BOUNDS ON SETS WITH FEW DISTANCES

ALEXANDER BARG∗ AND OLEG R. MUSIN†

ABSTRACT. We derive a new estimate of the size of finite sets of points in metric spaces with few distances. The following applications are considered:

• we improve the Ray-Chaudhuri–Wilson bound of the size of uniform intersecting families of subsets;
• we refine the bound of Delsarte-Goethals-Seidel on the maximum size of spherical sets with few distances;
• we prove a new bound on codes with few distances in the Hamming space, improving an earlier result of Delsarte.

We also find the size of maximal binary codes and maximal constant-weight codes of small length with 2 and 3 distances.

1. INTRODUCTION

We consider finite collections of points in a metric space $X$ with distance function $d$. Following the terminology of coding theory we call such collections codes. We say that $C \subset X$ is an $s$-code if the set of distances $d(x_1, x_2)$ between any two distinct points of $C$ has size $s$. The subject of this paper is to estimate the size (the number of points) of $s$-codes.

The study of $s$-codes in $\mathbb{R}^n$ was initiated by Einhorn and Schoenberg [8]. Delsarte [4, 5] obtained several classical results for $s$-codes in finite spaces, while for the case of the unit sphere $S^{n-1} \subset \mathbb{R}^n$ the problem of bounding the size of $s$-codes was first addressed by Delsarte, Goethals, and Seidel in [6]. Codes with few distances in finite spaces are closely related to the well-known combinatorial problem of bounding the size of families of sets with restricted intersections. Results of this kind are often called intersection theorems in combinatorial literature. They have been a subject of extensive studies beginning with the work of Ray-Chaudhuri and Wilson [14]. Their proofs are mostly based on two general methods, namely, the method of linearly independent polynomials, see e.g., Alon et al. [1], Blokhuis [3], Babai et al. [2], and on Delsarte’s linear programming method [5, 6].

Recently an improvement of the Delsarte-Goethals-Seidel bound on spherical $s$-codes for the case $s = 2$ was obtained in second author’s paper [12]. Following this result, Nozaki [13] proved a general bound on the size of spherical $s$-codes. We continue this line of work, employing Delsarte’s ideas to derive a general improvement of the bound [6] for every even $s$ as well as new estimates of the size of $s$-codes over a finite alphabet. The latter result also enables us to tighten the Ray-Chaudhuri–Wilson bound on the size of uniform $s$-intersecting families. Of course, both these bounds are known to be tight in general, so our improvements are only valid under some assumptions on the size of the intersections.
2. A BOUND ON s-CODES

In this section we present a general bound on the size of s-codes (Theorem 4). The bound is most conveniently described in the context of harmonic analysis. This approach to packings of metric spaces was introduced in [4, 6] for finite spaces known as association schemes and the sphere $S^{n-1}$ respectively. It was generalized in [10] to all distance transitive compact metric spaces. Under this approach the space $X$ is viewed as a homogeneous space of its isometry group $G$. The space $X$ is called distance transitive if $G$ acts doubly transitively on ordered pairs of points of $X$ at a given distance. Denote by $d\alpha$ the normalized $G$-invariant measure on $X$. The space $L^2(X, d\alpha)$ of square-integrable functions on $X$ decomposes into a finite or countably infinite direct sum of pairwise orthogonal finite-dimensional linear spaces $V_i$ of functions called (generalized) spherical harmonics. Let us fix a basis of spherical harmonics $(\phi_{i,1}, \ldots, \phi_{i,h_i})$ in the space $V_i$, where $h_i = \dim V_i$. Since $X$ is distance transitive, the function

$$p_i(x, y) = \sum_{i=1}^{h_i} \phi_{i,j}(x) \overline{\phi_{i,j}(y)}$$

depends only on the distance $d(x, y)$. This expression is called the addition formula in the theory of special functions, and it is only this formula that we need in later derivations. We assume that $p_0 \equiv 1$.

