

Datapath Synthesis for Overclocking: Online Arithmetic for Latency-Accuracy Trade-offs

Authors

ABSTRACT

Digital circuits are currently designed to ensure timing closure. Releasing this constraint by allowing timing violations could lead to significant performance improvements, but conventional forms of computer arithmetic do not fail gracefully when pushed beyond deterministic operation. In this paper we take a fresh look at Online Arithmetic, originally proposed for digit serial operation, and synthesize unrolled digit parallel online operators to allow for graceful degradation. We quantify the impact of timing violation on key arithmetic primitives, and show that substantial performance benefits can be obtained in comparison to binary arithmetic. Since timing errors are caused by long carry chains, these result in errors in least significant digits with online arithmetic, causing less impact than conventional implementations. Using analytical models and empirical FPGA results from an image processing application, we demonstrate an error reduction over 89% and an improvement in SNR of over 20dB for the same clock rate.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.4 [Information Systems Applications]: Miscellaneous;
D.2.8 [Software Engineering]: Metrics—*complexity measures, performance measures*

General Terms

Design, Performance, Reliability

Keywords

Online Arithmetic, Overclocking, Imprecise Design, Approximate Computing

1. INTRODUCTION

Circuit performance has increased tremendously over the past decades with the continuous scaling of CMOS technology. Typically hardware designers tend to employ conservative safety margins for timing closure. However, continuing with this approach could become very costly in the short

term future. This is because the highly scaled CMOS devices would inevitably exhibit probabilistic behavior, meaning that we can no longer expect a uniform circuit performance. Covering all possible worst cases would become increasingly difficult, expensive and result in large yield loss due to the variation.

While the standard approaches such as heavily pipeline the datapath can be used to boost the frequency, the overall latency will not tend to be reduced. As a result, this method will not be applicable to many embedded applications, which normally have strict latency requirements, or in any datapath containing feedback where C-slow retiming is inappropriate. Besides, the conservative timing margin will not be removed by these approaches. To tackle this problem, a large volume of current studies has demonstrated that relaxing the absolute accuracy requirement can provide the freedom to create designs with better performance or energy efficiency. Our previous work also demonstrated that allowing timing violations to happen would be of benefit in many applications, because the worst case only happens with a very small probability.

However, we notice that research in this area focus on standard binary arithmetic, which potentially suffers from large magnitude of timing errors. This is because in standard arithmetic operators such as ripple-carry adders, the most significant digit (MSD) is last updated due to carry propagation, whereas timing violation initially affects the MSD. In this paper, for the first time we attempt to solve this problem by using online arithmetic, which was designed for the MSD-first operation. We evaluate the probabilistic behavior of basic arithmetic primitives with different types of arithmetic when operating beyond the deterministic region. We suggest that in comparison to conventional arithmetic, operators with online arithmetic are less sensitive to overclocking, because timing errors only affect the least significant digits. To support this hypothesis, we initially propose probabilistic models of errors generated in this process for the online multiplier. It is followed by experimental results on an image processing application. We demonstrate that our novel design methodology can lead to substantial performance benefits compared to the design method using conventional arithmetic. The contributions of this paper are:

- the first evaluation of datapath function with different types of computer arithmetic under overclocking,
- probabilistic models of overclocking errors for a digit-

parallel online multiplier,

- analytical and empirical results which demonstrate that the impact of timing violations is ameliorated with on-line arithmetic and that large performance benefits can be achieved.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Online Arithmetic

In conventional arithmetic, the computation results are generated either from the least significant digit (LSD), e.g. addition and multiplication, or the MSD, e.g. division and square root. This inconsistency in computing directions can result in large latency when propagating data among different operations. To tackle this problem, online arithmetic has been proposed and studied over the past few decades [2, 8, 6]. Both the inputs and outputs are processed in a MSD-first manner using online arithmetic, enabling parallelism among multiple operations. Therefore the overall latency can be greatly reduced.

Originally online arithmetic was designed for digit-serial operation. In order to generate the first output digit, δ digits of inputs are required, as illustrated in Figure xxx. δ is known as the online delay, which is a constant, independent of the precision in a given operation. For ease of discussion, the input to our circuit is normalized to a fixed point number in the range $(-1, 1)$. Based on this premise, the online representations of the operands and the results are given by (1) [3] for $j \in [-\delta, N-1]$ and r denotes the radix.

$$X_{[j]} = \sum_{i=1}^{j+\delta} x_i r^{-i}, \quad Y_{[j]} = \sum_{i=1}^{j+\delta} y_i r^{-i}, \quad Z_{[j]} = \sum_{i=1}^j z_i r^{-i} \quad (1)$$

The MSD-first operation in the online arithmetic is accomplished by utilizing a redundant number system [1], in which each digit is represented with a redundant digit set $\{-a, \dots, -1, 0, 1, \dots, a\}$, where $a \in [r/2, r-1]$. Due to the redundancy, the MSDs of the result can be estimated only based on partial information of the inputs and then the value of the number can be revised by the following digits.

