_i \in \{0, 1\}$. Here, m_i aligns with the spatial dimensions of z_i to localize the retained elements in z_i. This process is executed from coarse to fine, progressively and finely assigning the multi-grained representations.

Subsequently, the determined features in each $\{z_i\}_{i=1}^{3}$ are matched to the codes in a pre-trained codebook C by VQGAN (this work use MoVQ (Zheng et al., 2022)) and quantized, producing $\hat{z}_i$ and a set of discrete VQ-indices Ind_i that represent the closest matches in C based on Euclidean distance. This quantization step $\mathbf{q}(\cdot)$ is mathematically formalized as:

$$\begin{cases} \hat{z}_i = \mathbf{q}(z_i) = \arg\min_{c_k \in C} \|z_i - c_k\|, \\ Ind_i = k. \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

where c_k denotes the k-th code in the codebook. With three quantized counterparts $\{\hat{z}_i\}_{i=1}^{3}$, we can construct the hybrid representation $\hat{z}$ to match the spatial scale of the finest granularity as follows:

$$\hat{z} = (\hat{z}_1 \odot m_1) + (\hat{z}_2 \odot m_2)_{\uparrow_2} + (\hat{z}_3 \odot m_3)_{\uparrow_4}. \tag{2}$$

where $(\cdot)\uparrow_4$ and $(\cdot)\uparrow_2$ signify upsampling operations that amplify the spatial dimensions by factors of 4 and 2, respectively. We use nearest neighbor interpolation as it employs replicates values of feature points along both the width and height, ensuring the preservation of the original local structure integrity for each feature point. $\odot$ is element-wise multiplication along the spatial dimension.

3.2 Probabilistic Conditional Decoder

Based on the VQGAN pattern, our decoder receives the indices of $\hat{z}_i$ and correspond masks m_i from the encoder, to reconstruct the features of the encoder by searching for the codebook. However, directly feeding $\hat{z}$ into the decoder layers is sub-optimal as many non-linear transformations in the decoder can cause information loss. While the upsampled components $\hat{z}_2$ and $\hat{z}_3$ maintain their local structure through direct value duplication (Eq. (2)), their global structure is inevitably changed.

To address this problem, we introduce a probabilistic conditional decoder, which formalizes the reconstruction through the conditional probability. Specifically, two downsampling operations $(\cdot)\downarrow_4$ and $(\cdot)\downarrow_2$ are first employed to downscale $\hat{z}$ back to the $\{\hat{z}_i \odot m_i\}_{i=1}^{3}$ losslessly. We provide $(\hat{z})_{\downarrow_4}$ as the initial decoder input y_1 which contains the same $\hat{z}_3 \odot m_3$ as the encoder output to ensure the accuracy of the input. $\hat{z}_1 \odot m_1$ and $\hat{z}_2 \odot m_2$ are provided as conditions to y_2 and y_3, respectively. These conditions serve as additional guidance for the reconstruction process:

$$\begin{aligned} y_2 &\sim p(y_2 \mid y_1, (\hat{z})_{\downarrow_2} \odot m_2) \\ y_3 &\sim p(y_3 \mid y_2, y_1, \hat{z} \odot m_1) \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

Consequently, the decoder D begins with the $(\cdot)\downarrow_4$ operation on $\hat{z}$ to produce y_1 that is fed into the first decoder layer D_1 to generate y_2. Then, $y_2 \odot m_2$ are deliberately replaced with the medium-grained representation $(\hat{z})_{\downarrow_2} \odot m_2$ (equal to $\hat{z} \odot m_2$). After that, D_3 condition with the $\hat{z} \odot m_1$ and replace the unexact $y_3 \odot (1 - m_1)$, ensuring the precision of features in deep layers

$$\begin{aligned} y_2 &= D_1(y_1) \odot (1 - m_2) + (\hat{z})_{\downarrow_2} \odot m_2 \\ y_3 &= D_2(y_2) \odot (1 - m_1) + \hat{z} \odot m_1 \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

This systematic replacement of representations at varying granularities with increasingly precise conditions progressively refines the latent space representation, which facilitates the decoder to diminish information loss and substantially elevates the accuracy of the reconstructed images. It should be noted that, compared to conventional compression methods (Ballé et al., 2017; Mentzer et al., 2020), our method effectively avoids the information loss between the encoder and decoder features except the quantization, thereby achieving nearly lossless reconstruction.

3.3 Statistical Entropy Coding Strategy

As analyzed in Sec. 3.2 and Eq. (4), the decoding process requires the bitstreams comprising the three features of three granularities and their corresponding masks. Since $\hat{z}_i$ can be retrieved by searching from the codebook based on the indices Ind_i. Therefore, what we need is actual the $\{Ind_i\}_{i=1}^{3}$ and the masks $\{m_1, m_2\}$. These elements can be encoded via lossless encoding algorithms as they are integers. Specifically, the mask consists of 0 and 1 which can be encoded directly into a binary stream. As for indices, one promising solution is the prefix Huffman coding algorithm (Huffman, 1952), which can generate the shortest average code length for a given symbol set. However, this advantage often comes from the frequency statistics of each element. In this work, directly applying this algorithm is sub-optimal as it needs to count the indice frequency used in each independent image and acquire a codebook that maps the indic to the binary codes. This can introduce significant bit overheads when reconstructing the image based on the Huffman codebook during the decoding process. A simplified is to treat all indices equally, *i.e.*, assuming the frequency in the codebook is uniform. Nevertheless, the indices, which point to codebook entries, exhibit an uneven frequency distribution, with a minority of codes used for quantzization (Zhang et al., 2023).

