20. The computer-implemented method of claim 17, wherein the first part is not stored at the local storage device after the playing of the media file.

21. The computer-implemented method of claim 17, wherein the combined first, second, and third parts are not stored at the local storage device after the playing of the representation of the media file.

22. In a client connected to a network and including a local storage device, a computer-implemented method of receiving and playing a media file comprising at least a first part and a second part, comprising:

receiving over the network and from a remote server in a first session the first part of the media file, the first part of the media file a representation of the media file at a first quality level;

receiving over the network and from a remote server the second part of the media file, wherein the first and second parts are combinable to form a representation of the media file at a second quality level higher than the first quality level;

storing the second part at the local storage device;

receiving over the network and from a remote server in a second session subsequent to the first session the first part of the media file and not the second part of the media file;

combining the received first part with the stored second part; and

playing a representation of the media file at the local client.

23. The computer-implemented method of claim 22, wherein the first part is not stored at the local storage device after the playing of the media file.

24. The computer-implemented method of claim 22, wherein the representation of the media file is played after combining the first and second parts.

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25. The computer-implemented method of claim 22, wherein the representation of the media file is played in response to a command, and the representation of the media file is generated from at least the first part.

26. The computer-implemented method of claim 25, wherein the representation of the media file is generated from the second part as well as the first part if both the first part and the second part have been received at the time of playback.

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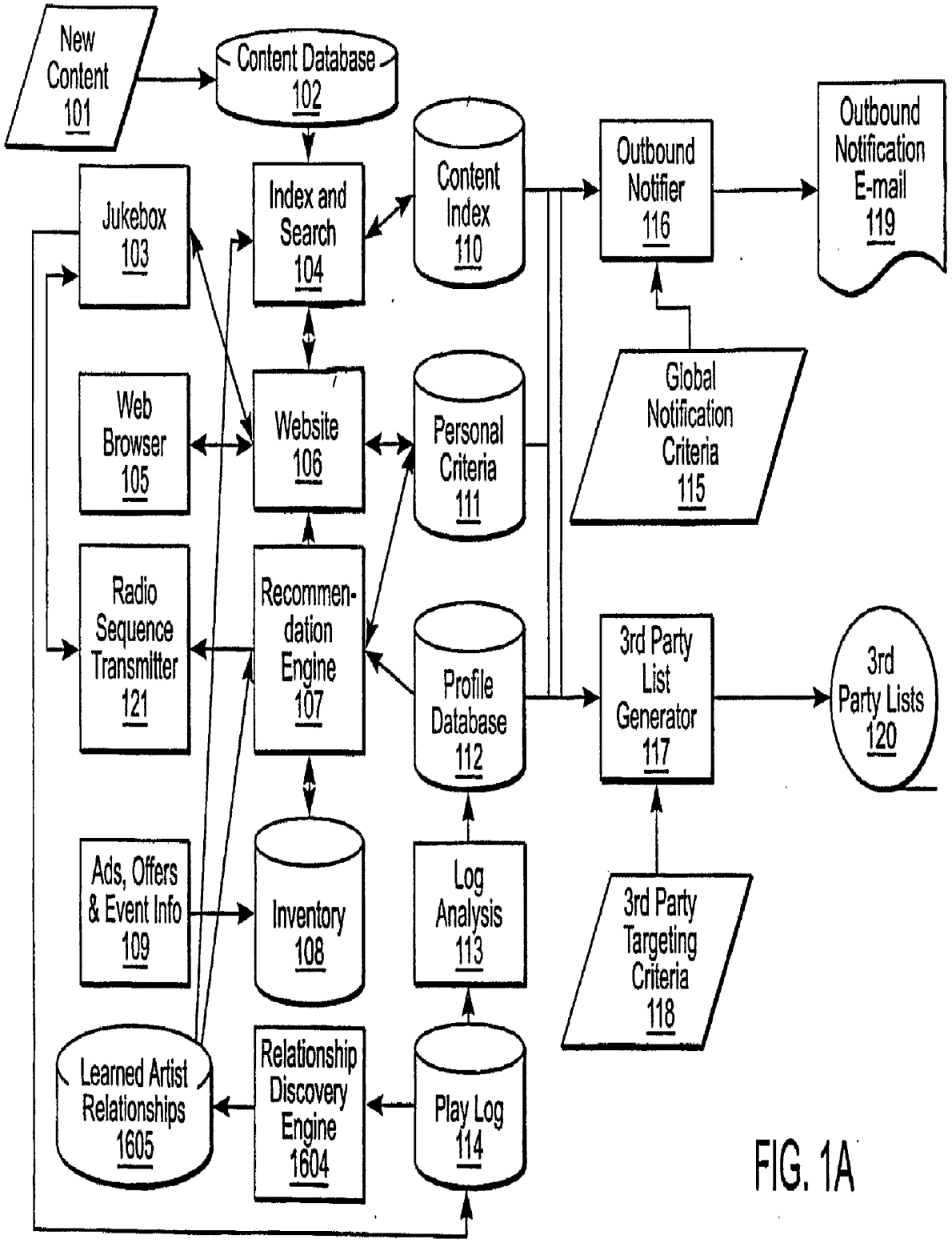

New Content 101
Content Database 102
Jukebox 103
Index and Search 104
Content Index 110
Outbound Notifier 116
Outbound Notification E-mail 119
Web Browser 105
Website 106
Personal Criteria 111
Global Notification Criteria 115
Radio Sequence Transmitter 121
Recommendation Engine 107
Profile Database 112
3rd Party List Generator 117
3rd Party Lists 120
Ads, Offers & Event Info 109
Inventory 108
Log Analysis 113
3rd Party Targeting Criteria 118
Learned Artist Relationships 1605
Relationship Discovery Engine 1604
Play Log 114

FIG. 1A

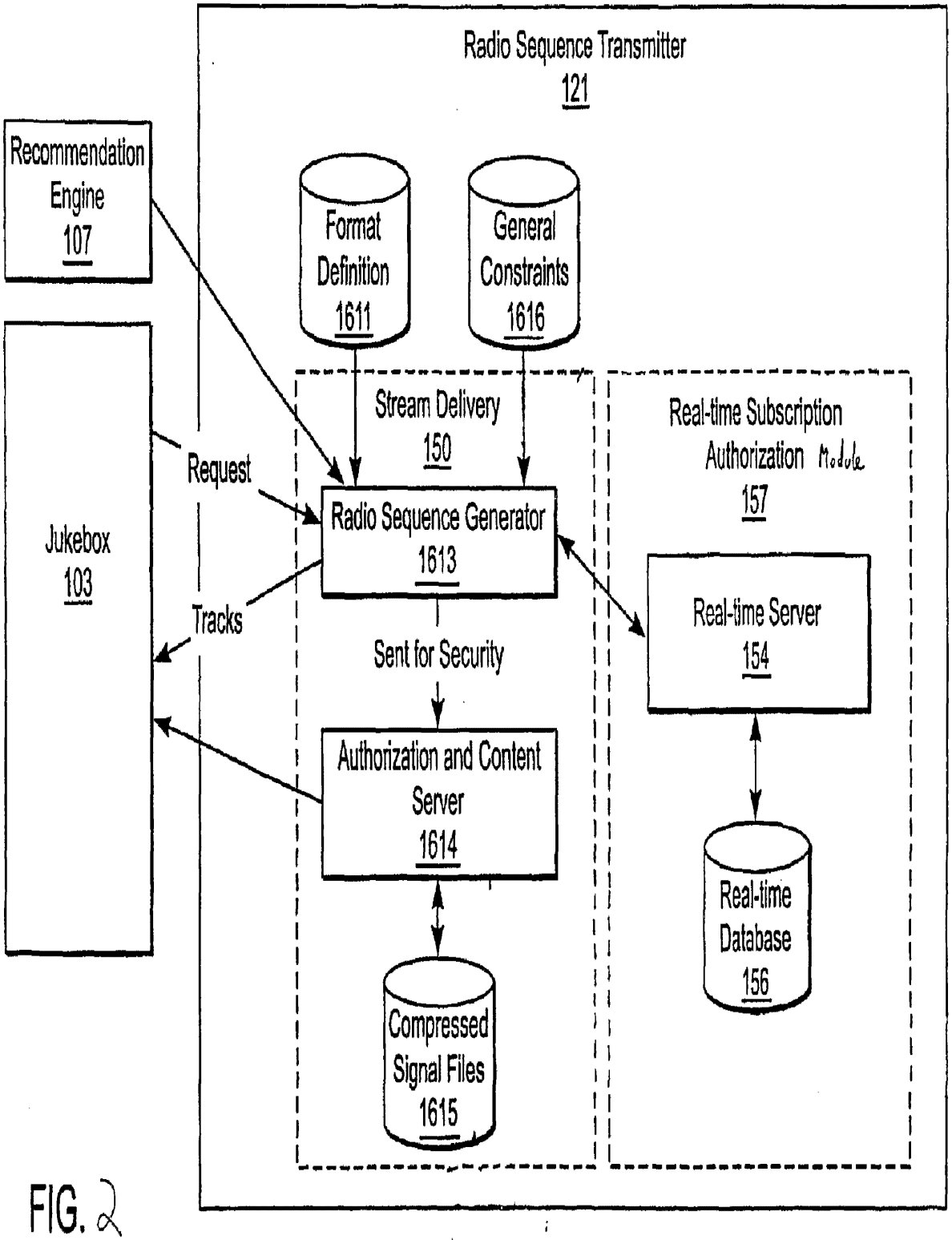

Radio Sequence Transmitter
121
Recommendation Engine
107
Format Definition
1611
General Constraints
1616
Stream Delivery
150
Real-time Subscription Authorization Module
157
Request
Radio Sequence Generator
1613
Jukebox
103
Tracks
Real-time Server
154
Sent for Security
Authorization and Content Server
1614
Real-time Database
156
Compressed Signal Files
1615

FIG. 2

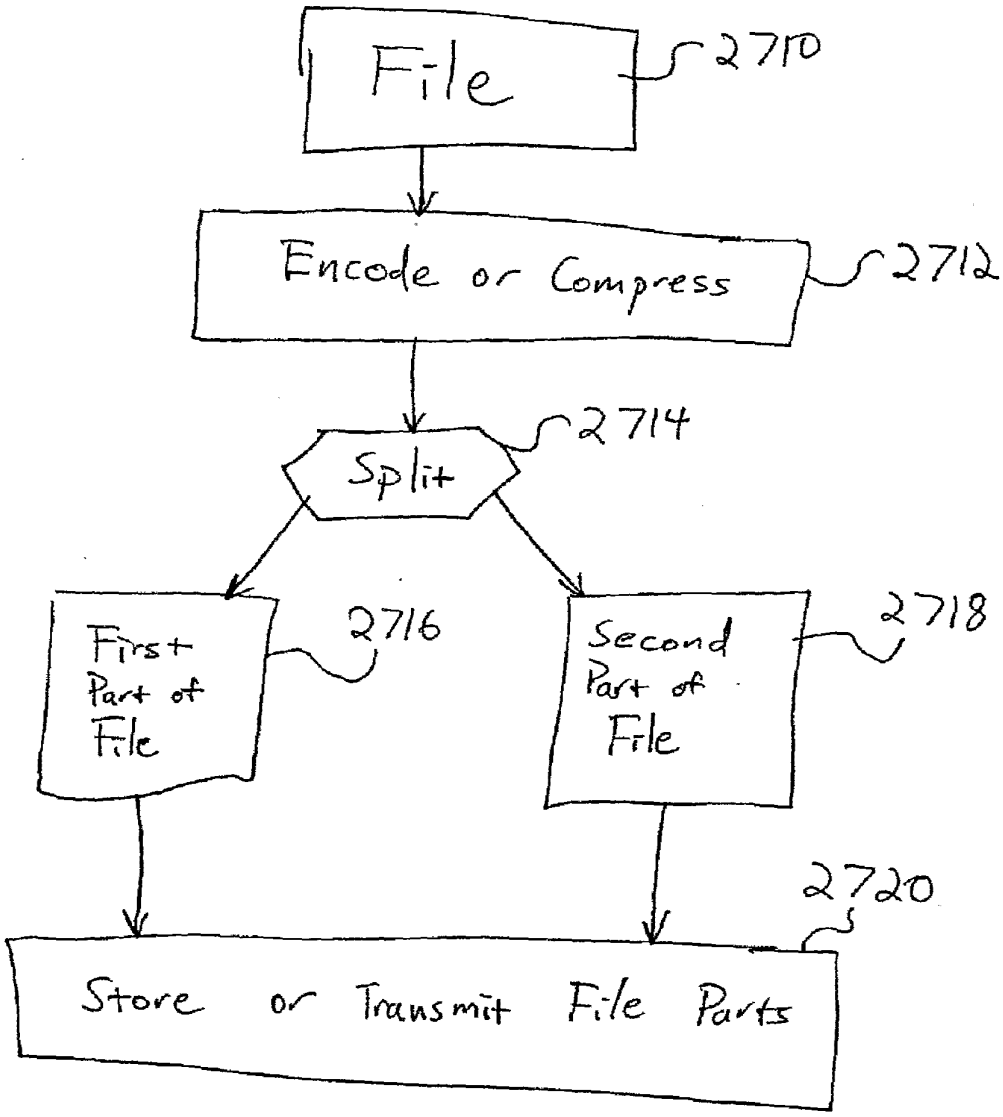

File
2710
Encode or Compress
2712
Split
2714
First Part of File
2716
Second Part of File
2718
Store or Transmit File Parts
2720

Fig. 3A

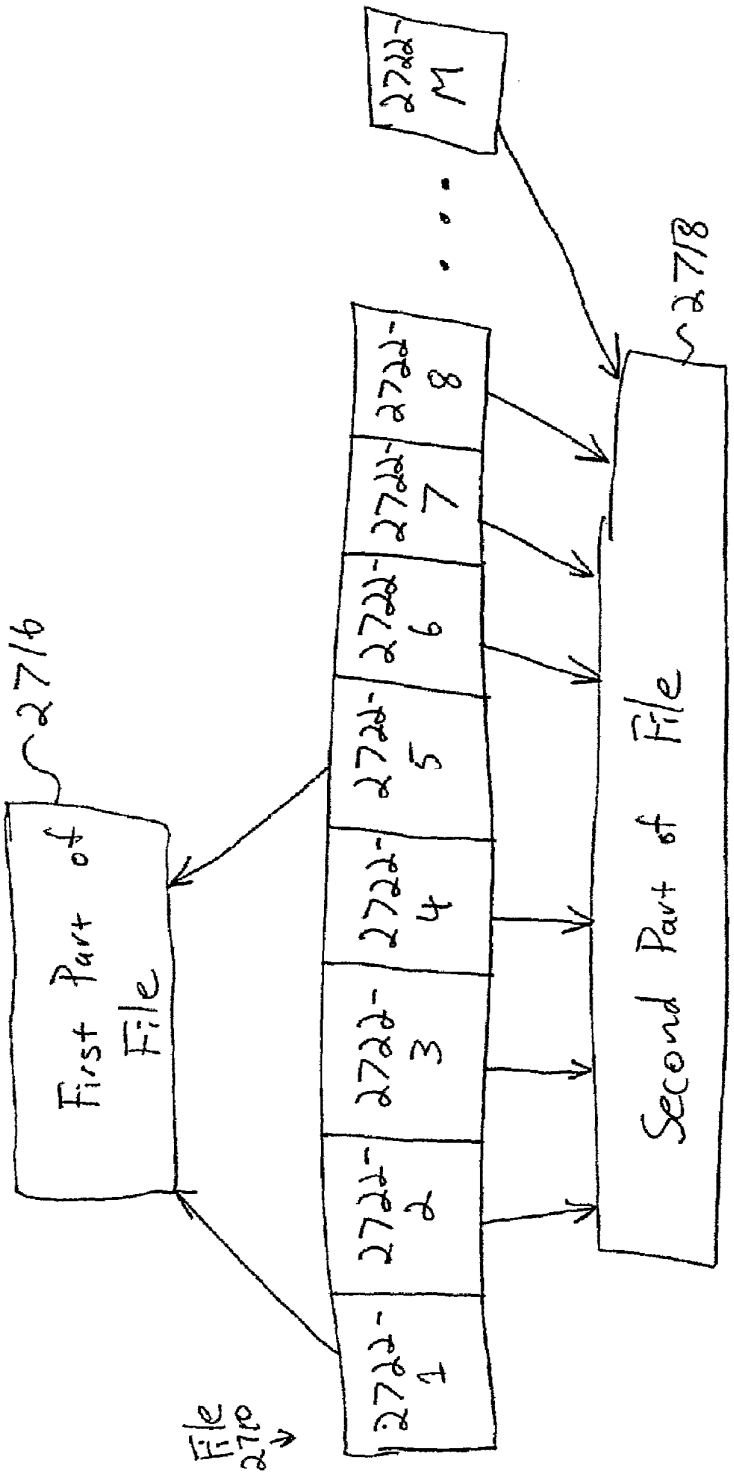

2722-1
2722-2
2722-3
2722-4
2722-5
2722-6
2722-7
2722-8
2722-M
2716
First Part of File
2718
Second Part of File
File 2720

Fig. 3B

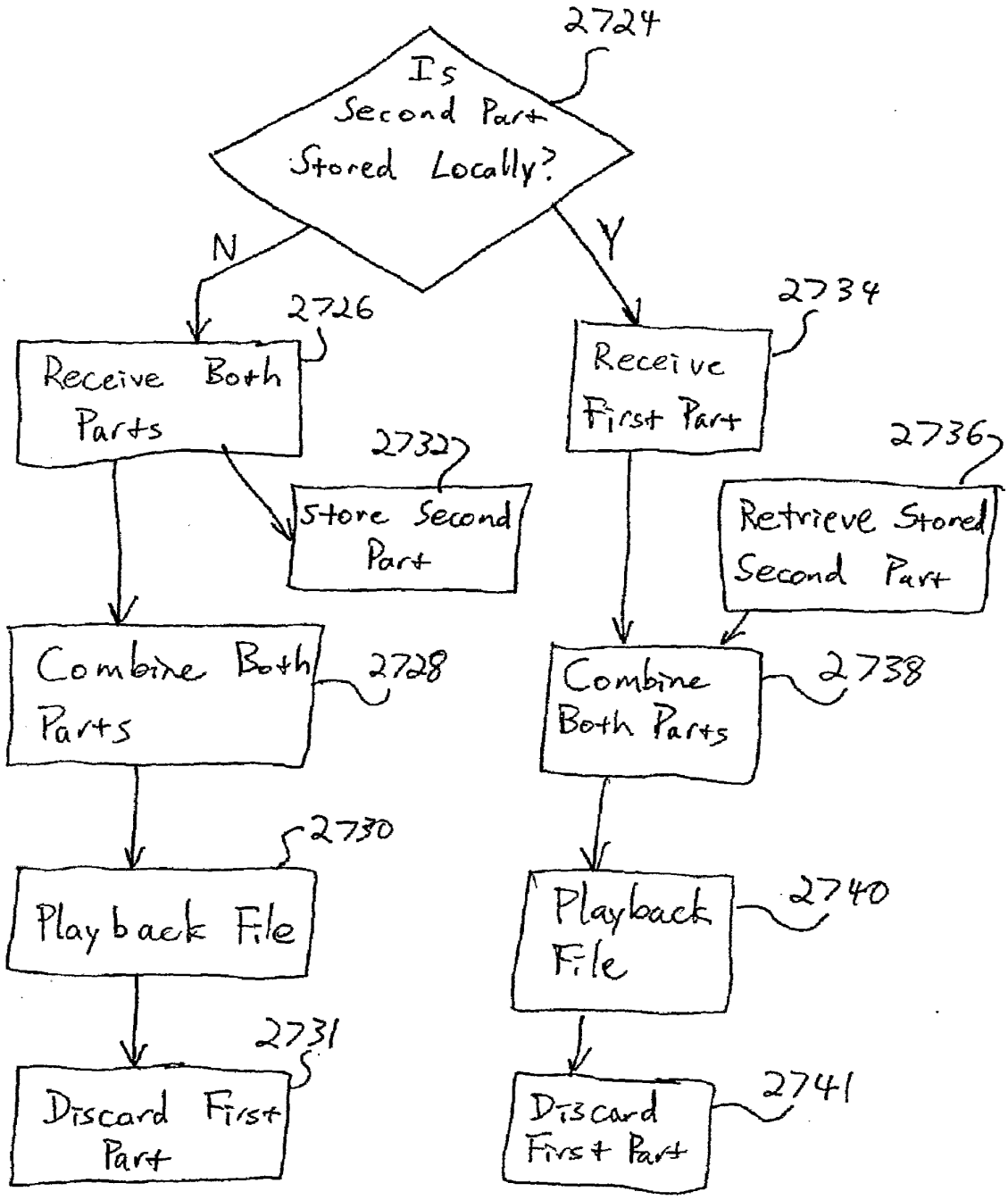

2724
Is Second Part Stored Locally?
N
Y
2726
Receive Both Parts
2732
Store Second Part
2734
Receive First Part
2736
Retrieve Stored Second Part
Combine Both Parts
2728
Combine Both Parts
2738
2730
Playback File
2740
Playback File
2731
Discard First Part
2741
Discard First Part

Fig. 3C

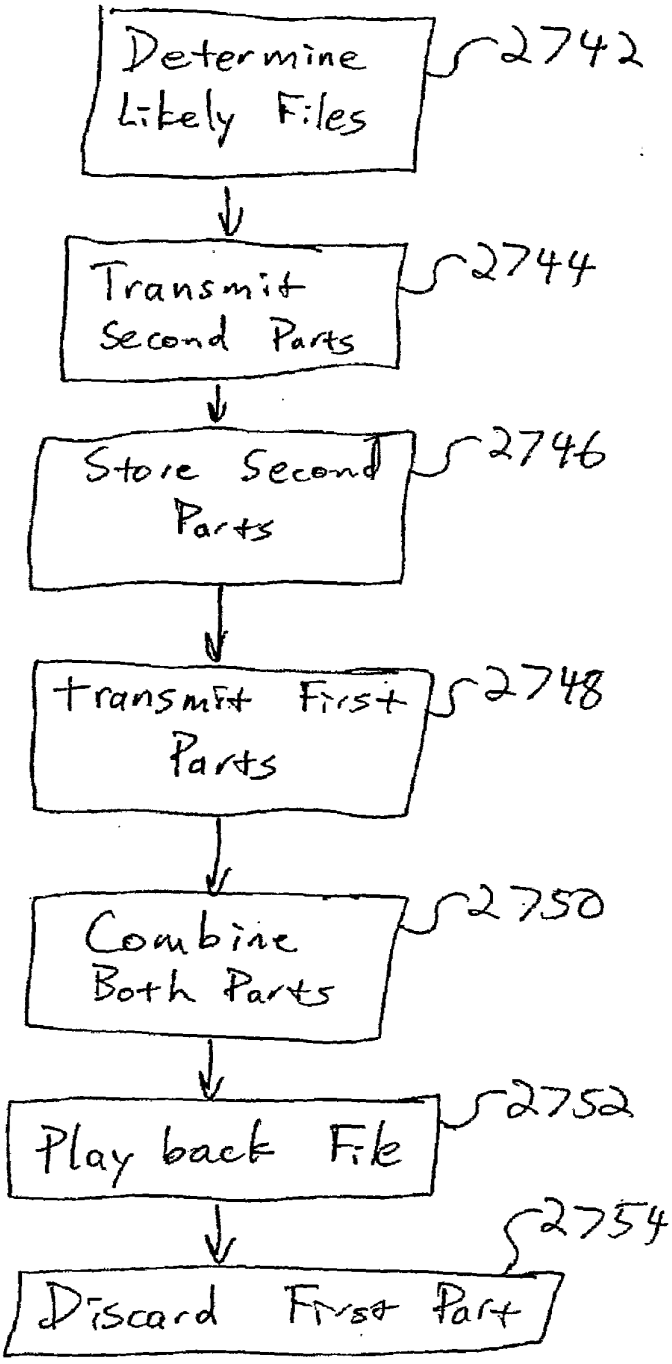
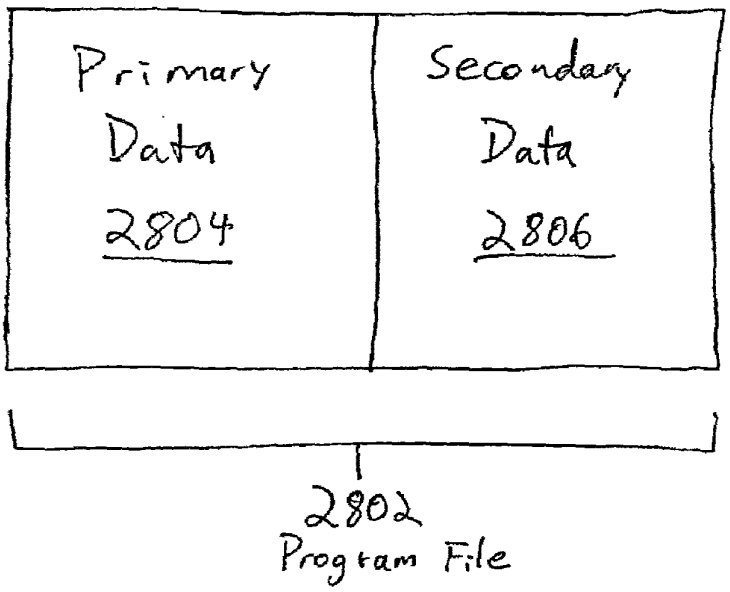

Determine Likely Files
2742
Transmit Second Parts
2744
Store Second Parts
2746
Transmit First Parts
2748
Combine Both Parts
2750
Play back File
2752
Discard First Part
2754

Fig. 3D

Fig. 4A


Primary Data 2804
Secondary Data 2806
2802 Program File

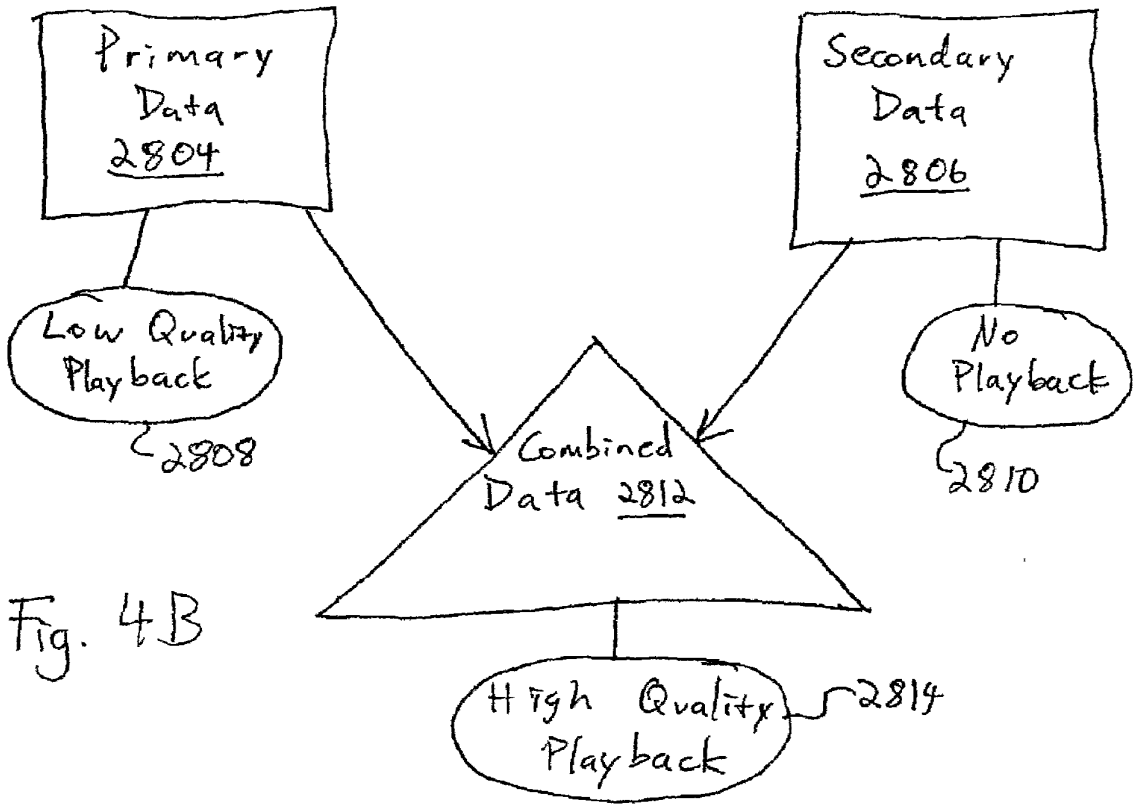

Primary Data 2804
Secondary Data 2806
Low Quality Playback
2808
Combined Data 2812
No Playback
2810
High Quality Playback
2814

Fig. 4B

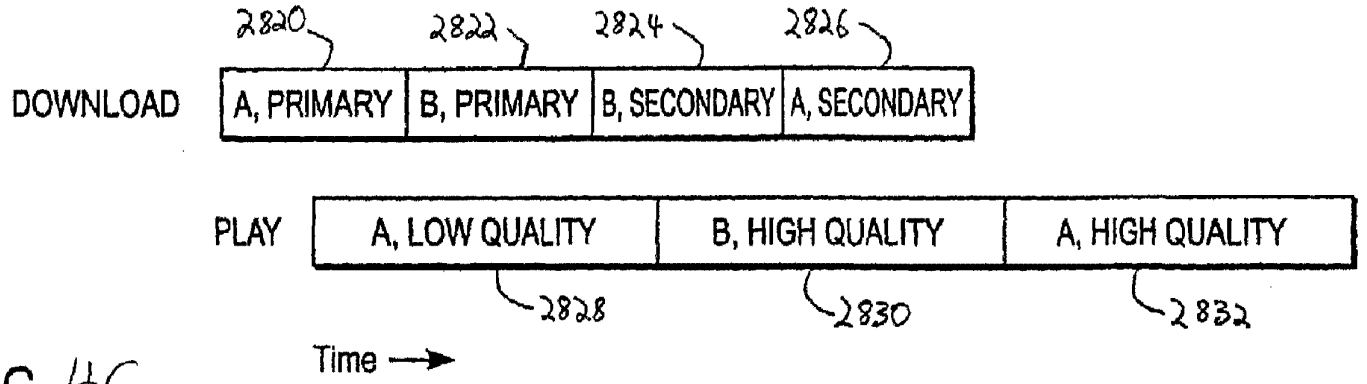


FIG. 4C

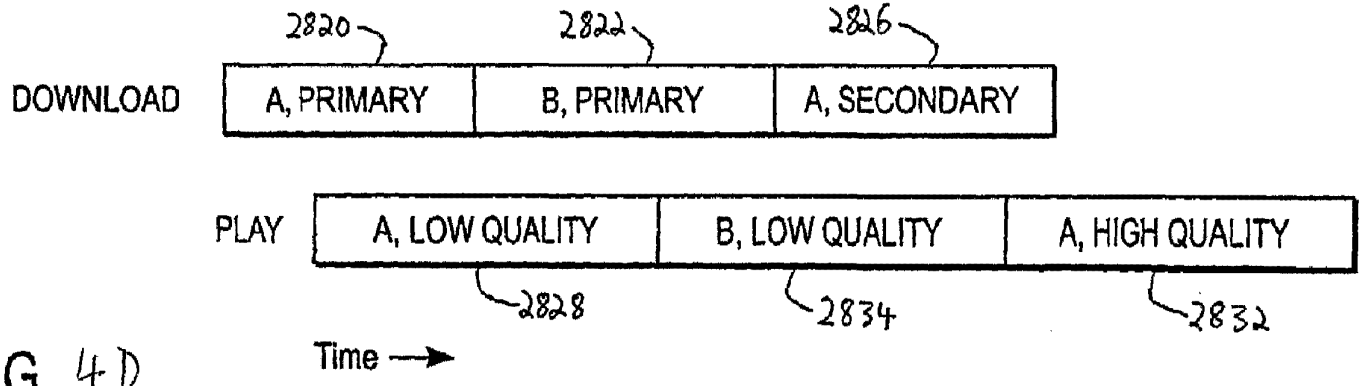


FIG. 4D

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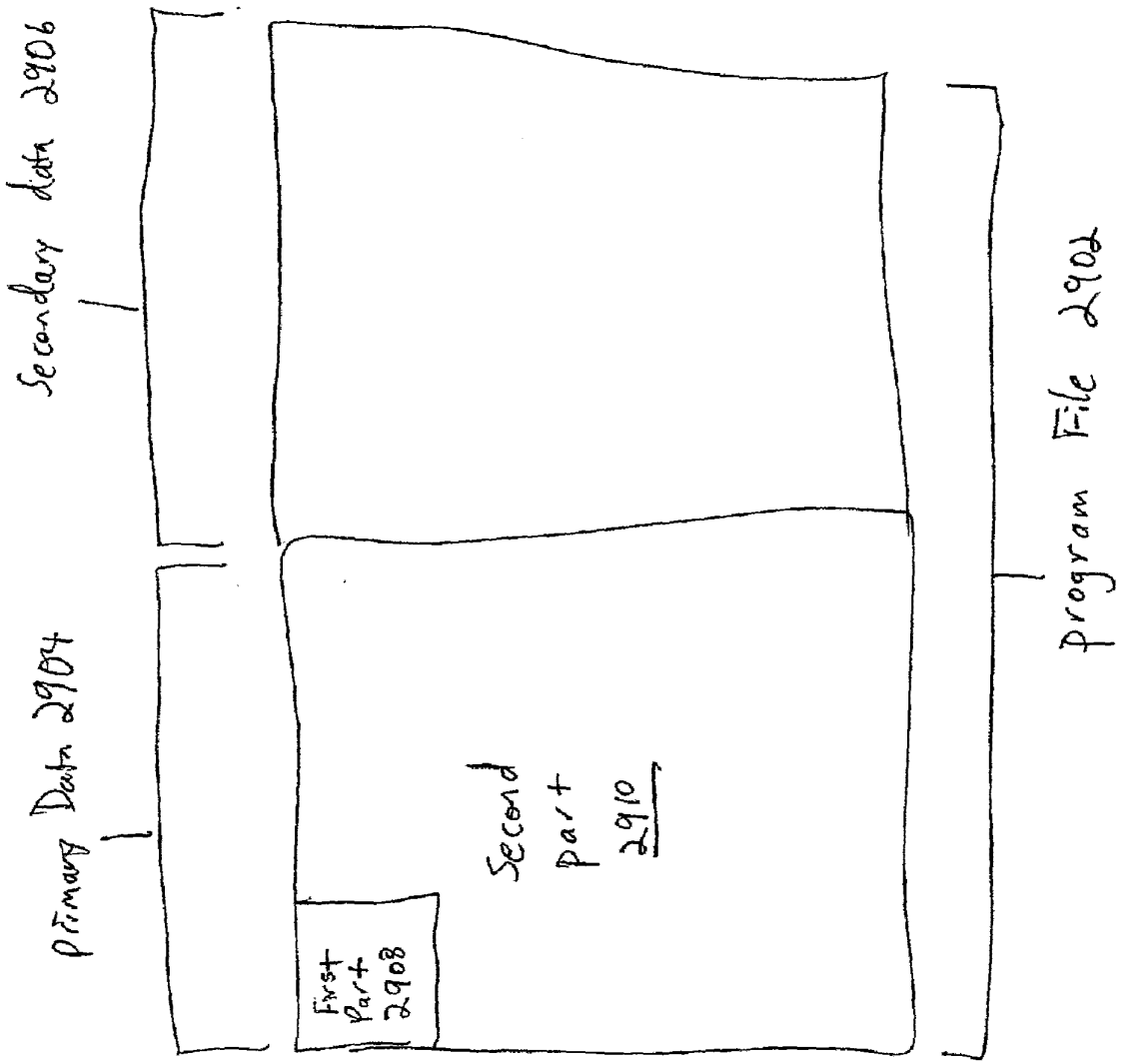


Fig. 5A

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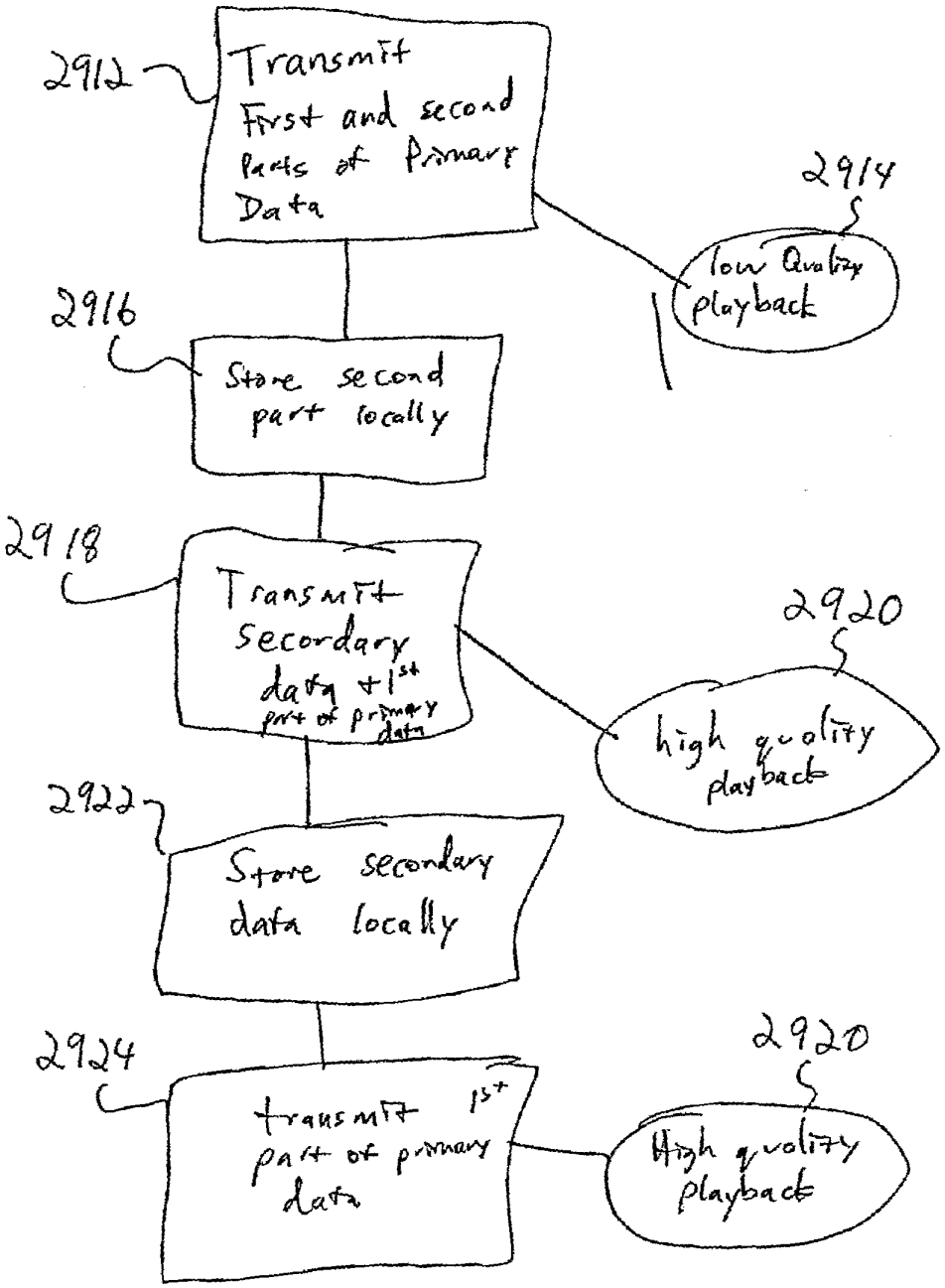


Fig. 5B

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Page 449

PTO/SB/08a (01-10)
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Application Number	16876579
Filing Date	2020-05-18
First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
Art Unit	2454
Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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	1	5267334	A	1993-11-30	Normille et al.	
	2	5404446	A	1995-04-04	Bowater et al.	
	3	5841432	A	1998-11-24	Carmel et al.	
	4	6389473	B1	2002-05-14	Carmel et al.	
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	1	20020156912	A1	2002-10-24	Hurst et al.	

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	Application Number	16876579
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	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

	2	20030055995	A1	2003-03-20	Ala Honkola	
	3	20030233464	A1	2003-12-18	Walpole et al.	
	4	20020131496	A1	2002-09-19	Vasudevan et al.	
	5	20030135863	A1	2003-07-17	VanDer Schaar	

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	1	0365683	EP	A1	1990-05-02	OTSUKA PHARMA CO LTD		☒

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Examiner Initials*	Cite No	Include name of the author (in CAPITAL LETTERS), title of the article (when appropriate), title of the item (book, magazine, journal, serial, symposium, catalog, etc), date, pages(s), volume-issue number(s), publisher, city and/or country where published.	T[5]
	1	ROY, S., et al., "Architecture of a Modular Streaming Media Server for Content Delivery Networks," 2002 IEEE. Published in the 2003 International Conference on Multimedia and Expo ICME 2003.	☒
	2	BOMMAIAH, E., et al., "Design and Implementation of a Caching System for Streaming Media over the Internet," 2000 IEEE. Published in RTAS '00 Proceedings of the Sixth IEEE Real Time Technology and Applications Symposium (RTAS 2000), page 111.	☒

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	16876579
	Filing Date	2020-05-18
	First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

	3	DEFENDANT JADOO TV, INC.'S DISCLOSURE OF INVALIDITY CONTENTIONS, U.S. N. Dist. Ca. Case No. 5:18-cv-05214-EJD dated Sept. 22, 2020.	☒
	4	DEFENDANT JADOO TV, INC.'S DISCLOSURE OF INVALIDITY CONTENTIONS APPENDIX A, U.S. N. Dist. Ca. Case No. 5:18-cv-05214-EJD dated Sept. 22, 2020.	☒
	5	Balk et al., Adaptive Video Streaming: Pre-Encoded MPEG-4 with Bandwidth Scaling, 44 COMPUTER NETWORKS 415 (Mar. 2004)	☐

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	Application Number	16876579
	Filing Date	2020-05-18
	First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

OR

☐ That no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to the knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was known to any individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(2).

☒ See attached certification statement.

Fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

None

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-11-16
Name/Print	Brett A. Carlson	Registration Number	39928

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6. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to another federal agency for purposes of National Security review (35 U.S.C. 181) and for review pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 218(c)).

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Page 454

PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN

(11)Publication number : **2011-004225**
(43)Date of publication of application : **06.01.2011**

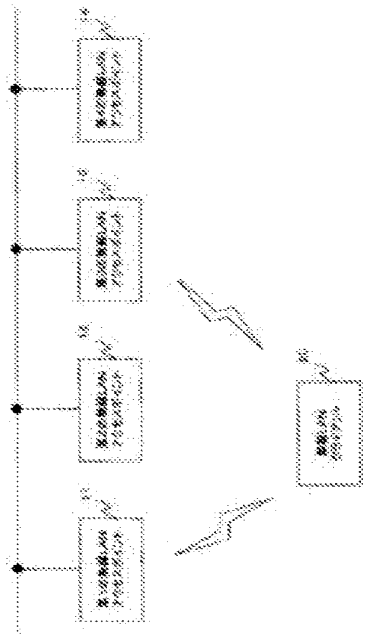
(51)Int.Cl. *H04W 48/20 (2009.01)*
H04W 84/12 (2009.01)
H04W 48/16 (2009.01)

(21)Application number : **2009-146288**
(22)Date of filing : **19.06.2009**

(71)Applicant : **NEC INFRONTIA CORP**
(72)Inventor : **HODOSHIMA TAKESHI**

(54) SYSTEM, METHOD AND PROGRAM OF HIGH-SPEED ROAMING OF WIRELESS LAN

(57)Abstract:
PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To attain high-speed roaming in a wireless LAN network.
SOLUTION: In a LAN system including: a plurality of wireless LAN access points; and a wireless LAN client to be connected to the wireless LAN access points, the wireless LAN access points are the ones existing on the same local area network, used channels and BSSIDS of the wireless LAN access points set to the same ESSID are recognized as wireless LAN access point information, held as data, and the wireless LAN client utilizes the wireless LAN access point information when the above connection is performed.



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(19)日本国特許庁(JP)　(12)公開特許公報(A)　(11)特許出願公開番号
特開2011-4225
(P2011-4225A)
(43)公開日　平成23年1月6日(2011.1.6)

(51)Int.Cl.		F I			テーマコード（参考）
H04W 48/20	(2009.01)	H04Q	7/00	416	5K067
H04W 84/12	(2009.01)	H04Q	7/00	630	
H04W 48/16	(2009.01)	H04Q	7/00	404	

審査請求 未請求　請求項の数 15　OL　（全 11 頁）

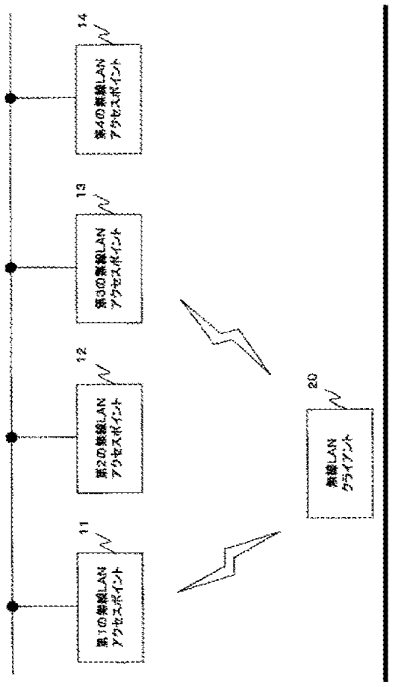
(21)出願番号　特願2009-146288 (P2009-146288)
(22)出願日　平成21年6月19日 (2009.6.19)

(71)出願人　000227205
ＮＥＣインフロンティア株式会社
神奈川県川崎市高津区北見方２丁目６番１号
(74)代理人　100130029
弁理士　永井　道雄
(74)代理人　100166338
弁理士　関口　正夫
(74)代理人　100152054
弁理士　仲野　孝雅
(72)発明者　程島　健
神奈川県川崎市高津区北見方２丁目６番１号　ＮＥＣインフロンティア株式会社内

Ｆターム(参考)　5K067 AA15 EE02 EE10 HH22 HH23 JJ72

(54)【発明の名称】無線ＬＡＮの高速ローミングシステム、高速ローミング方法及び高速ローミングプログラム

(57)【要約】
【課題】無線ＬＡＮネットワークにおいて高速ローミングを実現する。
【解決手段】複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントと、を有する無線ＬＡＮシステムにおいて、前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として認識しデータとして保持し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは前記接続を行う際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を利用する。
【選択図】図１



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【特許請求の範囲】
【請求項1】
複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントと、を有する無線ＬＡＮシステムにおける接続方法において、
前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として認識しデータとして保持し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは前記接続を行う際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を利用することを特徴とする接続方法。
【請求項2】
前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントと接続された際に、自らが保持している前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を無線ＬＡＮクライアントに受け渡すことを特徴とする請求項１に記載の接続方法。
【請求項3】
前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは最初に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに接続を試みる際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをしたチャンネルの中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続することを特徴とする請求項１又は２に記載の接続方法。
【請求項4】
前記最低限のチャンネルのスキャンは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが、前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報の中から自分の接続可能なＥＳＳＩＤを持つ無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントのチャンネルを抽出し、当該抽出したチャンネルのみを前記最低限のチャンネルと判断することにより行われることを特徴とする請求項１乃至３の何れか１項に記載の接続方法。
【請求項5】
複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントが行う接続方法であって、
前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに最初に接続を試みる際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、接続された際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントから、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として受け取り、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、その中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続することを特徴とする接続方法。
【請求項6】
複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントと、を有する無線ＬＡＮ接続システムにおいて、
前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として認識しデータとして保持し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは前記接続を

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行う際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を利用することを特徴とする接続システム。

【請求項7】

前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントと接続された際に、自らが保持している前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を無線ＬＡＮクライアントに受け渡すことを特徴とする請求項６に記載の接続システム。

【請求項8】

前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは最初に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに接続を試みる際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをしたチャンネルの中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続することを特徴とする請求項６又は７に記載の接続システム。

【請求項9】

前記最低限のチャンネルのスキャンは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが、前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報の中から自分の接続可能なＥＳＳＩＤを持つ無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントのチャンネルを抽出し、当該抽出したチャンネルのみを前記最低限のチャンネルと判断することにより行われることを特徴とする請求項６乃至８の何れか１項に記載の接続システム。

【請求項10】

複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントにおいて、

前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに最初に接続を試みる際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、接続された際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントから、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として受け取り、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、その中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続することを特徴とする無線ＬＡＮクライアント。

【請求項11】

複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントと、を有するシステムに搭載される無線ＬＡＮ接続プログラムにおいて、

前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として認識しデータとして保持し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは前記接続を行う際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を利用するシステムとしてコンピュータを機能させることを特徴とする接続プログラム。

【請求項12】

前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントと接続された際に、自らが保持している前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を無線ＬＡＮクライアントに受け渡すことを特徴とする請求項１１に記載の接続プログラム。

【請求項13】

前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントは最初に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに接続を試みる

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際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをしたチャンネルの中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続することを特徴とする請求項１１又は１２に記載の接続プログラム。

【請求項14】

前記最低限のチャンネルのスキャンは、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが、前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報の中から自分の接続可能なＥＳＳＩＤを持つ無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントのチャンネルを抽出し、当該抽出したチャンネルのみを前記最低限のチャンネルと判断することにより行われることを特徴とする請求項１１乃至１３の何れか１項に記載の接続プログラム。

【請求項15】

複数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと接続される無線ＬＡＮクライアントに搭載される接続プログラムにおいて、

前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに最初に接続を試みる際は前記ローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの全チャンネルをスキャンし、当該スキャンをした中から最良の条件の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続し、接続された際に前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントから、当該無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと同一のローカルエリアネットワーク上に存在する無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントであって同一のＥＳＳＩＤに設定されている無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントの使用チャンネル及びＢＳＳＩＤを同一ネットワークの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報として受け取り、前記無線ＬＡＮクライアントが前記無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントと圏外から再接続を試みる際、或いは、ローミングする際には、前記受け取った無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報を基に、最低限のチャンネルをスキャンし、その中から最良の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを選択し接続する無線ＬＡＮクライアントとしてコンピュータを機能させることを特徴とする接続プログラム。

【発明の詳細な説明】

【技術分野】

【0001】

本発明は、無線ＬＡＮに関し、より詳細には無線ＬＡＮのローミング又は再接続に関する。

【背景技術】

【0002】

近年無線ＬＡＮの機器の低価格化等の影響もあり、無線ＬＡＮが一般に広く普及している。また、無線ＬＡＮを構築する際に１つのローカルエリアネットワーク内に多数の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを敷設するといったことも一般的に行われている。

【0003】

このような環境下において無線ＬＡＮクライアントは、１つのローカルエリアネットワーク内の全ての無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを対象として、接続可能な無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントを検索する。

【0004】

そして、無線ＬＡＮクライアントは、検索の結果に基づいて最良と判断した無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイントに対して接続動作をする（例えば特許文献１参照）。

【図面の簡単な説明】

【0016】

【図1】本発明の実施形態における無線ＬＡＮネットワークの基本的構成の例を表す図である。

【図2】本発明の実施形態における各機器の設定の例を表す図である。

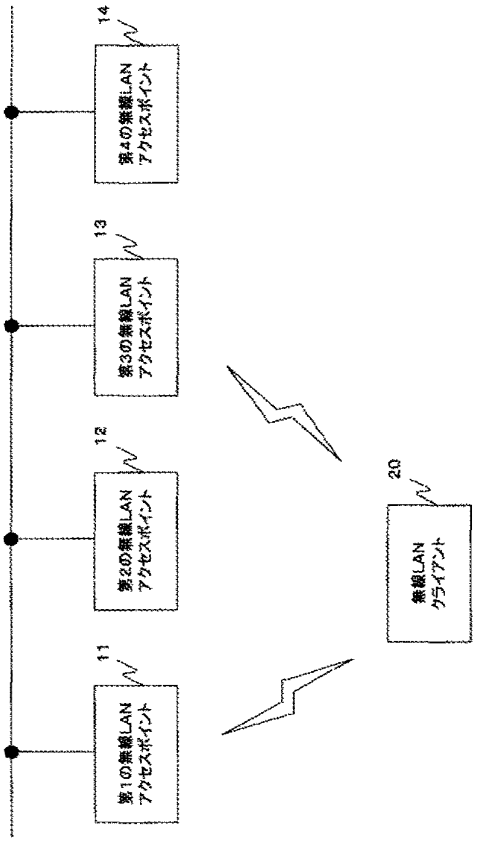
【図3】本発明の実施形態における無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント情報の例を表す図である

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【図4】本発明の実施形態における無線ＬＡＮクライアントの無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント接続動作を表すフローチャートである。
【符号の説明】
【0045】
１１　第１の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント
１２　第２の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント
１３　第３の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント
１４　第４の無線ＬＡＮアクセスポイント
２０　無線ＬＡＮクライアント

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【図1】



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【図2】

各機器の設定			
SYSTEM NAME	BSSID	ESSID	CH
AP11	11111−11111	Office1	1
AP12	22222−22222	Office1	4
AP13	33333−33333	Office1	7
AP14	44444−44444	Office2	14
CL20	−	Office1	−

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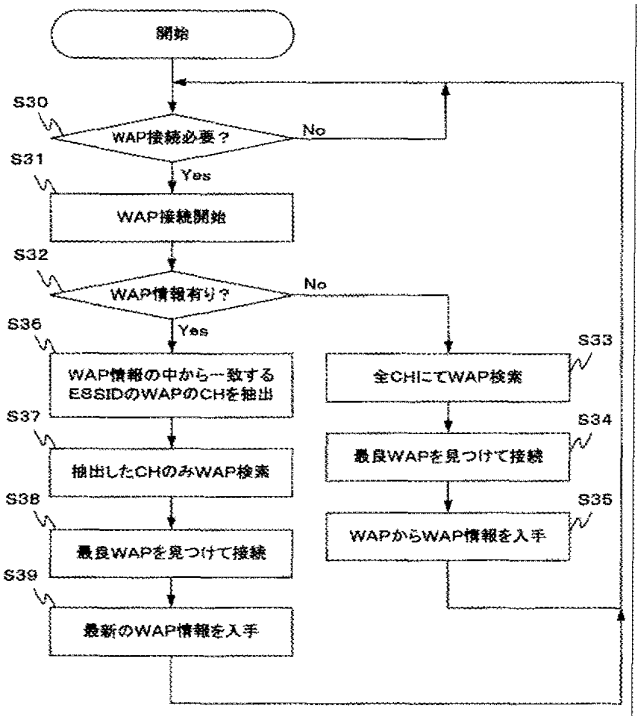
【図3】

無線LANアクセスポイント情報			
SYSTEM NAME	BSSID	ESSID	CH
AP11	11111−11111	Office1	1
AP12	22222−22222	Office1	4
AP13	33333−33333	Office1	7
AP14	44444−44444	Office2	14

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【図4】



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PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN

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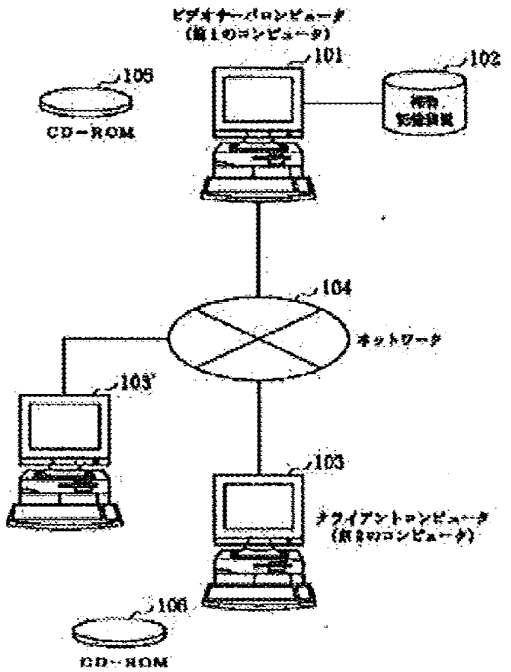
(51)Int.Cl. G06F 13/00
G06F 12/00
H04L 12/56
H04N 7/24

(21)Application number : 11-271422
(22)Date of filing : 24.09.1999

(71)Applicant : HITACHI INFORMATION SYSTEMS LTD
(72)Inventor : SHIOMI YOSHIHIRO
AIKAWA NOBUYUKI
NIGO MASAKI

(54) SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING PICTURE DATA AND RECORDING MEDIUM USED FOR THE SAME

(57)Abstract:
PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To provide a picture data distribution system capable of efficiently distributing picture data with appropriate quality in accordance with changes of the network connection environment of a client computer from moment to moment and a recording medium on which its program is recorded.
SOLUTION: This system has a 1st computer (image server computer 101) capable of distributing the picture data and one or more 2nd computers (client computer 103) receiving the picture data, and the 1st computer 101 receives a line situation notification message from the 2nd computer 103 and transmits the picture data (picture data extracted among a plurality of pieces of picture data which are preliminarily stored and have different compressibility or picture data compressed with optimum compressibility every time) which are subjected to compressibility being optimum to the communication speed of a line to which the 2nd computer is connected on the basis of the message.



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(19)日本国特許庁（ＪＰ）　(12)**公開特許公報**（Ａ）　(11)特許出願公開番号
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（P2001－92752A）
(43)公開日　平成13年４月６日(2001.4.6)

(51)Int.Cl.[7]		識別記号	Ｆ Ｉ		テーマコード（参考）
Ｇ０６Ｆ	13/00	３５４	Ｇ０６Ｆ	13/00	３５４Ｄ　５Ｂ０８２
	12/00	５４５		12/00	５４５Ｍ　５Ｂ０８９
Ｈ０４Ｌ	12/56		Ｈ０４Ｌ	11/20	１０２Ａ　５Ｃ０５９
Ｈ０４Ｎ	7/24		Ｈ０４Ｎ	7/13	Ｚ　５Ｋ０３０

審査請求　未請求　請求項の数５　ＯＬ　（全 11 頁）

(21)出願番号　特願平11－271422

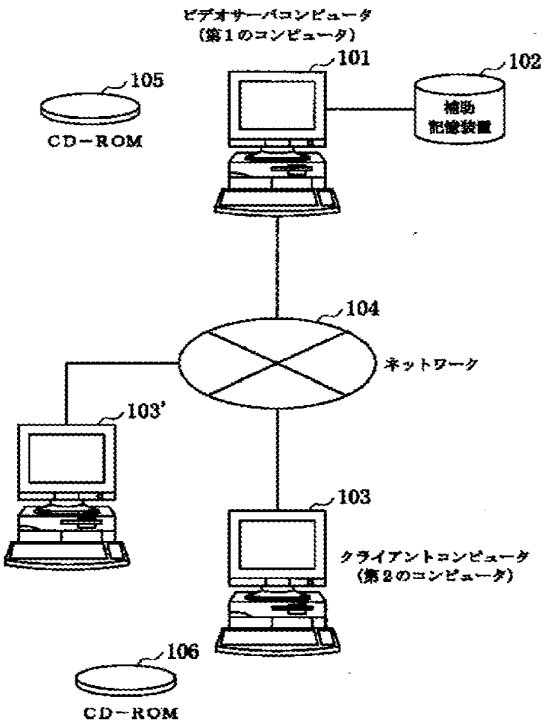
(22)出願日　平成11年９月24日(1999.9.24)

(71)出願人　000152985
株式会社日立情報システムズ
東京都渋谷区道玄坂１丁目16番５号
(72)発明者　塩見　芳弘
東京都渋谷区道玄坂一丁目16番５号　株式会社日立情報システムズ内
(72)発明者　相川　伸之
東京都渋谷区道玄坂一丁目16番５号　株式会社日立情報システムズ内
(74)代理人　100077274
弁理士　磯村　雅俊　（外１名）

最終頁に続く

(54)【発明の名称】　画像データ配信システムおよびそれに用いる記録媒体

(57)【要約】
【課題】　クライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境の時々刻々の変化に応じて、適切な品質の画像データを効率よく配信することが可能な画像データ配信システムおよびそのためのプログラムを記録した記録媒体の提供。
【解決手段】　画像データを配信可能な第１のコンピュータ（画像サーバコンピュータ１０１）とその画像データを受信する１以上の第２のコンピュータ（クライアントコンピュータ１０３）を有し、第１のコンピュータ１０１は、第２のコンピュータ１０３から回線状況通知メッセージを受信し、そのメッセージに基づいて、第２のコンピュータが接続されている回線の通信速度に最適な圧縮を施した画像データ（予め記憶している圧縮率の異なる複数の画像データから抽出した画像データかまたはその都度最適な圧縮率で圧縮した画像データ）を送信する。



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【特許請求の範囲】

【請求項１】　画像データをストリーミング配信可能な第１のコンピュータとその画像データを受信する１以上の第２のコンピュータを有する画像データ配信システムにおいて、

前記第１のコンピュータは、

前記第２のコンピュータから回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて、該第２のコンピュータが接続されている回線の通信速度に最適な圧縮を施した画像データを送信する最適画像配信手段を有することを特徴とする画像データ配信システム。

【請求項２】　前記最適画像配信手段は、

送信時間を計測するタイマと、

圧縮率の異なる複数の画像データおよび該画像データ毎に該画像データの内容を識別可能な内部識別アドレスと送信の際の送信タイミングを規定するタイムスタンプとの対応データを保持する記憶手段と、

前記第２のコンピュータからの回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて前記記憶手段から最適な圧縮率の画像データを抽出するとともに、該抽出した画像データの、前記タイマで計測された送信時間に対応する前記内部識別アドレス以降の画像データ内容を配信する手段とを有することを特徴とする請求項１記載の画像データ配信システム。

【請求項３】　前記最適画像送出手段は、

１つの画像データを保持する記憶手段と、

前記第２のコンピュータから所定の時間間隔で受信する回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて、前記記憶手段に保持されている１つの画像データから、該第２のコンピュータが接続されている回線に最適な圧縮率の画像データを動的に作成して配信する手段とを有することを特徴とする請求項１記載の画像データ配信システム。

【請求項４】　前記第１のコンピュータは、画像サーバコンピュータであり、前記第２のコンピュータは、クライアントコンピュータであることを特徴とする請求項１または請求項２記載の画像データ配信システム。

【請求項５】　請求項１または２記載の第１のコンピュータにおける各手段および第２のコンピュータにおける各手段を実現する処理をプログラムコード化して記憶したことを特徴とするコンピュータで読み取り可能な記録媒体。

【発明の詳細な説明】

【０００１】

【発明の属する技術分野】本発明は、ネットワーク上でビデオストリーミングデータを送信する場合におけるデータ作成および配信システムに関し、特にデータを要求するクライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境の動的な変化に対応して最適なビデオデータ配信を実現するビデオデータ配信システムおよびそのためのプログラムを記録した記録媒体に関する。

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【０００２】

【従来の技術】ネットワーク上における一般的なビデオデータ配信においては、ビデオサーバコンピュータはクライアントコンピュータのデータ送信要求に対し該当するデータのストリーミング配信を行なっている。通常のビデオデータは非常にサイズが大きいため、回線上に大きな帯域幅を必要としていた。従って、従来は、限られたネットワーク内において回線の帯域幅を考慮し適切な圧縮を行うことにより、ビデオデータ配信が行われていた。

【０００３】しかし、近年のインターネット技術の普及に伴い、インターネットを利用したビデオ配信システムが多数考案されている。インターネットを利用した場合、インターネットに接続され世界中に点在する膨大な数のコンピュータがクライアントコンピュータとなり得る。そのため、クライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境はクライアントコンピュータ毎に異なることとなる。

【０００４】従って、例えば高品質（低圧縮率）のビデオデータを配信した場合、帯域幅の狭い通信回線に接続しているクライアントコンピュータは、配信された全てのビデオデータを受信しきれなくなる。この理由により、インターネット上でビデオ配信を行なう場合には、できるだけ多くのクライアントコンピュータで受信可能となるように、帯域幅の狭い通信回線に合わせた低品質（高圧縮率）のビデオデータを配信するようにしていた。この環境においては、高品質のビデオデータの受信可能なクライアントコンピュータであっても品質の低いビデオデータを受信することに甘んじなければならなかった。

【０００５】この問題点に関するものとして、ビデオサーバが、予め記憶装置に格納してある中間形態の動画データを事前に高品質および低品質の複数のデータを準備し、さらにビデオデータを要求するクライアントコンピュータが接続されている回線の通信速度を取得する手段を具備し、取得した通信速度により最適なデータを配信する仕組みが考案されている。

【０００６】

【発明が解決しようとする課題】しかしながら、一般に、クライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境すなわち帯域幅は回線の混雑の度合等により刻々と変化するものであるが、上記従来技術においては、動画データの配信要求のあったクライアント端末のネットワーク性能（伝送速度）を検知し、それに応じた圧縮率の動画データを送信するものであり、ネットワーク性能の時々刻々の変化に応じて送信ビデオデータの品質（データ圧縮率）を変化させるものとはなっていない。

【０００７】本発明の目的は、クライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境すなわち帯域幅の時々刻々の変化に応じて、適切な品質の画像データを効率よく配信

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することが可能な画像データ配信システムおよびそのためのプログラムを記録した記録媒体を提供することである。

【０００８】

【課題を解決するための手段】本発明は、上記目的を達成するために、画像データをストリーミング配信可能な第１のコンピュータ（好ましくは画像サーバコンピュータ）とその画像データを受信する１以上の第２のコンピュータ（好ましくはクライアントコンピュータ）を有する画像データ配信システムにおいて、第１のコンピュータは、第２のコンピュータから回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて、第２のコンピュータが接続されている回線の通信速度に最適な圧縮を施した画像データを送信する最適画像配信手段を有することを特徴としている。

【０００９】なお、前記最適画像配信手段は、（ａ）送信時間を計測するタイマと、圧縮率の異なる複数の画像データおよび該画像データ毎に該画像データの内容を識別可能な内部識別アドレスと送信の際の送信タイミングを規定するタイムスタンプとの対応データを保持する記憶手段と、第２のコンピュータからの回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて記憶手段から最適な圧縮率の画像データを抽出するとともに、該抽出した画像データの、タイマで計測された送信時間に対応する内部識別アドレス以降の画像データ内容を配信する手段とを有するか、あるいは、（ｂ）１つの画像データを保持する記憶手段と、第２のコンピュータから所定の時間間隔で受信する回線状況通知メッセージに基づいて、記憶手段に保持されている１つの画像データから、第２のコンピュータが接続されている回線に最適な圧縮率の画像データを動的に作成して配信する手段とを有している。

【００１０】また、本発明の記録媒体は、前記第１のコンピュータ（画像サーバコンピュータ）における各手段および第２のコンピュータ（クライアントコンピュータ）における各手段を実現する処理をプログラムコード化してコンピュータ読み取り可能なＣＤ－ＲＯＭ，ＤＶＤ，ＦＤなどの記録媒体に記録したものである。

【００１１】

【発明の実施の形態】以下、本発明の好ましい実施の形態を説明する。画像データを配信する機能を有するネットワークに接続されている画像配信サーバを具備し、該画像配信サーバは画像データを格納可能な記憶装置を具備し、画像配信サーバにアクセス可能な不特定多数のクライアントコンピュータを具備する構成とする。

【００１２】配信するビデオデータ作成において、ビデオサーバコンピュータは、オリジナルビデオデータを基に、高品質から低品質まで複数のビデオデータを記憶装置に作成し、個々のビデオデータに対し一定時間間隔のタイムスタンプを付加する機能を具備する。

【００１３】また、ビデオデータを受信するクライアントコンピュータでは、ビデオデータ受信中に受信パケットの状態を監視し、損失パケットが一定の基準を超えた場合、クライアント側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されていないと判定し、また、一定の基準時間の間に損失パケットが無い場合は、クライアント側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されていると判定し、その判定結果を配信中のビデオサーバコンピュータへ送信する手段を具備する。

【００１４】上述の判定結果を受信したビデオサーバは、その判定結果に適切な品質のビデオデータファイルを選択し、現在配信中のビデオデータファイルの切り換えを行う。その際、切り換え前後の２つのビデオデータに付加されているタイムスタンプを参照し、配信を中止する時点でのタイムスタンプと同様のタイムスタンプを持つ時点より切り換え後のビデオデータの配信を開始する機能を具備する。

【００１５】また、上記目的を達成するために、本発明は、ビデオデータを配信する機能を有するネットワークに接続されているビデオサーバコンピュータを具備し、さらにその記憶装置に記憶されているオリジナルビデオデータを送信時に所定の圧縮率で圧縮しながら配信する機能を具備する構成とする。

【００１６】ビデオデータを受信する際において、クライアントコンピュータは、ビデオデータ受信中に受信パケットの状態を監視し、損失パケットが一定の基準を超えた場合クライアント側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されていないと判定し、また、一定の基準の時間、損失パケットが無い場合、クライアント側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されていると判定し、その判定結果を配信中のビデオサーバコンピュータへ送信する手段を特徴とする機能を具備する。

【００１７】さらに、上述の判定結果を受信したビデオサーバコンピュータは、その判定結果に従い、動的に圧縮率に変更し、その変更された圧縮率で圧縮されたビデオデータを配信する機能を具備する。

【００１８】上記構成を採用することにより、配信されるビデオデータは、受信するクライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境に従い配信するビデオデータの品質を動的に変化させることができる。これにより、クライアントコンピュータは常に最適化されたビデオデータを見掛け上切れ目なく受信することが可能となる。

【００１９】また、本発明の記録媒体は、上記の如きクライアントコンピュータが行う処理やビデオサーバコンピュータが行う処理をプログラムコード化してコンピュータ読み取り可能なＣＤ－ＲＯＭ，ＤＶＤ，ＦＤなどの記録媒体に記録したものである。

【００２０】（実施例の説明）以下、本発明の実施例として、２つの実施例を説明する。図１は、第１の実施例および第２の実施例における共通のハードウエア構成を示すブロック図である。本発明は、圧縮して配信することが可能な全てのデータ（特に画像データ）に対して適

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用可能であるが、本実施例では、ビデオデータ（動画データ）を例にとって説明する。

【００２１】図１において、１０１はビデオデータの作成および配信を行なうビデオサーバコンピュータ、１０２はビデオデータを格納する補助記憶装置、１０３および１０３’はクライアントコンピュータ、１０４はビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１とクライアントコンピュータ１０３が接続されるネットワーク環境である。以下の説明では、１つのサーバコンピュータと１つ以上のクライアントコンピュータからなるクライアント・サーバシステムの場合を用いて説明するが、第１のコンピュータから第２のコンピュータへの２つのコンピュータ間でのデータの配信にも適用可能であることはいうまでもない。

【００２２】（第１の実施例）まず、第１の実施例について図２～図６を用いて説明する。図２は、記憶装置に格納する圧縮ビデオデータファイルのファイル構造の説明図である。図２において、２０３は圧縮ビデオデータファイルのヘッダ情報、２０４は本実施例で取り上げる画像データファイル、２０５はＥＯＦ（ＥＯＦ：End of File）を示す。また、２０１は本発明の特徴である圧縮ビデオデータファイルのタイムスタンプであり、２０２は、タイムスタンプ２０１と対応する圧縮ビデオデータファイルの内部識別アドレスである。なお、本実施例で取り上げる圧縮率の異なる他の画像ファイル（圧縮画像ファイルＢおよび圧縮画像ファイルＣ）構造も図２と同様である。内部識別アドレス２０２は、ファイル毎にタイムスタンプ１０２に対応して設けられるものであるが、ファイルの品質（圧縮率）が異なればそれに伴って異なる値を有する。

【００２３】図３は、同一画像ファイルから生成された圧縮率の異なる３種類の圧縮ビデオデータファイルのヘッダ情報の説明図である。同図（ａ）は低圧縮画像ファイルＡのヘッダ情報を、同図（ｂ）は中圧縮画像ファイルＢのヘッダ情報を、同図（ｃ）は高圧縮画像ファイルＣのヘッダ情報を示している。３０１はタイムスタンプ情報、３０２は、インデックスに対応する図２に示すファイルの内部識別アドレスである。

【００２４】図４は、圧縮率の異なる３つの画像ファイルとタイムスタンプと内部識別アドレスの関係を説明するための図である。同図（ａ）は、低圧縮画像ファイルＡとタイムスタンプと内部識別アドレスの関係を、同図（ｂ）は中圧縮画像ファイルＢとタイムスタンプと内部識別アドレスの関係を、同図（ｃ）は高圧縮画像ファイルＣとタイムスタンプと内部識別アドレスの関係を、それぞれ示している。本例では、説明を簡単にするために、同図（ａ）に示す低圧縮画像ファイルＡを１／２に圧縮したものを中圧縮ファイルＢとして同図（ｂ）に示し、さらにこれを１／２に圧縮したものを高圧縮画像ファイルＣとして同図（ｃ）に示すとともに、タイムスタンプ，内部識別アドレスと圧縮画像ファイルＡ～Ｃの内容の関係がわかりやすいように画像ファイル中に「い」、「ろ」、「は」・・・などを便宜的に示した。

【００２５】図５は、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１に保持される、通信速度と該通信速度に最適化された圧縮画像ファイルとの対応図である。図５における通信速度を表わす記号（ｍ、ｎ）の大小関係は、ｍ＜ｎとする。同図に示すように、通信速度が低速の場合は（～ｍ）、低品質である高圧縮画像ファイルＣを、通信速度が高速の場合は（ｎ～）、高品質である低圧縮画像ファイルＡを配信するようにする。

【００２６】図６および図７は、第１の実施例の動作を説明するためのフローチャートである。まず、ビデオデータを配信するビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１の動作を、図６を用いて詳細に説明する。

【００２７】図６において、クライアントコンピュータ１０３からのデータ要求に従い、該当する記憶装置内のビデオデータ（システムには初期配信ファイルが設定済とする。本実施例では、初期配信ファイルは「中圧縮画像ファイルＢ」とする）の配信を開始し、かつ配信時間の計測を開始する（ステップ６０１）。

【００２８】クライアントコンピュータ１０３から低品質データの受信要求（後述する図７のステップ７０６参照）があった場合（ステップ６０３）、図５の対応図に従い、現在送信中のファイル（ファイルＢ）より１段階品質の劣る「高圧縮画像ファイルＣ」を送信ファイルとして確定する（ステップ６０４、６０５）。

【００２９】次に現在時点の配信時間を測定する（ステップ６０６）。本実施例では、この時の測定時間が４ｍｓであったと仮定し、図３に示すヘッダ情報より、「ファイルＢ」の４ｍＳの開始内部識別アドレスは「iiii」と確定する（ステップ６０７）。すなわち、画像「い」、「ろ」は配信済みとする。ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１は即座に配信中の「中圧縮画像ファイルＢ」の配信を中止し、内部識別アドレス「iiii」から「高圧縮画像ファイルＣ」の画像「は」、「に」、・・・の配信を開始する（ステップ６０８）。

【００３０】逆に、クライアントコンピュータ１０３より高品質データの受信要求（後述する図７のステップ７０７参照）があった場合（ステップ６０３：Ｙ）、図５の対応図に従い、現在配信中の「中圧縮画像ファイルＢ」より１段階品質の高い「低圧縮画像ファイルＡ」を次送信ファイルとして確定する（ステップ６０４、６０５）。以下の動作は同様である。すなわち、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１は即座に配信中の「中圧縮画像ファイルＢ」の配信を中止し、内部識別アドレス「iiii」から「低圧縮画像ファイルＡ」の画像「は」、「に」、・・・の配信を開始する（ステップ６０８）。

【００３１】なお、現時点での配信データが「高圧縮画像ファイルＣ」であった場合にさらに低品質の高圧縮の

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画像ファイルが要求された場合、図５より１段階品質の劣るビデオデータは存在しないことがわかる。また、現時点での配信データが「低圧縮画像ファイルＡ」であった場合にさらに高品質の低圧縮画像ファイルが要求された場合にも、図５より１段階品質の高いビデオデータは存在しないことがわかる。このような場合は、データの存在しない旨のメッセージを送信し、現時点でのデータ配信を続行する（ステップ６０９）。

【００３２】また、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１は、ビデオデータの終端すなわち図２に示す「ＥＯＦ」まで配信を行った場合（ステップ６０２：Ｙ）、データの配信を終える。

【００３３】次に、ビデオデータを受信するクライアントコンピュータ１０３の動作を、図７を用いて詳細に説明する。図７において、先ず、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１に対するビデオデータ要求により、ビデオサーバから送信されたデータの受信を開始し、同時に損失パケット監視タイマをリセットする（ステップ７０１）。

【００３４】損失パケット数がシステムに既設定済の数を超過した場合（ステップ７０２：Ｙ）、クライアントコンピュータ側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されていないと判断し、ビデオサーバに低品質データの要求メッセージを送信する（ステップ７０６）。損失パケット数がシステムに既設定済の数を超過しない場合（ステップ７０２：Ｎ）、損失パケットの発生を常に監視し（ステップ７０３）、損失パケットが発生した場合（ステップ７０３：Ｙ）、損失パケット監視タイマをリセットする（ステップ７０４）。

【００３５】この損失パケット監視タイマが、システムに既設定済の一定時刻を超過した場合、すなわち損失パケットが一定時間発生しなかった場合（ステップ７０３：Ｎ，７０５：Ｙ）、クライアントコンピュータ１０３側の通信回線に十分な帯域が確保されており現在受信中のビデオデータよりも高品質なデータ（低圧縮のデータ）の受信が可能と判断し、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１に高品質データの要求メッセージを送信する（ステップ７０７）。ステップ７０８では、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１からの配信データに従い今までと異なる品質の配信データを受信し、同時に損失パケット監視タイマをリセットする。

【００３６】ここで、図６のステップ６０９に示すデータ無しのメッセージを受信した場合、そのメッセージに従い、低品質データ無しの場合はステップ７０６の低品質データ要求メッセージ送信を、また、高品質データ無しの場合はステップ７０７の高品質データ要求メッセージ送信を中止する。なお、クライアントコンピュータ１０３はビデオデータの終端をしめす「ＥＯＦ」まで受信した場合（ステップ７０９：Ｙ）、受信動作を終了する。

【００３７】最後に、ビデオデータフォーマットについて詳述する。本実施例における配信ビデオデータのフォーマットは、図２に示すようにヘッダ情報部分（２０３）とデータ部分（２０４）とから構成され、ヘッダ部分には、図３に示すような、タイムスタンプ毎のアドレスが保持されている。ビデオサーバによりビデオデータを圧縮する際に、ヘッダ部分を生成し付加する。なお、図２および図３における２０１と３０１、２０２と３０２は同値である。

【００３８】以上、第１の実施例は、オリジナルなビデオデータを基に高品質（低圧縮）から低品質（高圧縮）まで、品質の異なる複数のビデオデータをビデオサーバの記憶装置に記憶しておき、クライアントコンピュータからの配信要求に対し、クライアントコンピュータにおける受信状態に応じて、最適な品質のビデオデータを動的に切替えながら配信するものである。

【００３９】（第２の実施例）次に説明する第２の実施例は、ビデオサーバに保持するビデオデータは、オリジナルなもの１種類のみとし、サーバから配信するビデオデータの圧縮を、クライアントコンピュータにおける受信状態に応じて動的に最適化するものである。

【００４０】以下、本第２実施例のビデオサーバ側の処理を、図８を用いて詳細に説明する。同図において、まず、クライアントコンピュータからのデータ要求に従い、該当する記憶装置内のオリジナルビデオデータをビデオサーバに取り出し（ステップ８０１）、圧縮を行いながら（システムには初期圧縮レートが設定済とする。）送信する（ステップ８０３）。クライアントコンピュータ１０３より低品質データ要求または高品質データ要求のメッセージ受信があった場合（ステップ８０４）、圧縮レートを変更する（ステップ８０５）。

【００４１】なお、ビデオサーバコンピュータ１０１はビデオデータの終端まで配信した場合（ステップ８０２）、配信動作を終了する。

【００４２】ビデオデータを受信するクライアントコンピュータの動作は、第１の実施例と同様のため詳細な説明は省略する。

【００４３】なお、上記の如き、ビデオサーバコンピュータが行う各処理手順およびクライアントコンピュータが行う各処理手順を、ＣＤ－ＲＯＭ，ＤＶＤ，あるいはＦＤなどの記録媒体に一緒にまたは別々に記録して市場に流通させることができる。利用者は、この記録媒体をビデオサーバコンピュータとクライアントコンピュータにインストールすることにより、本発明を簡単に利用することが可能になる。

【００４４】

【発明の効果】以上詳細に説明したように、本発明によれば、ビデオサーバにより配信されるビデオデータは、受信するクライアントコンピュータのネットワーク接続環境に従い動的に変化させることが実現できる。これにより、クライアントコンピュータは常に最適化されたビ

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デオデータを見掛け上切れ目なく受信することが可能となる。

【図面の簡単な説明】

【図１】本発明の第１の実施例および第２の実施例における共通のハードウエア構成を示すブロック図である。

【図２】記憶装置に格納する圧縮ビデオデータファイルのファイル構造の説明図である。

【図３】同一画像ファイルから生成された圧縮率の異なる３種類の圧縮ビデオデータファイルのヘッダ情報の説明図である。

【図４】圧縮率の異なる３つの画像ファイルとタイムスタンプと内部識別アドレスの関係を説明するための図である。

【図５】ビデオサーバコンピュータに保持される、通信速度と該通信速度に最適化された圧縮画像ファイルとの対応図である。

【図６】第１の実施例におけるビデオサーバコンピュータの動作を説明するためのフローチャートである。

【図７】第１の実施例におけるクライアントコンピュータの動作を説明するためのフローチャートである。

【図８】第２の実施例におけるビデオサーバコンピュータの動作を説明するためのフローチャートである。

【符号の説明】

１０１：ビデオデータの作成および配信を行なうビデオサーバコンピュータ（第１のコンピュータ）

１０２：ビデオデータを格納する記憶装置

１０３，１０３’：ネットワークと接続されるクライアントコンピュータ（第２のコンピュータ）

１０４：ビデオサーバコンピュータとクライアントコンピュータが接続されるネットワーク環境

１０５：プログラム記録媒体（ＣＤ－ＲＯＭ）

１０６：プログラム記録媒体（ＣＤ－ＲＯＭ）

２０１：圧縮ファイルのタイムスタンプ

２０２：圧縮ファイルのタイムスタンプに対応した内部識別アドレス

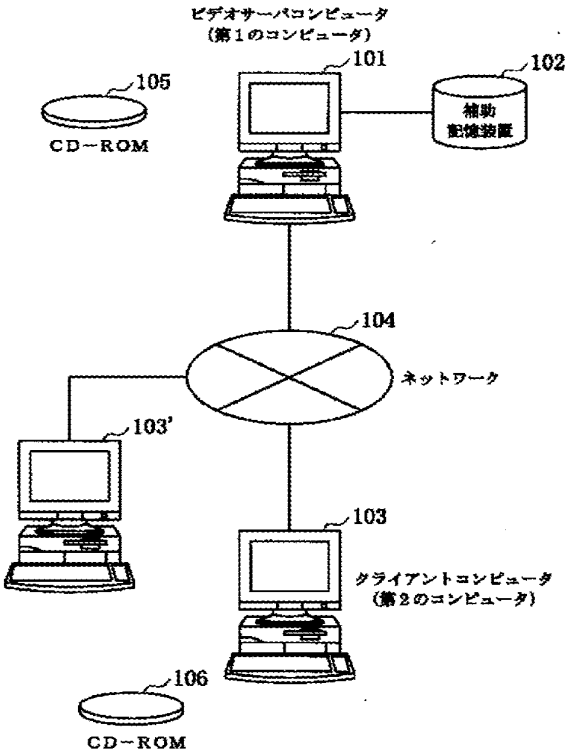
２０３：圧縮ファイルのファイルのヘッダ情報

２０４：本実施例で取り上げるファイルＡのファイルフォーマット

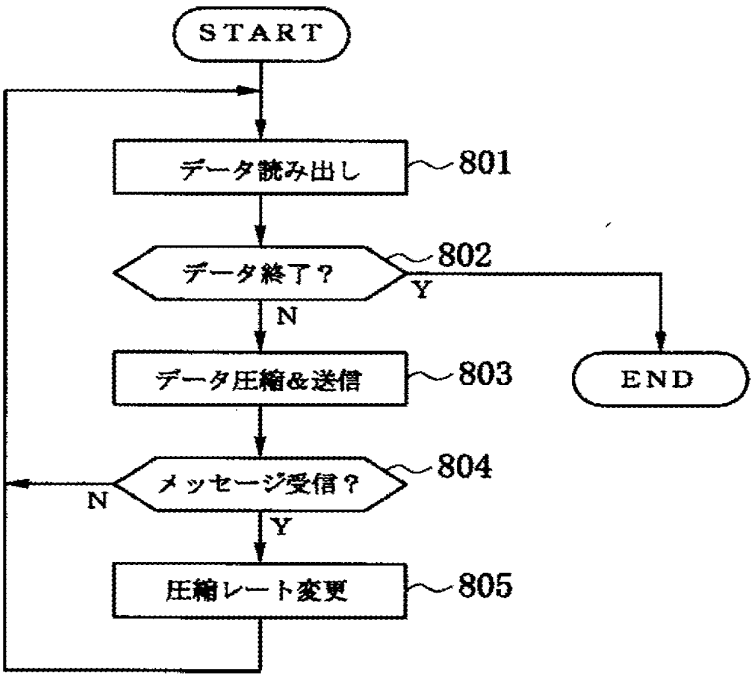
３０１：圧縮ファイルヘッダのタイムスタンプ情報

３０２：圧縮ファイルヘッダのタイムスタンプ情報に対応する内部識別アドレス

【図１】



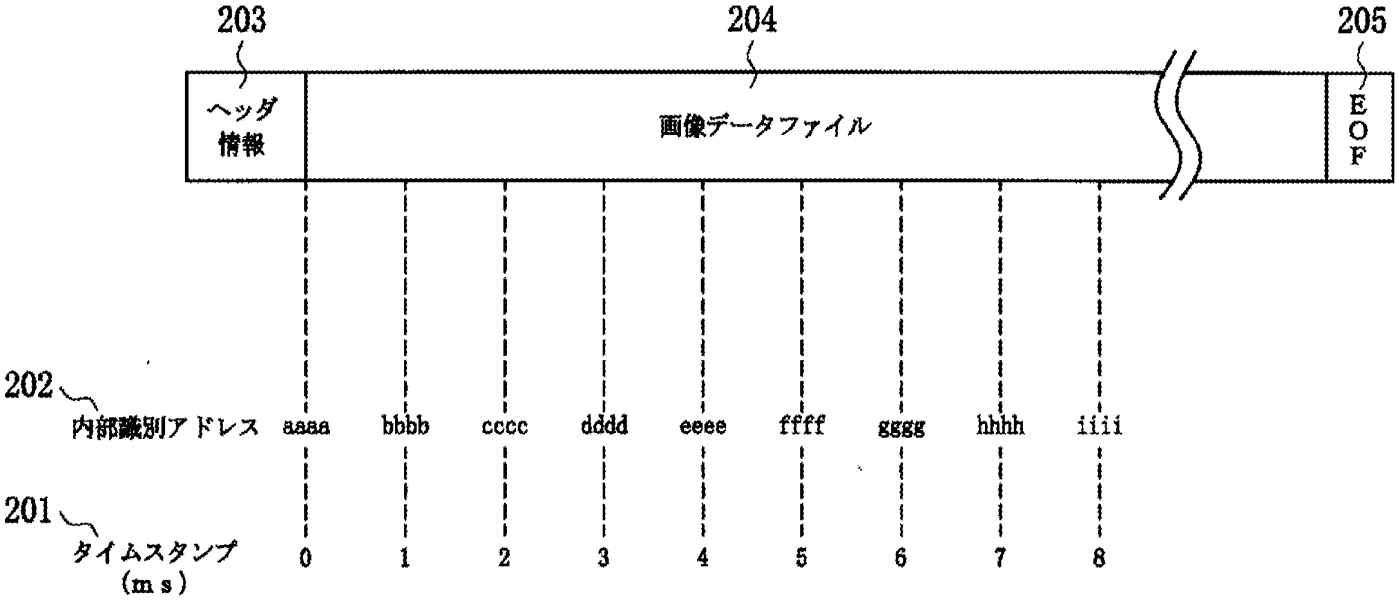
【図８】



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【図２】

画像データファイルのフォーマット



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【図３】

ヘッダ情報の構造

301　302

タイムスタンプ	内部識別アドレス
0	a a a a
1	b b b b
2	c c c c
3	d d d d
4	e e e e
5	f f f f
6	g g g g
7	h h h h
8	i i i i
:	:

低圧縮
画像ファイル（A）
（a）

301　302

タイムスタンプ	内部識別アドレス
0	a a a a
1	c c c c
2	e e e e
3	g g g g
4	i i i i
5	k k k k
6	m m m m
7	o o o o
8	q q q q
:	:

中圧縮
画像ファイル（B）
（b）

301　302

タイムスタンプ	内部識別アドレス
0	a a a a
1	e e e e
2	i i i i
3	m m m m
4	q q q q
5	u u u u
6	y y y y
7	:
8	:
:	:

高圧縮
画像ファイル（C）
（c）

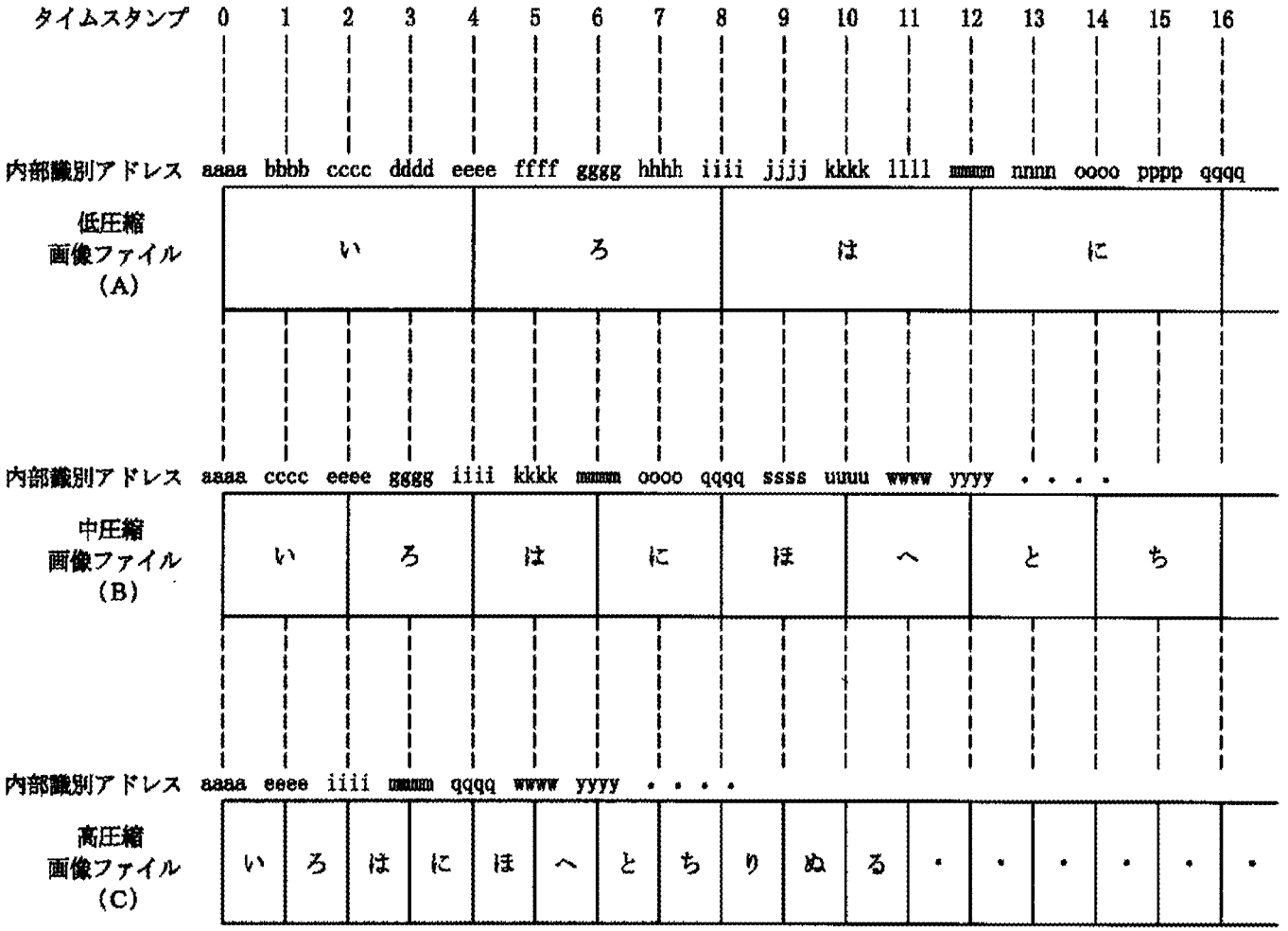
【図５】

通信速度と対応圧縮ファイル

項番	通信速度（ｂｐｓ）	ファイル名
1	～m	圧縮画像ファイルC
2	m～n	圧縮画像ファイルB
3	n～	圧縮画像ファイルA

通信速度の大小関係　m＜n

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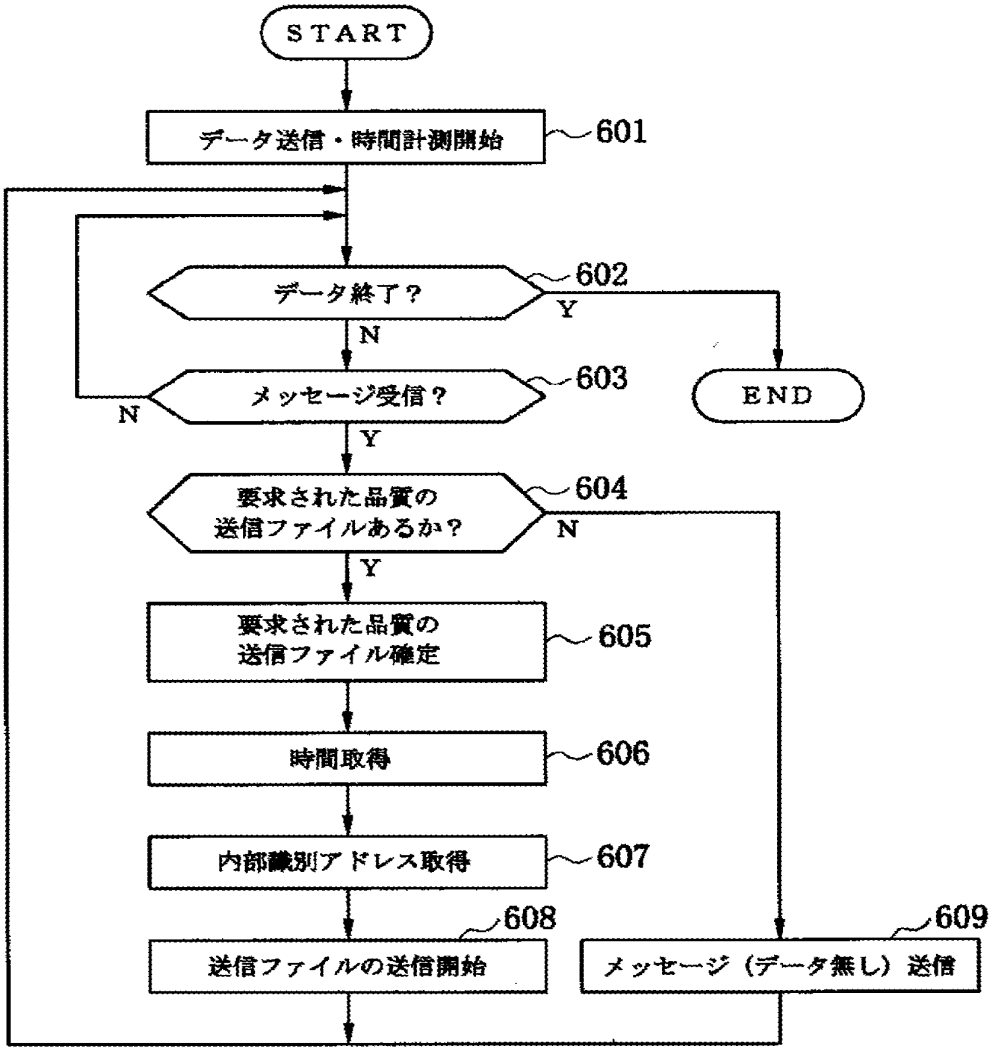
【図４】

特開２００１－９２７５２

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【図６】

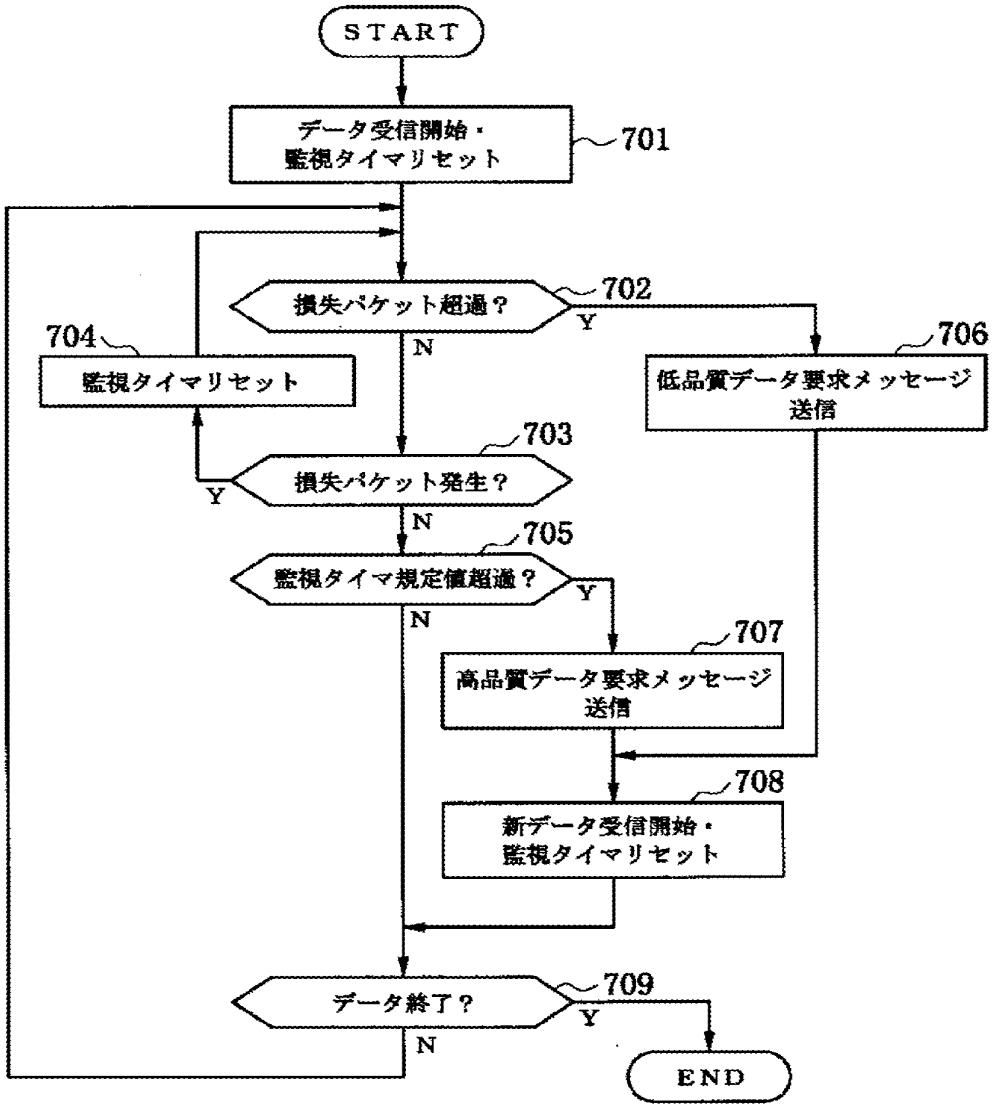
（ビデオサーバコンピュータの処理）



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【図７】

(クライアントコンピュータの処理)



フロントページの続き

(72)発明者　二郷　正樹
東京都渋谷区道玄坂一丁目16番５号　株式
会社日立情報システムズ内

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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **THOMSON LICENSING S.A.** [FR/FR]; 46, Quai A. Le Gallo, F-92648 Boulogne (FR).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **BOYCE, Jill, MacDonald** [US/US]; 3 Brandywine Court, Manalapan, NJ 07726 (US). **RAMASWAMY, Kumar** [IN/US]; 71 Sayre Drive, Princeton, NJ 08540 (US).