2.2 Radix-2 Digit-parallel Online Adder

Adders serve as a critical building block for arithmetic operations. To perform digit-parallel online addition, a redundant adder can be directly utilized. The adder structure diagram is shown in Figure 1. A major advantage with the redundant number system over the standard ripple-carry based arithmetic is that the propagation of carry is eliminated, resulting in a precision-independent computation time for addition. As seen in Figure 1, the computation delay of this adder is only 2 full adder (FA) delays for any operand word-length, with the cost of one extra FA for each digit of operands. Therefore it is unlikely that timing violations happen on the online adder. For this reason, this adder structure has been widely used as a part of other arithmetic operators such as multipliers to accelerate the sum of partial products [5, 7].

2.3 Radix-2 Digit-parallel Online Multiplier

Multiplication is another key primitive of arithmetic operations. Typically the online multiplication is performed in a recursive manner, as illustrated in Algorithm 1 where both

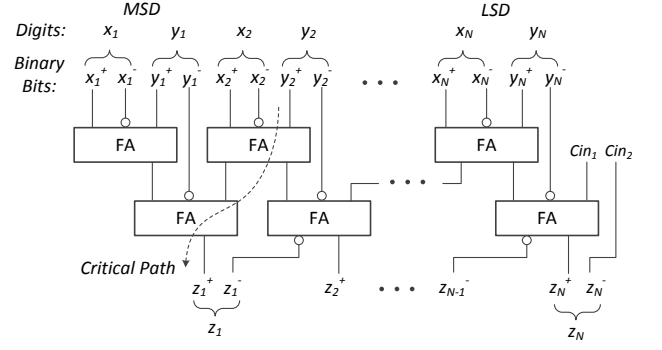


Figure 1: An N -digit radix-2 online adder.

Algorithm 1 Online Multiplication

Initialization: $X_{[-\delta]} = Y_{[-\delta]} = P_{[-\delta]} = 0$

Recurrence: for $j = -\delta, -\delta+1, \dots, N-1$ do

$$\begin{aligned} H_{[j]} &= r^{-\delta} (x_{j+\delta+1} \cdot Y_{[j+1]} + y_{j+\delta+1} \cdot X_{[j]}) \\ W_{[j]} &= P_{[j]} + H_{[j]} \\ z_j &= \text{sel}(W_{[j]}) \\ P_{[j+1]} &= r(W_{[j]} - z_j) \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

inputs and outputs are N -digit number as represented in (1) [3, 9]. For a given iteration j , the product digit z_j is generated through a selection function $\text{sel}()$. In order to ensure the convergence of the algorithm, appropriate selection method and the value of δ should be determined on the basis of radix r and the digit set. As radix-2 is used most commonly in computer arithmetic, we keep $r = 2$ throughout this paper with the corresponding redundant digit set $\{\bar{1}, 0, 1\}$. In this case we have $\delta = 3$, and $\text{sel}()$ is given by (3) [4]. It can be seen that the decision is made only based on 1 integer bit and 1 fractional bit of $W_{[j]}$.

$$\text{sel}(W_{[j]}) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } W_{[j]} \geq \frac{1}{2} \\ 0 & \text{if } -\frac{1}{2} \leq W_{[j]} < \frac{1}{2} \\ \bar{1} & \text{if } W_{[j]} < -\frac{1}{2} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

Algorithm 1 can be synthesized into a unrolled digit parallel structure as shown in Figure 2(a). In an N -digit OM, there are totally $N + \delta$ stages, of which the online inputs are generated from the appending logic according to (1). For each stage, an online adder is used as shown in Figure 2(b). The SDVM module performs the signed-digit vector multiplication. When $r = 2$ and the digit set $\{\bar{1}, 0, 1\}$ is used, the implementation of SDVM is straight forward, because for instance the output of $(y_{j+\delta+1} \cdot X_{[j]})$ is 0, $X_{[j]}$ or $-X_{[j]}$ when y is equal to 0, 1 and -1 respectively.

