



Compressive Sensing: A Survey on Theory, Algorithms and Applications

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Abstract

Compressive Sensing (CS) is an advanced signal acquisition paradigm that enables the reconstruction of sparse or compressible signals from far fewer samples than required by classical Nyquist–Shannon sampling theory. This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the fundamental principles, algorithmic developments, and practical applications of CS. It begins by examining the core concept of sparsity, which forms the theoretical foundation for efficient signal representation in suitable transform domains. The paper then discusses the role of sensing matrices and their influence on measurement stability, robustness, and feasibility in real-world systems. Various reconstruction algorithms including optimization-based, greedy, and iterative thresholding techniques are analysed with respect to their computational complexity and reconstruction performance. Additionally, the paper highlights factors affecting CS performance, such as sparsity level, noise tolerance, and algorithmic scalability. Beyond theoretical insights, this work explores major application areas where CS has demonstrated significant impact, including medical imaging, wireless communications, radar systems, remote sensing, and low-power Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices. Recent advancements integrating deep learning with CS frameworks are also reviewed, underscoring the growing shift toward data-driven reconstruction methods. Overall, this paper aims to provide a unified understanding of CS, emphasizing its relevance, challenges, and emerging research directions in modern signal processing.

Keywords: Compressive Sensing, Sparse Representation, Reconstruction Algorithms, Signal Processing, Sensing Matrices.

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1. Introduction

Compressive Sensing (CS) is an emerging signal processing approach that challenges traditional sampling theory by enabling the reconstruction of signals using fewer samples than conventionally required. This concept is based on the assumption that natural signals possess sparsity in some domain, allowing efficient acquisition and processing. In recent years, the rapid growth of digital technologies has resulted in an unprecedented increase in the amount of data generated, transmitted, and stored across modern engineering systems. Traditional signal acquisition frameworks, governed by the Nyquist–Shannon sampling theorem, require signals to be sampled at least twice their highest frequency component in order to be reconstructed accurately. While effective for many classical applications, this requirement becomes highly inefficient when dealing with large-scale, high-dimensional, or bandwidth-limited systems. As the demand for faster processing, reduced storage, and energy-efficient acquisition grows, conventional sampling techniques face fundamental limitations.

Compressive Sensing (CS) has emerged as a powerful paradigm that addresses these challenges by exploiting a core property found in many natural and engineered signals sparsity[1]. Sparsity implies that although signals may appear complex in their raw form, they possess concise representations in suitable transform domains such as Fourier, Wavelet, or Discrete Cosine transforms. CS leverages this underlying structure to reconstruct signals from a substantially reduced number of measurements, challenging the classical assumptions of conventional sampling theory. By integrating principles from linear algebra, optimization, probability theory, and signal processing, CS provides an elegant framework that allows accurate reconstruction even when sampling rates fall well below Nyquist limits. The impact of compressive sensing has been transformative across multiple domains. In medical imaging—particularly Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)—CS has enabled accelerated scan procedures, reducing patient discomfort and improving clinical throughput. In wireless communication, CS-based methods have enhanced channel estimation, spectrum sensing, and data recovery under resource-constrained environments. Remote sensing, radar imaging, Internet-of-Things (IoT) sensing, and machine learning pipelines have also benefited significantly from sparse reconstruction techniques and efficient sensing matrix designs.

Given the theoretical depth and practical relevance of CS, ongoing research continues to expand its capabilities, addressing challenges such as noise robustness, algorithmic complexity, hardware realizations, and large-scale sparse optimization. This paper provides a comprehensive survey of the foundational principles of compressive sensing, major reconstruction algorithms, sensing matrix designs, and their real-world applications. By synthesizing current research trends and methodological advancements, the study aims to offer valuable insights for researchers, engineers, and practitioners seeking to develop or implement CS-based systems.