In the cases of interest to us, the functions $p_i$ form a family of classical orthogonal polynomials. Namely, consider the linear functional $\mathcal{L}(f) = \int f(x) d\mu(x)$, where $d\mu$ is the measure induced by $d\alpha$ on the set of possible values of the distance on $X$. Then $\mathcal{L}(p_ip_j) = 0$ for $i \neq j$, and

$$r_i \mathcal{L}(p_i^2) = 1, \quad \text{where } r_i = \frac{1}{h_i}.$$ 

As is well known, the polynomials $p_i$ satisfy a three-term recurrence of the form

$$xp_i = a_i p_{i+1} + b_i p_i + c_i p_{i-1},$$

where the numbers $a_i, b_i, c_i$ can be easily computed. Given a polynomial $f(x)$ of degree $d$ we can compute its Fourier coefficients in the basis $\{p_i\}$ in a usual way, namely,

$$f_i = r_i \mathcal{L}(f p_i) \quad (0 \leq i \leq d).$$

Our primary examples will be the Hamming space $H_q^n = (Z_q)^n$ where $Z_q$ is the set of integers mod $q$, the binary Johnson space $J^{n,w}$ formed by the $n$-dimensional binary vectors with $w$ ones, $w \leq n/2$, and the sphere $S^{n-1}$. The distance in $H_q^n$ is defined as $d_H(x_1, x_2) = |\{i : x_{1i} \neq x_{2i}\}|$, the distance in $J^{n,w}$ is given by $d_J(x_1, x_2) = \sqrt{2d_H(x_1, x_2)}$, and the distance on $S^{n-1}$ is measured as the inner product between the vectors. To illustrate the above ideas, let us consider the Hamming case $X = H_q^n$. A typical isometry of $X$ is a permutation of coordinates followed by a permutation of symbols in every coordinate, i.e., $G = S_n \ltimes (Z_q)^n$. An orthogonal basis of the space $V_i$ is formed of functions $\phi_{i,j}(x) = e^{2\pi i (\alpha_1 x_{1i} + \cdots + \alpha_i x_{ii})}$, where $1 \leq l_1 < \cdots < l_i \leq n$ is the $j$th $i$-subset of $[n]$ (in an arbitrary fixed numbering of such subsets) and $\alpha_m \in Z_q \setminus \{0\}$, $m = 1, \ldots, i$. We have $h_i = \binom{n}{i}(q-1)^i$. Then $p_i$ is a Krawtchouk polynomial $K_i(x)$ of degree $i$ whose explicit form can be found from (1). We have

$$K_i(x) = \sum_{j=0}^{i} (-1)^j \binom{x}{j} \binom{n-x}{i-j} (q-1)^{i-j},$$

for $0 \leq x \leq n$. This formula is the $q$-analog of the well-known relation for the Krawtchouk polynomials (2).
The Hahn polynomial of degree 

In particular, 

\( K_i(0) = \binom{n}{i}(q - 1)^i \),  

\( K_0(x) = 1, \ K_1(x) = n(q - 1) - qx, \quad K_2(x) = \frac{1}{2}q(2q^2 - 2q - 4n + 2)x + (q - 1)^2n(n - 1) \).

For \( X = J^{n,w} \) the polynomials \( p_i \) form a certain family of discrete Hahn polynomials \( \mathbb{H} \). The Hahn polynomial of degree \( i \) is given by

\[
Q_i(x) = \binom{n}{i} - \binom{n}{i-1} \sum_{j=0}^{i} (-1)^j \binom{i}{j} \binom{n+1}{j} \binom{n-j}{j} x^j.
\]

Finally, for \( S^{n-1} \) the functions \( p_s \) are given by the Gegenbauer polynomials \( G_s(t) \). The explicit form and properties of these polynomials are well known. All the information about them that we need is listed in Table 1 together with the corresponding properties of \( K_i \) and \( Q_i \).