(74) Agents: **TRIPOLI, Joseph, S.** et al.; Thomson Licensing Inc., Suite #200, Two Independence Way, Princeton, NJ 08540 (US).

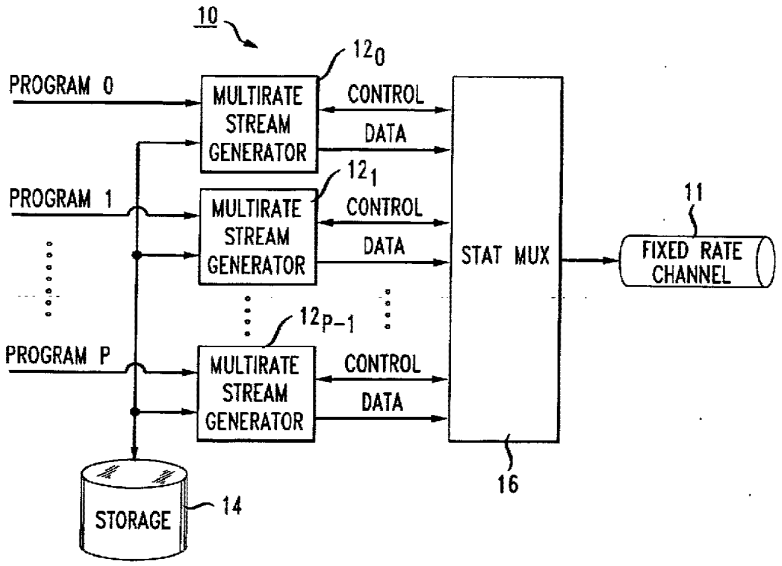
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: VIDEO ON DEMAND SERVER SYSTEM AND METHOD



(57) Abstract: A Video-on-Demand Server architecture (100, 200, 300) transmits a plurality of pre-coded programs having different bit rates across a fixed bandwidth channel (11). For each program, a generator (120-12P-1, 110, 210) generates a plurality of different bit rate representations for each program. Each generator also provides control information at each of a plurality of successive time windows T for each bit rate representation. The control information provides a bit rate and a quality measure during each time window T. The control information enables a statistical multiplexer (16, 160, 260) to select a bit rate representation for each program during each time window T to maximize the quality of the selected representations while not exceeding the total available channel capacity.

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

VIDEO ON DEMAND SERVER SYSTEM AND METHOD

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to a technique for efficiently providing video on demand while maintaining bandwidth constraints of a fixed channel.

BACKGROUND ART

Present day Video-on-Demand (VoD) systems typically transmit Constant Bit Rate (CBR) video. Transmitting CBR video does not achieve the same efficiency as transmitting variable bit rate (VBR) video for equivalent long-term average bit rates. Transmitting multiple pre-recorded VBR-encoded video programs over a constant bandwidth channel has problems since the sum of the instantaneous bitrates required by each program can sometimes exceed the total available bitrate. On the other hand, broadcast applications employing real-time encoders use statistical multiplexing to exploit the instantaneous bitrate variations between multiple programs being carried on the same carrier or transponder. The encoders operate in real time to enable the system to constrain the total combined bit rate for all programs so as not to exceed the channel capacity over a given time window. Each video program has an associated complexity measure. A central controller dynamically adjusts the bit rate allocated to each video program based upon the relative complexities.

There now exist devices known as "video transraters" that operate to reduce the bit rate of video streams within a common compression standard, such as MPEG 2 for example. Present day transraters often experience difficulties when converting between constant and variable bit rates. Such transraters also can experience difficulties when trying to alter the bit rate for bit streams that have many scene changes, or a large number of I-Pictures.

Scalable video encoding, which permits dividing a video signal into a base layer and one or more enhancement layers, can also address bit rate issues. Several methods of scalable video encoding exist, including spatial, SNR, temporal, data partitioning, fine grain scalability (FGS), frequency scalability. The MPEG-2 and MPEG-4 video compression standards include several scalability methods. Using scalable encoding requires both the transmitter and receiver have the same ability to implement different coding algorithms, thus introducing additional complexity.

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Thus, there exists a need for a technique for managing variable bit rate video on demand that obviates the disadvantages of the prior art.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly, in accordance with present principles, there is provided a method for transmitting a plurality of pre-coded programs having different bit rates across a fixed bandwidth channel. For each program, at least two, and preferably, a plurality of different bit rate representations are generated. Control information is provided at each of a plurality of successive time windows for each bit rate representation. The control information provides a bit rate and a quality measure during each time window. The control information enables selection during each time window of a bit rate representation for each program to maximize the quality of the selected representations while not exceeding the total available channel capacity in that time window.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DRAWING

FIGURE 1 depicts a block schematic of first preferred embodiment of a Video-on-Demand server architecture in accordance with the present principles;

FIGURE 2 depicts a block schematic of second preferred embodiment of a Video-on-Demand server architecture in accordance with the present principles; and

FIGURE 3 depicts a block schematic of third preferred embodiment of a Video-on-Demand server architecture in accordance with the present principles.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Before proceeding to describe the technique of the present principles, the following terminology will prove helpful:

T is the time interval over which the system optimization is being contemplated

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T

P is the total number of programs

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p

$n[p] \in (0, N[p]-1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T

$q[p, x]$ is the quality of representation x of program p during T

FIGURE 1 depicts a first preferred embodiment of a Video-on-Demand server architecture 10 in accordance with the present principles for transmitting pre-encoded CBR and/or VBR audio/video programs over a fixed bandwidth channel 11 having a total channel capacity, C. The server architecture 10 includes a plurality of multirate stream generators 12_0, $12_1 \ldots 12_{P-1}$, where P is an integer greater than zero corresponding to the number of separate input streams. The stream rate generators 12_0-12_{P-1} each pre-code a corresponding one of the programs Program 0, Program 1...Program $P-1$ at a plurality of different bit rates. Stated another way, each multirate stream generator pre-codes the corresponding program to yield at least two or more different bit rate representations. A representation can include a particular stored encoded bit stream, or a combination of various portions of different encoded bit streams. A storage device 14, typically in the form of a single disc drive, a Redundant Array of Inexpensive Discs (RAID), or a plurality of RAIDs, serves to store the pre-coded representations generated by the multirate stream generators 12_0-12_{P-1}.

Each of the multirate stream generators 12_0-12_{P-1} generates control information for each time window T of for the corresponding one of Programs 0 to $P-1$, respectively. The control information for each time window T for each representation of each program includes an indication of the bit rate of that representation and a quality measure, such as the peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR) of the representation. A central statistical multiplexer ("stat mux") 16 receives the control information for each representation. At each successive time window T, the stat mux 16 selects a representation for each program to maximize the quality of the transmitted programs while maintaining the total bit rate at or below the total capacity C of the channel 11.

The lowest bit rate representation for each program should not exceed a prescribed value such that the sum of the lowest bit rates for all programs will not exceed the channel capacity for each interval T. In this way, at least one representation of each program can undergo transmission over the channel 11. Requiring the lowest bit rate representation for each program to have a peak bit rate of C/P or less can achieve this constraint. Other methods exist that meet the constraint $\sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,0] \le C$ for all time windows T of all programs. Typically, advance knowledge does not exist as to when playback of particular programs will commence. Therefore,

enforcing capacity restraints becomes easiest by requiring that the bit rate limit of the lowest bit rate representation be the same for all time windows T of a particular program.

The process for the maximization of the overall combined quality can occur in several different ways. In all cases, the constraint $\sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \le C$ must remain met for all time windows T of all programs. A minimax approach can satisfy the constraint by choosing *n[p]* for each $p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$ to maximize the quality of the minimum quality program (i.e., minimizing the maximum distortion.)

The minimax approach can be implemented by sorting the control information for each representation of each program so that the quality and bit rate index increases monotonically increasing with the index. The change in bit rate for each step (referred to as the "delta (Δ)"bit rate) is then stored. The stat mux 16 begins with the lowest index for each program representation and computes the total capacity S. The stat mux 16 the selects the program representation at the lowest quality and checks if adding its delta bit rate to S exceeds C. If the addition of the representation does not exceed C, the index for that representation is incremented, and process is repeated. Once C is exceeded, the representation with the next to lowest quality is checked to see if adding its delta bit rate to S exceeds C. The process is repeated until no increment in any representation can be made without exceeding the channel capacity C. Alternatively, the total quality of all programs could be optimized by maximizing the sum of the individual program qualities which involves solving the following constrained optimization problem:

$$\max_{n[.]} \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p,n[p]]; \text{ subject to } \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \le C$$

It is also possible to optimize the product of the individual program qualities in the following manner:

$$\max_{n[.]} \prod_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p,n[p]]; \text{ subject to } \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \le C$$

A weighted average can also be used, in order to provide different classes of service for different viewers.

The multirate stream generators 12_0-12_{P-1} can use several different methods, or a combination of methods to form multiple representations of each program. In all cases, a random access point, such as an intra-coded (I) frame should occur at the beginning of each time window T, for each representation, so that for each time window T a different representation can be

chosen without causing drift. Each representation can use either CBR or VBR coding as long as the capacity of the lowest bit rate representation meets the total channel capacity constraint.

In a first method, a multirate video encoder encodes each program at several different bit rates into several independent bit streams. Each different bit rate bit stream serves as a different representation. FIGURE 2 depicts an architecture 100 for carrying out this method. As seen in FIG. 2, a multirate video encoder 110 serves to encode a corresponding program to yield a plurality of different rate representations. A separate one of transport packetizers 112_0, $112_2 \ldots 112_{P-1}$ each packetizes a corresponding representation. The multirate encoding performed by the multirate encoder 110, and the packetization performed by the packetizers 112_0-112_{P-1} occurs once, not necessarily in real time, prior to storage in a storage device 140 similar in construction to the storage device 14 of FIG. 1.

Selection of the representations stored in storage device 140 for output in real time occurs in response to a signal received from a selector block 150. The selector block 150 identifies the stored representation for output in response to a request from the stat mux 160 for a particular representation. Upon receipt of the signal from the selector block 150, the storage device 140 supplies the selected packetized representations to the stat mux 160 for output.

In a second method, portions of the several different bit streams are combined to yield additional representations of a program. The presence of random access points at the same location in all bit streams of a program (as would naturally occur at scene changes) or the use of fixed group-of-pictures structures, permits the combination of compressed data from different bit rate streams at random access boundaries to form new representations. No need exists to store each representation independently, as long as the ability exists to generate each representation from the data that is stored. Consider the following example where T is one second, the data is coded at 30 fps, and I frames are inserted every 15 frames, yielding three different bit rate bit streams, designated as Bit stream 0, Bit stream 1, and Bit Stream 2, respectively. Each bit stream constitutes a separate representation. An additional representation can be formed which uses Bitstream 0 for the first 15 frames and Bitstream 1 for the second 15 frames, and so on.

Assuming alignment of the random access points with the transport packets, the server architecture 100 of FIG. 2 works well when the transport packetization occurs in advance. FIGURE 3 depicts a VoD server architecture 200 better suited when the random access points do not necessarily align with the transport packets. Referring to FIG. 3, VoD server architecture 200 includes multirate video encoder 210 for generating a plurality of different bit rate

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representations for storage in a storage device 240 similar to the storage devices 14 and 140. The representations stored in the storage device 140 exist as un-packetized bit streams.

Selection of the representations stored in storage device 240 for output in real time occurs in response to a signal received from a selector block 250. The selector block 250, similar in nature to the selector block 150 of FIG. 2, identifies the stored representation for output in response to a request from a static mixer/multiplexer 260 for a particular representation. Upon receipt of the signal from the selector block 250, the storage device 240 supplies the selected packetized representations to the static mixer/multiplexer. A packetizer 212 packetizes the output stream of the static mixer/multiplexer 260 for output on the channel (not shown).

Representations also can be formed by switching between stored bit streams for non-reference pictures, such as for video codecs (not shown) that include pictures that are not used as reference pictures for predicting other pictures, such as MPEG-2 B frames or JVT non-stored pictures. Each non-reference picture can be selected from a different stored bitstream without affecting the quality of subsequently coded pictures, as the non-stored pictures are not used for prediction. Complete elimination of a non-reference picture in a representation can also occur. Each non-reference picture could be switched individually, or groups of non-reference pictures could be switched together, allowing for many possible total bit rate representations. The multirate stream signal generators 12_0-12_{P-1} of FIG. 1 can choose to limit the number of possible representations to send to the stat mux 16 of FIG. 1 to choose those with significant differences in quality and bit rate. It is not necessary for each representation to be independently stored in storage, but a table listing the location and length of each coded frame can be stored to simplify generation of the representation when needed. It is also possible to store multiple bit rate bit streams only for the non-stored pictures and only store a single version of the reference (I and P) pictures, which can significantly reduce storage requirements.

With the VoD server architectures 100 and 200 of FIGS. 2 and 3, respectively, the stat mux 160 and the static mixer/multiplexer 260 generate a bit stream corresponding to the selected representation. If individual pictures are not transport packet aligned, the architecture 200 of FIG. accomplishes transport packetization after the generation of the bit stream for a particular representation. Otherwise, the VoD server architecture 100 of FIG. 2 FIG. 2 will work well.

In accordance with another aspect of the present principles, scalable video coding can occur by the use of a scalable video encoder (not shown) to form a base layer and one or more enhancement layers. Any type of scalability that which employs the base layer for motion compensated reference picture prediction in order to avoid drift can be used, such as frequency

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scalability, FGS, SNR scalability or temporal scalability. The lowest bit rate representation corresponds to the base layer. The peak bit rate of the base layer must be such that when the bit rates of all programs' base layers are summed, the channel capacity C is not exceeded for each time window T. Other higher bit rate representations will correspond to the base layer plus some portion of the enhancement layer. This approach requires that the video decoder support the type of scalability used. The VoD server architecture 100 of FIG. 2 is used upon inclusion of an entire enhancement layer in a particular representation. The VoD server architecture 200 of FIG. 3 is used if portions of an enhancement layer are used in a representation.

For systems which use encryption for contents right management, the VoD server architecture 100 of FIG. 2 does not require any decryption or encryption in real time, as encryption is added to the transport packetization process done in non-real time and entire encrypted transport packets are stored and transmitted. The VoD server architecture 200 of FIG. 3 requires that encryption be performed along with transport packetization in real-time.

VoD programs generally include both audio and video. As audio bit rates are generally significantly lower than video bit rates and are also generally at a fixed bit rate, there is less advantage to be gained by selecting from different pre-encoded audio bit streams by the stat mux 16 and 160 of FIGS 1 and 2, and the static mixer/multiplexer 260 of FIG. 3. A user likely will find the switching of audio quality during the viewing of a single program disturbing. The total channel capacity C can be considered to be totally consumed by the video channel; assuming that a single bit rate audio stream is also sent for each program. Alternatively, the above-described methods can also be applied to audio, where multiple representations of audio programs with different bit rates and qualities can be generated.

A video player (not shown) that works with the VoD server architectures of the present principles will contain a video decoder (not shown) and some storage for buffering. For the particular program being received, the data can arrive at a non-uniform data rate, but with the requirement that the data corresponding to time unit T will arrive any time within the T time window. The video player must have the capability of buffering and delaying for T. An upper limit on the maximum bit rate that can be transmitted for a given representation of a program for a time window T can be pre-determined to limit the decoder complexity and decoder buffer size. The decoding buffer is generally a requirement of a video decoder, e.g. MPEG-2 levels sets buffer size particular requirements, and the combination of T and the bitrate may be chosen to meet it.

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Fast forward and fast reverse tracks for each program can also be stored at the VoD server. They can be stored at a single bit rate, or at several different bit rates, and allowed to adapt as is done for the normal play program.

Determination of the time window T length is based on several factors. T should be as large as possible to get the most statistical multiplexing gain, but small enough to constrain the delay at the video player for start-up and switching between normal play and trick play streams. T should be small enough to meet decoder requirements.

The foregoing describes a system and method for efficiently providing video on demand while maintaining bandwidth constraints of a fixed channel.

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CLAIMS

1. A method for transmitting a plurality of pre-coded programs having different bit rates across a fixed bandwidth channel, comprising the steps of:

generating at least two different bit rate representations of each program;

providing control information at each of a plurality of successive time windows T for each representation of each program, the control information for each successive window indicating a bit rate and quality measure for a representation of a corresponding program; and

during each time window T, selecting a representation for each program such to maximize the quality of the selected representations while not exceeding a total available capacity for the channel.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of generating at least two different bit rates representation further comprises the step of generating for each program a lowest bit rate representation having a peak bit rate not greater than C/P where C is the total channel capacity in time T and P is the total number of programs.

3. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of providing the control information further comprises the step of establishing the peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR) as the quality measure embodied in the control information.

4. The method according to claim 1 wherein the selecting step further comprises the step of selecting a representation for each program which meets the constraint $\sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p, n[p]] \leq C$ for all time windows wherein:

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p] - 1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p; and

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T

5. The method according to claim 4 further comprising the step of choosing each program's representation n[p] $\in$ (0, N[P]-1) to maximize the quality of the program p that had the minimum quality.

6. The method according to claim 5 further comprising the steps of:

(a) sorting the quality information for with the bit rate and quality measure monotonically increasing with an index value;

(b) storing each bit rate increment (delta) and quality value for each index value;

(c) beginning with a lowest index value, computing total capacity S for program representations selected thus far for such index value;

(d) selecting a program representation at a lowest quality measure;

(e) checking whether the bit rate increment of the selected program at the lowest quality, when added to the representations selected thus far, exceeds total channel capacity, and if not

(f) incrementing the index value; and

(g) repeating steps (c)-(f).

7. The method according to claim 1 wherein the selecting step further comprises the step of selecting the representation for each program such to maximize a sum of individual program qualities by solving $\max_{n[.]} \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p, n[p]]$; subject to $\sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p, n[p]] \leq C$

wherein ,

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p] - 1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p;

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T; and

$q[p, x]$ is the quality of representation x of program p during T.

8. The method according to claim 1 wherein the selecting step further comprises the step of selecting the representation for each program such to maximize a product of individual program qualities by solving

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$$\max_{n[.]} \prod_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p,n[p]]; \text{ subject to } \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \leq C$$

where,

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p]-1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p;

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T; and

$q[p, x]$ is the quality of representation x of program p during T.

9. The method according to claim 8 further comprising the step of applying a weighted average to provide different classes of service for different viewers.

10. A system for transmitting a plurality of pre-coded programs having different bit rates across a fixed bandwidth channel, comprising the steps of:

means for generating at least two different bit rate representations of each program;

means providing control information at each of a plurality of successive time windows T for each representation of each program, the control information for each successive window indicating a bit rate and quality measure for a representation of a corresponding program; and

means for selecting during each time window T a representation for each program such to maximize the quality of the selected representations while not exceeding a total available capacity for the channel.

11. The system according to claim 10 wherein the generating means and control information providing means collectively comprise:

a plurality of multirate stream generators, each associated with a corresponding one of the plurality of pre-coded programs.

12. The system according to claim 10 wherein the generating means and control information providing means collectively comprise:

a multirate video encoder for encoding at least two bit rate representations of each pre-coded program.

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13. The system according to claim 10 wherein the generating means and control information providing means collectively comprise:

a multirate video encoder for encoding at least two bit rate representations of each pre-coded program; and

a plurality of transport packetizers, each serving to packetize the bit rate presentations for each pre-coded program.

14. The system according to claim 10 wherein the selecting means includes a static multiplexer.

15. The system according to claim 12 wherein the selecting means comprises:

a static multiplexer; and

a transport packetizer for packetizing the selecting representation.

16. The system according to claim 10 wherein the selecting means generates for each program a lowest bit rate representation having a peak bit rate not greater than C/P where C is the total channel capacity in time T and P is the total number of programs.

17. The system according to claim 10 wherein control information providing means establishes quality measure in accordance with a peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR).

18. The system according to claim 10 wherein the selecting means selects a representation for each program which meets the constraint $\sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p, n[p]] \leq C$ for all time windows where:

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p] - 1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p; and

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T.

19. The system according to claim 18 wherein the selecting means chooses each program's representation n[p] $\in$ (0, N[P]-1) to maximize the quality of the program p that had the minimum quality.

20. The system according to claim 10 wherein the selecting means selects the representation for each program such to maximize a sum of individual program qualities by solving:

$$\max_{n[.]} \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p,n[p]]; \quad \text{subject to} \quad \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \le C$$

where,

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p]-1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p;

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T; and

$q[p, x]$ is the quality of representation x of program p during T.

21. The system according to claim 10 wherein the selecting means selects the representation for each program such to maximize a product of individual program qualities by solving:

$$\max_{n[.]} \prod_{p=0}^{P-1} q[p,n[p]]; \quad \text{subject to} \quad \sum_{p=0}^{P-1} r[p,n[p]] \le C$$

where,

C is the total channel capacity available in time frame T;

P is the total number of programs;

$p \in (0, P\text{-}1)$, is the index of a particular program;

$N[p]$ is the total number of representations of program p;

$n[p] \in (0, N[p]-1)$ is the index of a particular representation of program p;

$r[p, x]$ is the bit rate of representation x of program p during T; and

$q[p, x]$ is the quality of representation x of program p during T.

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22. The system according to claim 10 wherein a weighted average is applied to provide different classes of service for different viewers.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A Video-on-Demand Server architecture (100, 200, 300) transmits a plurality of pre-coded programs having different bit rates across a fixed bandwidth channel (11). For each program, a generator (12_0-12_{P-1}, 110, 210) generates a plurality of different bit rate representations for each program. Each generator also provides control information at each of a plurality of successive time windows T for each bit rate representation. The control information provides a bit rate and a quality measure during each time window T. The control information enables a statistical multiplexer (16, 160, 260) to select a bit rate representation for each program during each time window T to maximize the quality of the selected representations while not exceeding the total available channel capacity.

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FIG. 1

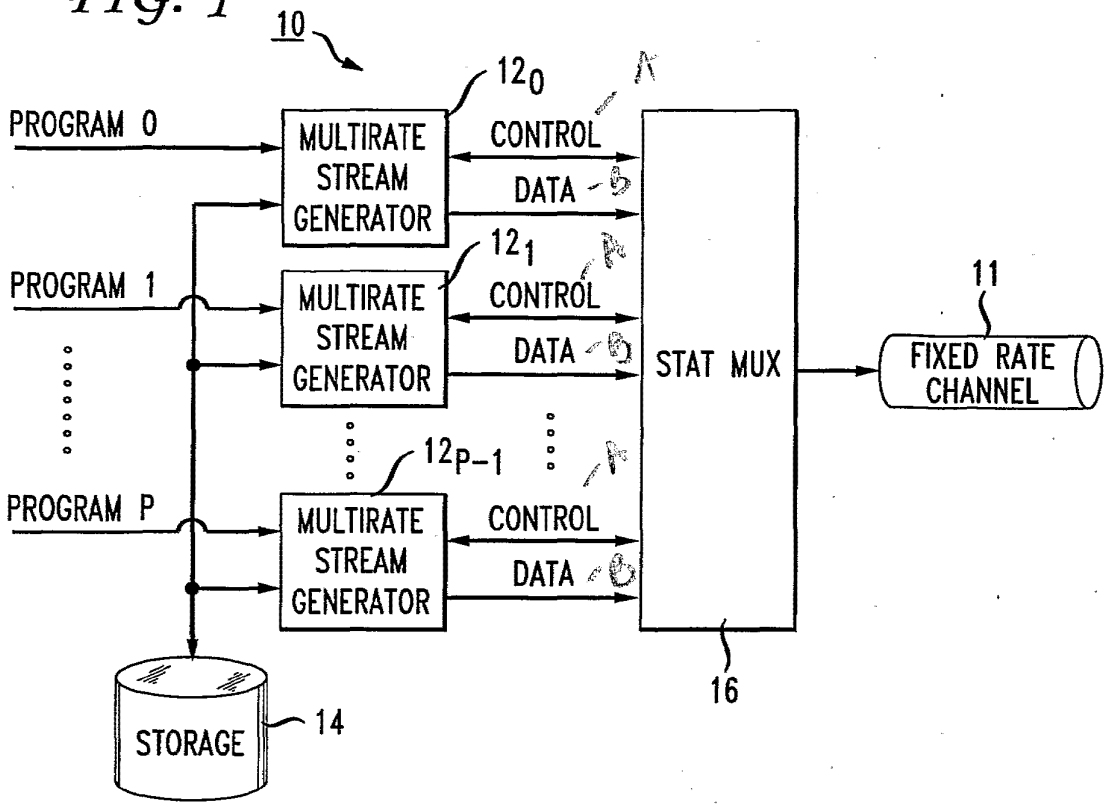

10
PROGRAM 0
PROGRAM 1
PROGRAM P
MULTIRATE STREAM GENERATOR
MULTIRATE STREAM GENERATOR
MULTIRATE STREAM GENERATOR
12_0
12_1
12_{P-1}
CONTROL
DATA
CONTROL
DATA
CONTROL
DATA
STAT MUX
11
FIXED RATE CHANNEL
16
STORAGE
14

FIG. 2

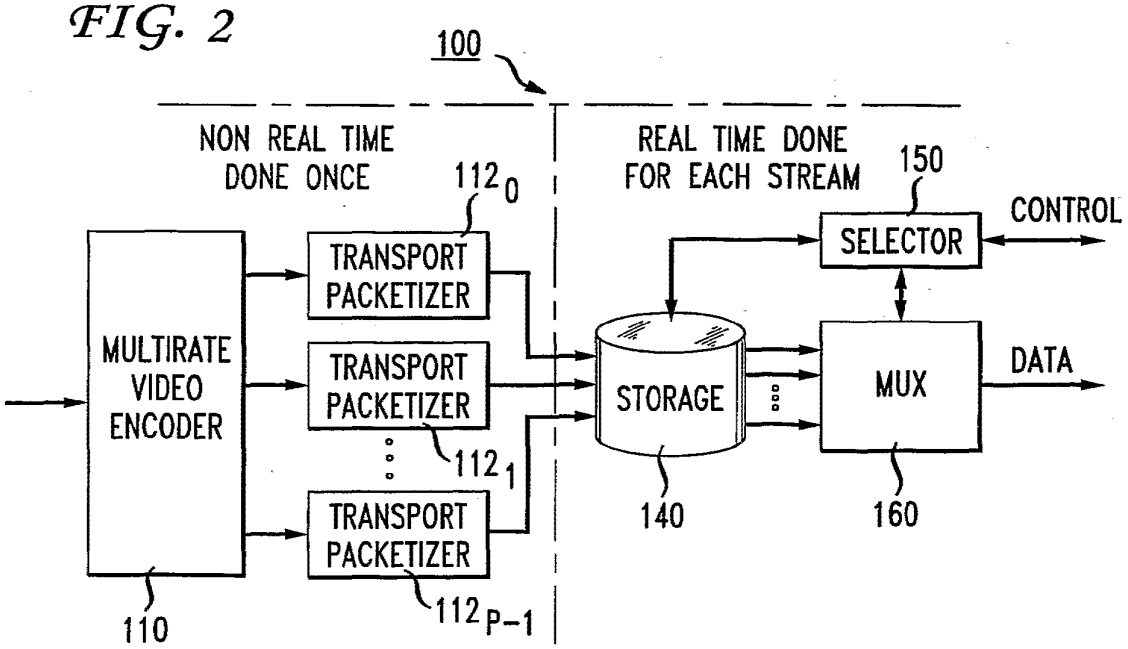
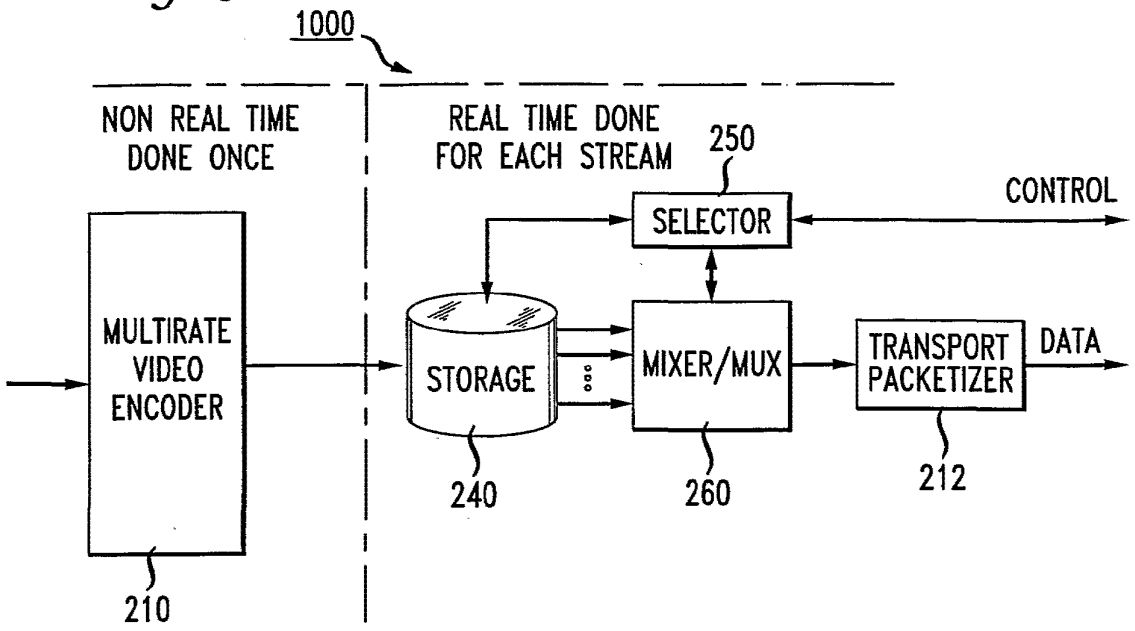

100
NON REAL TIME DONE ONCE
REAL TIME DONE FOR EACH STREAM
MULTIRATE VIDEO ENCODER
110
TRANSPORT PACKETIZER
TRANSPORT PACKETIZER
TRANSPORT PACKETIZER
112_0
112_1
112_{P-1}
STORAGE
140
150
SELECTOR
CONTROL
MUX
160
DATA

FIG. 3


1000
NON REAL TIME
DONE ONCE
REAL TIME DONE
FOR EACH STREAM
250
SELECTOR
CONTROL
MULTIRATE
VIDEO
ENCODER
STORAGE
MIXER/MUX
TRANSPORT
PACKETIZER
DATA
210
240
260
212

PCT
New International Application
Inventory of Unscannable or Missing Items

Serial Number

Check This Column if Item Is Present	Item	Check This Column if Item Is Missing on Filing
✓	Return Receipt Postcard	
	Check (amount $ _____)	✓
✓	PCT EASY Diskette	
	DNA Diskette	
	Exhibit	
✓	Express Mail Label or Envelope	
	Applicant Supplied Priority Document	
	Other (specify)	XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX	Cover Letter	
XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX	Other (specify)	

Winword/PTO\Automation\Unscanned inventory.wpd sheet

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(71) Applicant: **Oplayo Oy**
00180 Helsinki (FI)

(72) Inventor: **Ala-Honkola, Pekka**
00180 Helsinki (FI)

(74) Representative: **Savela, Antti-Jussi**
Patent Agency Compatent Ltd.
Hämeentie 29, 4th. Fl.
00500 Helsinki (FI)

(54) Adaptive media stream

(57) This invention relates to media streams transmitted in a network, such as the Internet. The idea is to change the source of the content of a media stream when an available transmission speed rate changes. Each source contains essentially the same information (such as video and voice), but the suitability of each source for transmission has been adjusted to a certain speed rate.

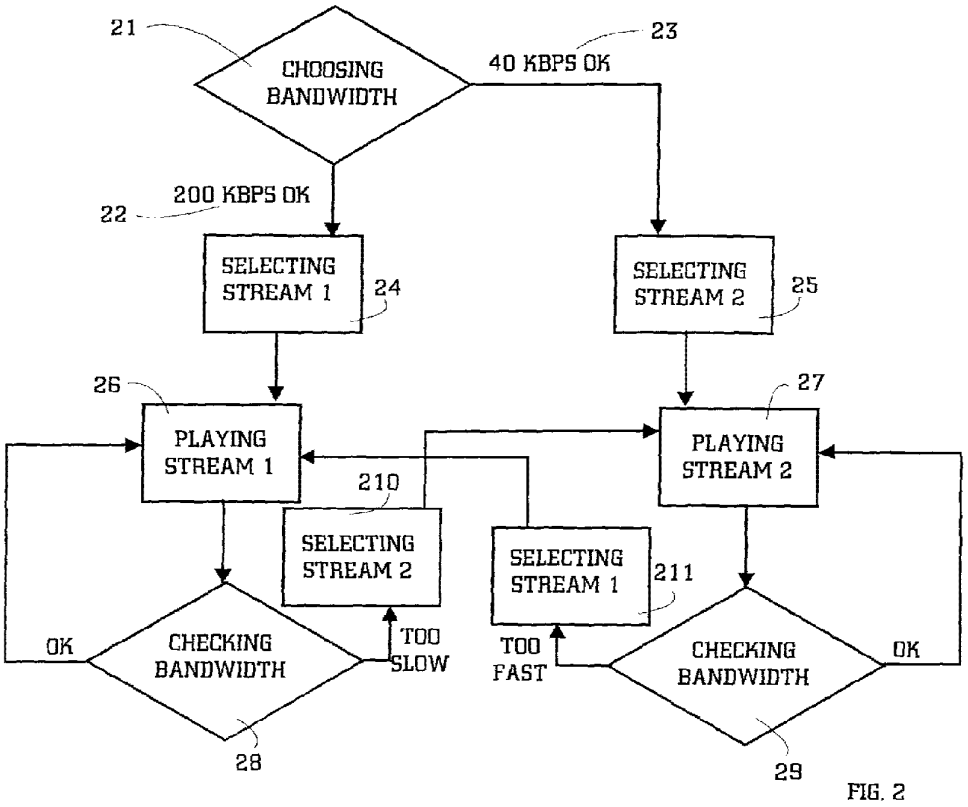


FIG. 2

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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to media streams transmitted in a network, such as the Internet. Especially, the invention relates to media streams concerning video pictures and voice.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] When media streams that contain continuous data, for example video pictures and voice, are transmitted in a network, such as the Internet, the speeds of the media streams have to be adjusted with the speed of the transmission connection available at the time. Often, in the case of video pictures, the adjustment is made by changing the visual quality of the pictures. The speed of a transmission connection in the Internet depends strongly on a user's Internet terminal. Some terminals support technically higher speed rates than others (usually older terminals). Thus, speed adjusted media streams must be offered for a variety of terminals.

[0003] Transmission speed may also vary with time. For example, when congestion happens in the network, the transmission speed may decrease considerably. After the congestion, the transmission speed returns to the normal speed rate.

[0004] Nowadays, most of the content of the Internet is in WWW servers, which use the HTTP protocol for transmitting desired contents to users. Originally, the HTTP protocol was not designed for continuous media streams (video, voice). The problem of the known solutions is that when a media stream has to be adjusted for a changed transmission condition, i.e. to be an adaptive media stream, a special software or protocol must be used, instead of the HTTP protocol. Real Server® (RealNetworks Inc, Seattle, Washington), Quicktime® Server (Apple Computers, Cupertino California), and Windows Media Server® (Microsoft, Redmond, Washington) are commercial server software, which support adaptive media streams. These software packages use special protocols, such as RTP (Real-Time Transport Protocol) and RTSP (Real Time Streaming Protocol), which are designed for the adaptive media streams.

[0005] However, using these software packages usually requires a user to invest and maintain parallel devices and software in addition to the WWW server that is used to serve other Internet content, such as web pages. User communities such as corporations require support staff which must be educated to use these systems. For a service provider this means in practice that a special media stream server must be maintained. The goal of this invention is to eliminate these drawbacks. This is achieved in a way described in the claims.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The following definitions should be kept in mind when reading these specifications:

Connection: A transport layer virtual circuit established between two programs for the purpose of communication. A connection can have varying transmission speed rates.

HTTP transport: An application layer transmission of data from a file on a server computer to a user terminal using HTTP 1.1 protocol. One HTTP 1.1 connection can consist of one or several HTTP 1.1 transports.

Stream: A continuous transmission of data over for example HTTP transport

[0007] An important aspect of the invention is to change the source of an adaptive media stream when an available connection speed rate changes. Each source contains essentially the same information (such as video and voice), but the suitability of each source for transmission has been adjusted to a certain connection speed rate. The coding of the source information can be different among the sources, which affects the speed rate. The picture information can be black-and-white instead of a color picture. The picture size can be smaller or larger. The video can be with or without voice. When the source is changed, also a new HTTP transmission for the new source is started for a new stream containing the information of the new source. In other words, the adaptive media stream, i.e. the adaptive stream, comprises at least one media stream for transmitting information.

[0008] In an arrangement according to the invention a source file is formed. The source file contains a plurality of sources intended for different media streams, according to such parameters as bandwidth, computing capability of the receiving terminal, etc. At the beginning of the transmission the optimal transmission speed rate at the time is chosen according to an information transfer condition. The source in the source file, which corresponds to the available speed rate, is selected to be the source of the adaptive media stream. When the available transmission speed rate changes, either to be faster or slower, a command for changing the source of the adaptive media stream, is sent from the user's terminal to the service provider's server, i.e. the source server, wherein the file of the service is. Preferably commands are sent using an HTTP protocol. When the available transmission speed rate changes again, a new command for changing the source is sent from the user's terminal to the source server. The commands are sent when it is possible to use a higher speed rate or when a lower speed rate must be used.

[0009] In one aspect, the invention thus provides a method for providing an adaptive media stream between a sending terminal and a user's terminal wherein

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the adaptive media stream comprises at least one media stream and the method comprises the steps of choosing a transmission speed rate for the media stream, selecting a suitable data source for the media stream among sources containing essentially the same information content, each source intended for a certain information transfer condition and playing the media stream. During such playing, checking the suitability of the actual transmission speed rate, and continuing playing the media stream if the transmission speed is still suitable or selecting a new data source, which is suitable at the moment as a response for the selection of the new data source, playing a new media stream. Those selection actions continue until the played stream stops.

[0010] Optionally, the step of choosing comprises the phase of reading a header field of a file, which contains at least two data sources, the header indicating the starting points of the sources and to which transmission speed rate each source is indented. Yet another option calls for the selecting step to include the phase of starting to read from the starting point of the selected source.

[0011] Other aspect of the invention provide for the step of monitoring to include the phase of monitoring a filling degree of a buffer for incoming data in the user's terminal, e.g. if the buffer is becoming empty or full, then selecting to continue to play the present media stream or to start playing another media stream. The information of the selection of the new data source may transmitted from the user's terminal to the sending terminal using a GET method of an HTTP protocol with an optional RANGE field. When a new stream is played, an optional phases of terminating the old media stream after starting to play the new media stream and creating the new media stream before playing the new media stream is also contemplated.

[0012] If a new stream is selected, according to another aspect of the invention, the step of reading timing marks in said adaptive media stream for defining the right point to start playing the new media stream is also performed. Further, the step of selecting the initial speed may comprise the phase of reading a header field of files, where each contains one data source, the header indicating the starting points of the source and to which transmission speed rate the source is indented.

[0013] An arrangement for providing an adaptive media stream between a sending terminal and a user's terminal, is also contemplated, wherein the adaptive media stream comprises at least one media stream and the arrangement comprises:

a) Means in the client terminal for choosing a transmission speed rate for the media stream,
b) A data structure in the sending terminal comprising at least two data sources containing essentially the same information, each source intended for a certain transmission speed rate,
c) Means in the client terminal and the sending terminal for selecting a suitable data source from among the sources for the media stream,
d) Means in the user's terminal for checking the suitability of the transmission speed rate when the media stream is played,
e) Means in the user's terminal for reselecting a suitable data source from among the sources for a new media stream.

[0014] An arrangement as described above may further comprise means for playing the data structure in a way that the playing is started from the right point of the data structure. Preferably, means a) comprises means for reading a message from the user's terminal, which defines alternative transmission speed rates. Further preferably, each source comprises timing marks, which indicate the corresponding point in the other sources. More preferably, the arrangement further comprises a GET method of an HTTP protocol with an optional RANGE field for transmitting the information of the reselection of the suitable data source from the user's terminal to the sending terminal. In another preferable embodiment, means d) comprises means for monitoring a filling degree of a buffer for incoming data in the user's terminal. It also preferable that the data structure is a file containing the data sources. Alternatively, the data structure may be a number of files, each of them containing one data source.

[0015] Means c) may further comprise means for reading a header of the data structure, which indicates the starting points of the sources and to which transmission speed rate each source is intended. Means c) may further comprise means for reading headers of the files, which indicate the starting point of the source and to which transmission speed rate the source is intended.

[0016] In yet another aspect, the invention teaches a method for storing adaptive media stream data comprising the steps of storing a plurality of media streams, each representing a substantially similar information content, and each adapted for a different set of information transfer conditions; and providing a plurality of pointers into a first of said media streams, said pointers associated with a source location in one of said media streams and pointing to at least one target location in a second of said media streams; wherein the information content of said target location is substantially a continuation of the information content prior to said source location.

[0017] Preferably, said plurality of media streams is contained in a single file. Said pointers are preferably embedded within said adaptive media stream data, and comprise target locations pointer comprises a byte offset into said single file. Alternatively, said target location pointer comprises an offset into said second source stream, within said single file. Another alternative teaches that said target locations pointers comprise a pointer to another file containing said second media stream or a portion thereof. Optionally in this case, said target location pointer further comprises a byte offset into said

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other file.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] In the following the invention is described in more detail by means of Figs. **1 - 3** in the attached drawings where.

FIG. **1** illustrates an example of the structure of a file according to the invention,
FIG. **2** illustrates an example of a flow chart describing the function of the inventive arrangement,
FIG. **3** illustrates an example of an arrangement according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] FIG. **1** describes an example of a file structure according to the invention. The file is in the service provider's server (source server) from where users can stream it. For example the file contains a video in two different formats. At the beginning of the file there exists a header **1**, which contains starting bytes for two different media sources - the sources for the media stream. Source 1, called stream 1 contains video data in a resolution of 320*240, for a speed rate 200 kbps (kilobit per second) **2.** The starting byte **4** for that video data is byte 2000 in the file. Source 2, called stream 2 contains video data in a resolution of 160*120 optimized for a speed rate 40 kbps **3.** The starting byte of that video data **5** in the file is at byte 800000. If the network and a user's terminal support the transmission speed rate 200 kbps then stream 1 is sent to the user - otherwise stream 2 is sent. In this embodiment, all data feeds are assumed to support communication at a speed of at least 40 kbps. It should be noted that stream 1 and 2 are sources i.e. the parts of the file structures in this example, and a media stream is a continuous transmission of data of a source over a transmission protocol. The transmission protocol used can be any protocol, in this text the HTTP protocol is used.

[0020] Stream 1 is sent, i.e. streamed, to the user. Stream 1 (and the media stream for it as well) contains timing marks **6, 7, 8, 9.** The timing marks are embedded in stream 1 at a various locations, and correlate the information in the two separate resolution streams. Thus the timing marks of stream 1 in the example of Fig. 1 indicate the byte of the file where the stream is running at the time and the corresponding byte **6A, 7A, 8A, 9A,** in stream 2. If for some reason, the network can not transmit stream 1 with 200 kbps, or the user's terminal can not receive at this speed rate, the transmission of the video is changed to stream 2. For example, when the need to change the speed rate to a lower one is noticed and the most recently received (or alternatively the next) timing mark is, let's say, the mark **7** indicating time 1000 ms, it tells the corresponding byte 805000 in stream 2 to where the source of the transmission of the video transfers **11.**

[0021] Similarly, stream 2 (and the media stream for it) contains timing marks **10**, **11**, **12**, **13**, which point to the location of corresponding information in stream 1, as shown by the corresponding byte **10A, 11A**, **12A**, **13A**, in stream 1. When the capability of transmitting 200 kbps is noticed during the transmission at 40 kbps rate, the transmission of the video is changed to stream 1. For example, when the availability of the higher speed rate is noticed and the next timing mark is the mark **13** indicating time 3000 ms, the corresponding byte 77000, located in stream 1, points to the location of corresponding information in stream 1 so the source of transmission is shifted to stream 1, using data stored in location **9** onwards.

[0022] FIG. **2** shows an example of a flow chart, which illustrates a function and method of the invention. FIG. **3** shows an example of the inventive arrangement. When a user visits a home page of a service provider, he/she may find something he wants to order, such as a video show. The video player client running in the user terminal sends **34** a request message from the terminal **33** to the service provider's server **31** through the network **32**, such as the Internet, to get the show using a GET method, which is one of the methods defined in the HTTP1.1 protocol. Let the request be:

GET http://www.serviceprovider.com/video/music/song1.video. **HTTP/1.1**

[0023] Often, the connection speed rate depends on the available (and optional) connection and processing speeds of the terminal. At the beginning, the first stream which is sent works like a test stream. The test stream, i.e. the first stream preferably forms the first part of the file structure, which preferably contains data for the lowest bandwidth. Thus the first stream over the HTTP transport also contains a list of alternative speed rates. The player in the client terminal chooses **21** one of the supported speed rate from the list. (It should be noted that the server can be informed of the capability of a terminal or the available bandwidth using other techniques and the specific method of learning the link capabilities is a matter of technical choice to one skilled in the art.) In this example, the user's terminal supports speed rates of 200 kbps and 40 kbps. Let's assume that the desired file **36** is the file in FIG. **1**. If the speed rate of 200 kbps **22** is available, stream 1 is selected **24**. Otherwise, the speed rate of 40 kbps **23** is chosen and stream 2 is selected **25.** (Notice that the higher speed rate means the higher bandwidth.)

[0024] In the selection of the speed rate of 200 kbps the server starts to play **26** stream 1 beginning at byte (2000) of the file. The data and the timing marks are sent **35** to the user's terminal during the play. The terminal checks **28** frequently that the currently available bandwidth is sufficient for the selected stream. If the bandwidth is sufficient, playing stream 1 is continued. If the bandwidth becomes unavailable for stream 1, stream 2 is selected **210** and stream 2 starts to play **27**, **311** be-

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ginning at the byte of the file defined by the latest timing mark. The bandwidth of stream 2 is checked **29** similarly as the bandwidth of stream 1, and when the bandwidth is again available for the speed rate of 200 kbps, stream 1 is selected **211**.

[0025] In the selection of the speed rate of 40 kbps the server starts to play **25** stream 2 from the right byte (800000) of the file. The data and the timing marks are sent **35** to the user's terminal during the play. The terminal checks **29** frequently that the bandwidth is okay for the selected stream. If the bandwidth is still restricted to 40 kbps, playing stream 2 is continued. If the bandwidth rise to a level sufficient to support 200 kbps transmission, stream 1 is selected **211** and stream 1 starts to play **26**, and is sent **311** to the terminal **33** beginning at the byte of the file defined by the latest timing mark. The bandwidth of stream 1 is checked **28** similarly as the bandwidth of stream 2, and when the bandwidth is again too slow for the speed rate of 200 kbps, stream 2 is selected **210**.

[0026] The checking of the bandwidth of the streams can be made, for example, measuring a filling degree of a buffer for incoming data connection in the user's terminal. When the buffer is becoming empty, the required bandwidth for current stream is too high compared to what is available through the network connection, and the speed rate should be dropped. When the buffer is becoming full, bandwidth for current stream is lower than what is available through the network connection, and the speed rate can be raised. After the measurement, the suitable stream source is selected **210, 211** and a GET command with an additional field RANGE is sent **310** from the user's terminal to the server for changing the stream. For example, let the GET command be GET http://www.serviceprovider.com/video/music/song3video RANGE: bytes= 805000- when the transmission speed rate changes from 200 kbps to 40 kbps.

[0027] It is worth noting that preferably, when a stream is changed, a new HTTP transport (and naturally a new media stream) is started and the old media stream is terminated after the new media stream starts playing. From the view of the user the desired file, such as a video show, seems to continue without any break because the new stream starts playing from the byte indicated by the timing mark, thus the information continuity is maintained, despite the media stream switch. So, when the source is changed, also a new HTTP transport is created for the new stream, i.e. media stream, instance and for the new source. Thus the adaptive media stream, i. e. the adaptive stream, is made up of one media stream or several consecutive media streams. Since the consecutive media streams carry essentially the same data, a user gets a visual impression of continuous shows. In other words, the adaptive media stream comprises at least one media stream for transmitting information. The HTTP 1.1 protocol provides a feature called Persistent Connections. Persistent Connection means that several requests (such as GET), can be sent via one TCP connection. Thus one connection may carry several consecutive streams. However, it should be noted that several TCP connections may be needed or used for transmitting consecutive streams.

[0028] Furthermore, it may be said that the adaptive media stream comprises several (or one if the speed rate remains the same during the whole transmission) instances (separate streams) of the same object (the adaptive media stream containing information such as video). Naturally, there are more ways to model the adaptive media stream, but common for these models are that transmission of information of the adaptive stream, (the stream of a continuous data, such as video over one or several connections) happens in one or several consecutive media streams over a transport protocol, each media stream adapted for certain conditions, and certain links or pointers periodically connect or cross connect the media streams in essentially content coherent fashion. Thus varying transmission conditions may dictate how many suitable media streams are sent forming together the adaptive stream.

[0029] For creating the inventive arrangement an initial selection module **39** (i.e. means) for choosing an original transmission speed rate and selecting a suitable source in a service provider's server is needed. In a user's terminal another estimation module **37** (i.e. means for checking transmission rate) is needed, for checking the suitability of the transmission speed rate as reselection module **38** (i.e. means) for reselecting a suitable source are needed.

[0030] Although, the processing and network connection speed of a user's terminal is mostly the decisive element when selecting a suitable transmission speed rate, it may happen that the network itself becomes congested. In congestion, the available speed rate decreases and the transmission speed rate must be lowered. On the other hand, if the network allows a higher speed, the transmission speed rate may be increased.

[0031] Using the inventive arrangement, an adaptive media stream can be served from with a common HTTP server. Therefore, there is no need for the use of a special media stream server, or parallel devices and software. Remarkable cost savings are achieved, since usually service providers and users support the HTTP protocol. Also the reliability of the system increases because of fewer sources of faults.

[0032] It is clear that inventive arrangement can be implemented in many ways. For example, the time period between two timing marks can be different than in the example of this text. It can be any suitable period depending on the features of a solution, such as 2 or 4 seconds. The format of the inventive file can be any suitable format as well, such as MPEG or another.

[0033] The inventive file may comprise more than two different streams (containing the same content), from which the most suitable stream is selected at any given time. Therefore, timing marks must contain a number of references for the corresponding byte in the other data

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sources.

[0034] All the sources do not have to be in the same file, but each source can be a separate file. However, the use of this kind of structure is not as efficient when attempting to use as little processing power as possible compared to the use of one file structure. In the structure of several files, timing marks must indicate the right file with the corresponding byte.

[0035] Although, a sending terminal have been described to be a server in the examples above, it is clear that the sending terminal can be another terminal capable of sending information.

[0036] Similarly other mechanisms are known and suitable to measure and select the most appropriate source. Such methods may be server based or user terminal based, or even utilize intermediate network nodes to estimate network congestion and bandwidth, and similar measurements that are indicative of total node to node capacity, as well as specific node capabilities, and the selection of sources (and media streams) may be carried out in various ways that will provide the best end-user experience according to varying conditions.

[0037] According to the above-mentioned matters, it is evident that the invention is not restricted to the solutions described in this text, but it can be modified for various solutions, in the scope of the inventive idea.

Claims

1. A method for providing an adaptive media stream between a sending terminal and a user's terminal **characterized in that** the adaptive media stream comprises at least one media stream and the method comprises the steps of:

   a) choosing a transmission speed rate for the media stream,
   b) selecting a suitable data source for the media stream among sources containing essentially the same information, each source intended for a certain transmission speed rate,
   c) playing the media stream,
   d) checking the suitability of the transmission speed rate,
   e) either continuing playing the media stream if the transmission speed is still suitable or,
   f) selecting a new data source, which is suitable at the moment,
   g) as a response for the selection of the new data source, playing a new media stream,
   h) repeating steps d) to g) until the stream, which is played, stops.

2. A method according to claim 1 **characterized in that** step b) comprises the phase of reading a header field of a file, which contains at least two data sources, the header indicating the starting points of the sources and to which transmission speed rate each source is intended.

3. A method according to claim 2 **characterized in that** step c) comprises the phase of starting to read from the starting point of the selected source.

4. A method according to claim 1 or 3 **characterized in that** step d) comprises the phase of monitoring a filling degree of a buffer for incoming data in the user's terminal.

5. A method according to claim 4 **characterized in that** if the buffer is becoming empty or full, then step f) is chosen, else step e) is chosen.

6. A method according to claim 1 or 5 **characterized in that** the information of the selection of the new data source is transmitted from the user's terminal to the sending terminal using a GET method of an HTTP protocol with an optional RANGE field.

7. A method according to claim 1 **characterized in that** step g) comprises phases of terminating the old media stream after starting to play the new media stream and creating the new media stream before playing the new media stream.

8. A method according to claim 1 or 7, **characterized in that** step g) further comprises the phase of reading timing marks in the data source for defining the right point to start playing the new media stream.

9. A method according to claim 1 **characterized in that** step b) comprises the phase of reading a header field of files, where each contains one data source, the header indicating the starting points of the source and to which transmission speed rate the source is intended.

10. An arrangement for providing an adaptive media stream between a sending terminal and a user's terminal, **characterized in that** the adaptive media stream comprises at least one media stream and the arrangement comprises:

    a) means in the sending terminal for choosing a transmission speed rate for the media stream,
    b) a data structure in the sending terminal comprising at least two data sources containing essentially the same information, each source intended for a certain transmission speed rate,
    c) means in the sending terminal for selecting a suitable data source from among the sources for the media stream,
    d) means in the user's terminal for checking the suitability of the transmission speed rate when the media stream is played,

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e) means in the user's terminal for reselecting a suitable data source from among the sources for a new media stream.

11. An arrangement according to claim 10, **characterized in that** the arrangement further comprises means for playing the data structure in a way that the playing is started from the right point of the data structure.

12. An arrangement according to claim 11, **characterized in that** means a) comprises means for reading a message from the user's terminal, which defines alternative transmission speed rates.

13. An arrangement according to claim 11, **characterized in that** each source comprises timing marks, which indicate the corresponding point in the other sources.

14. An arrangement according to claim 13, **characterized in that** the arrangement further comprises a GET method of an HTTP protocol with an optional RANGE field for transmitting the information of the reselection of the suitable data source from the user's terminal to the sending terminal.

15. An arrangement according to claim 11, **characterized in that** means d) comprises means for monitoring a filling degree of a buffer for incoming data in the user's terminal.

16. An arrangement according to claim 11, **characterized in that** the data structure is a file containing the data sources.

17. An arrangement according to claim 16, **characterized in that** means c) comprises means for reading a header of the data structure, which indicates the starting points of the sources and to which transmission speed rate each source is intended.

18. An arrangement according to claim 11, **characterized in that** the data structure is a number of files, each of them containing one data source.

19. An arrangement according to claim 18, **characterized in that** means c) comprises means for reading headers of the files, which indicate the starting point of the source and to which transmission speed rate the source is intended.

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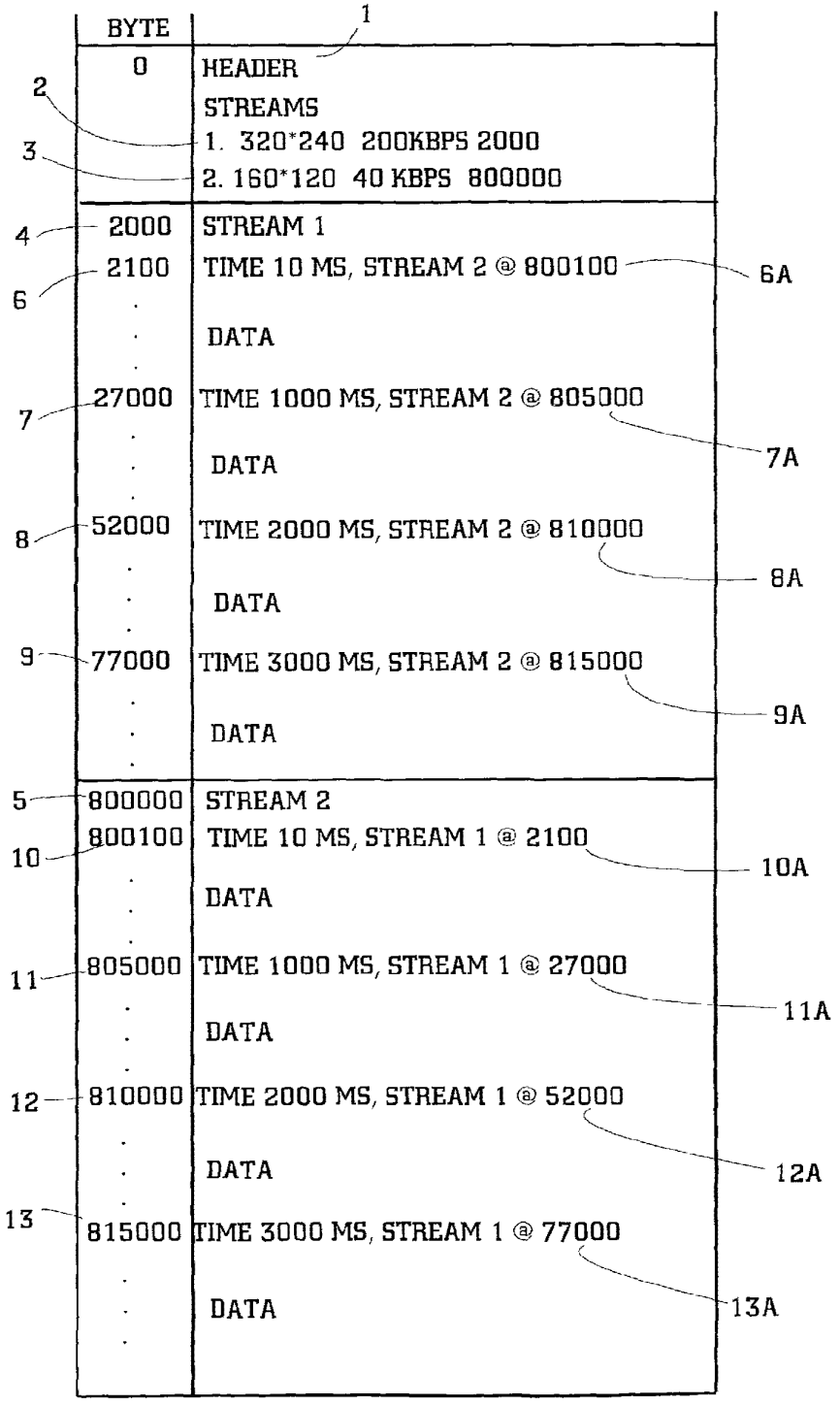


FIG. 1

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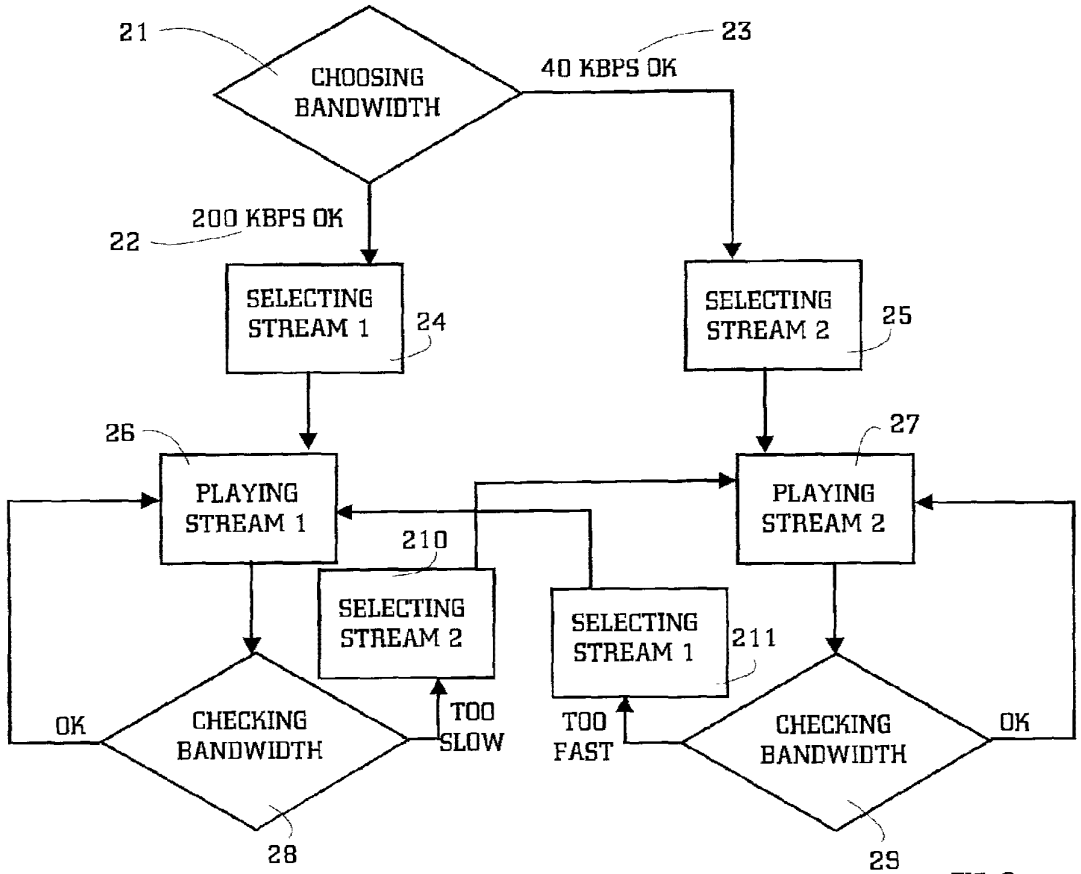


FIG. 2

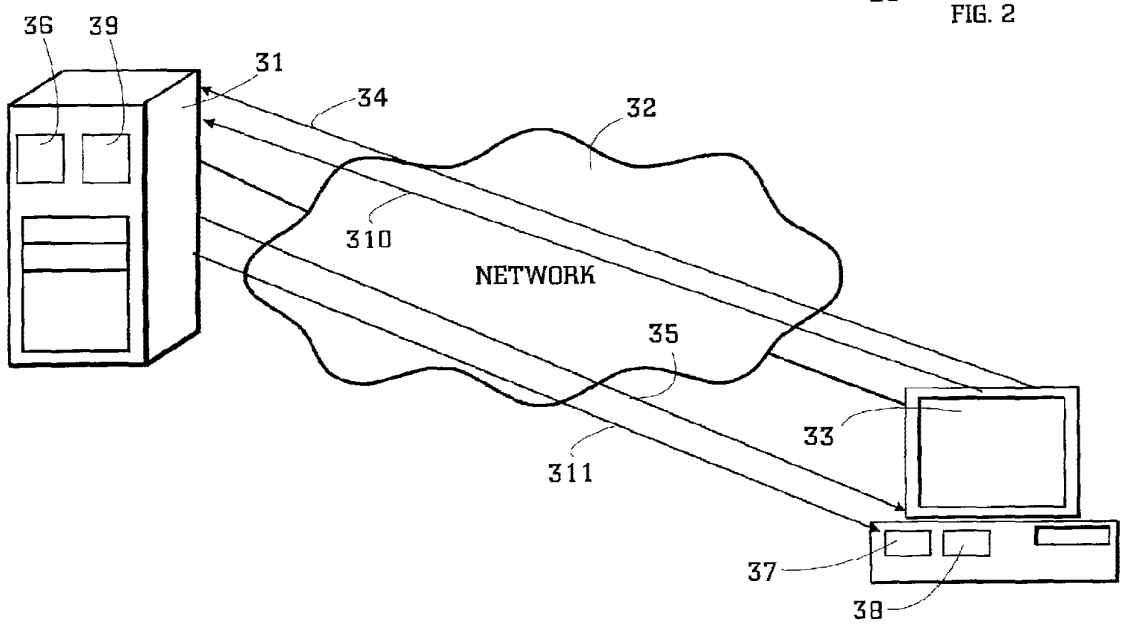


FIG. 3

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(71) Applicant: OTSUKA PHARMACEUTICAL CO., LTD.
9, Kandatsukasacho 2-chome
Chiyoda-ku Tokyo 101(JP)

(72) Inventor: FUJII, Setsuro
323, Ebiya-cho Sanjyo-sagaru
Gokomachi-dori
Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto-shi Kyoto 604(JP)
Inventor: SHIRASAKA, Tetsuhiko
8-8-302, Uchidehama
Otsu-shi Shiga 520(JP)
Inventor: FUKUSHIMA, Masakazu
9-7, Sen-cho 2-chome
Otsu-shi Shiga 520(JP)
Inventor: SHIMAMOTO, Yuji
3-9-11, Ojigaoka
Otsu-shi Shiga 520(JP)

(74) Representative: Hansen, Bernd, Dr.rer.nat. et al
Hoffmann, Eitle & Partner Patentanwälte
Arabellastrasse 4 Postfach 81 04 20
D-8000 München 81(DE)

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(54) ## COMPOSITION FOR INHIBITING ABSORPTION OF NUCLEIC ACID BASES.

(57) A composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid bases in a living body, which contains as an active ingredient a lower thio alkanoic acid represented by the general formula: R^1-S-R^2-COOH (wherein R^1 represents a hydrogen atom or a lower alkyl group, and R^2 represents a lower alkylene group optionally substituted by an amino group) or its salt. This composition is effective for prophylaxis and treatment of gout in virtue of its action of inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid bases.

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SPECIFICATION

Composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base

<Technical field>

This invention relates to a composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base, more specifically relates to a composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base which is the cause of a gout.

<Background art>

An intake amount of nucleic acid base (purine form and pyrimidine form) in recent Japanese meal is gradually increased, and approaches to that of Europeans and Americans, (i.e. 600 to 1000 mg/day). As a food including a large amount of nucleic acid base, example is an animal meat, an internal, e.g. a liver or a kidney, typically a fish meat of sardine, cod, carp, flatfish, trout or the like, shellfish, bacon, beef, chicken, sausage, pork, and these soups or extracts; a grain such as oatmeal, a bean such as kidney bean or pea; a vegetable such as asparagus, mushroom, spinach.

A purine form intaked into a living body is metabolized, and a mainmetabolite, xanthine is finaly

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oxidized to uric acid by xanthine oxidase (purine metabolism). In this case, when the intake amount of purine form is excessive, or when an endogenous purine-metabolism abnormality is recognized, by promotion of the purine metabolism, the uric acid concentration in a blood is increased to cause a hyperuricemia, and further due to continuation of it, gout is generated by accumulation of uric acid crystal in a joint.

Accordingly, alimentary therapy using a purine restriction meal in which the content of purine is decreases is conventionally adapted to a gout patient, especially a gout patient of acute arthritis attack term or renal insufficiency complication [for example, "Rinsho eiyo"("a clinical nutrition" in Japanese), 49, 319 (1976); "Kyoto igakukai zasshi" ("Magazine of Kyoto medical associate" in Japanese), 22, 37 (1973); "Saishin Igagu" ("Recent medicine" in Japanese), 29, 486 (1974); "JAMA", 15, 7, 1096 (1955) and the like].

However, even if employing such an alimentary therapy, the decreased amount of uric acid in blood is merely about 0.5 to 1.0 mg/dl. Also, the purine restricting meal is complicated, and due to an unbalanced nutrition and a mental anguish of the patient, this therapy is far from satisfactory.

Accordingly, under the present conditions, the intake

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of foods containing a special large amount of nucleic acid base such as purine is merely restricted.

The main object of this invention is to provide a composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base by which an excess intake or accumulation of nucleic acid base in the living body can be restricted, during the free intake of nucleic acid base, in place of the alimentary therapy mentioned above.

<Disclosure of the invention>

As a result of research which is conducted by inventors to achieve the above object, a new fact that a composition containing, as an effective ingredient, at least one selected from thio-lower alkanoic acid or salt thereof, represented by the general formula:

$$R^1 - S - R^2 - COOH \quad (1)$$

wherein R^1 is a hydrogen atom or a lower alkyl group, R^2 is a lower alkylene group which may have an amino group, has an excellent effect that absorption of nucleic acid base is inhibited, is found.

In the above general formula (1), example of lower alkyl group represented by R^1 is a linear or branched linear alkyl group having 1 to 6 of carbon atoms, such as methyl, ethyl, propyl, isopropyl, butyl, sec-butyl, tert-butyl, pentyl, hexyl or the like. Also, example of lower alkylene group which may have an amino group, represented by R^2, is a

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linear or branched linear alkylene group having 1 to 6 of carbon atoms, which may have amino group as a substituent, such as methylene, ethylene, propylene, trimethylene, tetramethylene, pentamethylene, hexamethylene, 2-methyltetramethylene, aminomethylene, 1-aminoethylene, 2-aminotrimethylene, 1-aminotetramethylene, 2-aminopentamethylene, 1-amino-2-methyltetramethylene, 3-aminohexamethylene or the like.

As a preferred compound in the compounds shown by the general formula (1) having the above groups, for example, L-cysteine, L-methionine or the like can be employed, and in particular, L-cysteine is suitable.

The nucleic acid base in this specification includes adenine, guanine, xanthine, hypoxanthine, thymine, uracil, cytosine, or the like.

Although all compounds represented by the general formula (1) are well-known, it is not known at all that these compounds have an inhibiting action of absorption of nucleic acid base. It is also recognized that the pharmaceutically acceptable salt of the above compound (1) has the same inhibiting effect of absorption of nucleic acid base as the compound (1). As an example of such a salt, acid-addition salt obtained by adding a pharmaceutically acceptable acid to thio-lower alkanoic acid of the general formula (1) can be employed. Example of such an acid is an

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inorganic acid such as hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, phosphoric acid, hydrogen bromide; or an organic acid such as oxalic acid, maleic acid, fumaric acid, malic acid, tartaric acid, citric acid, benzoic acid, acetic acid, p-toluenesulfonic acid, ethanesulfonic acid.

In the case that thio-lower alkanoic acid of formula (I) has an acid group, a salt obtained by reacting a pharmaceutically acceptable basic compound also shows the same inhibiting action of absorption of nucleic acid base. Example of the basic compound is a metal hydroxide such as sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, calcium hydroxide; an alkali metal carbonate or bicarbonate such as sodium carbonate, potassium hydrogencarbonate, sodium hydrogencarbonate; or the like.

In order to effectively inhibiting the absorption of nucleic acid base in the living body, the oral intake of the composition of this invention is desirable, since nucleic acid base is mainly absorbed in the intestinal tract.

Form for oral intake is not limited at all, and therefore may be various pharmaceutical forms as employed in the conventional medicine or general food forms. These forms can be prepared by the conventional methods, and other ingredients used together with the above ingredient can be optionally selected.

That is, the composition of this invention is

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prepared to the pharmaceutical form by using the effective amount of the above effective ingredient together with a pharmaceutical carrier used conventionally, e.g. a dilution agent or a vehicle such as filler, bonding agent, humidity-keeping agent, disintegrator, surface active agent, a lubricant. Typical example of the pharmaceutical form is tablet, pil, powder, liquid, suspension, emulsion, granule, capsule or the like. When forming the tablet, an example of the carrier used for manufacturing a pharmaceutical preparation is a vehicle such as lactose, sucrose, sodium chloride, glucose, urea, starch, calcium carbonate, kaolin, crystalized cellulose, silicic acid; a bonding agent such as water, ethanol, propanol, simple syrup, glucose liquid, starch liquid, gelatin solution, carboxymethyl cellulose, shellac, methyl cellulose, calcium phosphate or polyvinyl pyrrolidone; a disintegrator such as dried starch, sodium alginate, agar powder, laminaran powder, sodium hydrocarbonate, calcium carbonate, polyoxyethylene sorbitan fatty acid ester, sodium laurilsulfate, stearyl monoglyceride, starch or lactose; a desintegration inhibiting agent such as sucrose, stearin, cacao butter or hydrogenation oil; an absorption promoting agent such as quaternary ammonium base or sodium laurilsulfate; a humidity keeping agent such as glycerin or starch; an absorbent such as starch, lactose, kaolin, bentonite or

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colloidal silica; a lubricant such as purified talc, stearate, boric acid powder or polyethylene glycol; or the like. Furthermore, the tablet may be used in the form having a conventional coating in compliance with the necessity. Example of the coated tablet is sugar coated tablet, gelatin coated tablet, enteric coated tablet, film coated tablet, and further the tablet may be in the form of doublelayer tablet or multilayer tablet.

When forming the pil, an example of a carrier is a vehicle such as glucose, lactose, starch, cacao butter, hydrogenated vegetable oil, kaolin or talc; a bonding agent such as powdered gum arabi, powdered tragacanth, gelatin or ethanol; and a disintegrator such as laminaran or agar; or the like. Capsule is prepared by mixing the effective ingredient with the various carriers mentioned above and then filling the mixture into hard gelatin capsule, soft gelatin capsule or the like in virtue of the conventional method.

In liquid preparation such as solution, emulsion or suspension, a diluent such as water, lactic acid aqueous solution, ethyl alcohol, propylene glycol, etoxyed isostearyl alcohol, polyoxy isostearyl alcohol, polyoxyethylene sorbitane fatty acid ester or the like is used, and liquid preparation is sterilized in virtue of the conventional method. Sodium chloride, glucose, glycerin or

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the like can be added to the liquid preparation, and further a dissolution accelating agent, a buffer agent or the like used conventionally can be also added.

Furthermore, to various medicinal preparations mentioned above, antioxidant (e.g. butylated hydroxytoluene, propylgalate, quinone, α-tocopherol or the like), coloring agent, preservative, perfume, flavor agent, sweetening agent or other medicine may be contained.

In the above medicinal preparations, the compound or its salt represented by general formula (1) as an effective ingredient may be contained without a special limitation, and the content of the compound or its salt is at least about 0.01% by weight, preferably about 1% to 70% by weight.

In the case of tablet, it is suitable that the content of the compound or its salt is in the range of 0.01g to 1g per 1 tablet.

The effective dose of the medicinal preparation to be orally administered is decided in compliance with the medicine form, conditions such as age, sex or the like and the degree of disease of the patient to be administered. Its dose may be optionally selected without special limitation, ordinally the standard of the amount of effective ingredient is about 30mg to 150mg per 1kg of weight of patient at one day, and may be varied optionally. The administration of the preparation can be divided into

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1 to 4 times per one day.

The composition of this invention can be also prepared in the food forms. Food forms are not specially limited except for orally taking, and therefore may be various eatables and drinkables ordinally well-known, such as seasoning, confectionery (Japanese confectionery, Western confectionary, ice cream, etc.), sirup, fruit processed good, vegetable processed good, animal meat processed good, fish meat processed good, delicacy, canned, bottling, refreshing drink, light quickly cooking eatable or drinkable food or the like. Such a food form is prepared by the conventional method, except that the above effective ingredient is blended in the optional step by the suitable means such as kneading, mingling, mixing, dissolving, soaking, permeating, scattering, appling, spraying, pouring or the like. The blending amount of the effective ingredient is not especially limited, and ordinally is decided so that an intake amount per one time is in the range of about 500mg to 2000mg.

In taking or administering the composition of this invention having various forms to the patient, the intake or administration time is optionally decided, and preferably is on or before and after meal, since the absorption of nucleic acid base is most active in intake of meal.

The composition of this invention may be used in the

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form of suppository, besides orally taking forms.

<Brief Explanation of the Drawings>

Figs. 1 to 6 show the results carried out in Examples, in order to evidence that the effective ingredient of this invention has an inhibiting action of the absorption of nucleic acid base to the living body.

<Industrial Applicability>

By taking the composition of this invention in the form suitable to restrict the absorption of nucleic acid base in the living body, excess intake or accumulation of nucleic acid base in the living body is inhibited, thereby being useful to therapy and prophylaxis of gout, etc.

<Example>

There was investigated how the effective ingredient of this invention is acted to absorption of nucleic acid base to the living body.

For this test, wistar-king rats which weighed 180g to 200g and to which bait and water were freely given were used, and were divided between control group and experimental group.

Test liquid, which was obtained by suspending 5mg/ml of each nucleic acid base (uracil, thymine, cytosine or adenine) into 5% arabic gum solution, so that the concentration of nucleic acid base is 5 mg/ml, followed by ultrasonication for 5 minutes, was orally administered to

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the control group. Dose of this test liquid was 1ml per 100g of rat weight, i.e. 50mg/kg. Also, another test liquid, which was obtained by adding and suspending the test compound, i.e. effective ingredient of this invention, to each suspension liquid containing 5 mg/ml of nucleic acid base, so that the concentration of the test compound is 15 mg/ml, followed by ultrasonication in accordance with the same manner as employing above, was orally administered to the experimental group. Dose of this test liquid was 1ml per 100g of rat weight, i.e. 150 mg/kg.

Each group was consisted of two or three rats, and each test liquid was administered by using oral probe.

After 15, 30, 60 and 120 minutes from administration of test liquid, celiotomy of rat of each group was carried out under anethesia with ether, and immediately about 5 ml of blood is taken from inferior vena cava. This blood was kept standing for 1 to 2 hours under the temperature atomosphere of 4 ℃ as it is, and then was centrifuged for 10 minutes under the same temperature atomosphere to separate a serum.

The nucleic acid base concentration in the serum thus obtained was measeured in accordance with the following method, and the mesuring value was estimated as oral absorption amount of nucleic acid base.

Method for measuring nucleic acid base concentration in

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serum

The serum obtained by the above procedure was analyzed by high performance liquid chromatography, after pre-treating as mentioned below.

That is, in the case of determination of uracil and thymine, 5 ml of ethyl acetate was added to 1 ml of serum mentioned above, followed by shaking under acidic condition in the presence of hydrochloric acid. Then, ethyl acetate layer was separated, was heated and evaporated to dryness at 40℃, and was dissolved into a small amount of water. 10 μl of a pre-treated sample thus obtained was applied to "ULTRON N-C_{18}-L column " (5 μm, 4.6 ID mm × 150mm) manufactured by SHINWA KAKOU SHA, 5 mM tetrabutyl anmonium solution (pH 5 to 6) containing 2 % methanol was flowed through the coloumn as a mobile phase, and analysis was carried out at 1 ml/minute of flow rate and 260 nm of detection wave length.

Also, cytosine and adenine were determined as mentioned below. 200 to 400 μl of the serum containing these nucleic acid base was mounted onto "Ultrafree C3GC cenrifugal filtration tube" (manufactured by MILLIPORE compony) followed by centrifuging at 10000 rpm for 10 minutes. Then, 20 μl of the obtained filtrate was applied to "CHEMCOSORB 300-C_{18} column"(5 μm, 4.6 ID mm × 150mm) manufactured by CHEMCO compony, 20 mM phosphate buffer

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solution (pH 3.8) was flowed through the coloumn as a mobile phase, and analysis was carried out at 1 ml/minute of flow rate and 260 nm of detection wave length.

Respective concentration of nucleic acid base was caluculated from chromatogram obtained by analyzing samples having a known concentration, which were prepared by adding standard nucleic acid base to normal rat serum, under the same conditions as mentioned above.

Figs 1 to 4 show the test results in the case that L-cysteine was used as test compound, i.e. effective ingredient compound of this invention. In each graph, used nucleic acid base is adenine (Fig. 1), thymine (Fig.2), uracil (Fig. 3) and cytosine (Fig. 4). The axis of ordinate and the axis of abscissa indicate nucleic acid base concentration (μg/ml) in blood and time (min.) after orally administering test liquid, respectively.

Furthermore, by using hypoxanthine as nucleic acid base, absorption inhibiting effect of hypoxanthine in virtue of the effective ingredient compound of this invention was examined in accordance with the following method.

[8 - ^{14}C]hypoxanthine (49.0 mCi/m mol, 250 μCi/ml) was added and blended to both of test liquid for control group, containing 5 mg/ml of hypoxanthine and another test liquid for experimental group, which was prepared by adding

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15 mg/ml of L-cysteine to the test liquid of the control group, so that concentration of hypoxanthine is 10 μCi/ml. Each test liquid was orally administered to rats at dose of 1ml per 100 g of rat weight by oral probe. Afer 15, 30 and 60 minutes from administration, blood was taken out from caudal vein of rat of each group, and blood plasma was separated by centrifugation.

For the purpose of deproteination, 1 ml of ice-cooled methanol was added to 0.1 ml of the plasma thus obtained, followed by centrifuging at 3000 rpm for 10 minutes. 0.5 ml of supernatant was contained into a vial, and 10 ml of liquid scintillator (AQUASOL - II) was added to measure the radioactivity with liquid scintillation counter.

From the radioactivity obtaind, the amount of absorbed hypoxanthine was estimated as the corresponding amount of[8 - ^{14}C]hypoxanthine included in 1 ml of blood. Test result is shown in graph of Fig. 5. In this Fig. 5, the axis of ordinate indicates the corresponding amount of ^{14}C - hypoxanthine in blood, and the axis of abscissa indicates time (min.) after oral administration of test liquid. Also, (1) and (2) in graph indicate experimental group (using the test liquid including L-cysteine) and control group (using the test liquid which does not include L-cysteine), respectively. Each value is the mean for three

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rats.

Also, by using L-methionine as a test compound and uracil as nucleic acid base, the test was carried out in the same manner as mentioned above. The test result is shown in Fig. 6 by the same manner as the other drawings mentioned above.

In each graph, (1) and (2) in graph indicate experimental group (using the test liquid including the effective ingredient compound) and control group (using the test liquid which does not include the effective ingredient compound), respectively. Each value is the mean for two to three tats.

From Figs. 1 to 6, it is indicated that effective ingredient compound of this invention lowers concentration of nucleic acid base in serum significantly.

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What is claimed is:

1. A composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base, which is taken into a living body to inhibit absorption of nucleic acid base in the living body, containing, as an effective ingredient, thio-lower alkanoic acid or salt thereof represented by the general formula:

$$R^1 - S - R^2 - COOH$$

wherein R^1 is a hydrogen atom or a lower alkyl group, and R^2 is a lower alkylene group which may have an amino group.

2. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 1, wherein R^1 is a hydrogen atom and R^2 is a lower alkylene group having an amino group.

3. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 1, wherein R^1 is a lower alkyl group and R^2 is a lower alkylene group having an amino group.

4. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 1, wherein said thio-lower alkanoic acid is L-cysteine.

5. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 1, wherein said thio-lower alkanoic acid is L-methionine.

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6. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 1, wherein the composition is prepared to the orally taken form.

7. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 6, wherein R^1 is a hydrogen atom and R^2 is a lower alkylene group having an amino group.

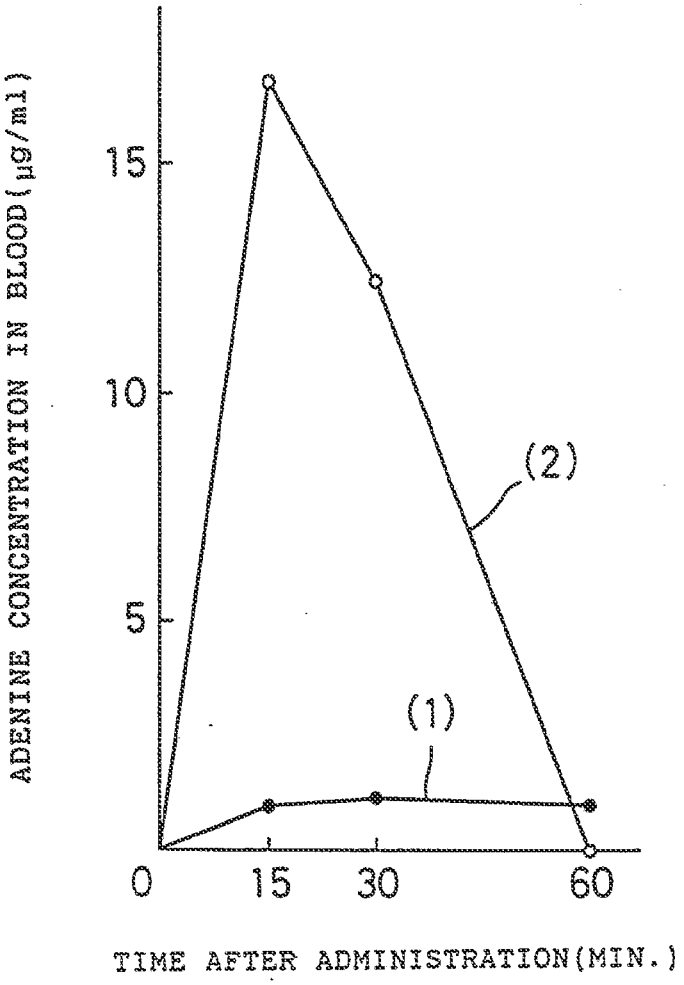
8. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 6, wherein R^1 is a lower alkyl group and R^2 is a lower alkylene group having an amino group.

9. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 6, wherein said thio-lower alkanoic acid is L-cysteine.

10. The composition for inhibiting absorption of nucleic acid base according to claim 6, wherein said thio-lower alkanoic acid is L-methionine.