2. Related Work

Research on Compressive Sensing (CS) has grown rapidly since its foundational theories were introduced in the mid-2000s. The seminal contributions of Donoho (2006) and Candès, Romberg, and Tao (2006–2008) established the mathematical basis for sparse signal recovery using ℓ_1 -norm minimization [1,2]. Their works demonstrated that signals possessing sparse representations could be reconstructed accurately from a small number of non-adaptive linear measurements, provided that the sensing matrix satisfies the Restricted Isometry Property (RIP)[3]. These theoretical results sparked a broad wave of research aimed at improving reconstruction performance, designing efficient sensing matrices, and expanding CS into practical engineering applications.

Following these foundational studies, considerable effort has been devoted to the development of algorithmic strategies for sparse recovery [2]. Early optimization-based approaches such as Basis Pursuit (BP) and LASSO offered strong theoretical guarantees but were computationally expensive for large-scale systems. To address this limitation, researchers proposed a range of greedy algorithms, including Orthogonal Matching Pursuit (OMP), Stagewise OMP, and Compressive Sampling Matching Pursuit (CoSaMP), each offering a balance between computational efficiency and reconstruction accuracy [3]. Parallel advancements in iterative thresholding and proximal gradient methods further improved scalability, enabling CS to be applied in real-time or resource-constrained environments. In parallel, the design of sensing matrices[5,6] has emerged as a major research direction[4-6]. Early studies focused on random Gaussian and Bernoulli matrices due to their strong RIP compliance and ease of theoretical analysis. However, real-world systems demanded more structured and hardware-friendly measurement strategies. This led to extensive

research on structured matrices, including partial Fourier matrices, Toeplitz matrices, circulant matrices, and those optimized for optical and wireless system architectures. Such designs enabled CS to transition from theoretical constructs to practical implementations.

A substantial body of literature has also explored the application domains of CS. In medical imaging, particularly Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), CS has significantly reduced scan times by acquiring fewer k-space samples while maintaining diagnostic image quality. Researchers such as Lustig et al. demonstrated the viability of CS-MRI, leading to widespread clinical adoption. In wireless communications, CS has been employed for spectrum sensing, channel estimation, and massive MIMO signal recovery, enabling efficient utilization of scarce spectral resources[3,4]]. Remote sensing and radar imaging have similarly benefited from CS techniques, which reduce acquisition bandwidth and computational overhead. Additionally, CS has been integrated into Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices, enabling low-power sensing architectures that rely on sparse data acquisition.

Recent works have expanded CS to intersect with machine learning, deep neural networks, and data-driven sparse models[7,8]. Hybrid frameworks combining CS theory with learned priors or neural reconstruction networks have demonstrated improved performance in imaging and communication systems. These advancements indicate a clear trend toward more adaptive, intelligent, and application-aware CS methods.

Overall, the existing literature highlights a rich and diverse evolution of compressive sensing—from its theoretical origins to its widespread adoption in practical engineering systems. This survey builds upon these prior contributions by synthesizing key theoretical developments, algorithmic advancements, and emerging application areas, offering a unified perspective on the current state and future direction of CS research.

3. Objective

The primary objective of this survey is to provide a comprehensive and structured understanding of the principles, methodologies, and practical relevance of Compressive Sensing (CS). This paper aims to bridge the gap between theoretical foundations and real-world implementations by examining how CS leverages signal sparsity to enable efficient acquisition and reconstruction from limited measurements. More specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. **To explain the fundamental theory behind Compressive Sensing**, including sparse representation, the Restricted Isometry Property (RIP), incoherence, and the mathematical models that govern CS-based signal acquisition. This includes describing how CS challenges the traditional Nyquist–Shannon sampling requirement and why sparsity plays a key role in sub-Nyquist sampling.
2. **To explore the wide range of reconstruction algorithms** used in CS, such as Basis Pursuit (BP), Orthogonal Matching Pursuit (OMP), Compressive Sampling Matching Pursuit (CoSaMP), Iterative Thresholding methods, and regularization-based approaches. The objective is to analyze how these algorithms differ in complexity, accuracy, robustness to noise, and suitability for various applications.
3. **To examine different sensing matrix designs**, including random matrices (Gaussian, Bernoulli), structured matrices (partial Fourier, Toeplitz, circulant), and hardware-friendly sensing strategies. This involves studying how matrix properties affect signal recovery quality, computational efficiency, and feasibility of implementation in practical systems.