| \( X \) | \( H_q^n \), \( q \geq 2 \) | \( J^{n,w} \) | \( S^{n-1} \) |
|---|---|---|---|
| \( d\mu \) | \( q^{-n} \binom{n}{i}(q - 1)^i \) | \( \frac{\binom{n}{i}}{2} \) | \( \frac{\Gamma(n/2)}{2^nn^{n/2}} (1 - x^2)^{(n-3)/2} dx \) |
| \( h_i \) | \( \binom{n}{i}(q - 1)^i \) | \( \binom{n}{i} - \binom{n}{i-1} \) | \( \binom{n}{i} - \binom{n}{i-1} \) |
| \( a_i \) | \( \frac{i+1}{q} \) | \( \frac{(i+1)(w-i)(n-w-i)}{(n-2i-1)(n-2i)} \) | \( \frac{(n+i)(n-i+1)}{(n-2i+2)(n-2i+3)} \) |
| \( b_i \) | \( \frac{i(q-1)(n-i)}{q} \) | \( \frac{(n-2i)(n-2i+2)}{(n-2i+1)(n-2i+3)} \) | \( 0 \) |
| \( c_i \) | \( \frac{q}{(n-i+1)(q-1)} \) | \( \frac{(w-i+1)(n-w+1)}{(n-2i+1)(n-2i+3)} \) | \( \frac{1}{n-2i+1} \) |

**TABLE 1. Parameters of the metric spaces**

In particular, \( K_i(0) = \binom{n}{i}(q - 1)^i \),

\[
K_0(x) = 1, \ K_1(x) = n(q - 1) - qx, \quad K_2(x) = \frac{1}{2}q(2q^2 - 2q - 4n + 2)x + (q - 1)^2n(n - 1) \).

For \( X = J^{n,w} \) the polynomials \( p_i \) form a certain family of discrete Hahn polynomials \( \mathbb{H} \). The Hahn polynomial of degree \( i \) is given by

\[
Q_i(x) = \binom{n}{i} - \binom{n}{i-1} \sum_{j=0}^{i} (-1)^j \binom{i}{j} \binom{n+1}{j} \binom{n-j}{j} x^j.
\]

Finally, for \( S^{n-1} \) the functions \( p_s \) are given by the Gegenbauer polynomials \( G_s(t) \). The explicit form and properties of these polynomials are well known. All the information about them that we need is listed in Table 1 together with the corresponding properties of \( K_i \) and \( Q_i \).

The following bound on \( s \)-codes is well known. It was proved by Delsarte \cite{4, 5} for codes in \( Q \)-polynomial association schemes which includes \( H_q^n \) and \( J^{n,w} \), and by Delsarte et al. \cite{6} for codes in \( S^{n-1} \).

**Theorem 1.** Let \( C \) be an \( s \)-code in a compact distance-transitive space \( X \). Then

\[
|C| \leq h_0 + h_1 + \cdots + h_s.
\]

For \( X = S^{n-1} \) and \( s = 2 \) this theorem gives the bound \( |C| \leq \frac{1}{2}n(n+3) \). This estimate was recently improved in \cite{12} where it was shown that if the inner products between distinct code words take values \( t_1, t_2 \), and \( t_1 + t_2 \geq 0 \), then \( |C| \leq \frac{1}{2}n(n+1) \). The proof relies on the method of linearly independent polynomials. Subsequently, H. Nozaki \cite{13} proved a general bound on spherical \( s \)-codes. His proof builds upon Delsarte’s ideas and is included here for completeness.

**Theorem 2.** (Nozaki \cite{13}) Let \( C \subset X \) be an \( s \)-code with distances \( d_1, \ldots, d_s \). Consider the polynomial \( f(x) = \prod_{i=1}^{s} (d_i - x) \) and suppose that its expansion in the basis \( \{ p_i \} \) has the form \( f(x) = \sum_{i} f_i p_i(x) \). Then

\[
|C| \leq \sum_{i:j \neq 0} h_i.
\]