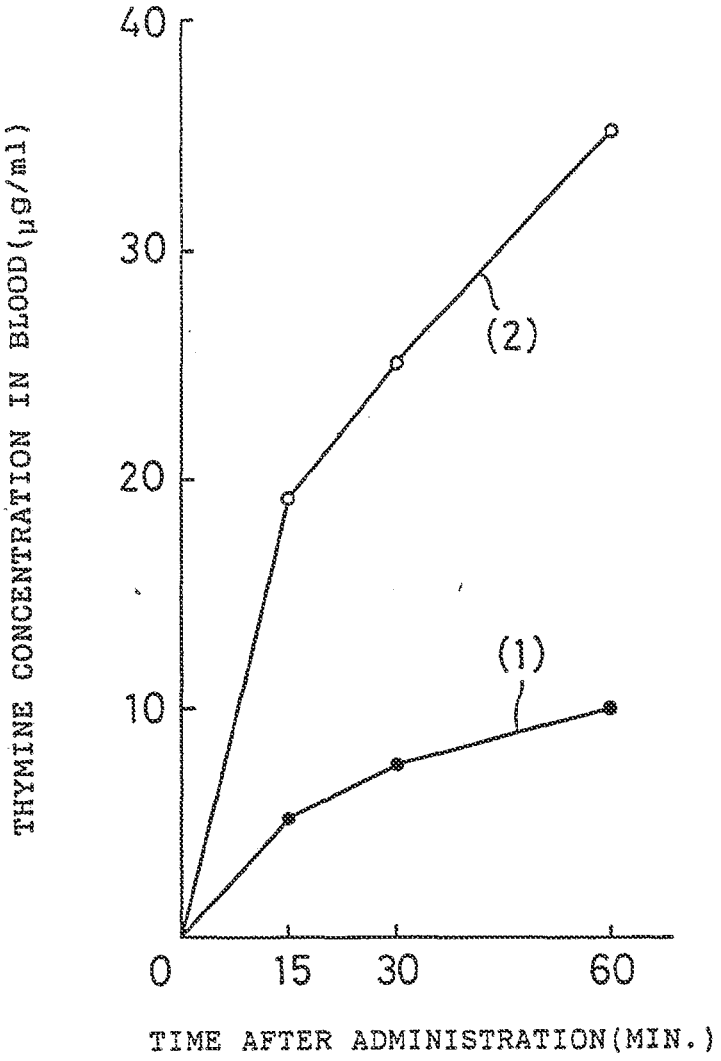
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Fig. 1



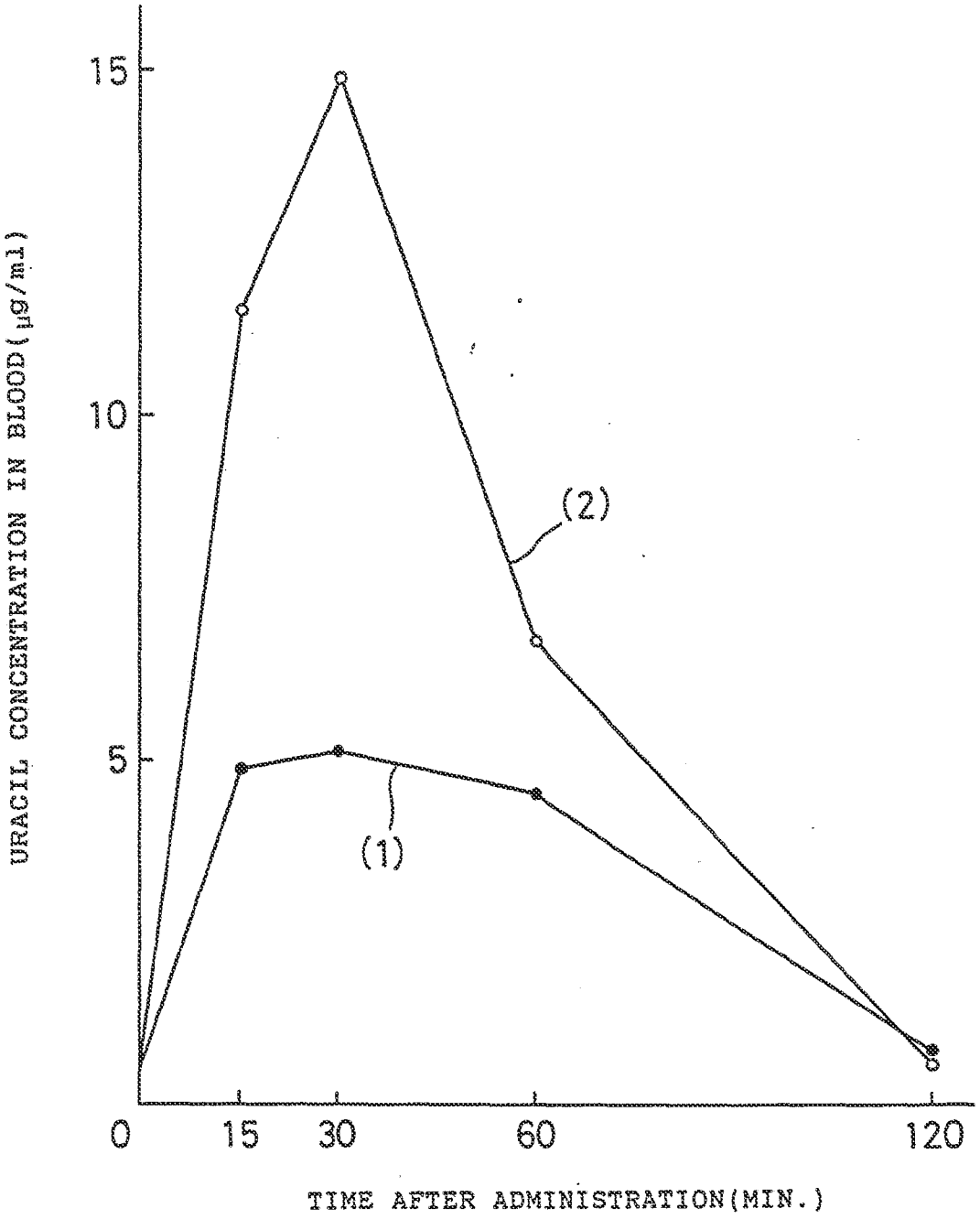
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Fig. 2



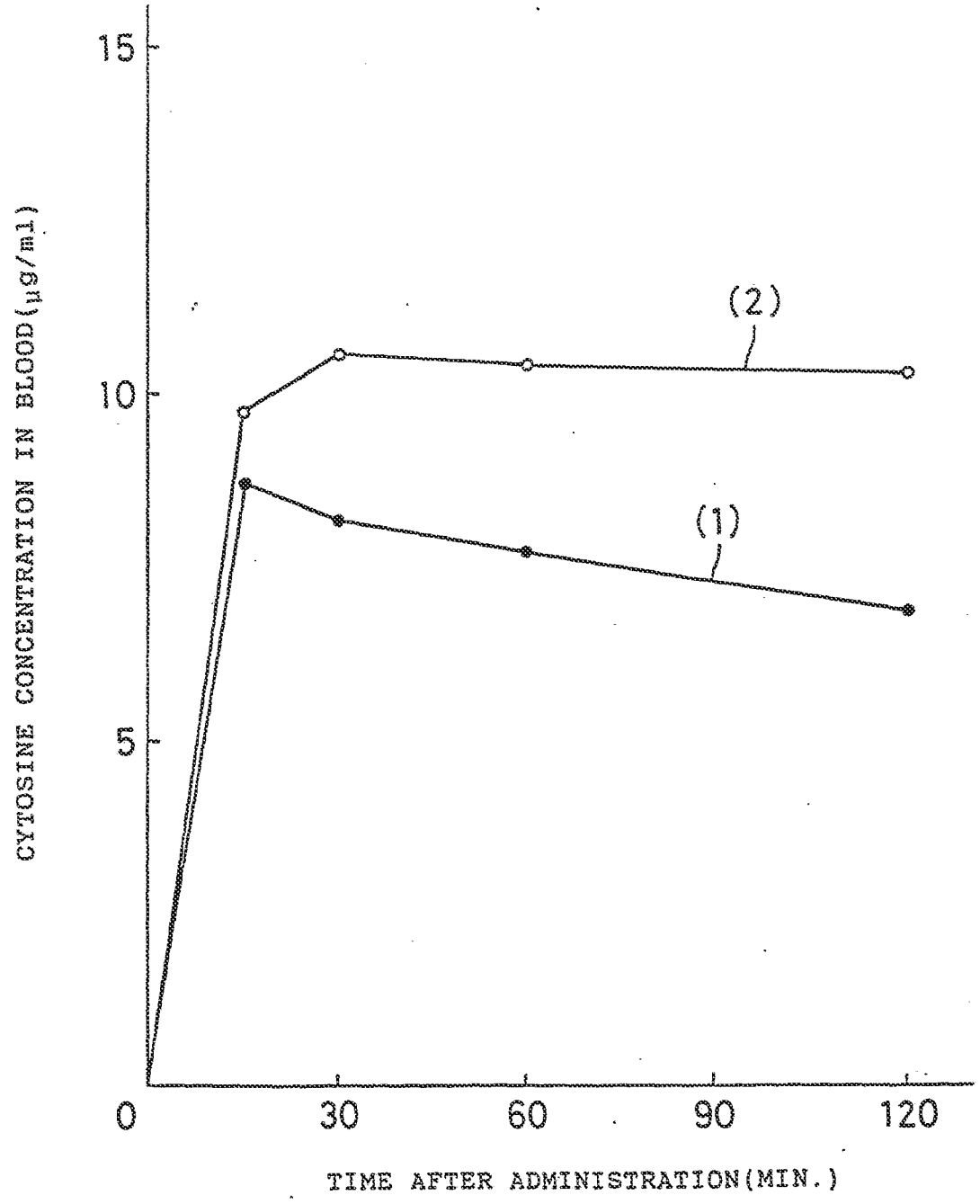
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Fig. 3



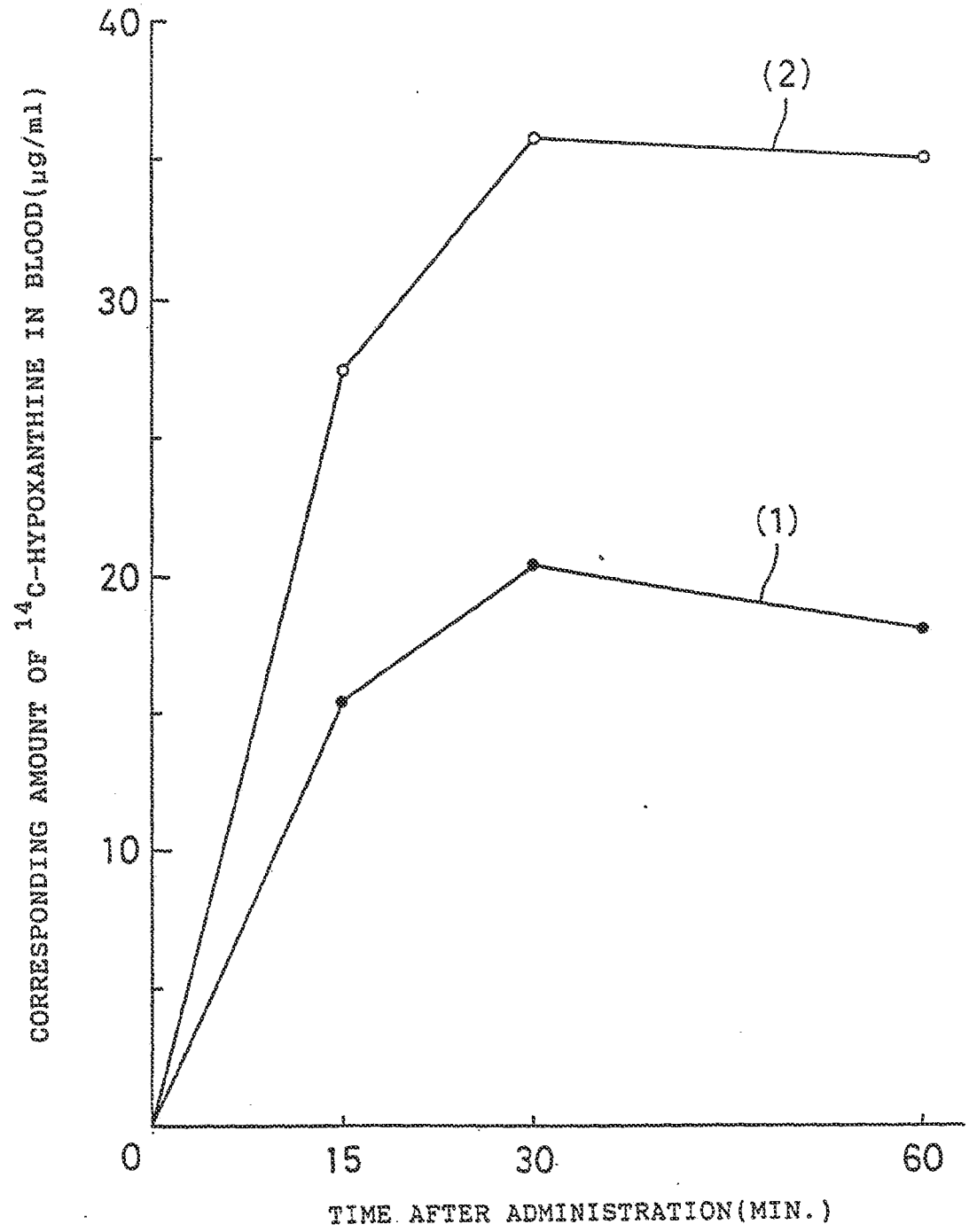
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Fig. 4



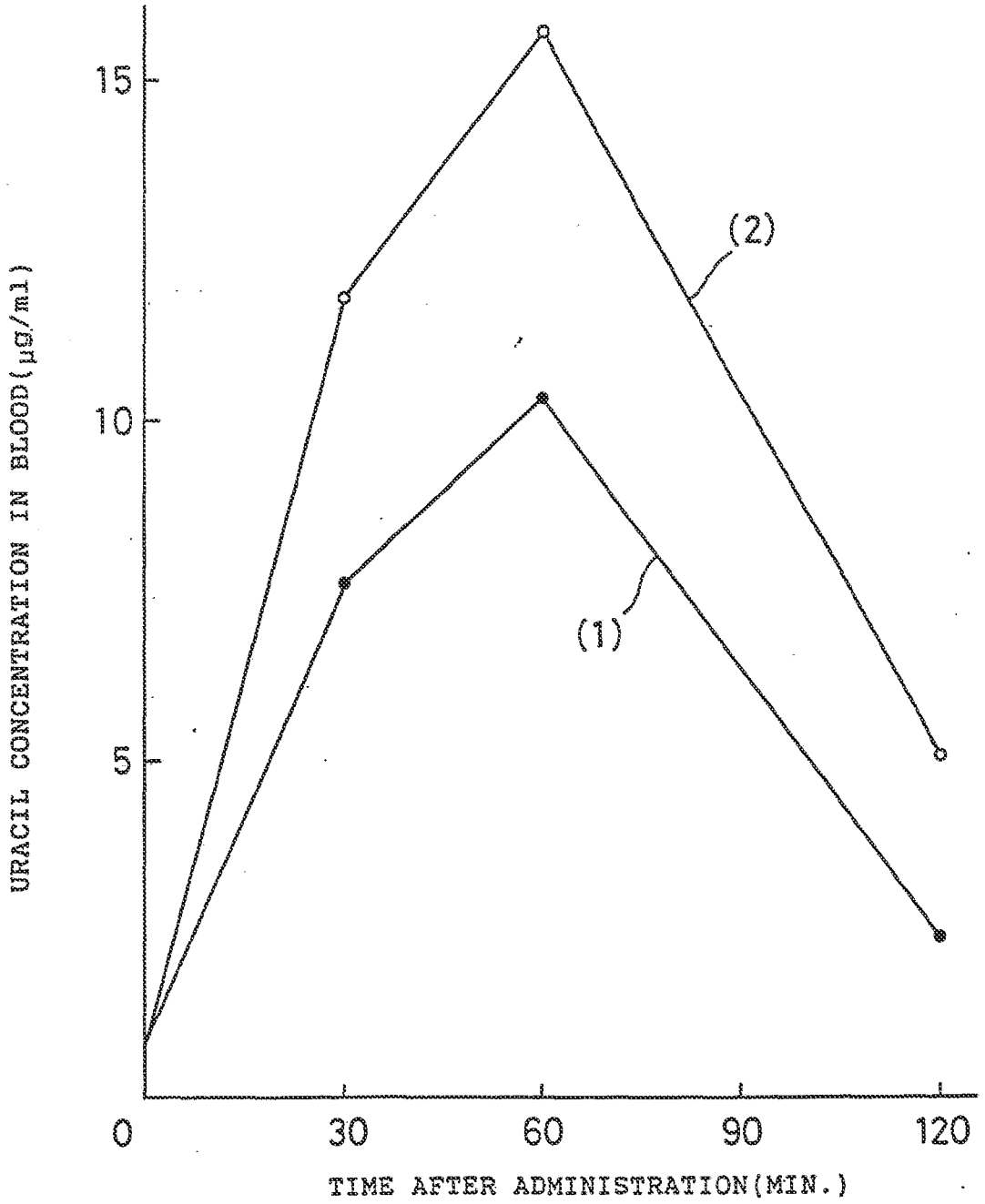
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Fig. 5



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Fig. 6



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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No PCT/JP89/00313

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (if several classification symbols apply, indicate all) *

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC

Int. Cl^4 A61K31/19// A23L1/03

II. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum Documentation Searched *

Classification System †	Classification Symbols
IPC	A61K31/19, A23L1/03

Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched §

III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT ‡

Category *	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
A	Chemical Abstracts, Vol. 102, No. 7, Abstract No. 102(7):61163b, 1985, (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.) Amubode, F.O., et. al., J. Agric. Sci., 103(3), 497-502	1-10
A	Chemical Abstracts, Vol. 95, No. 17, Abstract No. 95(17):148998p, 1981 (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.) Ueda, H., et. al., Nutr. Rep. Int., 24(1), 85-94	1-10
A	Chemical Abstracts, Vol. 95, No. 5, Abstract No. 95(5):41169s, 1981, (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.) Aguilar, F., et. al., Bol. Soc. Quim. Peru. 45(3),256-65	1-10
A	Chemical Abstracts, Vol. 91, No. 9, Abstract No. 91(9):73452n, 1979, (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.) Muramatsu, T., et. al., J. Nutr.,	1-10

* Special categories of cited documents: ¹⁰

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

IV. CERTIFICATION

Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search	Date of Mailing of this International Search Report
June 12, 1989 (12. 06. 89)	June 26, 1989 (26. 06. 89)
International Searching Authority	**Signature of Authorized Officer**
Japanese Patent Office	

Form PCT ISA 210 (second sheet) (January 1985)

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FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM THE SECOND SHEET

	109(6), 1057-62	
A	Chemical Abstracts, Vol. 81, No. 23, Abstract No. 81(23):150847t, 1974, (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.) Kal'nitskii, B.D., Byull. Vses. Nauchno-Issled. Inst. Fiziol., Biokhim. Pitan. Skh. Zhivotn., 7(2), 20-2	1-10

V. ☐ OBSERVATIONS WHERE CERTAIN CLAIMS WERE FOUND UNSEARCHABLE [1]

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2) (a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claim numbers ...., because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claim numbers ...., because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claim numbers ...., because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of PCT Rule 6.4(a).

VI. ☐ OBSERVATIONS WHERE UNITY OF INVENTION IS LACKING [2]

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims of the international application.

2. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims of the international application for which fees were paid, specifically claims:

3. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claim numbers:

4. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the International Searching Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.

Remark on Protest

☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by applicant's protest.

☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

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(71) Applicant: **Kabushiki Kaisha Toshiba**
Tokyo 105-8001 (JP)

(72) Inventors:
- **Nagai, Takeshi, c/o Kabushiki Kaisha Toshiba**
  Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8001 (JP)
- **Kikuchi, Yoshihiro,**
  c/o Kabushiki Kaisha Toshiba
  Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8001 (JP)
- **Masuda, Tadaaki, c/o Kabushiki Kaisha Toshiba**
  Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-8001 (JP)

(74) Representative: **Midgley, Jonathan Lee**
Marks & Clerk
57-60 Lincoln's Inn Fields
GB-London WC2A 3LS (GB)

(54) Data transmission apparatus and method

(57) A data transmission apparatus comprises a network condition determination device for determining a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter (103) based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from a receiver (104), and a video encoder (102) including means for changing at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and a error resilience level according to the transmission condition.

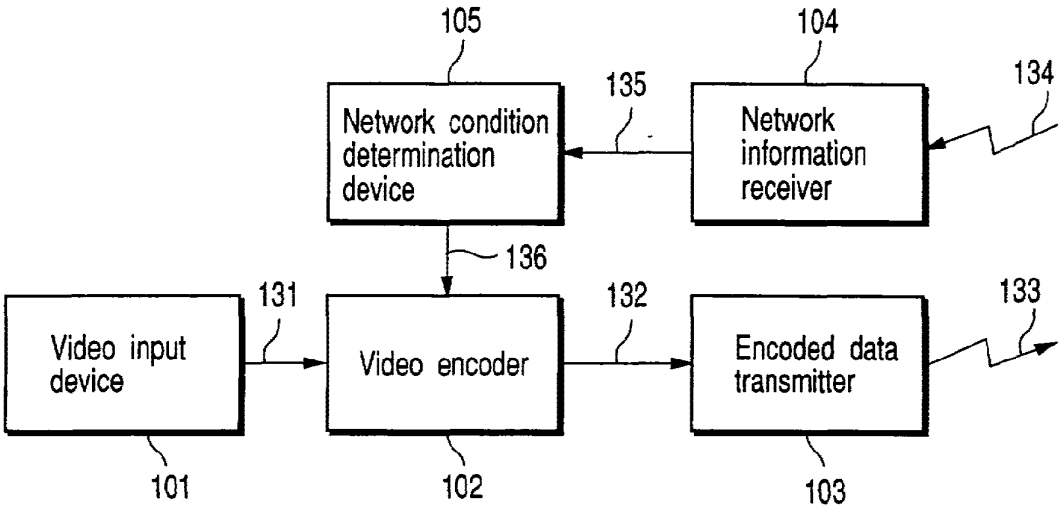


FIG. 1

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a data transmission method for transmitting encoded moving/still picture by using a wired communication network such as ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) or a wireless communication network such as PHS (Personal handy-phone System) or satellite communication and a data transmission apparatus to which such method is applied.

[0002] In recent years, with progress of digital encoding technology of a variety of information such as image and a broadband network technology, the development of applications using these technologies becomes active, and a system of transmitting compression-encoded image by utilizing a communication network is developed.

[0003] For example, an input video signal is encoded at a video encoder, the obtained encoded data is provided to an encoded data transmitter, and transmission data is transmitted to a transmission channel. In this way, a video is encoded and transmitted. In recent years, with the spread of Internet/Intranet, there has been increased an application or system of transmitting/receiving a packet of data. Providing data as a packet is very effective means for efficiently sharing a bandwidth of a communication channel by a plurality of users.

[0004] In the meantime, as a protocol for transmitting/receiving packet data via Internet/Intranet, there exists TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) or UDP/IP (User Datagram Protocol/Internet Protocol) and the like.

[0005] Among them, TCP/IP is an Internet standard protocol. This protocol is applied as the world's best known protocol to Intranet or LAN as well as Internet. TCP works in a transport layer that is a fourth layer of an OSI basic reference model, and IP works in a network layer that is a third layer.

[0006] In addition, UDP/IP is one of the TCP/IP suite transport layer protocols. TCP is a connection type protocol. UDP is a disconnection type protocol. As with TCP, a host application is identified by using a port number. This protocol is often used to carry short data for monitor control of a network or real time oriented data such as audio data or video data.

[0007] TCP/IP incorporates a frame such as retransmission. Thus, this protocol is strong against errors or the like. Even if a large amount of time is required, this protocol is effective to download type applications if an attempt is made to validly receive data. However, this protocol is not powerful for applications requiring real time properties.

[0008] In contrast, although UDP/IP does not have a retransmission frame, a delay associated with retransmission does not occur. Thus, this protocol is very effective to applications requiring real time processing.

[0009] Transmission of moving picture is exemplified as a typical example of application requiring real time processing. However, in the case of general video communication, video data has a very large amount of data, and overflows a network bandwidth in most cases. In this case, a technique for encoding a video data signal, and transmitting a reduced amount of data is used. Techniques such as motion compensation, discrete cosine transform (DCT), sub-band encoding, pyramid encoding, and variable-length encoding or a combination of these techniques are developed as compression-encoding of a video signal.

[0010] As an international standard system for moving picture encoding, there are ISO MPEG-1, MPEG-2, ITU-T H. 261, H. 262, and H. 263. In addition, as an international standard system for multiplying an encoded data stream having a speech/audio signal compressed or other data, there are an ISO MPEG system, ITU-T H. 221, and H. 223.

[0011] Internet or the like is encompassed via an infinite number of networks. Usually, no one knows which network is used or what state is. In addition, an amount of data flowing a network changes from time to time. Thus, a system of judging what amount of data can be communicated in a real time is required.

[0012] Therefore, with further advancement from real time applications utilizing UDP/IP, there have been increased in number applications using a packet format called RTP (Real-time Transport Protocol) for adding and transmitting time information or the like to a packet.

[0013] This RTP is a protocol for transferring audio data signal or video data signal ruled in RFC 1889 in real time. Usually, data is carried on UDP (User Datagram Protocol). This protocol is assumed to be applied to a multimedia system such as video conference, and data can be exchanged in a real time interactive scheme. However, the protocol has no sound quality or picture quality assurance function. Sequential number or time stamp data is assigned into an RTP header, thereby supporting a read time operation.

[0014] RFC is an abbreviation of Request for Comments, and denotes a document such as technical proposal or comments disclosed by TETF (Internet Engineering Task Force). Many de-fact standards such as a variety of protocols of TCP/IP suite are described in RFC.

[0015] By utilizing this RTP, time information and a packet number are added to a packet, so that a receiver can display a voice or image by using correct time information, can determine a packet or the like whose order is replaced in a network, and can detect that a packet is lost by referring to a packet number.

[0016] Moreover, the RTP provides with a system (RTCP) for notifying network state information such as jitter or packet loss rate from a transmitter to a receiver.

[0017] However, how this RTCP information is utilized depends on applications, and is not determined in standards.

[0018] In addition, in the case of an image, a bandwidth corresponding to video transmission cannot be al-

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located in a network bandwidth, thus making it necessary to compress and deliver a video signal in an encoding system such as MPEG, as described previously. Although this encoding system is effective in a decreased amount of data, the system becomes very fragile to a packet loss or error entry by supplying data to unstable Internet. This is because a moving picture encoding system transmits only a difference between a current frame and a previous frame. Thus, partial data missing causes a very serious problem. In the case of using the UDP or RTP, data retransmission is not basically carried out, thus making it necessary to counteract this problem.

[0019] There generally exist two modes in picture encoding, that is, one is an inter-frame encoding mode for transmitting a difference between the current frame and the previous frame and an intra-frame encoding mode for carrying out encoding in one frame. In general, intra-frame encoded pictures are provided at a proper timing, and inter-frame encoded pictures are provided between them. An interval between the frames encoded in an intra-frame encoding mode is called a GOP (Group of Picture) interval.

[0020] When an encoded picture is missing during transmission to the decoder, the decoded picture corresponding to the missing encoded picture is destroyed. Thereafter, the intra-encoded pictures following the missing encoded picture are decoded based on the destroyed picture. Thus, all the subsequent decoding pictures are affected by the destroyed picture, and decoding cannot be carried out correctly. Therefore, an intra-frame encoded picture is inserted in the way of a stream of frames to cut off a propagation of missing error and recover adequate decoding.

[0021] In a conventional technology, it can determine that errors occur in a network. However, how to utilize the determination result has been unknown. Also, a system for notifying the network information to the transmitter in an unique format is conceived. However, the system is based on the specification of associated applications and lacks a general-purpose use. The system receives transmission data using an information receiver, and controls a video encoder within a range of the information received from the network via a transmission channel.

[0022] A conventional network condition determination is conceived on assumption of network congestion. However, since Internet is popularized in mobile environment, it is required to consider an error or the like in wireless environment. Current technique does not assume countermeasures against such error.

[0023] Further, in the case of dealing with the error, a case in which a network condition changes, and an error rate is not constant is not considered. If a short GOP interval is set in order to counteract a case in which errors frequently occur, the intra-frame encoding increases resulting in impairing the encoding efficiency. When errors occur frequently qualitatively, it may be required to establish such state in which such errors occur frequently. However, in the case of a network in which an error hardly occurs in a normal state, and an error occurs only at one moment, this setting is very wasteful. Conversely, when a long GOP interval is set, it is troublesome that a great influence occurs when an error occurs.

[0024] Thus, a real time transmission using RTP is noted. As described above, by utilizing the RTP that is a protocol for transferring audio data signal or video data signal in real time, time information and a packet number are added to a packet, whereby the receiver can display a voice or image by using correct time information, can determine a packet or the like whose order is replaced in a network, or can detect that a packet is lost by referring to a packet number.

[0025] Moreover, at the RTP, there is provided a system (RTCP) for notifying network state information such as jitter or packet loss rate from the transmitter or receiver.

[0026] It is an object of the present invention to provide a data transmission apparatus and method capable of adjusting a transmission rate by using the RTP characteristics in accordance with a transmission state of a transmission channel based on notification of network state information such as jitter or packet loss rate, obtained from the receiver in the transmitter or capable of carrying out controls such as changing error resilience, thereby making it possible to efficiently transmit data to the maximum, and fully utilize transmission that requires real time properties.

[0027] According to an aspect of the invention, there is provided a data transmission apparatus that transmits transmission data from a transmitter to a receiver via a transmission channel, comprising: an estimation device configured to estimate a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and a controller configured to change at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and a error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

[0028] According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a data transmission method comprising: estimating a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and changing at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and an error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

[0029] According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a data transmission program stored on a computer readable medium, comprising: instruction means for instructing a computer to estimate a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and instruction means for instructing the computer to change at least

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one of a bit rate of transmission data and a error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

[0030] This summary of the invention does not necessarily describe all necessary features so that the invention may also be a sub-combination of these described features.

[0031] The invention can be more fully understood from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a view showing a basic configuration of a data transmission apparatus according to a first embodiment of the present invention;
FIG. 2 is a view showing another configuration in the present embodiment;
FIG. 3 is a view showing a configuration of a network condition determination device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 4 is a view showing a configuration of a video encoder in the present embodiment;
FIG. 5 is a view showing a configuration of an encoded parameter determining device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 6 is a view showing a basic configuration of a data transmission apparatus in a second embodiment of the present invention;
FIG. 7 is a view showing a configuration of an encoded data switch device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 8 is a view illustrating a timing of encoded data switching at an encoded data switch device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 9 is a view illustrating a timing of switching encoded data with its different frame interval at the encoded data switch device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 10 is a flow chart showing a basic example of the network condition determination method at the network condition determination device in the first embodiment of the present invention;
FIG. 11 is a flow chart showing a basic example when a delay is forced to occur by using the network condition determination method at the network condition determination device in the first embodiment of the present invention;
FIG. 12 is a flow chart showing a basic example considering a time direction change with the network condition determination method at the network condition determination device in the present embodiment;
FIG. 13 is a view showing an exemplary configuration according to a third embodiment of the present invention;
FIG. 14 is a flow chart showing an example of a GOP interval calculation method at a GOP interval calculator in the present embodiment;
FIG. 15 is a flow chart showing another example of a GOP interval calculation method at a GOP interval calculator in the present embodiment; and
FIG. 16 is a flow chart showing still another example of a GOP interval calculation method at a GOP interval calculator in the present embodiment.

[0032] Hereinafter, embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0033] The present invention utilizes RTP or RTCP that is a protocol for transferring audio data signal or video data signal in real time. The transmitter performs controls such as adjusting a transmission rate or changing error resilience in accordance with a transmission state of a transmission channel based on notification of network state information acquired from the receiver such as jitter (Jitter information) or packet loss rate. In this manner, data transmission can be carried out efficiently to the maximum. Hereinafter, embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail.

(First Embodiment)

[0034] FIG. 1 shows a basic configuration of an image transmission apparatus according to a first embodiment of the present invention. In FIG. 1, a video signal 131 input from an image input device 101 is processed to be encoded. That is, an encoded data transmitter 103 processes encoded data 132 that has been encoded by a video decoder 102 in the form which conforms to a network, and transmits the encoded data to a receiver. A network information receiver 104 receives network information 134 delivered from the receiver, and outputs the received information to a network condition determination device 105. This network condition determination device 105 has a function that determines a network condition from network information 135 output from the network information receiver 104, and notifies the result as network condition information 136 to the video encoder 102.

[0035] The video encoder 102 encodes the video signal 131 using the network condition information 136. This encoding is carried out as follows. That is, in the case of RTP or RTCP, a packet loss rate or Jitter information is provided to the network condition determination device 105. The network condition determination device 105 determines that, if a packet loss rate is not "0" or if a delay time is longer than a predetermined value, any load is applied to a network, and a presumed amount of data cannot be supplied. Then, the network condition determination device 105 is configured so as to carry out processing so as to issue an instruction (network condition information 136) for lowering a bit rate to the video encoder 102, and to lowly set a target bit rate in encoding.

[0036] According to the thus configured apparatus, when the video signal 131 is inputted from the image input device 101, the inputted video signal 131 is encod-

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ed by the video encoder 102. Encoded data 132 encoded by the video encoder 102 is inputted to the encoded data transmitter 103.

[0037] The encoded data transmitter 103 processes the encoded data in the form suitable to a network, and receives the processed data to a receiver. The network information receiver 104 receives the network information 134 delivered from the receiver, and outputs the received information to the network condition determination device 105.

[0038] The network condition determination device 105 determines a network condition from the network information 135 outputted from a network information receiver, and notifies the result as the network condition information 136 to the video encoder 102.

[0039] The video encoder 102 encodes the video signal 131 using the thus notified network condition information 136.

[0040] FIG. 10 shows a very simple example of a method for determining a network condition at the network condition determination device 105 by way of showing a flow chart.

[0041] According to this flow chart, at the step S1001, a packet loss rate of network information is checked to see if the rate is "0" or not. As the result of this check, if the packet loss is not "0", an effective bit rate is calculated from the packet loss rate in accordance with the step S1002. This bit rate can be calculated by formula (1) shown below.

$$b' = b \times (1 - r) \quad (1)$$

where "b" denotes a current bit rate, b' denotes a new bit rate, and "r" denotes a packet loss rate.

[0042] Next, at the step S1003, a parameter (encoding parameter) obtained at the step S1002 is notified to the video encoder 102. Here, the above parameter is used to determine a rate control or error resilience level for encode processing at the image encoder 102. This parameter is also used for adjustments such as adjusting and controlling the encode processing speed of the input image signal 131 to this parameter, thereby changing a bit rate, a frame interval, or an error resilience level.

[0043] On the other hand, at the step S1001, when the packet loss rate is "0", no parameter change occurs at the step S1004. This determination method is provided as a mere example. It is possible to employ any other method for obtaining a bit rate based on a case in which the criterion of the step S1001 is determined by thresholds without being set to "0" or others or based on a formula other than the above formula (1).

[0044] Therefore, according to the first embodiment, even when a transmission network bandwidth is unknown or when the bandwidth changes halfway, it is possible to reset a parameter or the like based on the receiver's network information, and then, encode and transmit an image in accordance with the parameter suitable to a current network. In this manner, even in the case of a network congestion, although a bit rate is automatically lowered, and an image quality is lowered, it is possible to communicate an image without an occurrence of a phenomenon that an image is destroyed due to such packet loss. This method is very effective in image transmission in real time.

[0045] The first embodiment can be carried out by modifying it as follows. For example, as shown in FIG. 11, a method other than that shown in FIG. 10 is employed as a method for determining a network condition at the network condition determination device 105. That is, in the flow chart shown in FIG. 10, a parameter is set at only a packet loss rate. In contrast, in the method shown in FIG. 11, even when no packet loss occurs at the step S1104, a delay quantity is checked. As a result of this check, if a delay occurs in excess of a predetermined value, it is determined that a network is congested. When it is determined that a network is congested, a bit rate is calculated, and a new parameter is set by using formula (2) below, for example, at the step S1105.

$$b' = b \times \{(TN-TS)+(d-dth)\}/(TN-TS) \quad (2)$$

where "b" denotes a delay time, b' denotes a new bit rate, TN denotes a current time, TS denotes a start time, "d" denotes a delay time, and "dth" denotes delay time thresholds.

[0046] FIG. 2 shows an example when the network condition determination device 105 is provided with a function for generating the network condition information 136 so as to provide the information to the image encoder 102 by extending the configuration shown in FIG. 1.

[0047] According to a configuration shown in FIG. 2, the network condition determination device 105 is provided with a function for acquiring a current parameter at the current image encoder 102 and a function for generating the network condition information 136 on what parameter should be set next from the thus acquired current parameter and network information 135, thereby providing the parameter to the image encoder 102.

[0048] In the case of this construction, the network condition determination device 105 can recognize a state of a video parameter, i.e., a state of the encode processing currently done at the video encoder 102, thus making it possible for the network condition determination device to calculate and grasp a bit rate or the like. This construction is advantageous in the case of determining a network condition by comparing the network information 135 with parameter information 137. Thus, a system is realized which is capable of changing a parameter so as to set an optimal bit rate in accordance with the network condition, and providing the parameter to the video encoder 102, thereby adjusting the encode processing.

[0049] In this way, according to the present invention,

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transmission is adjusted in accordance with a transmission state of a transmission channel or error resilience is changed. The transmission state is adjusted by changing a bit rate or changing a frame interval. With respect to a change in quality of a transmission channel, the error resilience is changed according to the transmission state of the transmission channel (for example, the error resilience is changed by changing an interval of an MPEG4 synchronous signal). Therefore, data transmission can be carried out efficiently to the maximum, thereby enabling data transmission that makes it possible to fully utilize transmission requiring real time processing.

[0050] FIG. 3 shows a configuration when the configuration shown in FIG. 2 is further developed. This network condition determination device 105 comprises a network information storage device 301 that stores past network information and an encoded parameter information storage device 302 that stores encoded parameter information supplied to the current video encoder 102. A network condition determination device 303 recognizes the past network information and the current encoded parameter from these elements, decides an elapse of time in network condition from these elements to determine an optimal parameter assigned to the video encoder 102, and provides the parameter to the video encoder 102.

[0051] With this construction, it is possible to determine a network condition more accurately by referring to an elapse of time relevant to network information. FIG. 12 shows a flow chart of a network condition determination method in the case of using this system. Processing at the network condition determination device 303 will be described in accordance with this flow chart. First, the network condition determination device 303 determines whether or not packet loss is "0" at the step S1201. As a result of this determination, when the packet loss is present, it is determined by the step S1202 whether or not the past packet loss occurs. As a result, when the past packet loss occurs, the loss rate is compared with the current rate. If the current packet loss rate is higher than the past packet loss rate, it can be determined that the past correction has been invalid.

[0052] It is understood from this determination that the bandwidth overflow of transmission data such as network congestion is not troublesome, but a possibility that a noise or the like occurs over a channel resulting in destroying is high. Therefore, the network condition determination device 303 does not change a bit rate at the step S1204, and carries out parameter setting to ensure reliable error correction, and notifies the fact to the video encoder 102 at the step S1205.

[0053] If the current packet loss rate is lower than the past packet loss rate at the step S1203, the network condition determination device 303 determines that the past change works efficiently, and re-calculates a valid bit rate from the packet loss rate at the step S1206. When the past packet loss does not occur at the step S1202, the last loss is determined as a channel noise, and processing goes to the step S1204.

[0054] On the other hand, when no packet loss occurs at the step S1201, the network condition determination device 303 checks a delay quantity at the step S1207. As a result, when the delay quantity exceeds thresholds "Th", a valid bit rate is calculated from the delay quantity at the step S1208, and the calculation result is notified to the video encoder 102 at the step S1205.

[0055] Lastly, when the delay quantity does not exceeds the thresholds "Th", the network condition determination device 303 determines that successful communication is established, and does not change a parameter at the step S1209.

[0056] By causing the network condition determination device 303 to carry out such processing, the network condition determination device 105 can have a function capable of determining whether a packet loss occurs on a transmission channel due to network congestion or whether a noise is generated, and the loss occurs due to the impairment of a channel state such as radio equipment.

[0057] This function is provided as a mere example. For example, when the past packet loss does not occur at the step S1202, a control for lowering a bit rate may be made by determining network congestion instead of determination of noise. If the current packet loss rate is improved more remarkably than the past packet loss rate at the step S1203, similar parameter change may be made after checking how the past change has been made. In this way, in this system, a variety of determination systems can be set according to a network.

[0058] In the foregoing, although there has been shown an example in which the video encoder 102 carries out encode processing based on encoded parameters determined and assigned at the network condition determination device 105, a configuration for the video encoder 102 to determine a parameter can be provided without being limited to the network condition determination device 105. An example is shown in FIG. 4.

[0059] FIG. 4 is a block diagram depicting an inclusive configuration when the video encoder 102 determines an encoded parameter. In the case of this example, the video encoder 102 comprises an encoded parameter determination device 401 and a signal processor 402.

[0060] In the case of this configuration, the network condition determination device 105 is configured to output the network condition information 136 from the network condition determination device 303, and then, provide the information to the video encoder 102.

[0061] In such a configuration, the network condition determination device 105 provides the network condition information 136 delivered from the network condition determination device 303 to the video encoder 102. Then, the video encoder 102 first inputs the network condition information 136 to an encoded parameter determination device 401. Then, the encoded parameter determination device 401 recognizes a network condi-

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tion from this network condition information 136, and generates an encoded parameter 431 in the form suitable to the network condition.

[0062] The thus generated encoded parameter 431 is inputted to a signal processor 402. Then, this signal processor 402 encodes the video signal 131 inputted from the video input device 101 by using this encoded parameter 431.

[0063] Encoding information 432 such as the number of encoded bits after encoding is inputted to the encoded parameter determination device 401, and is used for the next encoded parameter determination. Encoded data 132 encoded at the signal processor 402 is output to the encoded data transmitter 103.

[0064] FIG. 5 is a block diagram depicting a configuration including a intra-frame encoding determination device 501 that forcibly sets intra-frame encoding at the encoded parameter determination device 401 shown in FIG. 4. As shown in the figure, the encoded parameter determination device 401 comprises an intra-frame encoding/determination device 501 and an encoded parameter determination device 502.

[0065] In the case of this configuration, the network condition information 136 outputted from the network condition determination device 105 is input to the encoded parameter determination device 502 possessed by the encoded parameter determination device 401. Then, encoded parameter information 531 corresponding to the network condition information 136 is output from the encoded parameter determination device 502.

[0066] The encoded parameter information 531 is input to the intra-frame encoding determination device 501, and it is determined whether inter-frame encoding is carried out as is or intra-frame encoding is forcibly carried out. When it is determined as intra-frame encoding, the encoding parameter information 531 is updated so as to carry out intra-frame encoding, and is output as the encoded,parameter information 431 to the signal processor 402 of the video encoder 102.

[0067] By doing this, even if the past data is not transmitted correctly to a receiver, when the data can be received correctly after parameter change, a correct image can be reproduced.

[0068] It is possible to configure a video encoder capable of determining a network condition, which has functions of the video encoder 102 and network condition determination device 105, thereby making it possible to provide the previously described function in one block.

[0069] The encoded parameter determination device 401 or network condition determination device 105 makes determination concerning the next encoded parameter setting. However, if a picture quality is changed suddenly due to temporary instability of network, an unclear picture may be produced. In order to suppress such a phenomenon, it is possible to incorporate a mechanism in which a change in encoded parameter is suppressed within its predetermined range. In the above described circumstance, this mechanism functions efficiently.

[0070] Although a bit rate or an error resilience parameter may be set as its calculated value, it is possible to employ a method of predetermining some patterns, and then, selecting the closest pattern from among them. Further, instead of the closest pattern, it is possible to make a selection of the closest bit rate which is lower than the calculated bit rate. This makes it possible to prevent the generation of a video image with its unexpected image quality due to a combination of a variety of parameters, and makes it possible to prepare a combination of encoded parameters that have been tested to some extent.

[0071] In the foregoing example, when the packet loss rate is not "0" or when a delay exceeds the thresholds, there has been made a control such that parameters such as bit rate or error resilience are changed, and the changed is reset to that suitable to the current state.

[0072] However, after recovery of a network condition, when no packet loss occurs or when a small delay occurs, it is possible to make a control for increasing a bit rate or decreasing an error resilience parameter.

[0073] The foregoing example will be described below according to a second embodiment.

(Second Embodiment)

[0074] FIG. 6 is a view showing a basic configuration of an image transmission apparatus according to the second embodiment of the present invention. The image transmission apparatus shown in FIG. 6 comprises a plurality of media 601, an encoded data switch device 602, an encoded data selector 603, an encoded data transmitter 103, a network information receiver 104, and a network condition determination device 105.

[0075] The storage media 601 are used to store encoded data 631 on contents that have been encoded in advance. The storage media 601 each store encoded data on the same contents encoded by different encoded parameters, respectively.

[0076] The encoded data switch device 602 selects one of a plurality of storage media 601, and provides encoding data 631 stored in the thus selected storage medium 601 to the encoded data transmitter 103. A selection of the storage media is carried out in accordance with switch information 632 from the encoded data selector 603.

[0077] The network information receiver 104 has a function that receives network information 134 such as packet loss rate or Jitter information delivered from a receiver or a network, and provides the received information as network information 135 to the network condition determination device 105.

[0078] The network condition determination device 105 determines a network condition from the input network information 135, and outputs the result as network condition information 136 to the encoded data selector

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603. The encoded data selector 603 has a function for estimating, from this network condition information 136, which of the encoded data on encoding parameters is optimal to the current network, and then, outputting to the encoded data switch device 602 the switch information 632 used for switching in order to select encoded data caused by the estimated optimal encoding parameter as an output.

[0079] The encoded data switch device 602 selects one item of encoded data from among the input encoded data 631, and outputs encoded data 132.

[0080] With such a configuration, the encoded data 631 encoded in advance and store in the storage medium 601 or the like is input to an encoding data switch device 602 when the data is reproduced from the storage medium 601. That is, respective encoded data encoded by the differential encoding parameters are maintained in a plurality of storage media 601. As a result of reproducing these items of data, the encoded data encoded by the different encoding parameters, respectively, is inputted. The encoded data switch device 602 selects one from among these items of data, and outputs it to the encoded data transmitter 103.

[0081] This selection is carried out in accordance with switch information 632 from the encoded data selector 603.

[0082] On the other hand, network information 134 such as packet loss rate or Jitter information from a receiver is received at the network information receiver 104, and then, the received information is delivered to the network condition determination device 105. The network condition determination device 105 determines a network condition from the inputted network information 135, and outputs the result as network condition information 136 to an encoded data selector 603.

[0083] The encoded data selector 603 estimates, from the network condition information 136, which of the encoded data of the encoding parameters is optimal to the current network, and outputs the switch information 632 to the encoded data switch device 602.

[0084] The encoded data switch device 602 selects one item of the encoded data from among the input encoded data 631, and outputs encoded data 132.

[0085] The present embodiment will be described by way of a specific example.

[0086] Now, assume that there exist five storage media 601a to 601e each having stored therein five items of encoded data encoded at 384 kbps, 128 kbps, 64 kbps, 32 kbps, and 16 kbps.

[0087] That is, for example, a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 384 kbps is defined as a storage medium 601a; a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 128 kbps is defined as a storage medium 601b; a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 64 kbps is defined as a storage medium 601c; a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 32 kbps is defined as a storage medium 601d; and a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 16 kbps is defined as a storage medium 601e.

[0088] In the case of using a transmission channel having its quality capable of being transmitted at 384 kbps, first, reproduced encoded data is selected by the storage medium 601a that is a storage medium having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 384 kbps; transmission is started at 384 kbps, and reception of network information from the receiver starts at the same time.

[0089] Although network information is received at a predetermined interval, if a problem occurs with a network based on the received information, a valid bit rate is calculated at a stage at which a packet loss or delay occurs. The encoded data selector 603 selects encoded data on a bit rate close to the calculated bit rate, and the encoded data switch device 602 switches and transmits the selected data.

[0090] For example, the calculated bit rate is 140 kbps, a value close to this bit rate is 128 kbps. In this case, the above switch device selects and switches encoded data reproduced from the storage medium 601b having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 128 kbps. In addition, if the calculated bit rate is 100 kbps, a value close to a bit rate lower than the calculated bit rate is 64 kbps. In this case, the switch device selects and switches encoded data reproduced from the storage medium 601c having stored therein encoded data on contents encoded at 64 kbps.

[0091] In this way, in the present embodiment, contents are prepared after encoded in advance for type of transmission bit rate, and a current optimal transmission rate is obtained based on network information such as packet loss rate or Jitter information from a receiver that is a function possessed by RTP. A storage medium having stored therein encoded data obtained at the bit rate corresponding to this transmission rate is selected by the switch 602, and reproduced encoded data output of the storage medium is transmitted. In this manner, there is no need for a server to carry out encode processing in real time, making it possible to reduce a load on the server. This is very effective in distributing a pre-produced video such as broadcast in particular.

[0092] Now, a modified example of the second embodiment will be described here. FIG. 7 is a block diagram depicting a method for carrying out control for a switch timing of encoded data to be inputted at the encoded data switch device 602.

[0093] Encoded data 631 is inputted to the switching position detecting device 701 and a switch device 702. Switch information 632 is inputted to the switching position detecting device 701. If there occurs a need to execute switching from the current encoded data to the other encoded data according to the switch information 632, the switching position detecting device 701 analyzes encoded data, and detects a switching enable posi-

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tion.

[0094] This means that a search is made for a frame encoded by intra-frame encoding (I-Picture).

[0095] When the switching enable position is set, an instruction for switching encoded data is supplied to the switch device 702 by using the switching instruction information 731. FIG. 8 shows an example of this instruction. Assume that encoded data A is currently selected, and there occurs a need to execute switching to encoded data B according to the switch information 632.

[0096] At this stage, assume that a frame is processed at the time of "switching instruction" shown in FIG. 8. In such a case, if encoded data is switched, an unmatched image occurs. This is because a difference from the previous image is encoded in intra-frame encoding (P-Picture). Therefore, if encoded data is switched at the time of P-Picture, an attempt is made to reproduce the next picture (picture P11 of encoded data (B)) by using immediately preceding picture (decoded picture 111 of encoding data (A)). This provides a problem that a correct decode picture cannot be obtained, and a picture is destroyed. Thus, there occurs a need to execute switching at a timing of a picture of intra-frame encoding (I-Picture) undergoing encoding by that frame only. This timing is defined as a timing at a position marked with "execute switching".

[0097] As in FIG. 9, a case in which the number of frames or time position differs depending on encoded data is considered. In this case as well, a switching enable position of encoded data at a switching destination is detected, and switching of encoded data is executed when the switching enable position is set.

[0098] At the switching position detecting device 701 shown in FIG. 7, when a need to execute switching according to the switch information 632 occurs, it is possible to employ a method for temporarily stopping an output 132 to the encoded data transmitter 103, and then, outputting new encoded data to the encoded data transmitter 103 at a stage at which the switching position is set.

[0099] This method is effective when it is necessary to suppress a buffer overflow or the like by switching encoded data. When an underflow is problematic, a stuffing bit is forcibly inserted, thereby making it possible to counteract such an underflow.

(Third Embodiment)

[0100] Now, a third embodiment according to the present invention will be described here.

[0101] The present embodiment describes an exemplary configuration of an encoding parameter determination device 401 of the video encoder 102 shown in FIG. 4 according to the first embodiment when a time interval (GOP interval) between frames encoded in a intra-frame encoded mode is adjusted based on the network condition information 136 outputted from the network state determination device 105. Here, a description will be given by focusing on differences from the first embodiment.

[0102] FIG. 13 shows an exemplary configuration of the encoding parameter determination device 401. This device comprises a GOP interval calculator (GOP interval calculator) 1501 and an encoding parameter determination device 502.

[0103] The network condition information 136 outputted from the network condition determination device 105 (including at least packet loss rate information) is input to an encoding parameter determination device 502. The parameter determination device 502 inputs packet loss rate information 1531 of the network condition information 136 to the GOP interval calculator 1501. The GOP interval calculator 1501 calculates a GOP interval from the packet loss rate information 1531. The GOP interval information 1532 is notified to the encoding parameter determination device 401. The encoding parameter determination device 401 outputs encoding parameter information 431 that contains the inputted GOP interval information 1532. When internally generated parameter information exists, the encoding parameter determination device 401 outputs GOP interval information 1532 and encoding parameter information 431 that contains the internally generated parameter information.

[0104] FIG. 14 shows an example of a method for determining a GOP interval at the GOP interval calculator.

[0105] At the step S1601, it is determined whether or not a packet loss occurs from the network condition information 136. When such a packet loss occurs, the GOP interval is estimated by formula (3) below, for example, at the step S1602.

$$Gop = (TN - TL)/\{(FN - FL) \times r\} \quad (3)$$

where "gop" denotes a GOP interval, "r" denotes a packet loss rate, FN denotes a total number of current frames, FL denotes a total number of frames during past calculation, TN denotes a time, and TL denotes a time during past calculation.

[0106] The GOP interval obtained at the step S1602 is notified to the signal processor 402 at the step S1603, and encoding is carried out based on the notified value.

[0107] On the other hand, when no packet loss has occurred at the step S1601, the default GOP thresholds are read out at the step S1604. At the step S1603, this value is notified to the signal processor 402.

[0108] According to the present embodiment, it is possible to change dynamically the GOP interval to a value suitable to a network. In this manner, when a small number of errors occur, the GOP interval is increased, thereby making it possible to reduce wasteful intra-frame encoded modes in number. In contrast, when a large number of errors occur, the GOP interval is decreased, and a frame in the intra-frame encoded mode appears quickly, thereby making it possible to acceler-

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ate recovery. In the present embodiment, it is possible to efficiently select an intra-frame encoded mode.

[0109] FIG. 15 shows another example of a method for determining a GOP interval at the GOP interval calculator in accordance with a flow chart.

[0110] In this example, even when packet loss is fewer than that in the system shown in FIG. 14, the network condition is estimated from the past history of packet loss at the step S1704, and an optimal GOP interval is calculated. This technique makes it possible to estimate whether a network is completely free of an error or an error may occurs by checking the past history instead of resetting the GOP interval to the default value by determining that no packet loss occurs at one moment. In this manner, it is possible to determine the network condition more accurately.

[0111] FIG. 16 shows still another example of a method for determining a GOP interval at the GOP internal calculator in accordance with a flow chart.

[0112] In this example, the GOP interval is determined by a unique calculation system instead of determination based on the presence/absence of a packet loss. This system can be used to determine the GOP interval from the current packet loss rate in accordance with a single formula or to determine the most suitable GOP interval by checking the past history.

[0113] The following formula (4) shows an example of calculation formula for determining the GOP interval.

$$Gop = [(TN - TL)/\{(FN - FL) \times r\}] \times \alpha \qquad (4)$$

where "gop" denotes a GOP interval, "r" denotes a packet loss rate, α denotes a sensitivity coefficient, FB denotes a total number of current frames, FL denotes a total number of frames during past calculation, TN denotes a current time, and TL denotes a time during past calculation.

[0114] In this example, the GOP interval calculated from an actual value is multiplied by a sensitivity coefficient, thereby making it possible to meet a requirement for accelerating recovery by sacrificing efficiency or a requirement when one does not take care even if an effect of error is somewhat extended. For example, if the sensitivity coefficient α is set to be smaller than 1, a GOP interval which is smaller than that calculated from an actually measured value is output. In this manner, although the efficiency is sacrificed, when an error occurs, it is possible to estimate faster recovery.

[0115] The present embodiment is not limited to formulas (3) and (4). For example, in these formulas, a value is calculated by using an increment during past calculation and subsequent, it is possible to calculate the value by taking a margin such as the n preceding increment. In this manner, it is possible to cope with a gradual change hidden in a change in detailed state or to eliminate a temporal change to some extent. Similarly, algorithms are not limited to those shown in the present embodiment.

[0116] The foregoing embodiment has described an exemplary configuration when a time interval (GOP interval) is adjusted, the time interval being between the frames encoded in the intra-frame encoded mode based on the network condition information 136 at the encoding parameter determination device 401 of the video encoder 102 shown in FIG. 4 according to the first embodiment. Alternatively, there can be provided a configuration in which the network condition determination device 105 according to the first embodiment (FIGS. 1, 2, or 3) determines a time interval (GOP interval) encoded in the intra-frame encoded mode based on information from the network information or information from the network information receiver 104 and information from the video encoder 102, and provides the encoded time interval to the image encoder 102.

[0117] As described in the first embodiment, it is possible to configure a video encoder capable of determining a network condition, the video encoder having functions of the video encoder 102 and network condition determination device 105, thereby providing the previously described functions in one block.

[0118] In the foregoing, although a variety of embodiments have been described, in short, the present invention utilizes characteristics of RTP, and comprises a system (RTCP) for notifying network state information such as jitter or packet loss rate from a transmitter or receiver. At the transmitter, a bit rate of transmission data at the transmitter is adjusted according to a transmission state of a transmission channel based on the notification of network state information acquired from the receiver in the transmitter such as jitter or packet loss rate so that control such as change of the error resilience level can be carried out. Therefore, according to the above described present invention, data can be transmitted efficiently to the maximum so as to achieve data transmission that makes it possible to fully utilize transmission requiring real time properties as well.

[0119] The techniques described in the embodiments of the present invention can be distributed to be stored as a computer executable program in a recording medium such as a magnetic disk (such as a flexible disk or a hard disk); an optical disk (such as CD-ROM, CD-R, CD-RW, DVD, or MO), and a recording medium such as a semiconductor memory. Further, the above program can be distributed by means of transmission via a network.

[0120] According to the present invention, it is possible to determine a network condition, and then, optimally set an encoding parameter. In addition, when a packet loss caused by congestion and a loss of a channel error coexist in a network, it is possible to determine the loss, and then, to set a parameter.

[0121] Therefore, according to the present invention, there can be provided a data transmission apparatus and method in which data can be transmitted efficiently to the maximum so as to achieve data transmission that

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makes it possible to fully utilize transmission requiring real time properties.

Claims

1. A data transmission apparatus for transmitting transmission data from a transmitter to a receiver via a transmission channel, **characterized by** comprising:

   means (105) for estimating a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and
   means (102) for changing at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and an error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

2. An apparatus according to claim 1, **characterized in that** the transmitter includes means (102) for generating encoded data obtained by encoding a single content at different transmission rates, and means (603) for selecting optimum encoded data having optimum bit rate from the encoded data of the encoded data generating means (102) to adjust a bit rate of the transmission data in the transmitter according to the estimated transmission condition.

3. A data transmission method of transmitting transmission data from a transmitter to a receiver via a transmission channel, **characterized by** comprising:

   generating encoded data obtained by encoding a single content at different transmission rates;
   estimating a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and
   selecting optimum encoded data having an optimum bit rate from the encoded data to adjust a bit rate of the transmission data in the transmitter according to the estimated transmission condition.

4. A data transmission method **characterized by** comprising:

   estimating a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and
   changing at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and an error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

5. A data transmitting apparatus that transmits transmission data from a transmitter to a receiver via a transmission channel, **characterized by** comprising:

   means (102) for generating plural encoded data obtained by encoding a single content at different bit rates, in the transmitter;
   means (105) for estimating a condition of the transmission channel based on Jitter information or packet loss rate; and
   means (603) for selecting encoded data having an optimum transmission rate from the plural encoded data according to the estimated transmission condition.

6. A method of transmitting transmission data from a transmitter to a receiver via a transmission channel, the method **characterized by** comprising:

   storing plural encoded data obtained by encoding a content at different bit rates;
   estimating a condition of the transmission channel based on Jitter information or packet loss rate;
   selecting encoded data having optimum transmission rate from the plural encoded data to adjust a bit rate of the transmission data in the transmitter.

7. A data transmission program stored on a computer readable medium, the program **characterized by** comprising:

   instruction means for instructing a computer to estimate a transmission condition of the transmission channel in the transmitter based on at least Jitter information or a packet loss rate obtained from the receiver; and
   instruction means for instructing the computer to change at least one of a bit rate of transmission data and a error resilience level according to the estimated transmission condition.

8. A data transmission apparatus, **characterized by** comprising:

   receiver means (104) for receiving network information regarding a condition of a network;
   determination means (105) for determining a network condition based on the network information from the receiver means;
   encoder means (102) for encoding a video data signal to generate encoded video data and control a bit rate or an error resilience level of the encoded video data according to the network condition information; and
   transmitter means (103) for transmitting the en-

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coded video data to the network.

9. An apparatus according to claim 6, **characterized in that** the encoder means (102) is supplied with an encoding parameter as the network condition information and generates encoded data whose bit rate is adjusted according to the encoding parameter,

the determination means (105) includes first storage means (302) for storing encoding parameter information obtained by the encoder means, second storage means (301) storing the network information input by the network information receiver, and determination means (303) for determine the encoding parameter by deciding the network condition based on network information input by the network information receiver, past encoding parameter information from the first storage means and past network information from the second storage means.

10. An apparatus according to claim 8, **characterized in that** the encoder means (102) includes parameter determination means (401) for determining the encoding parameter from the network condition information input from the receiver means, the encoder means (102) encoding the video data signal to generate the encoded video data whose bit rate is adjusted in correspondence with the encoding parameter determined by the determination means (401).

11. An apparatus according to claim 10, **characterized by** including encoding determination means (501) determine whether a next frame is to be encoded forcibly in an intra-frame encoding mode, when the parameter determination means (401) determines the encoding parameter using the network condition information.

12. An apparatus according to claim 8 or 9, **characterized in that** the determination means (105) includes computation means for computing a GPO interval from the network information input from the receiver means (104) to generate network condition information including GOP interval information indicating the GOP interval obtained by the computation means, and the encoder means (102) encodes the video data signal according to the GOP interval information included in the network condition information.

13. An apparatus according to claim 8 or 10, **characterized in that** the encoder means (102) includes GOP interval computation means for computing a GOP interval based on the network information input from the receiver means (104) and encodes the video data signal according to the GOP interval information indicating the GOP interval computed by the GOP interval computation means.

14. An apparatus according to claim 12 or 13, **characterized in that** the determination means (105) determines at least a packet loss rate as the network condition, and the GOP interval computation means computes the GOP interval based on at least the packet loss rate.

15. An apparatus according to claim 8, **characterized by** including switching means (602) for switching among plural encoded data encoded at different transmission rates, respectively, to select encoded data having a transmission rate corresponding to switching information, and selector means (603) for selecting a transmission rate of encoded data to be transmitted from the transmitter based on the network condition information outputted from the determination means (105) and output the selected transmission rate as the switching information to the switching means.

16. An apparatus according to claim 15, **characterized in that** the switching means (602) includes a switching position detector for detecting a switching position at which one of the encoded data can be switched to the other, and when an encoded data switching signal is generated by the switching information output from the selector means (603), the switching position detector detects the switching position, to switch the encoded data at the switching position.

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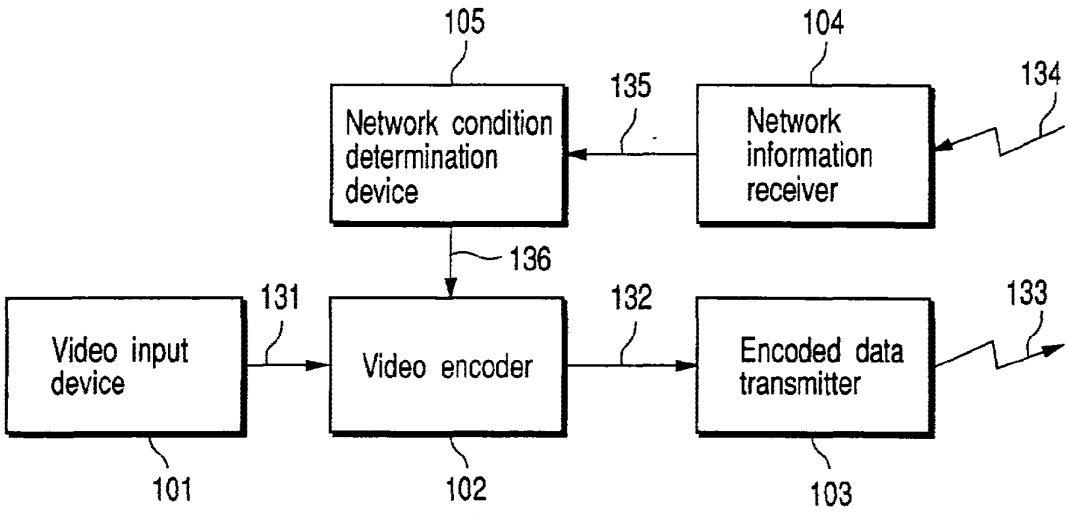


FIG. 1

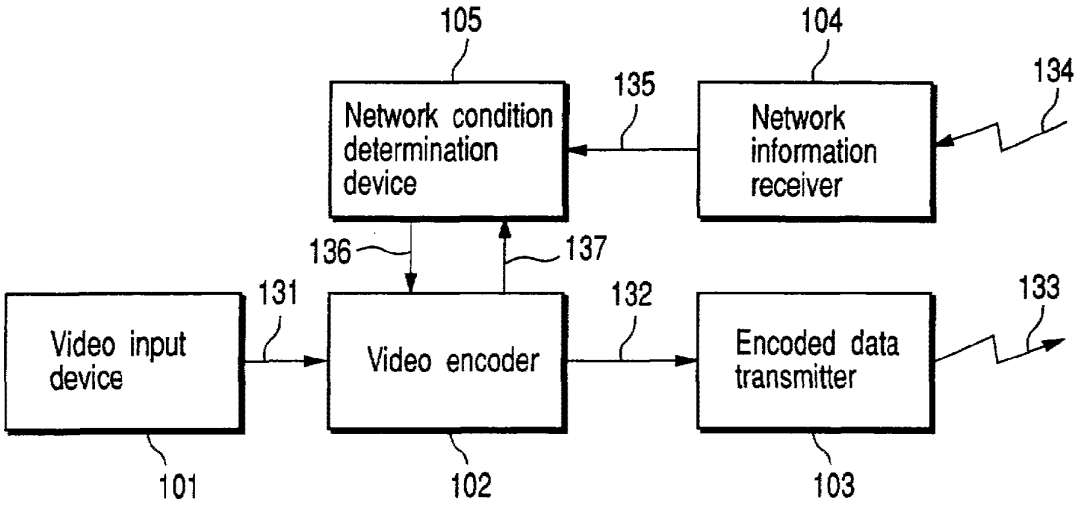


FIG. 2

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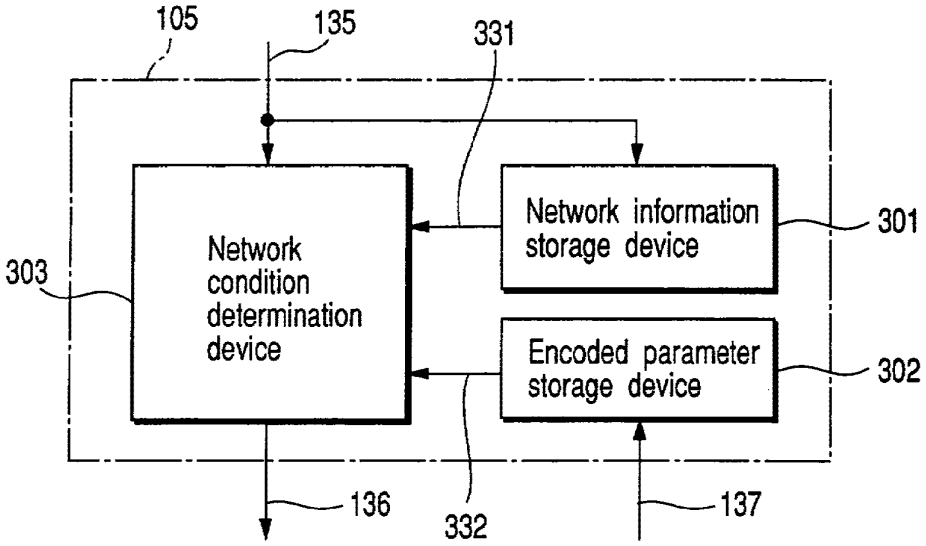


FIG. 3

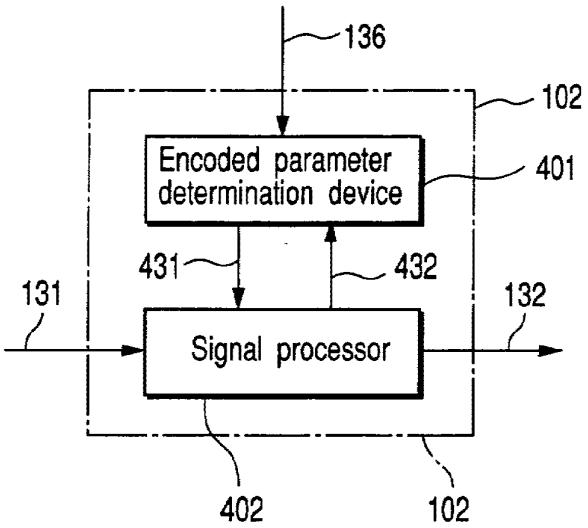


FIG. 4

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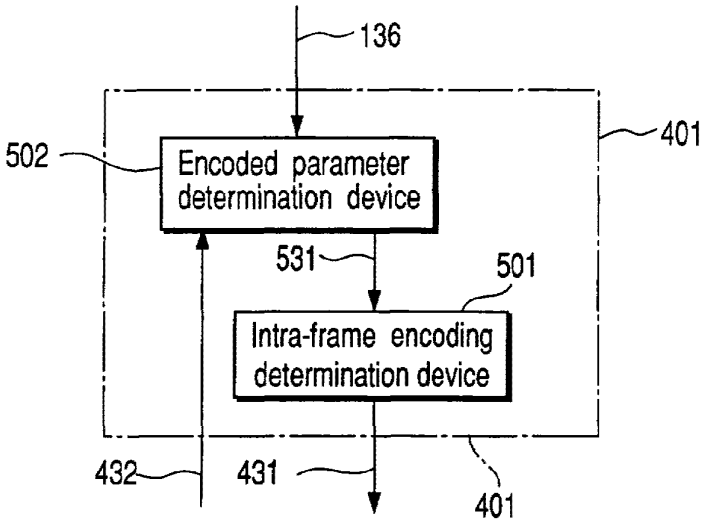


FIG. 5

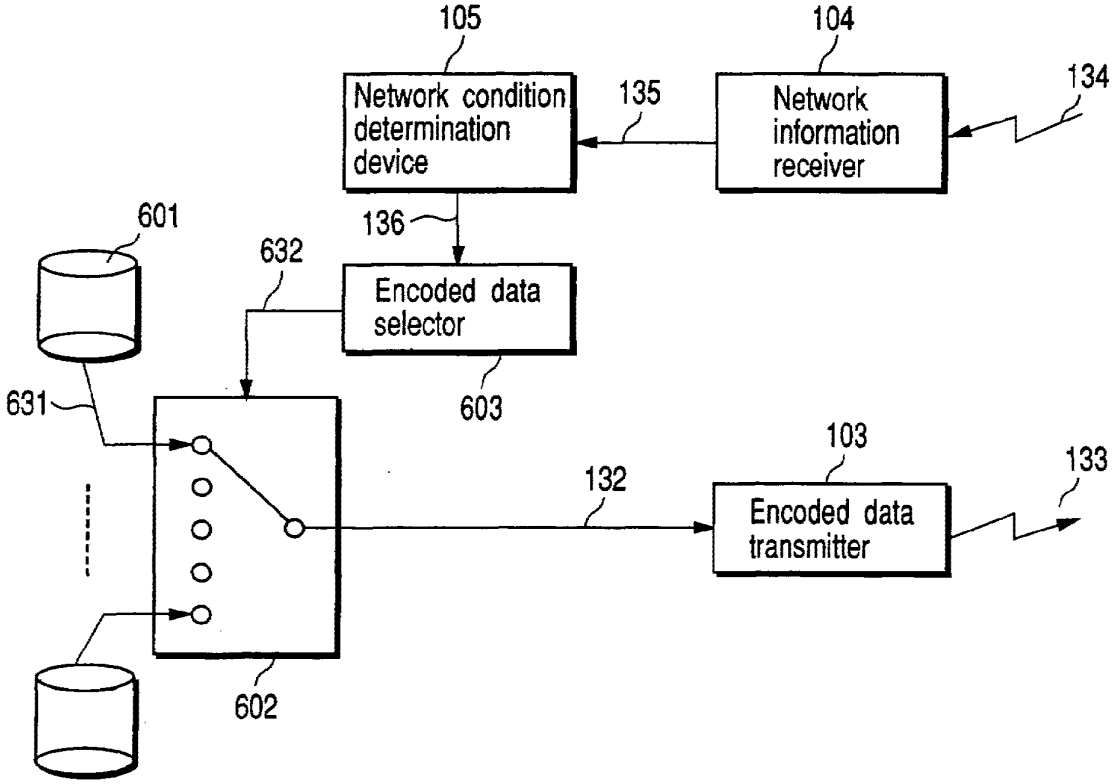


FIG. 6

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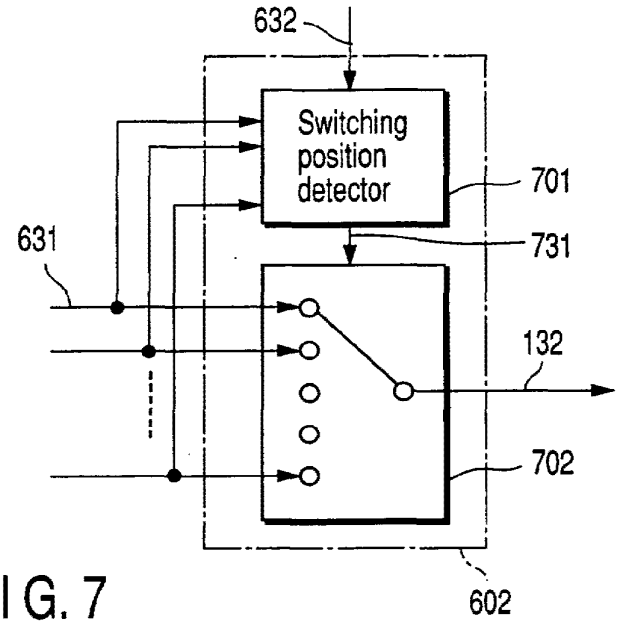


FIG. 7

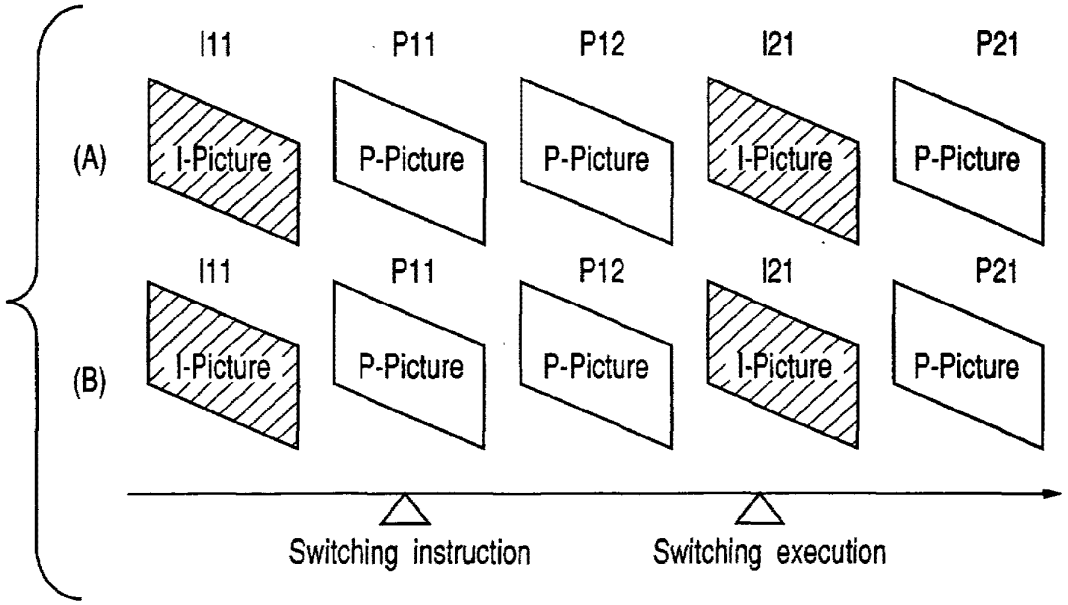


FIG. 8

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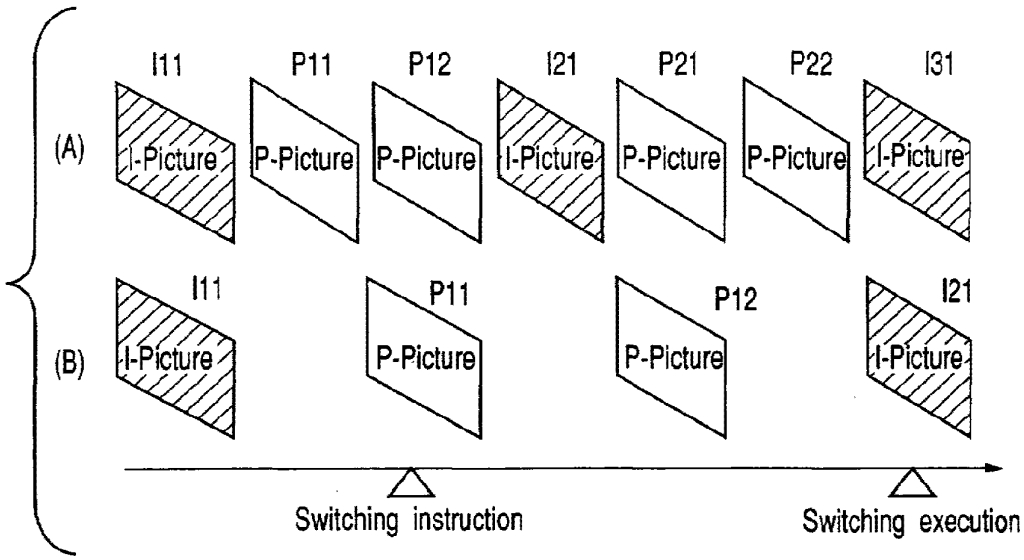


FIG. 9

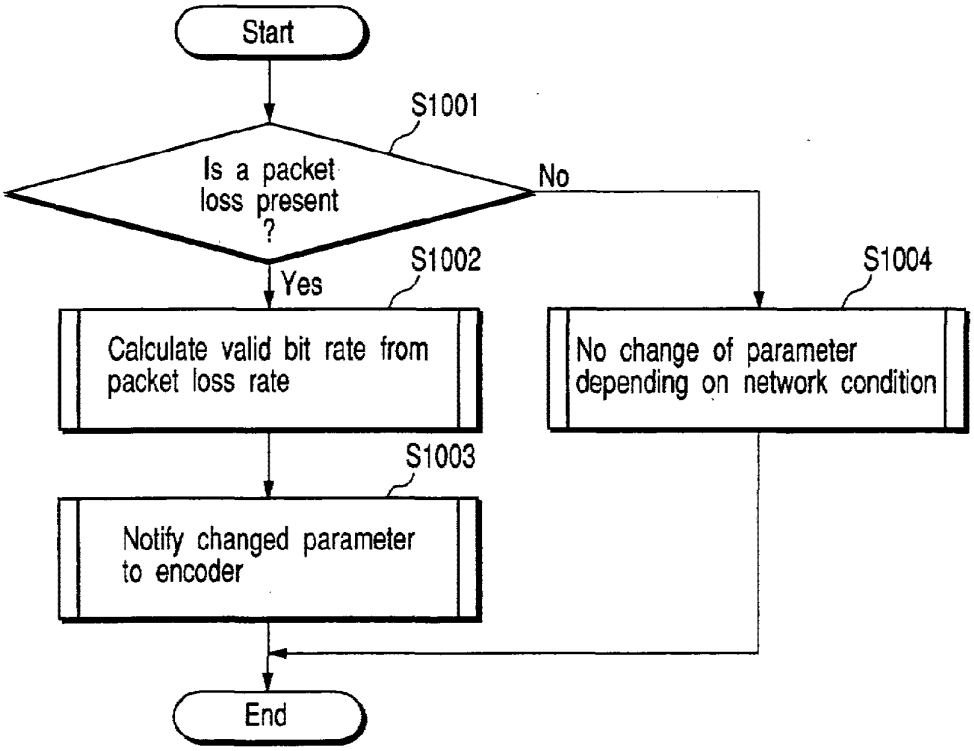


FIG. 10

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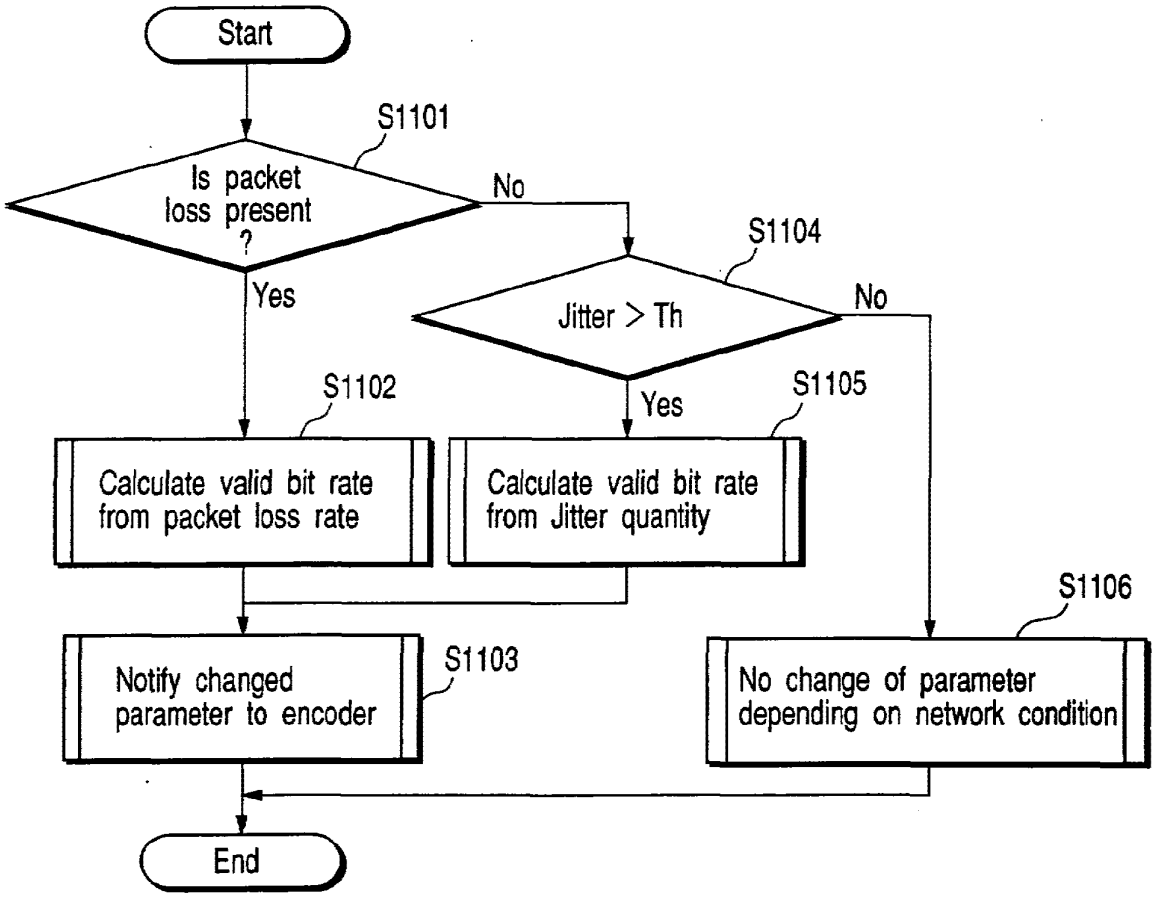


FIG. 11

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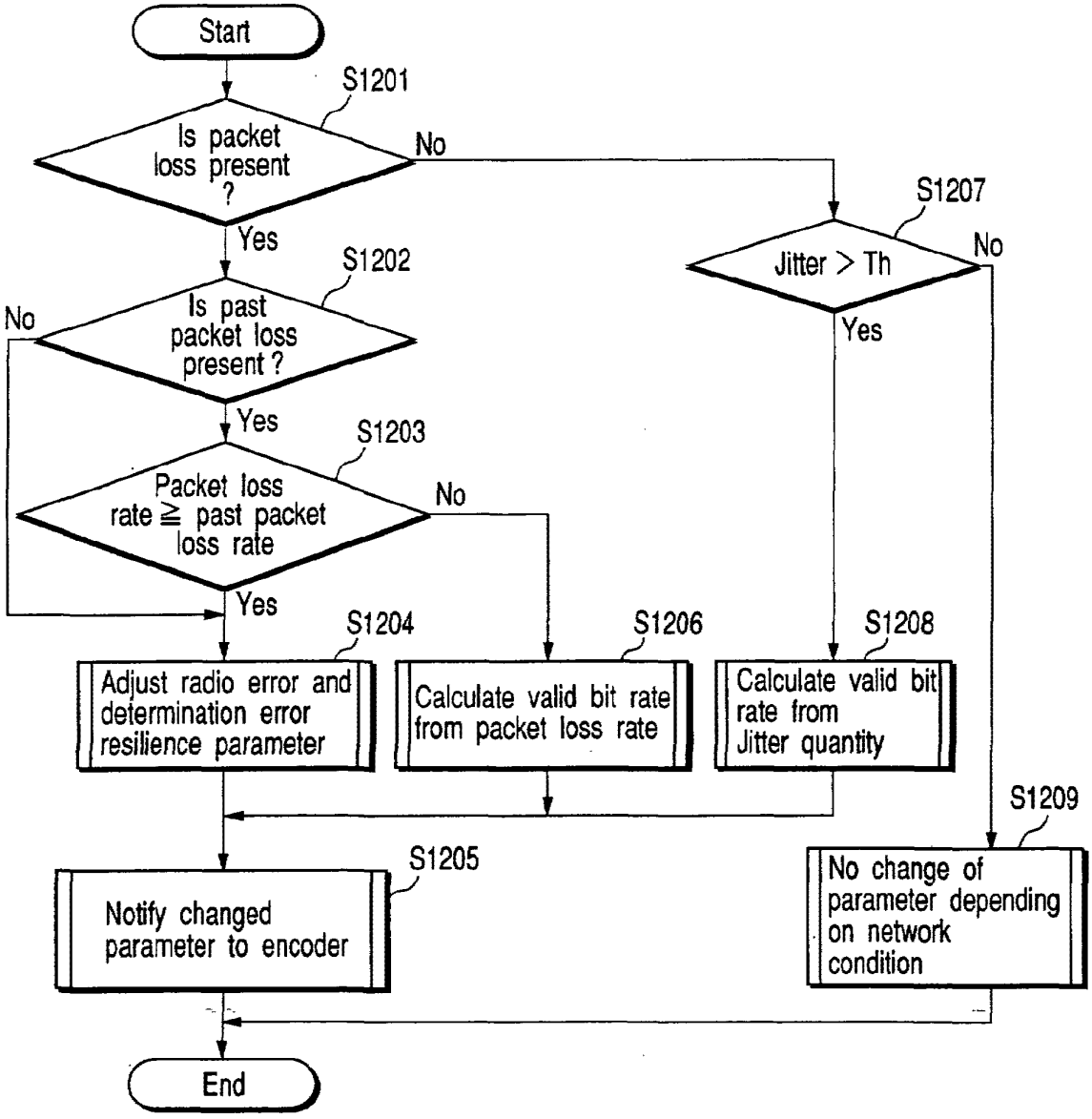


FIG. 12

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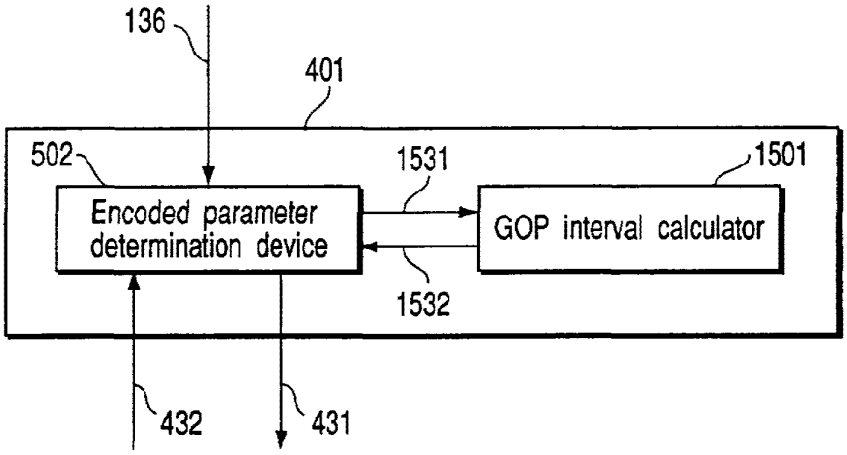


FIG. 13

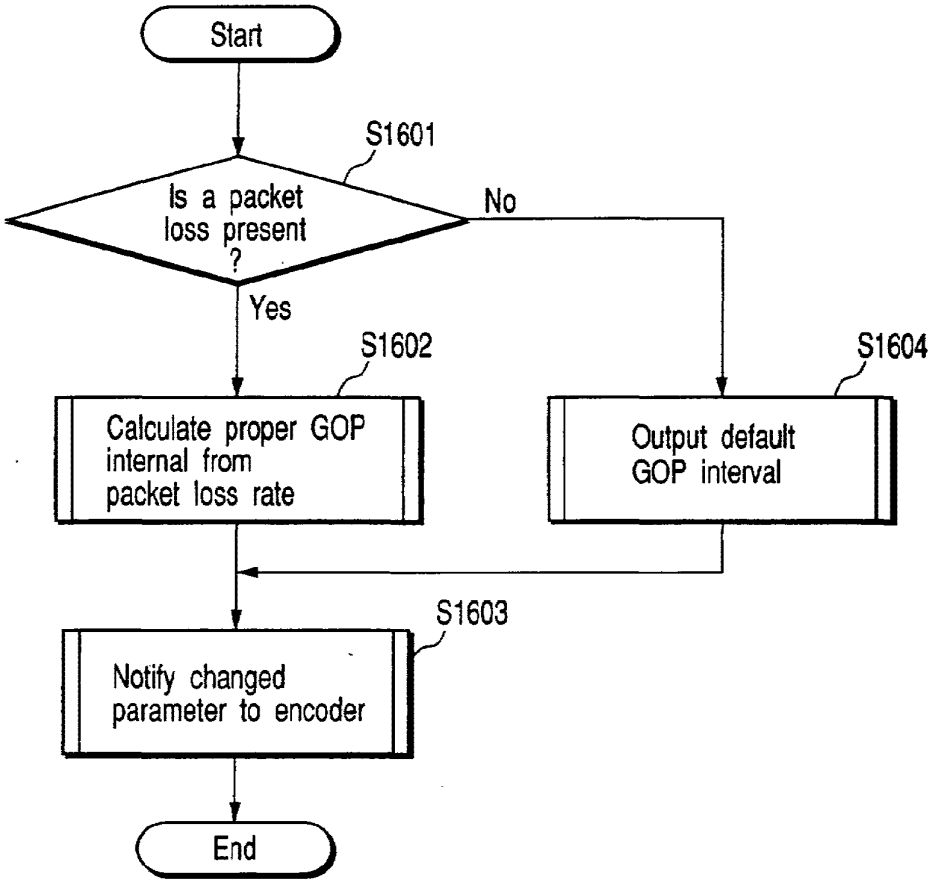


FIG. 14

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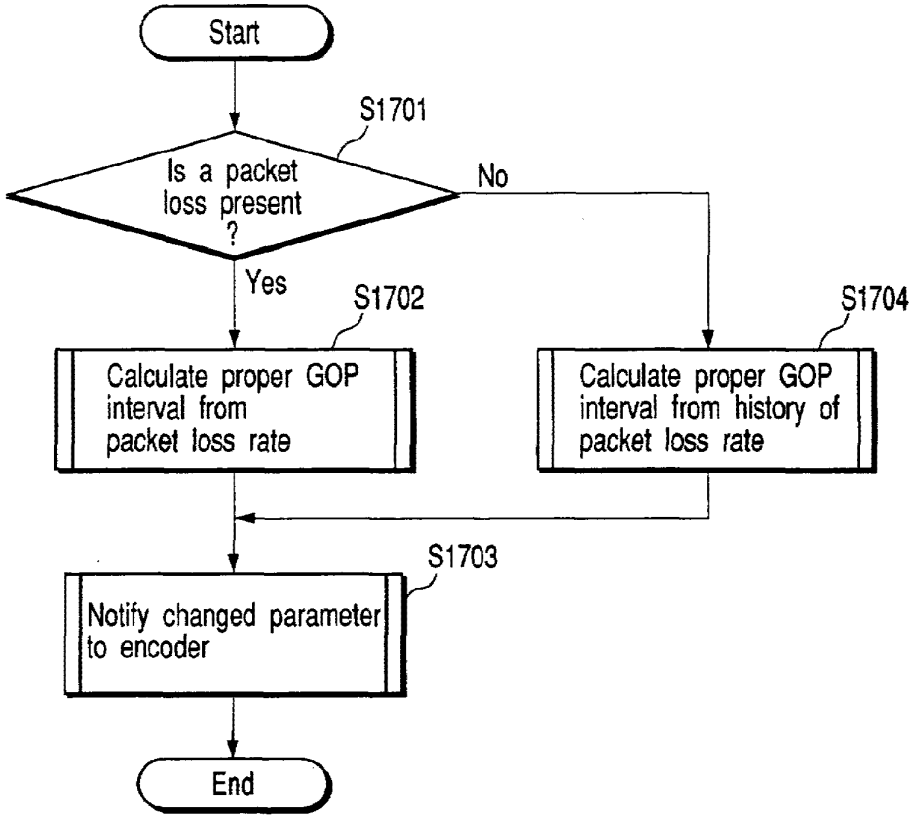


FIG. 15

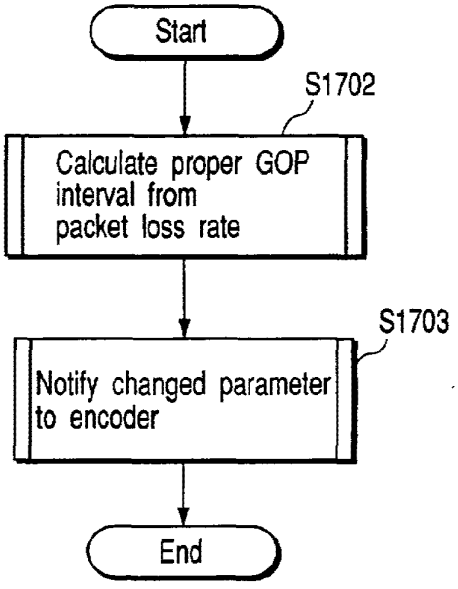


FIG. 16

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Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	16876579
Filing Date:	18-May-2020
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Filer:	Brett Carlson/Julie Graf
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9

Filed as Large Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				
Extension-of-Time:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Miscellaneous:				
SUBMISSION- INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STMT	1806	1	260	260
		Total in USD ($)		**260**

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(71) Applicant: **BRITISH TELECOMMUNICATIONS public limited company**
London EC1A 7AJ (GB)

(72) Inventor: **The designation of the inventor has not yet been filed**

(74) Representative: **Lloyd, Barry George William et al**
BT Group Legal
Intellectual Property Department
PP C5A
BT Centre
81 Newgate Street
London EC1A 7AJ (GB)

(54) Adaptive video transmission with variable frame rate

(57) Video signals are sent via a network, such as an internet protocol network, the bandwidth of which varies with time. The amount of data to be sent is controlled by varying the frame rate. This is achieved by (a) measuring the transmission capacity to the receiver; (b) determining the rate of change of transmission capacity; and (c) adjusting the transmitted video frame rate as a function of the said rate of change.

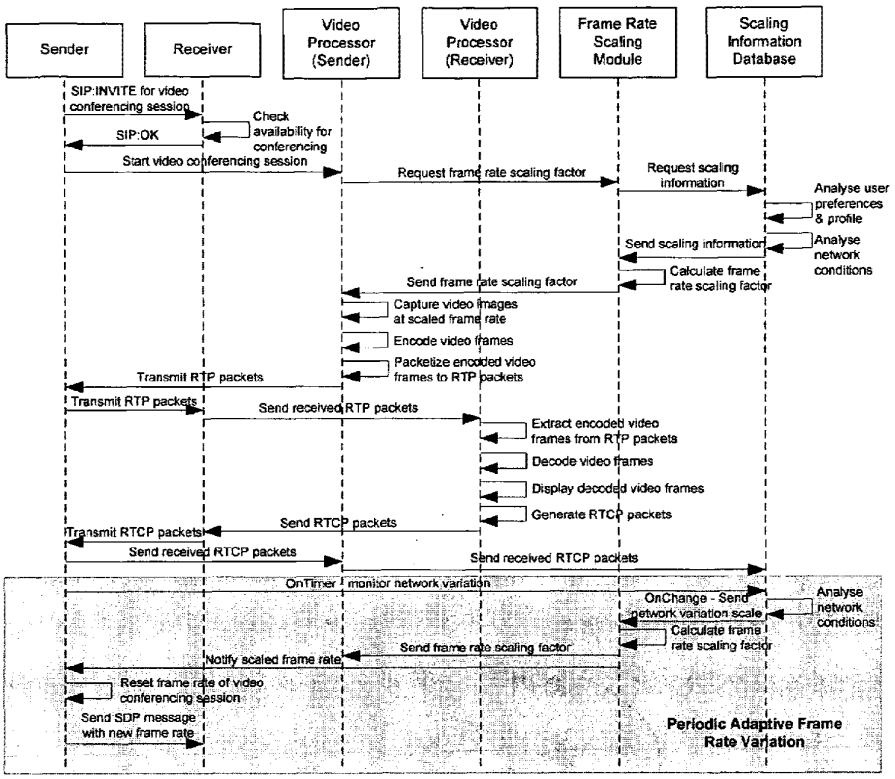


Figure 3 Sequence Diagram of Adaptive Video Frame Rate Application

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Description

[0001] The present invention is concerned with the transmission of video signals via a network.

[0002] In the future, the next generation communication environment is envisaged as allowing users to roam freely and to communicate with each other at any time and any place [1]. Client devices with different capabilities, which range from low power mobile phones to high performance workstations, may be used for communications. Users will be interconnected by networks with various capacities, with packet loss rates that range from almost lossless transmission to quite error prone environments. The rapid development of the client device industry and the proliferation of network access technologies is expected to result in the extensive growth of bandwidth-intensive real-time multimedia internetworking applications (e.g. voice over IP, video streaming, video conferencing and so on).

[0003] Real-time multimedia transmission over a variable bandwidth network environment requires a strict guarantee of network bandwidth and of several other quality of service (QoS) parameters, such as end-to-end delay, delay variation and packet loss. Unfortunately, most of the current QoS mechanisms in existing networks (such as wireless and mobile networks) do not provide such guarantees. In dynamic and unpredictable network environments, due to diverse forms of mobility and interference at the air interface, it gives rise to varying bandwidth and dynamically changing error rates [2]. This further intensifies the challenge for consistent provision of QoS. Traditional QoS mechanisms (e.g. Integrated Services and Differentiated Services), which are typically designed for wired networks, assume a fixed network topology and a fixed amount of available resources. These are inadequate to satisfy users' QoS requirements or to utilize the system resources efficiently, especially in bandwidth-limited and error prone network environments.

[0004] In order to solve this, adaptive multimedia applications are proposed. By implementing adaptive applications, media quality can, in the case of bandwidth variation of network, be adapted appropriately. The bandwidth of the media stream can be scaled down to provide a degraded quality at the destination. In this invention, we are particularly interested in the implementation of video applications. Adaptive video applications use protocols such as Real-Time Streaming Protocol (RTSP) and Real-Time Protocol (RTP), to adapt to changing network conditions using a number of techniques. These techniques include hierarchical encoding, efficient compression, bandwidth smoothing, rate shaping, error control, and adaptive synchronization. Feedback from lower networking layers can be used by the application layer and this helps to match the transmission to the available bandwidth as well as to increase the robustness of the video transmission. However, the perceived quality of video applications is being neglected. Variations of frame rates are proposed in some of these adaptive mechanisms [3] [4]. However, abrupt changes of frame rates can annoy users and hence have a severe impact on the perceived quality of such video applications.

[0005] QoS provisioning is an important issue in real-time internetworking video applications. The dramatic fluctuation of network conditions further intensifies the problems of QoS provisioning. Under variable bandwidth network environments (such as users are moving from one network to another with different bandwidth capacity or network is being congested by heavy traffic), characteristics of video applications need to be adjusted in order to fit the requirements of the current operating network and also maintain the perceived QoS.