Instead of duplicating the digit-serial implementation $N + \delta$ times, each stage in the digit-parallel architecture can be optimized for area reduction. For instance, the SDVM modules and the appending logic are not required in the last δ stages because the inputs are 0. This leads to a smaller online adder in these stages. Similarly for the first δ stages the selection logic can be removed, as the first digit of the result is generated at S_0 .

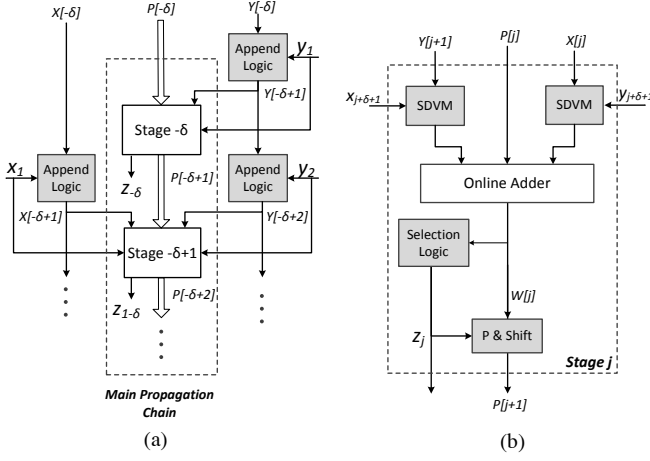


Figure 2: (a) Synthesis of Algorithm 1 into a digit-parallel online multiplier (b) Structure of one stage.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CRITICAL PATH

From Figure 2 we observe two types of delay chains. One is caused by generation and propagation of $P_{[j]}$ among different stages. The other is the generation of online inputs from the appending logic. Since the appending logic is basically wires, the overall latency will eventually be determined by the delay from the first source, especially with increasing operand word-lengths. As such, we initially model the delay of each stage within an online multiplier to be a constant value μ . We also assume that the generation of online inputs costs no delay.

For an N -digit OM, let a propagation chain is generated at S_τ with the length of $d(\tau)$ digits, then τ is bounded by (4).

$$-\delta \leq \tau \leq N - 1 - \delta \quad (4)$$

Suppose a chain is generated at the first stage $S_{-\delta}$ and is propagated to the final stage S_{N-1} . This corresponds to $d(\tau) = N + \delta$ and hence the critical path delay of the OM is then given by (5). Note that this value is normally employed by the timing analysis tools together with a guard-band to ensure a correct functionality across a variety of operating conditions.

$$\mu_{OM_structural} = (N + \delta) \cdot \mu \quad (5)$$

For a given stage S_τ when inputs are initially introduced, we have $W_{[\tau]} = H_{[\tau]}$ as $P_{[\tau]} = 0$. From (2) the maximum word-length of $H_{[\tau]}$ and $P_{[\tau]}$ is $(\tau + 2\delta + 2)$ and $(\tau + 2\delta)$, respectively. Thus the propagation of $P_{[\tau]}$ will only affect the first $(\tau + 2\delta)$ MSDs of $W_{[\tau]}$. As an example, the maximum word-length of $P_{[-2]}$ is 4 digits while the value of $H_{[-2]}$ is 6. After delay μ from the start of computation, only the first 4 digits of $W_{[-2]}$ will be changed by the propagation of $P_{[-2]}$, as labeled on the segment of $P_{[-2]}$ in Figure 3. During each propagation, this value is reduced by 1 due to the shifting to derive $P_{[j+1]}$ in (2). Finally this chain annihilates if the number shrinks to 1, because for all possible changes as listed in Table 5, the propagation output keeps unchanged. In the previous example, the chain generated at S_{-3} will annihilate at S_1 as shown in Figure 3. Besides, chains generated at other stages with the maximum lengths are also depicted for a 3-digit OM. It can be seen that the actual worst-case delay is

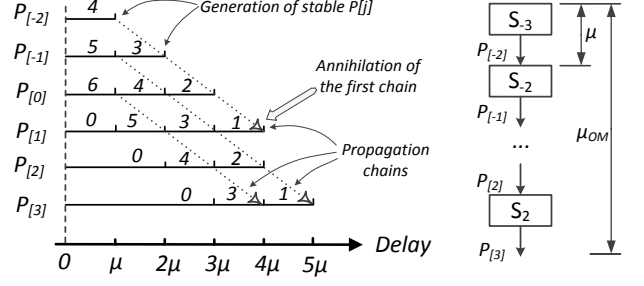


Figure 3: All possible chains with the maximum length in a 3-digit online multiplier. The numbers on the line segment represent the number of the updated MSDs of $W_{[j]}$.

Table 1: All the combinations of $W_{[j]}$ of which 2 MSBs might change. Together with the corresponding z_j and the integer bit of $P_{[j+1]}$.