**Proof.** Let \( |C| = M \) and consider the \( M \times h_1 \) matrix \( H_i \) given by \( (H_i)_{s,j} = \phi_{i,j}(x_i) \), where \( i = 1 \ldots, M; j = 1 \ldots, h_i \). Let \( \mathcal{H} = (H_0, H_1, \ldots, H_s) \) and consider the \( M \times M \)
matrix $A = \mathcal{H} F \mathcal{H}^t$ where
\[ F = f_0 I_1 \oplus f_1 I_{h_1} \oplus \cdots \oplus f_s I_{h_s}, \]
is a direct sum. By (1) the general entry of $A$ equals $A_{x,y} = f(d(x,y))$, which implies that $A = f(0)I_M$. Thus $A$ is positive definite. Also $M = \text{rank}(A) \leq \text{rank}(\mathcal{H})$, and so the rows $z_i, i = 1, \ldots, M$ of $\mathcal{H}$ are linearly independent. Thus we have found $M$ linearly independent vectors $z_i$ that lie in the positive subspace of the quadratic form $F$. Therefore, their number cannot exceed the number of positive eigenvalues of $F$ (counted with multiplicities). \hfill \Box

Remark. Without the last observation this argument gives $5$, and it is how this bound was proved by Delsarte in [4, Theorem 5.20], [5].

To apply this theorem let us compute some coefficients of the polynomial $f(x)$.

**Lemma 3.** Let $f(x) = \prod_{i=1}^s (d_i - x) = \sum_{i=0}^s f_i p_i(x)$. Then
\[ f_s = (-1)^s r_s c_1 c_2 \ldots c_s \quad (s \geq 1), \]
\[ f_{s-1} = (-1)^s r_{s-1} c_1 \ldots c_{s-1} \sum_{j=1}^s (b_j - d_j) \quad (s \geq 2). \]

**Proof.** We have
\[ f(x) = (-1)^s (x^s - (d_1 + \cdots + d_s) x^{s-1}) + \ldots. \]

In the following we use the obvious relation $\mathcal{L}(x^m p_k) = 0$ valid for all $0 \leq m < k$ and relations (2) and (3). We compute
\[ (-1)^s f_s = r_s \mathcal{L}(x^s p_s) = r_s \mathcal{L}(x^{s-1}(a_s p_{s+1} + b_s p_s + c_s p_{s-1})) = r_s c_s \mathcal{L}(x^{s-1} p_{s-1}) = \cdots = r_s c_1 c_2 \ldots c_s. \]

Next we claim that
\[ \mathcal{L}(x^s p_{s-1}) = c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-1}(b_0 + b_1 + \cdots + b_{s-1}), \quad s \geq 2. \]

Indeed, $\mathcal{L}(x^2 p_1) = \mathcal{L}(x(b_1 p_1 + c_1)) = b_1 c_1 + b_0 c_1$. Now let us assume that
\[ \mathcal{L}(x^{s-1} p_{s-2}) = c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-2}(b_0 + b_1 + \cdots + b_{s-2}). \]

Then
\[ \mathcal{L}(x^s p_{s-1}) = \mathcal{L}(x^{s-1}(b_{s-1} p_{s-1} + c_{s-1} p_{s-2})) = b_{s-1} c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-1} + c_{s-1}(c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-2}(b_0 + b_1 + \cdots + b_{s-2})) \]
as was to be proved. Next,
\[ f_{s-1} = r_{s-1} \mathcal{L}((-1)^s (x^s - (d_1 + \cdots + d_s) x^{s-1}) p_{s-1}) = (-1)^s r_{s-1} (c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-1}(b_0 + b_1 + \cdots + b_{s-1}) - (d_1 + \cdots + d_s) c_1 \ldots c_{s-1}) = (-1)^s r_{s-1} (c_1 c_2 \ldots c_{s-1}(b_0 + b_1 + \cdots + b_{s-1}) - (d_1 + \cdots + d_s)). \]

The next theorem provides an improvement of the general bound $5$. It will be used in subsequent sections to establish the main results of this paper.
Theorem 4. Let $C$ be a code in a compact distance-transitive space $X$ with distances $d_1, \ldots, d_s$. Let the numbers $b_i, c_i, i \geq 0$ be defined by (2) and let
\[ D = b_0 + \cdots + b_{s-1} - d_1 - \cdots - d_s. \]
(a) Suppose that $c_i < 0$, $i = 1, 2, \ldots$ and $D > 0$. Then
\[ |C| \leq h_0 + h_1 + \cdots + h_{s-2} + h_s. \]
(b) Suppose that $c_i > 0$, $i = 1, 2, \ldots$. Then
\[ |C| \leq \begin{cases} h_0 + h_1 + \cdots + h_{s-2} & s \equiv 1 \mod 2 \text{ and } D > 0 \\ h_0 + h_1 + \cdots + h_{s-1} & s \equiv 1 \mod 2 \text{ and } D < 0 \\ h_0 + h_1 + \cdots + h_{s-2} + h_s & s \equiv 0 \mod 2 \text{ and } D < 0. \end{cases} \]