[0006] An IBM document on QoS policies [5] clearly states that "the priority for smooth video is higher than the priority for frame quality". It points out that the importance of smooth video is even more significant when users are watching high motion videos (such as sports programmes). Traditional adaptive frame rate variation mechanisms in video applications, which adjust the video requirements according to the rate supportable by the network, attempt to keep the quality of video constant by varying the frame rate. In these mechanisms, the perceived quality of video application is often degraded as frame rates are reduced to a much lower rate or being increased to a much higher rate in order to fit network conditions. The abrupt changes of frame rates (from higher rate to lower rate and vice versa), which cause jerkiness and unsteady video displays, annoy users who are expecting a smooth and continuous flow of video frames in real-time video applications. The users are able to notice the sudden change of frame rate in video transmission. For example, a video application may be sending video at 25 frames per second (fps) during normal network condition and frame rate is reduced to 8fps when network congestion is detected; the frame rate is then increased to 15fps again when network conditions improve. This drastic fluctuation of frame rates will affect the smoothness of the video display and hence have a severe impact on perceived quality.

[0007] References:

1. T. Takebayashi et al, Approaches to User-Centric Computing System for Ubiquitous Solutions, Fujitsu Sci. Tech. J., 39, 2, December 2003, p.261-269.

2. M. Naghshineh et al, End-to-End QoS Provisioning in Multimedia Wireless/Mobile Networks Using an Adaptive Framework, IEEE Communication Magazine November 1997.

3. J. Kim et al, TCP-Friendly Internet Video Streaming Employing Variable Frame-Rate Encoding and Interpolation, IEEE Transaction on Circuits and Systems for Video Technology, Vol.10, NO.7, October 2000.

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[4] W. Guetz et al., U.S. Patent 6,091,777.

[5] IBM. Functions of mobile multimedia QoS control. http://www.trl.ibm.com/projects/mmqos/system_e.htm.

[0008] According to the present invention there is provided a method of transmitting video over a network to a receiver, comprising repeatedly

(a) measuring the transmission capacity to the receiver;
(b) determining the rate of change of transmission capacity;
(c) adjusting the transmitted video frame rate as a function of the said rate of change.

[0009] Other aspects of the invention are set out in the claims.

[0010] Some embodiments of the invention will now be described, with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0011] The basic system operational view of our implementation is depicted in Figure 1. The figure shows one-way communication (sender-to-receiver), however, it can be implemented as a two-way communication application (client-to-client). Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) can be used to start a communication session between two or more clients. Real-Time Protocol (RTP) and

[0012] Real-Time Control Protocol (RTCP) can be used as underlying transport layer to send data packets and also control packets. In this implementation, Session Description Protocol (SDP) signalling can be used to reset the parameters of a video conferencing session and send them to the receiving end.

[0013] The video processor, which involves capture/display, encoder/decoder and transmitter/receiver, is mainly for media processing. The adaptation mechanism appears as a standalone module in the application. A scaling information database extracts and stores network statistical information (monitored periodically using a timer) and user profiles (set by users). The frame rate scaling module is the core mechanism which calculates a frame rate scaling factor based on information obtained from information database. A scaled frame rate will then be fed to the video processor for setting new video parameters.

[0014] Figure 2 illustrates how the different parameters influence the frame rate in the case of fluctuation in the network . To calculate the frame rate scaling factor, several parameters need to be taken into consideration. These parameters may include network statistics, RTCP feedback statistics and the user profile. The main contributor to the scaling factor is the network statistics, where the changes with time (Δbandwidth/Δt) are tracked.

[0015] The sequence diagram (Figure 3) shows the activity flows of our implementation. The periodic adaptive frame rate variation mechanism (shaded portion) is applied to avoid the situation that frame rate variation is only incurred when network congestion is detected. A timer is initiated for periodic network condition monitoring at the client end. The frame rate will be scaled based on the scaling factor extracted from scaling information as discussed previously. This will improve the perceived quality by giving a gradual change of frame rate and smooth playbacks of video throughout entire communication.

[0016] The control mechanism essentially comprises the following steps:

(a) measurement, at intervals, of the network bandwidth $B(t_i)$;
(b) determination of the gradient $\{B(t_i) - B(t_{i-1}))/(t_i - t_{i-1})$;
(c) determination of a scaling factor *M,* as a function of the gradient *m*;
(d) determination of a new frame rate, multiplying the existing rate by the scaling factor - subject however to the rate remaining within a range determined by preset maximum and minimum values..

[0017] In more detail:

(a) Bandwidth could be measured by any one of a number of conventional methods. If the communication session is peer to peer within a similar subnet, say, in an enterprise scenario, the backhaul link of the connecting equipment could expose its bandwidth availability through its SNMP agent residing in that particular equipment. This could be queried via SNMP calls. On the other hand, in an environment when there are several nodes in the path of its communication, an application level implementation of measuring its delay and thus bottleneck within that particular path could be used. This would suggest bandwidth availability.
Clearly it is important, in terms of reducing the risk of large changes in frame rate, to measure the bandwidth (and adjust the frame rate) at frequent intervals - that is to say, frequent in relation to the rate of change of network conditions. A typical rate might be every 10 seconds. It would be possible to measure the bandwidth once per frame, but this is not preferred, in that it involves additional overheads. In theory the bandwidth could be measured more often than once per frame, but naturally the frame rate adjustment cannot occur more often than once per frame.
(b) The gradient is determined by the formula given above. The use of the gradient rather than simply the absolute value of the bandwidth is significant because it introduces an element of prediction into the assessment of bandwidth availability.
(c) The determination of the scaling factor *M* as a function of the gradient *m* should be such that

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If *m* is large & positive, multiplier is >1;
If *m* is small & positive, multiplier is > 1 (but smaller than when *m* is large);
If *m* is 0, multiplier is 1;
If *m* is small & negative, multiplier is <1;
If m is large & negative, multiplier is <1 (but smaller than when *m* is small and negative.
For example, a possible relationship for the situation where the bandwidth gradient is expected to vary over the range -50 to 50 kbit/s/s is: that M varies between 0.4 and 2.5. A simple, piecewise-linear implementation would be to specify that for m>0: M = 1 + 0.03 m; for m=0: M = 1; and for m<0: M = 1 + 0.012 m. However we prefer a nonlinear relationship in which frame rate changes are more extreme at the ends of the scale. Such a relationship would best be implemented by the use of a look-up table.
(d) A typical limit range for frame rate might be from 10 to 25 frames per second. Thus if the existing frame rate is f_i then the new frame rate will be

$$f_{i+1} = \mathrm{Max}\{\mathrm{Min}\{Mf_i, 25\}, 10\}.$$

[0018] The user preferences referred to earlier could mean constraints on the level of adaptation that the user is prepared to live with in a congested network situation, i.e reaction time, image resolution resizing, colour depth. This could influence the extent for the need to switch to a lower frame rate.

[0019] In order to achieve better perceived quality of real-time internetworking video application in variable bandwidth network environments, degradation of video quality needs to be occur gracefully. In the method we have described, an adaptive mechanism, which resides in the video application, allows smooth variation of frame rates under variable bandwidth network environments. It varies frame rates gradually and hence minimises the jerkiness and flickering of video displays. A gradual degradation or upgrade of video quality gives an illusion to users that there is only little change in video quality throughout the communication period. The variation incurred is less aggressive and significant as compared with traditional frame rate variation mechanisms.

[0020] The method improves the perceived QoS of real-time internetworking video applications by implementing smooth variation frame rate mechanism of adaptive video application. An adaptation mechanism resides in a real-time internetworking multimedia application to adapt video quality dynamically to changes in network conditions. Network conditions are absorbed and analysed from time to time and network statistical analysis is then fed back to the video processor of the application. The application is then triggered to set the frame rate of the video to a requested rate based on the analysis of network conditions. The frame rate changes dynamically when network conditions vary - but not only when network congestion is detected. The degree of variation in frame rate depends on the degree of variation in network conditions (such as network utilization) and the variations of frame rates occur throughout the communication session. Hence, it prevents sudden changes in frame rate of the video transmission and helps to minimise the jerkiness of video displays under variable bandwidth conditions. User preferences and profiles may also be taken into account when frame rate is being adjusted. This further improves user perceived QoS of the application.

Claims

1. A method oftransmitting video over a network to a receiver, comprising repeatedly

   (a) measuring the transmission capacity to the receiver;
   (b) determining the rate of change of transmission capacity;
   (c) adjusting the transmitted video frame rate as a function of the said rate of change.

2. A method according to claim 1 in which the frame rate is adjusted to equal the existing frame rate multiplied by a factor which is a monotonically increasing function of rate of change of transmission capacity.

3. A method according to claim 2 in which the factor is a nonlinear function of rate of change of transmission capacity.

4. A method according to claim 3 in which the factor is obtained by means of a look-up table.

5. A method according to any one of the preceding claims in which the rate of change of transmission capacity is evaluated to determine whether an adjustment of frame rate is necessary at regular intervals.

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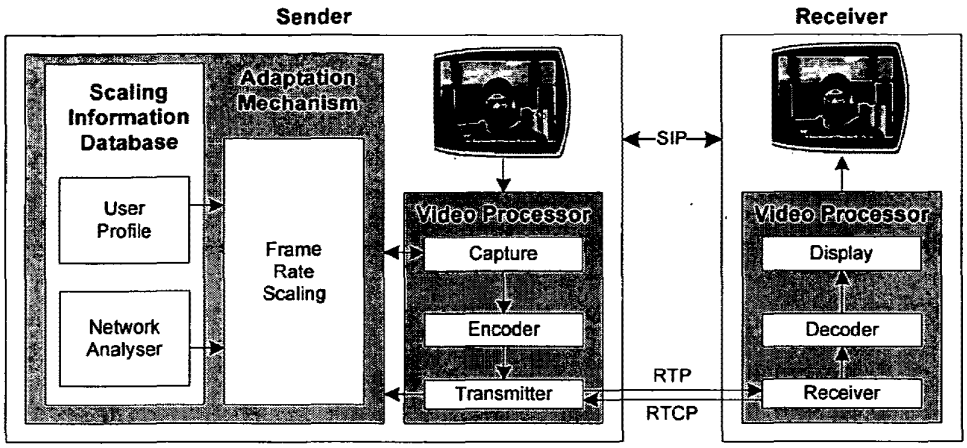


Figure 1 Basic System Operational View

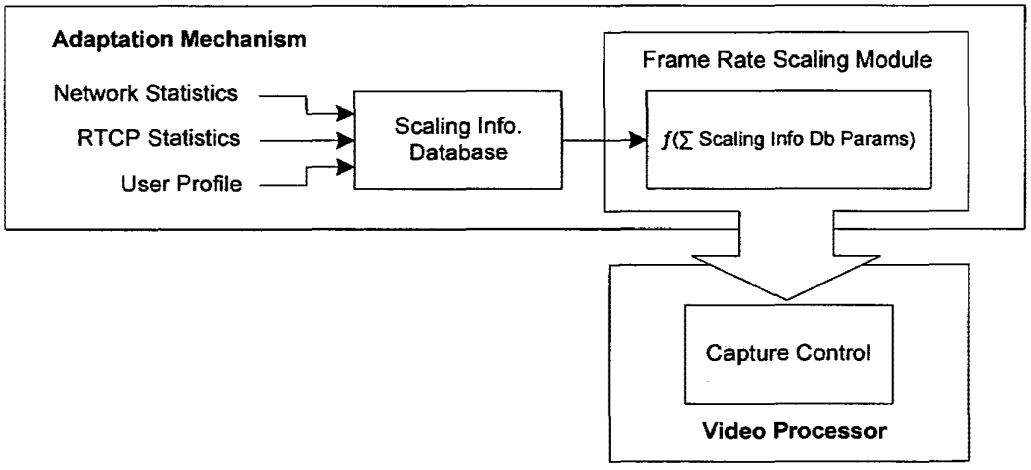


Figure 2

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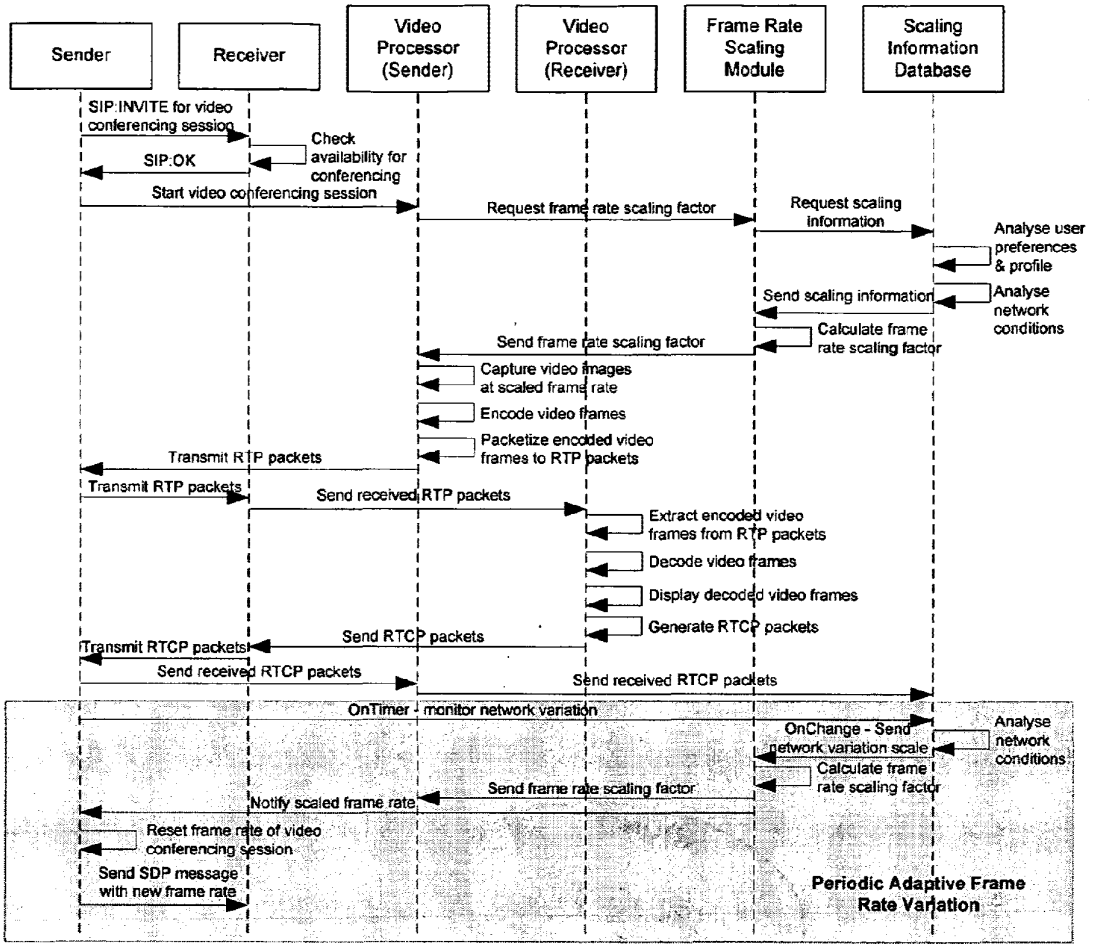


Figure 3 Sequence Diagram of Adaptive Video Frame Rate Application

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Application Number
EP 05 25 6302

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
X,D	KIM JONGWON ET AL: "TCP-Friendly Internet Video Streaming Employing Variable Frame-Rate Encoding and Interpolation" IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON CIRCUITS AND SYSTEMS FOR VIDEO TECHNOLOGY, IEEE SERVICE CENTER, PISCATAWAY, NJ, US, vol. 10, no. 7, 1 October 2000 (2000-10-01), pages 1164-1177, XP002369021 ISSN: 1051-8215 * page 1168, left-hand column, paragraph B *	1-5	H04N7/46
A	REED E C ET AL: "CONSTRAINED BIT-RATE CONTROL FOR VERY LOW BIT-RATE STREAMING-VIDEO APPLICATIONS" IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON CIRCUITS AND SYSTEMS FOR VIDEO TECHNOLOGY, IEEE SERVICE CENTER, PISCATAWAY, NJ, US, vol. 11, no. 7, July 2001 (2001-07), pages 882-889, XP001083363 ISSN: 1051-8215 * page 885, right-hand column - page 886, left-hand column *	1-5	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (IPC) H04N
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-/--

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
Berlin	28 March 2006	Raeymaekers, P

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
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Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
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TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (IPC)

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

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Application Number	16876579
Filing Date	2020-05-18
First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
Art Unit	2454
Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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	1	7577750	B2	2009-08-18	Shen et al.	
	2	6195680	B1	2001-02-27	Goldszmidt et al.	
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	Examiner Name	Patel, Chirag R.
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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3. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a Member of Congress submitting a request involving an individual, to whom the record pertains, when the individual has requested assistance from the Member with respect to the subject matter of the record.

4. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a contractor of the Agency having need for the information in order to perform a contract. Recipients of information shall be required to comply with the requirements of the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(m).

5. A record related to an International Application filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization, pursuant to the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

6. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to another federal agency for purposes of National Security review (35 U.S.C. 181) and for review pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 218(c)).

7. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the Administrator, General Services, or his/her designee, during an inspection of records conducted by GSA as part of that agency's responsibility to recommend improvements in records management practices and programs, under authority of 44 U.S.C. 2904 and 2906. Such disclosure shall be made in accordance with the GSA regulations governing inspection of records for this purpose, and any other relevant (i.e., GSA or Commerce) directive. Such disclosure shall not be used to make determinations about individuals.

8. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the public after either publication of the application pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 122(b) or issuance of a patent pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 151. Further, a record may be disclosed, subject to the limitations of 37 CFR 1.14, as a routine use, to the public if the record was filed in an application which became abandoned or in which the proceedings were terminated and which application is referenced by either a published application, an application open to public inspections or an issued patent.

9. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency, if the USPTO becomes aware of a violation or potential violation of law or regulation.

fuboTV Media Inc.
Exhibit 1002
Page 594

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	41163515
Application Number:	16876579
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3720
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Customer Number:	70560
Filer:	Brett Carlson
Filer Authorized By:	
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9
Receipt Date:	18-NOV-2020
Filing Date:	18-MAY-2020
Time Stamp:	19:46:47
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	no

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1		20201118_SupplementalResponse_06-0141X1C9.pdf	136880 2c295b10580c97399fbd862f4473ed8031ba5c9f	yes	2

	Multipart Description/PDF files in .zip description		
	Document Description	**Start**	**End**
	Applicant Arguments/Remarks Made in an Amendment	2	2
	Supplemental Response or Supplemental Amendment	1	1
Warnings:			
Information:			
	Total Files Size (in bytes):	136880	

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

REMARKS

Upon further review of our previously-filed response, it was discovered that we neglected to respond to the double patenting rejection alleging that our claims are verbatim identical to those of the issued parent, US Patent No. 10,469,554. We respectfully disagree: at the very least, the independent claims differ because the "video" referenced in present claim is not necessarily restricted to "live action" video, as in the cited parent. Even to the extent that dependent claims may overlap, this is remediable with a terminal disclaimer.

We are submitting terminal disclaimers citing both US Patent No. 10,489,554 and US Patent No. 10,489,555. Again, if the Examiner has any questions or suggestions to advance prosecution, the undersigned would welcome a telephone call.

Conclusion

Should any issues remain, we would welcome a telephone call to - (480) 385-5069 or an email to bcarlson@lkglobal.com. *Recognizing that Internet communications are not secure, we hereby authorize the USPTO to communicate with the undersigned and practitioners in accordance with 37 CFR 1.33 and 37 CFR 1.34 concerning any subject matter of this application via video conferencing, instant messaging, or electronic mail. We understand that a copy of these communications will be made of record in the application file. (MPEP 502.03). Without limiting the foregoing, we further authorize the use of email for informal correspondence, including the exchange of proposed amendments or other draft documents.*

Respectfully submitted,

LORENZ & KOPF, LLC

Dated: November 18, 2020

By: /Brett A. Carlson /
Brett A. Carlson
Reg. No. 39,928

bcarlson@lkglobal.com
480-385-5069 (direct)
480-241-8219 (mobile)
480-385-5060 (general)

LKGLOBAL is LORENZ & KOPF, LLC
Customer No. 70560

fuboTV Media Inc.
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Page 597

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Serial. No.:	16/876,579	Confirmation No.:	3720
Examiner:	Chirag R. Patel	Art Unit:	2454
Filed:	05/18/2020	Customer No.:	70560

Title: **APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING**

Attorney Docket No.: 066.0141x1C9

SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE

Mail Stop AMENDMENT
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

FILED ELECTRONICALLY USING THE PTO-EFS SYSTEM

Commissioner:

In further response to the Office Action mailed on June 18, 2020 (for which the period for response has already been extended until November 18, 2020 in our response submitted earlier today), please consider the remarks below under 37 C.F.R. § 1.111, or any other appropriate rule.

REMARKS begin on page 2.

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Page 598

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	41163337
Application Number:	16876579
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3720
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Customer Number:	70560
Filer:	Brett Carlson
Filer Authorized By:	
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9
Receipt Date:	18-NOV-2020
Filing Date:	18-MAY-2020
Time Stamp:	19:22:45
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	yes
Payment Type	CARD
Payment was successfully received in RAM	$640
RAM confirmation Number	E2020AHJ23070661
Deposit Account	
Authorized User	
The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows:	

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1		20201118_Response_06-0141X1C9.pdf	139680 66bad8e59fbd570342941e07ac613a6748aea593	yes	3

	Multipart Description/PDF files in .zip description		
	Document Description	**Start**	**End**
	Applicant Arguments/Remarks Made in an Amendment	2	3
	Amendment/Req. Reconsideration-After Non-Final Reject	1	1

Warnings:

Information:

2	Fee Worksheet (SB06)	fee-info.pdf	30996 b1ee06c1c8a073a67ee1e5b25794e903dc65f646	no	2

Warnings:

Information:

Total Files Size (in bytes):	170676

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Serial. No.:	16/876,579	Confirmation No.:	3720
Examiner:	Chirag R. Patel	Art Unit:	2454
Filed:	05/18/2020	Customer No.:	70560

Title: **APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING**

Attorney Docket No.: 066.0141x1C9

RESPONSE AND AMENDMENT
FILED UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.111

Mail Stop AMENDMENT
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

FILED ELECTRONICALLY USING THE PTO-EFS SYSTEM

Commissioner:

In response to the Office Action mailed on June 18, 2020 (for which the period for response has been extended until November 18, 2020), please consider the remarks below under 37 C.F.R. § 1.111.

REMARKS begin on page 2.

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Exhibit 1002
Page 601

Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	16876579
Filing Date:	18-May-2020
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Filer:	Brett Carlson
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9

Filed as Large Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				
Extension-of-Time:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Extension - 2 months with $0 paid	1252	1	640	640
Miscellaneous:				
			Total in USD ($)	**640**

REMARKS

This is a response to the above-reference application, which has been granted Track One status. No amendments are made, so no new matter has been added.

Allowable Subject Matter

We appreciate the Examiner's acknowledgement that all claims are allowable but for the double patenting rejection addressed below.

Double Patenting Rejection

The only issue raised by the Office Action is a double patenting rejection citing the issued parent to this application, US Patent No. 10,469,554. The Office Action states that the rejection can be overcome with a terminal disclaimer, which is being filed under separate cover.

After entry of the terminal disclaimer, the rejection is believed to be moot. If there are any issues with the terminal disclaimer or associated fee payment, however, or if any additional disclaimers are needed, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned via telephone at 480.241.8219 (mobile) or 480.385.5069 (office).

Information Disclosure Statement

A large information disclosure statement has been submitted under separate cover. Almost all of the references cited are already of record from the parent applications to this matter, but Applicant desires that the art be printed on the front of the issued patent. If there are questions about the IDS or any of the cited art, the undersigned would welcome a telephone call.

Conclusion

Should any issues remain, we would welcome a telephone call to - (480) 385-5069 or an email to bcarlson@lkglobal.com. *Recognizing that Internet communications are not secure, we hereby authorize the USPTO to communicate with the undersigned and practitioners in accordance with 37 CFR 1.33 and 37 CFR 1.34 concerning any subject matter of this application via video conferencing, instant messaging, or electronic mail. We understand that a copy of*

fuboTV Media Inc.
Exhibit 1002
Page 604

these communications will be made of record in the application file. (MPEP 502.03). Without limiting the foregoing, we further authorize the use of email for informal correspondence, including the exchange of proposed amendments or other draft documents.

Respectfully submitted,

LORENZ & KOPF, LLC

Dated: November 18, 2020

By: /Brett A. Carlson /
Brett A. Carlson
Reg. No. 39,928

bcarlson@lkglobal.com
480-385-5069 (direct)
480-241-8219 (mobile)
480-385-5060 (general)

LKGLOBAL is LORENZ & KOPF, LLC
Customer No. 70560

fuboTV Media Inc.
Exhibit 1002
Page 605

Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	16876579
Filing Date:	18-May-2020
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Filer:	Brett Carlson/Julie Graf
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9

Filed as Large Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
STATUTORY OR TERMINAL DISCLAIMER	1814	1	170	170
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Extension-of-Time:				
Miscellaneous:				
			Total in USD ($)	**170**

Doc Code: DIST.E.FILE Document Description: Electronic Terminal Disclaimer - Filed	PTO/SB/26 U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Department of Commerce

Electronic Petition Request	**TERMINAL DISCLAIMER TO OBVIATE A DOUBLE PATENTING REJECTION OVER A "PRIOR" PATENT**
Application Number	16876579
Filing Date	18-May-2020
First Named Inventor	DAVID BRUECK
Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9
Title of Invention	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING

☒ Filing of terminal disclaimer does not obviate requirement for response under 37 CFR 1.111 to outstanding Office Action

☒ This electronic Terminal Disclaimer is not being used for a Joint Research Agreement.

Owner	Percent Interest
DISH TECHNOLOGIES LLC	100%

The owner(s) with percent interest listed above in the instant application hereby disclaims, except as provided below, the terminal part of the statutory term of any patent granted on the instant application which would extend beyond the expiration date of the full statutory term of prior patent number(s)

10469555

10469554

as the term of said prior patent is presently shortened by any terminal disclaimer. The owner hereby agrees that any patent so granted on the instant application shall be enforceable only for and during such period that it and the prior patent are commonly owned. This agreement runs with any patent granted on the instant application and is binding upon the grantee, its successors or assigns.

In making the above disclaimer, the owner does not disclaim the terminal part of the term of any patent granted on the instant application that would extend to the expiration date of the full statutory term of the prior patent, "as the term of said prior patent is presently shortened by any terminal disclaimer," in the event that said prior patent later:
- expires for failure to pay a maintenance fee;
- is held unenforceable;
- is found invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction;
- is statutorily disclaimed in whole or terminally disclaimed under 37 CFR 1.321;
- has all claims canceled by a reexamination certificate;
- is reissued; or
- is in any manner terminated prior to the expiration of its full statutory term as presently shortened by any terminal disclaimer.

- (◉) Terminal disclaimer fee under 37 CFR 1.20(d) is included with Electronic Terminal Disclaimer request.
- (○) I certify, in accordance with 37 CFR 1.4(d)(4), that the terminal disclaimer fee under 37 CFR 1.20(d) required for this terminal disclaimer has already been paid in the above-identified application.

Applicant claims the following fee status:

- (○) Small Entity
- (○) Micro Entity
- (◉) Regular Undiscounted

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

THIS PORTION MUST BE COMPLETED BY THE SIGNATORY OR SIGNATORIES

I certify, in accordance with 37 CFR 1.4(d)(4) that I am:

- (◉) An attorney or agent registered to practice before the Patent and Trademark Office who is of record in this application

  Registration Number 39928

- (○) A sole inventor
- (○) A joint inventor; I certify that I am authorized to sign this submission on behalf of all of the inventors as evidenced by the power of attorney in the application
- (○) A joint inventor; all of whom are signing this request

Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/
Name	/BRETT A. CARLSON/

*Statement under 37 CFR 3.73(b) is required if terminal disclaimer is signed by the assignee (owner).
Form PTO/SB/96 may be used for making this certification. See MPEP § 324.

Doc Code: DISQ.E.FILE
Document Description: Electronic Terminal Disclaimer – Approved

Application No.: 16876579

Filing Date: 18-May-2020

Applicant/Patent under Reexamination: BRUECK

Electronic Terminal Disclaimer filed on November 19, 2020

☒ APPROVED

This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer

☐ DISAPPROVED

Approved/Disapproved by: Electronic Terminal Disclaimer automatically approved by EFS-Web

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	41166947
Application Number:	16876579
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3720
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Customer Number:	70560
Filer:	Brett Carlson/Julie Graf
Filer Authorized By:	Brett Carlson
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9
Receipt Date:	19-NOV-2020
Filing Date:	18-MAY-2020
Time Stamp:	11:10:57
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	yes
Payment Type	CARD
Payment was successfully received in RAM	$170
RAM confirmation Number	E2020AIB10535159
Deposit Account	
Authorized User	
The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows:	

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1	Terminal Disclaimer-Filed (Electronic)	eTerminal-Disclaimer.pdf	33611 2490b4dad50041890c6ab95030e5658250eaecf2	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
2	Fee Worksheet (SB06)	fee-info.pdf	30458 be55c8697533e89844cc242bcc44d4d00ebf6e08	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
		Total Files Size (in bytes):	64069		

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

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New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
16/876,579	05/18/2020	DAVID F. BRUECK	066.0141X1C9	3720

70560 7590 02/05/2021

LKGLOBAL (Dish Technologies L.L.C.)
7010 E. COCHISE ROAD
SCOTTSDALE, AZ 85253

EXAMINER	
PATEL, CHIRAG R	

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
2454	

NOTIFICATION DATE	DELIVERY MODE
02/05/2021	ELECTRONIC

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Notice of the Office communication was sent electronically on above-indicated "Notification Date" to the following e-mail address(es):

dish@lkglobal.com
ipdept@dish.com

Office Action Summary	Application No. 16/876,579	Applicant(s) BRUECK et al.	
	Examiner CHIRAG R PATEL	Art Unit 2454	AIA (FITF) Status No

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTHS FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

1)☑ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 18 November 2020.

☐ A declaration(s)/affidavit(s) under **37 CFR 1.130(b)** was/were filed on _____.

2a)☑ This action is **FINAL.** 2b) ☐ This action is non-final.

3)☐ An election was made by the applicant in response to a restriction requirement set forth during the interview on _____; the restriction requirement and election have been incorporated into this action.

4)☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims*

5) ☑ Claim(s) 1-30 is/are pending in the application.

5a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.

6) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.

7) ☑ Claim(s) 1-30 is/are rejected.

8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.

9) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement

* If any claims have been determined allowable, you may be eligible to benefit from the **Patent Prosecution Highway** program at a participating intellectual property office for the corresponding application. For more information, please see http://www.uspto.gov/patents/init_events/pph/index.jsp or send an inquiry to **PPHfeedback@uspto.gov.**

Application Papers

10)☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.

11)☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a)☐ accepted or b)☐ objected to by the Examiner.

Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).

Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

12)☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).

Certified copies:

a)☐ All b)☐ Some** c)☐ None of the:

1.☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.

2.☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.

3.☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

** See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

1) ☐ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)

2) ☑ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08a and/or PTO/SB/08b) Paper No(s)/Mail Date 11/17/20, 11/17/20, 11/17/20.

3) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413) Paper No(s)/Mail Date _____.

4) ☐ Other: _____.

fuboTV Media Inc.
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Page 614

Notice of Pre-AIA or AIA Status

The present application is being examined under the pre-AIA first to invent provisions.

Double Patenting

A rejection based on double patenting of the "same invention" type finds its support in the language of 35 U.S.C. 101 which states that "whoever invents or discovers any new and useful process... may obtain a patent therefor..." (Emphasis added). Thus, the term "same invention," in this context, means an invention drawn to identical subject matter. See *Miller v. Eagle Mfg. Co.*, 151 U.S. 186 (1894); *In re Vogel*, 422 F.2d 438, 164 USPQ 619 (CCPA 1970); *In re Ockert*, 245 F.2d 467, 114 USPQ 330 (CCPA 1957).

A statutory type (35 U.S.C. 101) double patenting rejection can be overcome by canceling or amending the claims that are directed to the same invention so they are no longer coextensive in scope. The filing of a terminal disclaimer cannot overcome a double patenting rejection based upon 35 U.S.C. 101.

Claims 1-2, 4-21, 23-26, 28 and 30 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 101 as claiming the same invention as that of claims 1-5, 7, 9-13, 16-19 and 23-28 of U.S. Patent No. 10,469,554. This is a statutory double patenting rejection.

Claims 1 and 2 of the instant application are a verbatim of claim 1 of the patent.

Claim 4 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 2 of the patent.

Claim 5 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 3 of the patent.

Claim 6 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 4 of the patent.

Claim 7 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 5 of the patent.

Claim 8 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 7 of the patent.

Claim 11 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 9 of the patent.

Claim 12 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 10 of the patent.

Claim 13 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 11 of the patent.

Claim 14 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 12 of the patent.

Claim 15 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 13 of the patent.

Claims 14 and 21 of the instant application are a verbatim of claim 16 of the patent.

Claim 15 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 17 of the patent.

Claim 16 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 18 of the patent.

Claim 17 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 19 of the patent.

Claim 18 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 23 of the patent.

Claim 19 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 24 of the patent.

Claim 20 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 25 of the patent.

Claims 23 and 26 of the instant application are a verbatim of claim 26 of the patent.

Claim 24 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 27 of the patent.

Claim 25 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 28 of the patent.

Claim 23 of the instant application is a verbatim of claim 26 of the patent.

Claims 28 and 30 of the instant application are a verbatim of claim 26 of the patent.

Allowable Subject Matter

The following is a statement of reasons for the indication of allowable subject matter: A thorough review of the prior art fails to disclose or render obvious, “wherein the first streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets has the same first duration and encodes the same first portion of the video in each of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, and wherein the first streamlet of the low quality stream encodes the same first portion of the video at a different bitrate than the first streamlet of the high quality stream and the first streamlet of the medium quality stream.”

Response to Arguments

Applicant's arguments filed November 18, 2020 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

Applicants state, "The only issue raised by the Office Action is a double patenting rejection citing the issued parent to this application, US Patent No. 10,469,554. The Office Action states that the rejection can be overcome with a terminal disclaimer, which is being filed under separate cover"

Examiner removes the obvious double patent rejections in response to the terminal disclaimer filed for US Patent No. 10,469,555. However, a terminal disclaimer does not remove a statutory double patent rejection, which applied to U.S. Patent 10,469,554. The statutory double patent rejections were not addressed in applicant's response.

Conclusion

THIS ACTION IS MADE FINAL. Applicant is reminded of the extension of time policy as set forth in 37 CFR 1.136(a).

A shortened statutory period for reply to this final action is set to expire THREE MONTHS from the mailing date of this action. In the event a first reply is filed within TWO MONTHS of the mailing date of this final action and the advisory action is not mailed until after the end of the THREE-MONTH shortened statutory period, then the shortened statutory period will expire on the date the advisory action is mailed, and any extension fee pursuant to 37 CFR 1.136(a) will be calculated from the mailing date of the advisory action. In no event, however, will the statutory period for reply expire later than SIX MONTHS from the mailing date of this final action.

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Chirag R Patel whose telephone number is (571)272-7966. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday to Friday from 8:00AM to 4:30PM. If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Glenton Burgess, can be reached on 571-272-3949. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see http://pairdirect.uspto.gov. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll free).

/Chirag R Patel/
Primary Examiner, Art Unit 2454

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	16876579
	Filing Date	2020-05-18
	First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Patel, Chirag R.
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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Examiner Signature	/CHIRAG R PATEL/	Date Considered	02/01/2021

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	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

OR

☐ That no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to the knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was known to any individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(2).

☒ See attached certification statement.

The fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

A certification statement is not submitted herewith.

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-11-16
Name/Print	Brett A. Carlson	Registration Number	39928

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the public which is to file (and by the USPTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 1 hour to complete, including gathering, preparing and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you require to complete this form and/or suggestions for reducing this burden, should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. **SEND TO: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.**

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EAST Search History

EAST Search History (Prior Art)

Ref #	Hits	Search Query	DBs	Default Operator	Plurals	Time Stamp
L1	1	("10,469,554").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2021/02/01 16:44
L2	1	("10,469,555").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2021/02/01 16:47
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L7	0	(L3 L4 L5 L6) and streamlet with "same" near2 duration	US-PGPUB; USPAT	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:05
L8	7	(L3 L4 L5 L6) and streamlet with duration	US-PGPUB; USPAT	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:06
L9	46	(("8521836") or ("7558869") or ("7707303") or ("7925781") or ("8880721") or ("9344496") or ("8683066") or ("8686066") or ("6708213") or ("6757796") or ("9462074") or ("20050033855") or ("20030093790") or ("20030195977") or ("20040199655") or ("20040267956") or ("20040220926") or ("20060010003") or ("20060277564") or ("20150058496") or ("20100262711") or ("20050251832") or ("20040221088") or ("20040179032") or	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO; JPO	OR	OFF	2021/02/01 17:13

		("20020161908") or ("20030021282") or ("20080120330") or ("20080120342") or ("20110307545") or ("20050262257") or ("20030236904")).PN.				
L10	0	(l5 l6 l9) and streamlet with multiple near2 bitrates with duration	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO; JPO	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:14
L11	0	streamlet with multiple near2 bitrates with duration	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO; JPO	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:14
L12	27	streamlet with multiple near2 bitrates	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO; JPO	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:15
L13	27	streamlet with multiple near2 bitrates and duration	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO; JPO	OR	ON	2021/02/01 17:15
S1	1	("10659513").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 07:55
S2	8	(("9571551") or ("9071668") or ("8612624") or ("8402156") or ("7818444") or ("8868772") or ("10469554") or ("10659513")).PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 07:58
S3	2	(("73369610") or ("20050055425") or ("20030103571")).PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:29
S4	3	(("7369610") or ("20050055425") or ("20030103571")).PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:30
S5	27	encod$3 near2 streamlets with bitrates	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR;	OR	ON	2020/06/12 10:36

			FPRS; EPO			
S6	1	("9751551").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:45
S7	1	("9571551").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:46
S8	1	("8402156").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:53
S9	1	("7818444").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 10:55
S10	7	(("20080162713") or ("20040170392") or ("20040143672") or ("6486803") or ("20030204519") or ("6486803") or ("20030005455") or ("20040054551") or ("20040170392")).PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 11:02
S11	54	streamlets with bitrates	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 11:33
S12	74	((H04N21/2662 OR H04N21/8456 OR H04L65/607 OR H04L65/608 OR H04L67/02).CPC.) and streamlet near3 encod$3	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 12:37
S13	0	((H04N21/2662 OR H04N21/8456 OR H04L65/607 OR H04L65/608 OR H04L67/02).CPC.) and streamlet near3 encod$3 and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:03
S14	5	((H04N21/2662 OR H04N21/8456 OR H04L65/607 OR H04L65/608 OR H04L67/02).CPC.) and streamlets and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:03

S15	33,997	portions with stream and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:28
S16	1,761,238	portions with stream with bitrat$3and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:29
S17	24	portions with stream with bitrat$3 and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:29
S18	2	((H04N21/2662 OR H04N21/8456 OR H04L65/607 OR H04L65/608 OR H04L67/02).CPC.) and divid$3 with stream same bitrate and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:30
S19	3	((H04N21/2662 OR H04N21/8456 OR H04L65/607 OR H04L65/608 OR H04L67/02).CPC.) and (divid$3 split$3)with stream same bitrate and @rlad<"20040430"	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR; FPRS; EPO	OR	ON	2020/06/12 13:30
S20	1	("10469554").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 14:26
S21	1	("10469554").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 14:44
S22	1	("10469555").PN.	US-PGPUB; USPAT; USOCR	OR	OFF	2020/06/12 14:47

EAST Search History (Interference)

<This search history is empty>

2/1/2021 5:15:38 PM
C:\Users\cpatel\Documents\EAST\Workspaces\16876579.wsp

Index of Claims	Application/Control No.	Applicant(s)/Patent Under Reexamination
	16/876,579	BRUECK et al.
	Examiner	Art Unit
	CHIRAG R PATEL	2454

✓	Rejected	-	Cancelled	N	Non-Elected	A	Appeal
=	Allowed	÷	Restricted	I	Interference	O	Objected

CLAIMS

☐ Claims renumbered in the same order as presented by applicant ☐ CPA ☐ T.D. ☐ R.1.47

CLAIM		DATE								
Final	Original	06/12/2020								
	1	✓								
	2	✓								
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	29	✓								
	30	✓								

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Doc code: IDS
Doc description: Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Filed

PTO/SB/08a (01-10)
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

(Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)

Application Number	16876579
Filing Date	2020-05-18
First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
Art Unit	2454
Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	5267334	A	1993-11-30	Normille et al.	
	2	5404446	A	1995-04-04	Bowater et al.	
	3	5841432	A	1998-11-24	Carmel et al.	
	4	6389473	B1	2002-05-14	Carmel et al.	
	5	6172672	B1	2001-01-09	Ramasubramanian et al.	

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Publication Number	Kind Code[1]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	20020156912	A1	2002-10-24	Hurst et al.	

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ALL REFERENCES CONSIDERED EXCEPT WHERE LINED THROUGH. /C.R.P/

	2	20030055995	A1	2003-03-20	Ala Honkola	
	3	20030233464	A1	2003-12-18	Walpole et al.	
	4	20020131496	A1	2002-09-19	Vasudevan et al.	
	5	20030135863	A1	2003-07-17	VanDer Schaar	

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Foreign Document Number[3]	Country Code[2]	Kind Code[4]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear	T[5]
	1	0365683	EP	A1	1990-05-02	OTSUKA PHARMA CO LTD		☒

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NON-PATENT LITERATURE DOCUMENTS Remove

Examiner Initials*	Cite No	Include name of the author (in CAPITAL LETTERS), title of the article (when appropriate), title of the item (book, magazine, journal, serial, symposium, catalog, etc), date, pages(s), volume-issue number(s), publisher, city and/or country where published.	T[5]
	1	ROY, S., et al., "Architecture of a Modular Streaming Media Server for Content Delivery Networks," 2002 IEEE. Published in the 2003 International Conference on Multimedia and Expo ICME 2003.	☒
	2	BOMMAIAH, E., et al., "Design and Implementation of a Caching System for Streaming Media over the Internet," 2000 IEEE. Published in RTAS '00 Proceedings of the Sixth IEEE Real Time Technology and Applications Symposium (RTAS 2000), page 111.	☒

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fuboTV Media Inc.
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
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	First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

	3	DEFENDANT JADOO TV, INC.'S DISCLOSURE OF INVALIDITY CONTENTIONS, U.S. N. Dist. Ca. Case No. 5:18-cv-05214-EJD dated Sept. 22, 2020.	☒
	4	DEFENDANT JADOO TV, INC.'S DISCLOSURE OF INVALIDITY CONTENTIONS APPENDIX A, U.S. N. Dist. Ca. Case No. 5:18-cv-05214-EJD dated Sept. 22, 2020.	☒
	5	Balk et al., Adaptive Video Streaming: Pre-Encoded MPEG-4 with Bandwidth Scaling, 44 COMPUTER NETWORKS 415 (Mar. 2004)	☐

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EXAMINER SIGNATURE

Examiner Signature	/CHIRAG R PATEL/	Date Considered	02/01/2021

*EXAMINER: Initial if reference considered, whether or not citation is in conformance with MPEP 609. Draw line through a citation if not in conformance and not considered. Include copy of this form with next communication to applicant.

[1] See Kind Codes of USPTO Patent Documents at www.USPTO.GOV or MPEP 901.04. [2] Enter office that issued the document, by the two-letter code (WIPO Standard ST.3). [3] For Japanese patent documents, the indication of the year of the reign of the Emperor must precede the serial number of the patent document. [4] Kind of document by the appropriate symbols as indicated on the document under WIPO Standard ST.16 if possible. [5] Applicant is to place a check mark here if English language translation is attached.

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (**Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99**)	Application Number	16876579
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	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

OR

☐ That no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to the knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was known to any individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(2).

☒ See attached certification statement.

Fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

None

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-11-16
Name/Print	Brett A. Carlson	Registration Number	39928

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the public which is to file (and by the USPTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 1 hour to complete, including gathering, preparing and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you require to complete this form and/or suggestions for reducing this burden, should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. **SEND TO: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.**

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2. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, in the course of presenting evidence to a court, magistrate, or administrative tribunal, including disclosures to opposing counsel in the course of settlement negotiations.

3. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a Member of Congress submitting a request involving an individual, to whom the record pertains, when the individual has requested assistance from the Member with respect to the subject matter of the record.

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5. A record related to an International Application filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization, pursuant to the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

6. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to another federal agency for purposes of National Security review (35 U.S.C. 181) and for review pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 218(c)).

7. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the Administrator, General Services, or his/her designee, during an inspection of records conducted by GSA as part of that agency's responsibility to recommend improvements in records management practices and programs, under authority of 44 U.S.C. 2904 and 2906. Such disclosure shall be made in accordance with the GSA regulations governing inspection of records for this purpose, and any other relevant (i.e., GSA or Commerce) directive. Such disclosure shall not be used to make determinations about individuals.

8. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the public after either publication of the application pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 122(b) or issuance of a patent pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 151. Further, a record may be disclosed, subject to the limitations of 37 CFR 1.14, as a routine use, to the public if the record was filed in an application which became abandoned or in which the proceedings were terminated and which application is referenced by either a published application, an application open to public inspections or an issued patent.

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Doc code: IDS
Doc description: Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Filed

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	8521836	B2	2013-08-27	Kewalramani et al.	
	2	7558869	B2	2009-07-07	Leon et al.	
	3	7707303	B2	2010-04-27	Albers et al.	
	4	7925781	B1	2011-04-12	Chan et al.	
	5	8880721	B2	2014-11-04	Hurst et al.	
	6	9344496	B2	2016-05-17	Hurst et al.	
	7	8683066	B2	2014-03-25	Hurst et al.	
	8	8686066	B2	2014-04-01	Kwampian et al.	

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	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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	9	6708213	B1	2004-03-16	Bommaiah et al.	
	10	6757796	B1	2004-06-29	Hofmann	
	11	9462074	B2	2016-10-04	Guo et al.	

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Publication Number	Kind Code[1]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	20050033855	A1	2005-02-10	Moradi et al.	
	2	20030093790	A1	2003-05-15	Logan et al.	
	3	20030195977	A1	2003-10-16	Liu et al.	
	4	20040199655	A1	2004-10-07	Davies et al.	
	5	20040267956	A1	2004-12-30	Leon et al.	
	6	20040220926	A1	2004-11-04	Lamkin et al.	

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	16876579
	Filing Date	2020-05-18
	First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
	Art Unit	2454
	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

ALL REFERENCES CONSIDERED EXCEPT WHERE LINED THROUGH. /C.R.P/

	7	20060010003	A1	2006-01-12	Kruse	
	8	20060277564	A1	2006-12-07	Jarman	
	9	20150058496	A1	2015-02-26	Hurst et al.	
	10	20100262711	A1	2010-10-14	Bouazizi	
	11	20050251832	A1	2005-11-10	Chiueh	
	12	20040221088	A1	2004-11-04	Lisitsa et al.	
	13	20040179032	A1	2004-09-16	Huang	
	14	20020161908	A1	2002-10-31	Benitez et al.	
	15	20030021282	A1	2003-01-30	Hospodor	
	16	20080120330	A1	2008-05-22	Reed et al.	
	17	20080120342	A1	2008-05-22	Reed et al.	

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
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	18	20110307545	A1	2011-12-15	BOUAZIZI	
	19	20050262257	A1	2005-11-24	Major et al.	
	20	20030236904	A1	2003-12-25	Walpole et al.	

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Foreign Document Number[3]	Country Code[2]	Kind Code[4]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear	T[5]
	1							

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	1	Krasic et al., QUALITY-ADAPTIVE MEDIA STREAMING BY PRIORITY DROP, Oregon Graduate Institute, 2001.	☓
	2	Krasic et al., QoS SCALABILITY FOR STREAMED MEDIA DELIVERY, Oregon Graduate Institute School of Science & Engineering Technical Report CSE 99-011, September 1999.	☒
	3	Huang et al., ADAPTIVE LIVE VIDEO STREAMING BY PRIORITY DROP, Portland State University PDXScholar, July 21, 2003.	☒

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	Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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	4	Walpole et al, A PLAYER FOR ADAPCTIVE MPEG VIDEO STREAMING OVER THE INTERNET, Oregon Graduate Institute of Science and Technology, October 25, 2012.	☒
	5	ALBANESE, ANDREW ET AL. "Priority Encoding Transmission", TR-94-039, August 1994, 36 pgs, International Computer Science Institute, Berkeley, CA.	☒
	6	BIRNEY, BILL "Intelligent Streaming", May 2003, Microsoft.	☒
	7	GOYAL, VIVEK K. "Multiple Description Coding: Compression Meets the Network," September 2001, pgs. 74-93, IEEE Signal Processing Magazine.	☒
	8	ON2 TECHNOLOGIES, INC. "TrueMotion VP7 Video Codec" White Paper, Document Version 1.0, January 10, 2005.	☒
	9	PATHAN, AL-MUKADDIM ET AL. "A Taxonomy and Survey of Content Delivery Networks" Australia, February 2007, available at http://www.gridbus.org/reports/CDN-Taxonomy.pdf.	☒
	10	PURI, ROHIT ET AL. "Multiple Description Source Coding Using Forward Error Correction Codes," October 1999, 5 pgs., Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, University of California, Berkeley, CA.	☒
	11	WICKER, STEPHEN B. "Error Control Systems for Digital Communication and Storage," Prentice-Hall, Inc., New Jersey, USA, 1995, parts 1-6.	☒
	12	LIU, JIANGCHUAN ET AL. "Opportunities and Challenged of Peer-to-Peer Internet Video Broadcast," School of Computing Science, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada.	☒
	13	CLEMENT, B. "Move Networks closes $11.3 Million on First Round VC Funding," Page One PR, Move Networks, Inc. Press Releases, February 7, 2007, http://www.move.tv/press/press20070201.html.	☒
	14	MOVE NETWORKS, INC. "The Next Generation Video Publishing System," April 11, 2007; http://www.movenetworks.com/wp-content/uploads/move-networks-publishing-system.pdf.	☒

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	Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

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	15	YOSHIMURA, TAKESHI ET AL. "Mobile Streaming Media CDN Enabled by Dynamic SMIL", NTT DoCoMo, Multimedia Laboratories and Hewlett-Packard Laboratories,dated May 7-11, 2002, ACM 1-58113-449-5/02/0005; http://www2002.org/CDROM/refereed/515/.	☒
	16	Nguyen, T. et al., Multiple Sender Distributed Video Streaming, IEEE TRANSACTINOS ON MULTIMEDIA, IEEE SERVICE CENTER, PISCATAWAY, NJ, US, vol. 6, no. 2, April 1, 2004, pages 315-326, XP011109142, ISSN: 1520-9210, DOI: 10.1109/TMM.2003.822790.	☒

If you wish to add additional non-patent literature document citation information please click the Add button Add

EXAMINER SIGNATURE

Examiner Signature	/CHIRAG R PATEL/	Date Considered	02/01/2021

*EXAMINER: Initial if reference considered, whether or not citation is in conformance with MPEP 609. Draw line through a citation if not in conformance and not considered. Include copy of this form with next communication to applicant.

[1] See Kind Codes of USPTO Patent Documents at www.USPTO.GOV or MPEP 901.04. [2] Enter office that issued the document, by the two-letter code (WIPO Standard ST.3). [3] For Japanese patent documents, the indication of the year of the reign of the Emperor must precede the serial number of the patent document. [4] Kind of document by the appropriate symbols as indicated on the document under WIPO Standard ST.16 if possible. [5] Applicant is to place a check mark here if English language translation is attached.

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

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Application Number	16876579
Filing Date	2020-05-18
First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck
Art Unit	2454
Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel
Attorney Docket Number	066.0141X1C9

ALL REFERENCES CONSIDERED EXCEPT WHERE LINED THROUGH. /C.R.P/

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

OR

☐ That no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to the knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was known to any individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(2).

☒ See attached certification statement.

The fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

A certification statement is not submitted herewith.

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-11-16
Name/Print	Brett A. Carlson	Registration Number	39928

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the public which is to file (and by the USPTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 1 hour to complete, including gathering, preparing and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you require to complete this form and/or suggestions for reducing this burden, should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. **SEND TO: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.**

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Privacy Act Statement

The Privacy Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-579) requires that you be given certain information in connection with your submission of the attached form related to a patent application or patent. Accordingly, pursuant to the requirements of the Act, please be advised that: (1) the general authority for the collection of this information is 35 U.S.C. 2(b)(2); (2) furnishing of the information solicited is voluntary; and (3) the principal purpose for which the information is used by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is to process and/or examine your submission related to a patent application or patent. If you do not furnish the requested information, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office may not be able to process and/or examine your submission, which may result in termination of proceedings or abandonment of the application or expiration of the patent.

The information provided by you in this form will be subject to the following routine uses:

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2. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, in the course of presenting evidence to a court, magistrate, or administrative tribunal, including disclosures to opposing counsel in the course of settlement negotiations.

3. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a Member of Congress submitting a request involving an individual, to whom the record pertains, when the individual has requested assistance from the Member with respect to the subject matter of the record.

4. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a contractor of the Agency having need for the information in order to perform a contract. Recipients of information shall be required to comply with the requirements of the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552a(m).

5. A record related to an International Application filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the International Bureau of the World Intellectual Property Organization, pursuant to the Patent Cooperation Treaty.

6. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to another federal agency for purposes of National Security review (35 U.S.C. 181) and for review pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 218(c)).

7. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the Administrator, General Services, or his/her designee, during an inspection of records conducted by GSA as part of that agency's responsibility to recommend improvements in records management practices and programs, under authority of 44 U.S.C. 2904 and 2906. Such disclosure shall be made in accordance with the GSA regulations governing inspection of records for this purpose, and any other relevant (i.e., GSA or Commerce) directive. Such disclosure shall not be used to make determinations about individuals.

8. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the public after either publication of the application pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 122(b) or issuance of a patent pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 151. Further, a record may be disclosed, subject to the limitations of 37 CFR 1.14, as a routine use, to the public if the record was filed in an application which became abandoned or in which the proceedings were terminated and which application is referenced by either a published application, an application open to public inspections or an issued patent.

9. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency, if the USPTO becomes aware of a violation or potential violation of law or regulation.

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ALL REFERENCES CONSIDERED EXCEPT WHERE LINED THROUGH. /C.R.P/

Search Notes	Application/Control No.	Applicant(s)/Patent Under Reexamination
	16/876,579	BRUECK et al.
	Examiner	Art Unit
	CHIRAG R PATEL	2454

CPC - Searched*		
Symbol	Date	Examiner
(H04N21/2662, H04N21/8456, H04L65/607,H04L65/608, H04L67/02	06/12/2020	C.P.

CPC Combination Sets - Searched*		
Symbol	Date	Examiner

US Classification - Searched*			
Class	Subclass	Date	Examiner

* See search history printout included with this form or the SEARCH NOTES box below to determine the scope of the search.

Search Notes		
Search Notes	Date	Examiner
EAST	06/12/2020	C.P.
EAST	02/01/2021	C.P.

Interference Search			
US Class/CPC Symbol	US Subclass/CPC Group	Date	Examiner

fuboTV Media Inc.
Exhibit 1002
Page 665

PTO/SB/06 (09-11)
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PATENT APPLICATION FEE DETERMINATION RECORD Substitute for Form PTO-875	Application or Docket Number 16/876,579	Filing Date 05/18/2020	☐ To be Mailed

ENTITY: ☑ LARGE ☐ SMALL ☐ MICRO

APPLICATION AS FILED - PART I

FOR	(Column 1) NUMBER FILED	(Column 2) NUMBER EXTRA		RATE ($)	FEE ($)
☐ BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a), (b), or (c))	N/A	N/A		N/A	
☐ SEARCH FEE (37 CFR 1.16(k), (i), or (m))	N/A	N/A		N/A	
☐ EXAMINATION FEE (37 CFR 1.16(o), (p), or (q))	N/A	N/A		N/A	
TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(i))	minus 20 =	*		x $100 =	
INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(h))	minus 3 =	*		x $460 =	
☐ APPLICATION SIZE FEE (37 CFR 1.16(s))	If the specification and drawings exceed 100 sheets of paper, the application size fee due is $310 ($155 for small entity) for each additional 50 sheets or fraction thereof. See 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(1)(G) and 37 CFR 1.16(s).				
☐ MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM PRESENT (37 CFR 1.16(j))					
* If the difference in column 1 is less than zero, enter "0" in column 2.				TOTAL	

APPLICATION AS AMENDED - PART II

		(Column 1)		(Column 2)	(Column 3)			
AMENDMENT	08/05/2021	CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	PRESENT EXTRA		RATE ($)	ADDITIONAL FEE ($)
	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	* 30	Minus	** 30	= 0		x $100 =	0
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	* 4	Minus	*** 4	= 0		x $480 =	0
	☐ Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))							
	☐ FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							
							TOTAL ADD'L FEE	0

		(Column 1)		(Column 2)	(Column 3)			
AMENDMENT		CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	PRESENT EXTRA		RATE ($)	ADDITIONAL FEE ($)
	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	*	Minus	**	=		x $0 =	
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	*	Minus	***	=		x $0 =	
	☐ Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))							
	☐ FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							
							TOTAL ADD'L FEE	

* If the entry in column 1 is less than the entry in column 2, write "0" in column 3.	LIE
** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 20, enter "20".	/DORIS M KING/
*** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 3, enter "3".	
The "Highest Number Previously Paid For" (Total or Independent) is the highest number found in the appropriate box in column 1.	

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.16. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the public which is to file (and by the USPTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 12 minutes to complete, including gathering, preparing, and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you require to complete this form and/or suggestions for reducing this burden, should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. **SEND TO: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.**

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Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	16876579
Filing Date:	18-May-2020
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
Filer:	Brett Carlson
Attorney Docket Number:	066.0141X1C9

Filed as Large Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				
Extension-of-Time:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Extension - 3 months with $0 paid	1253	1	1480	1480
Miscellaneous:				
RCE- 1ST REQUEST	1801	1	1360	1360
		Total in USD ($)		**2840**

PTO/SB/30EFS (07-09)
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REQUEST FOR CONTINUED EXAMINATION(RCE)TRANSMITTAL
(Submitted Only via EFS-Web)

Application Number	16876579	Filing Date	2020-05-18	Docket Number (if applicable)	066.0141x1c9	Art Unit	2454
First Named Inventor	David F. Brueck			Examiner Name	Chirag R. Patel		

This is a Request for Continued Examination (RCE) under 37 CFR 1.114 of the above-identified application.
Request for Continued Examination (RCE) practice under 37 CFR 1.114 does not apply to any utility or plant application filed prior to June 8 1995, or to any design application. The Instruction Sheet for this form is located at WWW.USPTO.GOV

SUBMISSION REQUIRED UNDER 37 CFR 1.114

Note: If the RCE is proper, any previously filed unentered amendments and amendments enclosed with the RCE will be entered in the orde in which they were filed unless applicant instructs otherwise. If applicant does not wish to have any previously filed unentered amendment(s entered, applicant must request non-entry of such amendment(s).

☐ Previously submitted. If a final Office action is outstanding, any amendments filed after the final Office action may be considered as a submission even if this box is not checked.

- ☐ Consider the arguments in the Appeal Brief or Reply Brief previously filed on _____
- ☐ Other _____

☒ Enclosed

- ☒ Amendment/Reply
- ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)
- ☐ Affidavit(s)/ Declaration(s)
- ☐ Other _____

MISCELLANEOUS

☐ Suspension of action on the above-identified application is requested under 37 CFR 1.103(c) for a period of months _____ (Period of suspension shall not exceed 3 months; Fee under 37 CFR 1.17(i) required)

☐ Other _____

FEES

☐ **The RCE fee under 37 CFR 1.17(e) is required by 37 CFR 1.114 when the RCE is filed.**
The Director is hereby authorized to charge any underpayment of fees, or credit any overpayments, to Deposit Account No _____

SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT, ATTORNEY, OR AGENT REQUIRED

☒ Patent Practitioner Signature

Applicant Signature

PTO/SB/30EFS (07-09)
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Signature of Registered U.S. Patent Practitioner			
Signature	/BRETT A. CARLSON/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-08-05
Name	Brett A. Carlson	Registration Number	39928

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fuboTV Media Inc.
Exhibit 1002
Page 671

REMARKS

We hereby respond under Rule 114 to request continued examination of the above-referenced application. Support for the above amendments can be found in the originally-filed application, and no new matter has been added.

If there are any remaining issues with this application, the undersigned requests a telephone call to 480.385.5069 (office) or 480.241.8219 (mobile).

Allowable Subject Matter

We appreciate that all claims have been indicated as allowable except for the double patenting issues addressed below.

Double Patenting

The Office Action objects to certain claims, which are alleged to be duplicates of certain claims pending in US Patent No. 10,469,554. We previously submitted a terminal disclaimer citing the '554 Patent, and our previous response pointed out that the claims are different at least in that the claims recited "video" that is not necessarily "live action" video.

Without consenting to the rejection, we are amending each of our independent claims for better clarity and to advance prosecution. We expressly reserve the right to revisit the prior claims at a later date (e.g., in a continuing application). At present, however, the rejections are believed to be no longer relevant. We respectfully request reconsideration.

Conclusion

Should any issues remain, we would welcome a telephone call to - (480) 385-5069 or an email to bcarlson@lkglobal.com. *Recognizing that Internet communications are not secure, we hereby authorize the USPTO to communicate with the undersigned and practitioners in accordance with 37 CFR 1.33 and 37 CFR 1.34 concerning any subject matter of this application via video conferencing, instant messaging, or electronic mail. We understand that a copy of these communications will be made of record in the application file. (MPEP 502.03).*

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Without limiting the foregoing, we further authorize the use of email for informal correspondence, including the exchange of proposed amendments or other draft documents.

No official fee is believed to be due in connection with this Response, other than any fees that may be addressed elsewhere in this submittal. If, however, any additional time extension or other fee is required to consider this response or to otherwise prevent abandonment of this application, please consider this as a request for an extension of time and as authorization to charge Deposit Account No. 50-2091 for any fees that may be due.

Respectfully submitted,

LORENZ & KOPF, LLC

Dated: August 5, 2021

By: /Brett A. Carlson /
Brett A. Carlson
Reg. No. 39,928

bcarlson@lkglobal.com
480-385-5069 (direct)
480-241-8219 (mobile)
480-385-5060 (general)

LKGLOBAL is LORENZ & KOPF, LLC
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Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	43439438
Application Number:	16876579
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3720
Title of Invention:	APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	DAVID F. BRUECK
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RAM confirmation Number	E202185G45163113
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The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows:	

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1	Request for Continued Examination (RCE)	20210805_RCE_06-0141X1C9.pdf	697604 11cb4aed396aad7af7e1c6b1849d312ecf66868c	no	3
Warnings:					
Information:					
2		20210805_RCEResponse_06-0141X1C9.pdf	130912 fe9132c7c31f3f0f19a9e4bb093c8302a27abb59	yes	11

Multipart Description/PDF files in .zip description

Document Description	Start	End
Amendment Submitted/Entered with Filing of CPA/RCE	1	1
Claims	2	9
Applicant Arguments/Remarks Made in an Amendment	10	11

Warnings:					
Information:					
3	Fee Worksheet (SB06)	fee-info.pdf	40976 4b16fe0c660e14bc964bade1ad0cfa1040ba90e3	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
		Total Files Size (in bytes):	869492		

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Serial. No.:	16/876,579	Confirmation No.:	3720
Examiner:	Chirag R. Patel	Art Unit:	2454
Filed:	05/18/2020	Customer No.:	70560

Title: **APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING**

Attorney Docket No.: 066.0141x1C9

REQUEST FOR CONTINUED EXAMINATION
FILED UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.114

Mail Stop RCE
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

*****FILED ELECTRONICALLY USING THE PTO-EFS SYSTEM***

Commissioner:

In further response to the Office Action mailed on February 5, 2021 (for which the period for response has been extended until August 5, 2021), please consider the remarks below under 37 C.F.R. § 1.114, or any other appropriate rule.

Amendments to the Claims begin on the following page (page 2).

Remarks begin on page 10.

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Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims without prejudice or disclaimer to read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for adaptive-rate content streaming of a video that is playable on one or more end user stations over the ~~Internet~~internet, the system comprising:

at least one storage device storing the video, wherein the video is digitally encoded at a plurality of different bitrates creating a plurality of streams including a low quality stream, a medium quality stream, and a high quality stream, the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream each comprising a group of streamlets, wherein each streamlet corresponds to a portion of the video, and wherein each streamlet in each group of streamlets is encoded at a respective one of the plurality of different bitrates, and wherein each group of streamlets ~~comprising~~ comprises at least first and second streamlets~~, each of the streamlets corresponding to a portion of the video~~;

wherein at least one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream is encoded at a bitrate of no less than 600 kbps; and

wherein the first streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets has the same first duration and encodes the same first portion of the video in each of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, and wherein the first streamlet of the low quality stream encodes the same first portion of the video at a ~~different~~ lower bitrate than the first streamlet of the high quality stream and the first streamlet of the medium quality stream.

2. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the video is a live event video.

3. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the video includes archived content.

4. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the second streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets each has the same second duration and corresponds to the

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same second portion of the video in the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, the second streamlet of the low quality stream having the same bitrate as the first streamlet of the low quality stream.

5. (Original) The system of claim 4, wherein the first and second durations are different.

6. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 1, further comprising: a plurality of web servers located at different locations across the internet, each web server configured to: receive at least one streamlet request over one or more internet connections from a respective one of the one or more end user stations to retrieve the first streamlet ~~storing a portion of the video~~, wherein the at least one streamlet request from the respective one of the one or more end user stations includes a request for a currently selected first streamlet from one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream based upon a determination by the respective one of the one or more end user stations to select a higher or lower bitrate version of a respective one of the plurality of streams; retrieve from the at least one storage device the requested first streamlet from the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream; and send the retrieved first streamlet ~~from the currently selected one of the different copies~~ to the ~~requesting~~ respective one of the one or more end user stations over the one or more ~~network~~ internet connections.

7. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein each of the first streamlets has a first duration that is the range of 0.1 to 5 seconds.

8. (Original) The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a first web server configured to: receive at least one streamlet request over one or more internet connections from the one or more end user stations to retrieve the first streamlet storing the first portion of the video,

wherein the at least one streamlet request from the one or more end user stations includes a request for a currently selected first streamlet from one of the low quality

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stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream based upon a determination by the end user station to select a higher or lower bitrate version of the video; retrieve from the storage device the requested first streamlet from the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream; and send the retrieved first streamlet from the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream to the requesting one of the end user stations over the one or more network connections.

9. (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein the first web server is further configured to: receive at least one virtual timeline request over the one or more internet connections from the one or more end user stations to retrieve a virtual timeline; and send the virtual timeline to the requesting one of the end user stations over the one or more network connections.

10. (Original) The system of claim 9, wherein the virtual timeline corresponds to the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream.

11. (Original) The system of claim 10, wherein the virtual timeline defines a playlist for a user to view.

12. (Original) The system of claim 11, wherein the virtual timeline comprises a file that is configured to define a playlist for a user to view.

13. (Original) The system of claim 12, wherein the virtual timeline comprises at least one quantum media extension (QMX).

14. (Currently Amended) An end user station to stream a video over a network from a server for playback of the video, the ~~content player device~~end user station comprising:

a processor;

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a digital processing apparatus memory device comprising non-transitory machine-readable instructions that, when executed, cause the processor to:

establish ~~one or more network connections~~an internet connection between the end user station and the server, wherein the server is configured to access at least one of a plurality of groups of streamlets;

wherein the video is encoded at a plurality of different bitrates to create a plurality of streams including at least a low quality stream, a medium quality stream, and a high quality stream, each of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream comprising a group of streamlets encoded at the same respective one of the different bitrates, each group comprising at least first and second streamlets, each of the streamlets corresponding to a portion of the video;

wherein at least one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream is encoded at a ~~bit rate~~bitrate of no less than 600 kbps; and wherein the first streamlets of each of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream and the high quality stream each has an equal playback duration and each of the first streamlets encodes the same portion of the video at a different one of the different bitrates;

select a specific one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream based upon a determination by the end user station to select a higher or lower bitrate version of the streams;

place a streamlet request to the server over the ~~one or more network connections~~internet connection for the first streamlet of the selected stream;

receive the requested first streamlet from the server via the ~~one or more network connections~~internet connection; and

provide the received first streamlet for playback of the video.

15. (Original) The end user station of claim 14, wherein the second streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets each has the same second duration and corresponds to the same second portion of the video in the low quality stream, the

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medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, the second streamlet of the low quality stream having the same bitrate as the first streamlet of the low quality stream.

16. (Original) The end user station of claim 15, wherein the first and second durations are different.

17. (Currently Amended) The end user station of claim 14, wherein each of the first streamlets has a first duration that is in the range of 0.1 to 5 seconds.

18. (Currently Amended) The end user station of claim 14, wherein the end user station is further configured to: request and receive a virtual timeline; and wherein one or more streamlet requests are based on the ~~at least one~~ received virtual timeline.

19. (Original) The end user station of claim 18, wherein the virtual timeline corresponds to the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream.

20. (Original) The end user station of claim 18, wherein the virtual timeline defines a playlist for a user to view.

21. (Original) The end user station of claim 14, wherein the video is a live event video.

22. (Original) The end user station of claim 14, wherein the video includes archived content.

23. (Currently Amended) A process executable by one or more servers to stream a video for playback by one or more end user stations, the process comprising:

storing, by the one or more servers, a plurality of streams including a low quality stream, a medium quality stream, and a high quality stream, wherein the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream each comprise a group

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of streamlets encoded at a respective one of a plurality of different bitrates, each group comprising at least first and second streamlets, each of the streamlets corresponding to a portion of the video;

wherein at least one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream is encoded at a bitrate of no less than 600 kbps; and wherein the first streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets has the same first duration and encodes the same first portion of the video in the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, the first streamlet of the low quality stream having a different one of the different bitrates than the first streamlet of the high quality stream and the first streamlet of the medium quality stream;

receiving at least one streamlet request over ~~one or more internet connections~~an internet connection from a respective one of the one or more end user stations to retrieve the first streamlet storing the first portion of the video,

wherein the at least one streamlet request from the respective one of the one or more end user stations includes a request for a currently selected first streamlet from one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream based upon a determination by the respective one of the one or more end user stations to select a higher or lower bitrate version of the video;

retrieving from the ~~storage device~~one or more servers the requested first streamlet from the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream; and

sending the retrieved first streamlet from the currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream to the ~~requesting~~ respective one of the one of the end user stations over the ~~one or more network connections~~internet connection.

24. (Original) The process of claim 23, wherein the second streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets each has the same second duration and corresponds to the same second portion of the video in the low quality stream, the medium quality

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stream, and the high quality stream, the second streamlet of the low quality stream having the same bitrate as the first streamlet of the low quality stream.

25. (Original) The process of claim 23, wherein the first and second durations are different.

26. (Original) The process of claim 23, wherein the video is a live event video.

27. (Original) The process of claim 23, wherein the video includes archived content.

28. (Currently Amended) A process executable by a content player device to stream a video over a network from a server for playback of the video by the content player device, the process comprising:

establishing ~~one or more network connections~~an internet connection between the content player device and the server,

wherein the server accesses a plurality of streams including a low quality stream, a medium quality stream, and a high quality stream, wherein the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream each comprise a group of streamlets encoded at a respective one of a plurality of different bitrates, each group comprising at least first and second streamlets, each of the streamlets corresponding to a portion of the video; wherein at least one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream is encoded at a bitrate of no less than 600 kbps; and

wherein the first streamlet of each of the groups of streamlets has the same first duration and encodes the same first portion of the video in the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream, the first streamlet of the low quality stream having a

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different bitrate than the first streamlet of the high quality stream and the first streamlet of the medium quality stream;

selecting, by the content player device, a currently selected one of the low quality stream, the medium quality stream, and the high quality stream based upon a determination by the ~~end user station~~content player device to select a higher or lower bitrate version of the video;

placing a streamlet request over one or more internet connections from the ~~one or more end user stations~~content player device to retrieve the first streamlet storing the first portion of the video; and

receiving the requested streamlet from the server via the ~~one or more network connections~~internet connection; and rendering, by the content player device, the received streamlet for playback of the video.

29. (Original) The process of claim 28, wherein the video includes archived content.

30. (Original) The process of claim 28, wherein the video is a live event video.

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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **BRITISH TELECOMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY** [GB/GB]; 81 Newgate Street, London EC1A 7AJ (GB).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **JACOBS, Richard, James** [GB/GB]; 15 Through Duncans, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 4EA (GB). **WALKER, Matthew, David** [GB/GB]; 9 Thirlmere Court, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 9SN (GB). **MIRAS, Dimitrios** [GR/GR]; 12 Proti Parodos Avras, 24100 Kalamata (GR).

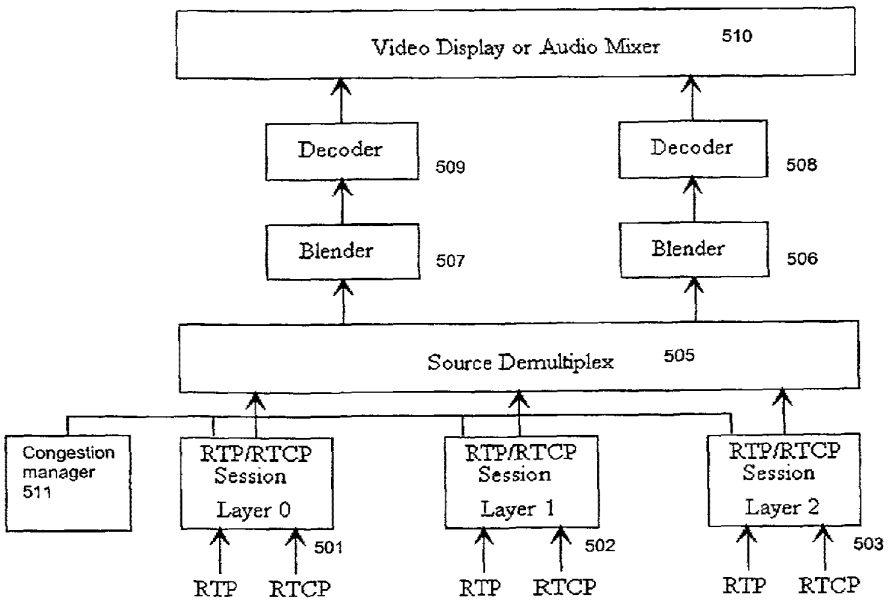
(74) Agent: **WILLIAMSON, Simeon, Paul**; 0T Group Legal, Intellectual Property Department, Holborn Centre 8th Floor, 120 Holborn, London EC1N 2TE (GB).

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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: VIDEO STREAM SWITCHING



(57) Abstract: A technique is described for providing a client on a packet based network with a stream of encoded video data. The system is able to maximise the bit-rate of the video stream by adapting to fluctuations in network capacity. The technique is characterised in that adaptation of the bit-rate of the transmitted encoded video data is timed to occur upon a scene change in the video sequence. In this way the interruption to the viewer when the perceived quality of the video sequence increases or decreases is minimised as it is 'hidden' in the scene change. The technique is described as applied to hierarchically encoded video data but equally may be applied to other encoding techniques which adapt to network conditions.

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Published:
— *with international search report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

Video Stream Switching

The invention is in the field of video streaming over packet networks and in particular concerns the adaptive transmission of data in response to network congestion.

In recent years, the Internet has experienced a proliferation in transmission of real-time multimedia, mainly in the form of streamed audio-visual content, either delivered live or from pre-recorded sources. Furthermore, traditional forms of multimedia such as streaming and conferencing are being followed by applications with richer content such as Internet multi-channel TV and complex immersive environments. This increase in traffic will put strains on the network and it is therefore desirable that application programs are designed to respond to congestion if stability of the network is to be maintained. It is desirable that network conditions are monitored and output bit-rates adjusted to the available bandwidth.

There is a more immediate advantage to the user in having an adaptive output bit-rate which is that the highest possible transmission bit-rate that the network will allow is used and therefore the user will always receive the best possible image quality. There are a number of known approaches to adaptive quality video streaming, one of which is hierarchical coding. In this technique the original video data is encoded into a number of discreet streams called layers, where the first layer consists of basic data of a relatively poor quality and where successive layers represent more detailed information so that layers can be added to increase the image quality or layers can be taken away, depending on the available bandwidth.

As the bit-rate available to a session is subject to significant variations in the number of layers that are transmitted, quality fluctuations occur in the decoded image as layers are added or dropped. When layers are added or dropped frequently the fluctuations in quality may become disturbing to a viewer.

In a first embodiment of the present invention there is provided a method of operating a multimedia server, said method comprising:

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providing a stream of video data representing a video sequence to an output of the multimedia server, wherein the output of the media server is connected to a packet based network,

measuring a property of the video data in order to determine the occurrence of a scene change in the video sequence,

detecting the available bandwidth on the network,

varying the bit-rate of the stream of video data,

wherein the method is characterised in that

variation in the bit-rate of the video data is controlled to occur in response to variations in the capacity of the network (203) and preferentially with a scene change in the video sequence.

The term preferentially used herein is meant to indicate that in certain circumstances (discussed in greater detail below) it may not be practical to wait for a change of scene to occur in the video sequence before varying the bit-rate of the video stream, and in such circumstances the bit-rate will be changed at points in the video stream which do not correspond to a change of scene.

The term scene change (or change of scene) is intended to refer to a sudden change in a video sequence within the space of a one or a very few frames such as typically occurs at a change of scene, whether or not there has been an actual change of scene.

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the following figures, where;

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of the content-based inter-stream session bandwidth sharing architecture.

Figure 2 shows the order of packets in a layered coding system.

Figure 3 is a diagram of a media server.

Figure 4 is a diagram of the network interface of the media server shown in Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a diagram of a client.

Figure 6 is a diagram of a client according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

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The client/ server arrangement for a known hierarchical streaming technology is shown in Figure 1. A media server 202 is provided which has access to compressed audiovisual data 201, which may be fed 'live' from an outside broadcast or may be pre-compressed and stored in a database. The data source 201 may be on the same premises as the media server 202 and linked via an intranet. The media server 202 runs on a suitable server computer and which has access to the Internet 203.

A video viewer, hitherto referred to as the client 204, running on a PC suitably configured to have access to the Internet 203, may connect to the media server 202 via the Internet 203 and thus the client 204 is able to access content. A suitable PC terminal is used.

Layered video compression is achieved with the 1998 version of H.263 but equally may be any other codec, such as MPEG4. Each layer in the hierarchy is coded in such a way as to allow the quality of individual pictures to be enhanced and their resolution to be increased, and additional pictures to be included to increase the overall picture rate, as explained with reference to Figure 2. Figure 2 illustrates a typical dependency between pictures in an H.263 scalable layered coder, with the boxes representing the frames for each layer and arrows showing the dependency between frames. The lowest row shows original, un-coded frames. The next row shows the lowest layer (Layer 0) of the hierarchy which is coded at half the frame rate of Layer 1. Frames in Layer 0 are predicted from the previously encoded frame, as in conventional video compression. Frames in Layer 1 may be predicted from the previously encoded frame in Layer 1 and, if present, the temporally simultaneous Layer 0 encoded frame. Frames in Layer 2 may be predicted from the previously encoded frame in Layer 2 and, if present, the temporally simultaneous Layer 1 or Layer 0 encoded frame. The H.263 specification allows for 15 layers; in the present embodiment server and client software is not limited in the number of layers that can be used, but in this case a database has been generated with video streams containing four layers.

Figure 3 shows the architecture of media server 201. In the present embodiment the audiovisual source is a database 301 of compressed video data and the media server 201 is responsible for reading the compressed data from a database, packetising and distributing it. The data is distributed according to the

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Real-time Transport Protocol (RTP) which provides end-to-end network transport functions suitable for applications transmitting real-time data such as audio, video or simulation data. RTP does not address resource reservation and does not guarantee quality-of-service for real-time services. The data transport is augmented by a control protocol (RTCP) to allow monitoring of the data delivery and to provide minimal control and identification functionality. RTP and RTCP are designed to be independent of the underlying transport and network layers. The media server 201 has four major components: database reader 302, video RTP packetiser 303, audio RTP packetiser 305 and a network interface 304. Video and audio data are stored as files of compressed bits in the database 301. The database reader 302 retrieves and synchronises the compressed audio and video from the database 301.

The audio and video data is then sent to a RTP packetiser 303,305. Audio and video information is transmitted over the IP network using the User Datagram Protocol (UDP) and Real-time Transport Protocol (RTP) packetisation. UDP provides a checksum to detect transmission errors, but does not guarantee data delivery: packets may be lost, duplicated or re-ordered. RTP provides end-to-end delivery services, such as payload type identification, sequence numbering, time-stamping and delivery monitoring. RTP packetisers 303,305 attach the RTP Header and, in the case of video packets, the H.263 Payload Header which provides some protection from packet loss. The Payload Header contains information specific to the video stream, such as motion vector predictors, which is obtained by decoding the compressed bit stream.

The rate at which data is read from the database 301 is controlled from the network interface 304, which is illustrated in greater detail in Figure 4. With reference to Figure 4 the arrangement of the network interface 304 for the video data will now be described. A packet numbering module 401 assigns a number to each packet of data. These packet numbers are used by the client to assemble packets into the sequence required for decoding. The number of bits produced by compressing a picture is in general not constant, even when the transmission rate is constant. The first picture of a new scene will usually produce a larger number of bits than a picture where there is little movement or detail. The encoding process will use a control strategy together with an output data buffer to smooth these variations in preparation for transmission at a

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constant bit rate. In the case of layered coding, each layer has its own control strategy and buffer as it has its own constant bit rate constraint to meet. The delay across each of these buffers will not be constant and will not be the same for each layer. Delay variation between the layers is therefore introduced at the source of the data. Transmission across a network may cause this delay variation to increase. A packet numbering scheme is therefore needed to ensure that a client can arrange the packets it receives into the order required for decoding. This scheme is required to handle the cases of the client not receiving all of the layers and of packet loss in the layers that it does receive.

Each layer is transmitted as an independent RTP Session on a separate IP address by a session handler 403, 405, 407, 409. The rate at which data is transmitted is controlled by the Transfer Rate Control module 402, which counts Layer 0 bytes to ensure that the correct number are transmitted in a given period of time. The transmission rate of the other layers is smoothed and locked to the rate of Layer 0 using First-In First-Out (FIFO) buffer elements 404, 406, 408.

The client 204 of the known hierarchical streaming technology will now be described with reference to Figure 5. Each RTP/RTCP Session associated with each layer of encoded data has a session handler 501, 502, 503, 504 at the client which is responsible for receiving RTP packets from the network.

The packets are then passed to a source demultiplex module 505. This receives packets from all layers and all sources, demultiplexes them by source, and routes them to a blender module 506, 507 for that source.

The blender module 506, 507 receives packets from all layers from one source in the order that they were received from the network. This may not be the order required for decoding because of packet inter-arrival jitter or packet loss. The blender module 506, 507 uses the packet numbers in the RTP headers to arrange the packets from each layer in order and then combines the packets from all layers together. The output of the blender module 506, 507 is a single stream of packets which are in the correct order for decoding. This is the same order as they come out of the packet numbering module 401 of the media server 202.

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Packets are then sent to the decoder 508, 509 where the packets are decoded into 20ms blocks of audio samples or to video pictures. In the case of pictures, these are rendered to a window on the display 508.

Also provided is a congestion manager 511 to which the session handlers 501-504 report packet loss. If packets are being consistently lost, indicating network congestion, the congestion manager 511 will instruct the session handler responsible for the highest layer of compressed data to terminate the RTP/RTCP Session. Periodically the congestion manager 511 will instruct an experimental joining of a layer via the appropriate session handler to test whether there is available bandwidth in the network. If this experiment is successful, i.e. that substantially all of the packets of each layer are getting reaching the client, then the new layer will be adopted. In this way the maximum available bandwidth is employed.

It possible for the congestion manager 509 to instruct layers to be dropped and restored rapidly as the network bandwidth fluctuates. This could be annoying for a viewer and so a way of 'hiding' the shift is employed. The layered encoding method described above is adapted so that if a layer is to be dropped or added, the changeover preferentially occurs during a scene-change in the video data. A video scene is typically perceived as the number of consecutive frames within a video sequence that do not show significant changes in the video content. Within a video scene or shot, the camera action may be fixed or may exhibit a number of relatively uniform changes like panning, zooming, tracking etc. Scene changes may be recognised as abrupt transitions of the camera action or gradual transitions. In order to identify the scenes within a video sequence the assumption is that the levels of motion energy as well as those of luminance and colour do not change much between successive frames within a single scene. Techniques of scene boundary identification include pixel differencing, motion vector and block matching techniques. A very sudden change in the content of temporally adjacent frames will thus appear as a change of scene; clearly it is conceivable that such a change might not actually relate to a scene change at all, but, for example, may instead be the consequence of a large foreground object coming rapidly into view. However, such an abrupt change will nonetheless be a good place to add or remove a

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session layer and thus the term scene change is meant to cover such large changes in frame content from one frame to another.

Figure 6 illustrates a system which detects congestion in the network and also imposes the extra condition of adding or dropping a layer upon a scene change. The server 601 comprises the components of the media server 202 of Figure 1 and the unit 603 comprises the components of the client 204 also shown in Figure 1. Video data from the audiovisual source is also passed to a content analyser 604 which segments the video sequence into scenes. The segmented video is then passed to an objective quality assessment module (OQAM) 605 which assesses the contribution to the perceived quality of a scene that each component layer provides.

These results are then passed to an inter layer adaptation module (ILAM) 607. The function of the ILAM 607 is to continuously calculate the number of layers that maximise the perceived quality for the session. The ILAM 607 also receives input from a sender congestion manager 608 which reports on the bandwidth available to the session on the network 203. The sender congestion manager 608 receives feedback from a client congestion manager 609 on the number of packets that have been received. If this matches the number of packets that were sent then the bandwidth is known to be the current transmission rate. If packets are being lost then the bandwidth available to the session is less than the transmission rate, in which case the sender congestion manager 608 informs the ILAM 607 that a layer should be dropped.

In order to select which layer should be dropped the ILAM 607 couples the bandwidth required by a layer with its contribution to the quality of the complete image, as calculated by the OQAM 605. The ILAM 607 performs an exhaustive search on all of the bandwidth/quality values. When the ILAM 607 has selected which layer is to be dropped from a particular scene, the timing of the drop is preferentially set to coincide with the transmission of that particular scene. In this way the drop in quality occurs with the scene change and is thus much less noticeable to a viewer than if the quality change had occurred during a scene. In the case that no packets have been lost for a preset period of time the sender congestion manager 608 will request the ILAM 607 to add in a layer to test

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whether all of the available bandwidth is being employed. If no packets are lost during this experiment then the newly added layer is maintained. This process of experimentation with adding layers is continued until a significant proportion of packets are lost, in which instance the system can be confident that all of the available bandwidth is being employed. Again, the timing of the introduction of a layer is set to occur preferentially as the scene changes.

Under a given bit-rate allocation the levels of perceived quality do not change considerably within a scene, but scene cuts cause considerable changes in perceived quality, especially when the content features (spatial and motion energy) change a lot between subsequent scenes. As a consequence there will also be a significant difference in the corresponding quality scores for those successive scenes which may justify a rescheduling of the number of layers in the stream.

The invention is not limited in use to hierarchical encoding schemes. The invention is suitable for use in any encoding technique where the adaptation of transmission bit-rate to accommodate fluctuations in network capacity occurs. For instance the invention may be applied to a transcoding system where encoded data streams are transcoded from a high bit-rate to a low bit-rate or from a low bit-rate to a high bit-rate. The present invention would be suitable to reduce the impact for the viewer as the output bit-rate shifts in response to network conditions by timing the transition to occur upon a scene change in the encoded video sequence. Another example of an adaptive video streaming technique to which the invention may be applied is where multiple independent video streams of different bit-rates are transmitted. In this case the client chooses which stream to accept based on session bandwidth. The client may switch from one stream to another as bandwidth fluctuates; the present invention ensures that the switch is timed to coincide with a scene change in the encoded video stream.

Naturally, there may be times when a change of scene is such a long way away that it is advantageous to switch from one bit-rate to another other than during a change of scene. For example, consider the case where multiple independent video streams at different bit-rates are available for transmission by a media server to a client as, for example, described in co-pending European patent

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application No. 00310594.7 the contents of which are hereby incorporated herein by way of reference. In such a case, the server may be capable of transmitting a first stream at a bit-rate of 500kbit/s and a second, higher quality stream at a bit-rate of 1500kbit/s. The client may initially request that the server transmit the first stream at a transmission rate of 1000kbit/s. If the network is not congested and all of the packets transmitted are successfully received by the client, the receive buffer at the client will start to fill with data at a rate of 500kbit/s, since the client will only be removing data from the buffer at a rate of 500kbit/s. After say 10 seconds of filling up the buffer at this rate, the client will have a buffer of ten seconds worth of data at which point it may decide it can attempt to receive the higher bit-rate second stream of video data from the server and thus sends an appropriate request to the server to this effect. If, however, the server is aware that the client has a receive buffer of 5 Mbytes size, it knows that it may continue sending data from the first stream at the rate of 1000kbit/s for at least another 150 seconds before the receive buffer overflows, causing problems for the client. Therefore, the server may attempt to wait for a specified period to see if a scene change occurs during this interval. If so, a switch to the second higher bit-rate signal is not made until the change of scene occurs. Of course, if there is no change of scene within the determined period, the server switches to the higher rate anyway. In this example, a period of only ten seconds is deemed appropriate as the waiting time.

Note that instead of simply waiting to see if a change of scene occurs in the specified period and switching at the end of the period if no such change of scene is detected, an alternative method would be to pre-analyse the video to be sent (clearly this only applies to pre-stored video data and not live video) and to note when changes of scene occur. In such a case, the server, upon receipt of a request from the client to switch streams, could search to see if a suitable change of scene will occur within the predetermined period and if not to switch immediately to the new bit stream.

In the present example, upon switching to the higher rate bit stream, the client may have requested a transmission rate of 1500kbit/s corresponding to the rate at which the data will be drawn from the receive buffer by the client. In such a case, the buffer size of 10 seconds should remain constant so long as all of the

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transmitted packets are successfully received by the client. However, in the event of congestion on the network, a proportion of packets may fail to arrive at the client. In such a case, the server will be warned of this via the RTCP. If the congestion is sufficiently severe, the server may deduce that the buffer is in danger of emptying which would cause a break in the video displayed by the client to occur. To prevent this, the server may switch back to the lower bit rate stream. Via the notification of how many packets are being lost, the server can deduce how long it will be before the buffer is emptied. For this time, the server can wait to see if a change of scene occurs, and if so, the new stream will be switched to at that point. Note that it would also be possible for the client to simply request that the new stream be switched to upon detecting that its receive buffer is emptying at an unsustainable rate.

Note that the amount of data in the buffer is actually of less significance than the rate of change of the amount of data in the buffer. Thus it is preferably this quantity which either the server or the client measures in order to determine whether to change from one bit stream to another (or whether to add or drop a layer in the first example).

CLAIMS

1. A method of operating a multimedia server (202), said method comprising;

providing a stream of video data representing a video sequence to an output of the multimedia server (202), wherein the output of the media server (202) is connected to a packet based network (203),

measuring a property of the video data in order to determine the occurrence of a scene change in the video sequence,

detecting the available bandwidth on the network (203),

varying the bit-rate of the stream of video data,

wherein the method is characterised in that

variation in the bit-rate of the video data is controlled to occur in response to variations in the capacity of the network (203) and preferentially with a scene change in the video sequence.

2. A method of operating a multimedia server (202) in accordance with claim 1 wherein upon detecting a decrease in the available bandwidth the bit-rate of the video data is decreased.

3. A method of operating a multimedia server (202) in accordance with claim 1 wherein the bit-rate of the video data is periodically increased in order to ensure that all of the available bandwidth is being used.

4. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with claims 1 to 3 wherein said stream of video data is comprised of a plurality of hierarchically encoded layers.

5. A method of operating a multimedia server (202) in accordance with claim 4 wherein the bit-rate of the video data is varied by adding or dropping layers from the stream of data transferred to the output port.

6. A method of operating a multimedia server (202) in accordance with claims 4 or 5 wherein the objective quality contribution of each layer to the

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overall quality of the video sequence is measured in order to determine which of the layers is to be added or dropped from the stream of data transferred to the output port.

7. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with claims 1 to 3 wherein said stream of video data is comprised of a plurality of independently encoded flows each of which encoded at different bit-rates.

8. A method of operating a multimedia server (202) in accordance with claim 7 wherein the bit-rate of the video data is varied by switching between independently encoded flows.

9. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with any of the preceding claims in which the source 201 of video data is stored in encoded form in a database.

10. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with any of claims 1 to 8 in which the source 201 of video data is encoded in real-time.

11. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with any of the preceding claims wherein, upon detecting a variation in the capacity of the network such as to render it appropriate for a change in bit rate to occur, the server waits for a predetermined time to attempt to detect a change of scene, and if such a change of scene is detected within the predetermined time, the change of bit rate is caused to occur at the time of the change of scene, but if a change of scene is not detected within the predetermined time, then the change of bit rate is caused to occur at the expiry of the predetermined time.

12. A method of operating a multimedia server 202 in accordance with any of the preceding claims wherein, upon detecting a variation in the capacity of the network such as to render it appropriate for a change in bit rate to occur, the server determines if there is going to be a change of scene within a predetermined time, and if it is determined that there will be such a change of scene within the predetermined time, the change of bit rate is caused to occur at the time of the change of scene, but if it is determined that there is not going to

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be a change of scene within the predetermined time, then the change of bit rate is caused to occur substantially immediately after having made such a determination.

13. The method of claim 12 further including the step of, prior to providing a stream of video data to the output of the media server, processing the video data to determine the positions within the video data in which changes of scenes occur and making this information available for permitting whether a scene change will occur within a predetermined period at any point along the stream of video data.

14. A multimedia server (202) comprising;

a reader (302) for reading video data representing a video sequence from a source (301),

a scene change detector (604) for detecting changes of scene in the video sequence,

a bit-rate controller (607) for controlling the rate at which the video data is transferred from the reader to an output port, wherein the output port is capable of communicating with a client (204) on a packet network (203);

the media server further comprising means (608) for detecting available bandwidth between the multimedia server (202) and client (204) on the packet network,

characterised in that

the bit-rate controller (607) is arranged to vary the bit-rate of the video data transferred to the output port in dependence on the detected bandwidth preferentially in correlation with a scene change detected by the scene change detector (604).

