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Triple Watermarking Scheme for Digital Images

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Abstract: Digital watermarking of text, image, and video data has become an indispensable strategy for the authentication, validation, and ultimate protection of digital content. This study aims to develop a resilient, imperceptible watermarking scheme for digital images. A triple transform domain watermarking scheme based on stationary wavelet transform (SWT), discrete cosine transform (DCT), and singular value decomposition (SVD) is presented as a comprehensive, adaptable, and resilient solution for safeguarding digital content in a dynamic digital environment. The proposed scheme leverages the unique strengths of SWT, DCT, and SVD. SWT was used to decompose the image into various frequency bands, whereas DCT was applied to these high-frequency components, enhancing the security of the watermark. SVD was then used to decompose the image matrix into singular values, providing further robustness. The watermarking algorithm was designed to be both imperceptible and robust against various attacks. The imperceptibility and robustness of the scheme were evaluated on three publicly available datasets using metrics such as mean square error (MSE), peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR), normalized cross correlation (NCC), and bit error ratio (BER). The results indicate that the SWT-DCT-SVD watermarking scheme is both robust and imperceptible and compares relatively well with state-of-the-art schemes.

Keywords: watermarking, zigzag process, stationary wavelet transform, discrete wavelet transform, discrete cosine transform, embedding, extraction.

数字图像三重水印方案

摘要:文本、图像和视频数据的数字水印已成为数字内容的认证、验证和最终保护不可 或缺的策略。本研究旨在为数字图像开发一种有弹性、难以察觉的水印方案。基于平稳小波 变换(斯威特)、离散余弦变换(离散余弦变换)和奇异值分解(奇异值分解)的三重变换域水印方 案被提出,作为一种全面的、适应性强且有弹性的解决方案,用于在动态数字环境中保护数 字内容。所提出的方案利用了斯威特、离散余弦变换和奇异值分解的独特优势。斯威特用于 将图像分解为各个频段,而离散余弦变换则应用于这些高频分量,增强了水印的安全性。然 后使用奇异值分解将图像矩阵分解为奇异值,从而提供进一步的鲁棒性。水印算法被设计为 既难以察觉又对各种攻击具有鲁棒性。使用均方误差(均方误差)、峰值信噪比(峰值信噪比)、 归一化互相关(NCC)和误码率(误码率)等指标在三个公开可用的数据集上评估该方案的不可感 知性和鲁棒性。结果表明,斯威特-离散余弦变换-奇异值分解水印方案既稳健又不易察觉, 并且与最先进的方案相比效果较好。

关键词: 水印、锯齿形处理、固定小波变换、离散小波变换、离散余弦变换、嵌入、提取.

1. Introduction

With the rapid adoption and proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and allied infrastructure, there has been an astronomical explosion in the volume of data creation, usage, processing, and transmission. Multimedia data such as images, audio, and video are being processed, stored, and transmitted in unprecedented volumes and at low cost [1]. This has had a devastating impact on data security and integrity, as instances of data breach, theft, and copyright infringement have increased astronomically, resulting in an increased drive for digital data protection [2]-[4]. Two complementary techniques, encryption and watermarking, have been used in research and practice to combat data infringements and copyright breaches for digital material. Digital data can be protected via encryption as it is being transferred from the source to the recipient. However, encryption is limited in providing decoded in-storage protection of data from infringements and unauthorized use [3], [5]. Digital watermarking, on the other hand, protects against data theft and copyrighting and helps in image marking, verification, and data hiding [6].

The primary goal of digital watermarking is to relay undetectable user-unique graphic imprints that function by slightly modifying the content of the media. The embedded watermark should be unnoticeable and strong enough to withstand hostile assault distortions and regular signal distortions. Because the watermark is obscure, a robustness attribute must be present to ensure that the watermark data are preserved if the image is altered [1], [6]. Additionally, it is important to develop a watermark embedding method that gives an imperceptible mark, i.e., one that does not substantially alter the original host signal. Invariably, imperceptibility and robustness are two important design considerations in the development of watermarking systems. Generally, watermarking can be done on text, audio, images, and videos [7].