4. **To evaluate the performance and limitations of CS frameworks**, considering factors such as sparsity level, measurement noise, sampling strategies, computational load, and scalability. The goal is to present a balanced view of the strengths and challenges associated with CS in real applications.
5. **To review major real-world applications of CS**, such as medical imaging (especially MRI), wireless communication, remote sensing, radar imaging, IoT-based low-power sensors, and machine learning pipelines. This objective highlights how CS contributes to reduced acquisition time, bandwidth efficiency, energy savings, and improved system performance.
6. **To identify emerging trends and future research directions** in CS, including data-driven sensing, deep learning-assisted reconstruction, adaptive measurement models, and hardware optimizations. The goal is to understand how the field is evolving and what advancements are expected in the coming years.

4. Methodology

The methodology of Compressive Sensing (CS) is built upon three essential pillars: sparse representation, compressed measurement acquisition, and signal reconstruction using optimization techniques. Together, these stages define how CS enables accurate signal recovery from far fewer samples than traditional sampling methods such as the Nyquist–Shannon criterion.

4.1 Sparse Representation

Sparse representation forms the foundational concept of compressive sensing. A signal is considered sparse if it contains only a small number of significant coefficients in some transform domain, even if it appears dense in the time or spatial domain[5-7]. Many natural signals, including images, speech, biomedical signals, and communication waveforms, inherently exhibit sparsity or can be transformed into a sparse domain.

Let a signal be $x \in R^N$ represented in terms of a basis or dictionary Ψ :

$$x = \Psi s$$

where:

- $\Psi \in R^{N \times N}$ is an orthonormal basis or overcomplete dictionary (e.g., Wavelet, Fourier, DCT),
- $s \in R^N$ is a sparse vector, containing only $k \ll N$ non-zero entries.

This implies that although the original signal may contain N samples, its essential information is captured by only k values[8]. Sparsity enables efficient compression, reducing storage and transmission requirements even before measurement takes place. To ensure robust recovery, the transform matrix Ψ should promote sparsity while maintaining low coherence with the sensing matrix used during measurement.

4.2 Measurement Process

Traditional sampling methods acquire data at uniform intervals, resulting in large sets of raw samples[9]. In contrast, CS acquires compressed measurements, significantly reducing the number of required samples while still preserving the signal's critical information. The measurement process is defined as:

$$y = \phi x$$

Substituting the sparse representation:

$$Y = \Phi \Psi s = \Theta s$$

where:

- $y \in R^M$ is the measurement vector,
- $\Phi \in R^{M \times N}$ is the sensing matrix,
- $\Theta = \Phi \Psi$ is the effective measurement matrix,
- $M \ll N$, meaning CS collects far fewer measurements compared to conventional sampling.

4.2.1 Properties of the Sensing Matrix

For accurate reconstruction, Φ must satisfy certain mathematical properties:

1. Restricted Isometry Property (RIP)

A matrix satisfies RIP of order k if it approximately preserves the Euclidean length of all k -sparse vectors:

$$(1 - \delta_k) \|s\|_2^2 \leq \|\Theta s\|_2^2 \leq (1 + \delta_k) \|s\|_2^2$$

where δ_k is the isometric constant.

2. Incoherence

The sensing matrix Φ and sparsifying basis Ψ must be incoherent, meaning their correlation is minimal. Low coherence helps ensure that sparse elements are distinguishable in the measurement domain.

Common Sensing Matrices

- Random Gaussian matrices
- Random Bernoulli (± 1) matrices
- Partial Fourier matrices
- Toeplitz and circulant structured matrices (hardware-friendly)

These matrices provide desirable RIP and incoherence properties, making them suitable for CS applications across imaging, radar, communications, and biomedical systems.