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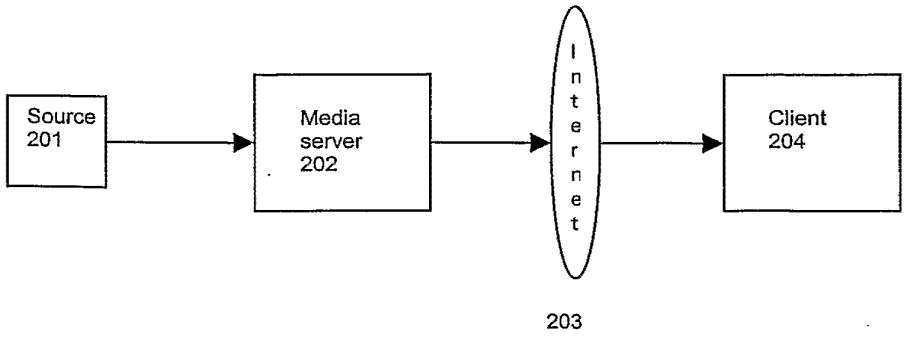


Figure 1

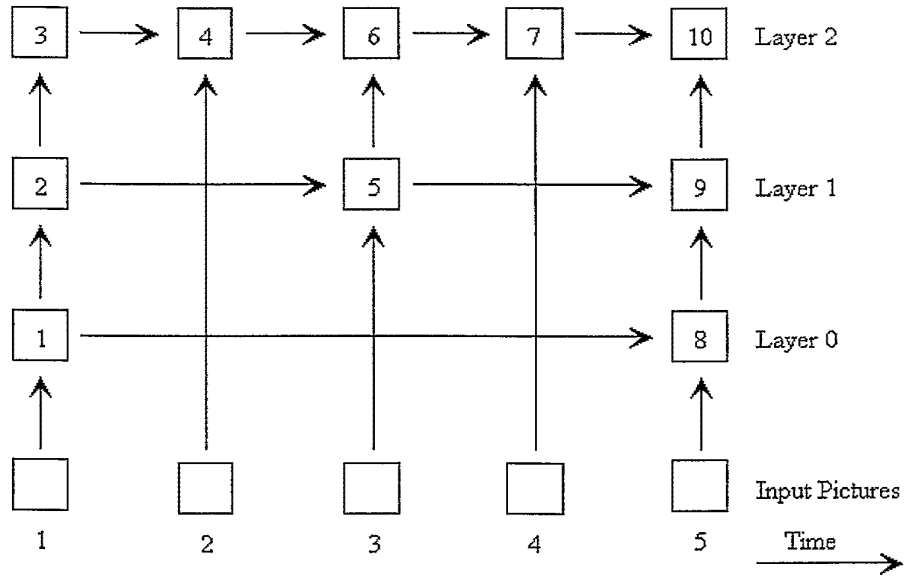


Figure 2

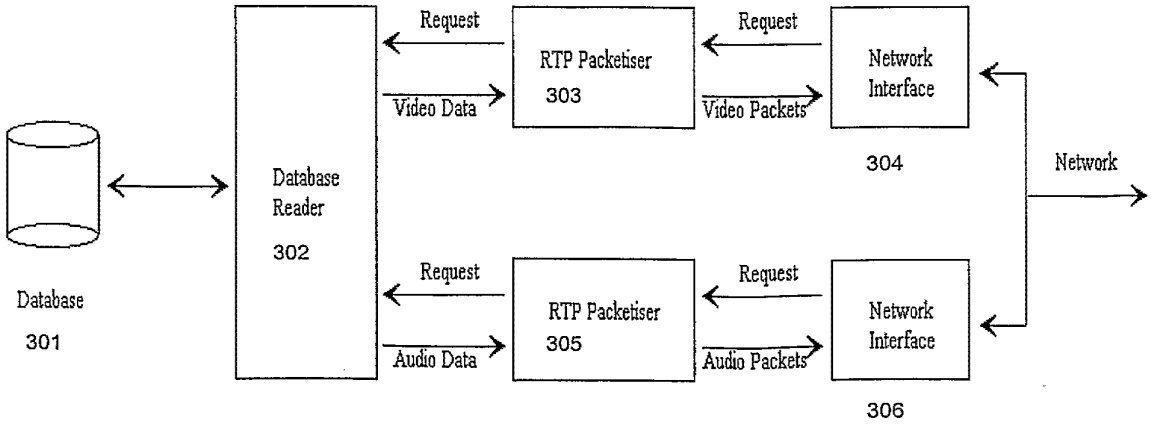


Figure 3

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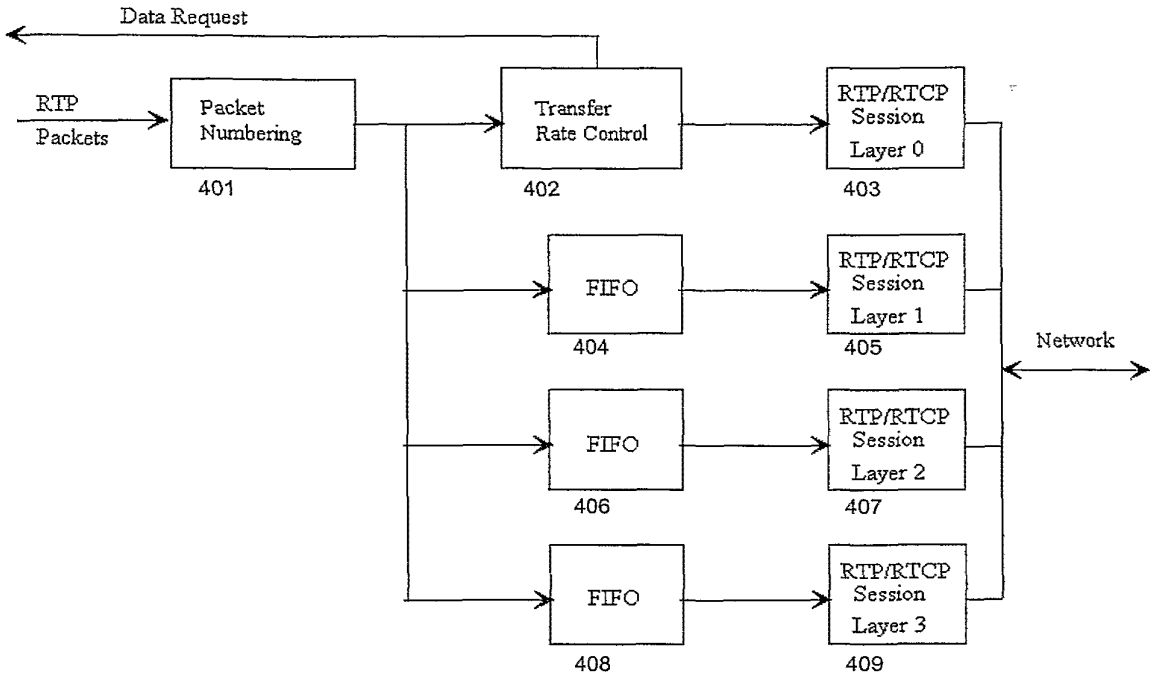


Figure 4

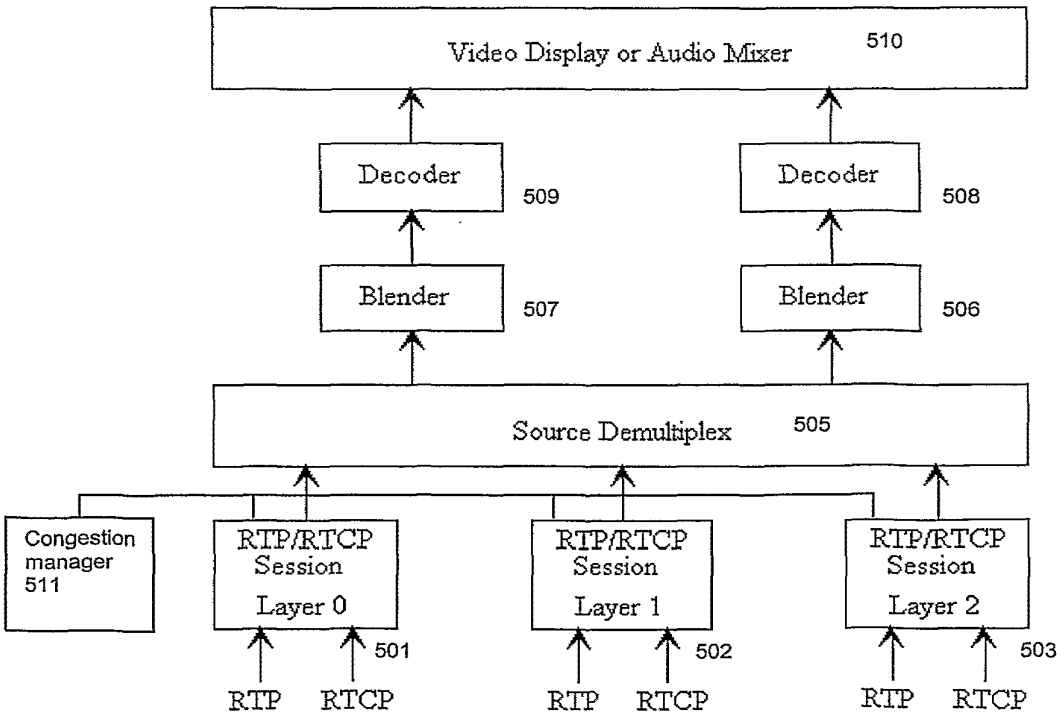


Figure 5

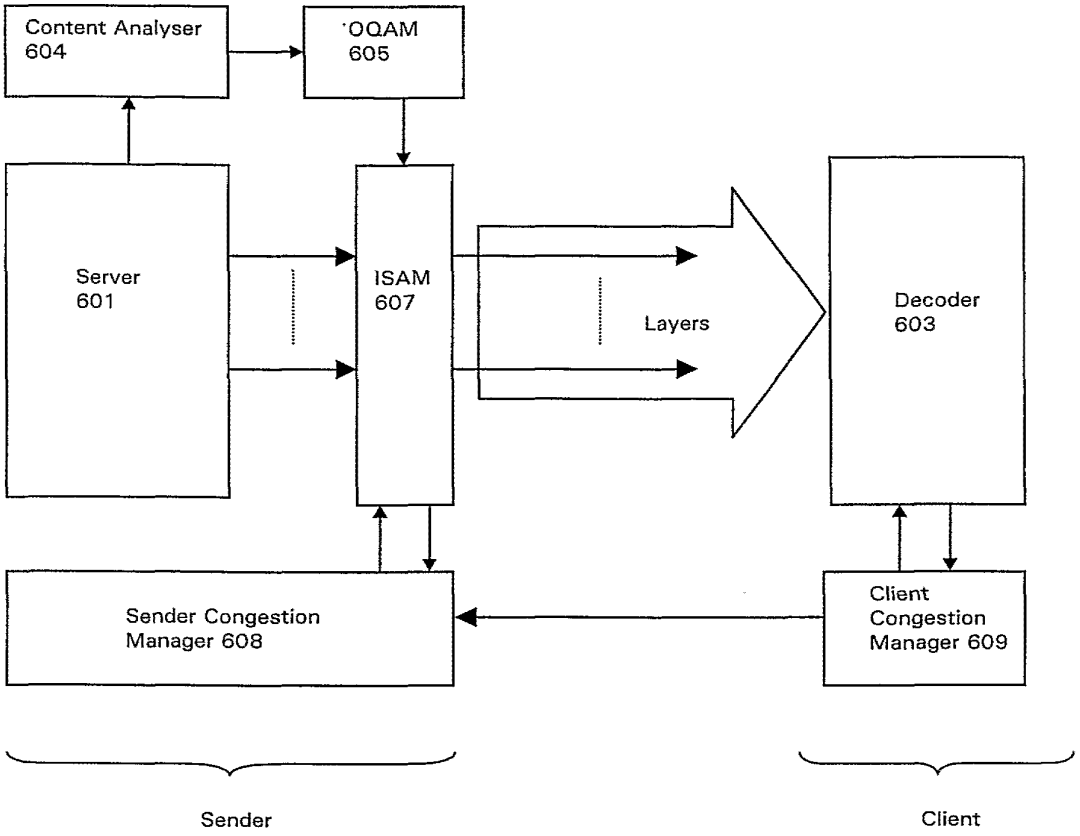

Content Analyser
604
OQAM
605
Server
601
ISAM
607
Layers
Decoder
603
Sender Congestion
Manager 608
Client
Congestion
Manager 609
Sender
Client

Figure 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

ational Application No
PCT/GB 02/03307

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 H04N5/00 H04N7/24

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 H04N H04L G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal, PAJ, IBM-TDB

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6 014 694 A (AHARONI AMIR ET AL) 11 January 2000 (2000-01-11)	1-10,14
Y	abstract column 2, line 29 - line 65 column 3, line 62 -column 4, line 34 column 8, line 54 -column 9, line 35 column 10, line 34 - line 49 column 14, line 34 -column 15, line 6	11-13
X	ANONYMOUS: "Method to Deliver Scalable Video across a Distributed Computer System" IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN, IBM CORP. NEW YORK, US, vol. 5, no. 37, 1 May 1994 (1994-05-01), pages 251-256, XP002079392 ISSN: 0018-8689	1-10,14
A	the whole document	11-13

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[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

[X] Patent family members are listed in annex.

° Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
16 September 2002	23/09/2002

Name and mailing address of the ISA	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL – 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31–70) 340–2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31–70) 340–3016	Fantini, F

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Page 704

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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A	column 2, line 52 -column 3, line 22 column 4, line 20 - line 49 column 6, line 9 - line 45 column 7, line 1 - line 24 column 13, line 46 -column 14, line 18 column 20, line 13 - line 30	1,14
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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UNITED STATES
PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313 - 1450
www.uspto.gov

ELECTRONIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT RECEIPT

APPLICATION #	RECEIPT DATE / TIME	ATTORNEY DOCKET #
16/876,579	**08/19/2021 03:37:32 PM ET**	**066.0141X1C9**

Title of Invention

APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND METHOD FOR MULTI-BITRATE CONTENT STREAMING

Application Information

APPLICATION TYPE	Utility - Nonprovisional Application under 35 USC 111(a)	PATENT #	-
CONFIRMATION #	3720	FILED BY	Francene Stewart
PATENT CENTER #	60286065	FILING DATE	05/18/2020
CUSTOMER #	70560	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	DAVID F. BRUECK
CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS	-	AUTHORIZED BY	Brett Carlson

Documents

TOTAL DOCUMENTS: 23

DOCUMENT	PAGES	DESCRIPTION	SIZE (KB)
20210819_IDS_066-0141X1C9.pdf	9	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	1013 KB
20210819_IDSCert_066-0141X1C9.pdf	1	Transmittal Letter	228 KB
EP1394973A2.pdf	31	Foreign Reference	1571 KB
JP2004295569A.pdf	62	Foreign Reference	2969 KB
WO2003009581.pdf	21	Foreign Reference	803 KB
WO2003041413.pdf	47	Foreign Reference	1912 KB

WO2003042856.pdf	38	Foreign Reference	1615 KB
WO2002045372.pdf	19	Foreign Reference	726 KB
NPL3_Dawson-ImprovingQuality.pdf	17	Non Patent Literature	2586 KB
NPL4_IntervuGranted.pdf	3	Non Patent Literature	61 KB
NPL5_InterVuStreams.pdf	4	Non Patent Literature	64 KB
NPL6_MicrosoftAnnounces.pdf	5	Non Patent Literature	88 KB
NPL7_SandpiperAddsRealSystem.pdf	4	Non Patent Literature	1401 KB
NPL8_Speedera.pdf	5	Non Patent Literature	147 KB
NPL9_DeveloperDocumentation2002.pdf	240	Non Patent Literature	1676 KB
NPL10_IBM-DigitalLibrary.pdf	26	Non Patent Literature	117 KB
NPL11_FreshApproach.pdf	6	Non Patent Literature	104 KB
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NPL14_20210618-PelotonResponseToComplaint.pdf	59	Non Patent Literature	611 KB
NPL15_20210618-VerifiedResponseICONToComplaint.pdf	78	Non Patent Literature	668 KB
NPL1_AppendixREAL06_RPG2Manual.pdf	77	Non Patent Literature	1082 KB

NPL12_MacOSX.pdf	65	Non Patent Literature	1344 KB
NPL2_Kontothanassis-TransportLayer2.pdf	11	Non Patent Literature	332 KB

Digest

DOCUMENT	MESSAGE DIGEST(SHA-512)
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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **BRITISH TELECOMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY** [GB/GB]; 81 Newgate Street, London EC1A 7AJ (GB).

(72) Inventors; and
(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **WALKER, Matthew, David** [GB/GB]; 9 Thirlmere Court, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 9SN (GB). **JACOBS, Richard, James** [GB/GB]; 15 Through Duncans, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 4EA (GB). **NILSSON, Michael, Erling** [GB/GB]; 5 Laburnum Gardens, Rushmere St. Andrew, Ipswich IP5 1BY (GB).

(74) Agent: **ROBINSON, Simon, Benjamin**; BT Group Legal Services, Intellectual Property Dept., Holborn Centre, 8th Floor, 120 Holborn, London EC1N 2TE (GB).

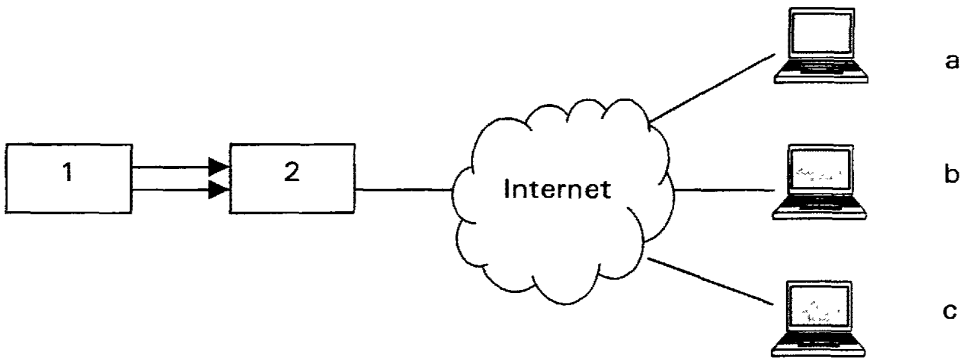
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(54) Title: TRANSMITTING AND RECEIVING REAL-TIME DATA



(57) Abstract: The invention concerns streaming real-time data (e.g. video) over packet networks (e.g. the Internet). Conventionally, in packet networks, in order to view streamed video data a reservoir of data is built up to reduce the effect of jitter, caused by variations in the inter-arrival times of packets of data. Consequently, a delay is experienced before the video material can be viewed as the reservoir is filled. The invention is concerned with providing streamed video without the start-up delay by transmitting data from a video streamer to the video viewer more rapidly than the video viewer consumes the data and using the excess data to build a buffer at the video viewer. When a suitable sized buffer is built the transmission rate of data to the buffer may be reduced. In order to deliver the best quality material for the available bandwidth, the supply of video data may be switched to a higher bit-rate source when the reservoir is filled. Fluctuations in network throughput may be accommodated during the transmission of data on a fine scale by adjusting the transmission rate of the data and on a coarse scale by switching between data streams encoded at different bit-rates. Fluctuations in network throughput are determined by counting the number of missing packets at the video viewer which information may then be fed back to the video streamer to adjust the flow of data accordingly.

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

Transmitting and Receiving Real-Time Data

The invention is in the field of handling of time-sensitive data over packet switched networks, and more particularly transmitting and receiving video data over the Internet.

The invention relates to a method of providing a streaming video service to a client across a packet network whilst reducing the start-up delay usually associated with preparing a buffer of data while maintaining the use of a buffer. The invention also relates to a method of controlling the transmission rate of the streaming video to adapt to congestion in the network.

Traditionally the Internet has supported traffic such as FTP, e-mail and web-surfing, where the overall delay does not intrinsically detract from the final presentation of the media. The advent of faster processing multimedia PC's has driven the delivery of multimedia, including video, over the Internet. Time-sensitive applications however require continuous, quality of service guaranteed, high bandwidth data channels, which is seemingly at odds with the packet-based nature of the Internet and has the potential to disrupt transmissions with unacceptable packet jitter, i.e. the variation in the inter-arrival times of packets caused by variable routing and changeability of delivery rates owing to congestion. Currently, commercial streaming technologies overcome jitter by constructing a large buffer (5-30 seconds) before starting to playback video material. This start-up delay is non-optimal for a user, who may have to wait for this period, before realising that the content requested is incorrect; and generally detracts from the users experience of the multimedia presentation.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of operating a real-time communication apparatus comprising a real-time data sender, a real-time data display device having a store and a network connecting said sender and said display device, said method comprising the steps of:

operating said sender to transmit a plurality first-encoding-rate data packets representing a first part of a real-time presentation to said display device, said transmission rate being higher than said encoding rate;

operating said display device to:

receive said first-encoding-rate data packets into said store;

remove first-encoding-rate data packets from said store at said first encoding rate for decoding to present said real-time presentation to said user at a first level of quality;

on said store being filled with said first-encoding-rate data to a predetermined level, sending an indication that said level has been reached to said sender;

operating said sender, on receipt of said indication, to send second-encoding-rate data packets representing subsequent parts of said real-time presentation to said display device, said second encoding rate being higher than said first encoding rate;

operating said display device to:

receive second-encoding-rate data packets representing a subsequent part of real-time presentation into said store;

remove second-encoding-rate data packets from said store at said second encoding rate for decoding to present said real-time presentation to said user at a second level of quality higher than said first level of quality.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client while constructing a buffer of time-sensitive data, said method comprising receiving time-sensitive data which has been transmitted to said client, passing said time-sensitive data to a data buffer; and, monitoring the quantity of time-sensitive data in the data buffer; reading said time dependent data out of the data buffer to be processed for viewing; wherein the method is characterised in that the rate at which the time-sensitive data is read out of the data buffer is lower than the rate at which the time-sensitive data is passed to the data buffer; and the time-sensitive data is read out of the data buffer when it

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arrives in the data buffer, such that there is substantially no delay between the client receiving the time-sensitive data and making the time-sensitive data available; and, presenting the time-sensitive data.

There will come a point when the data buffer becomes sufficiently full. The rate of transmission can then be reduced to equal the rate of consumption by the viewing means which will bring the quantity of data in the buffer to an equilibrium. However, in this situation the bandwidth of the connection may not be employed to full capacity.

In a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client, wherein, time-sensitive data encoded at a first bit-rate is received until a pre-determined quantity of data fills the data buffer, whereupon time-sensitive data encoded at a second bit-rate is received, wherein said second bit-rate is higher than the first bit-rate.

A still further aspect of the present invention provides a method of providing time-sensitive data to a client is taught, wherein time-sensitive data encoded at a first bit-rate is read from a first data buffer at a first transmission rate to be transmitted to the client; and, upon request, time-sensitive data encoded at a second bit-rate is read from a second data buffer at a second rate.

It is desirable to use as much of the available bandwidth of a link as possible to transmit data because with a higher bit-rate of video data comes better quality reproduction. However, loss of data in the network causes severe degradation of service – far outstripping the benefits of increased bit-rate. For example, with predictive coding schemes such as H.263 and MPEG, receiving half of a 500 $kbits^{-1}$ video stream is likely to give a much worse quality than all of a 250 $kbits^{-1}$ stream. It is therefore important to reduce transmission rate in a controlled way, rather than letting data be lost to the network. The Internet protocol TCP has a built-in control mechanism whereby the data transmission rate is steadily increased until packet loss is detected, whereupon the data rate is reduced. The data rate is then increased again until packet loss reoccurs. A variable transmission rate is said to be elastic and applications which are able to control the transmission rate of data in response to network conditions are said to be TCP-friendly. It is desirable to provide video data in

a TCP-friendly way so that the as much of the bandwidth available at any particular time is utilised. A further benefit of TCP-friendly data delivery is that congestion in the network is managed as individual applications themselves reduce data rates until each has a fair share of the bandwidth.

Standard compression technologies, such as MPEG4 or H.263 can be managed to exhibit TCP-friendly behaviour, see for example the applicant's co-pending patent application number GB 9928023.2. This solution, however, requires a high-speed, dedicated PC per video stream. Transcoding an encoded data stream from a high bit-rate to a low bit-rate when network congestion is detected also suffers from the problem of being computationally demanding. Another approach is to use layering of video streams, whereby quality adaption is achieved by adding or dropping layers of the video stream. The disadvantage of this method is that it is inefficient, as a certain proportion of the available bandwidth must be allocated to instructions for integrating the layers.

The present invention further provides a method wherein the rate at which time-sensitive data is read out from first and second buffers may be dynamically varied in dependence upon the condition of a link to the client, and further, time-sensitive data encoded at a first bit-rate is read from a first data buffer at a first transmission rate to be transmitted to the client; or, time-sensitive data encoded at a second bit-rate is read from a second data buffer at a second rate, in dependence upon the condition of a link to the client, wherein said first bit-rate is lower than the second bit-rate.

Embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the figures, where:

Figure 1 is a schematic overview of the relationship between encoder, video streamer and clients;

Figure 2 shows the arrangement of the video streamer;

Figure 3 shows the arrangement of a client; and

Figure 4 shows the stepwise operation of one embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in Figure 1, a first embodiment of the present invention consists of a source of compressed video data, encoder 1, which encodes data both at a low bit-rate R_L, which may have a value of for example 500 $kbits^{-1}$, and a high bit-rate R_H, of

for example 1500 $kbits^{-1}$. The compression codec used is H.263 but equally may be any other codec, such as MPEG4. Encoder 1 takes 'live' video data as its input, for instance a broadcast of a sporting event.

The two encoded data streams are transmitted via separate logical connections to the video streamer 2 at a transmission rate T_E. The video streamer 2 may be on the same premises as the encoder 1 and linked via an intranet. The video streamer 2 runs on a server computer, for instance one comprising a Pentium III 700 MHz, 256MB RAM which has access to the Internet.

A video viewer, hitherto referred to as the client, running on a PC (a,b,c etc in Figure 1) suitably configured to have access to the Internet, may connect to the video streamer 2 via the Internet and thus the client is able to access content. A suitable PC terminal is a 266 MHz Pentium II laptop PC. The video streamer 2 can support a large number of clients (typically up to 1000) viewing the same stream.

For a live broadcast, the encoder 1 will transmit at a transmission rate T_E which is real-time. The two streams of data R_L and R_H coded at different bit-rates offer different quality video reproduction, but each data stream has the same transmission rate, T_E. The data must be decoded at this rate for the program to play back in real-time.

Figure 2 shows the arrangement of the video streamer 2. Low quality encoded video data encoded at a low bit-rate R_L and high quality encoded video data encoded at a high bit-rate R_H from the encoder 2 is received at the input connections 21 and 22 respectively and fed to buffers 23 and 24 respectively. It should be noted that there is provided one buffer per channel of encoded video data that is received by the video streamer 2. Encoded video data is read out from each buffer 23, 24 via a switch 26 which selects which encoded video data stream is to be sent to the output connection 27. There is provided a buffer manager 25 which is capable of controlling the rate at which data is read out from each of the buffers 23, 24 and thus defines the transmission rate T_S of the video streamer 2. The buffer manager is also in connection with the switch 26 and is further capable of receiving signals from connection 28. T_S is selected by varying the time delay between the transmission of each packet, such that T_S may be less than, equal to or greater than the encoder transmission rate T_E. Those skilled in the art will realise that the limiting factor on the sustainability of transmission where $T_S > T_E$ is the size of the buffer 23, 24 such that

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a buffer of size S kbits will be able to sustain a transmission rate of $T_S = 2T_E$ for twice as long as a buffer of size S/2 kbits. Through the control of both switch 26 and the transmission rate T_S the buffer manager is able to control the bit-rate which is output from the video streamer 2 on two scales; by adjusting the transmission rate T_S fine control of the bit-rate is achieved, and by switching between the two encoded data streams encoded at bit-rates R_L and R_H control of the bit-rate on a coarse scale may be achieved. The buffer manager 25 makes adjustments to T_S or switches the output between buffers in response to signals received from connection 28.

Figure 3 shows the arrangement of the client running on a PC 3a, b, c etc. The encoded video data that is sent from the video streamer 2 is received at the client via a connection 27 and checked for completeness by a packet loss detector 31. The data is then sent into a client buffer 32 which is of a size suitable to absorb fluctuations in network throughput. The client buffer 32 is connected directly to a decoder 33 and from there decoded data is sent to be displayed at the client screen (not shown). A client status monitor 34 is connected to the packet loss detector 31 and client buffer 32. The client status monitor 34 is able to send signals via connection 28.

The packet loss detector 31 monitors incoming packets. If packet loss is detected then a signal is sent to the client status monitor 34, which is informs the buffer manager at the video streamer 2 via connection 28. Missing packets can be retransmitted. The buffer manager 25 steadily increases the transmission rate T_S until a consistent pattern of packet loss occurs, indicating that the maximum bandwidth is being utilised. In the interest of maintaining a congestion free network, the transmission rate T_S may then be exponentially reduced. The client status monitor 34 monitors the volume of data in the client buffer 32 such that a signal is sent via connection 28 to the buffer manager 25 at the video streamer 2 when the client buffer 32 becomes sufficiently full of data.

The system of video streamer 2 and client 3 as described above allows user-friendly video streaming, i.e. the client buffer 32 enables the quality of the video to be despite variations in network conditions, which might otherwise have a detrimental effect on the overall perceived quality of the media.

The operation of the present embodiment of the invention will now be described with reference to Figure 4.

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The video streamer 2 is initialised, which involves filling the buffers 23, 24 with a quantity of data from the encoder 1. For a live broadcast, data is constantly fed into the buffers 23, 24 and is subsequently discarded after an amount of time defined by the size of the buffer and the quality of data being received.

A PC running browser software to browse web pages on the Internet may be used to select a link to, for example, a live broadcast on a site hosted by the entity providing streamed video. Being interested in viewing the particular clip or broadcast, the user clicks (selects) the link. The browsing software detects that streamed video data has been requested and launches the video viewing client software which embodies the client 3. The client 3 issues a "send data" command via connection 28 to the buffer manager 25, which sets switch 26 to read encoded video data from the low bit-rate data buffer 23 and requests a transmission rate of $T_S = 2T_E$. The data is transmitted to the data connection 27 and thence to the client 3. Using the example encoding bit-rate cited above of 500 $kbits^{-1}$ for R_L , data flows into the network to the client at a rate of 1000 $kbits^{-1}$.

The client 3 receives the encoded video data and sends it via the packet loss detector 31 to the client buffer 32 which is supplied at the rate $2T_E$. When data is detected in the buffer 32 the encoded video data is promptly read out to the decoder 33 at a rate of T_E. Therefore the buffer 32 fills at a rate T_E while the decoded data from the decoder 33 is displayed. Thus the user is provided with video pictures without having to wait for the client buffer 32 to fill.

The client monitor 34 waits for the quantity of R_L data in the client buffer 32 to reach a specified level, upon which a "switch buffer" command is sent to the buffer manager 25 at the video streamer 2 via the connection 28. The buffer manager 25 then switches the flow of data from the low bit-rate data buffer 23 to the high bit-rate data buffer 24 and instructs transmission at a rate $T_S = T_E$. Using the example encoding rate cited above, data is transmitted on the network at 1500 $kbits^{-1}$.

The client buffer 32 will then begin filling with high quality data which will be placed behind the low quality data. After a length of time the R_H data will begin to be read into the decoder 33, whereupon the user will perceive an increase in the picture quality. At this point, the client 3 has a full buffer and the user is watching images of a quality which is consistent with the capacity of the network link.

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The video streamer 2 can support a number of clients (typically 1000). Each client is initially given a unique read-out point for the start-up phase, whereupon, after equilibrium of the client buffer 32 has been reached and the video streamer 2 is supplying high bit-rate data from the buffer 24, the read-out point can be amalgamated with other client read-out points. Read-out points may have to be devolved as discrepancies in network capacity demand increasing or decreasing the transmission rate for a particular client.

The skilled person will appreciate that the low bit-rate data buffer 23 should be of a size which will allow data to be read from it at a rate $2T_E$ for a period of time which is long enough to provide the client buffer 32 with a suitable quantity of data. For example, in order to buffer 5 seconds worth of 500 $kbits^{-1}$ data at the client 3, the video streamer 2 must supply 1000 kbits of data for 5 seconds, 500 kbits of which will be consumed by the decoder 33 per second and 500 kbits will build up in the buffer per second until 5 seconds has elapsed. Therefore the low bit-rate data buffer must be able to hold at least 5Mbits of data (5x1000kbits), or just over 0.5Mb.

The skilled person will appreciate that there are problems associated with 'tapping into' a stream of encoded data when data is initially read out of a buffer. The compression technology typically employed by the encoder 1 involved coding a frame of video data, termed an anchor frame or an I-frame and from this frame an estimate is made as to what the next frame will look like, this estimated frame being termed a B-frame. In this way the quantity of data representing a series of frames may be greatly reduced. However, if the first frame to be read from either of the data buffers 23, 24 is a B-frame then the first few frames of decoded data may be unintelligible as the decoder tries to reconstruct frames based on an estimate. In a further embodiment of the invention, an extra buffer of data is supplied in parallel with the data buffers 23, 24 consisting solely of I-frames. The first frame to be transmitted is read from the I-frame buffer and thus gives the decoder a reliable point from which to start decoding. Data is then switched to be read from either of the data buffers 23, 24.

The system allows user-friendly video streaming, i.e. the quality of the video does not fluctuate rapidly as network conditions vary, which can have a detrimental affect on the overall perceived quality of the media. In the event of packet loss being reported by the client, the system can exponentially reduce its transmission rate. This need

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not result in an immediate switching of the video source, as there may be data buffered at the client. Immediately after the packet loss it is possible that the transmission rate is lower than the encoding rate, and the client is supplementing received data with buffered data in order to meet the demands of the video decoder, with the result that the client's buffer is emptying. In the event of isolated packet loss, the system can again ramp up the transmission rate, initially slowing the rate at which the client's buffer is emptying before eventually returning to a state of filling it.

The skilled person will appreciate that the ability to transmit data at variable rates for a period of time enables the streamed data to be elastic and allows TCP-friendly transmission. Detection of sustained packet loss by the packet loss detector 31 is indicative of network congestion. The buffer manager 25 at the video streamer 2 reacts to notification of packet loss by instructing a reduction in the transmission rate of data from the high bit-rate data buffer 24. The high bit-rate data buffer 24 should be appropriately sized to cope with such an event. If packet loss persists at the reduced transmission rate for longer than the high bit-rate data buffer can sustain, then the buffer manager 25 will switch to supply data from the low bit-rate data buffer 23. Effective management protocols are necessary to prevent rapid switching between data buffers 23 and 24 as the data capacity of the network fluctuates, because this will cause changes in the perceived quality of the played back video. While a user will tolerate low quality playback, rapid changes in quality can be irritating to a user.

There is no limit to the number of encoded data streams that may be provided to the video streamer. Maximum bandwidth utilisation may be achieved thus: starting by reading data from a low bit-rate data buffer, the transmission rate is increased. Finding that no packets are lost at this transmission rate, the output is switched to a higher bit-rate data buffer, whereupon the transmission rate is increased. If this transmission rate encounters no obstacle then a higher still bit-rate data buffer can be switched in, and so on until the maximum bandwidth is employed.

The buffer manager 25 located at the video streamer 2 is enabled to decide how to adjust the transmission rate T_S and when to switch buffers. Equally, instructions may be sent from the client 3 to the video streamer 2 about transmission rate T_S and which buffer to feed data from. The location of the buffer manager 25 in the

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embodiments described has been chosen because it is practical to situate the control centre close to the centre which is responsible for charging for the service, which in this case is the ISP.

The example of video data is chosen as an example of multimedia data to illustrate the above embodiments. The invention is equally suited to any other form of time-sensitive data, such as audio data or a multimedia presentation.

In the embodiment described above, data is supplied by the encoder 1. Equally, compressed video data may be held in a library of program data files, for example a library of feature films, which may be accessed when required.

The video streamer 2 may be remote from the encoder 1, such that the video streamer 2 and the encoder 1 are connected via the Internet. It is likely that the video streamer 2 would be operated by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and remote connection of the video streamer 2 and encoder 1, would allow the ISP to make content available to the client from many encoders.

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CLAIMS

1. A method of operating a real-time communication apparatus comprising a real-time data sender, a real-time data display device having a store and a network connecting said sender and said display device, said method comprising the steps of:

operating said sender to transmit a plurality first-encoding-rate data packets representing a first part of a real-time presentation to said display device, said transmission rate being higher than said encoding rate;

operating said display device to:

receive said first-encoding-rate data packets into said store;

remove first-encoding-rate data packets from said store at said first encoding rate for decoding to present said real-time presentation to said user at a first level of quality;

on said store being filled with said first-encoding-rate data to a predetermined level, sending an indication that said level has been reached to said sender;

operating said sender, on receipt of said indication, to send second-encoding-rate data packets representing subsequent parts of said real-time presentation to said display device, said second encoding rate being higher than said first encoding rate;

operating said display device to:

receive second-encoding-rate data packets representing a subsequent part of real-time presentation into said store;

remove second-encoding-rate data packets from said store at said second encoding rate for decoding to present said real-time presentation to said user at a second level of quality higher than said first level of quality.

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2. A method of presenting time-sensitive data and constructing a buffer of time-sensitive data, said method comprising

receiving time-sensitive data;

reading said time-sensitive data into a data buffer; and,

reading said time-sensitive data out of the data buffer for presentation; and,

presenting the time-sensitive data;

wherein the method is characterised in that

the rate at which the time-sensitive data is read out of the data buffer is lower than the rate at which the time-sensitive data is read into the data buffer; and,

reading the time-sensitive data out of the data buffer is initiated when the time-sensitive data first arrives at the data buffer, such that there is substantially no delay between the client first receiving the time-sensitive data and making the time-sensitive data available for presentation.

3. A method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client according to claim 2, including the step of,

monitoring the quantity of time-sensitive data in the data buffer;

wherein the bit-rate of the received time-sensitive data is dependent on the quantity of data in the data buffer.

4. A method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client according to claim 3, wherein,

time-sensitive data encoded at a first bit-rate is received until the quantity of data in the data buffer reaches an upper threshold, whereupon time-sensitive data encoded at a second bit-rate is received, wherein said first bit-rate is lower than the second bit-rate.

5. A method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client according to claim 4, wherein,

time-sensitive data encoded at the second bit-rate is received until the quantity of data in the data buffer reaches a lower threshold, whereupon time-sensitive data encoded at the first bit-rate is received.

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6. A method of presenting time-sensitive data at a client according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein,

the rate at which the time-sensitive data is read into the data buffer is dependent on the quantity of data in the data buffer.

7. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client, wherein

time-sensitive data is encoded at a plurality of bit-rates;

wherein data encoded at one of the plurality of bit-rates is selected for transmission to the client;

transmitting the data to the client.

8. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client according to claim 7, wherein,

the rate at which time-sensitive data selected for transmission to the client is transmitted to the client may be dynamically varied.

9. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client, according to claim 7, wherein,

the time-sensitive data encoded at one of the plurality of bit-rates is selected in dependence upon a received signal.

10. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client according to claim 8, wherein,

the rate at which the time-sensitive data selected for transmission is transmitted is dependent upon a received signal.

11. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client according to claims 9 or 10, wherein,

the received signal is representative of the condition of the link to the client.

12. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client according to claims 9 or 10, wherein,

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the received signal is representative of the quantity of data in a data buffer at the client.

13. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client according to claim 11, wherein,

the condition of the link to the client is determined by the quantity of data in a data buffer at the client.

14. A method of providing time-sensitive data to a client in accordance with any one of the preceding claims, wherein the time-sensitive data represents video data or may represent audio data.

15. Apparatus for receiving time-sensitive data, said apparatus comprising,

buffer means for storing received time-sensitive data for a period of time,

means for reading said time-sensitive data into the buffer means,

means for reading said time dependent data out of said buffer means,

monitoring means for monitoring the quantity of data held in the buffer means; and

means for transmitting data relating to the quantity of time dependent data held in said buffer means,

said apparatus being characterised in that means for initiating reading the time-sensitive data out of the data buffer when the monitoring means detects the arrival of time-sensitive data at the data buffer, such that there is substantially no delay between the client first receiving the time-sensitive data and the time-sensitive data being read out of the buffer.

16. Apparatus for supplying encoded video data to at least one client, said apparatus comprising,

receiving means to receive a plurality of data streams, wherein each of the plurality of data streams comprises video data encoded from the same source with differing quantisation parameters,

a plurality of buffer means for storing each stream of encoded video data for a period of time,

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at least one reading means for reading encoded video data from one of the plurality of buffer means,

buffer management means arranged to control the at least one reading means,

characterised in that,

said reading means is arranged to read, under control of the buffer management means, encoded video data from any of the buffer means at a frame rate which may be less than, equal to or greater than the frame rate at which the video data is encoded.

17. Apparatus for supplying encoded video data to a client as claimed in claim 16, including,

means for receiving data relating to the quantity of encoded video data in the buffer of the client, and

means for determining the current capacity of the link to the client,

wherein the buffer management means is arranged to control the reading means in dependence on the quantity of encoded video data in the buffer of the client and on the capacity of the link to the client.

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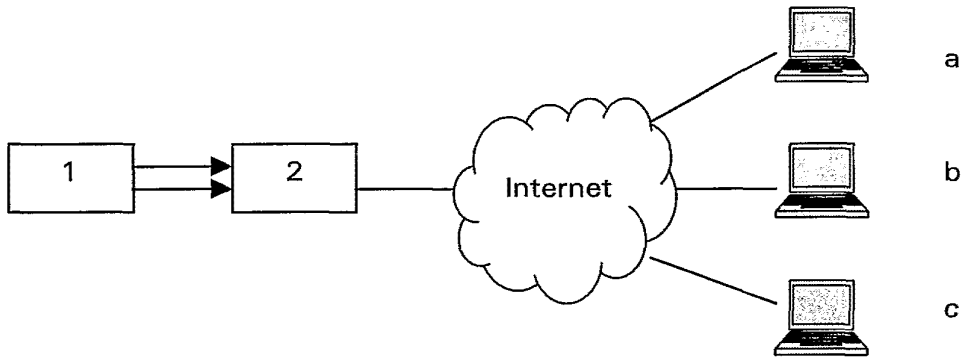


Figure 1

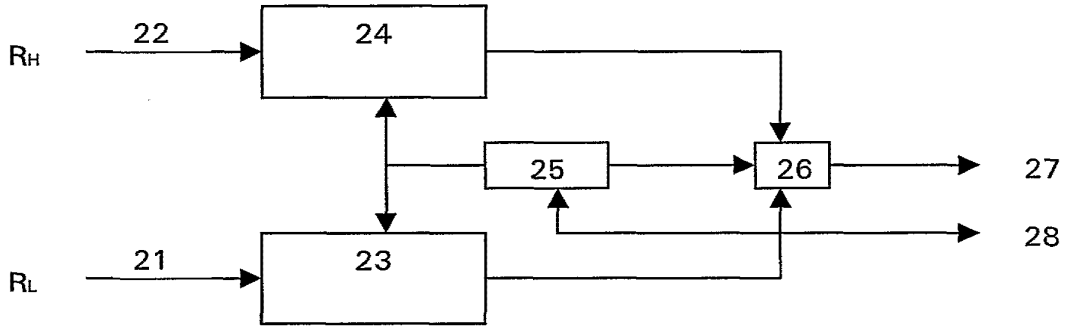


Figure 2

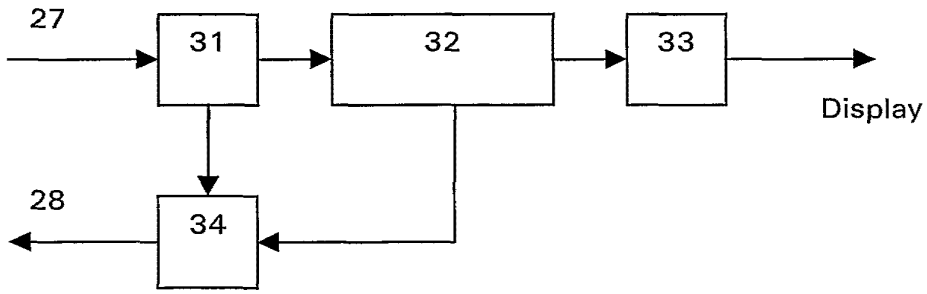


Figure 3

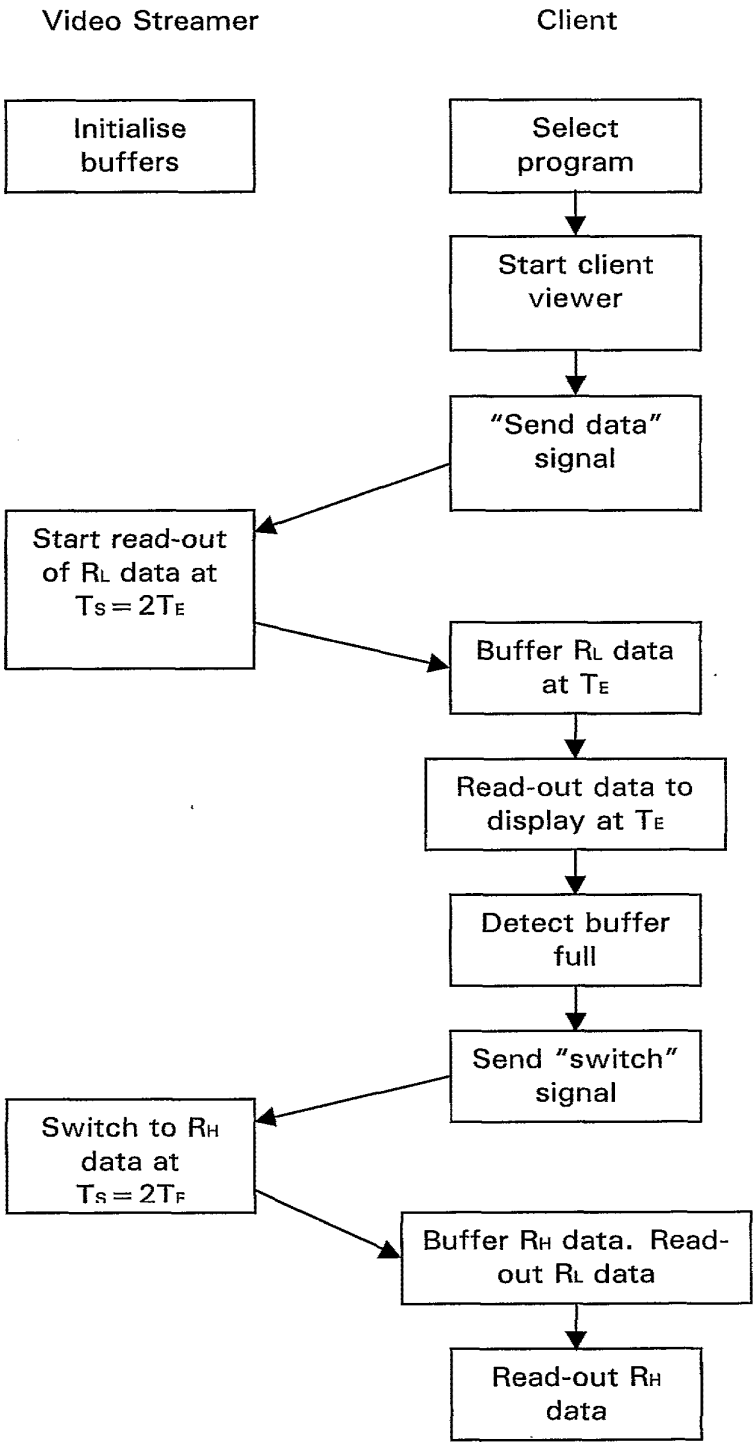


Figure 4

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IDS CERTIFICATION STATEMENTS

I. **THIS IDS IS BEING FILED UNDER 37 C.F.R. 1.97(b): (check one box)**

☐ Within three months of the filing date of a national application other than a continued prosecution application under 1.53(d).

☐ Within three months of the date of entry of the national stage as set forth in 1.491 in an international application.

☐ Before the mailing date of a first Office Action on the merits. In the event that a first Office Action on the merits has been mailed, please consider this IDS under 37 C.F.R. 1.97(c) and see the statement under 1.97(e) **or** charge deposit account 50-2091 the fee specified by 37 C.F.R. 1.17(p) if such statement is not selected in Section IV.

☑ Before the mailing of a first Office Action after the filing of a request for continued examination under 1.114.

II. **THIS IDS IS BEING FILED UNDER 37 C.F.R. 1.97(c):**

☐ After the period specified in 37 C.F.R. 1.97(b) and before the mailing date of any of a final action under 1.113, a notice of allowance under 1.311 or an action that otherwise closes prosecution in the application, and accompanied by:

- ☐ a statement specified in 1.97(e) as subsequently provided in this IDS; or
- ☐ the fee set forth in 1.17(p).

III. **THIS IDS IS BEING FILED UNDER 37 C.F.R. 1.97(d):**

☐ After the period specified in 37 C.F.R. 1.97(c) and on or after the mailing date of any of a final action under 1.113, a notice of allowance under 1.311 or an action that otherwise closes prosecution in the application, but before or simultaneous with payment of the issue fee, and accompanied by a statement specified in 1.97(e) as subsequently provided in this IDS **and** the fee set forth in 1.17(p).

IV. **Statement under 37 C.F.R. 1.97(e) (check only one box)**

The undersigned hereby states that:

☐ Each item of information contained in the IDS was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of this IDS.

☐ No item of information contained in the IDS was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the IDS was known to any individual designated in 37 C.F.R. 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of this IDS.

V. **Statement under 37 C.F.R. §1.704(d)**:

☐ The undersigned hereby states that each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement: (i) was first cited in any communication from a patent office in a counterpart foreign or international application or from the Office, and this communication was not received by any individual designated in § 1.56(c) more than thirty days prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement; or (ii) is a communication that was issued by a patent office in a counterpart foreign or international application or by the Office, and this communication was not received by any individual designated in § 1.56(c) more than thirty days prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement..

VI. **CONCLUSION**

It is respectfully submitted that the claims presently on file patently distinguish the present invention from each of the references cited in this IDS. The references cited in this IDS are being cited only in the interest of candor and without any admission that they constitute statutory prior art or contain matter which anticipates the invention or which would render the same obvious, either singly or in a combination, to a person of ordinary skill in the art. Furthermore the filing of this IDS should not be construed to be an admission that the information cited in this IDS is, or is considered to be, material to patentability as defined in 1.56(b). In addition, the filing of this IDS should not be construed as a representation that a search has been made.

If the Examiner has any questions concerning this IDS, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number associated with Customer No. 70560 . If it is determined that this IDS has been filed under the wrong rule, the PTO is requested to consider this IDS under the proper rule, with a petition if necessary, and charge the appropriate fee to Deposit Account No. 50-2091.

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(71) Applicant: **MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC INDUSTRIAL CO., LTD.**
Kadoma-shi, Osaka 571-8501 (JP)

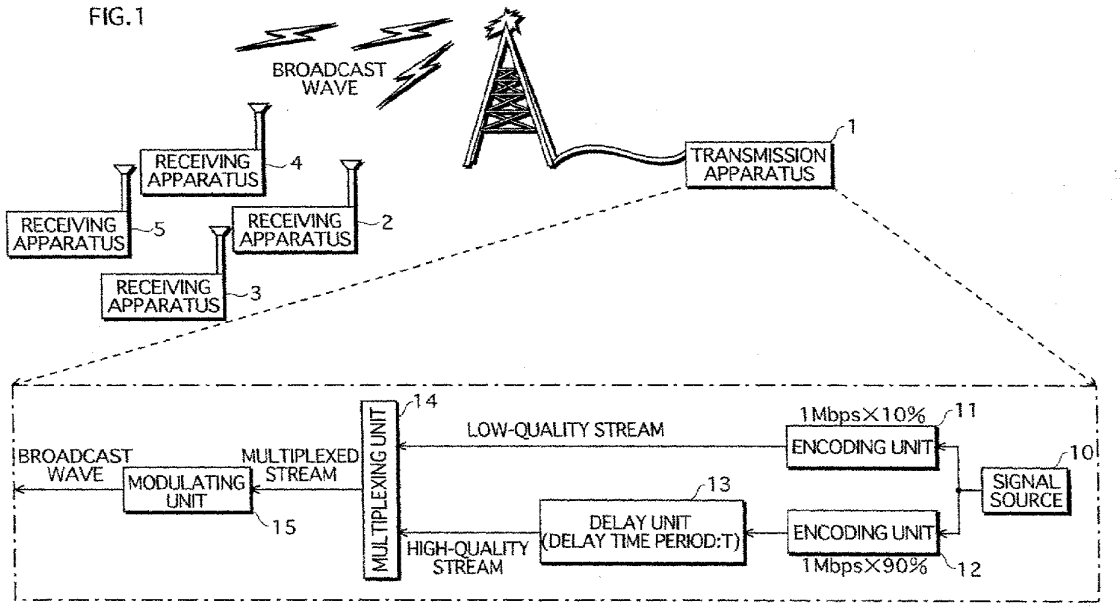
(72) Inventor: **Kitamura, Tomohiko**
Hirakata-shi Osaka 573-0034 (JP)

(74) Representative: **Crawford, Andrew Birkby**
A.A. Thornton & Co.
235 High Holborn
London WC1V 7LE (GB)

(54) Broadcast system having a transmitter and a receiver for low quality and high quality streams based on the same content, the receiver and program

(57) A broadcast system has digital receiving apparatuses that imitate deteriorated reproduction that is observed in analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, thus preventing the audiences, who are accustomed to the analog broadcasting, from sensing discomfort at the digital broadcasting. A transmission apparatus causes encoding units 11 and 12 to generate low- and high-quality streams based on the same contents, and transmits these streams onto a transmission path while delaying the high-quality stream. In the receiving apparatuses, a reproduction unit 25 reproduces the high-quality stream in a normal state, while packets of the low-quality stream received during a time period T until the current time are accumulated in an accumulation unit 22. If a transmission path failure occurs, a reproduction control unit 26 causes the reproduction unit 25 to reproduce, instead of the high-quality stream, the accumulated packets of the low-quality stream.

FIG.1



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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

(1) Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a broadcast system having a transmission apparatus and receiving apparatuses, specifically to improvements in digital broadcast services.

(2) Description of the Related Art

[0002] In recent years, the infrastructure for the shift from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting has been improved steadily. In this improvement of the infrastructure, it is important to fully recognize the differences between the analog broadcasting and the digital broadcasting. One of such differences is observed when a transmission path failure occurs.

[0003] In the analog broadcasting, when a transmission path failure occurs, the failure is recognized by the audiences as deteriorated reproduction quality. Experiencing more than 50 years of operation of analog broadcasting, the audiences are familiar with such deteriorated reproduction quality that is caused by a thunderstorm or the like.

[0004] On the other hand, in digital broadcasting, a transmission path failure causes receiving apparatuses to detect a bit error. When they detect a bit error in a received broadcast wave, the receiving apparatuses correct the bit error using Reed-Solomon parity codes or the like before supplying reproduction output. With these operations, the audiences are supplied with reproduction outputs not deteriorated by the bit error. However, the receiving apparatuses stop supplying the reproduction outputs if a thunderstorm or the like causes a large amount of bit error that cannot be corrected by a bit error correction. It should be noted here that in the present document, a "digital broadcast failure" indicates a large failure that cannot be overcome by a bit error correction.

[0005] Meanwhile, the common knowledge: "when a transmission path failure occurs, the failure is recognized by the audiences as deteriorated reproduction quality" may become an unexpected obstacle in digital broadcasting. That is to say, for example, if a sudden thunderstorm occurs while a user is supplied with a reproduction output, the user will probably expect deterioration in the reproduction quality due to the above-mentioned common knowledge that has taken root. However, if supply of reproduction output from a receiving apparatus suddenly stops against this expectation due to a transmission path failure, the user may mistake the transmission path failure for a receiving apparatus failure. In such circumstances, there is a possibility that a flood of complaints about a receiving apparatus failure are sent to the maker of the receiving apparatus each time a thunderstorm or the like causes a lot of transmission path failures. In such a case, the maker will be tied up with dealing with the complaints.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The object of the present invention is therefore to provide a broadcast system having digital receiving apparatuses that imitate deterioration of reproduction output that is observed in the analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, thus preventing the audiences from mistaking a transmission path failure for a receiving apparatus failure.

[0007] The above object is fulfilled by a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including: a generating unit operable to generate a first digital stream and a second digital stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is lower than An encoding bit rate for the second digital stream; and a transmission unit operable to transmit the first and second digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream relative to the first digital stream, the receiving apparatus including: a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second digital stream in a normal state; and a reproduction control unit operable to, if a transmission path failure occurs, cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the second digital stream, a portion of the first digital stream that has been received before the occurrence of the transmission path failure.

[0008] With the above-stated construction, the transmission apparatus transmits the low-quality stream preceding the high-quality stream. The receiving apparatus reproduces the high-quality stream in a normal state, but if a transmission path failure occurs, reproduces a portion of the low-quality stream that has been received prior to and has the same contents as a portion of the high-quality stream that should have been reproduced if the transmission path failure had not occurred. With this arrangement, the audience would fail to recognize that the reproduction has been suspended.

[0009] Also, by reproducing the low-quality stream in place of the high-quality stream during the reception-interruptedperiod, the receiving apparatus imitates deteriorated reproduction that has been observed long in analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, thus preventing the audiences, who are accustomed to the analog broadcasting, from sensing discomfort at the digital broadcasting.

[0010] In the above broadcast system, the receiving apparatus may superpose a signal resembling a noise on the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit when the one or more packets are reproduced due to occurrence of a transmission path failure.

[0011] With the above-stated construction, the digital receiving apparatus can reproduce a digital stream with

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which a white noise is mixed in imitation of a degraded reproduction of analog receiving apparatuses. This realistic imitation prevents the audiences, who are accustomed to the analog broadcasting, from sensing discomfort at the digital broadcasting.

[0012] In the above broadcast system, the receiving apparatus may be provided with a pilot lamp that emits light in a manner in which a normal state is distinguished from an abnormal state, wherein in the normal state, the second digital stream is reproduced, and in the abnormal state, the first digital stream is reproduced.

[0013] With the above-stated construction, the digital receiving apparatus can reproduce a digital stream with blinking of the pilot lamp, which is familiar to the audiences of analog receiving apparatuses. This realistic imitation prevents the audiences, who are accustomed to the analog broadcasting, from sensing discomfort at the digital broadcasting.

[0014] In the above broadcast system, the receiving apparatus may further include: an operation receiving unit operable to receive input of an operation by a user to request real time reproduction; and a switch unit operable to switch from reproduction of the second digital stream to reproduction of the first digital stream if the operation receiving unit receives the input of the operation by the user.

[0015] The above-stated construction provides a practical advantage. For example, suppose a user is watching a real sports game while listening to the live broadcasting of the sports game with a portable-type receiving apparatus. The user can select either the high-quality stream which is provided with delay or the low-quality stream which is provided without delay. This function facilitates the user since he/she can select the reproduction of the low-quality stream and enjoy watching the game without being confused by the time lag between the real game and the broadcast of the game.

[0016] In the above broadcast system, the generating unit of the transmission apparatus may include two encoders that respectively generate the first digital stream and the second digital stream by performing a variable-length encoding onto an analog signal.

[0017] With the above-stated construction in which the generating unit performs a variable-length encoding onto an analog signal, as much amount of bit rate as omitted from the audio frames that contain less amounts of audible component can be appropriated to the audio frames that contain more amounts of audible component. This enables the quality of the audio reproduction to be improved in total.

[0018] The above objects are also fulfilled by a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including: a generating unit operable to generate a first digital stream, a second digital stream, and a third digital stream by encoding a same signal respectively at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is the lowest among the encoding bits rates, an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream is the middle between encoding bit rates for the first and third digital streams, and an encoding bit rate for the third digital stream is the highest among the encoding bits rates; and a transmission unit operable to transmit the first, second, and third digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream by time period T1 and delaying the third digital stream by time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the receiving apparatus including: an accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first and second digital streams received from the transmission apparatus; a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the third digital stream in a normal state; and a reproduction control unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the third digital stream, the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce the part of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit following the reproduction of the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit.

[0019] With the above-stated construction, in the normal reception period, data is reproduced with a quality level that is proportionate to 85 % of the bit rate, and in the reception-interrupted period, first, data is reproduced with a quality level that is proportionate to 10 %, and then with a quality level that is proportionate to 5 % of the bit rate. This would give an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality is gradually deteriorated, making them feel as if they were listening to an analog receiver.

[0020] The above objects are also fulfilled by a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including: a first generating unit operable to generate a first audio stream and a second audio stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first audio stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second audio stream; a second generating unit operable to generate a first video stream and a second video stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first video stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second video stream; and a transmission unit operable to transmit the first and second audio streams and the first and second video streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second video stream by a time period T1 and delaying the second audio stream by a time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the receiving apparatus including: a first accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first video stream received during the time period T1 until a current time; a second accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first audio stream received during the time period T2 until the current time; a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second video stream and the second audio stream in a normal state; and a reproduction control

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unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce (i) the part of the first video stream accumulated in the first accumulating unit and (ii) the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit for the time period T1 if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce, after the time period T1, the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit.

[0021] With the above-stated construction, the "high-quality audio + high-quality video" output that is supplied during the normal reception period changes to the "low-quality audio + low-quality video" output if a failure occurs to the transmission path. Furthermore, if the time reception interruption continues for a certain time period, the reproduction changes from "audio + video" to "only audio". That is to say, the reproduced data changes step by step from the high-quality audio and video in the normal reception period to the low-quality audio and video, and to the only audio without video. In this way, the digital receiving apparatuses imitate the gradual deterioration of reproduction output that is observed in the analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, giving an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality is gradually degraded in the same manner as when they are listening to analog receivers.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] These and the other objects, advantages and features of the inventionwillbecomeapparent from the followingdescription thereof taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings which illustrate a specific embodiment of the invention. In the drawings:

Fig. 1 shows the construction of a broadcast system in Embodiment 1 of the present invention;
Fig. 2 shows encoding procedures performed by the encoding units 11 and 12;
Fig. 3 shows the structure of the digital stream generated by the encoding unit 11;
Fig. 4 shows how the high-quality stream is delayed by the delay unit 13 with reference to the low-quality stream;
Fig. 5 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses;
Fig. 6 shows the portion of the low-quality stream that is accumulated in the accumulating unit 22;
Figs. 7A to 7D shows how packets are written (accumulated) into the accumulating unit 22;
Fig. 8 shows reproduction control performed by the reproduction control unit 26;
Fig. 9 is a flowchart showing the reproduction control procedures of the reproduction control unit 26;
Fig. 10 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 2;
Fig. 11 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 3;
Fig. 12 shows the construction of a transmission apparatus in Embodiment 4;
Fig. 13 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses;
Fig. 14 shows the construction of the broadcast system in Embodiment 5;
Fig. 15 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 5; and
Fig. 16 shows the construction of a transmission apparatus in a broadcast system in Embodiment 6.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0023] The following describes a broadcast system according to preferred embodiments of the present invention.

Embodiment 1

[0024] Fig. 1 shows the construction of a broadcast system in Embodiment 1 of the present invention. In Fig. 1, the broadcast system includes a digital transmission apparatus 1 and digital receiving apparatuses 2-5, and provides a digital broadcast service. It should be noted here that the present embodiment deals with a terrestrial digital radio broadcasting.

[0025] The transmission apparatus 1 transmits a digital stream using a band for digital broadcasting. The band for digital broadcasting can be identified by a time slot in a radio frequency band. It is supposed here that a bit rate of 1 Mbps is assigned to the band.

[0026] The receiving apparatuses 2-5 are digital receiving apparatuses that have been developed to replace existent analog radio receiving apparatuses. There are portable and stationary types of digital receiving apparatuses, and both types receive the digital streams from the transmission apparatus and reproduce them.

[0027] Now, the construction of the transmission apparatus for use in the broadcast system outlined above will be described with reference to Fig. 1. As shown in Fig. 1, the transmission apparatus 1 includes a signal source 10, an encoding unit 11, an encoding unit 12, a delay unit 13, a multiplexing unit 14, and a modulating unit 15.

[0028] The signal source 10 receives audio signals from a sound recording apparatus in a broadcast station and/or a reproduction apparatus for reproducing analog audio signals recorded on tape, and outputs analog signals.

[0029] The encoding unit 11 encodes the analog signals output from the signal source 10 into a first type of digital stream. Fig. 2 shows encoding procedures performed by the encoding units 11 and 12. The upper portion of Fig. 2 is a graph showing change with time in the analog signals output from the signal source 10.

[0030] First, the encoding unit 11 samples the amplitude of the analog signals output from the signal source

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10, with a predetermined sampling frequency "cy". The amplitude obtained by the sampling is represented by the number of quantization bits "rx". This encoding process outputs audio frames. The audio frame is the smallest unit of digital audio data, and has a time period (for example, an order of 20 milliseconds) that corresponds to the inverse of the sampling frequency. By repeating this encoding process while analog signals are output from the signal source 10, a digital stream composed of a sequence of audio frames is obtained. Fig. 3 shows the structure of the digital stream generated by the encoding unit 11. The digital stream includes a header and at least one audio frame. The header includes a packet identifier for identifying a packet that is currently received among those included in a digital stream. The encoding unit 11 encodes the received analog signal by obtaining the number of quantization bits at 10 % of 1 Mbps of bit rate assigned to one band. A bit rate is assigned to each type of digital stream by taking the transmission on a transmission path into account. It should be noted here that 1 Mbps of bit rate is only an example, and the bit rate may be different from this.

[0031] The encoding unit 12 encodes the analog signals output from the signal source 10 into a second type of digital stream. In this encoding, the encoding unit 12 assigns 90 % of the bit rate for one band to the second type of digital stream. The second type of digital stream has higher quality than the first type of digital streams due to a great difference between the bit rates. The arrows "ib1" and "ib2" in Fig. 2 indicate the encoding processes performed by the encoding units 1 and 2, respectively. The indicators "ib1" and "ib2" indicate "density" of the first and second types of digital streams, which results from the bit rates assigned by the encoding units 1 and 2, respectively. As the indicators indicate, the encoding unit 12 encodes analog signals with a lot of quantization bits, thus providing a high quality. For this reason, the second type of digital stream obtained by the encoding unit 12 is referred to as a high-quality stream, and the first type of digital stream obtained by the encoding unit 11 is referred to as a low-quality stream.

[0032] The delay unit 13 delays the high-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 12, by a time period T. Fig. 4 shows how the high-quality stream is delayed relative to the low-quality stream by the delay unit 13. Both low-quality and high-quality streams are a sequence of packets to which identifiers P1, P2, ... are assigned. As indicated by Fig. 4, the first packet P1 of the high-quality stream is provided together with packet P6 of the low-quality stream after the delay unit 13 delays the high-quality stream by time period T.

[0033] The multiplexing unit 14 multiplexes the low-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 11 and the high-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 12 and delayed by the delay unit 13, into a multiplexed stream.

[0034] The modulating unit 15 modulates the multiplexed stream, and transmits a broadcast wave obtained as a result of the modulation onto a transmission path using one band for digital broadcasting.

[0035] Now, the receiving apparatuses will be described. Fig. 5 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses. As shown in Fig. 5, each receiving apparatus includes a demodulating unit 20, a demultiplexing unit 21, an accumulating unit 22, a complement data storage unit 23, a selection/output unit 24, a reproduction unit 25, and a reproduction control unit 26.

[0036] The demodulating unit 20 demodulates a broadcast wave received via the transmission path, performs an error correction onto the demodulated broadcast wave to obtain a multiplexed stream, and outputs the obtained multiplexed stream to the demultiplexing unit 21.

[0037] The demultiplexing unit 21 performs an error correction onto the multiplexed stream output from the demodulating unit 20, and demultiplexes the multiplexed stream into a high-quality stream and a low-quality stream. The demultiplexing unit 21 performs the error correction by calculating a bit error rate in the multiplexed stream, and judges whether the bit error rate exceeds a predetermined standard value, and if the judgment is positive, notifying the reproduction control unit 26 of the fact. The standard value used in the judgment is an acceptable limit within which the bit error can be corrected through an error correction. The notification that the bit error rate has exceeded the predetermined standard value indicates that the bit error found in the multiplexed stream cannot be corrected, and that the demultiplexing unit 21 has stopped execution of the demultiplexing process. The reproduction control unit 26 monitors how long the demultiplexing unit 21 stops execution of the demultiplexing process, and recognizes the time period detected by the monitoring as a reception-interrupted period. Conversely, a time period during which the digital streams are received normally is referred to as a normal reception period.

[0038] The accumulating unit 22 is a buffer memory in which part of the low-quality stream obtained by the demultiplexing is accumulated. The accumulating unit 22 accumulates a portion of the low-quality stream that corresponds to a time period T in the past up to the current time. In the present embodiment, the time period T is equal to the delay time T.

[0039] Fig. 6 shows the portion of the low-quality stream that is accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 . It is supposed here that among the packets in the low-quality stream, packet P10 was received most recently, and packets P6 to P10 received during the time period T are accumulated in the accumulating unit 22. It should be noted here that each receiving apparatus keeps receiving a new packet, and packets received during the time period T until the current time are always accumulated in the accumulating unit 22.

[0040] Figs. 7A to 7D shows how packets are written (accumulated) into the accumulating unit 22. Fig. 7A indicates that packet P11 is received newly when packets

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P6 to P10 have been accumulated in the accumulating unit 22. Fig. 7B indicates that the oldest packet P6 is deleted and the newly received packet P11 is written into the accumulating unit 22. This applies to the case where packet P12 is received. Fig. 7C, indicates that packet P12 is received newly when packets P7 to P11 have been accumulated in the accumulating unit 22. Fig. 7D indicates that the oldest packet P7 is deleted and the newly received packet P12 is written into the accumulating unit 22.

[0041] The above-described procedures are repeated and most recently received packets during the time period T are always accumulated in the accumulating unit 22. The capacity of the accumulating unit 22 is set to "time period T × 1 Mbps × 10 %". The accumulating unit 22 keeps on accumulating part of the low-quality stream as long as the low-quality stream is received normally. The accumulating unit 22 does not accumulate the low-quality stream when the low-quality stream is not received, namely in the reception-interrupted period.

[0042] It should be noted here that in the present embodiment, the time period T is equal to the delay time T for the sake of convenience, but in realty, the two time periods may differ from each other.

[0043] The complement data storage unit 23 stores complement data realized by supplementary audio data that is used to complement the stopped reproduction during the reception-interrupted period. The supplementary audio data is an announcement of the fact that the reproduction output has been stopped due to deteriorated condition of the transmission path.

[0044] The selection/output unit 24 selects one from: (a) a high-quality stream; (b) part of the low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22; and (c) audio data stored in the complement data storage unit 23, and outputs the selected one to the reproduction unit 25. The selection and output is performed by the selection/output unit 24 in accordance with instructions sent from the reproduction control unit 26.

[0045] The reproduction unit 25 reproduces the digital stream selectively output from the selection/output unit 24. Since the digital stream dealt with in the present embodiment is audio data, the reproduction unit 25 supplies audio outputs. When the part of the low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 is reproduced by the reproduction unit 25, the quality of the reproduced audio is low since only 10 % of the bit rate is assigned to the low-quality stream.

[0046] The reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to select and output the high-quality stream while the multiplexed stream is received normally. The reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to select and output the part of the low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 when it is notified from the demultiplexing unit 21 of occurrence of.a reception interruption. That is to say, the part of the low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 is output during the reception-interrupted period.

[0047] Fig. 8 shows reproduction control performed by the reproduction control unit 26. During the reception-interrupted period shown in Fig. 8, packets P11 to P16 of the low-quality stream and packets P6 to P11 of the high-quality stream are expected to be received. It is supposed here that it is inevitable that some packets drop out from both the high-quality and low-quality streams due to the reception interruption.

[0048] On the other hand, the accumulating unit 22 has accumulated packets of the low-quality stream during the time period T immediately before the start of the reception-interrupted period. In this example shown in Fig. 8, the accumulating unit 22 has accumulated packets P6 to P10 of the low-quality stream during the period. This is because as explained earlier, the reception of the high-quality stream is delayed from the reception of the low-quality stream. With this arrangement, it is possible for the reproduction control unit 26 to instruct the selection/output unit to select and output the packets of the low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 so that packets P6 to P10 of the low-quality stream are reproduced instead of packets P6 to P10 of the high-quality stream during the reception-interrupted period.

[0049] As apparent from above, both packets P6 to P10 of the low-quality stream and P6 to P10 of the high-quality stream have been generated from the same source and have the same broadcast contents, but are different in that while 90 % of the bit rate for one band for digital broadcasting are assigned to the high-quality stream, 10 % of the same bit rate for the band are assigned to the low-quality stream. When reproduced by the reproduction unit 25, the quality of the low-quality stream is lower than that of the high-quality stream, though the broadcast contents are the same. This gives an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality has been degraded.

[0050] Fig. 9 is a flowchart showing the reproduction control procedures of the reproduction control unit 26.

[0051] The process performed by the reproduction control unit 26 is broadly divided into the process for the normal reception period (steps S1-S2) and the process for the reception-interrupted period (steps S3-S7).

[0052] In the normal reception period, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to select and output the high-quality stream unless it is notified from the demultiplexing unit 21 that the bit error rate exceeded the standard value (steps S1-S2).

[0053] If it is notified from the demultiplexing unit 21 that the bit error rate exceeded the standard value, the reproduction control unit 26 performs the process for the reception-interrupted period, starting with obtaining a packet identifier of a packet of the high-quality stream that has been demultiplexed most recently by the demultiplexing unit 21 (step S3). The reproduction control unit 26 then judges whether a packet having a packet identifier that follows the packet identifier obtained in step S3 has been accumulated in the accumulating unit

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22 (step S4). If the judgment result is positive, the reproduction control unit 26 reads the packet from the accumulating unit 22 and instructs the selection/output unit 24 to output the read packet (step S5). The above steps S4-S6 are executed repeatedly during the reception-interrupted period, and the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 are output and reproduced in succession. If the reception-interrupted period is longer than a time required to reproduce the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22, it may happen that there is no packet accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 that can be reproduced before the reception-interrupted period ends. In this case, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to output the audio data stored in the complement data storage unit 23 (step S7). This enables the audiences to be informed that the reproduction output has been stopped due to deteriorated condition of the transmission path.

[0054] As described above, according to the broadcast system in the present embodiment, the low-quality stream is transmitted preceding the high-quality stream by apredetermined time period, and most recently received packets of the low-quality stream during the predetermined time period are always accumulated in the accumulating unit 22. And if a reception interruption occurs, the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22 are reproduced. This prevents the audiences from recognizing a suspended reproduction.

[0055] With the above-described arrangement in which the digital receiving apparatuses imitate deterioration of reproduction output that is observed in the analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, it is possible to prevent the audiences, who are familiar with deterioration in reproduction quality in such a case, from being confused by a sudden stop of reproduction supply.

[0056] It is preferable that the time period T is determined based on statistics of the reception-interrupted period for the transmission path. This is because with such an arrangement, if a reception interruption occurs, the high-quality stream is delayed by the time period T, packets of the low-quality stream are always accumulated during the time period T until the current time, and the reception-interrupted period lasts for the time period T, thus making it highly possible that the audiences can enjoy seamless reproduction of the broadcasting even during the reception-interrupted period.

[0057] In the present embodiment, the high-quality stream and the low-quality stream are multiplexed into one multiplexed stream, which is then transmitted onto a transmission path. However, the high-quality stream and the low-quality stream may be transmitted onto different transmission paths, respectively. For example, the high-quality stream and the low-quality stream may be transmitted onto transmission paths for the radio broadcasting and the cable broadcasting, respectively. In this case, even if a thunderstorm or the like causes a failure on a transmission path for the high-quality stream, the failure does not affect a transmission path for the low-quality stream, and the broadcast is provided without interruption.

[0058] Also, in the present embodiment, an audio announcement is provided as the complement data. However, music or an electronic sound may be provided instead of announcement. It is preferred that the music or electronic sound has such a tone as makes the audiences feel alarmed that the transmission path failure might have occurred.

Embodiment 2

[0059] Embodiment 2 relates to an improvement of the receiving apparatuses in live broadcasting of a sports game or the like. In Embodiment 1, the receiving apparatuses reproduce delayed high-quality stream during the normal reception period. This means that the audiences listen to the broadcast contents always after a delay of time period T. The audiences do not recognize such a delay when they listen to a pre-recordedbroadcast program. However, when the audiences listen to a live broadcast program of a sports game or the like, some problems may occur. For example, suppose a user is watching a real sports game listening to the live broadcasting of the sports game with a portable-type receiving apparatus. The user might be confused by the time lag between the real game and the broadcast of the game, which is caused by the receiving apparatus reproducing the delayed high-quality stream.

[0060] The present embodiment provides a method to solve the problem. Fig. 10 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 2. The construction resembles the construction shown in Fig. 1, but differs from it in that the multiplexing unit 21 outputs both the low-quality and high-quality streams directly to the selection/output unit 24, as well as outputting the low-quality stream to the accumulating unit 22. The receiving apparatuses in the present embodiment also include a switch 27 that receives an instruction by the user (audience) to switch between the low- and high-quality streams, and sends the instruction to the selection/output unit 24.

[0061] Now, the operation of the receiving apparatuses in the present embodiment will be described.

[0062] As described in Embodiment 1, the selection/output unit 24 receives the high-quality stream output from the multiplexing unit 21 and outputs it to the reproduction unit 25. However, if the user operates the switch 27 to switch from the high-quality stream to low-quality stream, the selection/output unit 24 receives the low-quality stream from the multiplexing unit 21 and outputs it to the reproduction unit 25.

[0063] As described above, audiences can select either the high-quality stream which is provided with delay or the low-quality stream which is provided without delay. This function facilitates the audiences, especially when they are watching a sports game while listening

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to the broadcast of the game since they can select the reproduction of the low-quality stream and enjoy watching the game without being confused by the time lag between the real game and the broadcast of the game.

Embodiment 3

[0064] In Embodiment 3, the imitation of analog receiving apparatuses by the digital receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 1 is performed in a more realistic manner. Fig. 11 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 3. Fig. 11 differs from Fig. 5 in that it additionally includes a superposing unit 28 and a pilot lamp 29.

[0065] The superposing unit 28 superposes a noise signal on the reproduced low-quality stream output from the reproduction unit 25 during the reception-interrupted period. The noise signal has a signal waveform that resembles the white noise. When the noise signal is superposed on the reproduced low-quality stream, the audiences can hear, together with voices/sounds output from the reproduction unit 25, a burst of noise that is familiar to them through analog broadcasting output from analog receiving apparatuses. This may give an impression to the audiences that they are listening to an analog receiving apparatus.

[0066] The pilot lamp 29 is a light-emitting element such as a light-emitting diode, where the light emitted from the pilot lamp indicates a state of stream reception. The reproduction control unit 26 controls the pilot lamp 29 for the audiences to visually distinguish the reception-interrupted period from the normal reception period. More specifically, the reproduction control unit 26 causes the pilot lamp 29 to blink stably during the normal reception period, and in contrast, to emit light intermittently on an unstable basis during the reception-interrupted period. This operation is an imitation of the blinking of a pilot lamp that is provided in many analog receiving apparatuses.

[0067] As described above, according to the present embodiment, the digital receiving apparatuses imitate the noise andblinking of a pilot lamp which have been familiar to the audiences of analog receiving apparatuses, thus preventing the audiences from sensing discomfort at the digital broadcasting.

Embodiment 4

[0068] In Embodiment 1, the low-quality stream and the high-quality stream are transmitted onto a transmission path. In Embodiment 4, n digital streams are transmitted onto a transmission path. Fig. 12 shows the construction of a transmission apparatus in Embodiment 4. In Fig. 12, it is presumed that the number of digital streams "n" is 3. The encoding units 11 and 12 shown in Fig. 1 are replaced with a low-rate encoding unit 31, a middle-rate encoding unit 32, and a high-rate encoding unit 33 in Fig. 12. The encoding units 31-33 encodes analog signals output from the signal source 10. Embodiment 4 differs from Embodiment 1 in the bit rate assigned to each digital stream by each encoding unit. More specifically, in Embodiment 1, the encoding units 11 and 12 assign 10 % and 90 % of the bit rate for one band to the two types of digital streams, respectively, while in Embodiment 4, the encoding units assign 5 %, 10 %, and 85 % of the bit rate for one band to three types of digital streams, respectively.

[0069] The delay unit 13 shown in Fig. 1 is replaced with delay units 34 and 35 in Fig. 12. The delay units 34 and 35 delays digital streams generated by the encoding units 32 and 33, respectively. The delay unit 34 delays digital streams generated by the middle-rate encoding unit 32 by a time period T/2, and outputs the delayed digital streams to the multiplexing unit 14. The delay unit 35 delays digital streams generated by the high-rate encoding unit 33 by a time period T, and outputs the delayed digital streams to the multiplexing unit 14.

[0070] With the above-described replacement of components, the multiplexing unit 14 shown in Fig. 12 multiplexes the following three types of digital streams into one multiplexed stream: (1) a digital stream generated by the low-rate encoding unit 31; (2) a digital stream generated by the middle-rate encoding unit 32 and delayed by the delay unit 34 by time period T/2; and (3) a digital stream generated by the high-rate encoding unit 33 and delayed by the delay unit 35 by time period T.

[0071] Now, the construction of the receiving apparatuses will be described. Fig. 13 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses. In Fig. 13, the accumulating unit 22 shown in Fig. 5 has been replaced with accumulating units 36 and 37. The accumulating unit 37 accumulates in itself a low-quality digital stream to which 5 % of the bit rate for one band is assigned. The accumulating unit 36 accumulates in itself a middle-quality digital stream to which 10 % of the bit rate for one band is assigned and delayed by time period T/2.

[0072] In Embodiment 4, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to select and output a high-quality digital stream to which 85 % of the bit rate for one band is assigned and delayed by time period T in the normal reception period. With this arrangement, the high-quality digital stream is reproduced by the reproduction unit 25 during the normal reception period.

[0073] The reproduction control during the reception-interrupted period will be described next. It is presumed here for the sake of convenience that the reception-interrupted period lasts for time period T. During the first half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to output the middle-quality digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 36. With this change of outputs, the quality of data reproducedby the reproduction unit 25 is degraded in proportionate to the change from 85 % to 10 % of the bit rate. Duringthesecondhalf (T/2) ofthereception-interruptedperiod, the reproduction

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control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24 to output the low-quality digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 37. With this change of outputs, the quality of data reproducedby the reproduction unit 25 is degraded in proportionate to the change from 10 % to 5 % of the bit rate.

[0074] As described above, in the present embodiment, in the normal reception period, data is reproduced with a quality level that is proportionate to 85 % of the bit rate, and in the reception-interrupted period, first, data is reproduced with a quality level that is proportionate to 10 %, and then with a quality level that is proportionate to 5 % of the bit rate. This would give an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality is gradual-lydeteriorated, making them feel as if they were listening to an analog receiver.

[0075] It should be noted here that the distribution rate of 85 %, 10 %, and 5 % is only an example, and it may be varied in so far as it gives an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality is gradually deteriorated.

Embodiment 5

[0076] In Embodiment 1, only one signal source is provided. In Embodiment 5, different signal sources are provided for video and audio, respectively. Fig. 14 shows the construction of the broadcast system in Embodiment 5. Signal sources 10a and 10b generate audio and video analog signals, respectively. Encoding units 11a and 12a and delay unit 13a are provided in correspondence with the signal source 10a, and encoding units 11b and 12b and delay unit 13b are provided in correspondence with the signal source 10b. With this construction, a low-quality stream and a high-quality stream are generated and the high-quality stream is delayed, for each of the audio and video signals.

[0077] Video data requires a higher bit rate in transmission than does audio data. As a result, the encoding unit 11a, 12a, 11b, and 12b assign different bit rates to digital streams, respectively.

[0078] As is the case with Embodiment 1, the encoding units 11a and 12a assign 10 % and 90 % of the bit rate (1 Mbps) for one band to the low- and high-quality streams for audio, respectively. It is supposed here that the bit rate for video data transmission in digital broadcasting is 5 Mbps. The encoding units 11b and 12b assign 10 % and 90 % of the bit rate (5 Mbps) for one band to the low- and high-quality streams for video, respectively.

[0079] That is to say, the encoding by the encoding units 11a, 12a, 11b, and 12b provides: (1) an audio digital stream to which 10 % of 1 Mbps is assigned; (2) an audio digital stream to which 90 % of 1 Mbps is assigned; (3) a video digital stream to which 10 % of 5 Mbps is assigned; and (4) a video digital stream to which 90 % of 5 Mbps is assigned. It should be noted here that 5 Mbps for video digital stream is given only as an example, and the bit rate may differ from this.

[0080] The delay units 13a and 13b delay the audio and video digital streams, respectively. As is the case with Embodiment 1, the delay unit 13a delays the audio high-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 12a by time period T. The delay unit 13b delays the video high-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 12b by time period T/2. The reason why the delay given by the encoding unit 12b is half the delay given by the encoding unit 12a is that the capacity of the accumulating unit 22 increases as the time period T increases, where the capacity of the accumulating unit 22 is calculated by: time period T $\times$ 1 Mbps $\times$ 10 %.

[0081] The video low-quality stream receives higher assignment of the bit rate, which is 5 Mbps $\times$ 10 % in the present embodiment, than the audio low-quality stream, which is 1 Mbps $\times$ 10 %. If the data is accumulated with this rate for the time period T, the video accumulating unit would require a storage capacity five times that of the audio accumulating unit. As a result, the video high-quality stream is delayed by T/2, so that the amount of the low-quality stream to be accumulated in the receiving apparatuses is reduced as much.

[0082] The low- and high-quality streams for audio and video, with the high-quality streams being delayed, are output to the multiplexing unit 14 to be multiplexed into streams.

[0083] The multiplexing unit 14 multiplexes all the types of digital streams into one multiplexed stream, and outputs the generated multiplexed stream to the modulating unit 15.

[0084] Up to now, the construction and operation of the transmission apparatus in Embodiment 5 has been described. Now, the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 5 will be described.

[0085] Fig. 15 shows the construction of the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 5. In the receiving apparatuses in Embodiment 5, the accumulating unit 22, the selection/output unit 24, and the reproduction unit 25 are provided for each audio and video. More specifically, an accumulating unit 22a, aselection/output unit 24a, and a reproduction unit 25a deal with the low- and high-quality streams for audio, and an accumulating unit 22b, a selection/output unit 24b, and a reproduction unit 25b deal with the low- and high-quality streams for video.

[0086] The demultiplexing unit 21 demultiplexes a multiplexed stream to obtain four types of digital streams: an audio low-quality stream; a video low-quality stream; an audio high-quality stream; and a video high-quality stream.

[0087] The accumulating unit 22a accumulates part of the audio low-quality stream that has been obtained during a time period T until the current time.

[0088] The accumulating unit 22b accumulates part of the video low-quality stream that has been obtained during a time period T/2 until the current time.

[0089] The selection/output unit 24a selects one among (i) the audio high-quality stream output from the

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demultiplexing unit 21 and (ii) part of the audio low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22a, and outputs the selected audio digital stream to the reproduction unit 25a.

[0090] The selection/output unit 24b selects one among (i) the video high-quality stream output from the demultiplexing unit 21 and (ii) part of the video low-quality stream accumulated in the accumulating unit 22b, and outputs the selected video digital stream to the reproduction unit 25b.

[0091] The reproduction unit 25a reproduces the audio digital stream output from the selection/output unit 24a.

[0092] The reproduction unit 25b reproduces the video digital stream output from the selection/output unit 24b.

[0093] The reproduction control unit 26 controls the output of the selection/output units 24a and 24b. The reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24a to output the audio high-quality stream and the selection/output unit 24b to output the video high-quality stream while the multiplexed stream is normally received. The reproduction control unit 26 performs the reproduction control during the reception-interrupted period as follows, where it is supposed that the reception-interrupted period lasts for time period T.

[0094] During the first half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24a to output the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22a, and instructs the selection/output unit 24b to output the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22b. Since the accumulating unit 22a accumulates part of the audio low-quality stream and the accumulating unit 22b accumulates part of the video low-quality stream, the audio low-quality stream and the video low-quality stream are reproduced during the first half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period.

[0095] During the second half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period, the reproduction control unit 26 instructs the selection/output unit 24a to output the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22a. However, since all the packets accumulated in the accumulating unit 22b, that is, part of the video low-quality stream has been reproduced during the first half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period, only the audio low-quality stream is reproduced during the second half (T/2) of the reception-interrupted period.

[0096] As described above, according to the present embodiment, the "high-quality audio + high-quality video" output that is supplied during the normal reception period changes to the "low-quality audio + low-quality video" output if a failure occurs to the transmission path. Furthermore, if the time reception interruption continues for a certain time period, the reproduction changes from "audio + video" to "only audio" . That is to say, the reproduced data changes step by step from the high-quality audio and video in the normal reception period to the low-quality audio and video, and to the only audio without video. In this way, the digital receiving apparatuses imitate the gradual deterioration of reproduction output that is observed in the analog receiving apparatuses when a transmission path failure occurs, giving an impression to the audiences that the reproduction quality is gradually degraded in the same manner as when they are listening to analog receivers.

Embodiment 6

[0097] The encoding units 11 and 12 in Embodiment 1 perform a fixed-bit-rate encoding. In Embodiment 6, the transmission apparatus performs a variable-length encoding.

[0098] Fig. 16 shows the construction of a transmission apparatus in a broadcast system in Embodiment 6. In comparison with Fig. 1, Fig. 16 includes encoding units 60 and 62 respectively in place of the encoding units 11 and 12, and includes buffers 61 and 63 that respectively correspond to the encoding units 11 and 12.

[0099] The encoding unit 60 generates a low-quality stream by performing a variable-length encoding in which it assigns a variable-length bit rate to each audio frame.

[0100] The buffer 61 stores 30 seconds of audio frames among those constituting the low-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 60.

[0101] The encoding unit 62 generates a high-quality stream by performing a variable-length encoding in which it assigns a variable-length bit rate to each audio frame.

[0102] The buffer 63 stores 30 seconds of audio frames among those constituting the high-quality stream generated by the encoding unit 62.

[0103] The multiplexing unit 14 multiplexes the 30 seconds of audio frames stored in the buffer 61 with the 30 seconds of audio frames stored in the buffer 63 into one multiplexed stream, and outputs the multiplexed stream to the modulating unit 15. The modulating unit 15 outputs the multiplexed stream at 1 Mbps of the bit rate for one band.

[0104] Here, the variable-length encoding performed by the encoding units 60 and 62 will be described.

[0105] In the variable-length encoding, the encoding unit 60 (62) checks each section of an analog signal that corresponds to each audio frame and detects an amount of audible component the section contains, assigns a bit rate to each section in proportionate to the detected amount of audible component, and generates audio frames by encoding each section in accordance with the assigned bit rate. With this arrangement, as much amount of bit rate as omitted from the audio frames that contain less amounts of audible component can be appropriated to the audio frames that contain more amounts of audible component. This enables the quality of the audio reproduction to be improved in total.

[0106] The bit rate assigned to each audio frame by

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the encoding unit 60 is a part of the number of bits obtained by "1 Mbps × 10 % × 30 seconds" . That is to say, although the encoding unit 60 assigns a variable-length bit rate to each audio frame, the total bit rate for 30 seconds does not exceed "1 Mbps × 10 %".

[0107] Similarly, the bit rate assigned to each audio frame by the encoding unit 62 is a part of the number of bits obtained by "1 Mbps × 90 % × 30 seconds". That is to say, although the encoding unit 62 assigns a variable-length bit rate to each audio frame, the total bit rate for 30 seconds does not exceed "1 Mbps × 90 %".

[0108] This is because the 30 seconds of audio frames stored in the buffer 61 and the 30 seconds of audio frames stored in the buffer 63, which are multiplexed together and output onto a transmission path, should not exceed 1 Mbps of the bit rate for one band.

[0109] As described above, the present embodiment enables the quality of the audio reproduction to be improved in total by assigning higher bit rates to the audio frames that contain more amounts of audible component, and assigning lower bit rates to the audio frames that contain less amounts of audible component.

[0110] It should be noted here that the time period of 30 seconds is only an example given for the sake of convenience, and it may be either increased or decreased.

Embodiment 7

[0111] In Embodiments 1 to 6, the signal source 10 generates an analog signal, and the encoding units 11 and 12 perform a quantization process with different numbers of quantization bits, so that two digital streams are transmitted at different bit rates on transmission paths. In Embodiment 7, the signal source 10 generates a digital signal. That is say, the signal source 10 generates a quantized digital signal and the encoding units 11 and 12 encode the quantized digital signal. In this encoding, the encoding amount in the encoding unit 11 is set to a larger value, and the encoding amount in the encoding unit 12 is set to a smaller value. It is possible to assign different bit rates to two digital streams for transmission only by adjusting the encoding amount as explained above. It is accordingly possible to use a digital signal source that has been encoded by MPEG and accumulated, as it is. This facilitates the broadcasting stations.

[0112] In the transmission apparatus in Embodiments 1-7, the delay unit 13 operates after the encoding unit 12 . However, the delay unit 13 may operate before the encoding unit 12. That is to say, the delay unit 13 may delay the signal from the signal source 10 before the signal is input to the encoding unit 12.

[0113] The features of the transmission apparatus and the receiving apparatuses described in Embodiments 1-7 can be realized by a computer-readable program. Such a computer-readable program can be executed separately from the transmission apparatus and the receiving apparatuses. Also, such a programmay be recorded into a computer-readable recording medium, may be transferred or lent to other parties via the recording medium, and may be executed by the parties. Also, such a program may be distributed on a network and executed by the receivers.

[0114] Although the present invention has been fully described by way of examples with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is to be noted that various changes and modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Therefore, unless such changes and modifications depart from the scope of the present invention, they should be construed as being included therein.

Claims

1. A broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including:

   a generating unit operable to generate a first digital stream and a second digital stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream; and
   a transmission unit operable to transmit the first and second digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream relative to the first digital stream,
   the receiving apparatus including:

   a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second digital stream in a normal state; and
   a reproduction control unit operable to, if a transmission path failure occurs, cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the second digital stream, a portion of the first digital stream that has been received before the occurrence of the transmission path failure.

2. The broadcast system of Claim 1, wherein
   the receiving apparatus further includes:

   a receiving unit operable to receive packets constituting the first and second digital streams for each digital stream; and
   an accumulating unit operable to accumulate one or more packets of the first digital stream received by the receiving unit during a predetermined time period until a current time, wherein
   the reproduction control unit causes the reproduction unit to reproduce the one or more packets of the first digital stream accumulated in the

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accumulating unit, if a transmission path failure occurs.

3. The broadcast system of Claim 2, wherein
the predetermined time period is equal to a time period by which the second digital stream is delayed by the transmission unit.

4. The broadcast system of Claim 2, wherein
the receiving apparatus further includes
a write control unit operable to, each time the receiving unit newly receives a packet, write the newly received packet into the accumulating unit after deleting an oldest packet among the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit.

5. The broadcast system of Claim 4, wherein
the predetermined time period is determined based on statistics of a time period for which a transmission path failure continues.

6. The broadcast system of Claim 1, wherein
the receiving apparatus superposes a signal resembling a noise on the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit when the one or more packets are reproduced due to occurrence of a transmission path failure.

7. The broadcast system of Claim 1, wherein
the receiving apparatus is provided with a pilot lamp that emits light in a manner in which a normal state is distinguished from an abnormal state, wherein in the normal state, the second digital stream is reproduced, and in the abnormal state, the first digital stream is reproduced.

8. The broadcast system of Claim 2, wherein
if a transmission path failure continues exceeding the predetermined time period during which the one or more packets are accumulated in the accumulating unit, the receiving apparatus reproduces supplementary data so as to complement the reproduction of the accumulated packets.

9. The broadcast system of Claim 1, wherein
the receiving apparatus further includes:

an operation receiving unit operable to receive input of an operation by a user to request real time reproduction; and
a switch unit operable to switch from reproduction of the second digital stream to reproduction of the first digital stream if the operation receiving unit receives the input of the operation by the user.

10. The broadcast system of Claim 1, wherein
the generating unit of the transmission apparatusincludes two encoders that respectively generate the first digital stream and the second digital stream by performing a variable-length encoding onto an analog signal.

11. A broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including:

a generating unit operable to generate a first digital stream, a second digital stream, and a third digital stream by encoding a same signal respectively at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is the lowest among the encoding bits rates, an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream is the middle between encoding bit rates for the first and third digital streams, and an encoding bit rate for the third digital stream is the highest among the encoding bits rates; and
a transmission unit operable to transmit the first, second, and third digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream by time period T1 and delaying the third digital stream by time period T2, wherein T2 > T1,
the receiving apparatus including:

an accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first and second digital streams received from the transmission apparatus;
a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the thirddigital stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the third digital stream, the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce the part of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit following the reproduction of the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit.