To address this problem, we introduce a statistical entropy coding strategy that captures the frequency distribution of indices usage across a natural dataset during training. Each index starts with a frequency count of 0, where the frequency is updated each time it is matched for vector quantization. Here, we utilize the frequency statistics at the endpoint of the training process to construct a frequency table tailored for Huffman coding as it is more stable and close to the overall data distribution. We denote the bitrate after coding as $\mathcal{R}(\cdot)$, then the total bitrate of the entire image can be formulated as:

$$\mathcal{R} = \sum_{i=1}^{3} \mathcal{R}(Ind_i) + \mathcal{R}(m_1) + \mathcal{R}(m_2), \tag{5}$$

Note that our model does not optimize network parameters for a specific bitrate. During inference, we control the bitrate using different multi-granularity allocation ratios. For example, we can set a

group of hyperparameters $\{r_1, r_2, r_3\}$ to represent the allocation ratios of the masks $\{m_1, m_2, m_3\}$ at three granularities. Since the bitrate is only related to the granular representations of local patches, we can flexibly determine the statistics of the granularities based on the entropy values to achieve dynamic adaption, achieving dynamic adaption in a target of the quality-bitrate adaptive manner in a unified model without any post-training.

3.4 Loss Function

In our experiments, the overall loss function $\mathcal{L}$ for training **Control-GIC** contains the loss associated with the VQVAE architecture and GAN component in VQGAN (Esser et al., 2021). The optimization objective of $\mathcal{L}_{\text{VQVAE}}(E, G, C)$ is two-fold: 1) minimizing the distortion between the original inputs x and their reconstructions $\hat{x}$, and 2) constrain the divergence between the continuous representations $z = E(x)$ and their quantized versions $\hat{z}$, as follows

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{L}_{VQVAE}(E, G, C) &= \beta d(x, \hat{x}) + d(z, \hat{z}) \\ &= \beta(d_M + d_P)(x, \hat{x}) + \|sg[z] - \hat{z}\|_2^2 + \|sg[\hat{z}] - z\|_2^2 \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

where we use MSE (d_M) and LPIPS (d_P) to measure the reconstruction distortion. $sg[\cdot]$ denotes the stop-gradient operation widely utilized in VQ-based models to overcome the non-differentiable nature of quantization. $sg[\cdot]$ enables the quantized representations $\hat{z}$ to propagate gradients directly for optimizing the codebook C and allows the continuous representations z to receive gradients for the refinement of the encoder E. We finely tune the balance between the two objectives using a hyperparameter β. Our **Control-GIC** deviates from the conventional R-D optimization paradigm with no-parametric indices compression. This enables the model to adapt flexibly to various data types and quality levels, transcending the fixed R-D trade-off in most generative methods.

For GAN loss, we use the patch-based discriminator in (Isola et al., 2017) to differentiate between original and compressed images:

$$\mathcal{L}_{GAN}(\{E, G, C\}, D) = \mathbb{E}_{x \sim p(x)}[\log D(x) + \log(1 - D(G(\hat{z})))] \tag{7}$$

Therefore, the total loss $\mathcal{L}$ is formulated by

$$\mathcal{L} = \mathcal{L}_{VQVAE} + \lambda \mathcal{L}_{GAN} \tag{8}$$

we use a hyperparameter λ to control the trade-off between VQVAE and GAN losses.

4 Experiment

4.1 Experimental Setup

Our method is based on MoVQ (Zheng et al., 2022) which improves the VQGAN model by adding spatial variants to representations within the decoder, avoiding the repeat artifacts in neighboring patches. We leverage the pre-trained codebook in MoVQ and carefully redesign the architecture.

Training & Inference. We randomly select 300K images from the OpenImages (Krasin et al., 2017) dataset as our training set, where the images are randomly cropped to a uniform 256×256 resolution. Within our model, we take three representation granularities: 4×4, 8×8, and 16×16. The codebook $C \in \mathbb{R}^{k \times d}$ comprises $k = 1024$ code vectors, each with a dimension of $d = 4$. We train the model for 0.6M iterations with the learning rate of 5×10^{-5} on NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPUs. Throughout the training, we maintain the ratio setting of $(50\%, 40\%, 10\%)$ for the fine, medium, and coarse granularity, respectively. During inference, our **Control-GIC** can process images of any resolution and allow fine bitrate adjustment using a unified model.

Evaluation. We evaluate our method on the Kodak (Kodak, 1993), DIV2K (Agustsson & Timofte, 2017), and CLIC2020 datasets. Kodak contains 24 high-quality images at 768×512 resolution. DIV2K and CLIC2020 contain 100 and 428 high-resolution images, respectively, with resolutions extending up to 2K. We carry out multi-dimensional evaluation and utilize a comprehensive set of evaluation metrics including perceptual metrics: **LPIPS** (Zhang et al., 2018), **DISTS** (Ding et al., 2020), distortion metric: **PSNR**, generative metrics: **FID** (Heusel et al., 2017), **KID** (Bińkowski et al., 2018), as well as the no-reference measurement: **NIQE** (Mittal et al., 2012) to thoroughly assess the performance of our method. More details of metrics are in the Appendix A.1.