$W_{[j]}$	z_j	$P_{[j+1]} = 2(W_{[j]} - z_j)$
$0.0 \rightarrow 1.0$	$0 \rightarrow \bar{1}$	$0 \rightarrow 0$
$0.1 \rightarrow 1.1$	$1 \rightarrow 0$	$1 \rightarrow 1$
$1.0 \rightarrow 0.0$	$\bar{1} \rightarrow 0$	$0 \rightarrow 0$
$1.1 \rightarrow 0.1$	$0 \rightarrow 1$	$1 \rightarrow 1$

5μ , instead of 6μ as predicted by (5).

In general for a given value of τ , the maximum value of $d(\tau)$ is bounded by two constraints. On one hand, the chain length cannot be greater than $N - 1$. On the other hand, the altered digit number of $P_{[\tau+1]}$ will eventually reduced to 1. The combination of both gives (6).

$$d(\tau)_{max} = \text{Min}(N - 1 - \tau, \tau + 2\delta + 1) \quad (6)$$

For all values of τ in (4), the critical path delay of the OM is then given by (7).

$$\mu_{OM} = \text{Max}(d(\tau)_{max}) \cdot \mu \quad (7)$$

Substituting (4) and (6) into (7), we obtain the expression of μ_{OM} in (8). The comparison between (5) and (8) is illustrated in Figure 4, from which we see that the OM could run at a higher frequency than predicted from naive structural timing analysis.

$$\mu_{OM} = \begin{cases} \frac{N-1}{2} \cdot \mu + 4\mu & \text{if } N \text{ is odd} \\ \frac{N-2}{2} \cdot \mu + 4\mu & \text{if } N \text{ is even} \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

3.1 Probabilistic Model of Overclocking Error

For an N -digit OM, it follows that if the clock period T_S is greater than μ_{OM} , correct results will be sampled. If, however, faster-than-rated sampling frequencies are applied such that $T_S < \mu_{OM}$, timing violations might happen and intermediate results will be sampled, potentially generating errors. For a given T_S , the maximum length of error-free propagation is described by (9) where f_S denotes the sampling frequency. We assume that the first digit of the result will be generated correctly, i.e. $b > 3$. The upper bound of

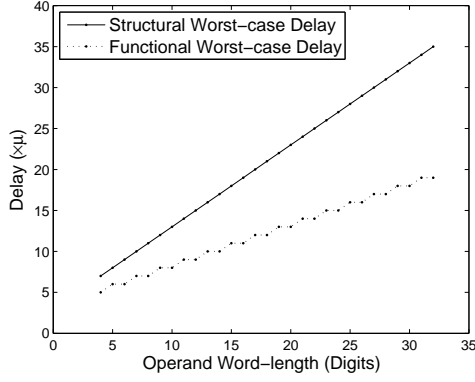


Figure 4: Comparison between the worst-case delay of an online multiplier obtained from (5) and (8).

parameter τ in (4) is then modified as given by (10). In this Section, we model the probability and the magnitude of the overclocking error, under the assumption that every digit of each input to our circuit is uniformly and independently generated with the digit set $\{\bar{1}, 0, 1\}$. Nevertheless, the assumption will be relaxed in Section xxx where real image data are used.

$$b := \left\lceil \frac{T_S}{\mu} \right\rceil = \left\lceil \frac{1}{\mu \cdot f_S} \right\rceil \quad (9)$$

$$\tau \leq N - 1 - b = \tau_{upp} \quad (10)$$

3.1.1 Probability of Timing Violations

If a chain is generated at S_τ , the presence of timing violation requires $d(\tau) > b$. Since the propagation and annihilation of the chain in an OM is irrelevant to the operand word-length, the probability of $d(\tau)$ is only dependent upon the specific input pattern of S_τ , which is denoted as $C(\tau)$. In general there are four types of inputs as listed in (11). Under the assumption that all digits of input signal are mutually independent, the probability of $C_1 \sim C_4$ equal to $4/9$, $1/9$, $2/9$ and $2/9$ respectively.

$$C(\tau) = \begin{cases} \text{Case 1 } (C_1): & x_{\tau+\delta+1} \neq 0, y_{\tau+\delta+1} \neq 0 \\ \text{Case 2 } (C_2): & x_{\tau+\delta+1} = 0, y_{\tau+\delta+1} = 0 \\ \text{Case 3 } (C_3): & x_{\tau+\delta+1} \neq 0, y_{\tau+\delta+1} = 0 \\ \text{Case 4 } (C_4): & x_{\tau+\delta+1} = 0, y_{\tau+\delta+1} \neq 0 \end{cases} \quad (11)$$