The core requirements/design considerations for the development of an effective watermarking scheme include imperceptibility, robustness, security, and computational cost. It is critical for a watermark to be imperceptible. In essence, the watermarked image must appear exactly like the original image. They should be perceptually indistinguishable by humans despite minor variations in luminance or visual contrast. As a result, the image quality must not be sacrificed [3]. Robustness is the capacity of a watermark to be recognized even after the use of many common signal processing alteration techniques. Lossy compression, spatial filtering, color mapping, examining and publishing, scaling, interpreting, and spinning are some examples of these methods. Several generic ways to achieve high robustness include watermarks for duplicated integration, spread spectrum, embedding, and so on. Invariably, an effective digital picture watermarking system should be resistant to a variety of attacks such as noise, cryptographic, and protocol attacks, ensuring that watermark data cannot be removed or excluded by unauthorized distributors [6]. For further security, the watermark can be placed in many locations in the image so that if one is lost or erased, the other remains [8]. The watermark should be embedded and extracted securely to ensure that the objective of watermarking is not compromised. Insecure watermarking technologies make copyright safeguarding, data authorization, fingerprinting, and monitoring of electronic data difficult. As a result, security is prioritized in digital image watermarking systems. Various encryption methods may be deployed to determine security, with the degree of security determined by the key. To secure the integration of watermark privacy and secrecy, several methods have been explored, such as encryption methods based on chaos, discrete cosine transform (DCT), and logistic maps [7]. Since the attacker will be deterred from looking for the insertion in an embedding space and long key position, the complexity of the watermark

may also be crucial to security. As a result, it is feasible to increase the size of the keys split into small pieces of cover picture to strengthen the algorithm security [9]. Of equal importance is the total time required to embed and extract a watermark [9]. However, considering cost as the primary motivation for studying complexity should be kept to a minimum. The speed of embedding and detection, and the quantity of embedders and detectors, are the two most important aspects of computational cost [9]. To have a good watermarking system, a healthy balance of toughness and cost must be maintained [6].

Watermarking techniques broadly classified as spatial domain and frequency domain techniques have been extensively explored. Spatial domain watermarking schemes achieve watermarking by altering the pixel value in the spatial domain. This approach is preferable in terms of implementation and complexity and is therefore often used in both research and practice [7]. For instance [10] presented a watermarking scheme that deployed LSB Substitution and Hill Cipher to enhance its security. They embedded the scheme in the spatial domain to improve its imperceptibility and interleaved it specifically within the block of the cover image that had the maximum value. The scheme was simulated on image data and evaluated for its concealment abilities based on both subjective and objective image quality assessment The results showed very promising metrics. performances relative to state-of-the-art techniques and robustness against popular attacks such as Gaussian filter and median filter attacks. The authors of [11] introduced a novel spatial-based scheme for colored image watermarking. Motivated by the established literature premises that spatial domain approaches generally produce fragile watermarking schemes, the authors extended the approach by introducing scalable diffusion of watermark information across a pixel region, similar to the transform domain approach to watermarking. This ensured that the images' high quality remained uncompromised and the technique remained resilient against attacks. Additionally, it guaranteed that any alteration in the color component was effectively adjusted to, ensuring that color variation or alterations were not visually observable. The scheme was then simulated and evaluated. The experimental results showed that the scheme was resilient against attacks and showed promising performances in terms of imperceptibility. Leveraging on the merits of the spatial domain and frequencydomain watermarking approach, [12] presented a watermarking technique that deployed discrete cosine transform (DCT) in the spatial domain. They explored the use of basic color layer quantization to accomplish watermarking and blind extraction in the spatial domain via pseudo-DCT. The technique leverages the network of intra-pixel association of DC coefficients in

adjacent pixel blocks. Experimental results on image data showed that compared with state-of-the-art techniques, the scheme offered superior imperceptibility, improved resilience, and optimized real-time performance. A robust digital watermarking scheme for digital images based on the DWT-SVD algorithm was presented in [13]. The hybridized technique combined discrete wavelet transform (DWT) and singular value decomposition (SVD) and applied the watermark over the unique values of the cover image sub-bands. The simulation results showed that the technique was capable of significantly improving imperceptibility while maintaining perceptual quality. The MSE, PSNR, and SSIM values obtained revealed that DWT-SVD was remarkably robust when subjected to various image signal processing attacks. While spatial domain watermarking schemes have been embraced due to their simplicity and real-time applicability, their key flaw, as established in the literature, is that they are optimized only for images that are free of noise. They are also susceptible to cropping attacks because of the simplicity of their design. Consequently, attention is shifting to frequency domain watermarking schemes, which address these notable limitations of spatial domain watermarking schemes.