4.3 Reconstruction

The recovery stage aims to estimate the sparse coefficient vector s from the compressed measurements y . Since the system:

$Y = \Theta s$ is underdetermined (more unknowns than equations), direct recovery is impossible without additional constraints[10]. CS resolves this by exploiting sparsity.

4.3.1 Sparse Recovery Formulation

The ideal objective is:

$$\min \|s\|_0 \text{ subject to } y = \Theta s$$

However, solving this l_0 -minimization problem is NP-hard. Therefore, it is replaced with its convex relaxation:

$$\min \|s\|_1 \text{ subject to } y = \Theta s$$

This basis pursuit (BP) problem can be solved using convex optimization algorithms. For noisy measurements, the recovery problem is modified as:

$$\min \|s\|_1 \text{ subject to } \|y - \Theta s\|_2 \leq \varepsilon$$

where ε represents the noise tolerance.

4.3.2 Reconstruction Algorithms

Several algorithmic families are used for sparse recovery[10-12]:

a) Convex Optimization Methods

These solve the l_1 -minimization problem with high accuracy but higher computational cost.

- Basis Pursuit (BP)
- Basis Pursuit Denoising (BPDN)
- LASSO (Least Absolute Shrinkage and Selection Operator)

b) Greedy Algorithms

Greedy algorithms provide faster reconstruction by iteratively selecting the best matching atoms.

- Orthogonal Matching Pursuit (OMP)
- Stagewise OMP (StOMP)
- Compressive Sampling Matching Pursuit (CoSaMP)

These methods are computationally efficient and suitable for real-time applications.

c) Iterative Thresholding Methods

These algorithms update the estimate by applying thresholding rules.

- Iterative Soft Thresholding Algorithm (ISTA)
- Fast ISTA (FISTA)
- Hard Thresholding Pursuit (HTP)

They are simple to implement and suitable for large-scale problems.

d) Machine Learning–Based Methods

Recent approaches use deep learning for faster and more accurate reconstruction.

- Learned ISTA (LISTA)
- Variational Autoencoders (VAE)-based CS
- Deep unrolled networks

These methods learn priors from data and achieve superior reconstruction quality in imaging and communication systems.

5. Performance Evaluation

The performance of a Compressive Sensing (CS) system is determined by several interdependent factors that influence the accuracy, robustness, and feasibility of reconstructing signals from reduced measurements. The most significant factors include the sparsity level of the signal, the noise conditions under which measurements are acquired, the characteristics of the sensing matrix, and the computational efficiency of the reconstruction algorithm. A detailed explanation of these factors is provided below.

5.1. Sparsity Level

The degree of sparsity within the signal plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of compressive sensing. Sparsity refers to the proportion of meaningful or non-zero components in a transformed representation of the signal. Signals that exhibit a high level of sparsity—meaning they contain only a few dominant coefficients—are much easier to reconstruct accurately from a limited number of measurements. In contrast, signals with lower sparsity require more measurements and are more challenging to recover. Therefore, the inherent compressibility of a signal directly influences the probability of successful reconstruction and overall system efficiency.

5.2. Noise Levels

In practical environments, measurements are often affected by noise arising from sensor imperfections, communication channels, and external disturbances. Noise distorts the acquired measurements, making it more difficult to accurately recover the original signal. The level of noise present during the acquisition phase thus has a significant impact on reconstruction quality. Consequently, the robustness of the chosen reconstruction algorithm to noise becomes a critical factor in real-world applications.

5.3. Sensing Matrix Properties

The sensing matrix is a fundamental component of the compressive sensing framework, as it defines how the original signal is sampled and transformed into a reduced set of measurements. The effectiveness of reconstruction largely depends on the ability of the sensing matrix to preserve essential information about the signal during this compression process. Well-designed sensing matrices ensure that different sparse signals produce distinct measurement patterns, leading to consistent and stable reconstruction. Matrices that exhibit desirable structural properties, such as randomness or low correlation with the sparsifying basis, tend to provide better performance. Thus, the choice and design of the sensing matrix greatly influence the accuracy, stability, and practical feasibility of the entire system.