As discussed when deriving (6), the value of $d(\tau)$ corresponds to the word-length of $P_{[\tau+1]}$ when computation initially starts. That is, (2) can be modified to give (12) for $\tau > -\delta$. Therefore the word-length of $P_{[\tau+1]}$ is best considered separately for different value of $C(\tau)$.

$$\begin{aligned} P_{[\tau+1]} &= r \cdot W_{[\tau]} \\ &= r^{-\delta+1} (x_{\tau+\delta+1} Y_{[\tau+1]} + y_{\tau+\delta+1} X_{[\tau]}) \end{aligned} \quad (12)$$

If $C(\tau) = C_1$, $P_{[\tau+1]}$ embodies the maximum word-length and hence $d(\tau) = d(\tau)_{max}$ as given in (7). If $C(\tau) = C_2$, we have $P_{[\tau+1]} = 0$. In this case no chain is generated and $d(\tau) = 0$. Similarly the probability is $1/9$.

Since C_3 and C_4 are statistically identical, we only discuss the situation that $C(\tau) = C_3$. In this case the word-length

of $P_{[\tau+1]}$ only depends on that of $Y_{[\tau+1]}$. Besides, we have $Y_{[\tau+1]} = Y_{[\tau]}$. It means $d(\tau)$ becomes dependent of the inputs of previous stage $S_{\tau-1}$. There are 2 possible situations for $\tau > -\delta$ as stated below:

- For the previous stage if $y_{\tau+\delta} \neq 0$, then the word-length of $Y_{[\tau]}$ is maximized. Thus $d(\tau) = d(\tau)_{max} - 1$.
- If $y_{\tau+\delta} = 0$, then $Y_{[\tau]} = Y_{[\tau-1]}$. This is a recursive process and these two judgements will be performed again for $\tau = \tau - 1$. It terminates when $\tau = -\delta$ or the first judgement is satisfied.

For the first stage where $\tau = -\delta$, (12) can be modified further yielding $P_{[-\delta+1]} = r^{\delta+1} (x_1 Y_{[-\delta+1]})$. Therefore the value in (7) can only be achieved when $C(-\delta) = C_1$, otherwise $d(-\delta) = 0$.

In summary, we derive Algorithm 2 to go through all possible stages that timing violations may occur and the corresponding inputs. This algorithm returns $Prob(T_S)$, which denotes the probability that timing violations happen in an N -digit online multiplier under a given T_S . $Prob(i, C(i))$ denotes the probability of the input pattern for stage i .

Algorithm 2 Probability of Timing Violations

- 1: $Prob(T_S) = 0$
 - 2: **for all** stages $\tau \in \{-\delta, -\delta+1, \dots, \tau_{upp}\}$ and input cases $C(\tau) \in \{C_1, \dots, C_4\}$ **do**
 - 3: Determine $d(\tau)$ based on $C(\tau)$
 - 4: **if** $d(\tau) > b$ **then**
 - 5: $Prob(T_S) = Prob(T_S) + \prod_{i=-\delta}^{\tau} Prob(i, C(i))$
 - 6: **end if**
 - 7: **end for**
 - 8: **return** $Prob(T_S)$
-

3.1.2 Magnitude of Overclocking Error

For a given T_S , timing violations may happen on multiple chains. For instance in Figure 3 if $T_S = 3.5\mu$, all the 3 chains would not be correctly propagated and all the three digits of the outputs are affected. For the first chain that timing violation may occur, i.e. $d(\tau)_{max} > b$, let it annihilate at S_λ where $\lambda = \tau + d_{max}(\tau) - 1$. Therefore overclocking errors may happen from digit λ to digit $N-1$ of the product. In general the magnitude of overclocking error is given by (13), where z_i and z_i' denote the correct value and the actual value of the output digit of S_i , separately.

$$|\varepsilon| = \left| \sum_{i=\lambda}^{N-1} 2^{-i-1} (z_i - z_i') \right| = \left| \sum_{i=\lambda}^{N-1} \varepsilon_i \right| \quad (13)$$

However, the change of output digits might not result in a new number with online arithmetic, because of the redundancy in number representation. For instance, the two's complement number 0.111 can be represented in the online form as 0.10 $\bar{1}$, 0.1 $\bar{1}$ 1 and 0.111.