12. A broadcast system including a transmission apparatus and a receiving apparatus, the transmission apparatus including:

a first generating unit operable to generate a first audio stream and a second audio stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first audio stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second audio stream;
a second generating unit operable to generate

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a first video stream and a second video stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first video stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second video stream; and
a transmission unit operable to transmit the first and second audio streams and the first and second video streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second video stream by a time period T1 and delaying the second audio stream by a time period T2, wherein T2 > T1,
the receiving apparatus including:

a first accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first video stream received during the time period T1 until a current time;
a second accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first audio stream received during the time period T2 until the current time;
a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second video stream and the second audio stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce (i) the part of the first video stream accumulated in the first accumulating unit and (ii) the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit for the time period T1 if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce, after the time period T1, the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit.

13. A receiving apparatus for use in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first digital stream and a second digital stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream, and transmits the first and second digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream relative to the first digital stream, the receiving apparatus comprising:

a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second digital stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control unit operable to, if a transmission path failure occurs, cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the second digital stream, a portion of the first digital stream that has been received before the occurrence of the transmission path failure.

14. The receiving apparatus of Claim 13 further comprising :

a receiving unit operable to receive packets constituting the first and second digital streams for each digital stream; and
an accumulating unit operable to accumulate one or more packets of the first digital stream received by the receiving unit during a predetermined time period until a current time, wherein
the reproduction control unit causes the reproduction unit to reproduce the one or more packets of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit, if a transmission path failure occurs.

15. The receiving apparatus of Claim 14, wherein
the predetermined time period is equal to a time period by which the second digital stream is delayed by the transmission apparatus.

16. The receiving apparatus of Claim 14 further comprising
a write control unit operable to, each time the receiving unit newly receives a packet, write the newly received packet into the accumulating unit after deleting an oldest packet among the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit.

17. The receiving apparatus of Claim 16, wherein
the predetermined time period is determined based on statistics of a time period for which a transmission path failure continues.

18. The receiving apparatus of Claim 13, wherein
the receiving apparatus superposes a signal resembling a noise on the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit when the one or more packets are reproduced due to occurrence of a transmission path failure.

19. The receiving apparatus of Claim 13, wherein
the receiving apparatus is provided with a pilot lamp that emits light in a manner in which a normal state is distinguished from an abnormal state, wherein in the normal state, the second digital stream is reproduced with delay, and in the abnormal state, the first digital stream is reproduced without delay.

20. The receiving apparatus of Claim 13, wherein
if a transmission path failure continues exceeding the predetermined time period during which the one or more packets are accumulated in the accumulating unit, the receiving apparatus reproduces supplementary data so as to complement the reproduction of the accumulated packets.

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21. The receiving apparatus of Claim 13 further comprising:

an operation receiving unit operable to receive input of an operation by a user to request real time reproduction; and
a switch unit operable to switch from reproduction of the second digital stream to reproduction of the first digital stream if the operation receiving unit receives the input of the operation by the user.

22. A receiving apparatus for use in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first digital stream, a second digital stream, and a third digital stream by encoding a same signal respectively at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is the lowest among the encoding bits rates, an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream is the middle between encoding bit rates for the first and third digital streams, and an encoding bit rate for the third digital stream is the highest among the encoding bits rates, and transmits the first, second, and third digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream by time period T1 and delaying the third digital stream by time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the receiving apparatus comprising:

an accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first and second digital streams received from the transmission apparatus;
a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the third digital stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce, instead of the third digital stream, the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce the part of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit following the reproduction of the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit.

23. A receiving apparatus for use in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first audio stream and a second audio stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first audio stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second audio stream, generates a first video stream and a second video stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first video stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second video stream, and transmits the first and second audio streams and the first and second video streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second video stream by a time period T1 and delaying the second audio stream by a time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the receiving apparatus comprising:

a first accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first video stream received during the time period T1 until a current time;
a second accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first audio stream received during the time period T2 until the current time;
a reproduction unit operable to reproduce the second video stream and the second audio stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control unit operable to cause the reproduction unit to reproduce (i) the part of the first video stream accumulated in the first accumulating unit and (ii) the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit for the time period T1 if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 ormore, and to reproduce, after the time period T1, the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit.

24. A program that causes a computer to execute a reception process in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first digital stream and a second digital stream from a same signal source by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream, and transmits the first and second digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream relative to the first digital stream, the reception process including:

a reproduction step for reproducing the second digital stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control step for causing, if a transmission path failure occurs, the reproduction step to reproduce, instead of the second digital stream, a portion of the first digital stream that has been.received before the occurrence of the. transmission path failure.

25. The program of Claim 24, wherein
the computer includes:

a receiving unit operable to receive packets constituting the first and second digital streams for each digital stream; and
an accumulating unit operable to accumulate one or more packets of the first digital stream received by the receiving unit during a predetermined time period until a current time,

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wherein
the reproduction control step causes the reproduction step to reproduce the one or more packets of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit, if a transmission path failure occurs.

26. The program of Claim 25, wherein
the predetermined time period is equal to a time period by which the second digital stream is delayed by the transmission apparatus.

27. The program of Claim 25, wherein
the reception process further includes
a write control step for, each time the receiving unit newly receives a packet, writing the newly received packet into the accumulating unit after deleting an oldest packet among the one or more packets accumulated in the accumulating unit.

28. The program of Claim 27, wherein
the predetermined time period is determined based on statistics of a time period for which a transmission path failure continues.

29. The program of Claim 24, wherein
the computer further includes
an operation receiving unit operable to receive input of an operation by a user to request real time reproduction, and
the reception process further includes
a switch step for switching from reproduction of the second digital stream to reproduction of the first digital stream if the operation receiving unit receives the input of the operation by the user.

30. A program that causes a computer to execute a reception process in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first digital stream, a second digital stream, and a third digital stream by encoding a same signal respectively at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first digital stream is the lowest among the encoding bits rates, an encoding bit rate for the second digital stream is the middle between encoding bit rates for the first and third digital streams, and an encoding bit rate for the third digital stream is the highest among the encoding bits rates, and transmits the first, second, and third digital streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second digital stream by time period T1 and delaying the third digital streamby time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the computer including
an accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first and second digital streams received from the transmission apparatus,
the reception process including:
a reproduction step for reproducing the third digital stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control step for causing the reproduction step to reproduce, instead of the third digital stream, the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce the part of the first digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit following the reproduction of the part of the second digital stream accumulated in the accumulating unit.

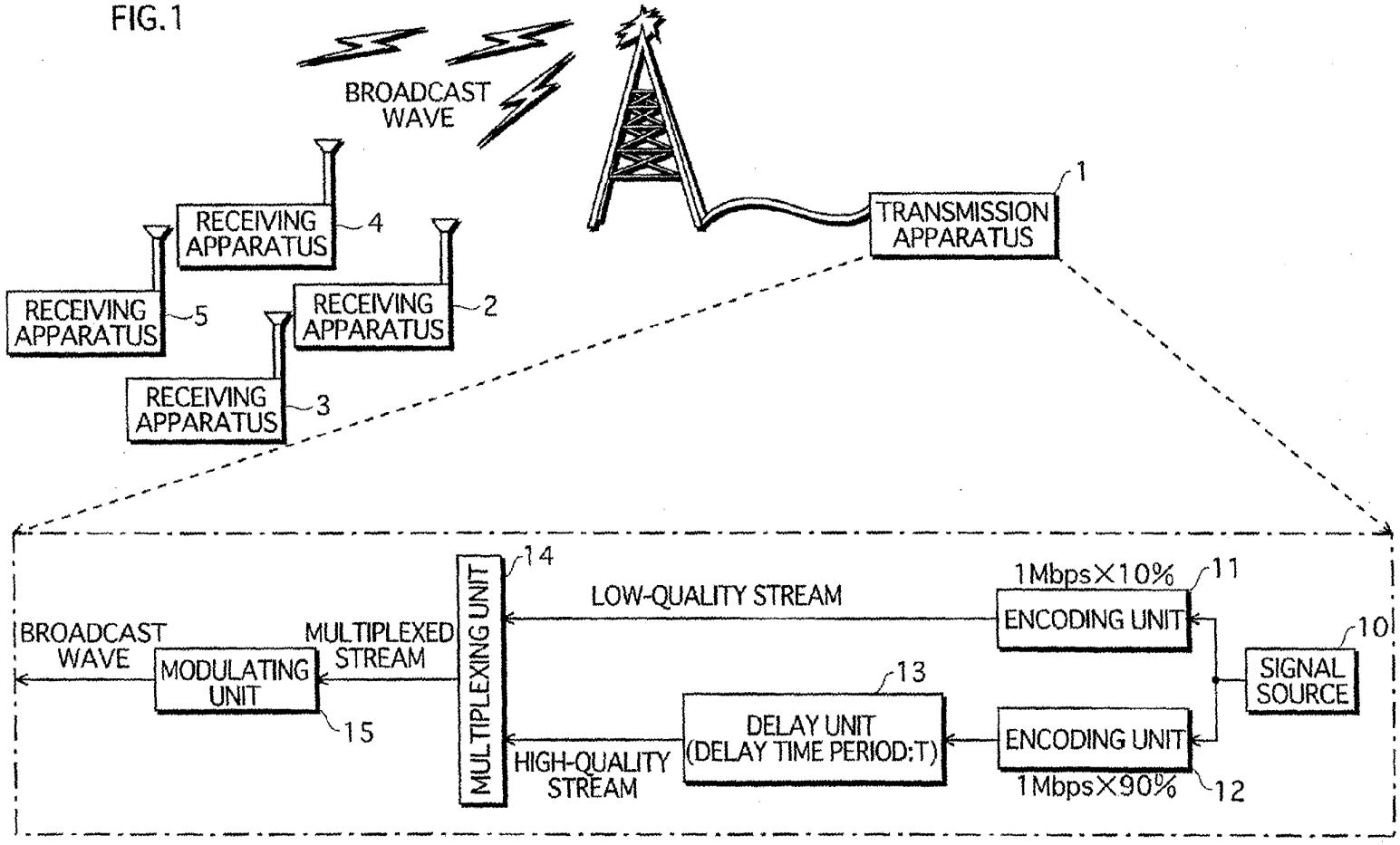
31. A program that causes a computer to execute a reception process in a broadcast system including a transmission apparatus that generates a first audio stream and a second audio stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first audio stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second audio stream, generates a first video stream and a second video stream by encoding a same signal at different encoding bit rates, where an encoding bit rate for the first video stream is lower than an encoding bit rate for the second video stream, and transmits the first and second audio streams and the first and second video streams onto a transmission path while delaying the second video stream by a time period T1 and delaying the second audio stream by a time period T2, wherein T2 > T1, the computer including:

a first accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first video stream received during the time period T1 until a current time; and
a second accumulating unit operable to accumulate part of the first audio stream received during the time period T2 until the current time,
the reception process comprising:

a reproduction step for reproducing the secondvideo stream and the second audio stream in a normal state; and
a reproduction control step for causing the reproduction step to reproduce (i) the part of the first video stream accumulated in the first accumulating unit and (ii) the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit for the time period T1 if a transmission path failure continues for the time period T2 or more, and to reproduce, after the time period T1, the part of the first audio stream accumulated in the second accumulating unit.

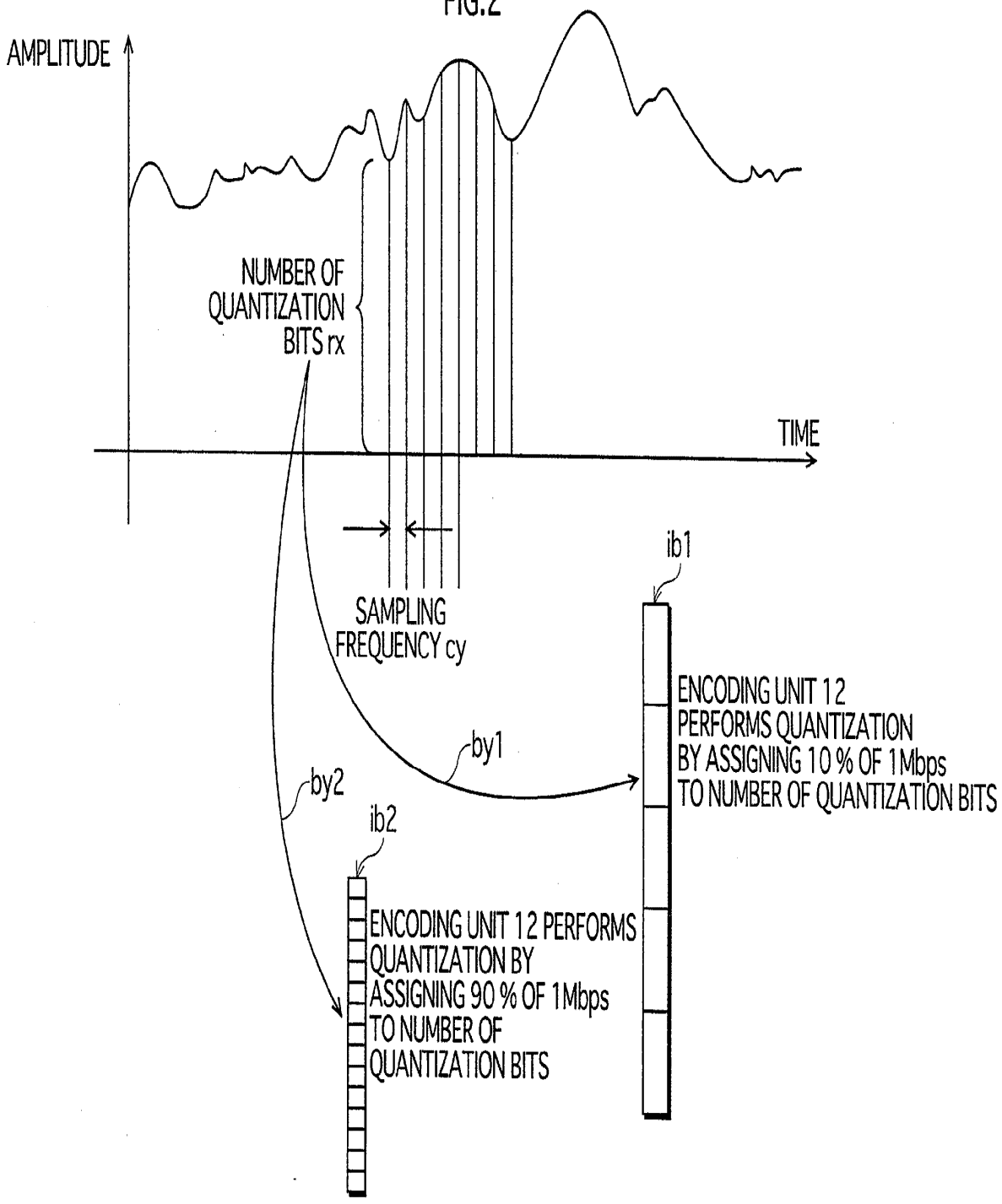
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FIG.1



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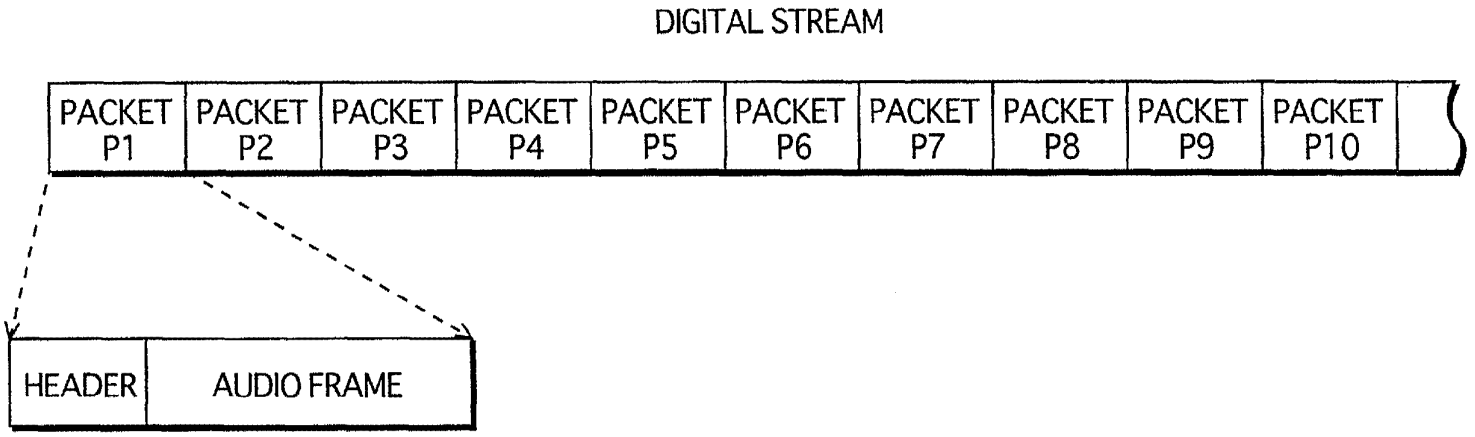
FIG.2



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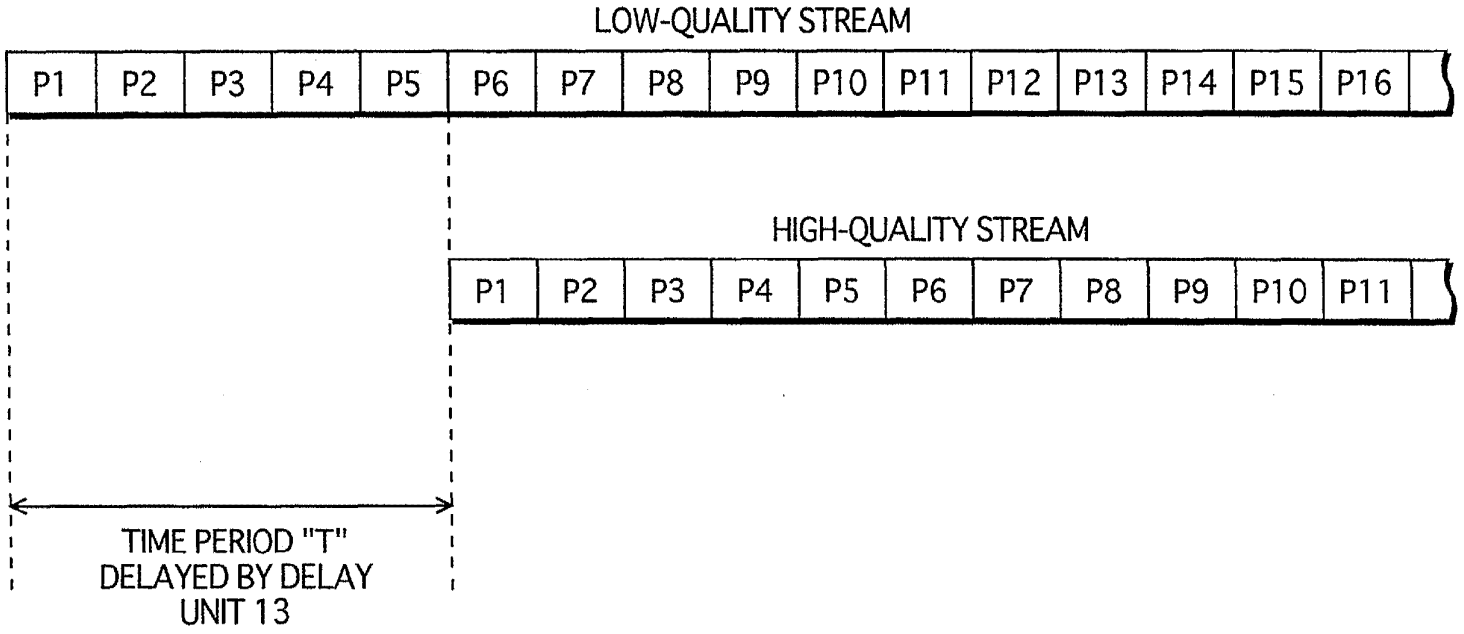
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FIG.3



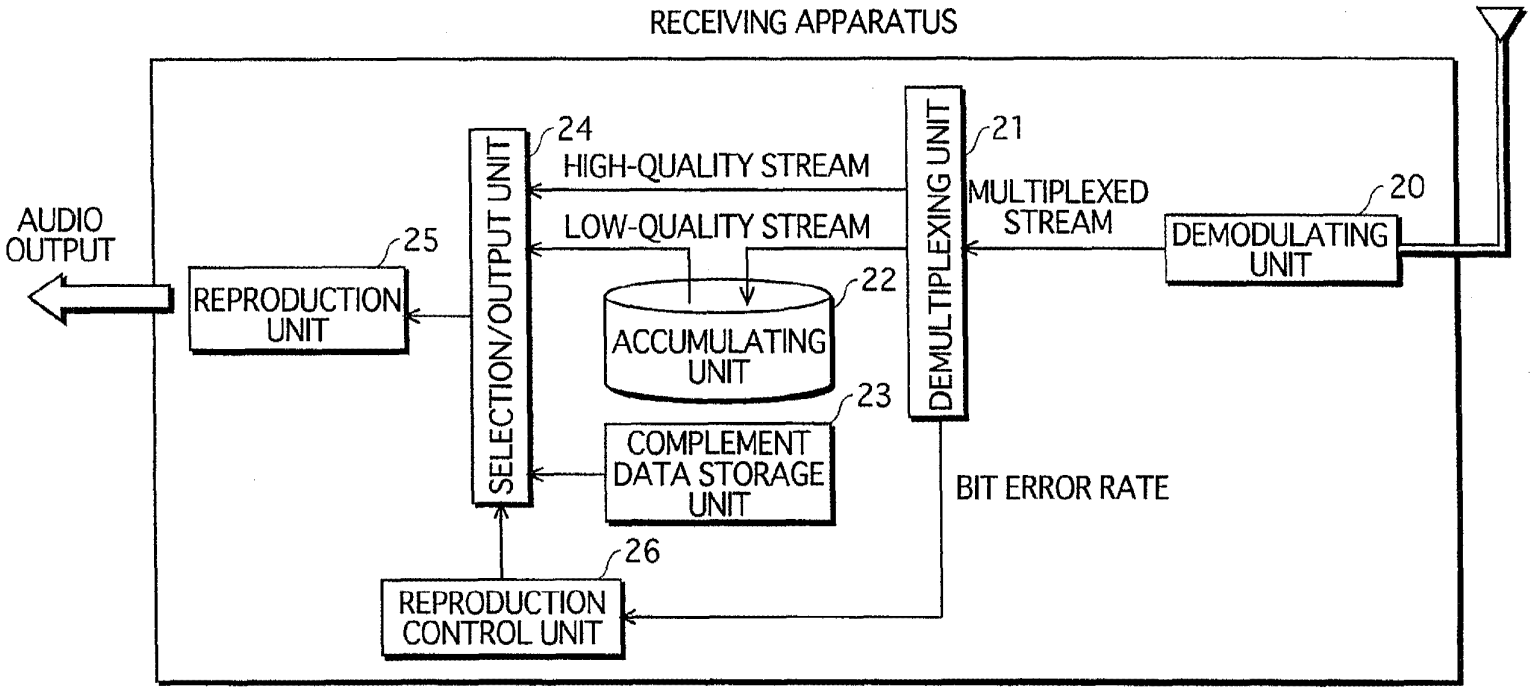
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FIG.4



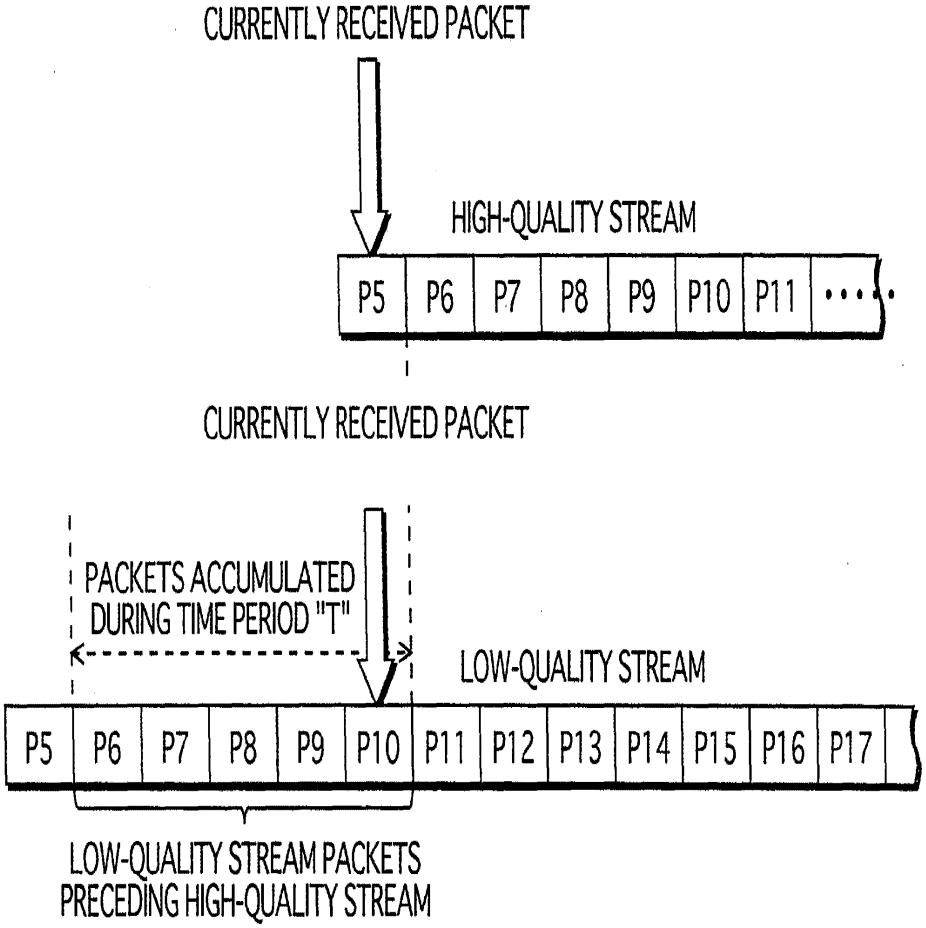
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FIG.5



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FIG.6



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FIG.7A

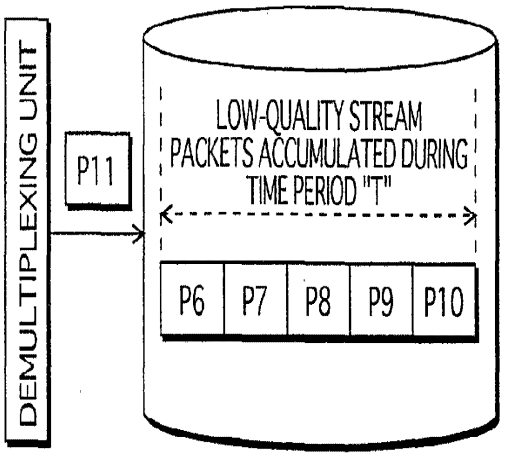


FIG.7B

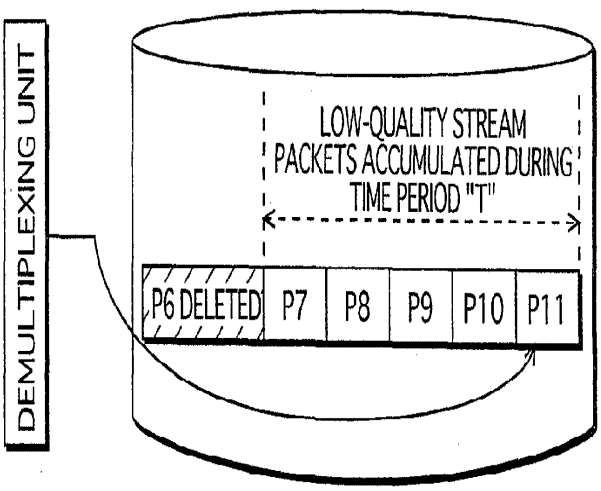


FIG.7C

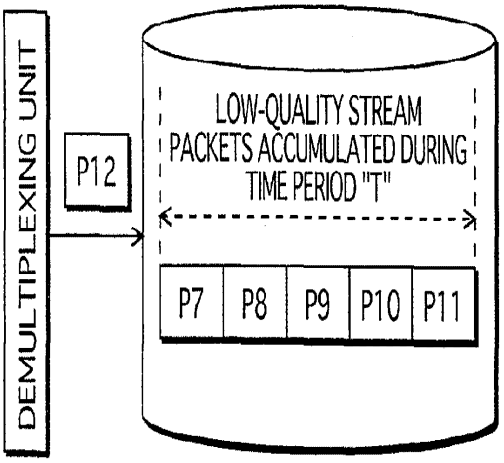
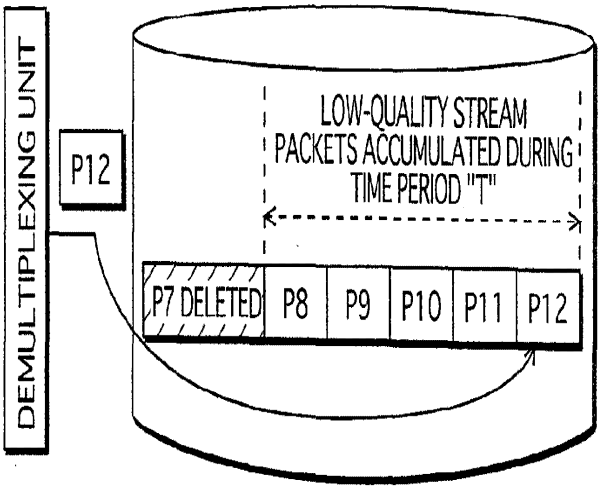


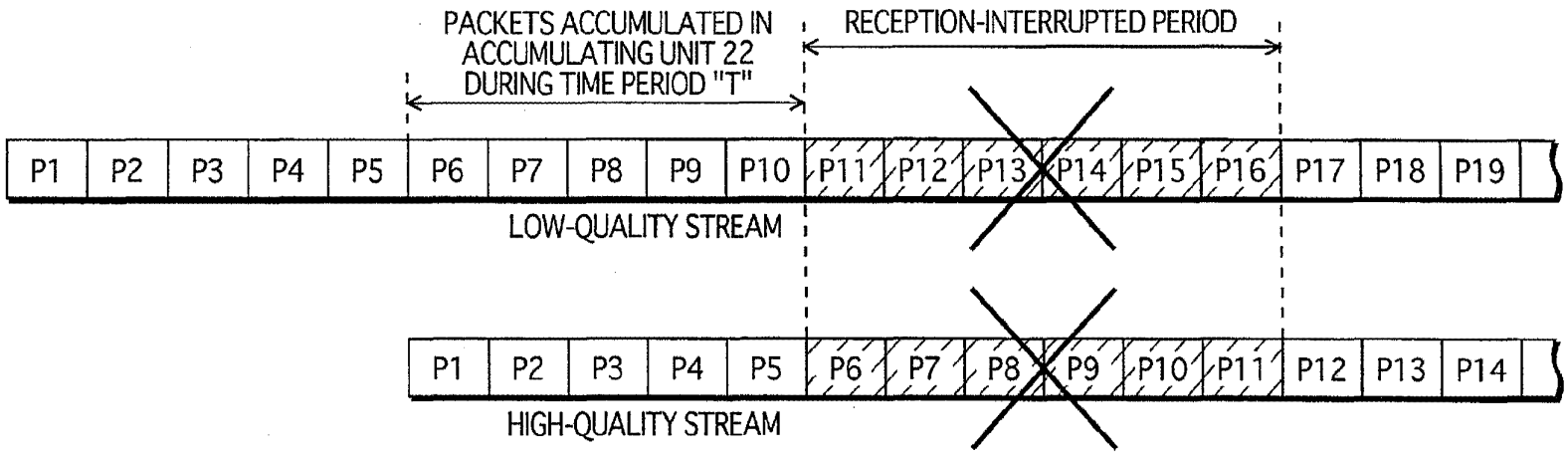
FIG.7D



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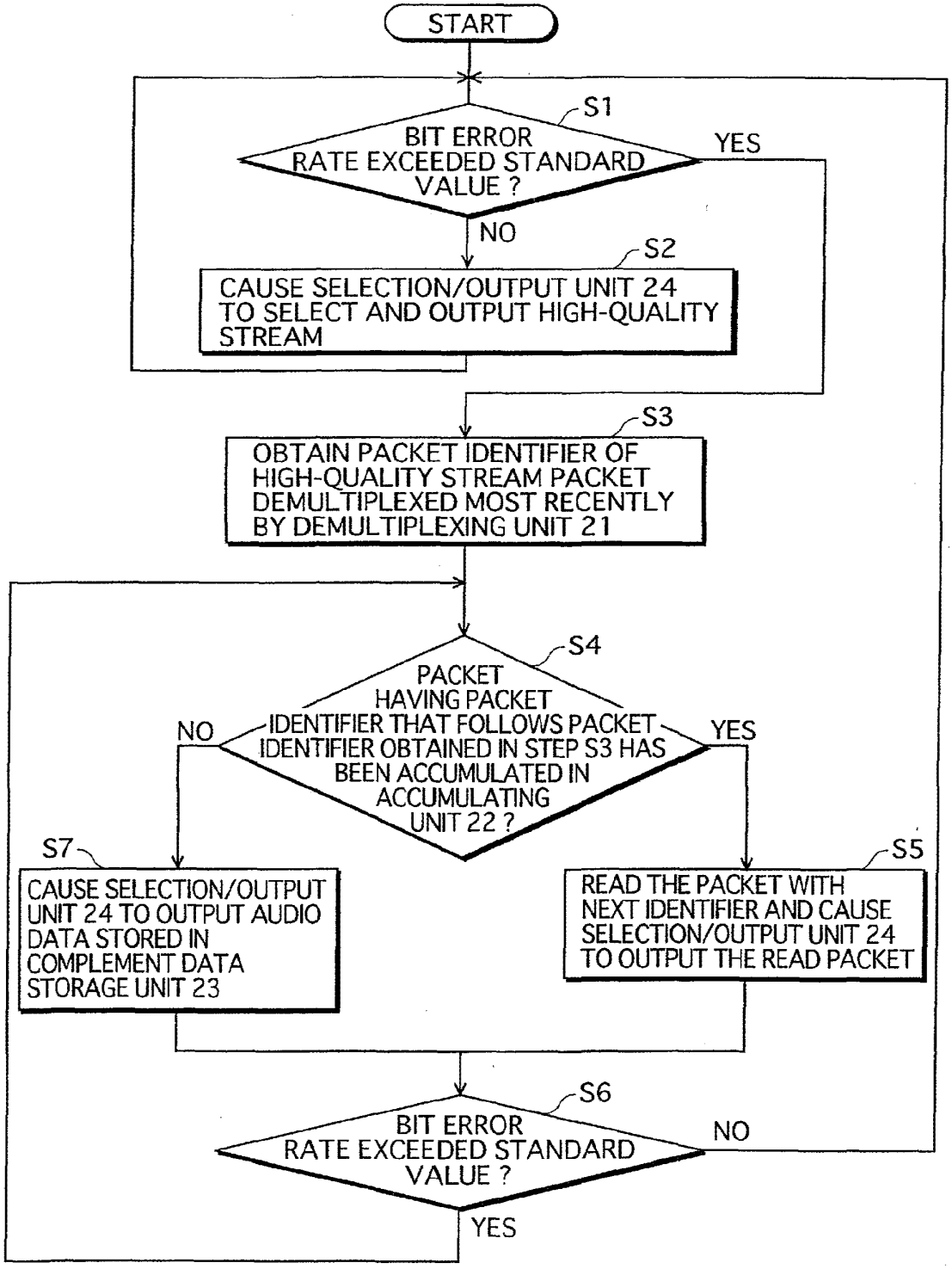
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FIG.8



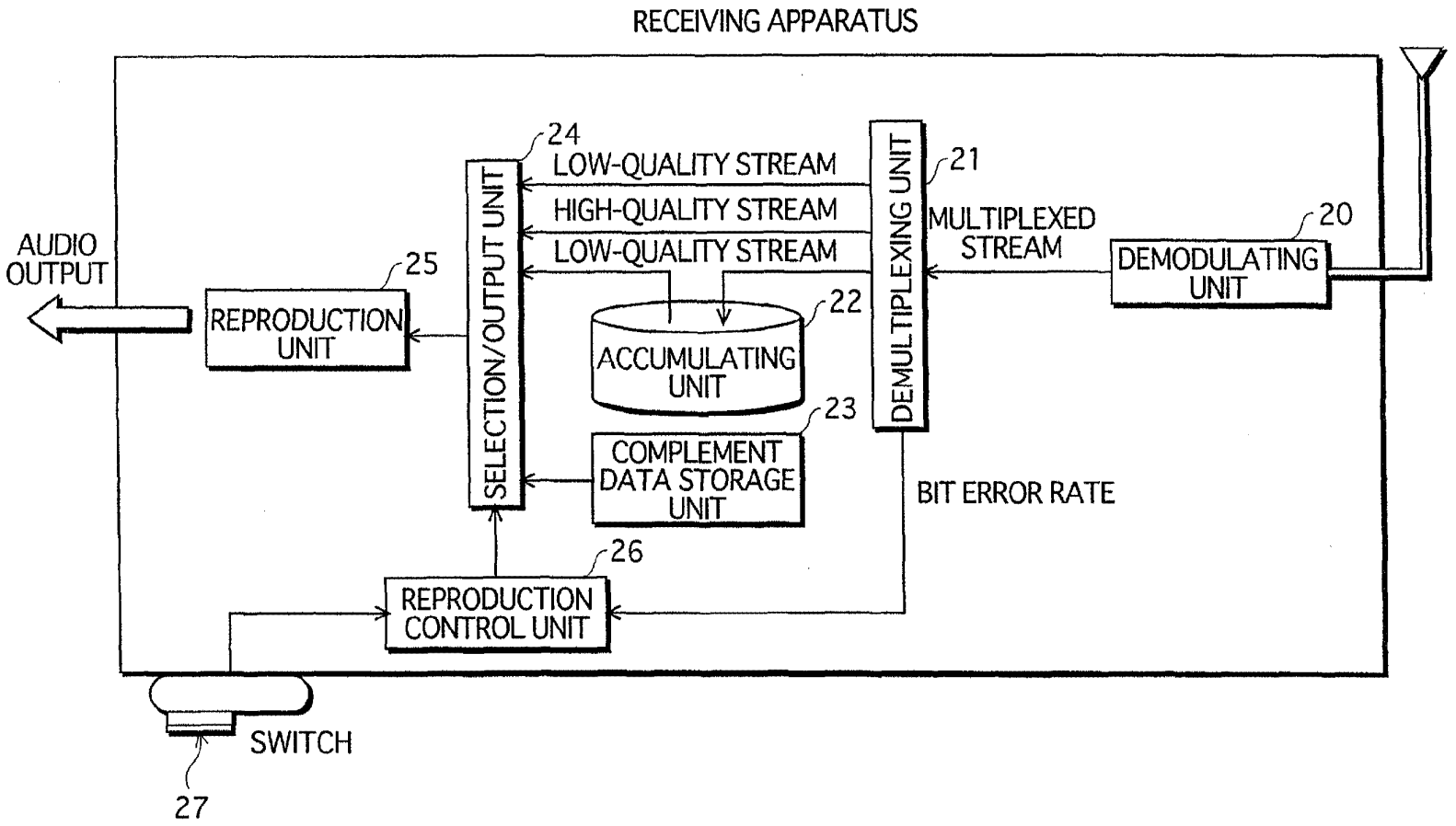
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FIG.9



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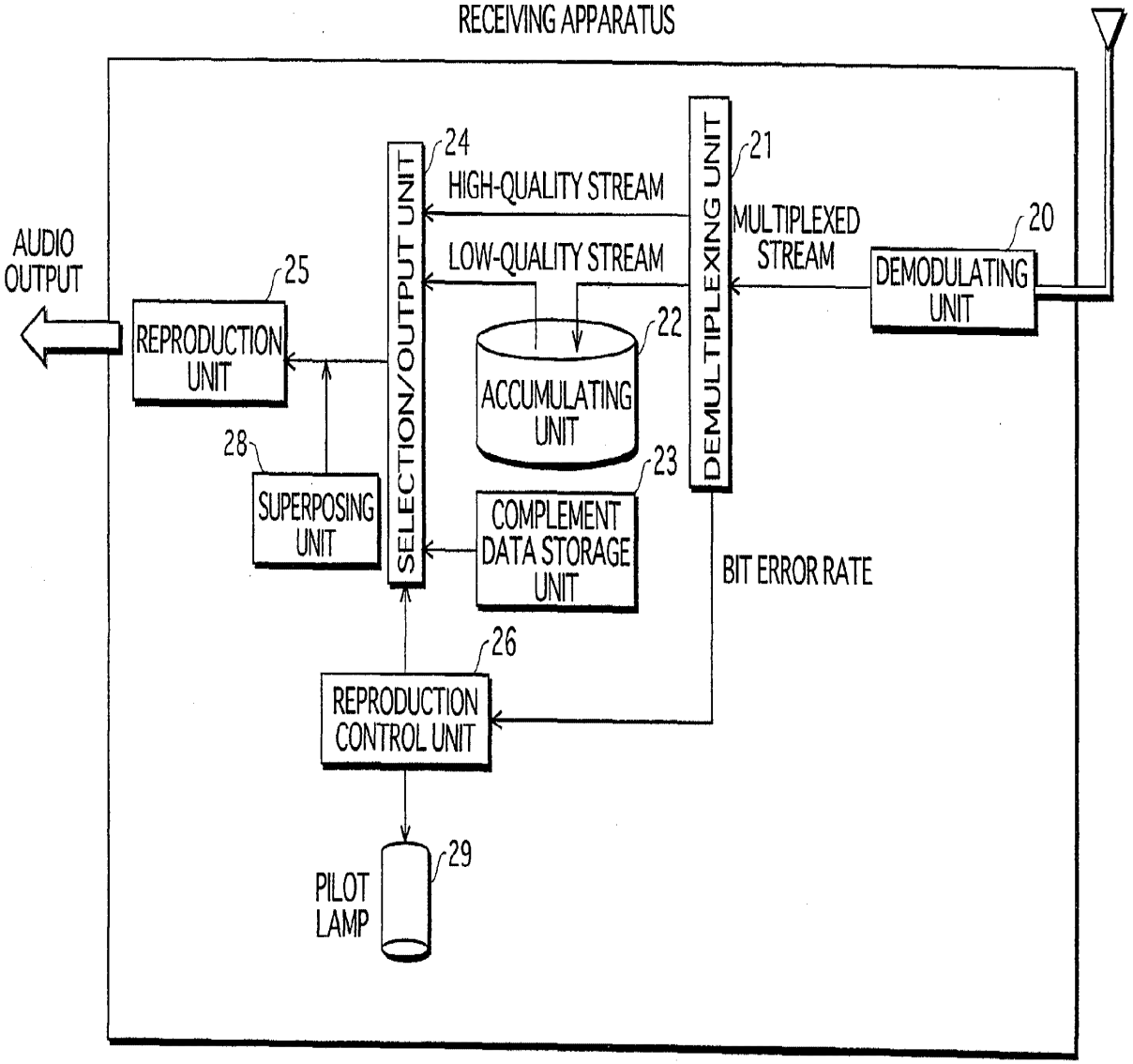
FIG.10



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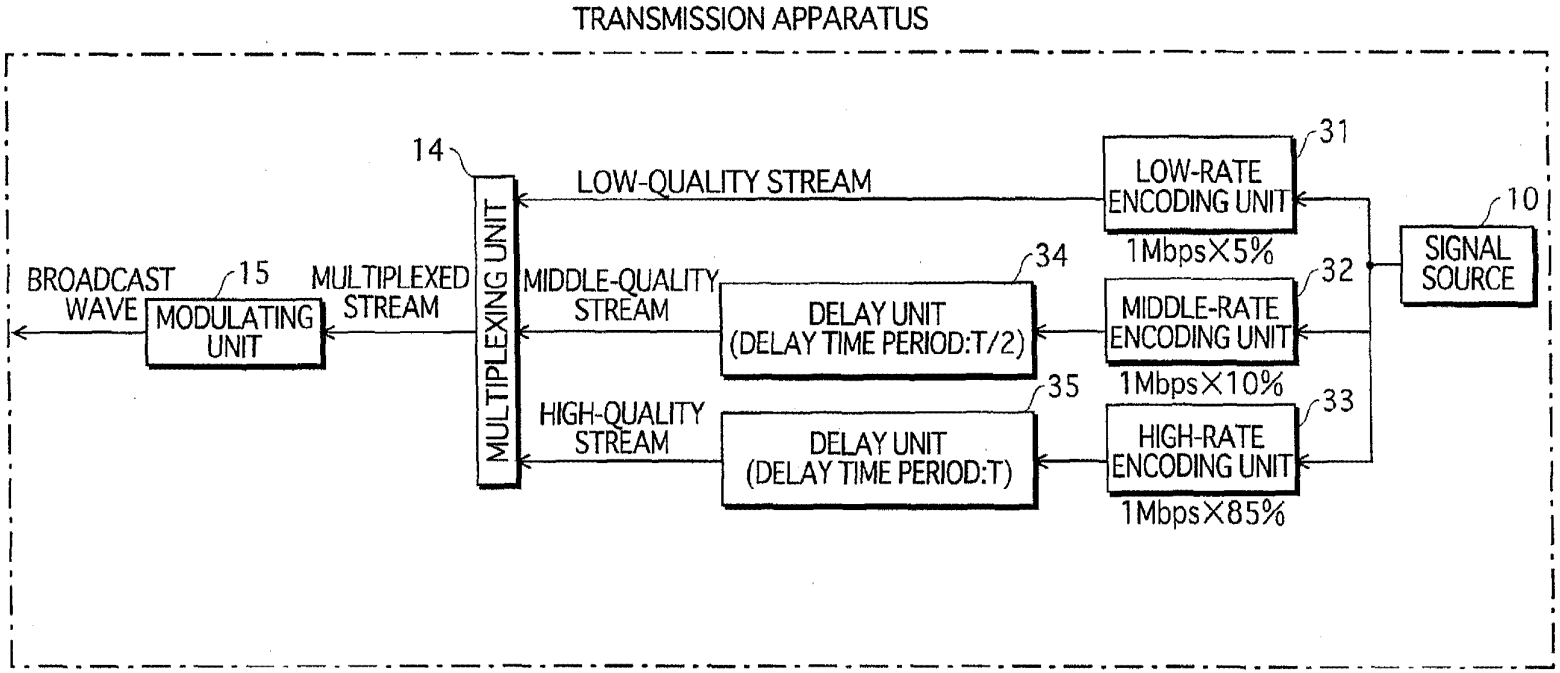
FIG.11



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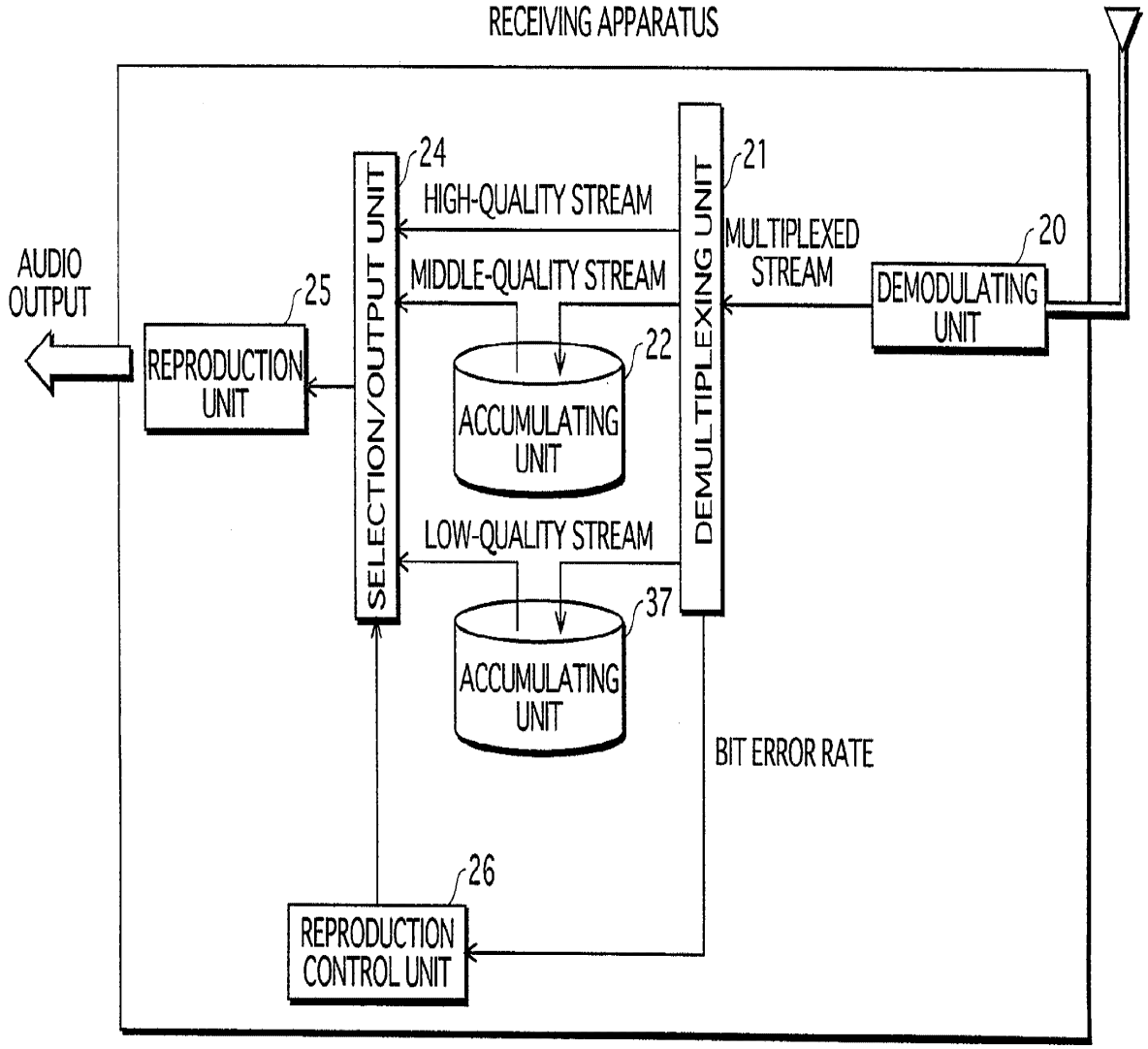
FIG.12



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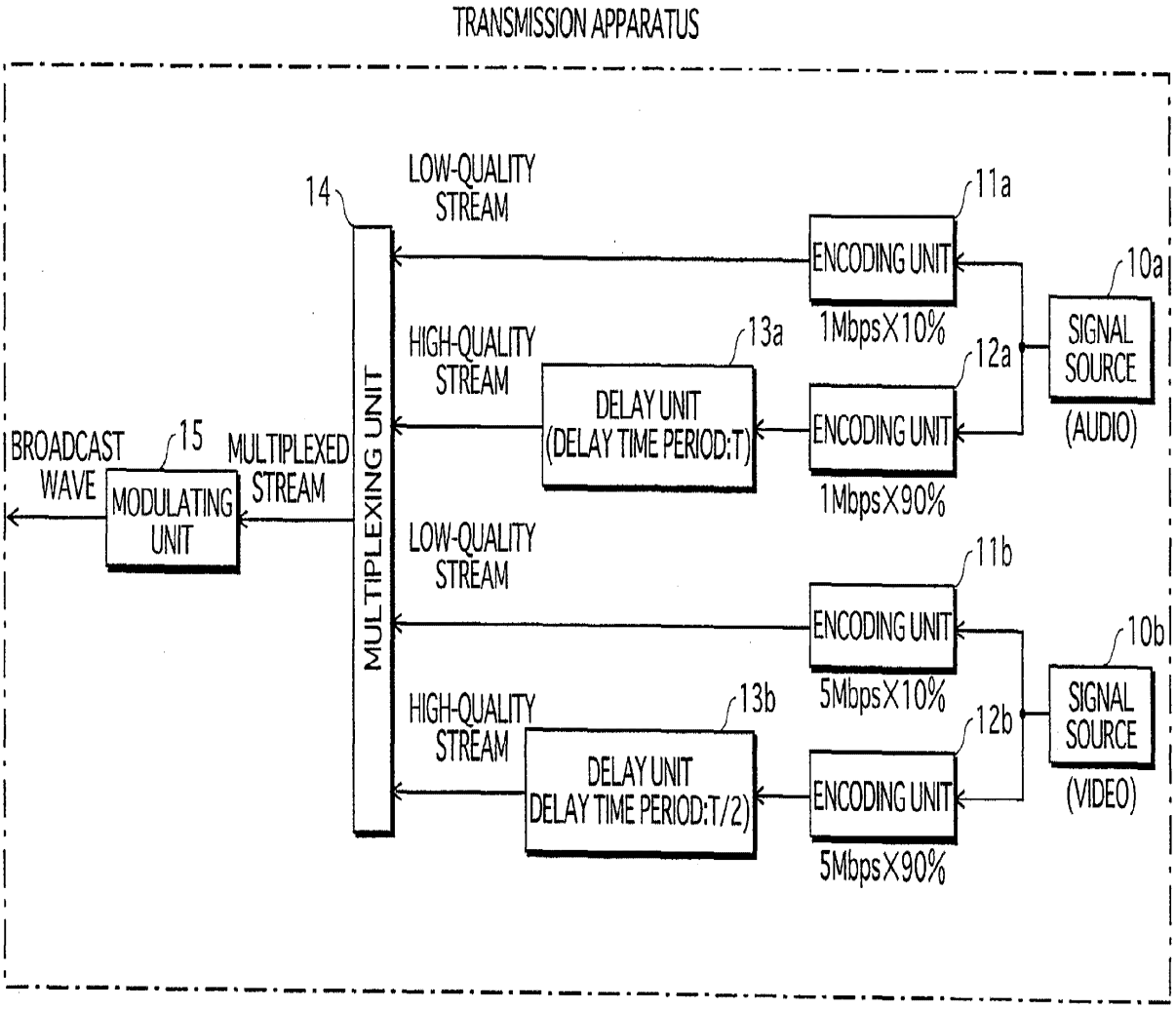
FIG.13



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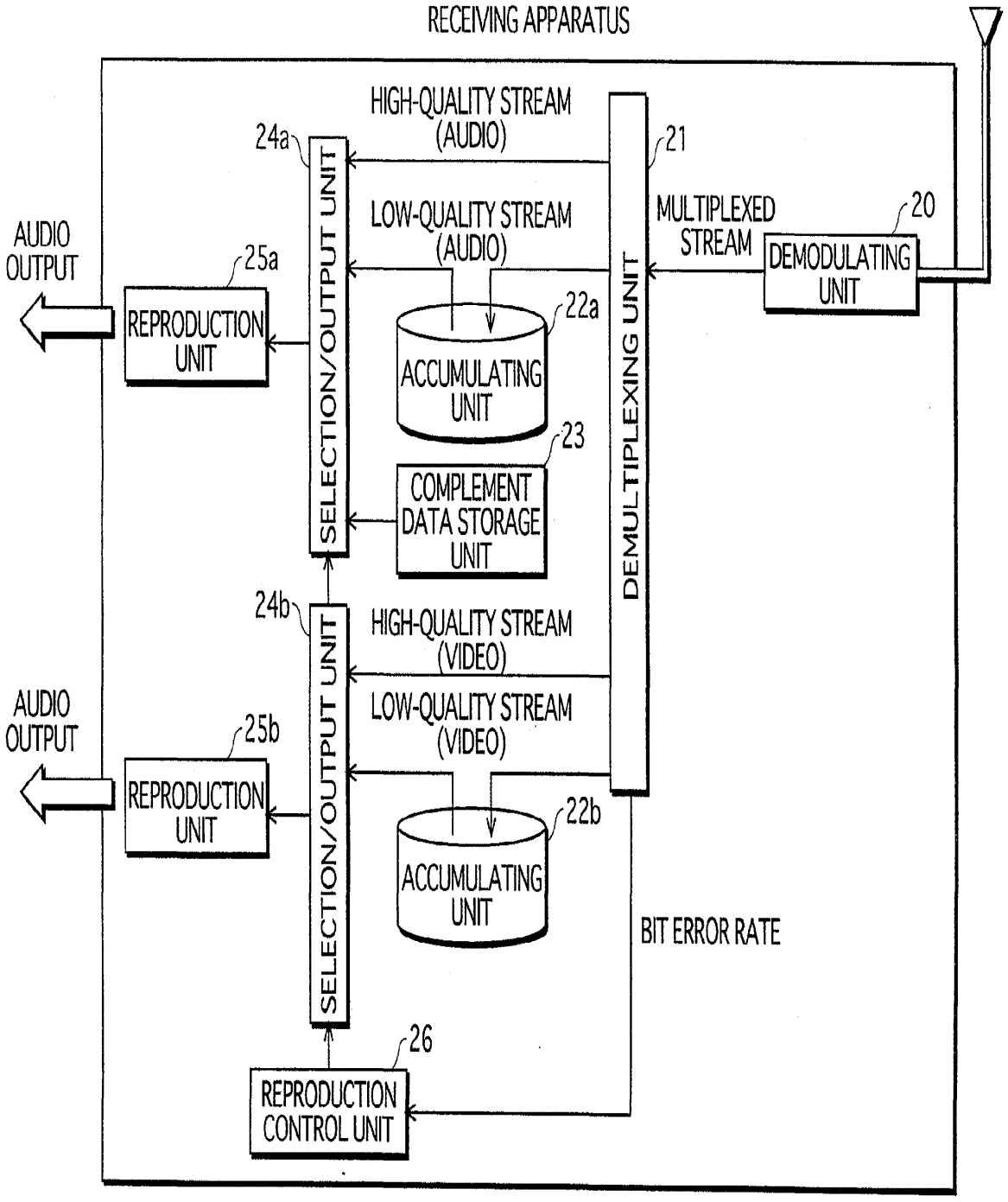
FIG.14



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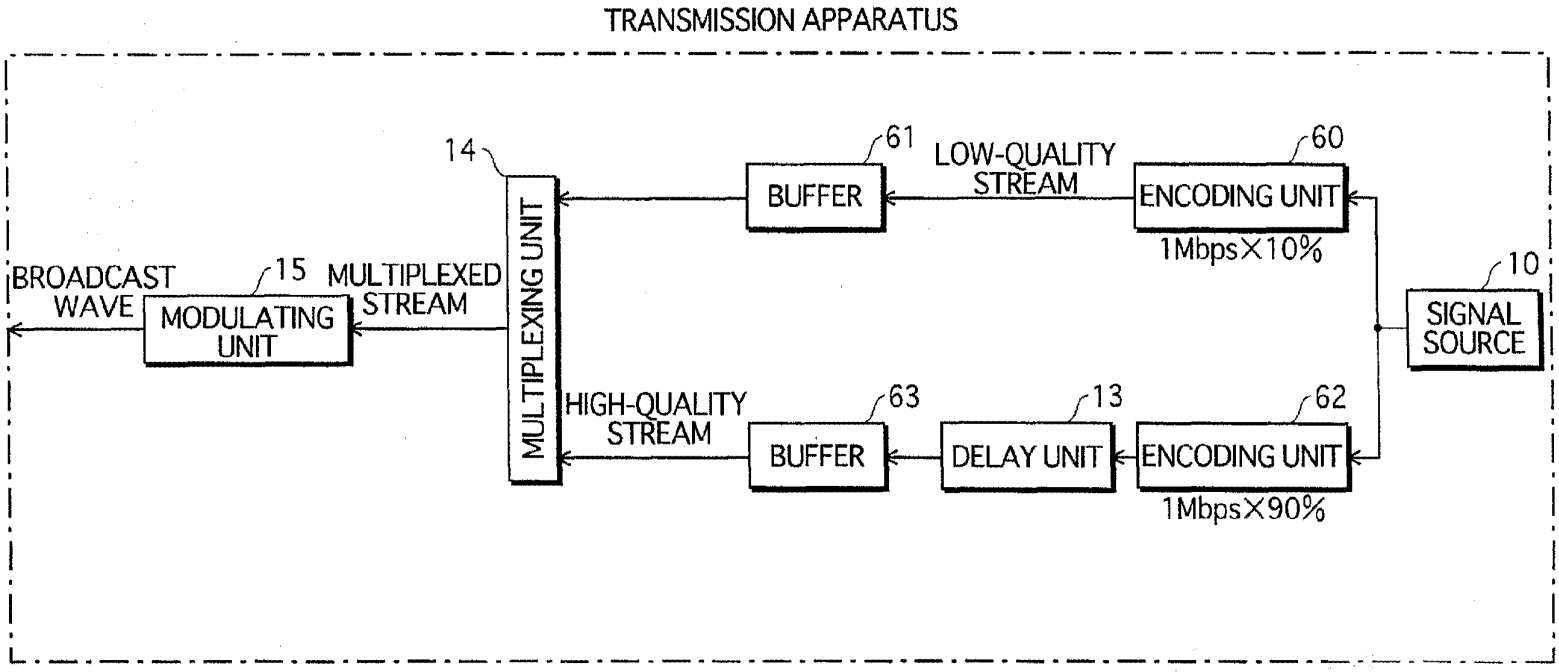
FIG.15



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FIG.16



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Espacenet

Bibliographic data: JP2004295569 (A) — 2004-10-21

INFORMATION PROCESSOR, INFORMATION PROCESSING METHOD, AND COMPUTER PROGRAM

Inventor(s): YOSHIKAWA NORIFUMI; HONDA YASUAKI; MORITA TOSHIHIRO; KUSAKABE TOSHIAKI ± (YOSHIKAWA NORIFUMI, ; HONDA YASUAKI, ; MORITA TOSHIHIRO, ; KUSAKABE TOSHIAKI)

Applicant(s): SONY CORP ± (SONY CORP)

Classification: **- international:** ***G06F13/00; G10K15/02; H04N21/262; H04N21/2668; H04N7/173;*** (IPC1-7): G06F13/00; G10K15/02; H04N7/173

- cooperative:

Application number: JP20030088010 20030327

Priority number(s): JP20030088010 20030327

Abstract of JP2004295569 (A)

PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED: To provide a device and method efficiently carrying out a content reproduction process in random order while reducing a load of a client. ;SOLUTION: A list randomly setting a reproduction order of contents is created in a server side on the basis of a request from the client, and it is sent to the client. Random order information corresponding to list order setting information of the content reproduction list is stored in property information corresponding to contents stored in a server, and in response to a browse request or the like from the client, a shuffle shifting process of the random order information of contents in a specific folder is carried out, a contents reproduction list set with a list order corresponding to shifted random order information is created, and it is sent to the client. By this composition, necessity to carry out a shuffle process by the user and a client side is eliminated. ;COPYRIGHT: (C)2005,JPO&NCIPI

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DESCRIPTION JP2004295569A

10 Information processing equipment, information processing methods, and computer programs

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14 The present invention relates to an information processing apparatus, an information processing method, and a computer program. Further, in detail, when the content provided by the content providing server is reproduced on the client side, the content reproduction sequence can be appropriately changed and reproduced without causing a burden on the client side. Information processing equipment, information processing methods, and computer programs. Conventional Technology With the spread of data communication networks in recent years, home appliances, computers, and other peripheral devices are connected to the network to enable communication between each device, that is, a so-called home network. Is permeating. The home network provides convenience and comfort to users, such as sharing the data processing function of each device by communicating between network-connected devices and sending and receiving content between devices. It is expected that it will become more and more popular. Universal Plug and Play (UPnP: Universal Plug and Play) is known as a protocol suitable for such a home network configuration. Universal Plug and Play (UPnP) makes it possible to easily build a network without complicated operations, and provides services for each connected device in network-connected devices without difficult operations or settings. It is intended to be receivable. In addition, UPnP has the advantage that devices can be easily added without depending on the OS (operating system) on the device. UPnP exchanges definition files conforming to XML (eXtensible Markup Language) between connected devices, and performs mutual recognition between the devices. The outline of UPnP processing is as follows. (1) Addressing process for acquiring own device ID such as IP address. (2) A discovery process that searches for each device on the network, receives a response from each device, and acquires information such as the device type and function included in the response. (3) Service request processing that requests a service from each device based on the information acquired in the discovery processing. By performing the

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above processing procedure, it is possible to provide and receive a service to which a device connected to the network is applied.

40 The device newly connected to the network acquires the device ID by the above addressing process, acquires the information of the other device connected to the network by the discovery process, and requests the service from the other device based on the acquired information. Is possible. For example, when trying to play content such as music data and image data stored in a server on a client-side device, the client acquires information about the content held by the server. The server stores the content in the storage unit and also stores the attribute information for the stored content. The attribute information includes, for example, various information such as the title of a song or movie, the artist name, the recording date and time, the data compression mode, and the like as contents. These attribute information is called metadata or meta information. For example, when trying to play content such as music data and image data stored in a server on a client-side device, the content information stored in the server from the client side to the server, for example, a song or a movie. Sends a request to acquire attribute information of various contents such as title, artist name, data compression mode information (ATRAC: moving picture experts group, MPEG: moving picture experts group, etc.), and copyright information as necessary. .. The server transmits metadata (attribute information) related to the contents held by the server to the client in response to a request from the client. The client displays the content information on the display of the client device according to a predetermined display program based on the metadata acquired from the server. For example, a list of songs consisting of artist names, titles, etc. is displayed on the display. The user confirms or selects the content to be played back based on the display information, and transmits the content transmission request to the server. The server receives the content request from the client, the server sends the content to the client in response to the reception request, and the received content is played back on the client side. The content stored in the server in this way can be searched from another device (client) connected to the network, and a specific content can be specified and played back.

65 For example, when the client selects only one music content as a playback target, a content transmission request including an identifier of the one music content is transmitted to the server, and the server acquires the designated content from the storage unit. Is sent to the client and played on the client, and the process ends. When a plurality of music contents are selected by the client as a playback target, a transmission request is transmitted from the client to the server for each content, and each music content is sequentially provided from the server to the client and played on the client side. Become. The content folder stored in the server includes a content folder containing a plurality of music contents, for example, a folder created by collecting only favorite songs by the user, or a plurality of music contents such as a specific artist and genre. The stored folders and the like can be set, and the user on the client side can specify these specific folders and sequentially play back a plurality of contents (songs) stored in the folders. For example, Patent Document 1 describes a configuration in which content and its management data are transmitted together when an aggregate composed of a plurality of songs is transferred from a recording / playback device to a terminal such as a portable device. .. When a client executes a plurality of contents in a folder

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in which a plurality of contents are stored as a playback target, if the playback order of the songs is always in a fixed order, the user who listens to the contents enjoys the content. Decline. Therefore, a process of changing the order of playing a plurality of contents, that is, shuffling the order of playing a plurality of contents to change the playing order is performed. Conventionally, in such a content reproduction sequence change process, the user performs a reproduction order determination process based on a data list such as a song related to a plurality of contents transmitted from the server to the client, or the client. Processing such as determining the playback order was performed by the playback sequence determination program stored in the device on the side. That is, the client side takes the initiative in determining the content reproduction order, and the client sends the content request to the server according to the determined content reproduction order. In general, the server simply sends the contents in sequence based on the request information from the client.

92 In such a configuration, it is necessary to execute a process of changing the playback order of a plurality of contents on the client side, such as setting the playback order of the contents or shuffling, which causes a burden on the user or the client side. was there. Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. 2001-216766 [0017] The present invention has been made in view of the above-mentioned problems, and is borne by the user or the client. It is an object of the present invention to provide an information processing device, an information processing method, and a computer program capable of appropriately changing and reproducing a reproduction sequence of contents without generating an information processing device. A first aspect of the present invention is an information processing device that executes a content information transmission process, an object including at least one of a content or a data folder, and attributes of the object. A storage unit that stores property information as information, a data transmission / reception unit that executes data transmission / reception processing between the client as a content information requesting device, and content information that generates content information to be transmitted to the client based on the property information. The property information has a rewritable random order information corresponding to the list order setting information of the content playback list, and the content information generation unit responds to a content playback list request from a client. It is characterized by having a configuration in which an update process is executed as a process of replacing and resetting the random order information, and a process of generating content playback list information having list order information according to the update information and transmitting it to a client is executed. It is in the information processing device. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the random order information is set for each property information corresponding to each content included in the content folder set as a set of a plurality of contents. It is numbering data as a number, and is information set so that n random order numbers are not duplicated with respect to the number n of contents included in the content folder, and the content information generation unit corresponds to the number of contents n. It is characterized in that the random order information of 1 to n is shuffled and the random order information exchange processing set for each property information is executed.

121 Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention,

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the random order information is numbering data as a number set for the property information corresponding to the content reproduction list folder storing the content reproduction list. The content information generation unit shuffles the random order information of 1 to n corresponding to the number of folders n to be shuffled, and executes the replacement process of the random order information set for each property information. It is characterized by executing the list order setting process for each folder. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the information processing apparatus determines whether or not there is a content reproduction list generation request by a random order in the content reproduction list request data from the client. It is characterized in that the configuration is such that the update process of the random order information is executed on condition that there is a content reproduction list generation request by the random order. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the information processing apparatus executes the update process of the random order information, and then the random order information is being reproduced while the content is being reproduced according to the content reproduction list in the client. It is characterized in that it is configured to maintain and retain the memory. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the information processing apparatus executes the update processing of the random order information, and then the random order information is being reproduced while the content is being reproduced according to the content reproduction list in the client. Is maintained and stored, and during the storage retention period, content playback list information based on the stored random order information is generated and transmitted to the client in response to a re-request of the content playback list request from the client. It is characterized in that it has a configuration for executing processing. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the content information generation unit is characterized in that it executes a process of generating the content playlist information as XML (eXtended Markup Language) data. And. Further, the second aspect of the present invention is an information processing apparatus that performs content information acquisition processing, with respect to a data transmission / reception unit that executes data transmission / reception processing with a server that holds the content information, and the server. Based on the content information request processing unit that executes the request processing of the content playback list set in the random order and the content information received from the server via the data transmission / reception unit, the content playback list composed of a plurality of content information is created. A content information analysis unit to be generated, a display unit to display the content playback list generated by the content information analysis unit, and a content acquisition request to be transmitted to the server according to the list order of the content playback list, and the content received from the server. The information processing apparatus is characterized by having a content reproduction control unit for executing the reproduction control process of the above.

162 Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the content information request processing unit sets a random order as the setting order sort

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information of the content playback list together with the designation information of the content folder storing a plurality of contents. It is characterized in that it has a configuration for executing a process of generating content information request data in which information is stored. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the content information request processing unit provides random order setting information as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the designation information of a plurality of content playback list folders. It is characterized in that it has a configuration for executing a process of generating stored content information request data. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the content reproduction control unit requests a content in which a content corresponding URL included in the content information received from the server is set according to the list order of the content reproduction list. It is characterized in that it is configured to execute a process of sequentially transmitting information to the server. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing apparatus of the present invention, the content information received from the server is XML (eXtended Markup Language) data that describes the property information corresponding to the content, and the content information analysis unit is The XML data is analyzed to generate a content reproduction list composed of a plurality of content information. Further, the third aspect of the present invention is an information processing method for executing the content information transmission process, the content information acquisition request receiving step for receiving the content information acquisition request from the client, and the property corresponding to the content. The random order information update step that executes the update processing of the random order information as the list order setting information of the content playback list stored in the information, and the content playback list information having the list order information according to the updated random order information. The information processing method is characterized by having a list generation step for generating the information and a step for transmitting the generation list to the client. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the random order information is set for each property information corresponding to each content included in the content folder set as a set of a plurality of contents. The numbering data as the number is set so that n random order numbers are not duplicated with respect to the number n of contents included in the content folder, and the random order information update step is set to the number of contents n. It is characterized in that the shuffle of the corresponding 1 to n random order information is executed and the random order information exchange processing set for each property information is executed.

199 Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the random order information is numbering data as a number set for the property information corresponding to the content playback list folder storing the content playback list. Yes, in the random order information update step, the random order information of 1 to n corresponding to the number of folders n to be shuffled is shuffled, and the random order information set for each property information is replaced. It is characterized by executing the list order setting process for each folder. Further, in one embodiment of the information

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processing method of the present invention, the information processing method further determines whether or not the request data of the content playlist from the client includes a content playlist generation request by a random order. It is characterized in that the update process of the random order information is executed on condition that the content playback list generation request by the random order is made. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the information processing method further executes the update processing of the random order information, and then the random is being played while the content is being played according to the content playback list on the client. It is characterized by having a step of maintaining and storing order information. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the information processing method further executes the update processing of the random order information, and then the random is being played while the content is being played according to the content playback list on the client. The order information is maintained and stored, and during the storage retention period, the content playback list information based on the stored random order information is generated to the client in response to the re-request of the content playback list request from the client. It is characterized by executing a process of transmitting. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the content information generation step is characterized in that a process of generating the content playlist information as XML (eXtended Markup Language) data is executed. Further, the fourth aspect of the present invention is an information processing method for performing content acquisition processing, and content information for executing request processing of a content playback list set in a random order for a server holding content information. A request processing step, a content information analysis step that generates a content playback list composed of a plurality of content information based on the content information received from the server, and a display step that displays the content playback list generated in the content information analysis step. The information processing method is characterized by having a content reproduction control step of transmitting a content acquisition request to the server according to the list order of the content reproduction list and executing a reproduction control process of the content received from the server. be.

236 Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the content information request processing step sets a random order as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the designation information of the content folder storing a plurality of contents. It is characterized by executing a process of generating content information request data in which information is stored. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the content information request processing step provides random order setting information as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the designation information of a plurality of content playback list folders. It is characterized by executing a process of generating stored content information request data. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the content reproduction control step requests a content in which a content corresponding URL included in the content

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information received from the server is set according to the list order of the content reproduction list. It is characterized in that a process of sequentially transmitting to the server is executed. Further, in one embodiment of the information processing method of the present invention, the content information received from the server is XML (eXtended Markup Language) data that describes the property information corresponding to the content, and the content information analysis step is It is characterized in that a process of generating a content reproduction list composed of a plurality of content information is executed by analyzing the XML data. Further, the fifth aspect of the present invention is a computer program that executes the content information transmission process, the content information acquisition request receiving step for receiving the content information acquisition request from the client, and the property corresponding to the content. Random order information update step that executes update processing of random order information as list order setting information of the content playback list stored in the information, and content playback list information that has list order information according to the updated random order information A computer program characterized by having a list generation step for generating information and a step for sending the generation list to a client. Further, the sixth aspect of the present invention is a computer program that performs content acquisition processing, and content information that executes request processing of a content playback list set in a random order for a server that holds content information. A request processing step, a content information analysis step that generates a content playback list composed of a plurality of content information based on the content information received from the server, and a display step that displays the content playback list generated in the content information analysis step. A computer program characterized by having a content reproduction control step of transmitting a content acquisition request to the server according to the list order of the content reproduction list and executing a reproduction control process of the content received from the server. be.

274 [Action] According to the configuration of the present invention, the client generates a list in which the playback order of the contents is randomly set on the server side based on the request from the client, and transmits the list to the client. Only by performing the playback process according to the list received from the server, it is possible to enjoy the content playback according to the random playback sequence, and the need for the shuffle process on the user and client sides is eliminated. Further, according to the configuration of the present invention, rewritable random order information corresponding to the list order setting information of the content playback list is stored in the property information corresponding to the content held in the server, and browsed from the client. Acquiring content information such as requests Content that acquires property information corresponding to the content in the specified folder, executes shuffle replacement processing of random order information, and sets the list order corresponding to the replaced random order information. Since the playback list is generated and sent to the client, the client can set the content playback sequence depending on the processing on the server side without increasing the processing load on the server side. Further, according to the configuration of the present invention, the server has a reset random order No. Random order No. based on

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After generating sequential content playback list information and sending it to the client, the random order information is maintained and stored during content playback according to the content playback list on the client, and the content playback list from the client is stored during the storage retention period. When the request is re-requested, the content playback list information based on the stored random order information is generated and sent to the client, so the client executes the process of sending the content in the specific folder to the random sequence. It becomes possible to reproduce without duplication according to. The computer program of the present invention provides, for example, a storage medium, a communication medium, for example, a CD or an FD, which is provided in a computer-readable format to a general-purpose computer system capable of executing various program codes. , MO, or a computer program that can be provided by a communication medium such as a network. By providing such a program in a computer-readable format, processing according to the program is realized on the computer system.

303 Still other objectives, features and advantages of the present invention will be clarified by more detailed description based on the examples of the present invention described later and the accompanying drawings. In the present specification, the system is a logical set configuration of a plurality of devices, and the devices having each configuration are not limited to those in the same housing. Hereinafter, details of the information processing apparatus, the information processing method, and the computer program of the present invention will be described with reference to the drawings. [System Overview] First, an example of an applicable network configuration of the present invention will be described with reference to FIG. FIG. 1 shows a server 101 that executes processing in response to processing requests from various client devices, and a PC 121, a monitor 122, a mobile phone 123, a player 124, and a PDA 125 as client devices that make processing requests to the server 101. Indicates a configuration connected via the network 100, for example, a home network configuration. In addition to this, various electronic devices and home appliances can be connected as the client device. The process executed by the server 101 in response to a request from the client is, for example, data processing by providing contents stored in a storage means such as a hard disk owned by the server 101 or by executing an application program that can be executed by the server. Services etc. Although the server 101 and the client device are shown separately in FIG. 1, the device that provides the service for the request from the client is shown as the server, and each client device is its own. When the data processing service is provided to other clients, the function as a server can be provided. Therefore, the network-connected client device shown in FIG. 1 can also be a server. The network 100 is a wired or wireless network, and each connected device transmits / receives communication packets such as Ethernet (registered trademark) frames via the network 100. That is, the client executes the data processing request to the server 101 by transmitting the frame in which the processing request information is stored in the data unit of the Ethernet frame to the server 101. The server 101 executes data processing in response to the reception of the processing request frame, stores the result data as the data processing result in the data unit of the communication packet as necessary, and transmits the result data to each client.

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332 The network connection device is composed of, for example, a universal plug and play (UPnP: Universal Plug and Play) compatible device. Therefore, it is easy to add or delete connected devices to the network. Devices newly connected to the network are (1) an addressing process that acquires their own device ID such as an IP address. (2) A discovery process that searches for each device on the network, receives a response from each device, and acquires information such as the device type and function included in the response. (3) Service request processing that requests a service from each device based on the information acquired in the discovery processing. By performing the above processing procedure, it is possible to receive the service to which the device connected to the network is applied. As an example of the information processing device constituting the server and the client device shown in FIG. 1, a hardware configuration example of a PC will be described with reference to FIG. The CPU (Central Processing Unit) 201 executes various processes according to a program stored in the ROM (Read Only Memory) 202, the HDD 204, or the like, and functions as a data processing means or a communication control processing means. .. The program and data executed by the CPU 201 are appropriately stored in the RAM 203. The CPU 201, ROM 202, RAM 203, and HDD 204 are connected to each other via the bus 205. An input / output interface 206 is connected to the bus 205, and the input / output interface 206 is connected to, for example, an input unit 207 composed of a keyboard, a switch, a button, a mouse, or the like operated by a user. An output unit 208 composed of an LCD, a CRT, a speaker, or the like that presents various information to the user is connected. Further, a communication unit 209 that functions as a data transmission / reception means, and a removable recording medium 211 such as a magnetic disk, an optical disk, a magneto-optical disk, or a semiconductor memory can be mounted, and data reading or writing processing from these removable recording media 211 can be attached. Drive 210 is connected to execute. The configuration shown in FIG. 2 is an example of a server and a personal computer (PC) as an example of the network-connected device shown in FIG. 1, but the network-connected device is not limited to the PC and is portable as shown in FIG. It can be configured by a mobile communication terminal such as a telephone or a PDA, other various electronic devices such as a playback device and a display, and an information processing device.

362 Therefore, it is possible to have a hardware configuration unique to each device, and the processing according to the hardware is executed. [Metadata] Next, the metadata held by the server that stores the content to be provided to the client will be described. The server has attribute information as metadata corresponding to each content such as still images, image data such as moving images, and audio data such as music stored in its own storage unit. The components of the metadata are called property information. Contents such as still images, image data such as moving images, and audio data such as music owned by the server are collectively referred to as AV contents. In the server, the AV content is managed by a content directory having a hierarchical structure. The content directory has a hierarchical structure composed of individual AV contents or folders storing a plurality of AV contents. Each element of the content directory, that is, each of the individual AV contents or the folder containing the plurality of AV contents, is called an object. The object is a general term for a

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data unit processed by a server, and there are various objects other than individual AV contents or folders storing a plurality of AV contents. Further, a set of objects is called a container, and the unit of the set is, for example, a set based on the physical storage position of each object, a set based on the logical relationship of each object, a set based on a category, or the like. It can be set in various ways. The smallest unit of AV content, that is, one piece of music data, one piece of video data, one piece of still image data, or the like is called an item. Objects are classified into classes according to their type, such as music (Audio), video (Video), photograph (Photo), and the like, and class labeling is performed. The client can, for example, specify a specific class to request and execute a "search" targeting only objects belonging to a specific classification. It is also possible to specify an object such as a specific folder, request "browsing" to request only information about the folder, and perform an acquisition process of information about the specific folder. In the server, the classes are also managed in a hierarchical structure, and subclasses can be set under one class.

388 The metadata is various management information including attribute information corresponding to the content of the server, class definition information, information on the hierarchical structure constituting the content directory, and the like. The metadata as the attribute information of the content defined in association with each object includes various information such as the content identifier (ID), data size, resource information, title, artist name, copyright information, and the like. .. The individual information contained in the metadata is called a property. It should be noted that it is predetermined in advance what kind of property metadata is possessed for each of the above-mentioned classes such as music (Audio), video (Video), and photo (Photo). [Content Reproduction Process by Client] For example, a client who intends to reproduce a content can make a content request to a server, receive the requested content from the server, and reproduce the content. A general content reproduction procedure will be described with reference to FIG. First, in step S11, the client requests the acquisition of the content information held by the server. In step S12, the server generates content information such as a title and an artist name as XML (eXteded Markup Language) data based on the content-corresponding metadata according to the client's request and transmits the content information to the client. In step S13, the client displays the content information on the display according to the received XML information. For example, in the case of music content, it is displayed as a list consisting of song names, artist names, playback times, etc. corresponding to a plurality of music held by the server. Next, in step S14, the client selects a song to be received and played from the server in the client device, and transmits the content designation information (for example, the content ID) to the server. The server acquires the content from the storage means based on the received content specification information and transmits the content. In step S16, the client reproduces the content received from the server. If the content is compressed by ATRAC, MPEG, etc., the content is decrypted on the client side and then played back. The normal content reproduction procedure is as described above. The client acquires various content attribute information, that is, property information included in the metadata corresponding to the content held by the server, displays a UI such as a content list on the client based on

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the property information, selects the content, and the server. Can be requested.

417 The process in step S11 shown in FIG. 3, that is, when the client acquires the content information held by the server, the client requests the content information containing "Christmas" as a word in the title, for example. It is possible to select and acquire specific content information by so-called search processing. Alternatively, the content of a plurality of contents stored in a specific folder, for example, a folder created by collecting only favorite songs by the user, or a folder containing a plurality of music contents such as a specific artist or genre, is specified and stored in the folder. It is possible to obtain information. As described above, in the server, the object as the management content is classified into various categories (types) such as music (Audio), video (Video), photo (Photo), artist, album, and the like.) Is used to classify and manage the classes, and the classes are managed in a hierarchical structure. FIG. 4 shows an example of the management class in the server. The example of FIG. 4 is an example of a class related to music contents. As shown in FIG. 4, various classes such as songs, albums, genres, and album cabinets in which a plurality of albums are integrated are set, and the server sets the content in each class, metadata as content attribute information, and property information. I am managing it. FIG. 5 shows an example of a hierarchical configuration of classes managed by the server. The hierarchical structure can be shown as a branched tree-like diagram as shown in FIG. Each of the circles shown in FIG. 5 corresponds to an individual class. This hierarchical structure shows a logical management structure corresponding to the contents stored and managed by the server in the storage unit. Metadata as attribute information is set corresponding to each class. In FIG. 5, the top level is called the root container 301. For example, music (music) class 302, moving image class 303, still image class 304, and the like are set under the root container. A class such as genre 305 is set at the lower level of the music class 302, and an artist 306 or the like is set at the lower level of the genre. [0073] A client who intends to execute a content search can specify a class and request and execute a search targeting only objects belonging to a specific classification.

443 In addition, it is possible to specify a specific object, for example, a folder in which a plurality of contents are stored, and acquire information on the contents stored in the folder. The client displays the content information on the display based on the XML data that describes the content information received from the server. FIG. 6 shows an example of display processing of the content information list. In the example shown in FIG. 6, a content information list 357 having a data structure listing the content numbers, titles, artist names, and the like is displayed on the display 350. These content information is generated based on the property information as a component of the content-corresponding metadata managed by the server. The server acquires property information in the metadata of the content that matches the conditions based on the search or browse request received from the client, generates XML data based on the acquired property information, and sends it to the client. The client receives the XML data based on the property information corresponding to the content extracted by the server, generates the display data as shown in FIG. 6 based on the received XML data, and displays it on the display of the client. The user on the client side selects the content to be played from these lists and transmits the selected content

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information to the server, so that the content, that is, various contents such as music, movies, and photographs are transmitted from the server to the client. Playback and output are executed on the side. [Content playback sequence setting process] As described above, the client selects the content stored in the server by browsing or searching, and then specifies the playback request content to the server, that is, the actual content, that is, music or an image. It is possible to acquire data, etc., and play and output it on the client. For example, when the client selects only one music content as a playback target, a content transmission request including an identifier of the one music content is transmitted to the server, and the server acquires the designated content from the storage unit. Is sent to the client and played on the client, and the process ends. When a plurality of music contents are selected by the client as a playback target, a transmission request is transmitted from the client to the server for each content, and each music content is sequentially provided from the server to the client and played on the client side. Become.

471 The content folder stored in the server includes a content folder containing a plurality of music contents, for example, a folder generated by collecting only favorite songs by the user, or a plurality of music contents such as a specific artist and genre. The stored folders and the like can be set, and the user on the client side can obtain a list of contents stored in these specific folders from the server by the above-mentioned browse or search. By displaying the content list on the display and setting the client to sequentially send content requests to the server in the order according to the list, continuous playback of a plurality of contents is possible. However, as described in the section of the prior art, when playing back a plurality of contents in a folder, if the playing order of the songs is always in a fixed order, the enjoyment of the user who listens to the contents is reduced. do. Therefore, a process of changing the order of playing a plurality of contents, that is, shuffling the order of playing a plurality of contents to change the playing order is performed. Conventionally, the content playback sequence change process is executed by shuffling the content list sent from the server to the client on the user side, changing the order of the list, and sending the content request to the server according to the changed list. Was there. However, this process creates a burden on the user or client side. In the configuration of the present invention, for example, when a client requests a content list in which a specific folder is specified, content information including content playback list information set in a random sequence is generated on the server side and transmitted to the client. do. The client displays a content playlist (content playlist) on the client-side display based on the content information (XML data) received from the server. The content playback list in random order order set on the server side is displayed on the client side display. Therefore, on the client side, the content can be shuffled, that is, the content can be reproduced in a random sequence only by making the content reproduction requests in the order according to the content playlist received from the server. [0083] With reference to FIG. 7, a processing procedure in the case of executing the random sequence reproduction processing of the content will be described. First, in step S31, the client executes the content information acquisition process from the server.

499 The client identifies a folder in which a plurality of contents are stored by searching or

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browsing, and requests an acquisition process of the content information in which the folder is specified. In this content information request, the client requests that the setting of the content playlist in the folder is set in a random sequence and transmitted together with the specified information of the folder in which the plurality of contents are stored. FIG. 8 shows an example of request data for transmitting by setting the setting of the content playlist to be transmitted from the client to the server in a random sequence. The example shown in FIG. 8 shows an example of data transmitted by the client in response to a browse request specifying a specific folder. In the transmission data, the request identifier 401 indicating that the request is a browse request, the folder identification information 402, and the sort designation information 403 indicating that sorting in a random order is desired as the sorting process of the content playback list. In addition, list information 404 indicating the range of list data to be included in the content playback list is included. As the sorting method, it is possible to specify the order of artists, the order of song titles, etc. in addition to the random order. The range of the list data to be included in the content playback list specified in the list information 404 can be arbitrarily set. For example, in the case of a folder in which 100 songs of music content are stored, 10 songs are specified as the list data and the sort process is performed. When a random order is specified, the first 10 songs are selected from the 100 songs of the random sequence content set on the server side, a list is generated, and the list is sent to the client. Returning to the sequence of FIG. 7, and continuing the description, in step S31, as shown in FIG. 8, a sort designation indicating that the client desires sorting in a random order as the sorting process of the content playback list. When a content information acquisition request including information is transmitted and the server receives the request, in step S32, the server acquires the property information corresponding to the content stored in the folder specified by the client and sets it in the property information. Random order No. Set. [089] With reference to FIG. 9, the property information corresponding to the content held by the server and the random order No. Will be described. The server stores the attribute information (property information) corresponding to the content stored in the storage means in the storage unit corresponding to the content.

529 For example, when the server holds a content folder 420 storing a plurality of contents of the contents A421, the contents B422, ... The contents N423 in a storage unit such as a hard disk in the server, the server causes the contents A to N. The property information 425, 426, 427 corresponding to the content is stored in the storage unit in association with the content. The property information is information corresponding to the content, and is attribute information of the content including various information such as a creator, an artist, and a playback time of the content. In the configuration of the present invention, as shown in the figure as property information corresponding to the content, the random order No. Is set. 【００９２】ランダムオーダＮｏ． Is numbering data (number) as random order information set for each content. This is rewritable random order information corresponding to the list order setting information of the content playlist. When the server receives from the client a content information acquisition request including sort specification information indicating that the content playback list is to be sorted in a random order as shown in FIG. 8 described

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above, the server receives the content information acquisition request. Random order No. in the property information of the content included in the specified folder. Is replaced and reset. 【００９３】ランダムオーダＮｏ．　Is numbering data as a number set for each property information corresponding to the content included in the content folder set as a set of a plurality of contents, and n pieces for the number n of the contents included in the content folder. Random order numbers of are the information set without duplication. For example, in a content folder containing 100 music contents, numbers 1 to 100 are random order numbers in the property information of each content. Is set as. This is executed for each sort request in random order from the client, and random order Nos. 1 to 100 are executed for each process. Is reset as the property information of each content. [0995] The set random order No. Is the sequence of the content playlist and is set as the playback sequence. Returning to FIG. 7, the description of the content reproduction sequence setting will be continued. In step S32, the server uses the random order No. 1 in the property information corresponding to the content included in the folder specified by the client as described above.

557 Shuffle the random order No. And set the random order No. The XML information as the configuration information for generating the content playlist is generated based on the above, and the content information including the list information is transmitted to the client in step S33. The content information transmitted to the client includes content information such as the title and artist name of the content, as well as URL (Uniform Resource Location) information of the content as address information indicating the location of the content. These are generated by XML (eXted Markup Language) data and transmitted to the client. In step S34, the client displays the content playlist on the display based on the content information received from the server. The client receives XML data based on the property information corresponding to the content extracted by the server, generates a content playback list as shown in FIG. 10 based on the received XML data, and displays it on the client's display. As shown in FIG. 10, the content playlist is displayed as a list showing content information in the order of reproduction. In the example shown in the figure, an example is shown in which a content information list 481 having a data structure in which the playback sequence number, content name, title, artist name, and playback time are listed in the playback order as display information is displayed on the display 480. There is. [0100] These content information is generated based on the property information as a component of the content-corresponding metadata managed by the server. The playback sequence number is a random order No. set by the server. Will be set as a value corresponding to. [0101] The client can reproduce the content according to the content playlist as shown in FIG. For example, by clicking the playback button 482 shown in FIG. 10, playback is started, and by clicking the continuous playback setting button 483 to set it to the enabled state, the list is controlled in consideration of the playback time of each playback content. Content requests are sequentially sent to the server in order, and the client side can receive and play the contents in the order of the list from the server. [0102] A series of sequences such as a content transmission request, content reception, content decoding, and output processing executed in the content reproduction process are executed according to the content

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reproduction program on the client side.

585 The content playback program sends a HTTP (Hyper Text Transfer Protocol) GET method, which is a content request for which a content identifier is set as content information received from the server together with the list, for example, a content acquisition request for which a content URL is set, to the server according to the list. The contents are sequentially transmitted, the contents are sequentially received from the server according to the order of the list, and the reproduction process is executed. The user can also specify only specific content from the list and play only the specified content. [0103] When the continuous playback process is enabled, the content playback program on the client side sequentially requests the content according to the list order in consideration of the playback time of the content, that is, HTTP (Hyper Text Transfer Protocol) in which the content URL is switched. Executes the process of generating the GET method and sending it to the server. The server transmits the content to the client based on the specified URL according to the content request (HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol) GET method) sent in the order of the list. In the sequence diagram shown in FIG. 7, the processes of step S35 on the client side and step S36 on the server side correspond to the above-mentioned series of processes. [0105] When the playback of the contents in the list is completed, the client can request the list corresponding to the remaining contents in the same folder and receive it from the server. In the server, the random order No. of each content is set while the content reproduction process is being executed on the client side, that is, within the time considering the content transmission to the client and the reproduction time on the client. The setting of is kept unchanged. [0106] In a new content playlist request from a client, for example, in the data shown in FIG. 8, the playlist No. = When there is a list request with a designation such as 11 to 20, the random order No. set in the property information (see FIG. 9) of each content. Based on No. Random order Nos. 11 to 20 Set the content playlist information based on the property information of the content with and send it to the client. [0107] The client can display the newly transmitted content playlist on the display and play the content according to the displayed content playlist.

612 [0108] As described above, in the configuration of the present invention, a list in which the playback order of the contents is randomly set is generated on the server side based on the request from the client, and the list is transmitted to the client. It is possible to enjoy the content reproduction according to a random reproduction sequence only by performing the reproduction processing according to the list received from, and the need for the shuffle processing on the user and the client side is eliminated. The processing sequences in each of the client and the server will be described with reference to the flowcharts of FIGS. 11 and 12. First, the processing procedure of the client will be described with reference to FIG. In step S101, the client requests a playlist from the server. This is done in response to a browse request that specifies a folder for the server, and as described earlier with reference to FIG. 8, it is possible to request that the request data for the server be sorted by a random order. .. In response to the client request, the server sets the random order No. 1 in the property information corresponding to the content included in the designated folder as described above. Shuffle the random order No. Was reset, and the set random order No. Generates a

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content playlist based on and sends it to the client. In step S102, the client receives the content information including the playlist, and displays the received content playlist on the display. [0112] In step S103, the user on the client side starts playing the content. At this time, when continuous playback is specified as described above, the playback processing program on the client side sequentially transmits the content request in which the content URL is set to the server in the order of the content playlist. [0113] In step S104, the content is received from the server, and the received content is reproduced in step S105. If the received content is compressed by ATRAC, MPEG, etc., it is reproduced after the decryption processing is performed on the client side. [0114] In step S106, it is determined whether or not the reproduction of all the listed contents is completed, and if there is unreproduced content, the processing of step S103 or less, that is, the content request, reception, and reproduction are repeatedly executed.