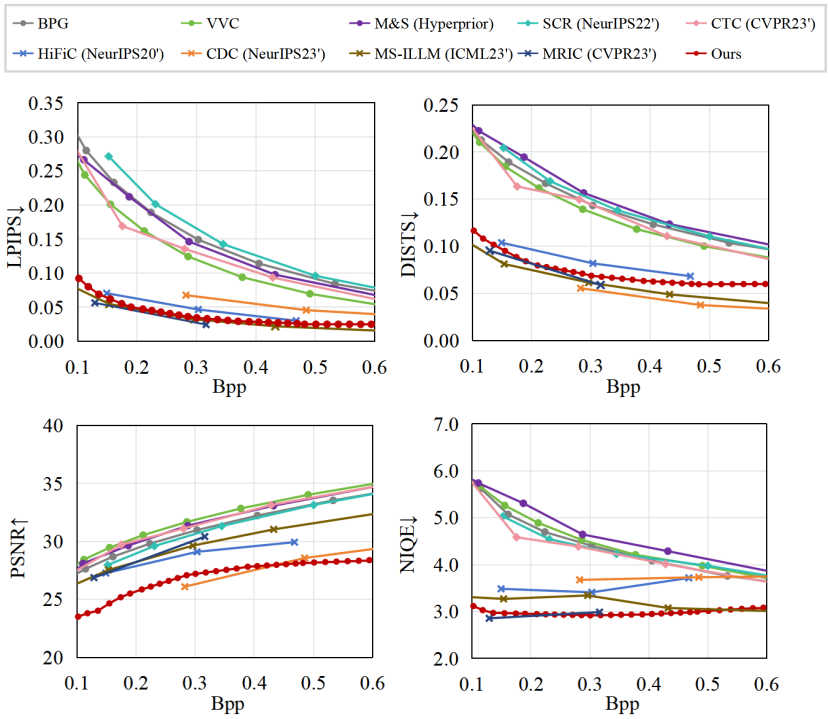

Figure 3: Comparisons with existing methods on the Kodak dataset, where the lines with forks represent generative compression methods and the lines with rhombus represent progressive and variable-rate methods.

4.2 Performance Comparison

We compare the proposed **Control-GIC** with 4 types of recent state-of-the-art (SOTA) NIC methods: **1) Generative compression methods.** HiFiC (Mentzer et al., 2020) and MRIC (Agustsson et al., 2023) leverages conditional GAN to purse rate-distortion-perception trade-off. MS-ILLM (Muckley et al., 2023) is a VQGAN-based method that improves statistical fidelity using local adversarial discriminators. CDC (Yang & Mandt, 2024) is a representative diffusion-based lossy compression approach. In our experiments, we utilize the best CDC ($\rho = 0.9$) version which is perception-oriented for a fair comparison; **2) Variable-rate and Progressive compression methods**. SCR (Lee et al., 2022b) proposes a 3D important map adjusted by quality level to decide the selected representation elements for variable rates. CTC (Jeon et al., 2023a) progressively decodes the bit stream truncated at any point to regulate the bitrate; **3) Classical NIC method**. M&S (Hyperprior) (Ballé et al., 2018) trains separate models for different bitrates; and **4) Traditional codecs** BPG (Bellard) and VVC (VTM10.0) (Bross et al., 2021).

R-D Performance. In Figure 3, we first provide the R-D curves for all methods, evaluated using four metrics: LPIPS, DISTS, PSNR, and NIQE, on the Kodak dataset. Our **Control-GIC** surpasses most methods across 4 distinct metrics and achieves comparable performance with the most state-of-the-art methods MS-ILLM and MRIC in LPIPS and NIQE, even though they are trained separately for specific R-D points. Compared to SCR and CTC, **Control-GIC** achieves finer granular flexibility for bitrate control while preserving obvious preferable perceptual quality. Besides, since conventional CNN-based NIC methods, *e.g.* M&S (Hyperprior) and SCR, optimize for the R-D trade-off using pixel-wise MSE loss, one can see that they produce relatively higher PSNR than generative methods including CDC *et al.* and ours.

Then, we conduct comparisons on the DIV2K (Agustsson & Timofte, 2017) dataset. As illustrated in Figure 4, in addition to the four metrics in Figure 3, we include FID and KID to provide a more comprehensive evaluation. The results demonstrate that our **Control-GIC** maintains promising competitiveness against existing methods in almost all the metrics across a wide spectrum of bitrates. We also investigate the effectiveness of our method on the CLIC2020 dataset (Toderici et al., 2020), where the results are provided in Figure 10 (Appendix A.5).

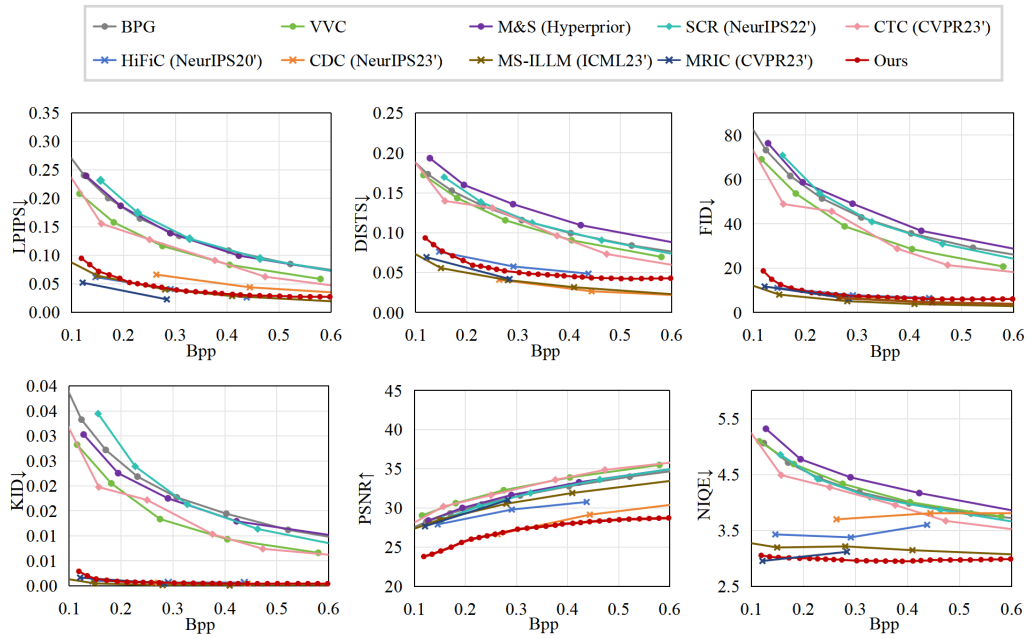

Figure 4: Compression performance on the DIV2K dataset with compared methods. In this figure, the lines with forks represent GIC methods, and the lines with rhombus represent variable-rate methods.