Transform domain techniques offer increased security, imperceptibility, and resilience against a multitude of signal processing assaults and are often deployed on the basis of schemes such as DCT, discrete wavelet transforms, discrete Fourier transform (DFT), and matrix decomposition [12]. A watermarking technique was developed in [14] based on block-based discrete cosine transform (DCT) coefficient change. The DCT parameters of two blocks were computed and adjusted based on the watermark bit within a predetermined range. The DCT coefficient and median of the AC coefficients organized by a zigzag sequence determined the degree of DCT coefficient alterations. Experiments showed that the technique was extremely resistant to various single and combined attacks. They noted that the solution is more efficient for electronic copyright safeguarding photos than some state-of-theart methods. The discrete shearlet transform (DST) was presented in [15] as a novel embedding technique for blind picture watermarking. The unique DST blind watermark detection system used a non-additive mechanism based on statistical decision theory. PDF is calculated using the DST coefficients, which are modeled as a Laplacian distribution. The likelihood ratio and decision threshold were compared to reduce missed detection due to a fixed false alarm probability. Thirty typical grayscale photos were used, each with different attributes, to evaluate the proposed technique when employed against diverse assaults. The payload, robustness, and imperceptibility of the system were evaluated. The technique outperforms discrete wavelet and contourlets in terms of windowing flexibility and sensitivity to directional and anisotropic characteristics. A wavelet-based threshold classification technique was developed in [16] for digital image watermarking. The technique separates the original image into several sections that are chosen to embed the watermark. The DWT coefficient was then categorized using lower frequency sub-bands. Additional tests were run, and the results showed that the system was robust and imperceptible.

While the performances of state-of-the-art single transform watermarking techniques have been remarkable, they not be able to satisfy all the fundamental design objectives of a watermarking system. Hybrid transform domain approaches that synergize the strengths of different techniques have been proposed to improve the overall performance of watermarking systems in terms of robustness, security, imperceptibility, scalability, flexibility, and adaptability. For instance, a fractal encoding method was developed in [17] based on the DCT digital watermarking algorithm. This approach integrates the fractal encoding and DCT methods to improve the previous DCT method, allowing the encryptions to be doubled. Fractal encoding was used to encode the image in the manner of the first encryption. The encoded parameters were then employed within the DCT method to accomplish the second encryption. The simulation findings obtained showed that the technique's performance in terms of robustness and PSNR was superior to that of ordinary DCT.

A method suggested in [18] hybridized DWT with DCT to achieve a high-quality digital watermark. This was based on the idea that the use of suitable transforms in conjunction with the DWT had the potential to increase the performance of the watermarking system. Digital watermarking was accomplished by embedding the hidden picture on DWT sub-bands of the image and then conducting DCT on the chosen DWT sub-bands. Compared to the current watermarking strategy, the proposed approach watermarking clarity increased and attained imperceptibility and resilience. The PSNR and MSE values of the results were used to examine them. When compared to other commonly used approaches, the estimated PSNR and MSE values showed that watermarking has no impact on image quality.

While state-of-the-art single and dual watermarking schemes, which are based on algorithms such as stationary wavelet transform (SWT), discrete cosine transform (DCT), singular value decomposition (SVD), and so on, have shown remarkable promises in their performances, the underlying weaknesses of individual methods continue to accentuate limitations in terms of resilience against a wide spectrum of attacks, imperceptibility, security, adaptability to complex emerging attacks, and so on. Thus, this study presents a resilient and undetectable implementation of the SWT-SVD-DCT system. This study contributes to knowledge by proposing a novel digital image watermarking scheme that uses three different watermarks, each of which is embedded in a different frequency band of the host image. This makes the watermarked image more robust to attacks, as it would be more difficult to remove all three watermarks without significantly degrading the quality of the image. The techniques used in this study help protect copyrights of digital images and prevent the unauthorized use of digital images.

This study is organized into four sections. Section 2 presents a detailed representation of the methodology used in this study. Section 3 presents the experimental results and discussion using tables and figures, and section 5 concludes the study.

2. Methodology

Given the multifaceted nature of digital copyright infringements and the need to provide effective solutions and significantly improve the performance of existing techniques, we present a triple transform domain watermarking scheme based on stationary wavelet transform (SWT), discrete cosine transform (DCT), and singular value decomposition (SVD). SWT, DCT, and SVD offer complementary attributes, making them suitable for hybridization into a robust and adaptable watermarking approach. The hybridized scheme harnesses the strength of each of these domains and compensates for their limitations. In the following subsection, we present the component methods.