Specifically as seen in Figure 3, only the MSD of $W_{[\lambda]}$ will change during $z_{\lambda'} \rightarrow z_{\lambda}$. Therefore $\Delta z_i = z_i - z_i'$ could be ± 1 according to Table 5. Whereas in other cases, $W_{[i]}$ might change 2 MSDs, potentially results in errors being 0, ± 1 and ± 2 .

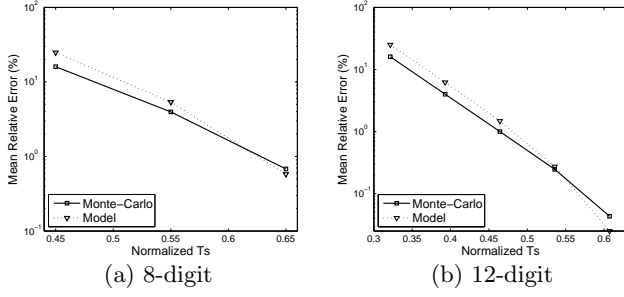


Figure 5: Expectation of overclocking error for on-line multipliers: verification of the proposed model against Monte-Carlo simulations based on aforementioned timing models.

Now we notice that the overclocking error is not a deterministic value for a given T_S . Thus instead of directly using (13), we employ the expectation of error magnitude across these variations on the condition of the appearance of timing violations as given by (14) where $\varepsilon_\lambda = \pm 2^{-\lambda-1}$ and $\varepsilon_i \in \{0, \pm 2^{-i-1}, \pm 2^{-i}\}$.

$$E(|\varepsilon|) = E\left(\left|\varepsilon_\lambda + \sum_{i=\lambda+1}^{N-1} \varepsilon_i\right|\right) \quad (14)$$

3.1.3 Expectation of Overclocking Error

For a given T_S , the combination of $Prob(T_S)$ and $E(|\varepsilon|)$ in Algorithm 2 and (14) yields the overall expectation of overclocking error, as presented in (15). The verification of the proposed model is illustrated in Figure 5 against the results from Monte-Carlo simulations based on the aforementioned timing model. T_S is normalized with respect to the value from (5). Note that both results are obtained when assuming the input data are randomly generated following uniform distribution. It can be seen that the modeled value match well with the simulation results.

$$E_{ovc} = Prob(T_S) \cdot E(|\varepsilon|) \quad (15)$$

For all possible τ as bounded by (4), the probability of different chain lengths within an N -digit OM and the corresponding magnitude of overclocking error can be obtained, as shown in Figure 6 with $N = 8, 12, 16, 32$, respectively. For a given T_S , the overall expectation of overclocking error in (15) can also be computed by (16).

$$E_{ovc} = \sum_{d>b} P_d \cdot \varepsilon_d \quad (16)$$

From Figure 6 several observations can be made. First, the error magnitude decreases exponentially with longer chain lengths, because in contrast to the conventional arithmetic, timing violation firstly affects LSDs with online arithmetic. Second, chains with longer delay would happen with greater probabilities in an OM, because the delay is mainly dependent upon the inputs that generate the chain, while the chain propagation and annihilation will not be affected by the inputs. For the traditional ripple-carry-based arithmetic, specific input patterns are required to decide carry generation, propagation and annihilation. In addition, carry chains could not be overlapped with traditional arithmetic, whereas

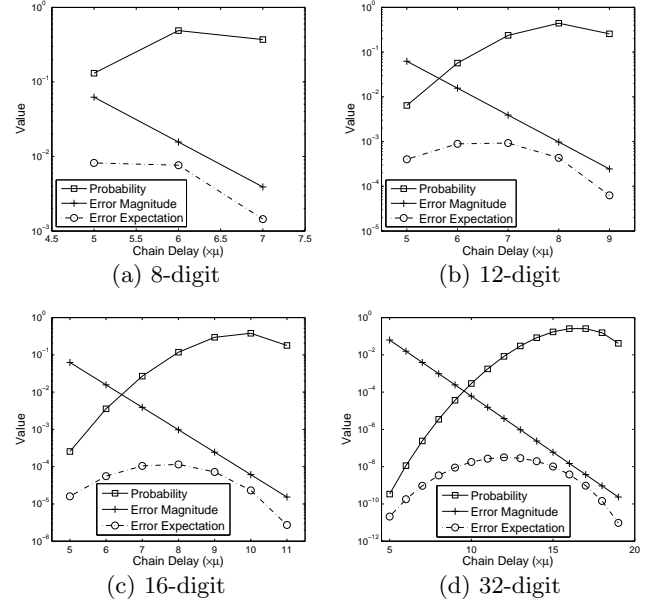


Figure 6: Probabilities of different chain delay, the corresponding magnitude of overclocking error and the combination of both in terms of error expectation in a radix-2 OM.

long chains might occur simultaneously and mutually overlapped within the OM, as shown previously in Figure 3. However, we also notice that for chains with long delays, the increasing speed of probability is much slower than the decreasing speed of error magnitude with long chain delays. Therefore the combination of both would results in a decline in error expectation. In traditional arithmetic, the decrease of probability is offset by the growth of error magnitude, as both of them vary exponentially. Hence the error expectation with respect to each chain delay keeps almost constant. This finding indicates that the OM is less sensitive to overclocking error than the multiplier using traditional arithmetic, especially when timing violations initially appear.