Proof. The proof is completed by the analysis of the signs of $f_s$ and $f_{s-1}$ for the cases specified in the theorem. \qed

Remark. It is possible to evaluate other coefficients of the polynomial $f(x)$ in Lemma 3 which will lead to further refinements of bound (5). However, the conditions on the distances will involve higher-degree symmetric functions of them, which limits somewhat their usefulness.

In the following sections we will use another general bound on codes known as Del-sarte’s “linear programming” bound [4]. For $s$-codes this bound gives

Theorem 5. (Delsarte) Let $C \subset X$ be an $s$-code with distances $d_1, \ldots, d_s$. Then
\[ |C| \leq \max \{1 + \alpha_1 + \cdots + \alpha_s : \sum_{i=1}^{s} \alpha_i p_k(d_i) \geq -p_k(\tau_0), k \geq 0; \alpha_i \geq 0, i = 1, \ldots, s\}. \]
Here $\tau_0 = 0$ for the Hamming and Johnson spaces and $1$ for the sphere $S^{n-1}$.

3. CONSTANT WEIGHT CODES AND INTERSECTING FAMILIES

Call a family $\mathcal{F} = \{F_1, F_2, \ldots\}$ of subsets of an $n$-element set $w$-uniform if $|F_i| = w$, $i = 1, 2, \ldots$, and call it $s$-intersecting if $\forall F_i, F_j |F_i \cap F_j| \in \{w, \ell_1, \ldots, \ell_s\}$ for some $\ell_1, \ldots, \ell_s, 0 \leq \ell_i < w$. For two subsets $F_1, F_2$ with $|F_1 \cap F_2| = \ell$ the distance between their indicator vectors $x_1, x_2$ equals $d_J(x_1, x_2) = w - \ell$. Thus, the indicator vectors of $\mathcal{F}$ form an $s$-code $C$ in $J^{n,w}$.

Theorem 6. (Ray-Chaudhuri–Wilson [14]) Let $\mathcal{F}$ be a $w$-uniform $s$-intersecting family. Then
\[ |\mathcal{F}| \leq \binom{n}{s}. \]

Proof. Follows from (5) and Table II \qed

Deza, Erdős, and Frankl [7] showed that for all $n$ greater than some $n_0(w)$ this estimate can be improved to
\[ |\mathcal{F}| \leq \prod_{i=1}^{s} \frac{n - \ell_i}{w - \ell_i}. \]
The particular case \( \{ \ell_1, \ldots, \ell_s \} = \{ w - s, w - s + 1, \ldots, w - 1 \} \) corresponds to the celebrated Erdős-Ko-Rado theorem \([9]\). According to it, if \( n \geq (w - s + 1)(s + 1) \) then
\[
|F| \leq \binom{n - w + s}{s}.
\]

Note also that generally \([6]\) is best possible because the bound is met by \( F = \binom{[n]}{w} \). Several generalizations of Theorem 6 were obtained in \([1, 2, 15]\). We obtain the following general improvement of this theorem.

