

TRUE COLOURS IMAGE STEGANOGRAPHY WITH SPATIAL DESYNCHRONIZATION

Aakanksha Upadhyaya*

Prof Brajesh Patel**

ABSTRACT

The term steganography literally means “covered writing”. Steganography and cryptography share the objective of protecting secret information. Cryptography encrypts the secret information prior to communication, whereas steganography hides the existence of the secret information. Steganography leaves behind detectable traces in the stego object and modifies the statistical properties. Detecting the presence of distorted statistical properties is called statistical steganalysis. The spatial de-synchronization operation is used to hide the embedding domain from the attacker by randomizing the embedding domain. This paper is based on the application of spatial de-synchronization in true colour image Steganography.

Keywords: *Steganography, Cover Image, Stego Image, Cipher Text, Image Format, Desynchronization.*

* Department of Computer Sc. & Engineering, SRIT, RGPV University, Jabalpur, India

** Head of Computer Sc. & Engineering Department, SRIT, RGPV University, Jabalpur, India.

1. Introduction

Steganography is the art and science of hidden communication. The objective of steganography is to communicate information in an undetectable manner such that when the messages are observed by unintended recipient there will not be enough evidence that the messages conceal additional secret data [7].

True color supports 24-bit for three RGB colors. It provides a method of representing and storing graphical-image information (especially in computer processing) in an RGB color space such that a very large number of colors, shades, and hues can be displayed in an image, such as in high-quality photographic images or complex graphics. Usually, true color is defined to mean at least 256 shades of red, green, and blue, for a total of at least 16,777,216 color variations. The human eye can discriminate up to ten million colors.

The protection of sensitive information against unauthorized access or fraudulent changes has been of prime concern throughout the centuries. Cryptography not only protects data from theft or alteration, but can also be used for user authentication. Cryptography systems can be broadly classified into symmetric-key systems that use a single key that both the sender and recipient have, and public-key systems that use two keys, a public key known to everyone and a private key that only the recipient of messages uses [13].

With Secret key cryptography, a single key is used for both encryption and decryption. Because a single key is used for both functions, secret key cryptography is also called *symmetric encryption*. Public-key cryptography has been said to be the most significant new development in cryptography in the last 300-400 years [11]. One more cryptography technique is Hash functions. Hash functions, also called message digests and one-way encryption, are algorithms that, in some sense, use no key. Instead, a fixed-length hash value is computed based upon the plaintext that makes it impossible for either the contents or length of the plaintext to be recovered.

2. What is Steganography?

Steganography hides the existence of a message by transmitting information through various carriers. Its goal is to prevent the detection of a secret message. A typical steganography system

consists of three objects: cover object (which hides the secret message), the secret message and the stego object (which is the cover object with message embedded inside it).

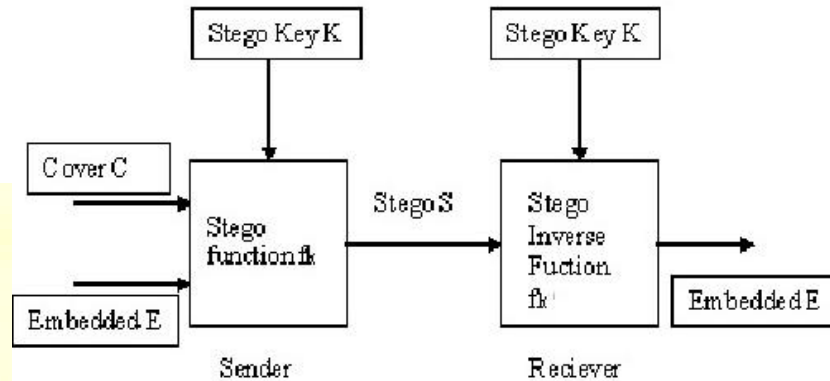


Figure 1: View of Steganography

Many different digital cover file formats can be used such as text, audio, image and video [1]. The steganography process may be defined as follows:

$$\text{Cover medium} + \text{Hidden information} + \text{Stegokey} = \text{Stego_medium}$$

2.1 Types of Steganography

Almost all digital file formats can be used for steganography, but the formats that are more suitable are those with a high degree of redundancy. Redundancy can be defined as the bits of an object that provide accuracy far greater than necessary for the object's use and display. Image and audio files especially comply with this requirement, while research has also uncovered other file formats that can be used for information hiding. Figure 2 shows the four main categories of file formats that can be used for steganography.

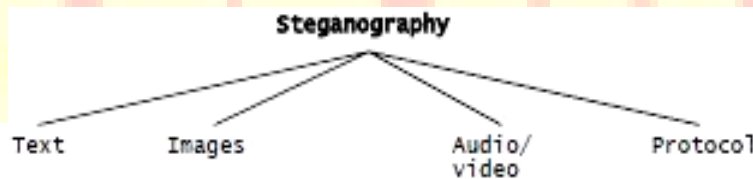


Figure 2: Categories of Steganography

2.2 Image Compression

When working with larger images of greater bit depth, the images tend to become too large to transmit over a standard Internet connection. In order to display an image in a reasonable amount of time, techniques must be incorporated to reduce the image's file size. These techniques make

use of mathematical formulas to analyze and condense image data, resulting in smaller file sizes. This process is called compression [1].