638 Before the end of the playback time of the currently played content, the next content request in the content playlist is output to the server. When the playback of the contents in the list is completed, the process ends. After the playback of the content at the end of the list is completed, it is possible to return to the top of the list and perform repeated playback. These processes are executed based on the settings of the content reproduction processing program on the client side. Next, a processing procedure on the server side will be described based on the flowchart of FIG. When the server receives the content information request from the client in step S201, the server determines in step S202 whether or not the request is made to set the content playlist as a random sequence. [0116] If it is a request to set the content playlist setting to a random sequence and transmit it (see FIG. 8), the process proceeds to step S203, and if there is no such specification, the process proceeds to step S211. In step S211, the sequence No. preset in the content stored in the designated folder is set. The default playlist information according to the above is generated, and the process proceeds to step S205 to transmit the content information including the generated list information to the client. If it is a request to set the content playback list setting to a random sequence and transmit it (see FIG. 8), the process proceeds to step S203, and the server corresponds to the content stored in the folder specified by the client. Random order No. set in the property information after acquiring each property information. Set. That is, the random order No. in the property information of the contents included in the specified folder. Shuffle and reset. [0118] In step S204, the reset random order No. Random order No. based on Sequential content playlist information is generated, and in step S205, XML information as content playlist configuration information is generated and transmitted to the client. [0119] In step S206, when the server receives a content request including, for example, content designation information (for example, content URL) from the client, the server extracts the content according to the designated information and transmits the content in step S207. In content transmission, data conversion may be performed according to client-side specifications or requests.

665 [0120] The processes of steps S206 and S207 are repeatedly executed when the client is executing continuous playback according to the content playlist. [0121] Further, the server is set to the reset random order No. Random order No. based on After generating sequential

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content playback list information and sending it to the client, the random order information is maintained and stored during content playback according to the content playback list on the client, and the content playback list from the client is stored during the storage retention period. When the request is re-requested, the process of generating the content playback list information based on the stored random order information and transmitting it to the client is executed. By this process, the client can play the contents in the specific folder without duplication according to a random sequence. [0122] In the above-described embodiment, the shuffling process for each content has been described, but the shuffling process for a folder storing a playlist of the content or a folder as a set of a plurality of contents is also possible. .. [0123] An example of shuffling processing for each folder will be described with reference to FIG. The server stores attribute information (property information) corresponding to a folder in which a playlist of contents is stored and a folder / folder as a set of a plurality of contents in a storage unit. In the example shown in FIG. 13, a plurality of folders A to N491 to 493 in which playlists of contents are stored, and property information 495,496,497 corresponding to each folder are shown. [0125] The property information is attribute information corresponding to a folder, and includes various information such as a folder creator, an artist, and a playback time. In the configuration of the present invention, as shown in the figure as property information corresponding to the folder, the random order No. Is set. 【０１２６】ランダムオーダＮｏ． Is numbering data (number) as random order information set in each folder. This is rewritable random order information that resets the content playlist included in each folder for each folder. When the server receives a content information acquisition request including sort specification information indicating that it wants to sort a plurality of folders from the client, the random order No. 1 in the property information of the specified plurality of folders.

692 Is replaced and reset. Specifically, the random order information of 1 to n corresponding to the number n of folders to be shuffled is shuffled, and the random order information set for each property information is replaced. For the request data from the client, in the configuration data shown in FIG. 8, a container identifier, that is, a container identifier information as a higher-level object of a plurality of content playback list folder objects is set instead of the folder identification information 402. It is a configuration in which a plurality of identifier information of a plurality of content playback list folder objects is set. 【０１２８】ランダムオーダＮｏ． Is numbering data as a number set for each property information corresponding to a plurality of folders included in the container, for example, which is set as a set of a plurality of folders, and is n for the number of folders n included in the container. Random order numbers of are the information set without duplication. [0129] For example, in a container containing 10 playlist folders, numbers 1 to 10 are random order Nos. In the property information of each playlist folder. Is set as. This is executed for each sort request in random order from the client, and random order Nos. 1 to 10 are executed for each process. Is reset as the property information of each folder. [0130] Random order No. reset for each folder. Based on, for example, when the playlist A folder 491 contains the content playlists of the contents a to f and the playlist N folder 493 contains the content playlists of the contents p to z, as shown in FIG. 13 by shuffling. In addition, the random

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order No. of the playlist N folder 493. = 1, Random order No. of playlist A folder 491. When = 2, the playlist in which the contents p to z of the playlist N folder 493 are set ahead of the contents a to f of the playlist A folder 491 is set, and the content reproduction is executed. [0131] As described above, in the configuration of the present invention, not only the content but also various objects stored in the storage unit by the server, such as the content or the data folder, are set as object attribute information (metadata). Random order information is stored in the property information and shuffle is executed in response to the request from the client, so the list order can be reset for each content or folder.

718 [Functional Configuration of Server and Client] The hardware configuration of the server and client device is as described above with reference to FIG. 2, and the various processes described above are stored in the storage unit of each server and client. It is executed under the control of a control unit (CPU, etc.) according to the stored program. [0133] For example, on the server side, the process executed by the CPU is a process of acquiring metadata corresponding to the content and generating XML data based on the property information in accordance with a request from the client, a random order No. of the property information. Shuffle processing, and processing for transmitting content according to the requested data mode from the client. The processing on the client side is the processing of displaying the content playback list on the display based on the XML data consisting of the property information received from the server, the processing of sequentially transmitting the content request with the content URL set according to the content playback list, and the processing of sending the content request to the server. Processing for receiving content, data conversion of received content, playback processing, and the like. [0134] Basically, these processes are executed under the control of the CPU as a control unit of the server and the client device, but the functional configuration of the server and the functions of the client required to execute the above-described processes. The configuration will be described with reference to FIGS. 14 and 15. FIG. 14 is a block diagram showing a main functional configuration of the server. The packet transmission / reception unit 501 receives a packet for the client and a packet from the client. The packet generation and analysis unit 502 performs transmission packet generation processing and reception packet analysis processing. Packet address setting, address recognition, data storage for the data part, data acquisition processing from the data part, etc. The content storage unit 503 stores the content owned by the server. The metadata storage unit 504 is a storage unit that stores metadata as attribute information corresponding to the content. The metadata includes the random order No. described with reference to FIG. Contains other property information. The property information acquisition unit 505 meta-meta data corresponding to the designated folder based on the property information acquisition request received from the client, for example, the browse request having the data structure described with reference to FIG. The process of extracting from the data storage unit 504 is executed.

748 【０１３８】ランダムオーダＮｏ． When the request of the content property list from the client specifies a random order, the setting unit 506 sets the random order No. of the property information of the corresponding content. Shuffle process. [0139] The content information generation unit 507 has the metadata acquired by the property information

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acquisition unit 505, the random order No. Based on the information set by the setting unit 506, XML data as content information including the configuration information of the content playlist is generated. The content information generation unit 507 shuffles the random order information of 1 to n corresponding to the number of contents n, and executes the random order information replacement process set for each property information. The data conversion unit 508 executes decoding processing such as coding processing of transmitted content data. For example, data conversion based on ATRAC3 and MPEG4 is executed. Next, the functional configuration of the client device will be described with reference to FIG. The packet transmission / reception unit 601 executes packet transmission to the server and packet reception processing from the server. The packet generation and analysis unit 602 performs transmission packet generation processing and reception packet analysis processing. It includes not only analysis of stored data in packets, but also packet address setting, address recognition, data storage for the data section, data acquisition processing from the data section, and the like. [0141] The content information request processing unit 603 generates request data (see FIG. 8) of the content playlist to be transmitted to the server. That is, a process of generating content information request data storing random order setting information as setting order sort information of the content playback list is executed together with the specification information of the content folder storing a plurality of contents. [0142] The storage unit 604 stores the content included in the packet received from the server, the content information including the content playlist, and the like. [0143] The output unit 605 includes a speaker and a display applied to the content reproduction process. The display is also used for outputting the content information list described above with reference to FIG. 7. The input unit 606 is used, for example, as a start / end of content reproduction, input of other reproduction control setting information, and other data input means. The content information analysis unit 607 analyzes the XML data composed of the property information received from the server, generates the content playback list described above with reference to FIG. 10 based on the analysis data, and serves as an output unit. Executes the process of outputting to the display of.

780 The content reproduction control unit 608 receives from the server and executes the content reproduction process according to the content playlist displayed on the display. The content request sequence is determined according to the content playlist, and the content URL according to the playlist is sequentially sent to the packet generation analysis unit 602. The packet generation analysis unit 602 generates a packet in which the content URL is set, and transmits the content request to the server via the packet transmission / reception unit 601. [0146] The data conversion unit 609 executes various data conversion processes such as decoding of the content data received from the server. For example, data conversion based on ATRAC3 and MPEG4 is executed. The decrypted data may be re-encoded and the re-encoded data may be stored in the storage unit 603. [0147] The server and the client functionally have the functions shown in FIGS. 14 and 15, and execute each of the above-described processes. However, the block diagrams shown in FIGS. 14 and 15 are block diagrams for explaining the functions, and in reality, various processing programs are executed under the control of the CPU in the hardware configuration of the PC or the like

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shown in FIG. NS. [0148] The present invention has been described in detail with reference to the specific examples. However, it is self-evident that a person skilled in the art can modify or substitute the embodiment without departing from the gist of the present invention. That is, the present invention has been disclosed in the form of an example, and should not be construed in a limited manner. In order to judge the gist of the present invention, the column of claims described at the beginning should be taken into consideration. [0149] The series of processes described in the specification can be executed by hardware, software, or a composite configuration of both. When executing processing by software, install the program that records the processing sequence in the memory in the computer built in the dedicated hardware and execute it, or execute the program on a general-purpose computer that can execute various processing. It can be installed and run. [0150] For example, the program can be recorded in advance on a hard disk or ROM (Read Only Memory) as a recording medium. Alternatively, the program may be temporarily or permanently placed on a removable recording medium such as a flexible disc, a CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read Only Memory), an MO (Magnet optical) disc, a DVD (Digital Versailles Disc), a magnetic disc, or a semiconductor memory. It can be stored (recorded).

810 Such a removable recording medium can be provided as so-called package software. [0151] In addition to installing the program on the computer from the removable recording medium as described above, the program can be wirelessly transferred from the download site to the computer, or wired to the computer via a network such as LAN (Local Area Network) or the Internet. The computer can receive the program transferred in this way and install it on a recording medium such as a built-in hard disk. [0152] The various processes described in the specification are not only executed in chronological order according to the description, but also executed in parallel or individually as required by the processing capacity of the device that executes the processes. May be good. Further, in the present specification, the system is a logical set configuration of a plurality of devices, and the devices having each configuration are not limited to those in the same housing. [Effect of the Invention] As described above, according to the configuration of the present invention, a list in which the playback order of the contents is randomly set on the server side is generated based on the request from the client and transmitted to the client. Therefore, the client can enjoy the content playback according to a random playback sequence only by performing the playback process according to the list received from the server, and eliminates the need for the user and the client to perform the shuffle process. .. Further, according to the configuration of the present invention, rewritable random order information corresponding to the list order setting information of the content playback list is stored in the property information corresponding to the content held in the server, and browsed from the client. Acquiring content information such as requests Content that acquires property information corresponding to the content in the specified folder, executes shuffle replacement processing of random order information, and sets the list order corresponding to the replaced random order information. Since the playback list is generated and sent to the client, the client can set the content playback sequence depending on the processing on the server side without increasing the processing load on the server side. Further, according to the configuration of the present invention, the

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server is set to the reset random order No. Random order No. based on After generating sequential content playback list information and sending it to the client, the random order information is maintained and stored during content playback according to the content playback list on the client, and the content playback list from the client is stored during the storage retention period. When the request is re-requested, the content playback list information based on the stored random order information is generated and sent to the client, so the client executes the process of sending the content in the specific folder to the random sequence. It becomes possible to reproduce without duplication according to.

844 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS FIG. 1 is a diagram showing an example of an applicable network configuration of the present invention. FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating a configuration example of a network connection device. FIG. 3 is a diagram illustrating a processing sequence between a server and a client in content data reproduction processing. FIG. 4 is a diagram showing an example of a management class of retained content in a server. FIG. 5 is a diagram illustrating a hierarchical structure of setting classes in a server. FIG. 6 is a diagram showing an example of a content information list displayed on a display based on XML data composed of property information transmitted from a server to a client. FIG. 7 is a diagram showing a data communication sequence between a server and a client when content reproduction is executed by randomly setting the content reproduction order. FIG. 8 is a diagram showing a request data structure of a content playlist requested from a client to a server when executing content reproduction by randomly setting a content reproduction order. FIG. 9 is a diagram for explaining content-corresponding property information held by the server. FIG. 10 is a diagram showing a display example of a content playlist. FIG. 11 is a flowchart illustrating a client-side process when executing content reproduction by randomly setting the content reproduction order. FIG. 12 is a flowchart illustrating a server-side process when executing content reproduction by randomly setting the content reproduction order. FIG. 13 is a diagram illustrating property information corresponding to a folder held by the server. FIG. 14 is a block diagram illustrating a processing function of a server. FIG. 15 is a block diagram illustrating a processing function of a client. [Description of Code] 100 Network 101 Server 121 PC122 Monitor 123 Mobile Phone 124 Player 125 PDA201 CPU202 ROM203 RAM204 HDD205 Bus 206 Input / Output Interface 207 Input Unit 208 Output Unit 209 Communication Unit 210 Drive 211 Removable Recording Medium 301 Root Containers 302 to 306 Class 350 Display 357 Content information list 401 Request identifier 402 Folder identifier 403 Sort information 404 List information 420 Content folder 421-423 Content 425-427 Property information 480 Display 481 Content playback list 482 Play button 483 Continuous play setting button 491-493 Folder 495 ~ 497 Property information 501 Packet transmission / reception unit 502 Packet generation and analysis unit 503 Content storage unit 504 Metadata storage unit 505 Property information acquisition unit 506 Random order No.

874 Setting unit 507 Content information generation unit 508 Data conversion unit 601 Packet transmission / reception unit 602 Packet generation and analysis unit 603 Content information request processing unit 604 Storage unit 605 Output unit 606 Input unit 607 Content information analysis unit 608 Content playback control processing unit 609 Data

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CLAIMS JP2004295569A

1.

13 An information processing device that executes content information transmission processing, an object containing at least one of contents or a data folder, a storage unit that stores property information as attribute information of the object, and a client as a content information request device. It has a data transmission / reception unit that executes data transmission / reception processing and a content information generation unit that generates content information to be transmitted to the client based on the property information, and the property information is used as list order setting information of the content playback list. It has the corresponding rewritable random order information, and the content information generation unit executes an update process as a replacement reset process of the random order information in response to a content playback list request from the client, and converts the update information into the update information. An information processing device having a configuration for executing a process of generating content playback list information having the following list order information and transmitting it to a client.

2.

29 The random order information is numbering data as a number set for each property information corresponding to each content included in the content folder set as a set of a plurality of contents, and the number of contents n included in the content folder. N random order numbers are set without duplication with respect to the information, and the content information generation unit executes shuffle of 1 to n random order information corresponding to the number of contents n to execute each property information. The information processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the random order information exchange processing set for is executed.

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3.

40 The random order information is numbering data as a number set for the property information corresponding to the content playback list folder storing the content playback list, and the content information generation unit sets the number of folders to be shuffled to n. Billing characterized in that the corresponding 1 to n random order information is shuffled, the random order information set for each property information is replaced, and the list order setting process is executed for each folder. Item 1. The information processing apparatus according to item 1.

4.

50 The information processing device determines whether or not there is a content playlist generation request by a random order in the content playlist generation request data from the client, and on condition that there is a content playlist generation request by a random order. The information processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the information processing apparatus is configured to execute the random order information update process.

5.

58 The information processing device is characterized in that, after executing the update process of the random order information, the information processing device maintains and stores the random order information during content reproduction according to the content reproduction list on the client. The information processing apparatus according to 1.

6.

65 After executing the update process of the random order information, the information processing apparatus maintains and stores the random order information during content reproduction according to the content reproduction list in the client, and also receives the random order information from the client during the storage retention period. The first aspect of claim 1, wherein the process of generating the content playback list information based on the stored random order information and transmitting the content playback list information to the client is executed in response to the re-request of the content playback list request. Information processing equipment.

7.

76 The information processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the content information generation unit is configured to execute a process of generating the content playlist information as XML (eXtended Markup Language) data.

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8.

82 An information processing device that acquires content information, and executes data transmission / reception processing with the server that holds the content information, and requests processing for the content playback list set in random order for the server. A content information request processing unit, a content information analysis unit that generates a content playback list composed of a plurality of content information based on the content information received from the server via the data transmission / reception unit, and the content information analysis unit. A display unit that displays the generated content playback list, and a content playback control unit that sends a content acquisition request to the server according to the list order of the content playback list and executes a playback control process of the content received from the server. An information processing device characterized by having.

9.

96 The content information request processing unit is configured to execute a process of generating content information request data storing random order setting information as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the specification information of the content folder storing a plurality of contents. The information processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the information processing device is provided.

10.

104 The content information request processing unit is configured to execute a process of generating content information request data in which random order setting information is stored as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the specified information of a plurality of content playback list folders. 8. The information processing apparatus according to claim 8.

11.

112 The content reproduction control unit is characterized in that it executes a process of sequentially transmitting a content request set with a content corresponding URL included in the content information received from the server to the server according to the list order of the content reproduction list. The information processing apparatus according to claim 8.

12.

119 The content information received from the server is XML (eXteded Markup Language) data that describes property information corresponding to the content, and the content information analysis unit analyzes the XML data to perform a content reproduction list

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composed of a plurality of content information. The information processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the information processing apparatus is configured to execute a process of generating the information.

13.

128 It is an information processing method that executes the content information transmission process, and the content information acquisition request reception step that receives the content information acquisition request from the client and the list order setting information of the content playback list stored in the property information corresponding to the content. The random order information update step that executes the update process of the random order information as, the list generation step that generates the content playback list information having the list order information according to the updated random order information, and the generation list are sent to the client. An information processing method characterized by having a step to perform.

14.

140 The random order information is numbering data as a number set for each property information corresponding to each content included in the content folder set as a set of a plurality of contents, and the number of contents included in the content folder n. N random order numbers are set without duplication with respect to the information, and the random order information update step executes shuffling of 1 to n random order information corresponding to the number of contents n to execute each property. The information processing method according to claim 13, wherein the random order information replacement process set for the information is executed.

15.

151 The random order information is numbering data as a number set for the property information corresponding to the content playback list folder storing the content playback list, and the random order information update step is the number of folders to be shuffled. It is characterized in that the random order information of 1 to n corresponding to is shuffled, the random order information set for each property information is replaced, and the list order setting process is executed for each folder. The information processing method according to claim 13.

16.

161 The information processing method further includes a step of determining whether or not there is a content playlist generation request by a random order in the content playlist generation request data from the client, and there is a content playlist generation request by

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a random order. The information processing method according to claim 13, wherein the random order information update process is executed on condition of the determination of the above.

17.

170 The information processing method is further characterized by having a step of maintaining and storing the random order information during content reproduction according to the content reproduction list in the client after executing the update process of the random order information. The information processing method according to claim 13.

18.

177 The information processing method further maintains and stores the random order information during content reproduction according to the content reproduction list in the client after executing the update process of the random order information, and also during the storage retention period. The thirteenth aspect of claim 13, wherein the process of generating the content playback list information based on the stored random order information and transmitting the content playback list information to the client is executed in response to the re-request of the content playback list request from the client. Information processing method.

19.

188 The information processing method according to claim 13, wherein the content information generation step executes a process of generating the content playlist information as XML (eXtended Markup Language) data.

20.

194 It is an information processing method that performs content acquisition processing, and is based on a content information request processing step that executes request processing of a content playback list set in a random order for a server that holds content information, and content information received from the server. A content information analysis step for generating a content playback list composed of a plurality of content information, a display step for displaying the content playback list generated in the content information analysis step, and a content acquisition request according to the list order of the content playback list. An information processing method comprising: a content reproduction control step of transmitting to a server and executing a reproduction control process of the content received from the server.

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21.

207 The content information request processing step executes a process of generating content information request data storing random order setting information as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with the specification information of the content folder storing a plurality of contents. The information processing method according to claim 20, wherein the information processing method is characterized.

22.

215 The content information request processing step is characterized in that it executes a process of generating content information request data in which random order setting information is stored as setting order sort information of the content playback list together with designation information of a plurality of content playback list folders. The information processing method according to claim 20.

23.

223 The content reproduction control step is characterized in that a process of sequentially transmitting a content request set with a content corresponding URL included in the content information received from the server to the server is executed according to the list order of the content reproduction list. Item 20. The information processing method according to Item 20.

24.

231 The content information received from the server is XML (eXteded Markup Language) data that describes property information corresponding to the content, and the content information analysis step is a content reproduction list composed of a plurality of content information by analyzing the XML data. The information processing apparatus according to claim 20, wherein the processing for generating the information processing is executed.

25.

239 A computer program that executes content information transmission processing, and the content information acquisition request reception step that receives the content information acquisition request from the client, and the list order setting information of the content playback list stored in the property information corresponding to the content. The random order information update step that executes the update process of the random order information as, the list generation step that generates the content playback list information having the list order information according to the updated random order information, and the generation list are sent to the client. A computer program characterized by having, and having steps to do.

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26.

251 It is a computer program that performs content acquisition processing, and is based on the content information request processing step that executes the request processing of the content playback list set in random order for the server that holds the content information, and the content information received from the server. A content information analysis step for generating a content playback list composed of a plurality of content information, a display step for displaying the content playback list generated in the content information analysis step, and a content acquisition request according to the list order of the content playback list. A computer program comprising: a content reproduction control step of transmitting to a server and executing a reproduction control process of the content received from the server.

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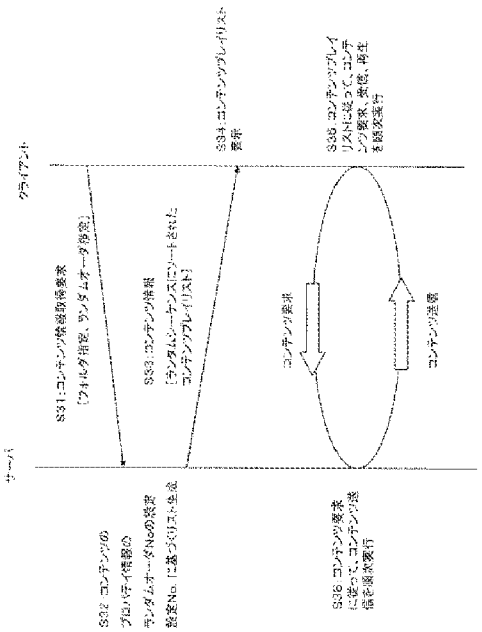
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(71)出願人　000002185
ソニー株式会社
東京都品川区北品川６丁目７番３５号
(74)代理人　100093241
弁理士　宮田　正昭
(74)代理人　100101801
弁理士　山田　英治
(74)代理人　100086531
弁理士　澤田　俊夫
(72)発明者　吉川　典史
東京都品川区北品川６丁目７番３５号　ソニー株式会社内
(72)発明者　本田　康晃
東京都品川区北品川６丁目７番３５号　ソニー株式会社内

最終頁に続く

(54)【発明の名称】情報処理装置、および情報処理方法、並びにコンピュータ・プログラム

(57)【要約】
【課題】ランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生処理をクライアントの負担を減少させて効率的に実行する装置および方法を提供する。
【解決手段】クライアントからの要求に基づいてサーバ側でコンテンツの再生順をランダムに設定したリストを生成し、クライアントに送信する。サーバで保持するコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報にコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応するランダムオーダ情報を格納し、クライアントからのブラウズ要求等に応じて、指定フォルダ内のコンテンツのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフル入れ替え処理を実行して入れ替えたランダムオーダ情報に対応するリスト順を設定したコンテンツ再生リストを生成してクライアントに送信する。本構成により、ユーザおよびクライアント側でシャッフル処理を行う必要が排除される。
【選択図】　図7



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【特許請求の範囲】
【請求項1】
コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行する情報処理装置であり、
コンテンツまたはデータフォルダの少なくともいずれかを含むオブジェクトと、前記オブジェクトの属性情報としてのプロパティ情報を記憶した記憶部と、
コンテンツ情報要求装置としてのクライアントとのデータ送受信処理を実行するデータ送受信部と、
前記プロパティ情報に基づいて、クライアントに送信するコンテンツ情報を生成するコンテンツ情報生成部とを有し、
前記プロパティ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報を有し、
前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、
クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求に応じて、前記ランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え再設定処理としての更新処理を実行し、更新情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成を有することを特徴とする情報処理装置。
【請求項2】
前記ランダムオーダ情報は、複数のコンテンツの集合として設定されるコンテンツフォルダに含まれる各コンテンツに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、コンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報であり、
前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、
コンテンツ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項3】
前記ランダムオーダ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストを格納したコンテンツ再生リストフォルダに対応するプロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、
前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、
シャッフル対象となるフォルダ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行しフォルダ単位でのリスト順設定処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項4】
前記情報処理装置は、
クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リストの要求データにランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるか否かを判定し、ランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるとの判定を条件として、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項5】
前記情報処理装置は、
前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持する構成であることを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項6】
前記情報処理装置は、
前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するとともに、該記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求に応じて、該

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記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項7】
前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、
前記コンテンツ再生リスト情報をＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データとして生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項１に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項8】
コンテンツ情報の取得処理を行う情報処理装置であり、
コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバとのデータ送受信処理を実行するデータ送受信部と、
前記サーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リストの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理部と、
前記データ送受信部を介して前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析部と、
前記コンテンツ情報解析部の生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示部と、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御部と、
を有することを特徴とする情報処理装置。
【請求項9】
前記コンテンツ情報要求処理部は、
複数のコンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項８に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項10】
前記コンテンツ情報要求処理部は、
複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項８に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項11】
前記コンテンツ再生制御部は、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従って、サーバから受信したコンテンツ情報に含まれるコンテンツ対応ＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求を前記サーバに、順次送信する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項８に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項12】
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報は、コンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報を記述したＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データであり、
前記コンテンツ情報解析部は、
前記ＸＭＬデータの解析により、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする請求項８に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項13】
コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行する情報処理方法であり、
クライアントからのコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信するコンテンツ情報取得要求受信ステップと、
コンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中に格納されたコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報としてのランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行するランダムオーダ情報更新ステップと、
更新されたランダムオーダ情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を

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生成するリスト生成ステップと、
生成リストをクライアントに送信するステップと、
を有することを特徴とする情報処理方法。
【請求項14】
前記ランダムオーダ情報は、複数のコンテンツの集合として設定されるコンテンツフォルダに含まれる各コンテンツに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであってコンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報であり、
前記ランダムオーダ情報更新ステップは、
コンテンツ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項15】
前記ランダムオーダ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストを格納したコンテンツ再生リストフォルダに対応するプロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、
前記ランダムオーダ情報更新ステップは、
シャッフル対象となるフォルダ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行しフォルダ単位でのリスト順設定処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項16】
前記情報処理方法は、さらに、
クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リストの要求データにランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるか否かを判定するステップを有し、
ランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるとの判定を条件として、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項17】
前記情報処理方法は、さらに、
前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するステップを有することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項18】
前記情報処理方法は、さらに、
前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するとともに、該記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求に応じて、該記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項19】
前記コンテンツ情報生成ステップは、
前記コンテンツ再生リスト情報をＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データとして生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項１３に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項20】
コンテンツ取得処理を行う情報処理方法であり、
コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リストの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理ステップと、
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコン

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テンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析ステップと、
前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップにおいて生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示ステップと、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御ステップと、
を有することを特徴とする情報処理方法。
【請求項21】
前記コンテンツ情報要求処理ステップは、
複数のコンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項２０に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項22】
前記コンテンツ情報要求処理ステップは、
複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項２０に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項23】
前記コンテンツ再生制御ステップは、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従って、サーバから受信したコンテンツ情報に含まれるコンテンツ対応ＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求を前記サーバに、順次送信する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項２０に記載の情報処理方法。
【請求項24】
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報は、コンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報を記述したＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データであり、
前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップは、
前記ＸＭＬデータの解析により、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする請求項２０に記載の情報処理装置。
【請求項25】
コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行するコンピュータ・プログラムであり、
クライアントからのコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信するコンテンツ情報取得要求受信ステップと、
コンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中に格納されたコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報としてのランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行するランダムオーダ情報更新ステップと、
更新されたランダムオーダ情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成するリスト生成ステップと、
生成リストをクライアントに送信するステップと、
を有することを特徴とするコンピュータ・プログラム。
【請求項26】
コンテンツ取得処理を行うコンピュータ・プログラムであり、
コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リストの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理ステップと、
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析ステップと、
前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップにおいて生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示ステップと、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御ステップと、

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を有することを特徴とするコンピューク・プログラム。
【発明の詳細な説明】
【０００１】
【発明の属する技術分野】
本発明は、情報処理装置、および情報処理方法、並びにコンピュータ・プログラムに関する。さらに、詳細には、コンテンツ提供サーバの有するコンテンツの再生をクライアント側で実行する場合に、クライアント側に負担を発生させることなく、コンテンツの再生シーケンスを適宜、変更して再生することを可能とした情報処理装置、および情報処理方法、並びにコンピュータ・プログラムに関する。
【０００２】
【従来の技術】
昨今のデータ通信ネットワークの普及に伴い、家庭内においても家電機器やコンピュータ、その他の周辺機器をネットワーク接続し、各機器間での通信を可能とした、いわゆるホームネットワークが浸透しつつある。ホームネットワークは、ネットワーク接続機器間で通信を行なうことにより各機器のデータ処理機能を共有したり、機器間でコンテンツの送受信を行なう等、ユーザに利便性・快適性を提供するものであり、今後、ますます普及することが予測される。
【０００３】
このようなホームネットワークの構成に適するプロトコルとしてユニバーサルプラグアンドプレイ（ＵＰｎＰ：Ｕｎｉｖｅｒｓａｌ　Ｐｌｕｇ　ａｎｄ　Ｐｌａｙ）が知られている。ユニバーサルプラグアンドプレイ（ＵＰｎＰ）は、複雑な操作を伴うことなく容易にネットワークを構築することが可能であり、困難な操作や設定を伴うことなくネットワーク接続された機器において各接続機器の提供サービスを受領可能とするものである。また、ＵＰｎＰはデバイス上のＯＳ（オペレーティングシステム）にも依存せず、容易に機器の追加ができるという利点を持つ。
【０００４】
ＵＰｎＰは、接続機器間で、ＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｓｉｂｌｅ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）に準拠した定義ファイルを交換し、機器間において相互認識を行なう。ＵＰｎＰの処理の概要は、以下の通りである。
（１）ＩＰアドレス等の自己のデバイスＩＤを取得するアドレッシング処理。
（２）ネットワーク上の各デバイスの検索を行ない、各デバイスから応答を受信し、応答に含まれるデバイス種別、機能等の情報を取得するディスカバリ処理。
（３）ディスカバリ処理で取得した情報に基づいて、各デバイスにサービスを要求するサービス要求処理。
【０００５】
上記処理手順を行なうことで、ネットワーク接続された機器を適用したサービスの提供および受領が可能となる。ネットワークに新たに接続される機器は、上記のアドレッシング処理によりデバイスＩＤを取得し、ディスカバリ処理によりネットワーク接続された他のデバイスの情報を取得して、取得情報に基づいて他の機器にサービスの要求が可能となる。
【０００６】
例えばサーバに格納された音楽データ、画像データ等のコンテンツをクライアント側デバイスにおいて再生しようとする場合には、クライアントは、サーバの保有するコンテンツについての情報を取得する。サーバは、コンテンツを記憶部に格納するとともに、格納コンテンツに対する属性情報を併せて格納している。属性情報には、例えばコンテンツとしての例えば曲や映画のタイトル、アーティスト名、記録日時、さらにデータの圧縮態様等に関する情報など様々である。これらの属性情報はメタデータあるいはメタ情報と呼ばれる。
【０００７】
例えばサーバに格納された音楽データ、画像データ等のコンテンツをクライアント側デバ

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イスにおいて再生しようとする場合には、クライアント側からサーバに対してサーバに格納されたコンテンツ情報、例えば曲や映画のタイトルやアーティスト名、さらにデータの圧縮態様情報（ＡＴＲＡＣ：ａｄａｐｔｉｖｅ　ｔｒａｎｓｆｏｒｍ　ａｃｏｕｓｔｉｃ　ｃｏｄｉｎｇ，　ＭＰＥＧ：ｍｏｖｉｎｇ　ｐｉｃｔｕｒｅ　ｅｘｐｅｒｔｓ　ｇｒｏｕｐ等）、さらに必要に応じて著作権情報などの様々なコンテンツの属性情報の取得要求を送信する。

【０００８】

サーバは、クライアントからの要求に応じてサーバの保有するコンテンツに関するメタデータ（属性情報）をクライアントに送信する。クライアントは、サーバから取得したメタデータに基づいて所定の表示プログラムに従ってクライアントデバイスのディスプレイにコンテンツ情報を表示する。例えばアーティスト名、タイトル等からなる曲目リストなどがディスプレイに表示される。ユーザは、表示情報に基づいて、再生対象コンテンツを確認あるいは選択して、コンテンツの送信要求をサーバに送信する。サーバはクライアントからのコンテンツリクエストを受信し、受信リクエストに応じてサーバからクライアントに対するコンテンツの送信が行われ、クライアント側において受信コンテンツの再生が行われる。

【０００９】

このようにサーバに格納されたコンテンツは、ネットワーク接続された他の機器（クライアント）から検索を行い、特定のコンテンツを指定して再生することが可能となる。

【００１０】

例えば、１つの音楽コンテンツのみを再生対象としてクライアントが選択した場合は、その１つの音楽コンテンツの識別子を含むコンテンツ送信要求がサーバに送信されて、サーバが指定コンテンツを記憶部から取得してクライアントに送信しクライアントにおいて再生され、処理が終了する。複数の音楽コンテンツが再生対象としてクライアントにより選択されると、コンテンツ毎に送信要求がクライアントからサーバに送信され、各音楽コンテンツがサーバからクライアントに順次、提供されて、クライアント側において再生されることになる。

【００１１】

サーバに格納されるコンテンツフォルダには、複数の音楽コンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダ、例えばユーザがお気に入りの曲のみを集めて生成したフォルダ、あるいは特定のアーティスト、ジャンル等の複数の音楽コンテンツを格納したフォルダ等を設定可能であり、クライアント側のユーザはこれらの特定のフォルダを指定してフォルダに格納された複数のコンテンツ（曲）をシーケンシャルに再生する処理が可能である。

【００１２】

複数の曲からなる集合体を記録再生装置から、携帯装置等の端末に転送する際に、コンテンツおよびその管理データを併せて送信する構成については、例えば特許文献１に記載されている。

【００１３】

複数コンテンツの格納されたフォルダをクライアントが再生対象としてフォルダ内の複数コンテンツ再生を実行する場合、曲の再生順が常に一定の順番で行われると、コンテンツを聞く側のユーザの楽しみが減退する。そこで、複数のコンテンツ再生の順番の変更処理、すなわち複数のコンテンツ再生順をシャッフルして再生順を変更することが行われる。

【００１４】

従来、このようなコンテンツ再生シーケンスの変更処理は、サーバからクライアントに送信されてきた複数コンテンツに関する曲目等のデータリストに基づいて、ユーザが再生順の決定処理を行うか、あるいは、クライアント側の機器に格納した再生シーケンス決定プログラムによって再生順を決定するなどの処理が行われていた。すなわち、クライアント側が主導的にコンテンツ再生順を決定し、決定したコンテンツ再生順に従ってクライアントがサーバにコンテンツ要求を送信する。サーバは、単にクライアントからの要求情報に基づいて、コンテンツを順次送信するという処理を行っているのが一般的であった。

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【００１５】
このような構成では、コンテンツの再生順の設定あるいはシャッフル等、複数コンテンツの再生順を変更する処理をクライアント側で実行することが必要となり、ユーザまたはクライアント側の負担が発生するという問題があった。
【００１６】
【特許文献１】
特許公開２００１－２１６７６６号公報
【００１７】
【発明が解決しようとする課題】
本発明は、上述の問題点に鑑みてなされたものであり、ユーザまたはクライアント側に負担を発生させることなく、コンテンツの再生シーケンスを適宜、変更して再生することを可能とした情報処理装置、および情報処理方法、並びにコンピュータ・プログラムを提供することを目的とする。
【００１８】
【課題を解決するための手段】
本発明の第１の側面は、
コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行する情報処理装置であり、
コンテンツまたはデークフォルダの少なくともいずれかを含むオブジェクトと、前記オブジェクトの属性情報としてのプロパティ情報を記憶した記憶部と、
コンテンツ情報要求装置としてのクライアントとのデータ送受信処理を実行するデータ送受信部と、
前記プロパティ情報に基づいて、クライアントに送信するコンテンツ情報を生成するコンテンツ情報生成部とを有し、
前記プロパティ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報を有し、
前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、
クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求に応じて、前記ランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え再設定処理としての更新処理を実行し、更新情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成を有することを特徴とする情報処理装置にある。
【００１９】
さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記ランダムオーダ情報は、複数のコンテンツの集合として設定されるコンテンツフォルダに含まれる各コンテンツに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、コンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報であり、前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、コンテンツ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００２０】
さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記ランダムオーダ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストを格納したコンテンツ再生リストフォルダに対応するプロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、シャッフル対象となるフォルダ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行しフォルダ単位でのリスト順設定処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００２１】
さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記情報処理装置は、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リストの要求データにランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるか否かを判定し、ランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるとの判定を条件として、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行する構成である

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ことを特徴とする。

【００２２】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記情報処理装置は、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２３】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記情報処理装置は、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するとともに、該記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求に応じて、該記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２４】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報生成部は、前記コンテンツ再生リスト情報をＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データとして生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２５】

さらに、本発明の第２の側面は、

コンテンツ情報の取得処理を行う情報処理装置であり、

コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバとのデータ送受信処理を実行するデータ送受信部と、

前記サーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リストの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理部と、

前記データ送受信部を介して前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析部と、

前記コンテンツ情報解析部の生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示部と、

コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御部と、

を有することを特徴とする情報処理装置にある。

【００２６】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報要求処理部は、複数のコンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２７】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報要求処理部は、複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２８】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ再生制御部は、コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従って、サーバから受信したコンテンツ情報に含まれるコンテンツ対応ＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求を前記サーバに、順次送信する処理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００２９】

さらに、本発明の情報処理装置の一実施態様において、前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報は、コンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報を記述したＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データであり、前記コンテンツ情報解析部は、前記ＸＭＬデータの解析により、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成する処

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理を実行する構成であることを特徴とする。

【００３０】

さらに、本発明の第３の側面は、

コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行する情報処理方法であり、

クライアントからのコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信するコンテンツ情報取得要求受信ステップと、

コンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中に格納されたコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報としてのランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行するランダムオーダ情報更新ステップと、

更新されたランダムオーダ情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成するリスト生成ステップと、

生成リストをクライアントに送信するステップと、

を有することを特徴とする情報処理方法にある。

【００３１】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記ランダムオーダ情報は、複数のコンテンツの集合として設定されるコンテンツフォルダに含まれる各コンテンツに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであってコンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報であり、前記ランダムオーダ情報更新ステップは、コンテンツ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行することを特徴とする。

【００３２】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記ランダムオーダ情報は、コンテンツ再生リストを格納したコンテンツ再生リストフォルダに対応するプロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、前記ランダムオーダ情報更新ステップは、シャッフル対象となるフォルダ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行しフォルダ単位でのリスト順設定処理を実行することを特徴とする。

【００３３】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記情報処理方法は、さらに、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リストの要求データにランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるか否かを判定するステップを有し、ランダムオーダによるコンテンツ再生リスト生成要求があるとの判定を条件として、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行することを特徴とする。

【００３４】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記情報処理方法は、さらに、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するステップを有することを特徴とする。

【００３５】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記情報処理方法は、さらに、前記ランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持するとともに、該記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求に応じて、該記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行することを特徴とする。

【００３６】

さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報生成ステップは、前記コンテンツ再生リスト情報をＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データとして生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする。

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【００３７】
さらに、本発明の第４の側面は、
コンテンツ取得処理を行う情報処理方法であり、
コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リストの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理ステップと、
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析ステップと、
前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップにおいて生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示ステップと、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御ステップと、
を有することを特徴とする情報処理方法にある。
【００３８】
さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報要求処理ステップは、複数のコンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００３９】
さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ情報要求処理ステップは、複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００４０】
さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記コンテンツ再生制御ステップは、コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従って、サーバから受信したコンテンツ情報に含まれるコンテンツ対応ＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求を前記サーバに、順次送信する処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００４１】
さらに、本発明の情報処理方法の一実施態様において、前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報は、コンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報を記述したＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データであり、前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップは、前記ＸＭＬデータの解析により、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成する処理を実行することを特徴とする。
【００４２】
さらに、本発明の第５の側面は、
コンテンツ情報送信処理を実行するコンピュータ・プログラムであり、
クライアントからのコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信するコンテンツ情報取得要求受信ステップと、
コンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中に格納されたコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報としてのランダムオーダ情報の更新処理を実行するランダムオーダ情報更新ステップと、
更新されたランダムオーダ情報に従ったリスト順情報を持つコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成するリスト生成ステップと、
生成リストをクライアントに送信するステップと、
を有することを特徴とするコンピュータ・プログラムにある。
【００４３】
さらに、本発明の第６の側面は、
コンテンツ取得処理を行うコンピュータ・プログラムであり、
コンテンツ情報を保有するサーバに対してランダムオーダに設定したコンテンツ再生リス

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トの要求処理を実行するコンテンツ情報要求処理ステップと、
前記サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報に基づいて、複数のコンテンツ情報からなるコンテンツ再生リストを生成するコンテンツ情報解析ステップと、
前記コンテンツ情報解析ステップにおいて生成したコンテンツ再生リストを表示する表示ステップと、
コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順に従ってコンテンツ取得要求を前記サーバに送信するとともに、該サーバから受信したコンテンツの再生制御処理を実行するコンテンツ再生制御ステップと、
を有することを特徴とするコンピュータ・プログラムにある。
【００４４】
【作用】
本発明の構成によれば、クライアントからの要求に基づいてサーバ側でコンテンツの再生順をランダムに設定したリストを生成し、クライアントに送信する構成としたので、クライアントは、サーバから受信するリストに従って再生処理を行うのみで、ランダムな再生シーケンスに従ってコンテンツ再生を楽しむことが可能となり、ユーザおよびクライアント側でシャッフル処理を行う必要が排除される。
【００４５】
さらに、本発明の構成によれば、サーバで保持するコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中にコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報を格納し、クライアントからのブラウズ要求等のコンテンツ情報取得要求に応じて、指定フォルダ内のコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報を取得してランダムオーダ情報のシャッフル入れ替え処理を実行して入れ替えたランダムオーダ情報に対応するリスト順を設定したコンテンツ再生リストを生成してクライアントに送信する構成としたので、サーバ側の処理負担も大きくすることなく、クライアントは、サーバ側の処理に依存したコンテンツ再生シーケンス設定を行うことが可能となる。
【００４６】
さらに、本発明の構成によれば、サーバは、再設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてランダムオーダＮｏ．順のコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持し、記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求があった場合は、記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成としたので、クライアントは特定フォルダ内のコンテンツを、ランダムシーケンスに従って重複なく再生することが可能となる。
【００４７】
なお、本発明のコンピュータ・プログラムは、例えば、様々なプログラム・コードを実行可能な汎用コンピュータ・システムに対して、コンピュータ可読な形式で提供する記憶媒体、通信媒体、例えば、ＣＤやＦＤ、ＭＯなどの記憶媒体、あるいは、ネットワークなどの通信媒体によって提供可能なコンピュータ・プログラムである。このようなプログラムをコンピュータ可読な形式で提供することにより、コンピュータ・システム上でプログラムに応じた処理が実現される。
【００４８】
本発明のさらに他の目的、特徴や利点は、後述する本発明の実施例や添付する図面に基づく、より詳細な説明によって明らかになるであろう。なお、本明細書においてシステムとは、複数の装置の論理的集合構成であり、各構成の装置が同一筐体内にあるものには限らない。
【００４９】
【発明の実施の形態】
以下、図面を参照しながら、本発明の情報処理装置、および情報処理方法、並びにコンピュータ・プログラムの詳細について説明する。

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【００５０】
［システム概要］
まず、図１を参照して、本発明の適用可能なネットワーク構成例について説明する。図１は、様々なクライアント装置からの処理要求に応じて処理を実行するサーバ１０１と、サーバ１０１に対して処理要求を行なうクライアント装置としてのＰＣ１２１，モニター１２２，携帯電話１２３、再生機１２４、ＰＤＡ１２５がネットワーク１００を介して接続された構成、例えばホームネットワーク構成を示している。クライアント装置としては、この他にも様々な電子機器、家電機器が接続可能である。
【００５１】
サーバ１０１がクライアントからの要求に応じて実行する処理は、例えばサーバ１０１の保有するハードディスク等の記憶手段に格納されたコンテンツの提供、あるいはサーバの実行可能なアプリケーションプログラムの実行によるデータ処理サービス等である。なお、図1においては、サーバ１０１と、クライアント装置とを区別して示しているが、クライアントからの要求に対するサービスを提供する機器をサーバとして示しているものであり、いずれのクライアント装置も、自己のデータ処理サービスを他のクライアントに提供する場合には、サーバとしての機能を提供可能となる。従って、図１に示すネットワーク接続されたクライアント装置もサーバとなり得る。
【００５２】
ネットワーク１００は、有線、無線等いずれかのネットワークであり、各接続機器は、例えばイーサネット（登録商標）フレーム等の通信パケットをネットワーク１００を介して送受信する。すなわち、クライアントは、イーサネットフレームのデータ部に処理要求情報を格納したフレームをサーバ１０１に送信することにより、サーバ１０１に対するデータ処理要求を実行する。サーバ１０１は、処理要求フレームの受信に応じて、データ処理を実行し、必要に応じてデータ処理結果としての結果データを通信パケットのデータ部に格納し、各クライアントに送信する。
【００５３】
ネットワーク接続機器は、例えばユニバーサルプラグアンドプレイ（ＵＰｎＰ：Ｕｎｉｖｅｒｓａｌ　Ｐｌｕｇ　ａｎｄ　Ｐｌａｙ）対応機器によって構成される。従って、ネットワークに対する接続機器の追加、削除が容易な構成である。ネットワークに新たに接続する機器は、
（１）ＩＰアドレス等の自己のデバイスＩＤを取得するアドレッシング処理。
（２）ネットワーク上の各デバイスの検索を行ない、各デバイスから応答を受信し、応答に含まれるデバイス種別、機能等の情報を取得するディスカバリ処理。
（３）ディスカバリ処理で取得した情報に基づいて、各デバイスにサービスを要求するサービス要求処理。
上記処理手順を行なうことで、ネットワーク接続された機器を適用したサービスを受領することが可能となる。
【００５４】
図１に示すサーバおよびクライアント装置を構成する情報処理装置の一例としてＰＣのハードウェア構成例について図２を参照して説明する。
【００５５】
ＣＰＵ（Ｃｅｎｔｒａｌ　Ｐｒｏｃｅｓｓｉｎｇ　Ｕｎｉｔ）２０１は、ＲＯＭ（Ｒｅａｄ　Ｏｎｌｙ　Ｍｅｍｏｒｙ）２０２、またはＨＤＤ２０４等に記憶されているプログラムに従って、各種の処理を実行し、データ処理手段、あるいは通信制御処理手段として機能する。ＲＡＭ２０３には、ＣＰＵ２０１が実行するプログラムやデータが適宜記憶される。ＣＰＵ２０１、ＲＯＭ２０２、およびＲＡＭ２０３、ＨＤＤ２０４は、バス２０５を介して相互に接続されている。
【００５６】
バス２０５には、入出力インタフェース２０６が接続されており、この入出力インタフェース２０６には、例えば、ユーザにより操作されるキーボード、スイッチ、ボタン、ある

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いはマウス等により構成される入力部２０７、ユーザに各種の情報を提示するＬＣＤ、ＣＲＴ、スピーカ等により構成される出力部２０８が接続される。さらに、データ送受信手段として機能する通信部２０９、さらに、磁気ディスク、光ディスク、光磁気ディスク、または半導体メモリなどのリムーバブル記録媒体２１１を装着可能で、これらのリムーバブル記録媒体２１１からのデータ読み出しあるいは書き込み処理を実行するドライブ２１０が接続される。

【００５７】

図２に示す構成は、図１に示すネットワーク接続機器の一例としてのサーバ、パーソナルコンピュータ（ＰＣ）の例であるが、ネットワーク接続機器はＰＣに限らず、図１に示すように携帯電話、ＰＤＡ等の携帯通信端末、その他、再生装置、ディスプレイ等の様々な電子機器、情報処理装置によって構成することが可能である。従って、それぞれの機器固有のハードウェア構成を持つことが可能であり、そのハードウェアに従った処理を実行する。

【００５８】

［メタデータ］

次にクライアントに提供するコンテンツを格納したサーバが保有するメタデータについて説明する。サーバは、自己の記憶部に格納した静止画、動画等の画像データ、音楽等の音声データ等のコンテンツ各々に対応する属性情報をメタデータとして保有している。なお、メタデータの構成要素をプロパティ情報と呼ぶ。

【００５９】

なお、サーバの保有する静止画、動画等の画像データ、音楽等の音声データ等のコンテンツを総称してＡＶコンテンツと呼ぶ。サーバにおいて、ＡＶコンテンツは、階層構成を有するコンテンツディレクトリによって管理される。

【００６０】

コンテンツディレクトリは、個々のＡＶコンテンツあるいは複数のＡＶコンテンツを格納したフォルダによって構成される階層構成を持つ。コンテンツディレクトリの個々の要素、すなわち、個々のＡＶコンテンツあるいは複数のＡＶコンテンツを格納したフォルダの各々はオブジェクト（Ｏｂｊｅｃｔ）と呼ばれる。なお、オブジェクトとは、サーバによって処理されるデータ単位の総称であり、個々のＡＶコンテンツあるいは複数のＡＶコンテンツを格納したフォルダ以外にも様々なオブジェクトが存在する。

【００６１】

また、オブジェクトの集合をコンテナ（Ｃｏｎｔａｉｎｅｒ）と呼ぶ、集合の単位は、例えば各オブジェクトの物理的な記憶位置に基づく集合、各オブジェクトの論理的関係に基づく集合、カテゴリに基づく集合等、様々に設定され得る。なお、ＡＶコンテンツの最小単位、すなわち１つの楽曲データ、１つの動画データ、１つの静止画データ等をアイテム（ｉｔｅｍ）とよぶ。

【００６２】

オブジェクトは、その種類、例えば音楽（Ａｕｄｉｏ）、ビデオ（Ｖｉｄｅｏ）、写真（Ｐｈｏｔｏ）等、その種類によりクラスに分類されクラスラベリングがなされる。クライアントは、例えば特定のクラスを指定して、特定の分類に属するオブジェクトのみを対象とした「サーチ」を要求し実行することができる。また特定のフォルダ等のオブジェクトを指定して、そのフォルダに関する情報のみを要求する「ブラウズ」を要求し特定フォルダに関する情報の取得処理をすることが可能である。なお、サーバにおいては、クラスも階層構成で管理されており、１つのクラスの下にサブクラスの設定が可能である。

【００６３】

メタデータは、サーバの持つコンテンツに対応した属性情報、クラスの定義情報、コンテンツディレクトリを構成する階層構成に関する情報等を含むさまざまな管理情報である。個々のオブジェクトに対応付けて定義されたコンテンツの属性情報としてのメタデータには、コンテンツの識別子（ＩＤ）、データサイズ、リソース情報、タイトル、アーティスト名、著作権情報等、様々な情報が含まれる。メタデータに含まれる個々の情報をプロパ

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ティと呼ぶ。なお、音楽（Ａｕｄｉｏ）、ビデオ（Ｖｉｄｅｏ）、写真（Ｐｈｏｔｏ）等、前述したクラス毎にどのようなプロパティからなるメタデータを持つかが予め規定されている。

【００６４】

［クライアントによるコンテンツ再生処理］

例えばコンテンツを再生しようとするクライアントは、サーバに対してコンテンツ要求を行い、要求コンテンツをサーバから受信してコンテンツの再生を行うことができる。一般的なコンテンツ再生の手順について図３を参照して説明する。まず、ステップＳ１１において、クライアントは、サーバの保有するコンテンツ情報の取得要求を行う。ステップＳ１２で、サーバは、クライアントの要求に従ってコンテンツ対応のメタデータに基づいて、タイトル、アーティスト名などのコンテンツ情報をＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データにより生成してクライアントに送信する。

【００６５】

クライアントは、ステップＳ１３において、受信ＸＭＬ情報に従って、コンテンツ情報をディスプレイに表示する。例えば音楽コンテンツであれば、サーバの保有する複数の音楽に対応する曲名、アーティスト名、再生時間等からなるリストとして表示される。

【００６６】

次に、クライアントはステップＳ１４において、クライアント装置において、サーバから受信し再生する曲を選択し、コンテンツ指定情報（例えばコンテンツＩＤ）をサーバに送信する。サーバは受信したコンテンツ指定情報に基づいてコンテンツを記憶手段から取得して、送信する。ステップＳ１６において、クライアントはサーバから受信したコンテンツを再生する。なお、コンテンツがＡＴＲＡＣ、ＭＰＥＧ等の圧縮処理がなされている場合は、クライアント側で復号処理を行った後に再生処理を行う。

【００６７】

通常のコンテンツ再生手順は、上述したとおりである。クライアントは、様々なコンテンツ属性情報、すなわち、サーバの保有するコンテンツ対応のメタデータに含まれるプロパティ情報を取得し、プロパティ情報に基づいてクライアントにコンテンツリスト等のＵＩを表示し、コンテンツを選択しサーバに要求することができる。

【００６８】

図３に示すステップＳ１１における処理、すなわち、クライアントがサーバの保有するコンテンツ情報を取得する際、クライアントは、例えばタイトルにワードとして「クリスマス」の入ったコンテンツ情報を要求するといったコンテンツ検索、いわゆるサーチ処理により、特定のコンテンツ情報を選択して取得することが可能である。あるいは、特定のフォルダ、例えばユーザがお気に入りの曲のみを集めて生成したフォルダ、あるいは特定のアーティスト、ジャンル等の複数の音楽コンテンツを格納したフォルダ等を指定してフォルダに格納された複数コンテンツのコンテンツ情報を取得することが可能である。

【００６９】

前述したように、サーバでは、管理コンテンツとしてのオブジェクトを、その種類、例えば音楽（Ａｕｄｉｏ）、ビデオ（Ｖｉｄｅｏ）、写真（Ｐｈｏｔｏ）等、さらに、アーティスト、アルバムなど、様々なカテゴリ（種類）によりクラスに分類して管理しており、階層構成でクラスの管理を行っている。

【００７０】

サーバにおける管理クラスの一例を図４に示す。図４の例は音楽コンテンツ関連のクラス例である。図４に示すように、曲、アルバム、ジャンル、複数のアルバムを集積したアルバムキャビネットなど、様々なクラスが設定され、サーバは、各クラスでのコンテンツおよびコンテンツ属性情報としてのメタデータ、プロパティ情報の管理を行っている。

【００７１】

サーバの管理するクラスの階層構成例を図５に示す。階層構成は図５に示すように分岐ツリー状の図として示すことができる。図５に示す各円の各々が個々のクラスに対応する。この階層構成は、サーバが記憶部に格納し管理するコンテンツに対応する論理的な管理構

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成を示すものである。各クラスに対応して属性情報としてのメタデータが設定される。
【００７２】
図５において、最上位はルートコンテナ３０１と呼ばれる。ルートコンテナの下位に例えば音楽（ミュージック）クラス３０２、動画クラス３０３、静止画クラス３０４等が設定される。音楽（ミュージック）クラス３０２の下位には、ジャンル３０５、ジャンルの下位には、アーティスト３０６などのクラス設定がなされる。
【００７３】
コンテンツ検索を実行しようとするクライアントは、クラスを指定して、特定のクラス分類に属するオブジェクトのみを対象としたサーチを要求し実行することができる。また、特定のオブジェクトの指定、例えば複数コンテンツを格納したフォルダ等を指定してフォルダに格納されたコンテンツの情報を取得することが可能である。クライアントは、サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報を記述したＸＭＬデータに基づいてコンテンツ情報をディスプレイに表示する。
【００７４】
コンテンツ情報リストの表示処理例を図６に示す。図６に示す例では、コンテンツＮｏ、タイトル、アーティスト名・・をリスト化したデータ構成を持つコンテンツ情報リスト３５７をディスプレイ３５０に表示した例を示している。
【００７５】
これらのコンテンツ情報は、サーバの管理するコンテンツ対応のメタデータの構成要素としてのプロパティ情報に基づいて生成される。サーバはクライアントから受信したサーチまたはブラウズ要求に基づいて条件に一致するコンテンツのメタデータ中のプロパティ情報を取得し、取得したプロパティ情報に基づいてＸＭＬデータを生成し、クライアントに送信する。
【００７６】
クライアントは、サーバによって抽出されたコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報に基づくＸＭＬデータを受信し、受信ＸＭＬデータに基づいて図６に示すような表示データを生成し、クライアントのディスプレイに表示する。
【００７７】
クライアント側のユーザはこれらのリストから再生対象コンテンツを選択し、選択コンテンツ情報をサーバに送信することで、サーバからコンテンツ、すなわち音楽や映画、あるいは写真等、様々なコンテンツが送信されクライアント側で再生、出力が実行される。
【００７８】
［コンテンツ再生シーケンス設定処理］
上述したように、クライアントは、サーバに格納されたコンテンツをブラウズまたはサーチにより選択した後、再生要求コンテンツをサーバに指定してコンテンツの実体、すなわち音楽や画像データ等を取得し、クライアントにおいて再生、出力することが可能となる。
【００７９】
例えば、１つの音楽コンテンツのみを再生対象としてクライアントが選択した場合は、その１つの音楽コンテンツの識別子を含むコンテンツ送信要求がサーバに送信されて、サーバが指定コンテンツを記憶部から取得してクライアントに送信しクライアントにおいて再生され、処理が終了する。複数の音楽コンテンツが再生対象としてクライアントにより選択されると、コンテンツ毎に送信要求がクライアントからサーバに送信され、各音楽コンテンツがサーバからクライアントに順次、提供されて、クライアント側において再生されることになる。
【００８０】
サーバに格納されるコンテンツフォルダには、複数の音楽コンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダ、例えばユーザがお気に入りの曲のみを集めて生成したフォルダ、あるいは特定のアーティスト、ジャンル等の複数の音楽コンテンツを格納したフォルダ等を設定可能であり、クライアント側のユーザはこれらの特定のフォルダに格納されたコンテンツのリ

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ストを上述したブラウズまたはサーチによりサーバから取得することができる。クライアントは、ディスプレイにコンテンツリストを表示して、リストに従った順に順次コンテンツ要求をサーバに送信する設定とすることで、複数コンテンツの連続再生が可能となる。

【００８１】

しかし、従来技術の欄で説明したように、フォルダ内の複数コンテンツ再生を実行する場合、曲の再生順が常に一定の順番で行われると、コンテンツを聞く側のユーザの楽しみが減退する。そこで、複数のコンテンツ再生の順番の変更処理、すなわち複数のコンテンツ再生順をシャッフルして再生順を変更することが行われる。従来、コンテンツ再生シーケンスの変更処理は、サーバからクライアントに送信されてきたコンテンツリストをユーザ側でシャッフルして、リストの順番を変更し、変更したリストに従ってコンテンツ要求をサーバに送信することで実行していた。しかし、この処理はユーザまたはクライアント側における負担を発生させることになる。

【００８２】

本発明の構成においては、例えばクライアントから特定フォルダを指定したコンテンツリストの要求に際し、サーバ側において、ランダムなシーケンスに設定したコンテンツ再生リスト情報を含むコンテンツ情報を生成して、クライアントに送信する。クライアントは、サーバから受信するコンテンツ情報（ＸＭＬデータ）に基づいてコンテンツ再生リスト（コンテンツプレイリスト）をクライアント側ディスプレイに表示する。クライアント側ディスプレイには、サーバ側で設定したランダムオーダ順のコンテンツ再生リストが表示される。従って、クライアント側では、サーバから受信したコンテンツ再生リストに従った順番でコンテンツ再生要求を行うのみで、シャッフルされた、すなわちランダムシーケンスでのコンテンツ再生が可能となる。

【００８３】

図７を参照して、コンテンツのランダムシーケンス再生処理を実行する場合の処理手順について説明する。まず、ステップＳ３１において、クライアントは、サーバからのコンテンツ情報取得処理を実行する。

【００８４】

クライアントは、複数コンテンツを格納したフォルダをサーチまたはブラウズによって特定して、フォルダを指定したコンテンツ情報の取得処理を要求するものとする。このコンテンツ情報要求において、クライアントは、複数コンテンツを格納したフォルダの指定情報とともにフォルダ内のコンテンツ再生リストの設定をランダムシーケンスに設定して送信することを要求する。

【００８５】

図８に、クライアントからサーバに対して送信するコンテンツ再生リストの設定をランダムシーケンスに設定して送信することの要求データ例を示す。図８に示す例は、クライアントが特定のフォルダを指定したブラウズ要求に際して送信するデータ例を示している。

【００８６】

送信データには、要求がブラウズ要求であることを示す要求識別子４０１、フォルダ識別情報４０２、コンテンツ再生リストのソート処理としてランダムオーダでのソートを希望していることを示すソート指定情報４０３、さらにコンテンツ再生リストに含めるリストデータの範囲を示すリスト情報４０４が含まれる。

【００８７】

ソート方式としては、ランダムオーダの他にアーティスト順、曲名順などの指定も可能である。リスト情報４０４に指定するコンテンツ再生リストに含めるリストデータの範囲は任意に設定可能であり、例えば１００曲の音楽コンテンツが格納されたフォルダであれば、リストデータとして１０曲を指定し、ソート処理としてランダムオーダを指定した場合は、サーバ側で設定したランダムシーケンスのコンテンツ１００曲から先頭の１０曲が選択されてリストが生成されクライアントに送信されることになる。

【００８８】

図７のシーケンスに戻り、説明を続ける、ステップＳ３１において、クライアントから、

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図８に示すように、コンテンツ再生リストのソート処理としてランダムオーダでのソートを希望していることを示すソート指定情報を含むコンテンツ情報取得要求が送信され、サーバがこれを受信すると、ステップＳ３２において、サーバは、クライアントから指定されたフォルダに格納されたコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報をそれぞれ取得し、プロパティ情報に設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．の設定を行う。

【００８９】

図９を参照してサーバの保有するコンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報、およびランダムオーダＮｏ．について説明する。サーバは、記憶手段に格納したコンテンツに対応する属性情報（プロパティ情報）をコンテンツに対応して記憶部に格納している。

【００９０】

例えばサーバが、コンテンツＡ４２１、コンテンツＢ４２２、・・コンテンツＮ４２３の複数コンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダ４２０をサーバ内のハードディスク等の記憶部に保持している場合、サーバは、各コンテンツＡ～Ｎに対応するプロパティ情報４２５，４２６，４２７をコンテンツに対応付けて記憶部に保持している。

【００９１】

プロパティ情報は、コンテンツに対応する情報であり、コンテンツのクリエータ、アーティスト、再生時間等の様々な情報を含んだコンテンツの属性情報である。本発明の構成では、コンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報として図に示すように、ランダムオーダＮｏ．が設定される。

【００９２】

ランダムオーダＮｏ．は、各コンテンツ各々に設定されるランダムオーダ情報としてのナンバリングデータ（番号）である。これは、コンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報である。サーバは、クライアントから、先に説明した図８に示すような、コンテンツ再生リストのソート処理としてランダムオーダでのソートを希望していることを示すソート指定情報を含むコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信すると、指定フォルダに含まれるコンテンツのプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．の入れ替え、再設定処理を行う。

【００９３】

ランダムオーダＮｏ．は、複数のコンテンツの集合として設定されるコンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、コンテンツフォルダに含まれるコンテンツ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報である。

【００９４】

例えば１００曲の音楽コンテンツが含まれるコンテンツフォルダでは、１～１００の番号が、各コンテンツのプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．として設定される。これは、クライアントからのランダムオーダでのソート要求毎に実行され、処理毎に１～１００のランダムオーダＮｏ．が各コンテンツのプロパティ情報として再設定される。

【００９５】

設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．がコンテンツ再生リストのシーケンスとなり、再生シーケンスとして設定される。

【００９６】

図７に戻り、コンテンツ再生シーケンス設定について説明を続ける。ステップＳ３２において、サーバは、上述したようにクライアントから指定されたフォルダに含まれるコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．のシャッフルを実行してランダムオーダＮｏ．を設定し、設定したランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてコンテンツ再生リストを生成するための構成情報としてのＸＭＬ情報を生成し、ステップＳ３３においてリスト情報を含むコンテンツ情報をクライアントに送信する。

【００９７】

クライアントに送信されるコンテンツ情報には、コンテンツのタイトル、アーティスト名などのコンテンツ情報に加え、コンテンツの所在を示すアドレス情報としてのコンテンツ

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のＵＲＬ（Ｕｎｉｆｏｒｍ　Ｒｅｓｏｕｒｃｅ　Ｌｏｃａｔｏｒｓ）情報等が含まれる。これらをＸＭＬ（ｅＸｔｅｎｄｅｄ　Ｍａｒｋｕｐ　Ｌａｎｇｕａｇｅ）データにより生成してクライアントに送信する。

【００９８】

ステップＳ３４で、クライアントは、サーバから受信したコンテンツ情報に基づいて、コンテンツ再生リストをディスプレイに表示する。クライアントは、サーバによって抽出されたコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報に基づくＸＭＬデータを受信し、受信ＸＭＬデータに基づいて図１０に示すようなコンテンツ再生リストを生成し、クライアントのディスプレイに表示する。

【００９９】

図１０に示すように、コンテンツ再生リストは、再生順にコンテンツ情報を示したリストとして表示される。図に示す例では、表示情報として、再生シーケンス番号、コンテンツ名、タイトル、アーティスト名・・再生時間を、再生順にリスト化したデータ構成を持つコンテンツ情報リスト４８１をディスプレイ４８０に表示した例を示している。

【０１００】

これらのコンテンツ情報は、サーバの管理するコンテンツ対応のメタデータの構成要素としてのプロパティ情報に基づいて生成される。再生シーケンス番号は、サーバが設定したランダムオーダＮｏ．に相当する値として設定されることになる。

【０１０１】

クライアントは、図１０に示すようなコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生を行うことが可能となる。例えば図１０に示す再生ボタン４８２をクリックすることで、再生が開始され、連続再生設定ボタン４８３をクリックして有効状態に設定することで、各再生コンテンツの再生時間を考慮した制御の下にリスト順にコンテンツ要求がサーバに、順次送信され、クライアント側では、サーバからリスト順にコンテンツを受信し再生することが可能となる。

【０１０２】

なお、コンテンツの再生処理において実行するコンテンツ送信要求、コンテンツの受信、コンテンツの復号、出力処理等の一連のシーケンスは、クライアント側のコンテンツ再生プログラムに従って実行される。コンテンツ再生プログラムは、サーバからのコンテンツ情報としてリストとともに受信しているコンテンツ識別子を設定したコンテンツ要求、例えばコンテンツＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ取得要求であるＨＴＴＰ（Ｈｙｐｅｒ　Ｔｅｘｔ　Ｔｒａｎｓｆｅｒ　Ｐｒｏｔｏｃｏｌ）ＧＥＴメソッドをサーバにリストに従って順次、送信し、リストの順番に従ってコンテンツを順次サーバから受信し、再生処理を実行する。なお、ユーザはリストから特定のコンテンツのみを指定して指定コンテンツのみを再生することも可能である。

【０１０３】

連続再生処理を有効にした場合は、クライアント側のコンテンツ再生プログラムが、コンテンツの再生時間を考慮してリスト順に従って、順次コンテンツ要求、すなわちコンテンツＵＲＬを切り替えたＨＴＴＰ（Ｈｙｐｅｒ　Ｔｅｘｔ　Ｔｒａｎｓｆｅｒ　Ｐｒｏｔｏｃｏｌ）ＧＥＴメソッドを生成してサーバに送信する処理を実行する。サーバは、リスト順に送られてくるコンテンツ要求（ＨＴＴＰ（Ｈｙｐｅｒ　Ｔｅｘｔ　Ｔｒａｎｓｆｅｒ　Ｐｒｏｔｏｃｏｌ）ＧＥＴメソッド）に従って指定ＵＲＬに基づいてコンテンツをクライアントに送信する。

【０１０４】

図7に示すシーケンス図において、クライアント側のステップＳ３５およびサーバ側のステップＳ３６の処理が、上述の一連の処理に対応する。

【０１０５】

クライアントは、リストにあるコンテンツの再生が終了した場合には、同一フォルダ内の残りのコンテンツに対応するリストを要求し、サーバから受信することができる。サーバでは、クライアント側でコンテンツ再生処理が実行されている間、すなわち、クライアン

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トに対するコンテンツ送信およびクライアントでの再生時間を考慮した時間内において、各コンテンツのランダムオーダＮｏ．の設定を変更せずに保持している。

【０１０６】

クライアントからの新たなコンテンツ再生リスト要求、例えば、図８に示すデータにおいて、プレイリストＮｏ．＝１１～２０等の指定のあるリスト要求があった場合に、各コンテンツのプロパティ情報（図９参照）に設定済みのランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいて、Ｎｏ．１１～２０のランダムオーダＮｏ．を持つコンテンツのプロパティ情報に基づいてコンテンツ再生リスト情報を設定してクライアントに送信する。

【０１０７】

クライアントは、新たに送信されたコンテンツ再生リストをディスプレイに表示して表示したコンテンツ再生リストに従って、コンテンツの再生を行うことが可能となる。

【０１０８】

このように、本発明の構成では、クライアントからの要求に基づいてサーバ側でコンテンツの再生順をランダムに設定したリストを生成し、クライアントに送信する構成としたので、クライアントは、サーバから受信するリストに従って再生処理を行うのみで、ランダムな再生シーケンスに従ってコンテンツ再生を楽しむことが可能となり、ユーザおよびクライアント側でシャッフル処理を行う必要が排除される。

【０１０９】

クライアントおよびサーバ各々における処理シーケンスについて、図１１、図１２のフローチャートを参照して説明する。

【０１１０】

まず、図１１を参照して、クライアントの処理手順について説明する。ステップＳ１０１において、クライアントは、サーバに対して再生リストを要求する。これは、サーバに対するフォルダを指定したブラウス要求に伴って行われ、先に図８を参照して説明したように、サーバに対する要求データにソート処理をランダムオーダとして実行することを要求することができる。

【０１１１】

サーバは、クライアント要求に応じて、上述したように指定フォルダに含まれるコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．のシャッフルを実行してランダムオーダＮｏ．を再設定し、設定したランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてコンテンツ再生リストを生成しクライアントに送信する。クライアントは、ステップＳ１０２において、この再生リストを含むコンテンツ情報を受信し、受信したコンテンツ再生リストをディスプレイに表示する。

【０１１２】

ステップＳ１０３において、クライアント側のユーザは、コンテンツの再生を開始する。この際、上述したように連続再生を指定した場合は、クライアント側の再生処理プログラムがコンテンツ再生リスト順に、順次コンテンツＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求をサーバに送信する。

【０１１３】

ステップＳ１０４では、サーバからコンテンツを受信し、ステップＳ１０５において受信コンテンツを再生する。なお、受信コンテンツがＡＴＲＡＣ、ＭＰＥＧ等の圧縮処理がなされている場合は、クライアント側で復号処理を行った後に再生を行う。

【０１１４】

ステップＳ１０６において、リストされた全コンテンツの再生が終了したか否かを判定し、未再生コンテンツがある場合は、ステップＳ１０３以下の処理、すなわちコンテンツ要求、受信、再生を繰り返し実行する。現再生コンテンツの再生時間の終了前に、コンテンツ再生リストの次のコンテンツ要求がサーバに対して出力される。リスト中のコンテンツ再生が終了すると処理を終了する。なお、リストの末尾のコンテンツの再生が終了した後、さらにリストの先頭に戻って、繰り返し再生を行う処理も可能である。これらの処理は、クライアント側のコンテンツ再生処理プログラムの設定に基づいて実行される。

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【０１１５】
次に、図１２のフローチャートに基づいて、サーバ側の処理手順について説明する。ステップＳ２０１において、サーバが、クライアントからのコンテンツ情報要求を受信すると、サーバは、ステップＳ２０２において、コンテンツ再生リストの設定をランダムシーケンスとする要求をしているか否かを判定する。
【０１１６】
コンテンツ再生リストの設定をランダムシーケンスに設定して送信することの要求（図８参照）であれば、ステップＳ２０３に進み、そのような指定がない場合は、ステップＳ２１１に進む。ステップＳ２１１では、指定フォルダに格納されたコンテンツに予め設定されたシーケンスＮｏ．に従ったデフォルトの再生リスト情報を生成してステップＳ２０５に進み生成したリスト情報を含むコンテンツ情報をクライアントに送信する。
【０１１７】
コンテンツ再生リストの設定をランダムシーケンスに設定して送信することの要求（図８参照）であれば、ステップＳ２０３に進み、サーバは、クライアントから指定されたフォルダに格納されたコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報をそれぞれ取得し、プロパティ情報に設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．の設定を行う。すなわち、指定フォルダに含まれるコンテンツのプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．をシャッフルして再設定処理を行う。
【０１１８】
ステップＳ２０４では、再設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてランダムオーダＮｏ．順のコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成し、ステップＳ２０５において、コンテンツ再生リスト構成情報としてのＸＭＬ情報を生成しクライアントに送信する。
【０１１９】
ステップＳ２０６において、サーバは、クライアントから例えばコンテンツ指定情報（例えばコンテンツＵＲＬ）を含むコンテンツ要求を受信すると、指定情報に従ってコンテンツを抽出してステップＳ２０７においてコンテンツを送信する。なお、コンテンツ送信においては、クライアント側の仕様または要求に応じたデータ変換を行う場合もある。
【０１２０】
なお、ステップＳ２０６、ステップＳ２０７の処理は、クライアントがコンテンツ再生リストに従った連続再生を実行している場合には、繰り返し実行される。
【０１２１】
また、サーバは、再設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてランダムオーダＮｏ．順のコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持し、記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求があった場合は、記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する。この処理により、クライアントは特定フォルダ内のコンテンツを、ランダムシーケンスに従って重複なく再生することが可能となる。
【０１２２】
なお、上述した実施例においては、コンテンツ個々のシャッフル処理について説明したが、コンテンツのプレイリストを格納したフォルダや、複数のコンテンツの集合としてのフォルダを単位としたシャッフル処理も可能である。
【０１２３】
図１３を参照してフォルダ単位としたシャッフル処理例について説明する。サーバは、コンテンツのプレイリストを格納したフォルダや、複数のコンテンツの集合としてのフォルダフォルダに対応する属性情報（プロパティ情報）を記憶部に格納している。
【０１２４】
図１３に示す例では、コンテンツのプレイリストを格納したフォルダＡ～Ｎ４９１～４９３の複数フォルダ、および各フォルダに対応するプロパティ情報４９５，４９６，４９７を示している。

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【０１２５】
プロパティ情報は、フォルダに対応する属性情報であり、フォルダのクリエータ、アーティスト、再生時間等の様々な情報を含んでいる。本発明の構成では、フォルダに対応するプロパティ情報として図に示すように、ランダムオーダＮｏ．が設定される。
【０１２６】
ランダムオーダＮｏ．は、各フォルダ各々に設定されるランダムオーダ情報としてのナンバリングデータ（番号）である。これは、各フォルダに含まれるコンテンツ再生リストをフォルダ単位で再設定する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報である。サーバは、クライアントから、複数のフォルダのソートを希望していることを示すソート指定情報を含むコンテンツ情報取得要求を受信すると、指定された複数のフォルダのプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．の入れ替え、再設定処理を行う。具体的には、シャッフル対象となるフォルダ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行する。
【０１２７】
なお、クライアントからの要求データは、図８に示す構成データにおいて、フォルダ識別情報４０２の変わりにコンテナ識別子、すなわち、複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダオブジェクトの上位オブジェクトとしてのコンテナの識別子情報を設定した構成、あるいは、複数のコンテンツ再生リストフォルダオブジェクトの複数の識別子情報を設定した構成となる。
【０１２８】
ランダムオーダＮｏ．は、複数のフォルダの集合として設定されるたとえばコンテナに含まれる複数フォルダに対応する各プロパティ情報に対して設定された番号としてのナンバリングデータであり、コンテナに含まれるフォルダ数ｎに対してｎ個のランダムオーダ番号が重複することなく設定された情報である。
【０１２９】
例えば１０のプレイリストフォルダが含まれるコンテナでは、１～１０の番号が、各プレイリストフォルダのプロパティ情報中のランダムオーダＮｏ．として設定される。これは、クライアントからのランダムオーダでのソート要求毎に実行され、処理毎に１～１０のランダムオーダＮｏ．が各フォルダのプロパティ情報として再設定される。
【０１３０】
フォルダ単位で再設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいて、例えば、プレイリストＡフォルダ４９１にコンテンツａ～ｆのコンテンツプレイリストが含まれ、プレイリストＮフォルダ４９３にコンテンツｐ～ｚのコンテンツプレイリスト含まれる場合、シャッフルにより、図１３に示すように、プレイリストＮフォルダ４９３のランダムオーダＮｏ．＝１、プレイリストＡフォルダ４９１のランダムオーダＮｏ．＝２として設定された場合は、プレイリストＮフォルダ４９３のコンテンツｐ～ｚをプレイリストＡフォルダ４９１のコンテンツａ～ｆの先に設定したプレイリストが設定されて、コンテンツ再生が実行される。
【０１３１】
このように、本発明の構成においては、コンテンツのみならず、コンテンツまたはデータフォルダ等、サーバが記憶部に格納している様々なオブジェクトについて、オブジェクトの属性情報（メタデータ）として設定されるプロパティ情報に、ランダムオーダ情報を格納し、クライアントからの要求に応じてシャッフルを実行する構成としたので、コンテンツまたはフォルダ単位でのリスト順の再設定が可能となる。
【０１３２】
［サーバおよびクライアントの機能構成］
サーバおよびクライアント装置のハードウェア構成については、先に図２を参照して説明した通りであり、上述した各種の処理は、サーバクライアントそれぞれの記憶部に格納されたプログラムに従って制御部（ＣＰＵ等）の制御の下に実行される。
【０１３３】

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ＣＰＵによって実行される処理は、例えばサーバ側では、クライアントからの要求に従って、コンテンツ対応のメタデータを取得しプロパティ情報に基づくＸＭＬデータを生成する処理、プロパティ情報のランダムオーダＮｏ．のシャッフル処理、さらにクライアントからの要求データ態様に応じたコンテンツを送信する処理等である。クライアント側の処理としては、サーバから受信するプロパティ情報からなるＸＭＬデータに基づいてディスプレイにコンテンツ再生リストを表示する処理、コンテンツ再生リストに従って、順次コンテンツＵＲＬを設定したコンテンツ要求をサーバに送信する処理、コンテンツを受信する処理、受信コンテンツのデータ変換、再生処理などである。

【０１３４】

基本的にこれらの処理は、サーバ、クライアント装置の制御部としてのＣＰＵの制御の下に実行されるが、上述した処理を実行するために必要となるサーバの機能構成とクライアントの機能構成について図１４および図１５を参照して説明する。

【０１３５】

図１４は、サーバの主要機能構成を示すブロック図である。パケット送受信部５０１は、クライアントに対するパケット、クライアントからのパケットを受信する。パケット生成、解析部５０２は、送信パケットの生成処理、受信パケットの解析処理を行う。パケットのアドレス設定、アドレス認識、データ部に対するデータ格納、データ部からのデータ取得処理などである。

【０１３６】

コンテンツ記憶部５０３は、サーバの保有するコンテンツを格納する。メタデータ記憶部５０４は、コンテンツに対応する属性情報としてのメタデータを格納した記憶部である。メタデータには、図９を参照して説明したランダムオーダＮｏ．他のプロパティ情報が含まれる。

【０１３７】

プロパティ情報取得部５０５は、クライアントから受信したプロパティ情報取得要求、例えば、先に図８を参照して説明したデータ構成を持つブラウズ要求に基づいて、指定フォルダに対応するメタデータをメタデータ記憶部５０４から取り出す処理を実行する。

【０１３８】

ランダムオーダＮｏ．設定部５０６は、クライアントからのコンテンツプロパティリストの要求にランダムオーダの指定がある場合に、対応コンテンツのプロパティ情報のランダムオーダＮｏ．のシャッフル処理を実行する。

【０１３９】

コンテンツ情報生成部５０７は、プロパティ情報取得部５０５の取得したメタデータ、ランダムオーダＮｏ．設定部５０６の設定した情報に基づいて、コンテンツ再生リストの構成情報を含むコンテンツ情報としてのＸＭＬデータを生成する。コンテンツ情報生成部５０７は、例えばコンテンツ数ｎに対応する１～ｎのランダムオーダ情報のシャッフルを実行して各プロパティ情報に対して設定されたランダムオーダ情報の入れ替え処理を実行する。データ変換部５０８は、送信コンテンツデータの符号化処理等、復号処理を実行する。例えばＡＴＲＡＣ３、ＭＰＥＧ４に基づくデータ変換を実行する。

【０１４０】

次に、クライアント装置の機能構成について、図１５を参照して説明する。パケット送受信部６０１は、サーバに対するパケット送信および、サーバからのパケット受信処理を実行する。パケット生成、解析部６０２は、送信パケットの生成処理、受信パケットの解析処理を行う。パケット内の格納データ解析のみならず、パケットのアドレス設定、アドレス認識、データ部に対するデータ格納、データ部からのデータ取得処理なども含む。

【０１４１】

コンテンツ情報要求処理部６０３は、サーバに対して送信するコンテンツ再生リストの要求データ（図８参照）を生成する。すなわち、複数のコンテンツを格納したコンテンツフォルダの指定情報とともに、コンテンツ再生リストの設定順ソート情報としてランダムオーダ設定情報を格納したコンテンツ情報要求データを生成する処理を実行する。

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【０１４２】
記憶部６０４は、サーバから受信したパケットに含まれるコンテンツ、およびコンテンツ再生リストを含むコンテンツ情報等を格納する。
【０１４３】
出力部６０５は、コンテンツ再生処理に適用するスピーカ、ディスプレイを含む。なお、ディスプレイは、先に図７を参照して説明したコンテンツ情報リストの出力にも利用される。入力部６０６は、例えば、コンテンツ再生の開始、終了、その他再生制御設定情報の入力、その他のデータ入力手段として利用される。
【０１４４】
コンテンツ情報解析部６０７は、サーバから受信したプロパティ情報からなるＸＭＬデータを解析し、解析データに基づいて、先に図１０を参照して説明したコンテンツ再生リストを生成し、出力部としてのディスプレイに出力する処理を実行する。
【０１４５】
コンテンツ再生制御部６０８は、サーバから受信し、ディスプレイに表示したコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生処理を実行する。コンテンツの要求シーケンスをコンテンツ再生リストに従って決定し、再生リストに従ったコンテンツＵＲＬを順次パケット生成解析部６０２に送る。パケット生成解析部６０２では、コンテンツＵＲＬを設定したパケットを生成し、パケット送受信部６０１を介してサーバにコンテンツ要求を送信する。
【０１４６】
データ変換部６０９は、サーバから受信したコンテンツデータの復号当、各種データ変換処理を実行する。例えばＡＴＲＡＣ３、ＭＰＥＧ４に基づくデータ変換を実行する。なお、復号データの再符号化処理を実行し、再符号化データを記憶部６０３に格納する処理を実行する構成としてもよい。
【０１４７】
サーバ、およびクライアントは、機能的には図１４、図１５に示す各機能を有し、上述した各処理を実行する。ただし、図１４、図１５に示すブロック図は、機能を説明するブロック図であり、実際には、図２に示すＰＣ等のハードウェア構成におけるＣＰＵの制御の下に各種の処理プログラムが実行される。
【０１４８】
以上、特定の実施例を参照しながら、本発明について詳解してきた。しかしながら、本発明の要旨を逸脱しない範囲で当業者が該実施例の修正や代用を成し得ることは自明である。すなわち、例示という形態で本発明を開示してきたのであり、限定的に解釈されるべきではない。本発明の要旨を判断するためには、冒頭に記載した特許請求の範囲の欄を参酌すべきである。
【０１４９】
なお、明細書中において説明した一連の処理はハードウェア、またはソフトウェア、あるいは両者の複合構成によって実行することが可能である。ソフトウェアによる処理を実行する場合は、処理シーケンスを記録したプログラムを、専用のハードウェアに組み込まれたコンピュータ内のメモリにインストールして実行させるか、あるいは、各種処理が実行可能な汎用コンピュータにプログラムをインストールして実行させることが可能である。
【０１５０】
例えば、プログラムは記録媒体としてのハードディスクやＲＯＭ（Ｒｅａｄ　Ｏｎｌｙ　Ｍｅｍｏｒｙ）に予め記録しておくことができる。あるいは、プログラムはフレキシブルディスク、ＣＤ－ＲＯＭ（Ｃｏｍｐａｃｔ　Ｄｉｓｃ　Ｒｅａｄ　Ｏｎｌｙ　Ｍｅｍｏｒｙ），ＭＯ（Ｍａｇｎｅｔｏ　ｏｐｔｉｃａｌ）ディスク，ＤＶＤ（Ｄｉｇｉｔａｌ　Ｖｅｒｓａｔｉｌｅ　Ｄｉｓｃ）、磁気ディスク、半導体メモリなどのリムーバブル記録媒体に、一時的あるいは永続的に格納（記録）しておくことができる。このようなリムーバブル記録媒体は、いわゆるパッケージソフトウエアとして提供することができる。
【０１５１】

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なお、プログラムは、上述したようなリムーバブル記録媒体からコンピュータにインストールする他、ダウンロードサイトから、コンピュータに無線転送したり、ＬＡＮ（Ｌｏｃａｌ　Ａｒｅａ　Ｎｅｔｗｏｒｋ）、インターネットといったネットワークを介して、コンピュータに有線で転送し、コンピュータでは、そのようにして転送されてくるプログラムを受信し、内蔵するハードディスク等の記録媒体にインストールすることができる。

【０１５２】

なお、明細書に記載された各種の処理は、記載に従って時系列に実行されるのみならず、処理を実行する装置の処理能力あるいは必要に応じて並列的にあるいは個別に実行されてもよい。また、本明細書においてシステムとは、複数の装置の論理的集合構成であり、各構成の装置が同一筐体内にあるものには限らない。

【０１５３】

【発明の効果】

以上、説明したように、本発明の構成によれば、クライアントからの要求に基づいてサーバ側でコンテンツの再生順をランダムに設定したリストを生成し、クライアントに送信する構成としたので、クライアントは、サーバから受信するリストに従って再生処理を行うのみで、ランダムな再生シーケンスに従ってコンテンツ再生を楽しむことが可能となり、ユーザおよびクライアント側でシャッフル処理を行う必要が排除される。

【０１５４】

さらに、本発明の構成によれば、サーバで保持するコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報中にコンテンツ再生リストのリスト順設定情報に対応する書き換え可能なランダムオーダ情報を格納し、クライアントからのブラウズ要求等のコンテンツ情報取得要求に応じて、指定フォルダ内のコンテンツに対応するプロパティ情報を取得してランダムオーダ情報のシャッフル入れ替え処理を実行して入れ替えたランダムオーダ情報に対応するリスト順を設定したコンテンツ再生リストを生成してクライアントに送信する構成としたので、サーバ側の処理負担も大きくすることなく、クライアントは、サーバ側の処理に依存したコンテンツ再生シーケンス設定を行うことが可能となる。

【０１５５】

さらに、本発明の構成によれば、サーバは、再設定されたランダムオーダＮｏ．に基づいてランダムオーダＮｏ．順のコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信後、クライアントにおけるコンテンツ再生リストに従ったコンテンツ再生中、該ランダムオーダ情報を維持して記憶保持し、記憶保持期間に、クライアントからのコンテンツ再生リスト要求の再要求があった場合は、記憶保持したランダムオーダ情報に基づくコンテンツ再生リスト情報を生成してクライアントに送信する処理を実行する構成としたので、クライアントは特定フォルダ内のコンテンツを、ランダムシーケンスに従って重複なく再生することが可能となる。

【図面の簡単な説明】

【図１】本発明の適用可能なネットワーク構成例を示す図である。

【図２】ネットワーク接続機器の構成例について説明する図である。

【図３】コンテンツデータ再生処理におけるサーバクライアント間の処理シーケンスについて説明する図である。

【図４】サーバにおける保持コンテンツの管理クラスの一例を示す図である。

【図５】サーバにおける設定クラスの階層構成について説明するズである。

【図６】サーバからクライアントに送信されるプロパティ情報からなるＸＭＬデータに基づいてディスプレイに表示されるコンテンツ情報リストの例を示す図である。

【図７】コンテンツ再生順をランダムに設定してコンテンツ再生を実行する際のサーバクライアント間のデータ通信シーケンスを示す図である。

【図８】コンテンツ再生順をランダムに設定してコンテンツ再生を実行する際のクライアントからサーバに要求するコンテンツ再生リストの要求データ構成示す図である。

【図９】サーバの保有するコンテンツ対応のプロパティ情報について説明する図である。

【図１０】コンテンツ再生リストの表示例を示す図である。

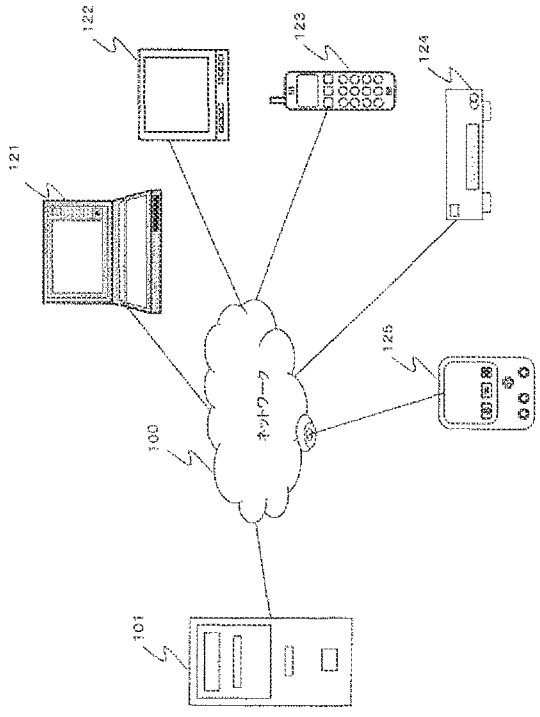
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【図１１】コンテンツ再生順をランダムに設定してコンテンツ再生を実行する際のクライアント側の処理を説明するフローチャートである。
【図１２】コンテンツ再生順をランダムに設定してコンテンツ再生を実行する際のサーバ側の処理を説明するフローチャートである。
【図１３】サーバの保有するフォルダ対応のプロパティ情報について説明する図である。
【図１４】サーバの処理機能を説明するブロック図である。
【図１５】クライアントの処理機能を説明するブロック図である。
【符号の説明】
１００　ネットワーク
１０１　サーバ
１２１　ＰＣ
１２２　モニター
１２３　携帯電話
１２４　再生機
１２５　ＰＤＡ
２０１　ＣＰＵ
２０２　ＲＯＭ
２０３　ＲＡＭ
２０４　ＨＤＤ
２０５　バス
２０６　入出力インタフェース
２０７　入力部
２０８　出力部
２０９　通信部
２１０　ドライブ
２１１　リムーバブル記録媒体
３０１　ルートコンテナ
３０２～３０６　クラス
３５０　ディスプレイ
３５７　コンテンツ情報リスト
４０１　要求識別子
４０２　フォルダ識別子
４０３　ソート情報
４０４　リスト情報
４２０　コンテンツフォルダ
４２１～４２３　コンテンツ
４２５～４２７　プロパティ情報
４８０　ディスプレイ
４８１　コンテンツ再生リスト
４８２　再生ボタン
４８３　連続再生設定ボタン
４９１～４９３　フォルダ
４９５～４９７　プロパティ情報
５０１　パケット送受信部
５０２　パケット生成、解析部
５０３　コンテンツ記憶部
５０４　メタデータ記憶部
５０５　プロパティ情報取得部
５０６　ランダムオーダＮｏ．設定部
５０７　コンテンツ情報生成部

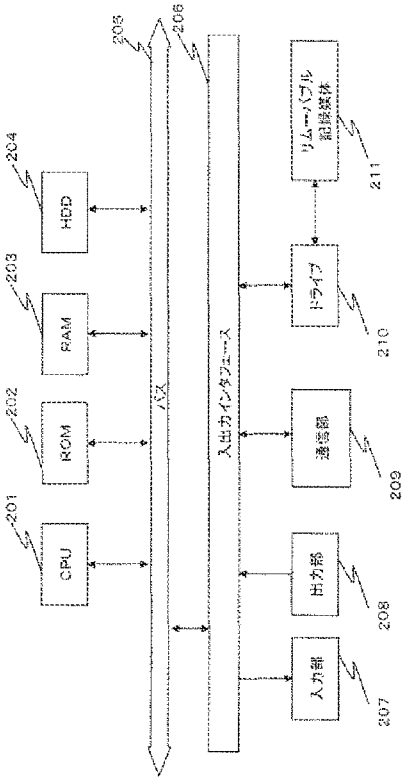
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５０８　データ変換部
６０１　パケット送受信部
６０２　パケット生成、解析部
６０３　コンテンツ情報要求処理部
６０４　記憶部
６０５　出力部
６０６　入力部
６０７　コンテンツ情報解析部
６０８　コンテンツ再生制御処理部
６０９　データ変換部

【図1】

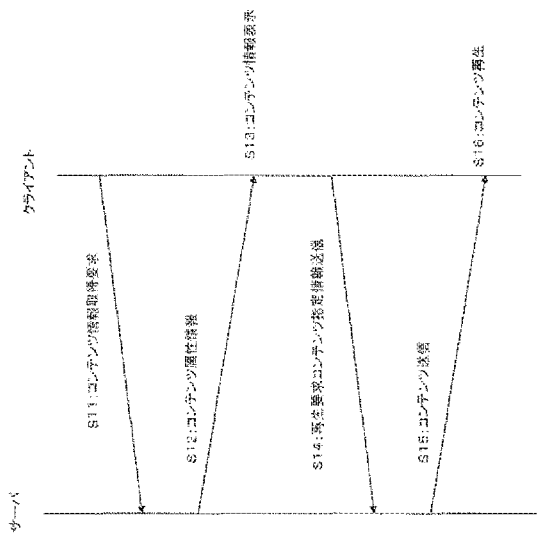


【図2】



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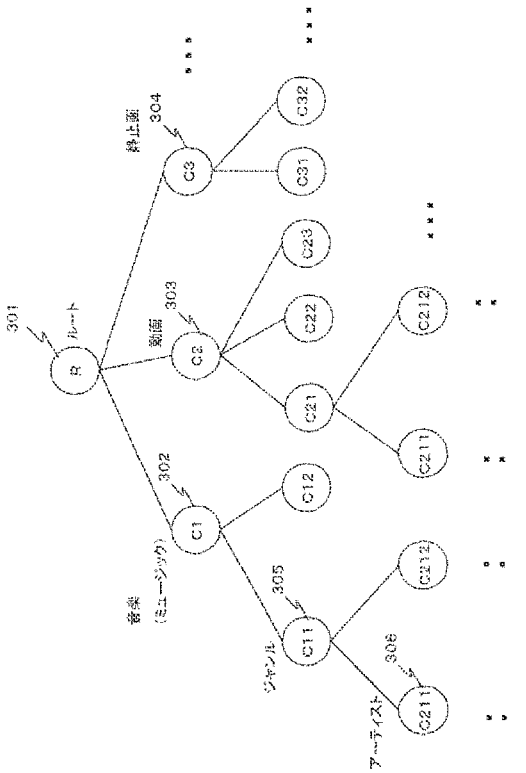
【図3】



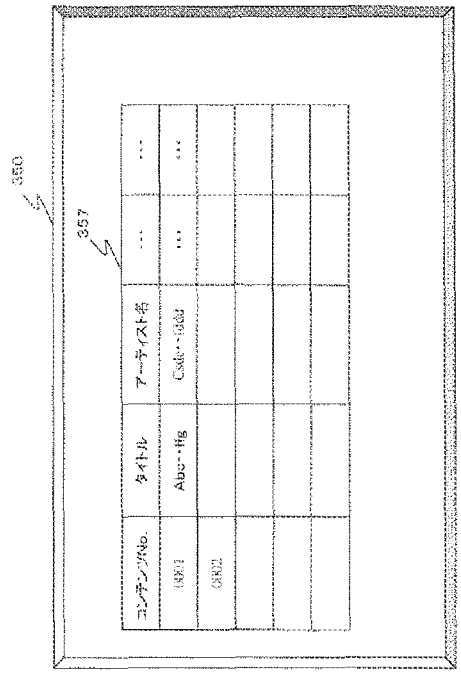
【図4】

class name	説明
avMusicTrack	曲
avMusicAlbum	アルバム 子として、avMusicTrackを持つ。
avMusicGenre	「ジャンル一覧」の中の各ジャンル 子として、avMusicArtistかavMusicAlbumか avMusicTrackを持つ。
avMusicArtist	「アーティスト一覧」の中の各アーティスト 子として、avMusicAlbumかavMusicTrackを持つ。
avMusicPlaylist	「プレイリスト一覧」コンテナの中のプレイリスト 子として、プレイリストを構成するavMusicTrackを持つ。
avMusicSearchav MusicSearch	「いろいろな検索」コンテナの中のサーバが自動生成するプレイリスト 子として、プレイリストを構成するavMusicTrackを持つ。
avMusicPlaylistFolder	プレイリストコンテナ 子として、avMusicPlaylistFolderかavMusicPlaylistを持つ 。 playlistContainerを改派しないのは、文字列マッチング でavMusicPlaylistとかつかるのを避けるため
avMusicAlbumCab inet	アルバムキャビネット 子として、avMusicAlbumを持つ
avAllavAllMusicTr acks	「すべての曲」コンテナ 子は、avMusicTrack
avAllavAllMusicAl bums	「アルバム一覧」コンテナ 子はavMusicAlbum
avAllavAllMusicA rtists	「アーティスト一覧」コンテナ 子はavMusicArtist
avAllavAllMusicG enre	「ジャンル一覧」コンテナ 子はavMusicGenre
avAllavAllMusicPl aylists	「プレイリスト一覧」コンテナ 子は、avMusicPlaylistかavMusicPlaylistFolder.
avAllMusicSearch	「いろいろな検索」コンテナ 子は、avMusicSearchavMusicSearch
avAllMusicAlbum Cabinets	「アルバムキャビネット一覧」コンテナ 子は、avMusicAlbumCabinet

【図5】

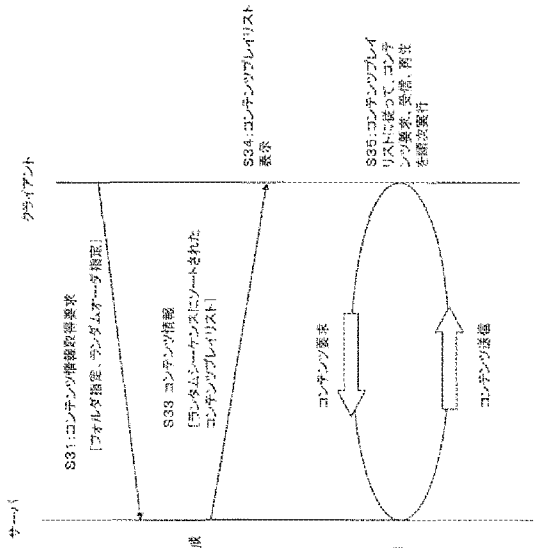


【図6】

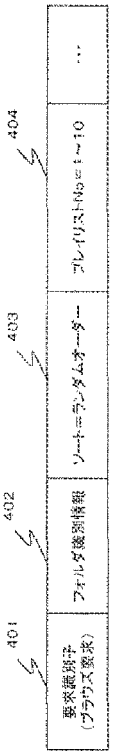


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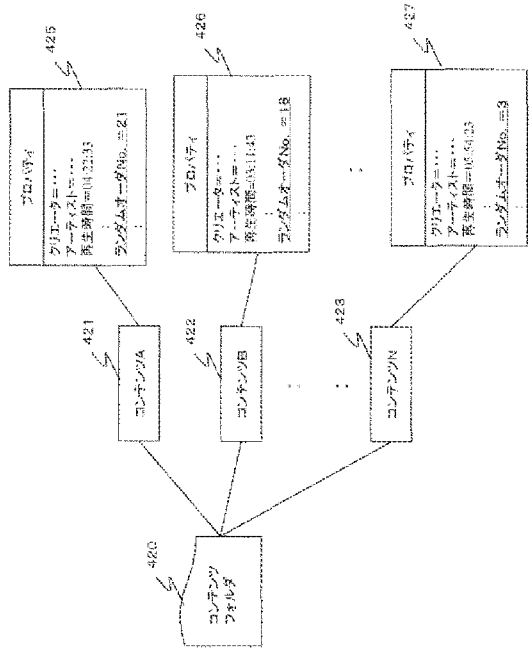
【図7】



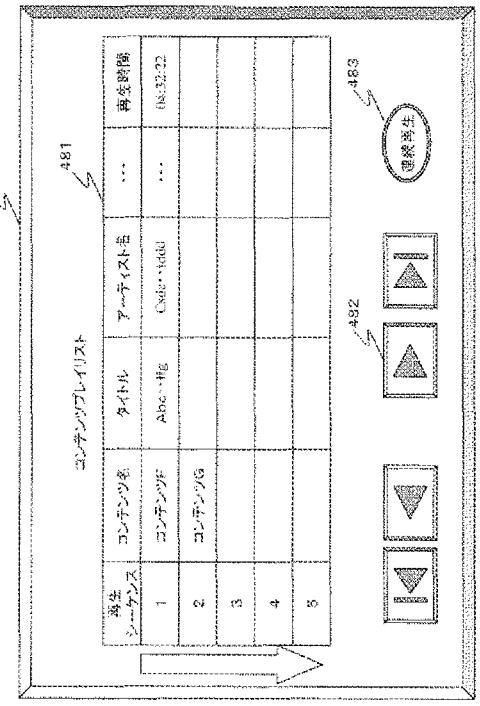
【図8】



【図9】

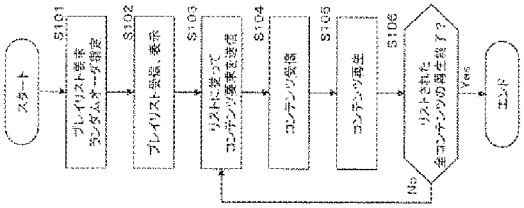


【図10】

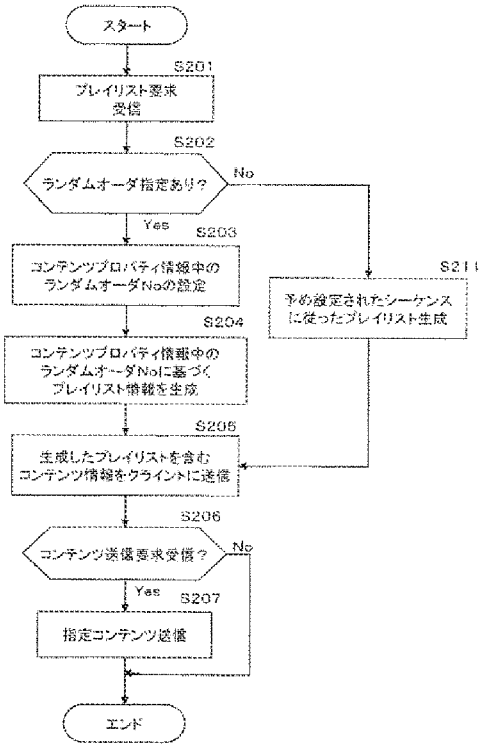


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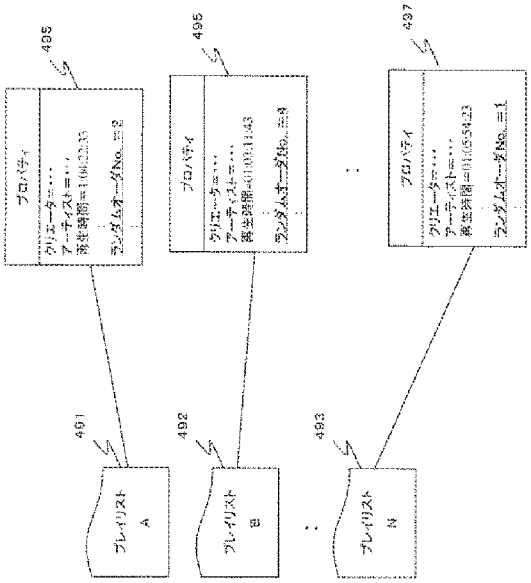
【図11】



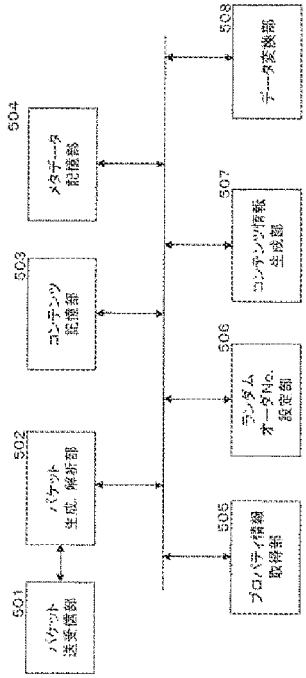
【図12】



【図13】

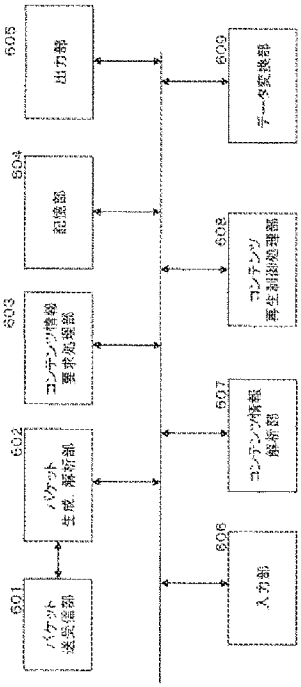


【図14】



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【図15】



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(72)発明者　森田　利広
東京都品川区北品川６丁目７番３５号　ソニー株式会社内
(72)発明者　日下部　俊昭
東京都品川区北品川６丁目７番３５号　ソニー株式会社内
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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **PA CONSULTING SERVICES LIMITED** [GB/GB]; 123 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SR (GB).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **DURRANT, Simon** [GB/GB]; 43 Withipoll Street, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2BZ (GB). **MULROY, Pat** [IE/GB]; 61 Cemetary Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2JA (GB). **YANG, Dekun** [CN/GB]; 24 Arreton Close, Leicester, Leicestershire LE2 3PP (GB).