2.1. Stationary Wavelet Transform (SWT)

Stationary wavelet transform (SWT), also referred to as undecimated wavelet, extends discrete wavelet transform (DWT) and addresses DWT's so called 'translation invariance' by eliminating downsampling and upsampling at every transformation level. Each level of the output generated by SWT has the same number of samples as the input. When the SWT transform is applied to an image, the image is divided into four sub-bands of high and low bands LL, LH, HL, SWT was the preferred wavelet HH. and transformation in this study because, unlike other wavelet transforms, it does not require any downsampling stages and instead uses a null placement process with the same length as the original sequence. Filters are updated at each level by padding them with zeros [19].

2.2. Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT)

DCT manipulates the frequency components of an image to convert it into a transform domain. Only real values are used in DCT, which is the sum of cosine functions. The data decorrelation and energy compaction qualities of DCT make it an orthogonal transformation. It is used to compress JPEG images. The following equation determines the discrete cosine transform (DCT) [20]:

$$C(a,b) = \alpha(a)\alpha(b)$$

$$\sum_{p=0}^{M-1} \sum_{q=0}^{M-1} f(y,z) cos \left[\frac{\pi(2y+1)a}{2M} \right] \qquad (1)$$

$$cos \left[\frac{\pi(2z+1)b}{2M} \right]$$

For a, b = 0, 1, 2, ..., M - 1 and $\alpha(a)$ and $\alpha(b)$ are defined in equation 4.

$$\begin{cases} \frac{1}{m} & \text{for } a = 0\\ \sqrt{\frac{2}{M}} & \text{for } a \neq 0 \end{cases}$$
(2)

The inverse transform is defined as

2.3. Singular Value Decomposition (SVD)

Singular Value Decomposition (SVD) represents a matrix decomposition module deployed to break a matrix into three simpler forms to provide explicit details of its attributes. Given an original image I, the SVD, when applied, decomposes it into three finer matrices X, Y, and Z with the following mathematical relation:

$$A = X \Sigma Z_o^T \tag{4}$$

where A is the original image matrix, X and Z are orthogonal matrices, signifying the left and right singular vectors, respectively, Σ (Sigma) is a diagonal matrix made up of the singular values and Z_o^T is the transpose of orthogonal matrix Z [19].

2.4. Hybrid SWT-DCT-SVD Design

The hybrid domain technique presented in this study involves the stepwise deployment of SWT, DCT, and SVD to achieve transform domain watermarking. Figure 1 presents the framework and components of the

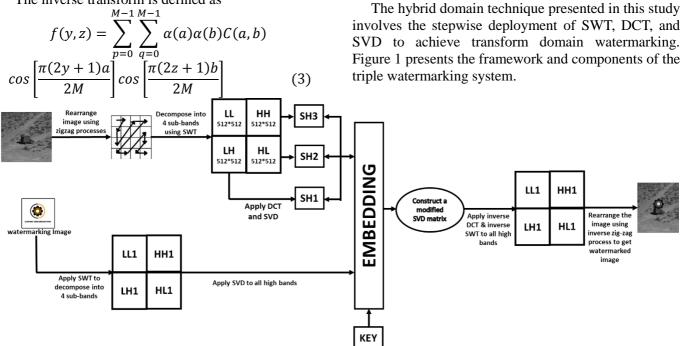


Fig. 1 Framework of the triple embedding algorithm

The triple watermarking algorithm is presented in Algorithm 1.

Algorithm 1 SWT–DCT–SVD watermarking algorithm			
Input: Original Image			
Output: Watermarked image			
1. Input the original image HI;			
2. Apply zigzag transformation to reposition the host			
picture HI to produce the rearranged image RI;			
3. Decompose RI into four sub-bands: LL, HL, LH, and			
HH using SWT;			
4. Select all the high bands of LL, HL, LH, and HH, and			
then apply DCT and SVD to all to obtain SH1, SH2, and SH3;			
5. Using a single-level SWT, divide the watermark image			
into four sub-bands: LL1, HL1, LH1, and HH1;			
6. Using the equation $S_{wi} = S_i + S_w$ where $i = 1,2,3$,			
modify SH1, SH2, and SH3;			
7. Construct LL, LH11, HL11, and HH11 using the			
modified SVD matrix;			
8. Apply inverse DCT to all high bands of LL11, LH11,			
HL11, and HH11;			

9.	Apply the inverse SWT (iSWT);			
10.	Using the inverse zigzag technique, move the image			
back to its original location to create the watermarked image WI.				