5.4. Algorithm Complexity

The reconstruction algorithm used to recover the original signal from compressed measurements must balance accuracy with computational efficiency. Some algorithms deliver highly accurate results but require substantial computational resources and processing time, making them unsuitable for real-time or embedded applications. Others prioritize speed and simplicity, enabling quick reconstruction at the cost of reduced precision. The complexity of the algorithm therefore determines whether compressive sensing can be implemented in environments such as real-time imaging systems, portable devices, or low-power sensor networks. Selecting an appropriate algorithm involves evaluating the trade-offs between accuracy, speed, memory requirements, and the intended application context.

6. Comparison Table

Algorithm	Computational Complexity	Noise Robustness	Reconstruction Accuracy	Strengths	Limitations	Suitable Applications
Basis Pursuit (BP)	High – Solving ℓ_1 -minimization requires intensive convex optimization, especially for large-scale signals.	High – Strong resistance to noise due to global optimization framework.	Excellent – Provides the most accurate sparse recovery among classical CS algorithms.	Best theoretical guarantees, highly stable reconstruction, ideal for under-sampled data.	Very slow for real-time systems; requires significant memory and computation.	Medical imaging (MRI), offline processing, high-precision scientific applications.

Orthogonal Matching Pursuit (OMP)	Moderate Greedy iterative selection reduces computation significantly.	Moderate Performance declines under high noise; sensitive to incorrect atom selection.	Good – Effective for moderately sparse signals.	Fast, simple implementation, suitable for hardware and real-time systems.	Less accurate than BP; can misidentify support in noisy environments.	Wireless communication, channel estimation, radar, real-time embedded systems.
CoSaMP	Moderate Selects multiple components per iteration; more efficient than BP but heavier than OMP.	High Improved noise stability due to iterative refinement.	Very Good Achieves near-BP accuracy with lower complexity.	Balanced tradeoff between speed and accuracy, better error control.	More complex than OMP; may require careful parameter tuning.	Noisy environments, compressed imaging, sensor networks, signal monitoring.
Iterative Soft Thresholding (IST)	Low Lightweight iterative updates ideal for large-scale problems.	Moderate Reasonably stable but influenced by step size and thresholding choices.	Good – Reliable but not as accurate as BP or CoSaMP.	Highly scalable, low memory requirement, easy to implement.	Slower convergence; reduced accuracy for highly sparse signals.	IoT devices, real-time sensing, large-scale optimization, embedded systems.

Table 6.1 Comparison table of Reconstructive Algorithms

7. Applications

Compressive Sensing (CS) has evolved into a powerful framework with wide-ranging applications across engineering, healthcare, communication, and environmental monitoring. Its ability to acquire and reconstruct signals from significantly fewer measurements has made it particularly valuable in systems where data acquisition is expensive, time-consuming, or energy-limited. The following sections highlight major application areas where CS has demonstrated substantial impact.

7.1 Medical Imaging

One of the most transformative applications of compressive sensing is in medical imaging, especially Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Traditional MRI scans are slow because they require extensive sampling of the spatial frequency domain[13,14]. CS allows for accelerated imaging by reducing the number of acquired

measurements while maintaining high image quality.

Benefits include:

- Shorter scan times, reducing patient discomfort
- Improved throughput for hospitals and clinics
- Enhanced imaging for dynamic processes such as cardiac MRI
- Reduced motion artifacts caused by patient movement

CS has also been explored in computed tomography (CT), positron emission tomography (PET), and optical coherence tomography (OCT), further demonstrating its versatility across medical imaging modalities.