**Theorem 7.** Let \( F \) be a \( w \)-uniform \( s \)-intersecting family. Suppose that
\[
\ell_1 + \cdots + \ell_s > \frac{s(w^2 - (s - 1)(2w - n/2))}{n - 2(s - 1)}.
\]

Then
\[
|F| \leq \binom{n}{s} - \binom{n}{s - 1} \frac{n - 2s + 3}{n - s + 2}.
\]

**Proof.** The proof will follow from Theorem 4(a). For it to hold, we need that
\[
\sum_{i=1}^{s} d_i = ws - \sum_{i=1}^{s} \ell_i < \sum_{i=0}^{s-1} b_i.
\]

Now take the value of \( b_i \) from Table I and use induction to show that
\[
\sum_{i=0}^{s-1} \frac{(n + 2)w(n - w) - ni(n - i + 1)}{(n - 2i)(n - 2i + 2)} = \frac{ws(n - w) - \binom{s}{2}n}{n - 2(s - 1)}.
\]

The proof is concluded by substituting this expression in (10).

Let us show that the region of \( \ell_i \)'s defined in (8) is not void. Write this inequality as
\[
\sum \ell_i - ws + \frac{ws(n - w) - \binom{s}{2}n}{n - 2(s - 1)} \geq \sum \ell_i - ws \frac{w}{n} - \frac{\binom{s}{2}}{2}.
\]

If \( w \) is close to \( n/2 \) and the \( \ell_i \)s are large, the right-hand side of the last inequality is positive, and (5) is satisfied. For instance if \( s = 2 \) then the Ray-Chaudhuri-Wilson bound can be tightened for all \( \ell_1 + \ell_2 > \frac{2w(w - 2) + n}{(n - 2)} \). See also the example in the end of this section. The bound (9) is not as good as (7) whenever the latter applies; on the other hand, (9) involves no restrictions on \( n \).

Let us consider in more detail the case of 2- and 3-intersecting families, switching to the language of constant weight codes.

**Corollary 8.** Let \( C \in J^{n,w} \) be a code.

(a) Suppose that the distances between distinct vectors of \( C \) take values \( d_1, d_2 \). If
\[
d_1 + d_2 < \frac{2w(n - w) - n}{n - 2}
\]
then \( |C| \leq \frac{1}{2}(n - 1)(n - 2) \).

(b) Suppose that the distances between distinct vectors in \( C \) take values \( d_3, d_2, d_3 \). If
\[
d_1 + d_2 + d_3 < \frac{3w(n - w) - 3n}{n - 4}
\]
then \( |C| \leq \frac{1}{6}(n^2 - 6n + 11)n \).
An extremal 2-distance code \( C \) for Part (a) of this corollary can be constructed by taking the \( \binom{n-w+2}{2} \) vectors with \( w-2 \) ones in the first coordinates and the remaining \( 2 \) ones anywhere outside them.

To establish the next result we will need the following result of Larman, Rogers, and Seidel \[11\], restated here in the form convenient to us: Suppose that \( C \subset H^*_n \) is a binary code with distances \( d_1 < d_2 \), and \( |C| > 2n + 3 \). Then \( d_1/d_2 = (k-1)/k \) where \( k \) is an integer satisfying \( 2 \leq k \leq 1/2 + \sqrt{n}/2 \). Below we call this relation for the numbers \( d_1, d_2 \) the LRS condition.

**Proposition 9.** (a) For \( 6 \leq n \leq 44 \) and \( 3 \leq w \leq n/2 \) the size of a 2-distance code \( C \subset J^{n,w} \) satisfies \(|C| \leq \frac{1}{2}(n-w+1)(n-w+2)\).

(b) If \( n \) and \( w \) satisfy any of the following conditions:

\[
\begin{align*}
6 \leq n & \leq 8 \quad \text{and} \quad w = 3; \\
9 \leq n & \leq 11 \quad \text{and} \quad 3 \leq w \leq 4; \\
12 \leq n & \leq 14 \quad \text{or} \quad 25 \leq n \leq 34 \quad \text{and} \quad 3 \leq w \leq 5; \\
15 \leq n & \leq 24 \quad \text{or} \quad 35 \leq n \leq 46 \quad \text{and} \quad 3 \leq w \leq 6,
\end{align*}
\]

then the maximum 2-distance code \( C \subset J^{n,w} \) satisfies \(|C| = \frac{1}{2}(n-w+1)(n-w+2)\).