4. CASE STUDY: IMAGE FILTER

4.1 Experimental Setup

The benefits of the proposed methodology are demonstrated by using a Gaussian image filter, which is implemented using two types of computer arithmetic. One is the radix-2 traditional arithmetic and data are represented in the 2's complemented form. In this case, adders and multipliers are created using Xilinx Core Generator[xxx] with speed optimization. The other is the radix-2 online arithmetic, of which basic building blocks are described in previous sections. In this case, all inputs and outputs are represented in the online format. In order to achieve the desired latency between input and output, both designs are overlocked and the error seen at the output are recorded. The results are obtained from a Xilinx Virtex-6 FPGA through post place-and-route simulations. In our experiments, the results are evaluated in terms of mean relative error (MRE), which represents the percentage of error at outputs, as given by (17) where E_{error} and E_{out} refer to the mean value of error and

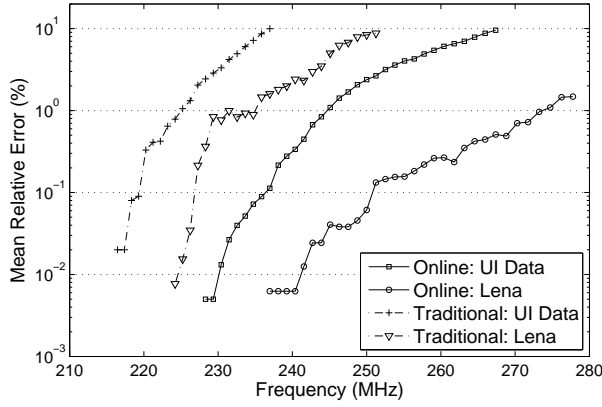


Figure 7: Overclocking error in an image filter with two types of computer arithmetic: online arithmetic and standard binary arithmetic, of which the rated frequencies are 148.3MHz and 168.7MHz, respectively, according to the timing analysis tool.

correct output, respectively.

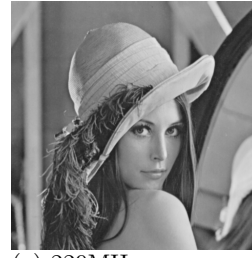
$$MRE = \left| \frac{E_{error}}{E_{out}} \right| \times 100\% \quad (17)$$

Since the redundant digit set is used in online arithmetic, a signed integer number within $[-2^N, 2^N - 1]$ can be represented using N digits. However the representation range is $[-(2^{N-1}, 2^{N-1} - 1)]$ with N digits using 2's complement number system. For a valid comparison, an N -digit image filter using online arithmetic is employed against an $(N + 1)$ -digit design using traditional arithmetic. In our experiments, two types of input data are utilized. One is randomly sampled from a uniform distribution of N -digit numbers. This type is referred to as “Uniform Independent (UI) inputs”. The other is called “real inputs”, which are the pixel values of several benchmark images.

4.2 Impact of Overclocking on Different Arithmetic

The values of overclocking error of the image filter based on traditional arithmetic (dotted lines) and online arithmetic (solid lines) when $N = 8$ are illustrated in Figure 7. According to the timing analysis tool, the rated operating frequencies of the two designs are 168.7MHz and 148.3MHz, respectively. However as seen in Figure 7, for both input types the online image filter actually operates at a higher frequency without timing violations, in comparison to the design using traditional arithmetic, as predicted in Section xxx. In addition, this error-free frequency is even larger when using the real image data as inputs, since the real data do not exactly follow the uniform distribution or the independent assumption. In Figure 7 the real inputs are the results for the “Lena” benchmark image.