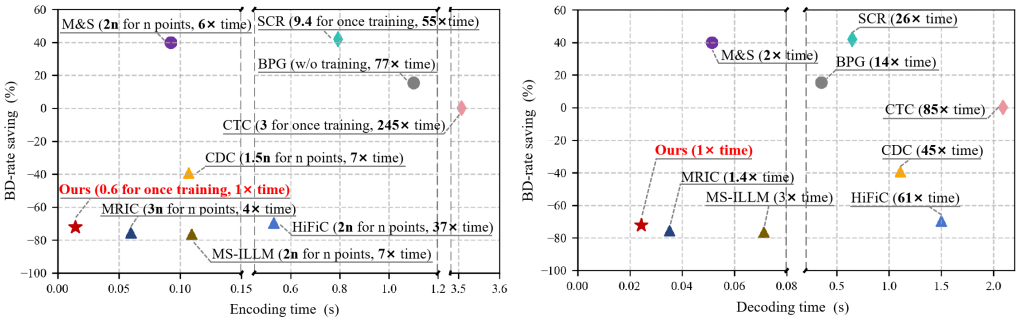

Figure 5: Comparison of model efficiency for all methods based on four terms: encoding time (s), decoding time (s), BD-rate saving (%), and training steps (M) on the Kodak dataset. The diamond icons represent variable-rate methods and the triangles represent generative methods, with the number of iterations required for model training and the encoding/decoding time multiplier compared to our method labeled in parentheses after each method name.

Model Efficiency. To demonstrate the efficiency of the proposed method, in Figure 5, we analyze existing state-of-the-art methods and our **Control-GIC** on four terms: encoding time (sec.), decoding time (sec.), BD-rate saving, and training steps (M). For fair comparisons, all the methods are evaluated using their original public codes and pre-trained models on the same platform NVIDIA 3090 GPU. We calculate the average encoding and decoding time on the Kodak dataset. The BD-rate saving is evaluated by quantifying the Bpp-LPIPS results, where VVC is applied as the anchor. As shown in Figure 5, MRIC, MS-ILLM, and **Control-GIC** obtain very close BD-rate saving and are superior to others. For the inference speed, M&S, CTC, and HiFiC suffer from critical time costs in both encoding and decoding. CDC applies a lightweight diffusion variational autoencoder, which benefits the encoding process but struggles with more decoding time due to its iterative reverse process. Our method achieves the fastest encoding/decoding time, which is $7\times$ faster than MS-ILLM and $4\times$ faster than MRIC in encoding, and $3\times$ faster than MS-ILLM and $1.5\times$ faster than MRIC in decoding. Moreover, the single-point training methods (*e.g.*, M&S, HiFiC, CDC, MRIC, MS-ILLM) require independent training of n models for n R-D points. The proposed model requires only a single training session that enables compression across various bitrates, with the total training steps being substantially reduced to 0.6 million steps. Although SCR and CTC support multiple compression

Figure 6: Reconstructed Kodak images by existing state-of-the-art methods and our **Control-GIC**.

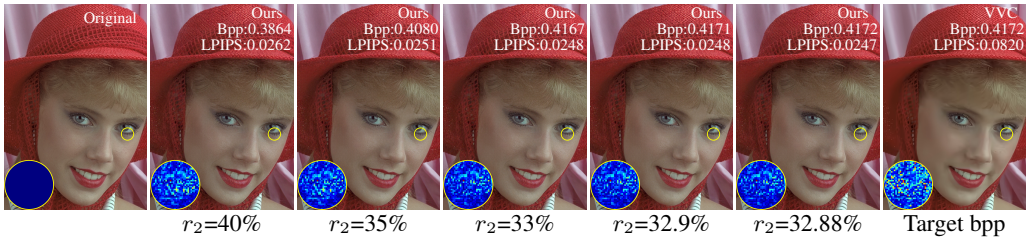

Figure 7: The fine-grained control over the bitrate by Control-GIC. All our presented results are achieved by adjusting the medium-grained feature ratio r_2 while keeping the coarse-grained feature ratio r_1 at a fixed 50%. As r_2 diminishes, the proportion of fine-grained features correspondingly increases, leading to a higher total count of codes, and a consequent increase in the bitrate (measured in bpp) and reconstruction quality (the lower left corner visualizes the difference maps between the original image and reconstructed ones).

rates in a single model, they still involve many more training steps, especially SCR which is more than 15× that of ours. By comparison, our **Control-GIC** can achieve a promising balance among training costs, inference speed, and BD-rate saving.

Qualitative Comparison. In Figure 6, we visualize the reconstructed images by all compared methods. As we can see, VVC, M&S, SCR, and CTC produce the results with noticeable blurs and artifacts. While HiFiC, CDC, and MS-ILLM can yield clearer details, their images contain some misleading textures and artifacts not present in the original ones. By comparison, our method excels at preserving texture integrity and image sharpness. More visual results are in Appendix A.7.