**Proof.** Part (a). If the distances in \( C \) satisfy \[11\], then the upper bound in part (a) follows from the previous corollary. Otherwise we examine every pair of distances \( d_1, d_2 \). If a given pair does not satisfy the LRS condition, then \(|C| \leq 2n + 3 \). If this condition is satisfied, we compute the Delsarte bound of Theorem 5. Together these arguments produced an upper bound \( \binom{n-1}{2} \) on the code size for all the parameters in the statement.

Part (b). For all \( n, w \leq n/2 \) there exists a constant weight 2-distance code of size \( \binom{n-w+2}{2} \). The matching upper estimates are established by computing the Delsarte bound.

As an example of the arguments involved in the proof, let \( C \) be a two-distance code in \( J^{n,w} \) with \( n = 13, w = 5 \). There are 10 possibilities for the distances \( d_1, d_2 \). The LRS condition is fulfilled if \( d_1/d_2 = (k-1)/k, 2 \leq k \leq 3 \). Thus, the pairs \((1, 3), (1, 4), (1, 5), (2, 5), (3, 4), (3, 5), (4, 5)\) do not satisfy it, so for all these cases \(|C| \leq 29 \). Next we compute the Delsarte bound \( D(d_1, d_2) \) for the 3 remaining cases, obtaining \( D(1, 2) = 45, D(2, 3) = 33, D(2, 4) = 27 \). This exhausts all the possible cases, so we conclude that \(|C| \leq 45 \). As mentioned above, the extremal configuration has 45 vectors at distances 1 or 2. This code meets both the Delsarte bound and the Erdős-Ko-Rado bound. This establishes both parts of the last proposition in the case considered.

Likewise, if \( n = 18, w = 8 \), Corollary 8(a) applies whenever \( d_1 + d_2 \leq 8 \). For any such two-distance code we obtain \(|C| \leq 136 \). The remaining possibilities for the distances are covered by the LRS condition or checked by computing the Delsarte bound. This establishes the corresponding case of Part (a) of the proposition.

Generally, the Delsarte bound is better than the other bounds for \( n \) up to about 45 and is rather loose (and difficult to compute) for greater \( n \).

### 4. \( s \)-codes in the Hamming space

Let \( C \subset H^n_q \) be a code in which the distances between distinct codewords are \( d_1, d_2, \ldots, d_s \). Theorem 4 implies the following bound.

**Theorem 10.** Suppose that

\[
d_1 + \cdots + d_s < \frac{s}{q}[(q-1)n - \frac{1}{2}(q-2)(s-1)] \quad (\text{for } q = 2)\]

is satisfied.
Then
\[ |C| \leq 1 + n(q - 1) + \binom{n}{2}(q - 1)^2 + \cdots + \binom{n}{s-2}(q - 1)^{s-2} + \binom{n}{s}(q - 1)^s. \]

This enables us to draw some conclusions for sets of binary vectors with few distances.

**Theorem 11.** (a) Let \( C \) be a binary code in which the distances between distinct codewords are \( d_1, d_2 \). If \( d_1 + d_2 < n \) then \( |C| \leq \frac{1}{2}(n^2 - n + 2) \).

(b) Let \( C \) be a binary code in which the distances between distinct codewords are \( d_1, d_2, d_3 \). If \( d_1 + d_2 + d_3 < \frac{3}{2}n \) then
\[ |C| \leq 1 + n + \binom{n}{3}. \]

If in addition none or two of the three distances \( d_1, d_2, d_3 \) are > \( n/2 \) then
\[ |C| \leq n + \binom{n}{3}. \]

**Proof.** Part (a) follows from the previous theorem.

Part (b). Consider the annihilator polynomial \( f(x) = (d_1 - x)(d_2 - x)(d_3 - x) \) and let \( f_0, \ldots, f_3 \) be its coefficients in the Krawtchouk basis. We know that under the assumption of the theorem, \( f_2 < 0 \). This proves the first claim in part (c). Further, by (3), the constant coefficient equals
\[ f_0 = -\left(\frac{n}{2} - d_1\right)\left(\frac{n}{2} - d_2\right)\left(\frac{n}{2} - d_3\right) + \frac{n}{4}(d_1 + d_2 + d_3) - \frac{3n^2}{8} . \]

If both assumptions in part (b) of the theorem hold then \( f_0 < 0 \). This proves the bound \( |C| \leq n + \binom{n}{3} \). \( \square \)

**Proposition 12.** (a) If \( 6 \leq n \leq 46, 48 \leq n \leq 52, \) or \( n = 54, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 69, 72, \) then the size of a maximal code with 2 distances equals \( \frac{1}{2}(n^2 - n + 2) \).