7.2 Wireless Communication

Compressive sensing has become a valuable tool in modern wireless communication systems, particularly with the increasing demand for high-speed data and efficient spectrum usage[15,16]. CS techniques enhance the performance of various communication processes, including:

- **Spectrum sensing** in cognitive radio networks, enabling the detection of unused frequency bands
- **Channel estimation** in massive MIMO systems, reducing pilot overhead
- **Sparse channel recovery** in millimeter-wave and 5G networks
- **Data compression** for low-power wireless sensor nodes

By exploiting the sparsity found in wireless channels and spectral occupancy patterns, CS enables more efficient resource allocation and improved network performance.

7.3 Image and Video Compression

Compressive sensing offers significant advantages in image and video processing, particularly in applications where high-resolution acquisition is required with minimal bandwidth or storage capacity[17,18].

Examples include:

- Single-pixel cameras, where CS enables image reconstruction using only one photodetector
- Video surveillance systems requiring real-time compression
- Remote imaging in drones and satellites where bandwidth is limited
- High-definition video streaming with reduced bit rates

The ability to directly acquire compressed measurements reduces the need for traditional compression techniques, simplifying hardware design.

7.4 Radar and Remote Sensing

Radar systems, including synthetic aperture radar (SAR) and ground-penetrating radar, often deal with large-scale data acquisition[19]. CS helps reduce the number of required measurements without compromising resolution.

Key advantages:

- Faster scanning and imaging in SAR systems
- Reduced energy consumption for airborne and satellite-based radars
- Efficient detection of targets in noisy or cluttered environments
- Enhanced reconstruction of sparse scenes such as urban and terrain structures

Remote sensing applications in environmental monitoring and geological exploration also benefit from CS-

enhanced data acquisition.

7.5 Internet of Things (IoT) and Wireless Sensor Networks

IoT devices often operate under strict energy and bandwidth constraints. Compressive sensing allows sensors to acquire only essential information, significantly reducing power consumption and data transmission load[19].

Applications include:

- Environmental monitoring (temperature, humidity, pollution tracking)
- Structural health monitoring in bridges and buildings
- Smart agriculture and irrigation control
- Wearable health devices with low-power sensing

By minimizing data acquisition and communication overhead, CS extends the battery life of IoT devices and enhances system scalability.

7.6 Machine Learning and Data Analytics

CS techniques have recently found applications in machine learning, especially in areas involving high-dimensional data or sparse feature representations[20].

Examples include:

- Dimensionality reduction for large datasets
- Sparse coding and dictionary learning
- Reconstruction of incomplete training samples
- Acceleration of deep learning models through compressed sensing layers

These applications demonstrate how CS contributes to more efficient learning pipelines and improved computational performance.

7.7 Astronomy and Scientific Imaging

Astronomical imaging often involves capturing extremely faint signals from distant celestial objects. Compressive sensing improves the efficiency of such systems by reducing the required number of samples while maintaining sensitivity[20].

Applications include:

- Radio astronomy and telescope imaging
- Hyperspectral imaging for planetary exploration
- Reconstruction of sparse astronomical events such as supernova signatures

The reduced sampling burden helps minimize exposure times and improve the quality of scientific observations.

7.8 Audio and Speech Processing

In audio applications, many signals exhibit sparsity in the frequency or wavelet domains[20]. CS enables:

- Compressed representation of speech for mobile communication
- Audio signal recovery in noisy environments
- Sparse coding for music synthesis
- Low-bitrate transmission for embedded systems

These applications reduce storage requirements and enhance processing efficiency.

8. Conclusions

Compressive Sensing has emerged as a transformative approach to signal acquisition, challenging traditional sampling paradigms through its exploitation of sparsity and efficient reconstruction mechanisms. Its strong theoretical foundation, coupled with advancing optimization and machine learning frameworks, has enabled successful deployment across imaging, communications, and remote sensing. As research continues to evolve, CS is expected to play a vital role in next-generation intelligent systems, particularly those requiring high efficiency, low latency, and reduced data redundancy.

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