4.3 Ablation Study

Fine-grained Control of Bitrate. As analyzed in Sec. 3.1, the proposed **Control-GIC** can flexibly control the bitrates through the granularity ratios (r_1, r_2, r_3). To validate the effects, in Figure 7, we visualize the reconstructed samples of our method, where VVC is adopted as a reference. We fix the ratio of the coarse-grained features as $r_3 = 50\%$ and adjust the ratio of medium-grained features r_2, thus one can directly obtain the ratio $r_1 = 1 - r_2 - r_3$ for the fine-grained features. It can be observed that, as r_2 diminishes, r_1 increases, resulting in a higher total count of codes and, consequently, a higher bitrate (measured in bpp), where the perceptual quality gradually improves. Furthermore, the

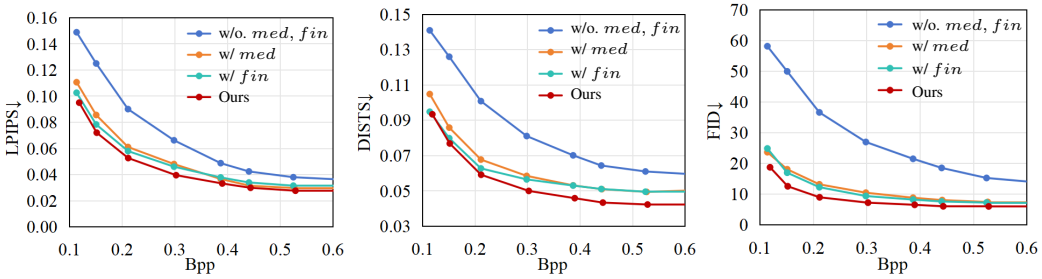

Figure 8: The ablation experiments on multi-grained conditions for the probabilistic conditional decoder. All experiments are performed on the DIV2K dataset.

Table 1: Bit cost comparison between our statistical entropy coding and classical ZIP, Huffman coding with uniform frequency for each index on the Kodak dataset.

Granularity Ratio	ZIP	Huffman w. Uniform Frequency	Statistical Entropy Coding (Ours)
0, 50%, 50%	0.304	0.141	0.132
10%, 80%, 10%	0.784	0.288	0.269
50%, 40%, 10%	1.232	0.550	0.505

continuous controllable compression in Figure 7 indicates that our method enables precise regulation of the bpp, allowing for minute adjustments within a range as narrow as 0.001 (from 0.4171 in the second-to-last column to 0.4172 in the last column).

Impacts of Probabilistic Conditional Decoder. In this work, we propose the probabilistic conditional decoder which formalizes the reconstruction through the conditional probability. Here, we investigate the contributions of the conditions: the medium-grained $(\hat{z})_{\downarrow_2} \odot m_2$ (denoted as med) and fine-grained $\hat{z} \odot m_1$ (denoted as fin) to the decoder in Eq. (4) to reveal the impacts of the proposed probabilistic conditional decoder, where their R-D performance is illustrated in Figure 8. We can observe that the model without the med and fin produces the worst results in three metrics. Besides, med and fin present a significant improvement in model performance, and conditioning upon both presents the best results, especially on DISTS. Moreover, the results also validate that adding the fine-grained fin to the model brings more benefits than adding med. This is because the fine-grained fin can correct the features in deeper layers of the decoder, thereby improving the accuracy after multiple non-linear transformations within the decoder.

Effeciency of Statistical Entropy Coding. In Table 1, we compare the proposed statistical entropy coding strategy to classical ZIP compression algorithm and Huffman coding with uniform frequencies for each index. Our statistical entropy coding strategy brings 68.4%, 65.7%, and 59.0% bit savings compared to ZIP in the three granularity ratios, as well as 6.4%, 6.6%, and 8.2% bit savings compared to Huffman coding with uniform frequency for each code, verify its efficiency.

5 Conclusion

In this work, we propose **Control-GIC**, an innovative controllable generative image compression framework that addresses the critical challenge of flexible rate adaption By leveraging a VQGAN foundation and correlating local image information density with granular representations, **Control-GIC** achieves fine-grained bitrate control across a wide range while maintaining high-fidelity compression performance. We propose a granularity-inform encoder that represents the image patches of sequential spatially variant VQ-indices to support precise variable rate control and adaption. Then, a non-parametric statistical entropy coding is devised to encode the VQ-indices losslessly. In addition, we develop a probabilistic conditional decoder, which aggregates historic encoded multi-granularity representations to reconstruct hierarchical granular features in a conditional probability manner, achieving realism improvements. Experiments validate the superior effectiveness, compression efficiency, and flexibility of our method.

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A APPENDIX

A.1 EVALUATION METRICS

We adopt a comprehensive set of evaluation metrics to thoroughly assess the performance of our image compression and reconstruction techniques. Our selection encompasses perceptual metrics, distortion metrics, generative metrics, and a no-reference metric, ensuring a multifaceted evaluation. The perceptual metrics include LPIPS (Zhang et al., 2018), which measures the perceptual difference between images, and DISTS (Ding et al., 2020), which evaluates the structural dissimilarity. These metrics are crucial for understanding how closely compressed and reconstructed images resemble their original counterparts in terms of human visual perception. We also include the widely recognized distortion metric PSNR, which quantifies the pixel-level differences between the original and reconstructed images. PSNR is a standard in the field, providing a straightforward measure of image fidelity. For generative metrics, we employ FID (Fréchet Inception Distance) (Heusel et al., 2017) and KID (Kernel Inception Distance) (Bińkowski et al., 2018) to offer statistical assessments of the similarity between the distributions of original images and those of reconstructed images, which is particularly valuable in the context of generative models. NIQE (Natural Image Quality Evaluator) (Mittal et al., 2012) stands out as a no-reference metric, capable of evaluating image quality without requiring an original reference image. This feature renders NIQE exceptionally beneficial in applications such as super-resolution where an original high-resolution image may not be available. For comparison with other methods on FID and KID, we divide the Kodak dataset into 192 patches, the DIV2K dataset into 6573 patches, and the CLIC2020 dataset into 28650 patches, each of size 256.