In images there are two types of compression: lossy and lossless. Both methods save storage space, but the procedures that they implement differ. Lossy compression creates smaller files by discarding excess image data from the original image. Lossless compression, on the other hand, never removes any information from the original image, but instead represents data in mathematical formulas. The original image's integrity is maintained and the decompressed image output is bit-by-bit identical to the original image input.

Image steganography techniques can be divided into two groups: those in the Image Domain and those in the Transform Domain. Image (or spatial) domain techniques embed messages in the intensity of the pixels directly, while for transform (or frequency) domain, images are first transformed and then the message is embedded in the image.

Image domain techniques encompass bit-wise methods that apply bit insertion and noise manipulation and are sometimes characterized as "simple systems". The image formats that are most suitable for image domain steganography are lossless and the techniques are typically dependent on the image format [1].

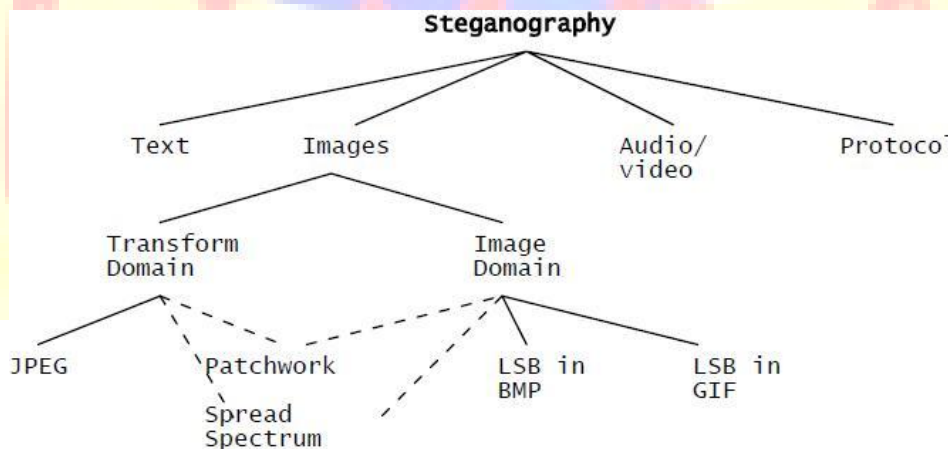


Figure 3: Categories of image Steganography

3. What Is Steganalysis?

Steganography leaves behind detectable traces (i.e., distortion) in the stego object and modifies the statistical properties. Detecting the presence of distorted statistical properties is called statistical steganalysis. Steganalysis is a relatively new research discipline with few articles appearing before the late-1990s. Steganalysis is "the process of detecting steganography by looking at variances between bit patterns and unusually large file sizes". It is the art of discovering and rendering useless covert messages [11]. The goal of steganalysis is to identify suspected information streams, determine whether or not they have hidden messages encoded into them, and, if possible, recover the hidden information.

The steganalysis techniques focus on detecting the presence/absence of a secret message in observed message, to our knowledge there seems to have been no attempt in extracting the secret message. In general, extraction of the secret message could be a harder problem than mere detection [6]. Therefore, based on the ultimate outcome of the effort we classify steganalysis into two categories: Passive steganalysis and Active steganalysis.

4. Spatial Desynchronization

The separation of the embedding domain from the steganalytic domain is used to prevent cover image prediction from the stego image. In other words, if the embedding domain is kept secret from the attacker then it is not possible to mount calibration attack by predicting the cover image statistics [12].

The spatial de-synchronization operation is used to hide the embedding domain from the attacker by randomizing the embedding domain. Here spatial de-synchronization implies the embedding grid is not synchronized with the JPEG compression grid of the stego image. Due to this spatial shifting (de-synchronization), a noise (sometimes called de-synchronization noise) is added to the stego image. This noise masks the steganographic noise in such a way that the detection of steganographic embedding becomes difficult for the attackers. Thus spatial shifting operation resists calibration based attacks [3].

5. Proposed Work

In this section I am going to discuss the proposed algorithm of steganography and extraction of hidden message. I use the concept of spatial de-synchronization, encryption, and hashing to perform complete algorithm.

5.1 Steganography Algorithm

Let I is the cover image. We can describe the proposed steganography algorithm in following steps:

Step 1: Desynchronize the cover image (I) is by the image cropping scheme, i.e by removing u topmost rows and v leftmost columns. Get cropped image (I_c) and remaining portion of image I_{cr} as output.