First, the original image was made to undergo zigzag transformation to re-arrange it into a 2-D matrix. Figure 2 represents the zig-zag process graphically. Thereafter, the SWT transform was applied to rearrange the image matrix, decomposing it into four sub-bands. The re-arranged image's high bands were subjected to DCT and SVD. A similar SWT decomposition was applied to the high bands of the watermark image, followed by SVD and DCT. To obtain a watermarked image, the singular matrix of the watermark image was implanted into the singular matrix of the host image using a key.

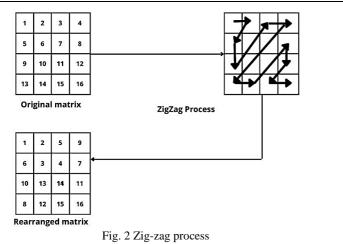


Figure 3 presents a flow diagram of the watermarking process.

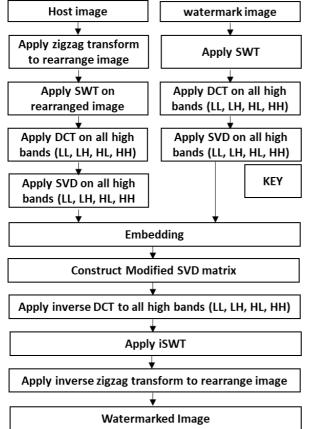


Fig. 3 SWT–DCT–SVD watermark embedding process

2.5. Extraction Phase

The extraction phase is the inverse of the embedding phase. The process is depicted in Algorithm 2.

Algorithm 2 SWT-DCT-SVD extraction algorithm **Input:** Watermarked image **Output:** Host Image

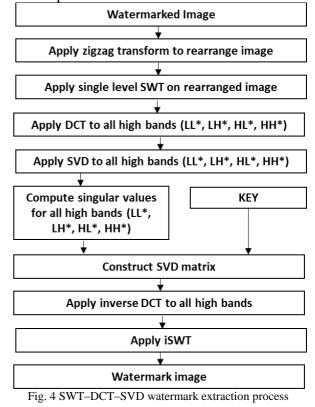
Output: nost mage			
1.	Input the watermarked image WI;		
2.	Apply zigzag transformation to rearrange the		
watermarked image WI to produce the rearranged image RI*;			
3.	Apply SWT to decompose RI* into four sub-bands:		
LL*, HL*, LH*, and HH*;			
4.	Apply DCT to all high bands of the rearranged image;		
5.	Apply SVD to all high bands of the rearranged image;		

6. Compute the singular value for all high bands and modify each by using the equation S_w = S_{wi} + S_i where *i* = 1,2,3;
7. Construct modified SVD matrix LL1*, HL1*, LH1*, and HH1*;

8. Apply inverse DCT (iDCT) to all high bands;

9. Apply inverse SWT (iSWT) to all sub-bands to obtain the watermark image.

Figure 4 presents a flow diagram of the triple extraction process.



3. Experimental Results and Discussion

We experimented with the SWT-DCT-SVD watermarking algorithm on three (3) different 512×512 , 8-bit depth 64×64 grayscale images downloaded from the USC-SIPI picture database. The watermarking scheme was simulated using Python programing language and Jupyter Lab as the IDE tool. Figure 5 presents the original images.

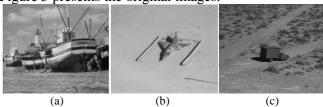


Fig. 5 Original images: (a) ship, (b) airplane, (c) truck

Two (2) watermark images presented in Figure 6 were equally used for the experimental procedure.

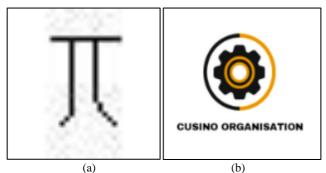


Fig. 6 Watermark images: (a) Pie, (b) Cusino organization logo

The original images and watermark images were used for the overall analysis of the triple watermarking scheme, which included mean square error (MSE), peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR) for imperceptibility analysis, normalized correlation coefficient (NCC) and bit error ratio (BER) for robustness analysis.

3.1. Imperceptibility Analysis

Imperceptibility analysis was carried out on the images that had been watermarked using the SWT-DCT-SVD watermarking scheme to establish that the quality of the original images had not been significantly distorted by the watermark. This is typically determined by computing the PSNR and MSE values of the original and watermarked images.