If errors can be tolerated, we may allow timing violations to happen for better performance. For a given arithmetic, the sensitivity of overclocking error can be evaluated by the slope of the lines in Figure 7. For instance under an error budget of 1% MRE , using the uniform independent inputs



(a) 229MHz, no errors



(b) 229MHz, SNR:20.6dB



(c) 242MHz, SNR:38.3dB



(d) 242MHz, SNR:15.6dB



(e) 250MHz, SNR:36.2dB



(f) 250MHz, SNR:8.5dB

Figure 8: Output images of image filter using online arithmetic (left column) and traditional arithmetic (right column).

the frequency of the traditional design can be improved by 3.89% with respect to the maximum frequency without errors, whereas the design with online arithmetic can be overclocked by 6.85%. This finding indicates that online arithmetic is less sensitive to overclocking error, as illustrated in Section xxx. The difference is even greater using real image data: 4.04% frequency speed-up for traditional arithmetic against 13.74% using online arithmetic, because fewer long chains are generated with real inputs.

The output images for both design scenarios are presented in Figure 8. The left column illustrates the output image from the online image filter. Since the overclocking errors are in the LSDs of the results, the degradation on the image can be hardly observed. In contrast, timing violations cause error in the MSDs when using traditional arithmetic. This leads to “salt and pepper noise”, as seen on the images in the right column of Figure 8. Meanwhile, errors in the MSDs would result in large noise power and therefore the signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) for the traditional design is small.

4.3 Potential Benefits in Circuit Design

In general, our results could be of interest to a circuit design in two folds. Typically by choosing different computing arithmetics and data representations, either a circuit can be designed to operate at a certain frequency with the mini-

Table 2: Relative Reduction of MRE with Online Arithmetic for Various Normalized Frequencies.

Inputs	Normalized Frequency					Geo. Mean
	1.05	1.10	1.15	1.20	1.25	
Uniform	94.5%	89.1%	90.1%	88.3%	84.3%	89.2%
Lena	99.3%	99.2%	98.9%	97.7%	94.9%	97.9%
Pepper	99.7%	98.3%	98.1%	97.2%	95.1%	97.7%
Sailboat	99.5%	97.9%	97.3%	96.8%	95.1%	97.3%
Tiffany	99.9%	97.6%	98.4%	97.8%	97.2%	98.2%

Table 3: Improvement of SNR with Online Arithmetic for Various Normalized Frequencies

Inputs	Normalized Frequency				
	1.05	1.10	1.15	1.20	1.25
Lena	44.6	36.3	33.2	29.1	22.9
Pepper	35.7	28.3	28.7	25.9	24.1
Sailboat	33.7	27.5	26.3	25.0	21.7
Tiffany	43.9	25.9	29.5	25.6	24.5

imum possible MRE, or a given error budget specified by the algorithm designer can be met with the fastest achievable operating frequency. For the first case, the experimental results obtained by uniform independent inputs together with 4 benchmark images are summarized in Table 2 in terms of the difference of SNR and the relative reduction of MRE as given by (18) where MRE_{OL} and MRE_{Trad} denote the value obtained with online arithmetic and with traditional arithmetic, respectively.

$$\frac{MRE_{Trad} - MRE_{OL}}{MRE_{Trad}} \times 100\% \quad (18)$$

For a fairer comparison, the frequency in this table is normalized to the maximum error-free frequency for each arithmetic. It can be seen that a significant reduction of MRE can be obtained using online arithmetic for all input types. The geometric mean reduction varies from 97.3% to 98.2%. In addition, larger differences of MRE reduction can be achieved in practice. This is because long chains occur with even smaller probabilities with real data. Similarly from Table 3, the differences in SNR vary from 21.4dB to 43.9dB.

Table 4 illustrates the frequency speedups with different input types when specific error budgets can be tolerated. We see that for all input types using online arithmetic still outperforms the traditional design for each MRE budget in terms of operating frequency. Likewise the geometric mean of frequency speed-ups is larger for real image inputs.

The area comparison between two designs when $N = 9$ is illustrated in Table 5. The area overhead with online arithmetic is 2.08 in terms of LUTs and 1.62 in terms of Slices in the FPGA.

Table 4: Relative Reduction of MRE with Online Arithmetic for Various Error Budgets.

Inputs	Error Budget				Geo. Mean
	0.01%	0.1%	1%	10%	
Uniform	N/A	4.59%	8.78%	12.83%	8.03%
Lena	7.96%	11.50%	16.39%	13.71%	11.88%
Pepper	6.22%	8.87%	18.68%	15.94%	11.32%
Sailboat	5.71%	8.87%	16.93%	15.29%	10.70%
Tiffany	2.35%	6.90%	18.58%	12.22%	7.79%

Table 5: Area Comparison between Two Designs.

Metric	Arithmetic Type		Overhead
	Traditional	Online	
LUTs	304	632	2.08
Slices	108	175	1.62

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