A.2 CORRELATION BETWEEN ENTROPY AND INFORMATION DENSITY

Inspired by Celik (Celik, 2014), we measure the information density of image regions based on a non-parametric spatial entropy algorithm. Unlike general feature-level entropy models (Ballé et al., 2017; 2018), our Control-GIC does not have the neural entropy model and is not optimized for entropy during training. We adopt the non-parametric algorithm to reduce computational overhead while maintaining robust granularity selection performance. The mathematical representation process is detailed as follows:

Consider a pixel $x \in \Omega$ with a value p_x within the interval [-1,1], where Ω denotes a patch of the image. We definite the pixel value bin $i = -1 + \frac{2k}{n-1}$, where $k = 0, 1, 2, ..., n-1$, and the number of bins n is set to 32. We compute the Gaussian distance $f_{x,i}$ of x to each bin i, where σ represents the standard deviation, as detailed in Eq. (9). Thus $f_{x,i}$ exhibits an unnormalized, truncated discrete Gaussian distribution along i. It implies that we hypothesize a probability $f_{x,i}$, indicating the potential diffusion of p_x to i.

$$f_{x,i} = \exp\left(-\frac{(p_x - i)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right), \tag{9}$$

Next, we average $f_{x,i}$ across all pixels within the patch Ω to get the probability distribution $f_{\Omega,i}$ of this region, normalizing it to obtain $\overline{f_{\Omega,i}}$. We denote the average operation as " $\text{mean}_{x\in\Omega}$". The mathematical expression is as follows:

$$\overline{f_{\Omega,i}} = \frac{f_{\Omega,i}}{\sum_j f_{\Omega,j}}, \quad \text{where } f_{\Omega,i} = \text{mean}_{x\in\Omega} f_{x,i}. \tag{10}$$

Finally, we use the following equation to compute the spatial entropy $H(\Omega)$ of the patch Ω:

$$H(\Omega) = -\sum_i \overline{f_{\Omega,i}} \log \overline{f_{\Omega,i}}. \tag{11}$$

Control-GIC considers the entropy of local patches as the basis of the information density distribution of the image and divides it into multiple non-overlapped patches sorted by their entropy value from low to high, thereby obtaining multi-grained features.

A.3 DETAILS FOR GRANULARITY DIVISION

As shown in Figure 2, given an image divided into serial patches, the encoder E first calculates the entropy values of all patches and sorts them from low to high. We define three types of granularities (coarse, medium, high) for these patches. Once trained, we can obtain an index frequency table and assign the codes to each index during the entropy encoding process based on this table. By calculation, for a codebook with 1024 codes, the average code length of all the indices is $L = 10.3875$. Supposing an input image with the size of $H \times W$, the amount of its assigned indices range is $[\frac{H}{16} \times \frac{W}{16}, \frac{H}{4} \times \frac{W}{4}]$, which corresponds to full coarse-grained and fine-grained patch division separately. For each combination of granularity ratios (r_1, r_2, r_3), we can get its theoretical bpp values of indices and masks by the following:

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbf{Bpp_{Indices}} &= \frac{\frac{H}{4} \times \frac{W}{4} \times r_1 + \frac{H}{8} \times \frac{W}{8} \times r_2 + \frac{H}{16} \times \frac{W}{16} \times r_3}{H \times W} \times L = \frac{(16r_1 + 4r_2 + r_3) \times L}{256} \\
\mathbf{Bpp_{Mask}} &= \frac{\frac{H}{4} \times \frac{W}{4} \times r_1 + \frac{H}{8} \times \frac{W}{8} \times r_2}{H \times W} = \frac{4r_1 + r_2}{256}
\end{aligned} \tag{12}$$

where the total bpp is $(\mathbf{Bpp_{Indices}} + \mathbf{Bpp_{Mask}}) = \frac{(16L+4)r_1+(4L+1)r_2+r_3}{256}$, $r_1 \geq 0$, $r_2 \geq 0$, $r_3 \geq 0$, $r_1 + r_2 + r_3 = 1$. Consequently, we can generate a query table for the theoretical bpps with (r_1, r_2, r_3). When receiving a user-given bpp, the model can automatically search the closest theoretical bpp in the query table and assign corresponding granularity ratios. In our investigations, we found that the error between the actual bpp and the theoretical bpp is less than 0.02, and the actual value is always slightly smaller than the theoretical value. Notably, our model allows users to modify the granularity ratios to mitigate such an error and produce better results. In Table 2, we provide a simplified query table that describes the correlations between theoretical bpp and granularity ratios, as an example. Our model enables a very meticulous control of bitrates.

Table 2: The partial query table of the bpps and granularity ratios.