The mean square error is given by equation 5.

$$MSE = \frac{1}{PxQ} \sum_{p=1}^{P} \sum_{q=1}^{Q} [1(p,q) - 1_w(p,q)]^2 \qquad (5)$$

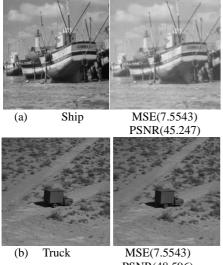
In equation 5, (p,q) is the original image and $1_w(p,q)$ is the watermarked image of size PxQ, respectively.

The formula used for calculating the PSNR is given in equation 6:

(6)

$$PSNR = 10\log_{10}\frac{255^2}{MSE}$$

Figure 7 shows the original images side by side with their watermarked images and their MSE and PSNR results.





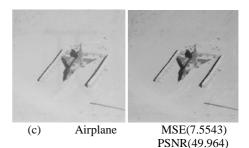


Fig. 7 Original images side by side with their watermarked images and their MSE and PSNR results: (a) Ship side by side with its watermarked version and its MSE and PSNR score, (b) Truck side by side with its watermarked version and its MSE and PSNR score, (c) Airplane side by side with its watermarked version and its MSE and PSNR score

The results showed that the MSE for the three images ranged on average at approximately 7.5, suggesting that the visual quality of the original images was not significantly altered; thus, they are less perceptible.

The PNSR for the three images ranged between 45 and 49, indicating that the watermark is less noticeable to human observers; thus, the scheme can be said to be less perceptible.

3.2. Robustness Analysis

В

Robustness analysis was performed to determine that the watermark was immune to degradation and other signal processing attacks. We used two generally accepted metrics, namely, the normalized correlation coefficient (NCC) and bit error ratio (BER), to establish this. The formula used in measuring NCC is given in equation 7, and the formula used in computing BER is stated in equation 8.

$$NCC = \frac{\sum_{x} \sum_{y} w(x, y) w_{i,j}^{i}}{\sum_{x} \sum_{y} |w(x, y)|^{2}}$$
(7)
$$ER(o, w) = \frac{\sum_{x=1}^{M} \sum_{y=1}^{M} \otimes o * (x, y)}{M^{2}}$$
(8)

Table 1 shows the NCC and BER scores of the SWT-DCT-SVD scheme on the images.

Table 1 Normalized cross-correlation results				
NCC and BER scores for SWT DCT SVD				
Images	NCC	BER		
Truck	0.9987	0.0081		
Airplane	0.9889	0.0075		
Ship	0.9989	0.0075		

The result showed that the NCC for the three images ranged on average from approximately 0.98 to 0.99, a very high ratio that is a pointer to the quality and fidelity of the scheme. It is also indicative that the watermarked image retains the properties and structure original image. The SWT-DCT-SVD of the watermarking scheme may therefore be adjudged robust having carried out watermarking with minimal distortion

The BER for the three images ranged on average

between 0.75 and 0.81, a low ratio indicating the SWT-DCT-SVD's resilience against attacks such as compression and noise and ability to retrieve the watermark, even in the presence of various attacks or distortions.

A digital image watermarking method using SWT-DCT-SVD was designed and simulated using publicly available image data. The experimental evaluation of the technique, using metrics such as PSNR, MSE, NCC, and BER, demonstrated a significant level of resilience against various attacks, robustness, and imperceptibility, despite the noisy nature of the images used. It is also noted that, while the literature that used exact list image data for simulation is sparse, we assessed that the SWT-DCT-SVD watermarking scheme performed comparatively well against similar schemes such as [13], [20]-[22].

4. Conclusion

This study's contribution to the frontiers of information security is highlighted in the innovative combination of three transform domains: stationary wavelet transform (SWT), discrete cosine transform (DCT), and singular value decomposition (SVD). Each of these domains is embedded in a different frequency band of the host image. This makes the watermarked image more robust to attacks because it would be more difficult to remove all three watermarks without significantly degrading the quality of the image. The integration of these three domains is a unique approach that leverages their complementary strengths to enhance watermarking performance. By incorporating the robustness of DCT and SVD into the watermarking process, the proposed scheme can withstand various signal processing attacks. The high values of normalized cross correlation (NCC) and low bit error ratio (BER) are indicative of the scheme resilience against common attacks, such as compression and noise, ensuring watermark retrieval even in the presence of distortions. The study was also able to successfully balance imperceptibility and robustness, as indicated by its PSNR and MER performance.

While it is established in the literature that SWT, DCT, and SVD are complementary algorithms, their hybridization nevertheless increased the computational cost. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies consider the integration of optimization schemes to reduce this concern.

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