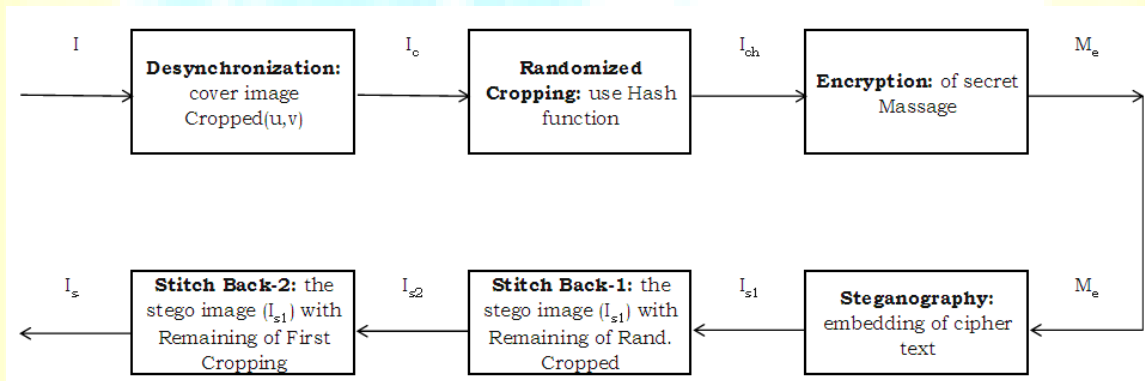


Figure 4: Block Diagrams of Proposed Steganography Method

Step 2: Apply Hash function to perform randomized cropping on cropped image (I_c). Get hashed cropped image (I_{ch}) and remaining portion of image I_{chr} as output.

Step 3: Encrypt the secret information (M). Get cipher text (M_e) as output.

Step 4: Now the hashed cropped version of the image (I_{ch}) is used for embedding cipher text (M_e) using steganographic. Get stego image (I_{s1}) as output.

Step 5: Stitch the stego image (I_{s1}) with I_{chr} to obtain the embedded image I_{s2} .

Step 6: Stitch the image (I_{s2}) with I_{cr} to obtain another embedded image I_s .

5.2 Algorithm to Extraction of stego-bits

Let I_s is the stego image. The extraction of stego bits is rather simple, nearly reverse process of above algorithm. This algorithm can be described in following steps:

Step 1: Extract the value of u & v (i.e. number of cropped rows and column) from stego image.

Step 2: Desynchronize the stego image (I_s) is by the image cropping scheme, i.e by removing u topmost rows and v leftmost columns. Get cropped image (I_{sc}) and remaining portion of image I_{scr} as output.

Step 3: Apply Hash function to perform randomized cropping on cropped image (I_{sc}). Get hashed cropped image (I_{sch}) and remaining portion of image I_{schr} as output.

Step 4: Now the hashed cropped version of the image (I_{sch}) is used for bit extraction procedure. Get cipher text of secret information (M_e) as output.

Step 5: Decrypt cipher text (M_e) to get the secret information (M) as output.

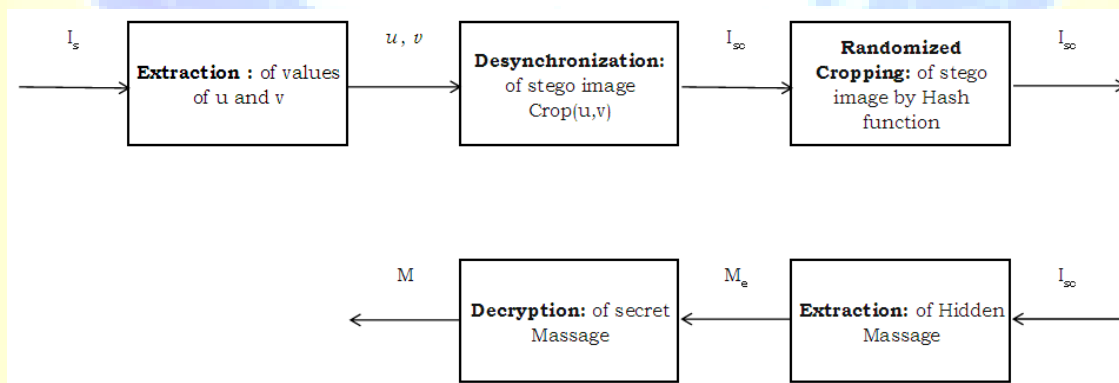


Figure 5: Block Diagrams of Proposed Message Extraction Method

6. Conclusions

In my work, a new steganographic algorithm have been proposed to resist steganalytic attacks. I tested my algorithm by taking nearly 50 different cover images of different image formats, specially JPEG and PNG image format. I found the correct working of proposed algorithm. I have applied the spatial desynchronization scheme in two stages. At first stage cropping number

of rows and columns is done. In second stage I performed randomized cropping. The advantages of randomized cropping are based on the level of randomization (refer section 6.2 for details). I also incorporate the concepts of encryption of message just before embedding it into cover image. The concepts of randomized cropping and encryption of message seems a better concept against steganalytic attacks. We can also perform the proposed algorithm in grayscale as well as true color images. Even I have implemented the proposed algorithm correctly and it seems a better algorithm but proper testing of proposed algorithm is needed.

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