Granularity Ratio			Bpp
r_1	r_2	r_3	
0	23%	77%	0.070
10%	67%	23%	0.187
37%	46%	17%	0.330
61%	30%	9%	0.460
90%	10%	0	0.616

A.4 VISUALIZATION OF DIFFERENT GRANULARITY RATIOS

In our method, the compression performance is highly correlated to the combination of different granularity ratios r_1, r_2, and r_3 for fine, medium, and coarse. To investigate its impact, we compress the images using the model with different combinations, where the qualitative results on the Kodak dataset are visualized in Figure 9. Generally, the visual quality improves as r_1 and r_2 increase. This is because high portions of medium- and fine-granularity patches can provide more local texture cues, benefiting details recovery. Besides, we can observe that the increase of r_1 and r_2 also introduces more bitrate costs. We then conduct experiments on the image with small faces, where the results of CDC (Yang & Mandt, 2024) and MS-ILLM (Muckley et al., 2023) are used as references. As we can see, the small face poses a critical challenge in image compression. Both CDC and MS-ILLM struggle to obtain promising generations. When we assign overly high coarse- and medium-granularity ratios on the face area, *i.e.* large patch size, the models also cannot recover the face details well. When we set the patches in the face region as fine-granularity ones and reduce their patch size, the artifacts can be further alleviated, where the generated images reveal clearer details. Consequently, our model using (40%, 40%, 20%) yields a better reconstruction and lower bpp. Despite the superiority, due to the complexity of small faces, there is still a need for more targeted design.

Figure 9: The compression results (Top: building; Bottom: small face) by the model with different granularity ratios, where r_1, r_2, and r_3 denotes fine, medium, and coarse, respectively.

A.5 Effectiveness on the CLIC2020 Dataset

Here, we evaluate the proposed method on the CLIC2020 dataset (Toderici et al., 2020) which contains 428 images. In Figure 10, we provide the R-D curves for our **Control-GIC** and existing state-of-the-art methods, which are measured in six metrics: LPIPS, DISTS, FID, KID, PSNR, and NIQE. It can be seen that **Control-GIC** achieves superior performance in most metrics over conventional codecs BPG, VVC, and variable-rate methods SCR, CTC. Compared to generative compression methods which are trained separately for multiple R-D points, our **Control-GIC** still maintains competitive performance, which validates that our method can achieve optimal trade-off between flexibility and effectiveness.

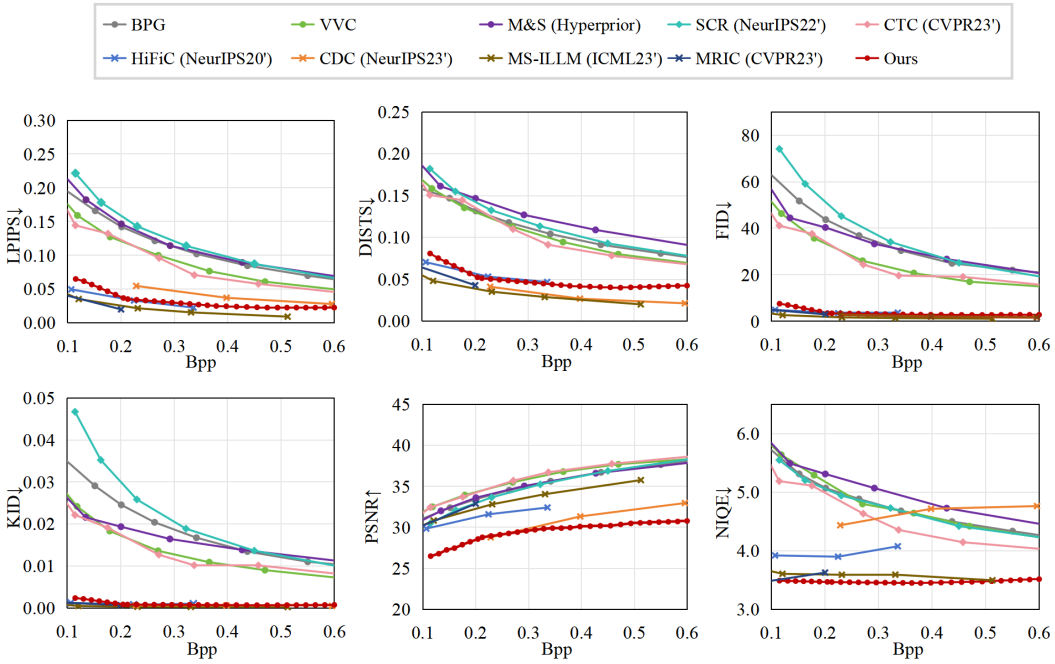


Figure 10: Compression performance on the CLIC2020 dataset with compared methods. The lines with forks represent GIC methods, and the lines with rhombus represent variable-rate methods.

Table 3: Quantitative performance at the extremely low bitrate on the Kodak and CLIC2020 datasets.

Dataset	Kodak		CLIC2020	
Method	Ours	Mao *et al.* (Mao et al., 2023)	Ours	Mao *et al.* (Mao et al., 2023)
Bpp↓	0.0381	0.0391	0.0372	0.0389
LPIPS↓	0.115	0.136	0.086	0.112

A.6 Extension to Extremely Low Bitrate Compression

As mentioned in Section 4, we take three representation granularities: 4×4, 8×8, and 16×16. The codebook $C \in \mathbb{R}^{k \times d}$ comprises $k = 1024$ code vectors, each with a dimension of $d = 4$. The lowest bitrate of our method corresponds to a fully coarse-grained partition, *i.e.* $(r_1, r_2, r_3) = (0, 0, 100\%)$. Here, we conduct experiments to explore the performance of our method on extremely low bitrate compression (< 0.05 bpp), where Mao *et al.* (Mao et al., 2023) is a VQGAN-based method also for very low bitrate used as a reference. In Table 3, we report the quantitative results in Bpp and LPIPS on the Kodak and CLIC2020 datasets. Our method achieves the best LPIPS on both datasets with lower bpp, validating its superiority. Moreover, we provide several visualizations of compressed images in Figure 11, where the results demonstrate that our method can be well-generalized to low bitrates while enabling more vivid reconstruction.