(b) If \( 8 \leq n \leq 22 \) or \( n = 24 \) then the size of a maximal code with 3 distances equals \( n + \binom{n}{3} \).

(c) If \( 10 \leq n \leq 24 \) then the size of a maximal code with 4 distances equals \( 1 + \binom{n}{2} + \binom{n}{4} \).

**Proof.** Part (a). Observe that the size of the code \( C \) formed of all vectors of weight 2 and the all-zero vector equals \( 1 + \binom{n}{2} \) for all \( n \geq 3 \). It remains to show that even if \( d_1 + d_2 \geq n \), no two-distance code of length \( n \) for each value of \( n \) in the statement can have larger size. To establish this, for each \( n \) we compute the Delsarte bound of Theorem [5] for all the possible distance values \( d_1, d_2, d_1 + d_2 \geq n \) that satisfy the LRS condition \( d_1/d_2 = (k - 1)/k \). These computations show that in each case the Delsarte bound is less than or equal to \( \frac{1}{2}(n^2 - n + 2) \). This establishes our claim.

Part (b). We proceed in a way analogous to part (a). Note that the code \( C \) formed of all vectors of weights 1 and 3 has size \( |C| = n + \binom{n}{3} \) for all \( n \geq 3 \). We need to show that even if \( d_1 + d_2 + d_3 \geq \frac{3}{2}n \), no three-distance code of length \( 8 \leq n \leq 22 \) or 24 can have larger size. This is accomplished by computing the Delsarte bound of Theorem [5] for each such \( n \) and all possible values of the distances that add to \( 3n/2 \) or more.

Part (c) is established in the same way as Part (b). \( \square \)
5. **Spherical codes**

Let $C \subset S^{n-1}$ be a code such that the inner product of any two distinct code vectors takes one of the $s$ values $t_1, \ldots, t_s$. Let

$$M_s := \binom{n + s - 1}{s} + \binom{n + s - 2}{s - 1}.$$ 

**Theorem 13.** (Delsarte-Goethals-Seidel, 1977) $|C| \leq M_s$.

**Proof.** Follows from (5) and Table 1 by the identity $\sum_{p=0}^{m} \binom{m+p+i}{k} = \binom{m+p+i}{p}$. □

This result was improved in [12] as follows: If $s = 2$ and $t_1 + t_2 > 0$ then $|C| \leq \frac{1}{2n}(n + 1)$. We now have the following general improvement.

**Theorem 14.** Suppose that $s$ is even and $t_1 + t_2 + \cdots + t_s > 0$, then

$$|C| \leq M_{s-2} + \binom{n - 2 + s}{s} + \binom{n + s - 3}{s - 1}.$$ 

**Proof.** Consider the polynomial $g(x) = \prod_{i=1}^{s} (x - t_i)$. By Lemma 3 its leading coefficients in the basis of Gegenbauer polynomials are

$$g_s = r_s c_1 c_2 \cdots c_s > 0, \quad g_{s-1} = r_s (-t_1 - t_2 \cdots - t_s) \prod_{i} c_i.$$ 

Thus, $g_{s-1}$ is negative if $t_1 + \cdots + t_s > 0$ (since $c_i > 0$ for all $i$). Then the last case of Theorem 4(b) applies, and the result follows from Table 1 □

Any binary code can be mapped to $S^{n-1}$ by a distance-preserving mapping, so the bound for spherical codes implies bounds on binary codes (both constant weight and unrestricted). However the bounds thus obtained are generally inferior to the results derived in the corresponding discrete spaces. This is because the bounds become progressively stronger as we move from a space to its subspaces, so there is no gain in using the last theorem for binary codes.

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