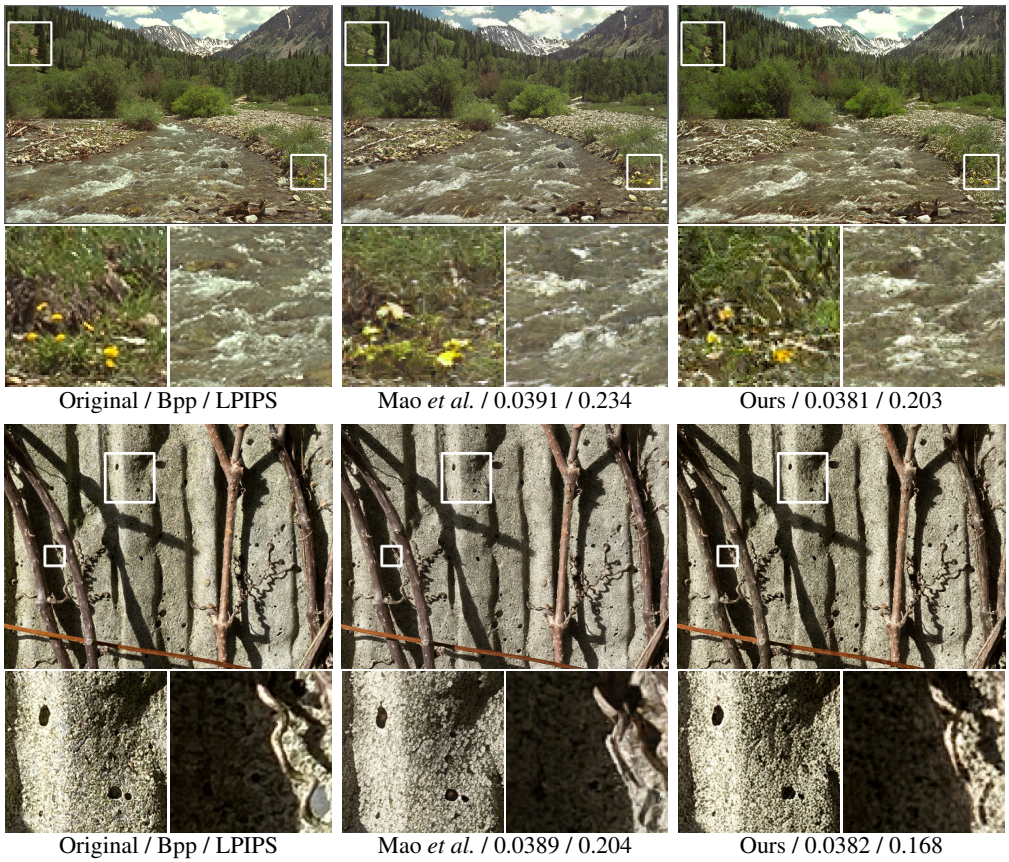


Figure 11: The visual results compressed by Mao *et al.* (Mao et al., 2023) and our **Control-GIC** at the extremely low bitrate on the Kodak (top) and CLIC2020 (bottom) datasets.

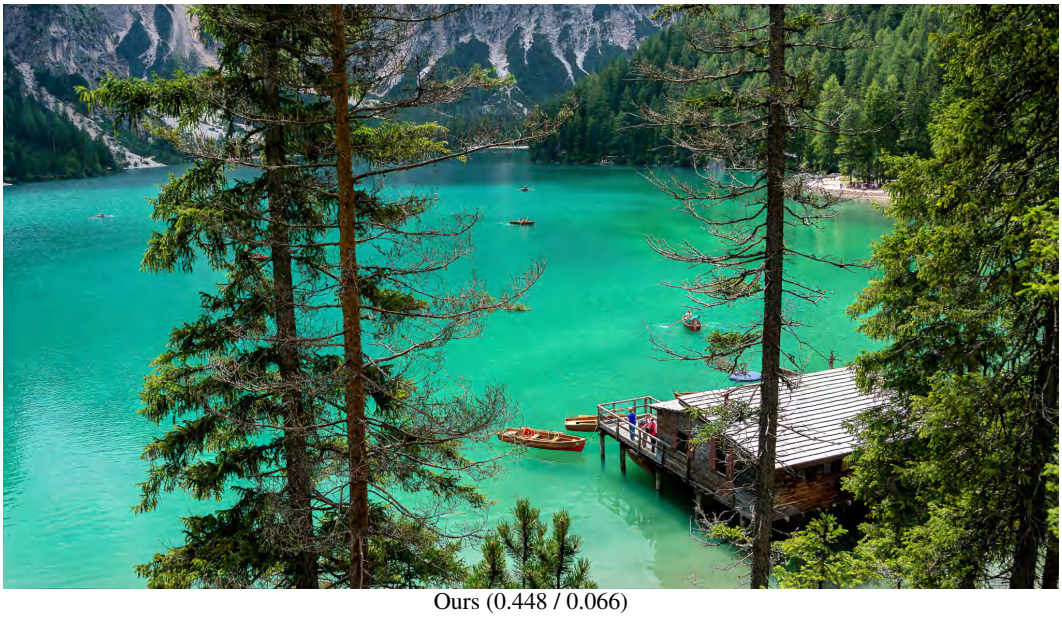
A.7 Additional Visualization

Figure 12: Rconstructed images of Kodim22. Bitrate (bpp) and LPIPS are below each image.

Original (Bpp / LPIPS)

VVC (1.069 / 0.093)

HiFiC (0.452 / 0.115)



Ours (0.448 / 0.066)

Figure 13: Rconstructed images of DIV2K0807. Bitrate (bpp) and LPIPS are below each image.