(74) Agents: **DRIVER, Virginia, Rozanne** et al.; Page White & Farrer, 54 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LS (GB).

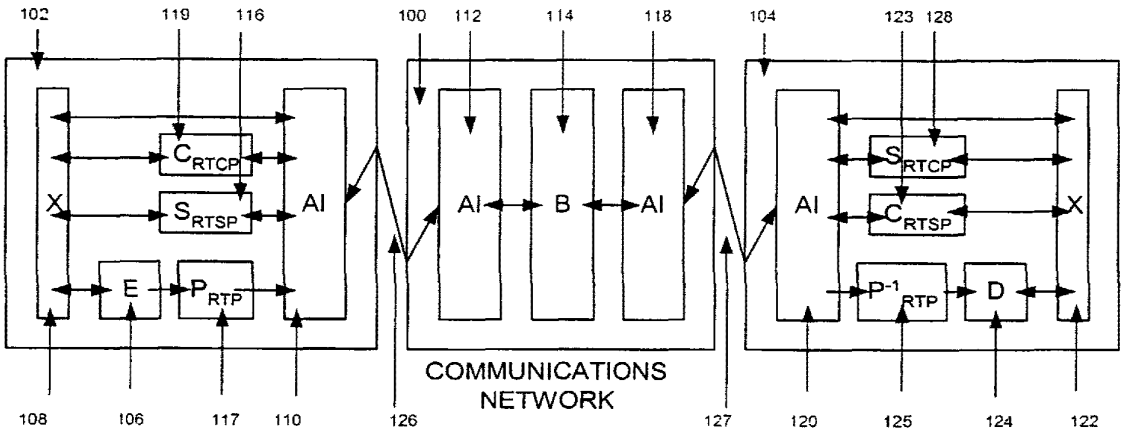
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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) **Title:** ERROR CONTROL TO VIDEO ENCODER



(57) **Abstract:** A method of generating a compressed video data stream (CVDS) from a video stream, for transmission from a transmitter to a receiver over a wireless channel within a communications network, the method including the steps of: (a) determining values of one or more error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel; (b) determining values of one or more bit rate parameters associated with the wireless channel; (c) calculating values of one or more encoding parameters using the values of the error rate parameters and the bit rate parameters; (d) controlling encoding of the video stream on the basis of the encoding parameters, thereby to generate the CVDS.

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ERROR CONTROL TO VIDEO ENCODER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to video streaming, and, more particularly, to the streaming of video data over a wireless communications network.

The invention has been developed primarily to allow video to be streamed in a UMTS or GPRS mobile telecommunications network using streamable formats such as MPEG-4 and H.263. However it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the invention is not limited to use with those particular standards

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

Robust transmission of real time video data over wireless networks promises to be one of important applications of the wireless packet data services. Robustness is one of the key issues because a wireless network is a bandwidth-constrained as well as error-prone environment. Bandwidth constraint forces video data to be compressed into lower bit-rate video streams before it can be transmitted over a wireless mobile network. Channel errors in a wireless mobile network range from random bit errors to burst errors.

Existing video compression standards such as MPEG-4 and H.263 use three kinds of coding techniques: motion compensated prediction to encode temporal redundancy, Discrete Cosine Transform (DCT) with quantisation to encode spatial redundancy, and Variable-Length Code (VLC) for entropy encoding. These compression mechanisms are based on exploiting both the spatial dependency and temporal dependency which make the compressed video stream susceptive to any transmission errors. Both motion-compensation based predictive coding and VLC are sensitive to transmission errors. A single bit error can cause failure in VLC decoding. Use of predictive coding leads to error

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propagation. Error resilient encoding is one of important issues in the reliable transmission of video data over noisy channels.

Existing video compression standards provide some error resilience to minimise the amount of data that has to be discarded whenever errors are detected: for example, the use of reversible VLC and the periodic insertion of resynchronisation markers so that the decoder regains synchronisation more quickly when transmission errors occur. Another mechanism is to increase the ratio of intra to inter-coding both at frame and block level to stop any residual error propagation at the expense of reducing the compression gain.

For real-time wireless streaming video applications, one of the key issues is how to achieve best possible encoding robustness under the bandwidth and time constraints of the wireless networks. Each wireless channel is associated with Quality of Service (QoS) parameters indicative of among other things the error rate parameters. During the transmission of video data between a transmitter and a receiver, QoS parameters vary with time randomly and asynchronously for the transmitter and the receiver. It is important for the transmitter to exploit wireless channel conditions and select appropriate error resilient mechanisms for successful end to end real time video transmission over the wireless channel.

It is the object of this invention to provide a method of making best use of error rate parameters associated with wireless channels for generating compressed video data stream with improved quality when transmitted over the wireless channels.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The present invention provides a method of generating a Compressed Video Data Stream (CVDS) for transmission from a transmitter to a receiver over a wireless channel within a communications network, the method including the steps of:

a) determining values of one or more error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel;
b) determining values of one or more bit rate parameters associated with the wireless channel;
c) calculating values of one or more encoding parameters using the values of the error rate parameters and the bit rate parameters;
d) controlling encoding of the video stream on the basis of the encoding parameters, thereby to generate the CVDS.

In accordance with the described embodiment of the present invention, a CVDS transmitter in a mobile handset comprises an encoder controller and a prior art video encoder. Preferably the video encoder has several adjustable encoding parameters for altering the degree of error resilience of the generated CVDS. The encoder controller ascertains the error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel between the transmitter and the receiver, and derives the encoding parameters for generating the CVDS with improved error resilience while meeting the bandwidth constraints of the wireless channel.

The basic idea underlying the present invention is to make best use of error rate parameters associated with the wireless channels for generating CVDS with improved quality when transmitted over said wireless channels. The encoder controller may ascertain the error rate parameters from several sources. In an embodiment of the invention where the transmitter is a mobile transmitter and the receiver is a network receiver, the encoder controller can ascertain the error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel between the transmitter and the network from the air interface. In another embodiment of the invention where the transmitter is a network transmitter and the receiver is a mobile receiver, the encoder controller can ascertain the error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel between the network and the receiver. In yet another embodiment of the invention where a mobile transmitter transmits CVDS to a mobile receiver, the encoder controller can ascertain the error rate parameters from the two sources described above. The end to end feedback from the receiver and the transmitter is used to convey the information related to the error rate parameters.

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In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the CVDS is packetised into IP format packet before being sent to the transmitter air interface. The IP packet is constructed by three wrapping operations respectively: (1) wrapping the CVDS in an RTP format packet, (2) wrapping the RTP packet in a UDP format packet, and (3) wrapping the UDP packet in a IP format packet.

The present invention can apply to both unidirectional streaming arrangement and bidirectional conversational arrangement. In the streaming arrangement the end to end feedback of error rate parameters can be performed via an RTCP session or an RTSP session. RTCP packets are wrapped in UDP and further IP format. RTSP packets are wrapped in TCP format and further IP format packets. In the conversational arrangement the end to end feedback of error rate parameters can be performed via a SIP session. SIP packets are wrapped in UDP format and further IP format packets.

Preferably, the wireless networks are UMTS or GPRS mobile telecommunications networks. Each wireless channel is associated with Quality of Service (QoS) parameters indicative of among other things the error rate information. At session initiation and when wireless channel characteristics are to be modified, the network provides each mobile handset with a QoS parameter set that is indicative of the available bit rate, error rate conditions of the wireless channel between the mobile handset and the network. The QoS parameter set is read at the mobile handset by the encoder controller or the decoder controller. The error rate parameters are derived from the QoS parameters associated with the wireless channels.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the video data is divided into a sequence of frames, with each frame being further divided into a number of Group of Blocks (GOB) or a number of slices, and with each GOB or slice being further divided into a number of blocks. Preferably, the encoder parameters including frame rate, frame type indicative of either intra-coded frame or inter-coded frame, block type indicative of either intra-coded block or inter-coded block, and quantisation parameter.

According to the preferred embodiment, the error control of video encoding is achieved by a combination of the following operations:

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a) setting proper ratio of intra-coded frames and inter-coded frames;
b) allocating GOBs or slices with suitable sizes such that the headers of GOBs or slices can be used as resynchronisation markers for the decoder to regain synchronisation quickly when transmission errors occur;
c) setting proper ratio of intra-coded blocks and inter-coded blocks for each GOB or slices in each inter-coded frame.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the rate control of video encoding operates in conjunction with the error control such that the generated CVDS is error resilient as well as within the bit rate budget associated with the channel bandwidth. Preferably, the encoder controller performs the rate control based on the derived parameters of the error control and the current encoding status information (e.g. instantaneous bit rate generated by the encoder and the motion estimation). The rate control is used for:

a) setting proper frame rate;
b) setting proper quantisation parameters;

such that the generated CVDS can match the bit rate constraints of the wireless channels.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the CVDS comprises a plurality of layers including the base layer and enhanced layers in which each layer comprises a sequence of frames which may be of the same type (intra-coded or inter-coded) or a mixture of types. Each layer can be carried via an RTP session. Preferably, more than one wireless channels are available and each wireless channel is used to transmit an RTP session. In this embodiment, in conjunction with the above error control operations, the error control also includes mapping CVDS layers into wireless channels such that the base layer is mapped into the wireless channel with better transmission quality.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Preferred embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

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Figure 1 is a simplified schematic diagram of a UMTS communication system showing a network and two mobile handsets, where one handset is the transmitter and the other a receiver, for streaming video;

Figure 2 is a simplified schematic diagram of a UMTS communication system showing a network and two mobile handsets, where each handset is simultaneously a transmitter and a receiver for conversational video;

Figure 3 shows the construction of a UDP/IP packet containing MPEG-4 video payload data;

Figure 4 shows the construction of a UDP/IP packet containing RTCP data;

Figure 5 shows the construction of multiple substreams with a common IP address and different UDP addresses per substream;

Figure 6 shows the construction of a TCP/IP packet containing RTSP and SDP data;

Figure 7 shows the construction of a TCP/IP packet containing SIP and SDP data;

Figure 8, Figure 10 and Figure 12 show single and multiple RTP/RTCP sessions and an RTSP session (also labelled more generically as IP Sessions), mapped onto single and multiple wireless channels for streaming video;

Figure 9, Figure 11 and Figure 13 show single and multiple RTP/RTCP sessions and a SIP session (also labelled more generically as IP Sessions), mapped onto single and multiple wireless channels for conversational video;

Figure 14 shows Quality of Service (QoS) parameters associated with the wireless channels between mobile handsets and networks, and the sending of these and other QoS parameters between the mobile handsets via IP sessions for streaming video;

Figure 15 shows QoS parameters associated with the wireless channels between mobile handsets and networks, and the sending of these and other QoS parameters between the mobile handsets via IP sessions for conversational video;

Figure 16 and Figure 17 shows typical mapping of compressed video data stream frames onto base and enhanced substreams;

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Figure 18 is a flowchart showing sequential operations performed by the encoder controller;

Figure 19 is a flowchart showing sequential operations performed by the decoder controller; and

Figure 20 is a flowchart showing sequential operations performed by the encoder.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED AND OTHER EMBODIMENTS

The preferred embodiment of the present invention is applied to a network and associated mobile handsets designed to operate under the current GPRS or proposed UMTS standard.

Referring to the drawings, and Figure 1 in particular, there is shown a UMTS network 100 that is used to establish an end to end link between a first mobile handset 102 and a second mobile handset 104. The communication session between the first mobile handset 102 and the second mobile handset 104 is unidirectional. Mobile handset 102 is acting solely as a transmitter of compressed video data, whilst mobile handset 104 is acting solely as a receiver of compressed video data. This is termed the streaming arrangement.

In the embodiment shown in Figure 2, the communication session between the first mobile handset 142 and the second mobile handset 144 is bi-directional. Mobile handset 142 is acting both as a transmitter and a receiver of compressed video data, and mobile handset 144 is also acting as a transmitter and receiver of compressed video data. This is termed the conversational arrangement. In Figure 2 the functions and operations of the second mobile handset 144 are identical to the functions and operations of the first mobile handset 142.

It will be appreciated that the transmitter function and operation of mobile handsets 142 and 144 is identical to that of the transmitter function and operation of mobile handset 102. It will also be appreciated that the receiver function and operation of mobile handsets 142 and 144 is identical to that of the receiver function and operation of mobile handset 104. In the case of mobile handsets 142 and 144, the receiver and transmitter functions and operations are present within

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the same mobile handset. In mobile handsets 102 and 104 only the transmitter or the receiver function is present respectively. It will be appreciated that the mobile handsets 142 and 144 can also operate exclusively as transmitters or receivers to produce the streaming arrangement, in addition to their conventional conversational arrangement, if so configured.

In Figure 1 the first mobile handset includes a transmitter controller 108, a Real Time Streaming Protocol (RTSP) server 116, an encoder 106, a Real Time Protocol (RTP) packetiser 117, a Real Time Control Protocol (RTCP) client 119 and a transmitter air interface 110, which are operatively interconnected with each other as shown. The encoder 106 accepts raw video data (RVD) from a video source such as a camera (not shown) associated with the first mobile handset 102 and encodes it into a compressed video data stream (CVDS) format, as discussed in detail below. This is then packetised by the RTP packetiser 117. According to the normal operation of a mobile communications network, the transmitter air interface 110 establishes a wireless channel with a transmit side air interface 112 in the network 100, which in turn is in communication with a network backbone 114.

The network 100 also includes a receive side air interface 118 that establishes a wireless channel with a receiver air interface 120 disposed in the second mobile handset 104. The second mobile handset 104 also includes a receiver controller 122, an RTSP client 123, an RTP depacketiser 125, an RTCP server 128 and a decoder 124. These are operatively interconnected with each other as shown.

In Figure 2 the mobile handsets 142 and 144 includes all the components that are present in both the mobile handset 102 for the transmitter function, with the exception of the RTSP server 116, and the mobile handset 104 for the receiver function, with the exception of the RTSP client 123. The RTSP server 116 is replaced by a SIP User Agent (UA) 146 in mobile handset 142 and the RTSP client 123 is replaced by a SIP UA 148 in mobile handset 144. The components of the transmitter function, the components of the receiver function, the User Agent and the air interface for mobile handsets 142 and 144 are operatively interconnected with each other as shown. It will be appreciated that

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the function and operation of the mobile communications network shown in Figure 2 is as above.

In a UMTS network, the mobile handsets 102, 104, 142 and 144 are designated User Equipment (UE), the air interface elements 112 and 118 correspond to the Universal Terrestrial Radio Access Network (UTRAN), the backbone element 114 corresponds to the Core Network (CN).

According to normal mobile communications network operation, an end to end link is established between the first and second mobile handsets 102, and 104 (or 142 and 144), comprising a first wireless channel 126 between the first mobile handset and the network and a second wireless channel 127 between the network and the second mobile handset. Wireless channels are established using different frequencies and/or spreading codes and/or time slots in a manner well known in the mobile communications art. They allow for bi-directional communication, both for data and control information.

As part of the wireless channel control information, the wireless channel 126 between the transmitter air interface 110 and the transmit side air interface 112 carries Quality of Service parameters (QoS), from the network 100 to the first mobile handset 102 (or 142). Similarly, the wireless channel 127 between the air interface 118 and the receiver side air interface 120 carries Quality of Service parameters (QoS), from the network 100 to the second mobile handset 104 (or 144).

The packetised CVDS is transmitted over the end to end link defined between the two mobile handsets 102 and 104 (or 142 and 144), across wireless channels 126 and 127. In the preferred embodiment, the CVDS takes the form of an MPEG-4 stream, but other suitable streaming formats, such as H.263 can also be used. Both of these standards are applicable to variable bitrate and low bitrate video, e.g. bitrates of 10kbps or higher. It is particularly preferred that the transmission be in RTP format, as discussed in detail below in relation to Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5.

Turning to Figure 3, the packetisation of the raw MPEG-4 data for transmission is shown. This packetisation takes place in the first mobile handset 102 or 142 under the control of the transmitter controller 108 before sending the

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packets to the transmitter air interface 110. Upon emerging from the wireless network of the transmitter the packets travel over a packet switched network to the wireless network of the receiver. Here the packets are sent to the receive side air interface 118 and on to the second mobile handset 104 or 144 via wireless channel 127.

Figure 3 shows the packetisation layers for a single MPEG-4 packet 200 in the form in which it leaves the encoder 106. It will be appreciated that a stream of such packets will be generated from the incoming RVD. The MPEG-4 video data 200 is wrapped in an RTP format packet layer 201. This, in turn, is wrapped in a UDP format packet layer 202, which in turn is packetised into an Internet Protocol (IP) packet 203. It is this IP packet 203 that is presented by the RTP packetiser 117 to the transmitter air interface 110 for transmission over the wireless channel. This layering format, defined by IETF, is known and is included in the developing UMTS standard for video transmission.

Each of the packetisation layers of the packet is directed to a particular part of the overall communication. They will not be described in detail because they are already known in the art and conform to the respective standards. However the principal component of each packet will be described insofar as is necessary to understand the embodiments of the invention that follow.

The MPEG-4 layer 200 contains the coded video data. The RTP layer 201 contains sequence numbers, time stamps, and payload bits that enable a depacketiser and decoder to decode it and replay at the correct time and in the correct sequence in relation to other packets from the same stream. The UDP layer is used for asynchronous communication of the data over the wireless communications channel and is a "best effort" connectionless protocol. The IP packet 203 contains an IP address which identifies the mobile receiver 104 or 144 as the destination. The IP packet header may also contain a Differentiated Services Code Point (DSCP) which could be used by a diffserv-enabled core network to determine how that packet should be forwarded by nodes inside that network.

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Figure 4 shows the packetisation layers for a single RTCP packet 205 in the form in which it leaves the RTCP server 128. The RTCP packet is wrapped in a UDP format packet layer 206, and packetised into an IP packet 207.

Turning to Figure 5, the CVDS can be transmitted over the wireless channels in one or multiple substreams, each transported by an RTP session, (and an associated RTCP session) where these are mapped to one or multiple wireless channels that may have different quality parameters. In this case the IP address 208 is common to both substreams. Routing through the transmission chain is achieved by characterising different substreams by different socket numbers 210 and 212 in the UDP address.

It will be understood that some of the receiving handsets, or, indeed, the transmitting handset may not be capable of forming a multi wireless channel connection with the network. This may be because of equipment incompatibilities or network resource issues, for example. In this case, it is still possible for the video layers to be allocated to multiple wireless channels in accordance with the above embodiment, whilst multiplexing the video onto a single wireless channel for those not capable of forming the requisite multi wireless channel connection.

In the streaming arrangement of Figure 1, the IP packet of Figure 3 is transmitted directly from the first mobile handset 102, via the network 100, to the second mobile handset 104.

Once received at the receiver air interface 120, the packets are forwarded to the RTP depacketiser 125, where the MPEG-4 data 200 is re-constructed. The packets must be re-ordered using RTP layer data 201 such as frame timestamps and the data from the plurality of substreams must be re-assembled. The re-constructed MPEG-4 data 200 is then sent from the RTP depacketiser 125 to the decoder 124, where it is decoded for replay on, for example, a visual display (not shown) on the second mobile handset 104.

In the return direction (i.e., from the second mobile handset 104 to the first mobile handset 102 in this example), control information is returned in accordance with the known RTCP and RTSP protocols, with the latter using the known Session Description Protocol (SDP).

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Figure 8 and Figure 10 show the IP sessions between a streaming server and client. The RTCP sessions provide feedback on the data transmission quality for each RTP session. RTSP additionally provides an overriding control connection from RTSP client 123 to RTSP server 116, using SDP to provide a description of the connection between client and server. It is known in the art that, when a session changes, an RTSP control packet containing a new SDP packet is sent to the remote entity.

The packetisation of the SDP and RTSP information is shown in Figure 6. The SDP information 306 is wrapped in an RTSP packet 300. An RTSP packet 300 is wrapped in a Transport Control Protocol (TCP) packet 302, which is within an IP packet 304. This packet is built up by the RTSP client 123 and supplied to the receiver air interface 120 for transmission to the receive side air interface 118 of the network 100. The destination address of this RTSP packet is that of the first mobile handset 102.

In the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 1, the RTSP packet passes to the transmit side air interface 112 via the backbone 114 for transmission to the transmitter air interface 110, to the RTSP server 116 and thence to the transmitter controller 108. Also, control information is exchanged between both mobile handsets 102 and 104 in accordance with the known RTCP protocol.

In the conversational arrangement of Figure 2 the IP packet of Figure 3 is transmitted and received between the mobile handsets 142 and 144, via the network 100, in the same way as for the streaming arrangement described above. The encoded video packet is also processed in the same way as for the streaming arrangement described above.

For the control of bi-directional communications sessions the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) is used instead of RTSP. This is managed by user agents 146 and 148 in mobile handsets 142 and 144 respectively. SIP uses SDP to provide a description of the connection between two peer user agents. It is known in the art that, when a session changes, a SIP control packet containing a new SDP payload is sent to the peer user agent.

Figure 9 and Figure 11 show the IP sessions between two peer user agents 146 and 148. The SIP session provides an overriding connection control

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between user agents 146 and 148 using the SDP. Again, control information is also exchanged between both mobile handsets 142 and 144 in accordance with the known RTCP protocol. The RTCP session will provide feedback on the data transmission quality for each RTP session.

The packetisation of the SIP information is shown in Figure 7, where the packet is denoted 308. An SDP payload 307 is encapsulated within the SIP packet 308. A SIP packet 308 is wrapped in a User Datagram Protocol (UDP) packet 310, which is within an IP packet 305. This packet is built up by the user agent 148 and supplied to the air interface 127 for transmission to the receive side air interface 118 of the network 100. The destination address of this SIP packet is that of the other mobile handset 142. It will be understood that user agents 146 and 148 are interchangeable in this scenario.

In the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 2, the SIP packet passes to the transmit side air interface 112 via the backbone 114 for transmission to the transmitter air interface 126 and thence to the transmitter controller 108 via the user agent 146.

In use, a user of, say, the first mobile handset, 102 or 142, places a call to the second mobile handset 104 or 144, by dialling the second handset's mobile number.

The first mobile handset's number is mapped to a first IP address taken from a pool of IP addresses, and the second mobile handset's number is mapped to a second IP address taken from the pool of IP addresses. This mapping persists for as long as the connection is maintained. Once the connection is broken, usually because one or both of the users hang up, the mapping is removed and the IP addresses are returned to the pool for reuse. It will be appreciated that this arrangement means that packets can be routed using the allocated IP addresses instead of the phone numbers.

There follows a description of the basic elements of call set-up at the wireless level to aid understanding of the invention.

When a user requests a call, the requested quality class of the wireless channel is communicated to the network 100. In particular, the first mobile handset 102 or 142 can request a particular QoS from the UMTS network, which

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specifies, for example, guaranteed and maximum bitrates. On this basis, and assuming there are sufficient network resources available, a wireless communications channel is established between the first mobile handset 102 or 142 and the network 100, the wireless channel having defined QoS criteria.

Alternatively the first mobile handset 102 or 142 might request the network resources as a number of wireless channels each with associated QoS (see later for multiple wireless channel discussion).

The second mobile handset 104 or 144 must similarly establish a connection with the network 100, establishing a wireless communications channel with an independent QoS criteria to that of the wireless channel established by the first handset 102 or 142.

Once the wireless communications channel or set of channels is established, video data from, say, a camera (not shown) associated with the first mobile handset 102 or 142 is received by the encoder 106, which in turn generates a sequence of CVDS video data. The video data is sent to the RTP packetiser 117, where it is packetised as described above and sent to the second mobile handset as described above. The receiving mobile handset is mobile handset 104 if mobile handset 102 is the transmitter; mobile handset 144 if mobile handset 142 is the transmitter; and mobile handset 142 if mobile handset 144 is the transmitter.

As other users make and break wireless communications channels and the network 100 continuously monitors user resource allocations, it can be the case that available bandwidth for any particular call changes, either increasing or decreasing. If a user has a multiple wireless channel allocation, one or more of the wireless channels may be terminated. It will be understood that these bandwidth changes can take place at a number of points along a given wireless communications channel. For example, it could take place between the first mobile handset 102 (or 142) and the network, or between the network and the second handset 104 (or 144).

Other factors, such as distance of a handset from a base station with which it is communicating, or strong multi-path reflections, can also cause the effective bandwidth or quality of a wireless channel to be reduced.

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Any change in effective bandwidth or quality can have two consequences. If the bandwidth increases it could in principle be possible to transmit video data at a higher bitrate. If it decreases, however, the rate at which video data can reliably be transmitted also decreases, possibly below the value that was set at the start of transmission. To accommodate these consequences the QoS parameter set including the available bitrate and bit error rate on the wireless channel between the first mobile handset 102 or 142 and the network 100 is monitored by the controller 108 at the first mobile handset 102 or 142.

In the preferred form, at session initiation and when wireless channel characteristics are to be modified, the UMTS network provides the first mobile handset with a QoS parameter set that is indicative of the available bitrate (i.e. bandwidth) on the wireless communications channel. Such a QoS parameter set is supplied through the protocol stack in known wireless systems from the air interface 112 of the network to the air interface 110 of the transmitting mobile handset 102 or 142. It is normally supplied across a wireless control channel on the downlink of the call.

According to the developing UMTS standard, the QoS parameter set is indicative of various transmission parameters, including the transmissible bitrate over the wireless channel, the signal to noise ratio, the error rate and a priority indicator which is an indication provided from the network to the transmitting mobile handset of the likely priority to be placed on the call. This is therefore an indicator of the bandwidth and likely reliability of the wireless communication channel that has been opened for the particular wireless channel. It will be appreciated in this context that the word "call" is used herein to describe the transmission of video data as well or instead of voice data. The QoS parameter set is read at the mobile handset 102 or 142 by the controller 108 and the transmissible bitrate is extracted from it.

The quality of the wireless communication channel between the network 100 and the second mobile handset 104 or 144 is also monitored. In the preferred form, a QoS parameter set indicative of, amongst other things, the available bandwidth for the RTP session mapped onto this wireless channel is ascertained in the second mobile handset 104 or 144 derived from the wireless control

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channel information it receives from the network according to the relevant wireless standard (in this case UMTS).

The QoS parameter set is dealt with at the second mobile handset 104 or 144 in a novel manner. The session control protocol (both bi-directional using SIP and unidirectional using RTSP) and have already been discussed. SDP provides for the exchange and updating of session description information such as codec and bitrate.

For the streaming arrangement (shown in Figure 1), according to the existing RTSP standard, various control parameters are conveyed by the RTSP packets including, for example, video commands such as PLAY and PAUSE. The standard also provides an ANNOUNCE instruction The system described herein uses the ANNOUNCE provision in the RTSP standard to cause elements of the QoS parameter set determined in the wireless environment and/or other derived parameters to be placed into an SDP payload which itself is placed in an RTSP packet for transmission from the second mobile handset 104 to the mobile handset 102. The thus constructed novel packets are transmitted by the RTSP client 123, via the receiver air interface and the received side air interface to the network backbone 114. From here they travel to the RTSP server 116 via the transmission side air interface 112 and the transmitter air interface 110.

For the conversational arrangement (in Figure 2), according to the existing SIP standard, SDP payload are conveyed by the SIP packets to control the bi-directional communication between two mobile handsets. A session is initiated using the INVITE instruction, which itself contains a session description in the SDP format. The standard provides for a session to be modified by either agent by issuing a subsequent INVITE instruction. The system described herein uses the re-INVITE provision in the SIP standard to cause the quality parameter determined in the wireless environment and/or other derived parameters to be placed into an SDP packet which itself is placed in a SIP packet for transmission from the receiving mobile handset 144 to the transmitting mobile handset 142. The thus constructed novel packets are transmitted by the session control agent 148, via the receiver air interface 120 and the received side air interface 118 to

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the network backbone 114. From here they travel to the session control agent 146 via the transmission side air interface 112 and the transmitter air interface 120.

It can be understood that user agents 146 and 148 are interchangeable in this scenario. For both streaming and conversational arrangements the RTP sessions carrying the video data each have associated RTCP sessions carrying control information back to the transmitter. The system described herein can, in addition to or instead of using RTSP or SIP, use the RTCP application defined (APP) packet to transfer application data (in this case the wireless and other derived QoS parameters) from the receiver to the transmitter.

In both the streaming (Figure 1) and conversational (Figure 2) arrangements, when a session control packet is received at the transmitting mobile handset, this along with locally derived QoS parameters can be used to modify the encoded bitrate as already discussed above. In this way, the bitrate of the video stream transmitted from the encoder can be adapted to the wireless channel between a transmitting mobile handset and the network and also to the wireless channel between the network and a receiving mobile handset. In the streaming arrangement and now referencing Figure 8 and Figure 10, there are shown two ways of transmitting a CVDS from an encoder 106 to a decoder 124 using RTP between an RTP packetiser 117 and an RTP depacketiser 125. RTCP control messages are sent between RTCP server 128 and RTCP client 119. RTSP control messages are sent between an RTSP server 116 and an RTSP client 123. Figure 8 shows a prior art method of streaming CVDS transported by an RTP session 804 and associated RTCP session 805. RTSP control messages are sent via RTSP session 806. It will be appreciated that at least some part of the end to end communications channel is wireless. In Figure 8 the RTP session containing all the frames of the video stream and the RTCP session containing all RTCP control messages are multiplexed onto a single wireless channel, with the CVDS parameters and frame sequencing being derived according to the QoS parameter of the wireless channel at call set up.

Figure 9 shows the prior art for conversational arrangement. Each mobile handset is depicted with an RTP packetiser (117 or 134), an RTP depacketiser (133 or 125) and a user agent (146 or 148). For a conversational arrangement, a

CVDS is transmitted from RTP packetiser 117 to RTP depacketiser 125 using RTP session 814 and RTCP session 815 simultaneously with a CVDS transmitted from RTP packetiser 134 to RTP depacketiser 133 using RTP session 816 and RTCP session 817. A single SIP session 818 controls all the RTP/RTCP sessions. In Figure 9, as in Figure 8, the RTP sessions containing all the frames of the video stream, the RTCP sessions corresponding to these and the SIP session containing all of the SIP control messages are multiplexed onto a single wireless channel, with the CVDS parameters and frame sequencing being selected according to the QoS parameter of the wireless channel at call set up.

Figure 10 shows a preferred embodiment of the invention for the streaming arrangement, in which there is a plurality of wireless channels. In the example shown there are three wireless channels. RTP/RTCP sessions 824/825 and 826/827 are used for transmitting the two substreams of a CVDS and RTSP control messages are sent via RTSP session 828. The wireless channels are provided at call set up as previously described in a situation where the encoder 106, RTP packetiser 117, RTCP client 119 and RTSP server 116 are in a first mobile handset, and the decoder 124, RTP depacketiser 125, RTCP server 128 and RTSP client 123 are in a second mobile handset in accordance with requested QoS and bandwidth parameters according to the UMTS standard.

As with previous embodiments, the CVDS substreams are transported via RTP between the RTP packetiser 117 and RTP depacketiser 125, RTCP control messages are sent between RTCP server 128 and RTCP client 119 and control messages are transmitted via an RTSP session between the RTSP server 116 and RTSP client 123. As shown in the example Figure 8, one RTSP session covers all the RTP/RTCP sessions between any two entities while each CVDS substream requires an individual RTP session and an associated RTCP session.

Figure 11 shows a preferred embodiment of the invention for the conversational arrangement, in which there is a plurality of wireless channels. In the example shown there are three wireless channels. RTP/RTCP sessions 834/835 and 836/837 are used for transmitting the two substreams of a CVDS generated by the encoder 106. RTP/RTCP sessions 838/839 and 840/841 are used for transmitting the two substreams of a CVDS generated by the encoder

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129. The SIP control messages are sent via SIP session 842. Figure 11 shows that the base layers produced by encoders 106 and 129, carried by RTP sessions 834 and 838 and packetised by RTP packetisers 117 and 134, use the up and down links of the same wireless bearer at each mobile handset. Similarly, the enhanced layers from the encoders 106 and 129, carried by RTP sessions 836 and 840 and packetised by RTP packetisers 117 and 134, use the up and down links of the same wireless bearer at each mobile handset. It will be appreciated that there are many other possible mappings between RTP/RTCP sessions to wireless bearer. The wireless channels are provided at call set up as previously described and in accordance with requested QoS and bandwidth parameters according to the UMTS standard. As shown in the example, one SIP session 845 covers all the RTP/RTCP sessions between any two entities while each CVDS substream requires an individual RTP session and an associated RTCP session.

Since wireless channels for the transmit side and receive side are allocated separately there is no guarantee that the number of transmit side and receive side wireless channels will be the same. In the streaming arrangement shown in Figure 12 there is one transmit side wireless channel and three receive side wireless channels. On the receive side RTP/RTCP sessions 844/845 and 846/847 and RTSP session 848 are each mapped to a separate wireless channel. On the transmit side all IP sessions 844-848 are mapped to the same wireless channel.

Figure 13 shows the situation for the conversational arrangement, where for the handset containing user agent 146 there is only one wireless channel, whilst for the handset containing user agent 148 there are three wireless channels. In the handset containing user agent 148 the RTP/RTCP sessions 853/854 and 857/858 are mapped to the same wireless channel. However the RTP/RTCP sessions 851/852 and 855/856 are mapped to another wireless channel and the SIP control 859 is mapped to yet another wireless channel. In the handset containing user agent 146 all IP sessions of all types 851-859 are mapped to the same wireless channel.

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Under the proposed UTMS standard (and others), wireless channels can be defined in terms of a number of quality of service parameters, such as priority, maximum and guaranteed bandwidth, residual bit error rate and delay.

In the embodiment of Figure 10, the first RTP session 824 is defined as carrying the base substream, having an example bitrate of 16kbps, whilst the second RTP session 826 has a bitrate of 32kbps. The first wireless channel has the lowest bitrate but highest priority and the base substream is allocated to it. The enhancement substream is allocated to the second wireless channel, since it has the lower priority. This ensures that the most important video data is allocated to the wireless channel with the highest priority. The first RTP session can also be marked with the highest priority DSCP for prioritised transport over the IP component of a diffserv enabled core network.

As discussed above in relation to other embodiments, the allocation of resources within a UMTS network is dynamic, and this can mean that bandwidths allocated to either of the RTP sessions can fluctuate with (amongst other things) network load. In the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the bandwidth available for each wireless channel is known to the transmitter controller 108 as it monitors the network messages at the transmitter air interface 110. In the event that the available bandwidth on one or more of the wireless channels is commanded by the network 100 to be reduced, an assessment is made as to whether it is desirable to reallocate the frames between substreams. For example, assuming the substream frame structure of Figure 16, if the second RTP session bandwidth fell to, say, 16kbps an assessment would be taken to determine whether to simply reduce the number of P and B frames generated and leave other substreams unchanged, or whether a better overall quality would be achieved by including some of the P and B frames on the base substream at the expense of say, reduced resolution in the I frames.

It is not necessarily the case that reallocation will happen automatically and immediately without any assessment of context. In one form, the preferred embodiment is configured to maintain a history of wireless channel behaviour in relation to the quality parameter. As an example, a sudden drop in bandwidth on a wireless channel to which relatively high priority substream or frame type is

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mapped may not be a trigger for the frame mapping to be changed. If there is a history of short-term bursts of bandwidth loss, it is likely that the higher bandwidth will be available shortly, and it may ultimately be more efficient to allow the short-term reduction to be ignored. Typically, an assessment of this type will be made by the transmitter controller 108. It will be understood that quite sophisticated proportional, integral and differential factors can be taken in to account to build a relatively sophisticated model of any wireless channel's behaviour (and likely future behaviour) over time. Such modelling well known to those skilled in the relevant art, and so is not described further here.

Similar history data can be collected for the other types of a quality data collected in earlier embodiments of the invention, and similarly used to make decisions about how and when to alter outputs of, for example, the encoder. In general, if there is a history of short-term bandwidth problems, then it may be more efficient or may provide a visibly better overall video streamed image if the bitrate out of the encoder is not immediately altered when the bandwidth initially drops. Rather, it will in some cases be preferable to wait until the bandwidth has remained low for a predetermined time period or number of frames before changing the output of the encoder.

Wireless channels between mobile handset and network have a certain QoS, which is provided for the mobile user of a network service. In an embodiment of the invention, a set of QoS parameters including Bitrate (BR) and Bit Error Rate (BER) are used for controlling the video encoder. These QoS parameters are conveyed between the encoder controller and the decoder controller via IP sessions. Referring to Figure 14, a wireless channel between transmitter 102 and network has QoS parameters BR and BER. A wireless channel between network and receiver 104 has QoS parameters BR' and BER'. The encoder controller 108 sends BR to decoder controller 122 via an RTSP session 866. Having received BR from the encoder controller 108, the decoder controller 122 sends BER' and the calculated Request Bitrate (RBR) to the encoder controller 108 via an RTSP session 866 or RTCP session 865. The encoder controller and the decoder controller will be discussed in detail below.

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The encoder controller 108 is used to control the video encoder 106 with the objective of improving the error resilience of video encoding while meeting the bitrate constraint of wireless channels.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the video encoder is an MPEG-4 or H.263 compliant encoder. The input video source is encoded into an MPEG-4 or H.263 compliant bit stream. The video data can be constructed using a plurality of different types of frames, which are referred to as I, P and B frames. I frames are self-contained still frames of video data, whereas P and B frames constitute intermediate frames that are predicatively encoded. The precise composition of the frames varies in accordance with the particular standards and application of the standards and is known *per se*.

MPEG-4 specifies a plurality of layers, including the base layer and enhanced layers, in which each layer is comprised of a sequence of frames which may be of the same type (I, P, B) or a mixture of types. As already described, in a wireless network the mobile may be allocated one wireless channel or a plurality of wireless channels. In the preferred form, each wireless channel is used to transmit a single RTP/RTCP session pair. Each RTP session carries an optimum sequence of I, P and B frames, known as a substream. The term "substream" is used rather than "layer" because the frame sequencing onto wireless channels can be varied dynamically and need not be one of the layer sequences pre-defined in MPEG-4 or other known video encoding standards. Other partitions of coded video data for error resilient purposes (e.g. Data Partitioning Modes of MPEG-4/H.263) are also possible and could be represented by substreams.

Figure 16 and Figure 17 illustrate example compositions of a video data stream in accordance with the MPEG-4 video standard. In the example two temporally scalable substreams are used with I frames on the base substream while P and B frames are carried on the enhanced substream. In the illustrated example in Figure 17, only the base substream is used, comprising interleaved I and P frames. The encoder controller can thus control the bitrate of the video data stream for each wireless channel by manipulation of the number of substreams used for transmission, and the number and type of frames per substream.

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Video encoding under MPEG-4 or H.263 standards operates on a frame-by-frame basis. Each frame is divided into either Group of Blocks (GOBs) or slices. A GOB comprises of macroblocks of one or several rows in a video frame. Slices are more flexible and can partition the frame into a variable number of macroblocks. A macroblock in turn comprises of four luminance and two spatially corresponding colour difference blocks of image data. All blocks in an I-frame are intra-coded. Blocks in an inter-coded P or B-frame can be of both intra-coded blocks (I-blocks) and inter-coded blocks (P-blocks or B-blocks).

The increase of I-block/P-block ratio (I_b/P_b) in P-frames or I-block/B-block ratio (I_b/B_b) in B-frames has two consequences: (1) improving the error resilience because more intra-coded blocks result in less error propagation; (2) increasing the bitrate because inter-coded blocks comprise substantially smaller amounts of data than intra-coded blocks. The encoder controller controls the encoder to make the best use of wireless channel utilisation for error resilient video encoding.

The error control can also be achieved by allocating GOBs or slices in a frame wherein the header of each GOB or slice can serve as synchronisation markers for decoder to regain synchronisation.

Figure 18 illustrates the operation of the encoder controller 108. The encoder controller operates by a closed-loop process. In the first step 400, the encoder controller obtains relevant information from various sources including the BR and BER associated with the wireless channel between the encoder and the network from air interface, the RBR and BER' via IP control session from the decoder, latency jitter (ΔL) of RTP packets from the RTCP client 123 and the instantaneous bitrate (IBR) from the encoder. In the second step 410, the encoder controller determines the target BR (BR_{target}) and the frame type (FT) based on the BR, RBR and IBR. In the third step 420, the encoder controller determines the I_b/P_b ratio for P-frames and the I_b/B_b for B-frames and the synchronisation marker rate R_{sync} for all frames. In the fourth step 430, the encoder controller determines the QP and the frame rate (FR) for the frame based on the I_b/P_b or I_b/B_b, and BR_{target}. In the fifth step 440, the encoder controller sends the encoding parameters FT, FR, R_{sync}, I_b/P_b or I_b/B_b, and QP to the encoder. In the sixth step 445, the encoder controller sends BR via IP control

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session to the decoder. Then the encoder controller goes back to the first step 400.

Figure 19 illustrates the operation of the decoder controller 122. The decoder controller operates by a closed-loop process. In the first step 450, the decoder controller obtains relevant information from various sources including the BR' and BER' associated with the wireless channel between the decoder and the network from air interface, the BR associated with the wireless channel between the encoder and the network via IP session from the encoder. In the second step 460, the decoder controller determines ΔL of RTP packets received. In the third step 470, the decoder controller calculates RBR based on ΔL, BR and BR'. In the fourth step 480, the decoder controller sends the RBR and BER' via IP control session to the encoder controller. Then the decoder controller goes back to the first step 450 .Figure 20 illustrates the operation of the encoder 106. The encoder operates on a frame-by-frame basis. In the first step 490, the encoder obtains the encoding parameters including FT, FR, R_{sync}, I_b/P_b or I_b/B_b, and QP from the encoder controller. In the second step 492, the encoder allocates GOBs or slices for inter-coded frames based on R_{sync}. In the third step 494, the encoder further allocates the I-block distribution within P or B-frames based on I_b/P_b or I_b/B_b. In the fourth step 496, the encoder encodes the frame using the above encoding parameters and adds it to the CVDS. In the fifth step 498, the encoder calculates the IBR and sends it to the encoder controller. Then the encoder goes back to the first step, to process the next frame.

Although various aspects of the invention have been described with reference to specific embodiments, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the invention can be embodied in many other forms.

DEFINITIONS

Unless the contrary intention clearly appears from the context in which certain words are used, the following definitions apply to words used in this specification:

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WIRELESS CHANNEL; a physical radio channel with associated QoS parameters, e.g. UMTS Radio Access Bearer.

END TO END LINK; an end to end communications link between transmitter and receiver containing a transmit side wireless channel and / or a receive side wireless channel;

IP SESSION; An IP communications session between two IP hosts carrying either control or application data. Examples are a RTP session, a RTCP session, a RTSP session and a SIP session. One or more IP sessions can be mapped to a wireless channel;

COMPRESSED VIDEO DATA STREAM (CVDS); an overall video stream, where the original stream of image frames is compressed by means of an encoder;

FRAME; a video encoder outputs a number of different frame types. These include full still images and derivative images that have different data transmission requirements, have different sensitivity to errors and may have dependency on other frames. In the MPEG-4 video standard, frames are also known as Video Object Planes (VOPS);

SUBSTREAM; a CVDS may be split into a number of substreams for the purposes of transmission over a channel or plurality of channels. Each substream can be used as a means of transmitting a sequence of video frames that may be of different types. A substream is not necessarily the same as a layer as defined in video standards such as MPEG-4 and H.263. A substream could also be used to transmit any part of the coded frame data that can be successfully partitioned for error resilient purposes (e.g. DCT coefficients and motion vector data in data partitioning modes of MPEG-4/H.263). Each substream is transported by an RTP session and an associated RTCP session.

RTCP SERVER; an entity generating RTCP Receiver Reports based on the reception of RTP packets. These are sent to the transmitter of the RTP packets, where an RTCP client uses them.

RTCP CLIENT; an entity that uses RTCP Receiver Reports. These are sent from the receiver of the RTP packets, where an RTCP server generates them.

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CLAIMS

1. A method of generating a compressed video data stream (CVDS) from a video stream, for transmission from a transmitter to a receiver over a wireless channel within a communications network, the method including the steps of:

(a) determining values of one or more error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel;

(b) determining values of one or more bit rate parameters associated with the wireless channel;

(c) calculating values of one or more encoding parameters using the values of the error rate parameters and the bit rate parameters;

(d) controlling encoding of the video stream on the basis of the encoding parameters, thereby to generate the CVDS.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein step (a) includes ascertaining the error rate parameters associated with the wireless channel between the transmitter and the receiver, and step (d) includes controlling encoding of the video stream to improve an error resilience of the CVDS whilst meeting the bandwidth constraints of the wireless channel.

3. A method according to claim 2, where the transmitter is a mobile transmitter and the receiver is a network receiver, wherein the error rate parameters are derived from data taken from an air interface associated with the transmitter.

4. A method according to claim 2, where the transmitter is a network transmitter and the receiver is a mobile receiver, wherein the error rate parameters are derived from data taken from an air interface associated with the receiver and communicated via end to end feedback between the receiver and the transmitter.

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5. A method according to 2, where both receiver and transmitter are mobile, wherein the error rate parameters are derived as in 3 and 4 and are combined in the transmitter.

6. A method according to claims 4 & 5, wherein the end to end feedback is carried out by one or more IP sessions between the receiver and the transmitter, wherein each IP session is one of an RTCP, RTSP or SIP session.

7. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the communications network is a UMTS or GPRS mobile telecommunications network.

8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the error rate and bit rate parameters are derived from Quality of Service (QoS) parameters associated with the wireless channel

9. A method according to claim 8, further including the step, prior to step (a), of initiating a session in which one or more of the wireless channels is established for transmission of the CVDS, the initiation of the session including receiving in the transmitter the QoS parameters from the network.

10. A method according to claim 9, when the QoS parameters are provided to the transmitter again in the event that they are modified.

11. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the CVDS is packetised into IP format packet prior to transmission.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the transmitter is a mobile handset and the IP packetisation includes the substeps of:

wrapping the CVDS in an RTP format packet;

wrapping the RTP packet in a UDP format packet; and

wrapping the UDP packet in an IP format packet for supply to an air interface associated with the transmitter for transmission to the receiver via the network

13. A method according to claim 12, wherein the receiver is configured to transmit a CVDS to the transmitter in accordance with any one of the preceding claims.

14. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the encoding parameters include any one or more of the following:

a frame rate;

a frame type, being indicative of either intra-coded frame or inter-coded frame;

a block type, being indicative of either intra-coded block or inter-coded block; and

a quantisation parameter.

15. A method according to claim 14, wherein the video data is divided into a sequence of frames, with each frame being further divided into Groups of Blocks (GOBs) or slices, each GOB or slice being further divided into a number of macroblocks.

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein the encoding parameters include any one or more of the following;

a ratio of intra-coded frames to inter-coded frames;

sizes of GOBs or slices, the sizes being selected such that headers of GOBs or slices can be used as resynchronisation markers for the decoder to regain synchronisation quickly when transmission errors occur;

a ratio of intra-coded blocks and inter-coded blocks for each GOB or slices in each inter-coded frame;

17. A method according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the CVDS comprises a plurality of layers including a base layer and enhanced layers, each layer comprising a sequence of frames.

18. A method according to claim 17, wherein each layer is carried via an RTP session.

19. A method according to claim 18, wherein more than one transmit side and/or receive side wireless channel is open between the transmitter and the receiver, and each wireless channel is used to transmit an RTP session.

20. A method according to claim 19, wherein layers of the CVDS are mapped onto the wireless channels such that the base layer is mapped into the wireless channel with better transmission quality.

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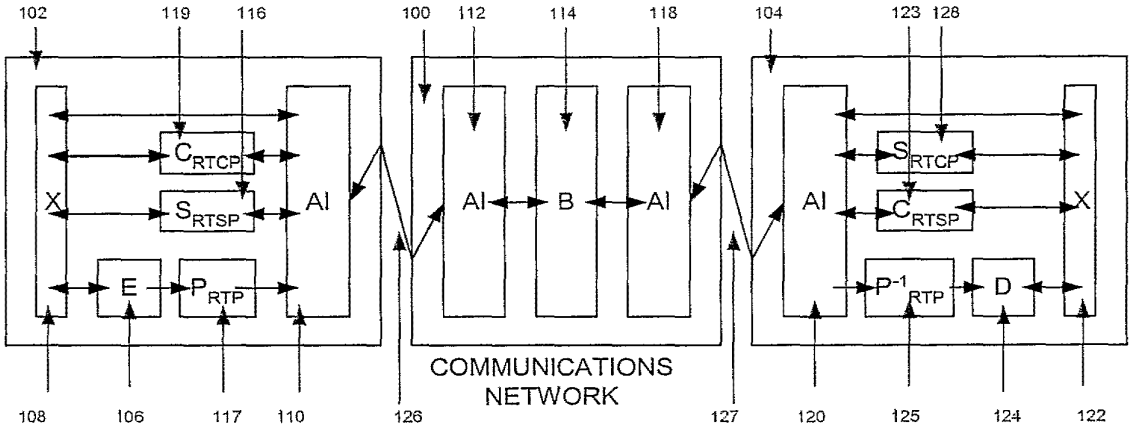


Figure 1

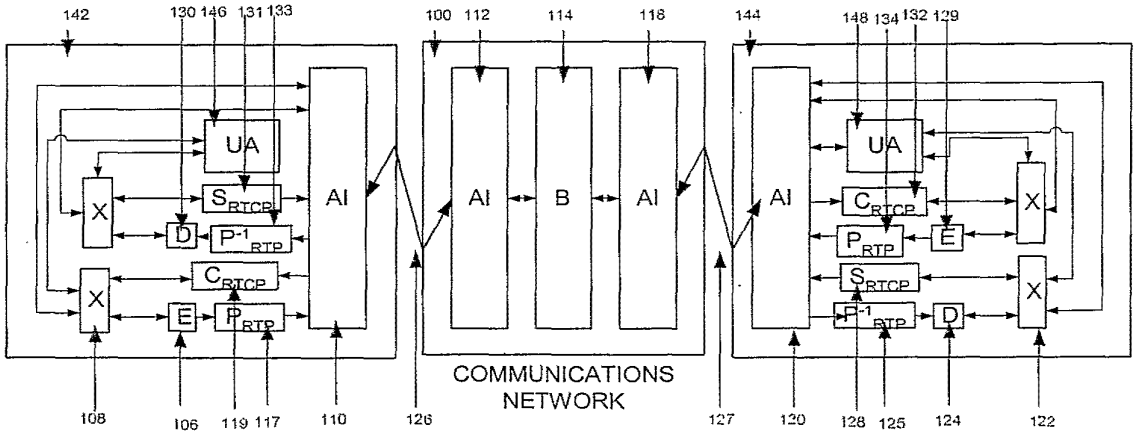


Figure 2

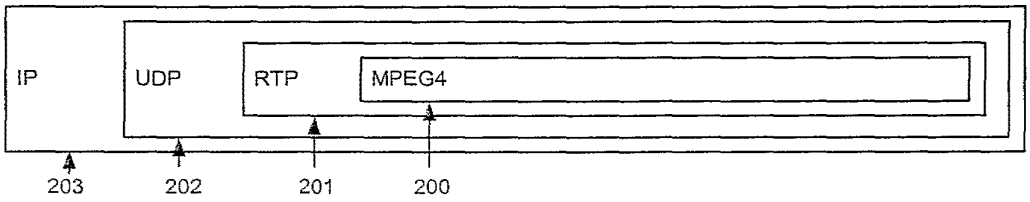


Figure 3

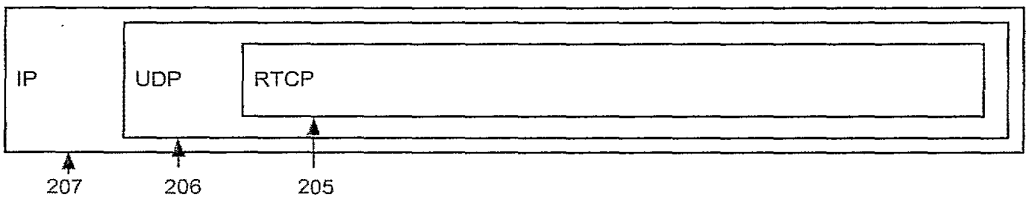


Figure 4

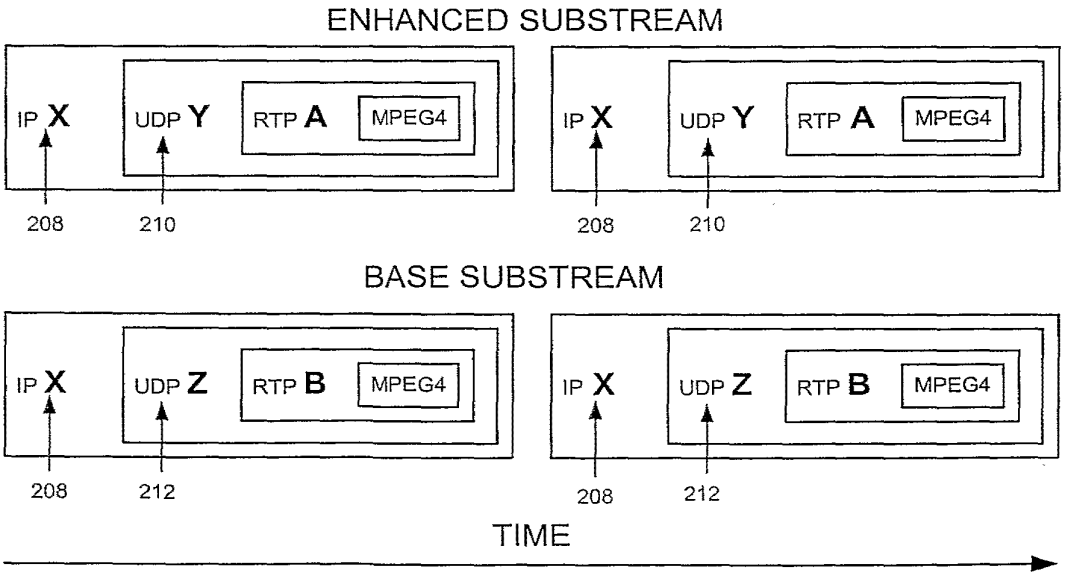


Figure 5

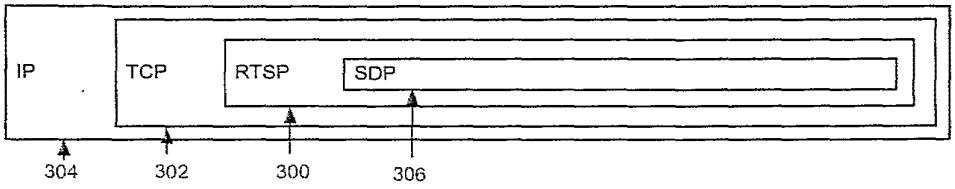


Figure 6

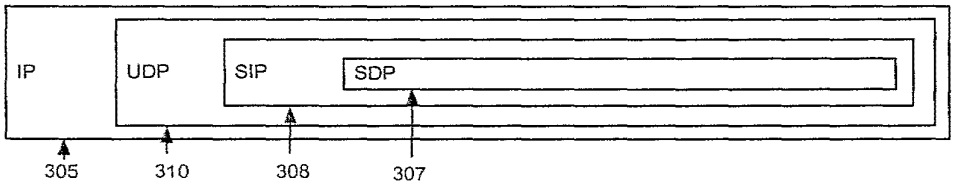


Figure 7

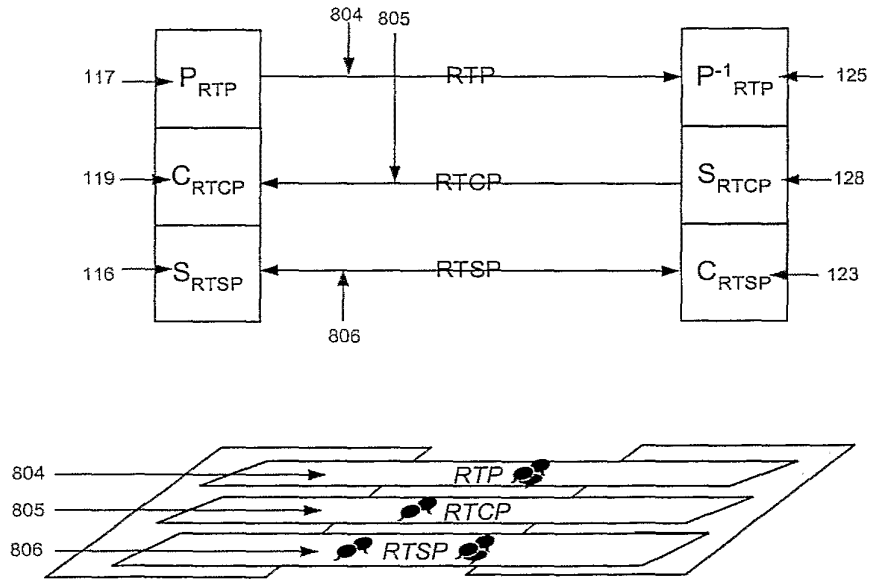


Figure 8

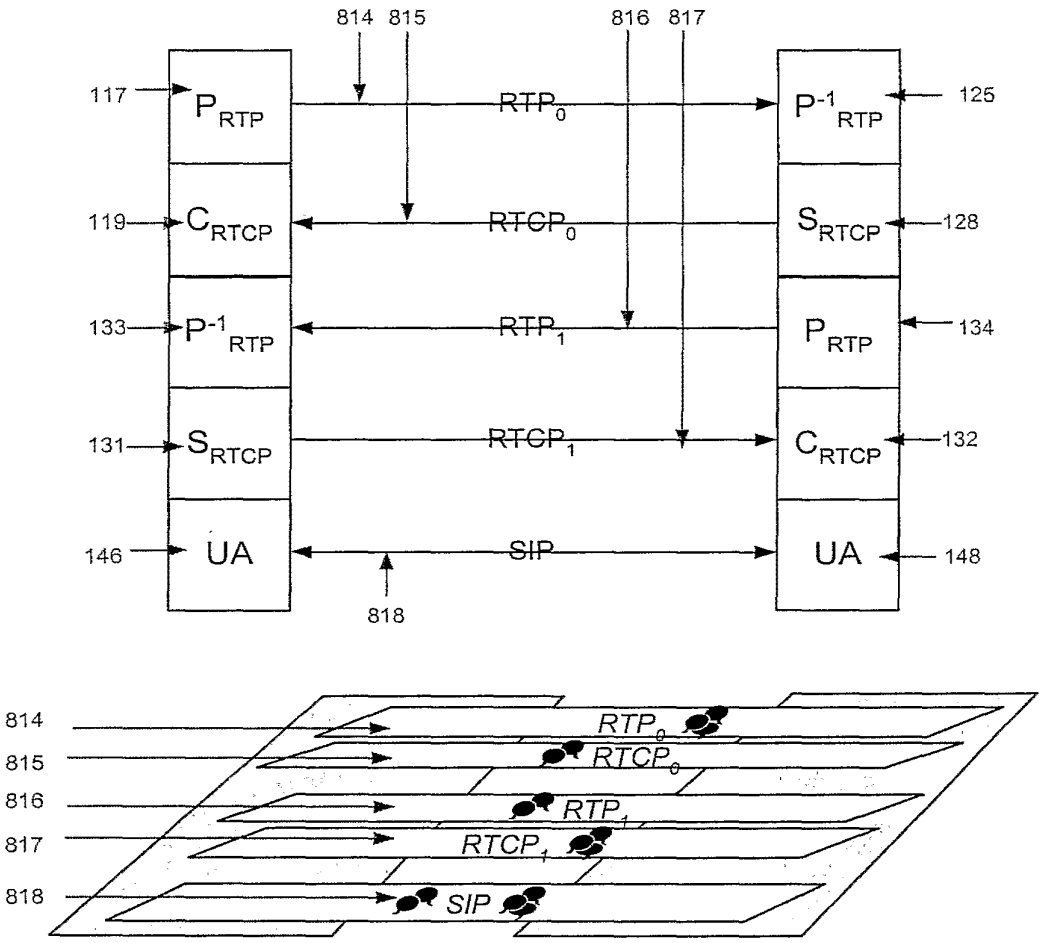

814
815
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817
818
117
119
133
131
146
125
128
134
132
148
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S_{RTCP}
UA
RTP_0
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RTP_1
$RTCP_1$
SIP

Figure 9

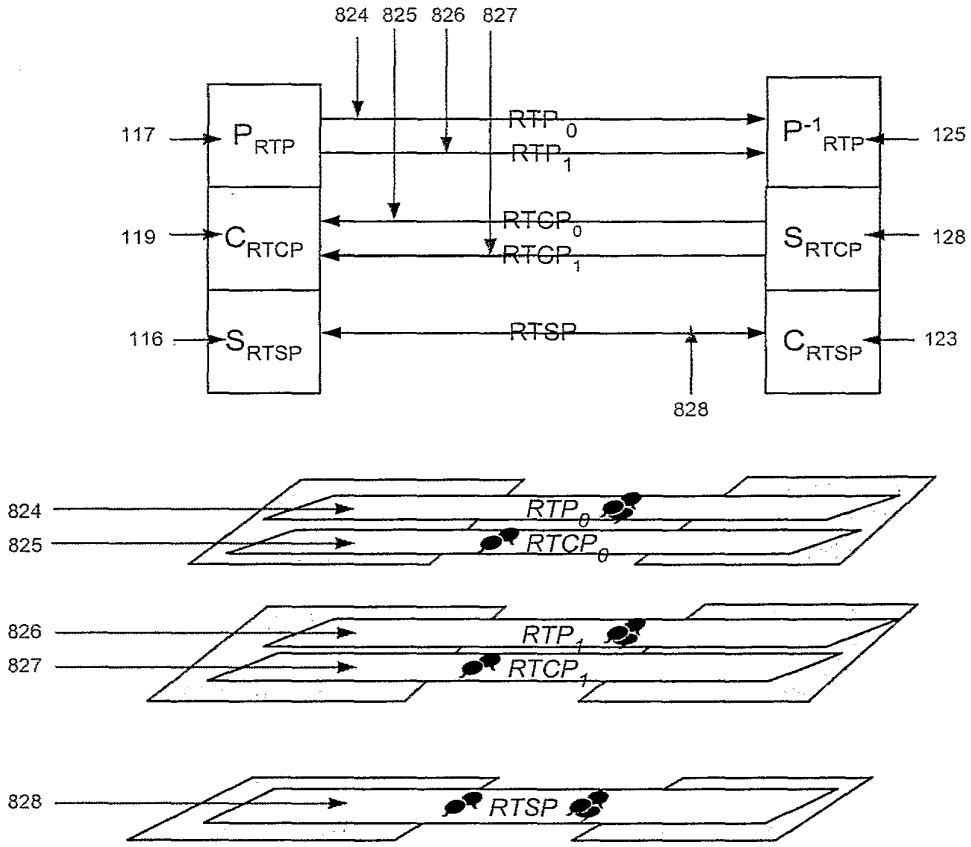

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$RTCP_1$
S_{RTCP}
128
116
S_{RTSP}
RTSP
C_{RTSP}
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RTSP

Figure 10

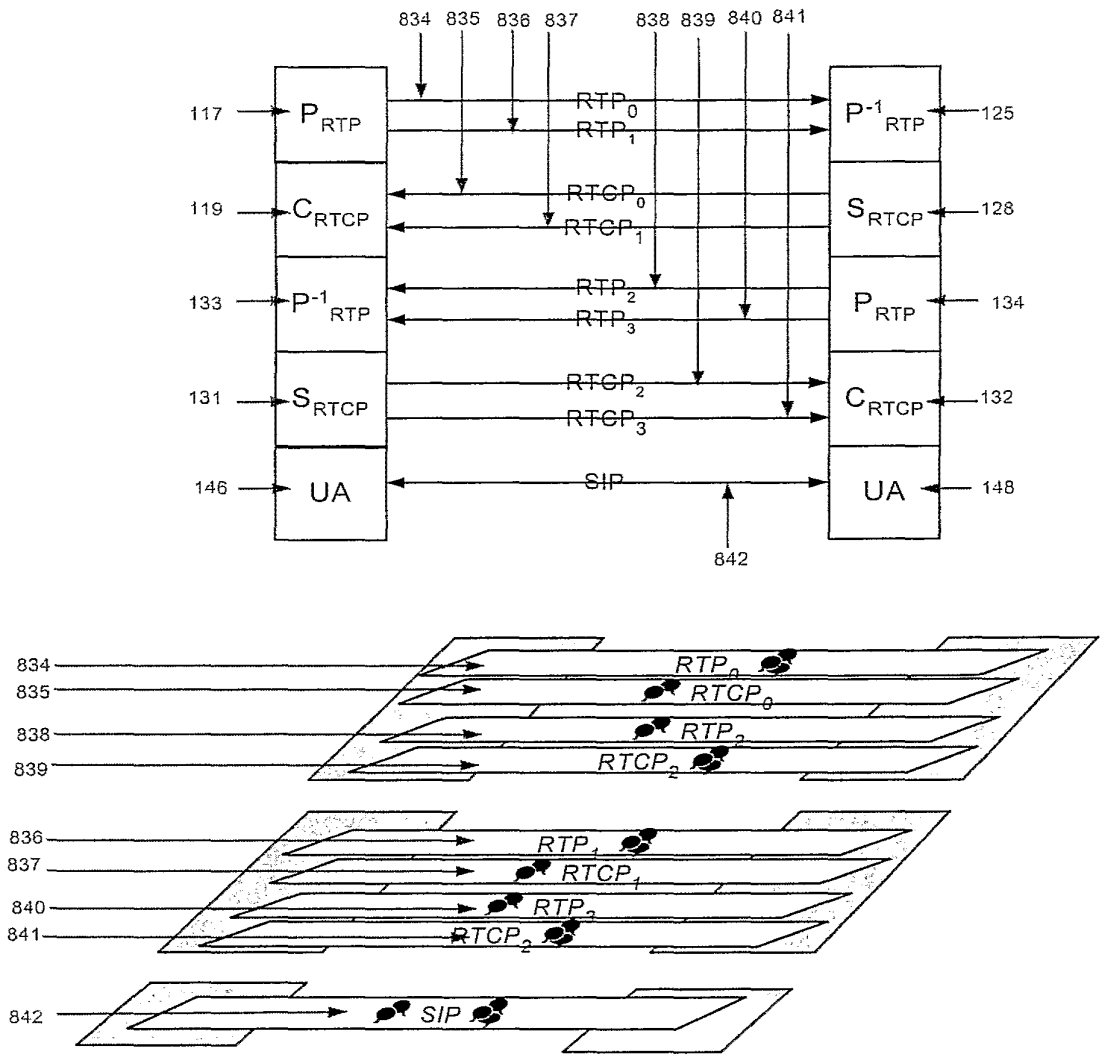

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117
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119
C RTCP
133
P-1 RTP
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S RTCP
146
UA
RTP0
RTP1
RTCP0
RTCP1
RTP2
RTP3
RTCP2
RTCP3
SIP
842
P-1 RTP
125
S RTCP
128
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C RTCP
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UA
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Figure 11

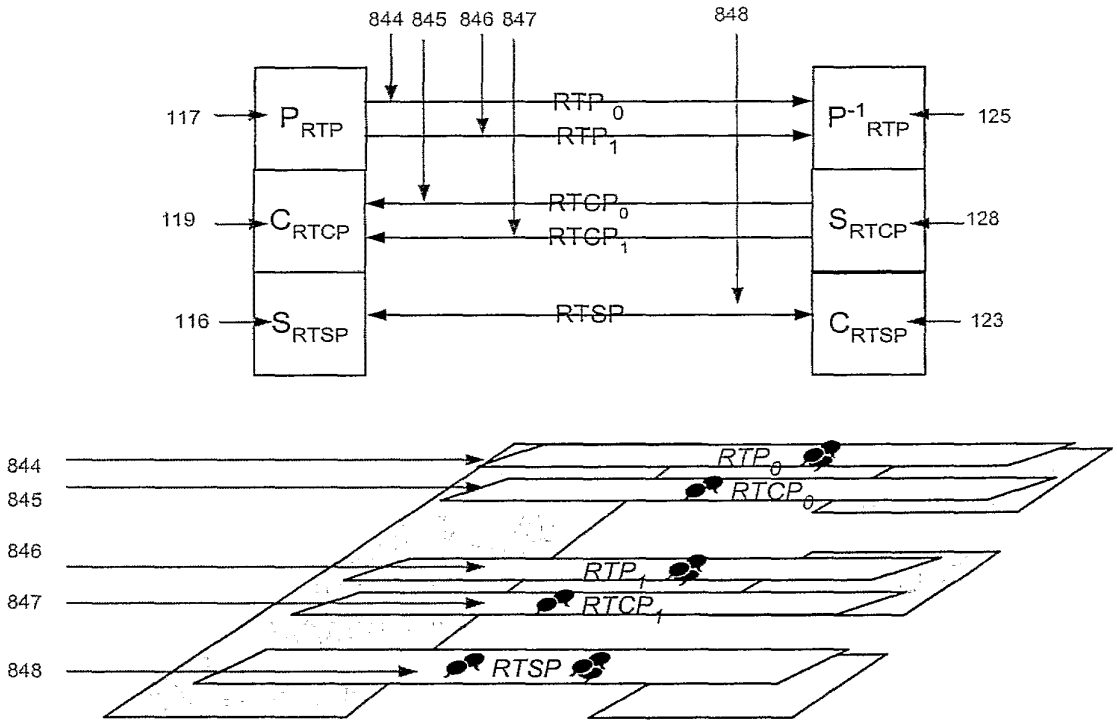

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C_{RTCP}
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$RTCP_1$
S_{RTCP}
128
116
S_{RTSP}
RTSP
C_{RTSP}
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$RTCP_1$
RTSP

Figure 12

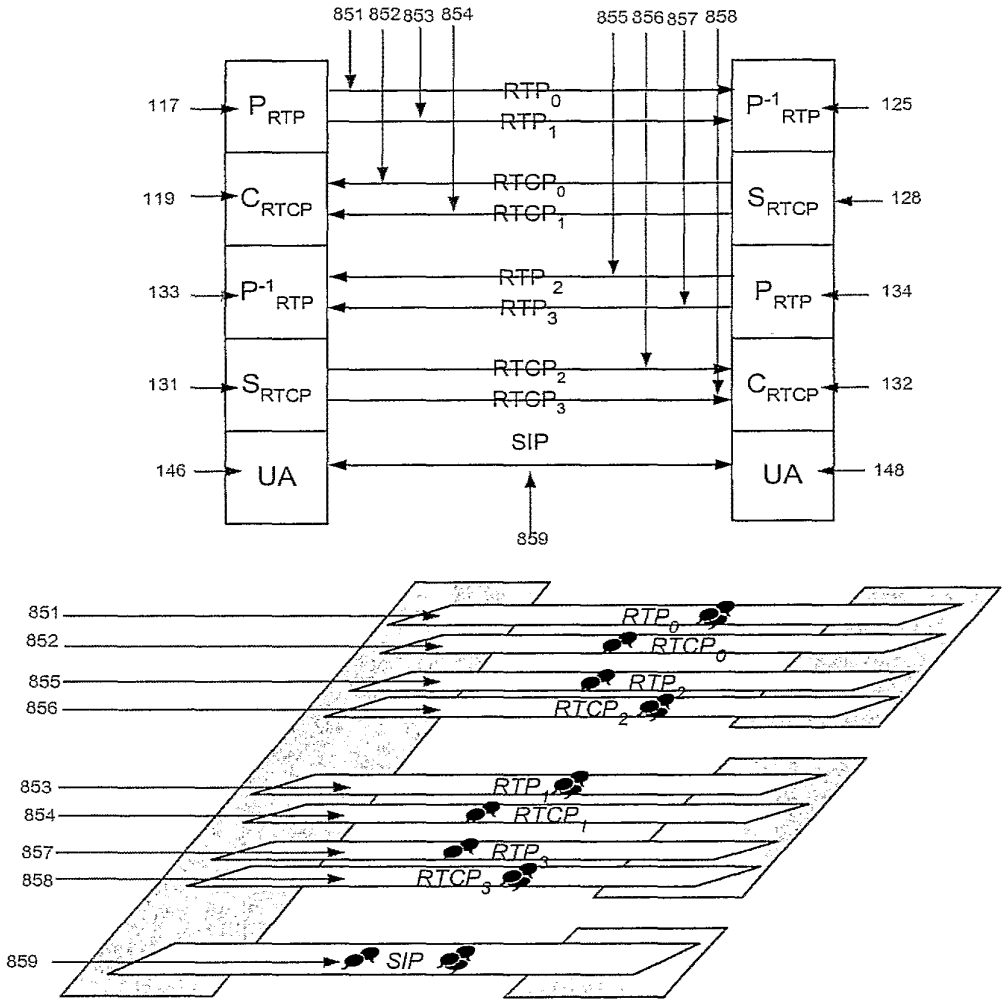

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RTP 1
P-1 RTP
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119
C RTCP
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RTCP 1
S RTCP
128
133
P-1 RTP
RTP 2
RTP 3
P RTP
134
131
S RTCP
RTCP 2
RTCP 3
C RTCP
132
SIP
146
UA
UA
148
859
851
852
855
856
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RTCP 3
859
SIP

Figure 13

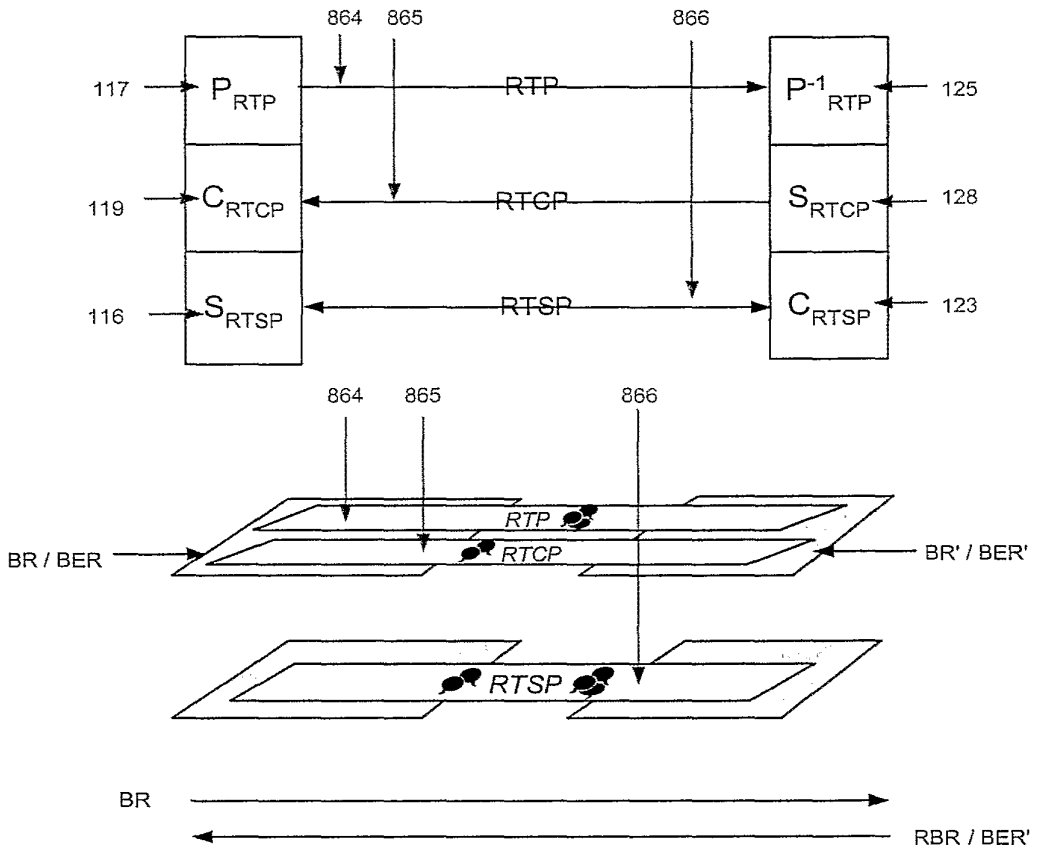

864
865
866
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P_{RTP}
RTP
P^{-1}_{RTP}
125
119
C_{RTCP}
RTCP
S_{RTCP}
128
116
S_{RTSP}
RTSP
C_{RTSP}
123
BR / BER
RTP
RTCP
BR' / BER'
RTSP
BR
RBR / BER'

Figure 14

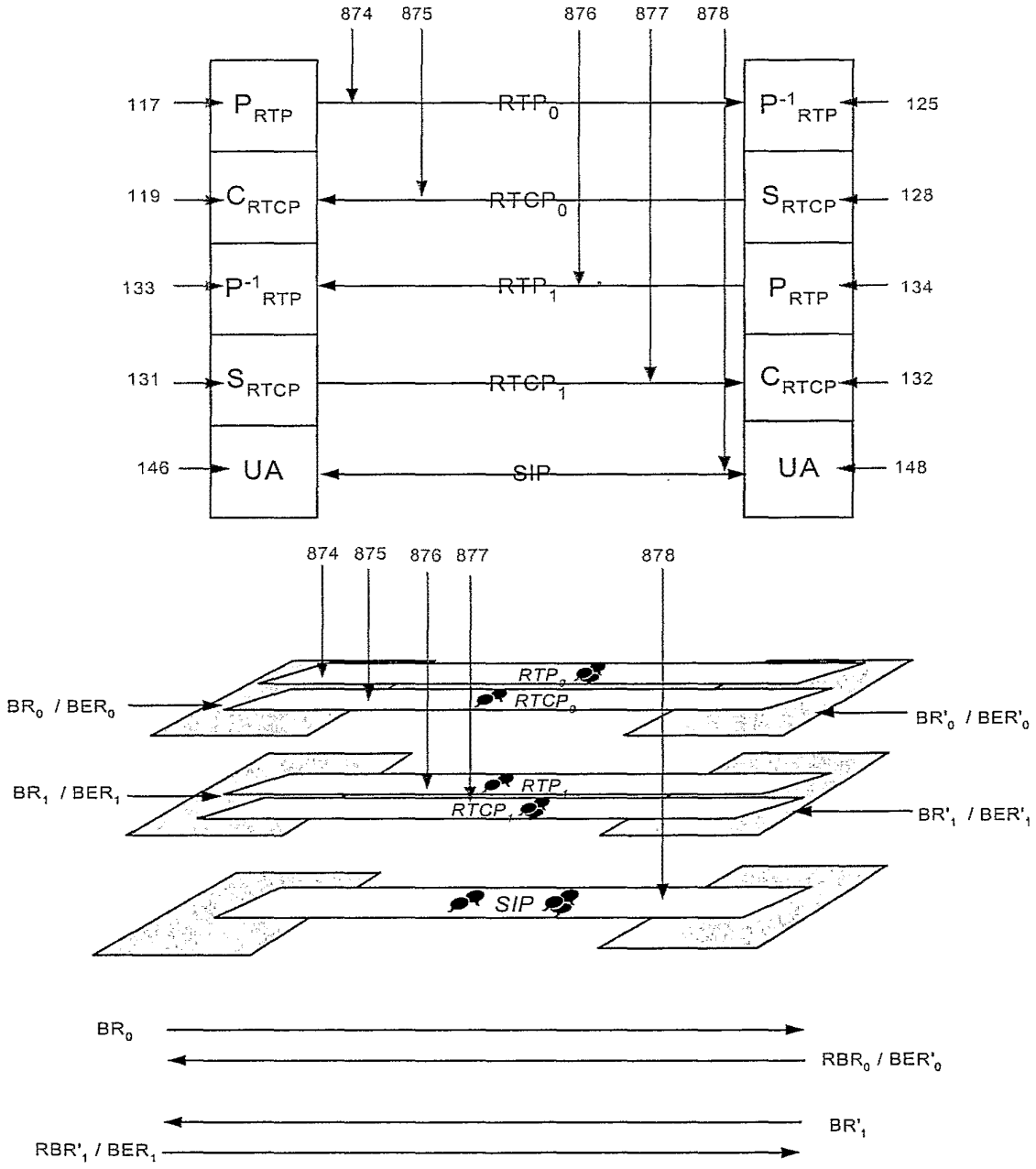

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RTP_0
P^{-1}_{RTP}
125
119
C_{RTCP}
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S_{RTCP}
128
133
P^{-1}_{RTP}
RTP_1
P_{RTP}
134
131
S_{RTCP}
$RTCP_1$
C_{RTCP}
132
146
UA
SIP
UA
148
BR_0 / BER_0
BR'_0 / BER'_0
BR_1 / BER_1
BR'_1 / BER'_1
RTP_0
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Figure 15

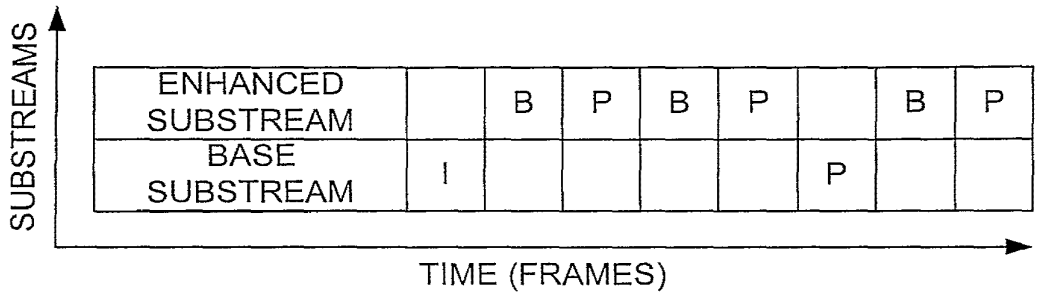


Figure 16

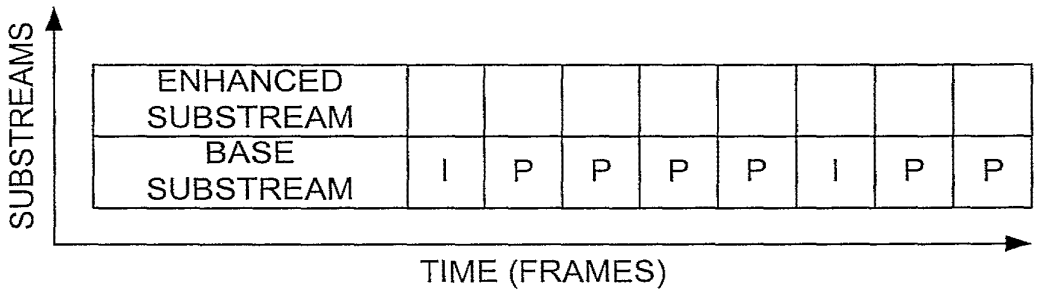


Figure 17

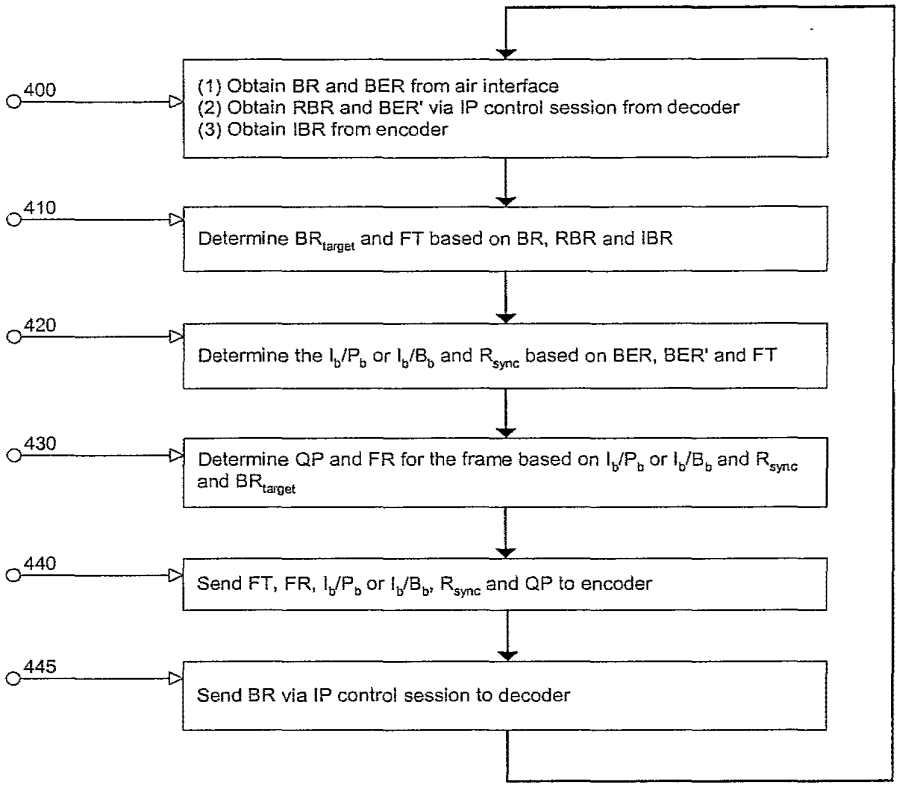


Figure 18

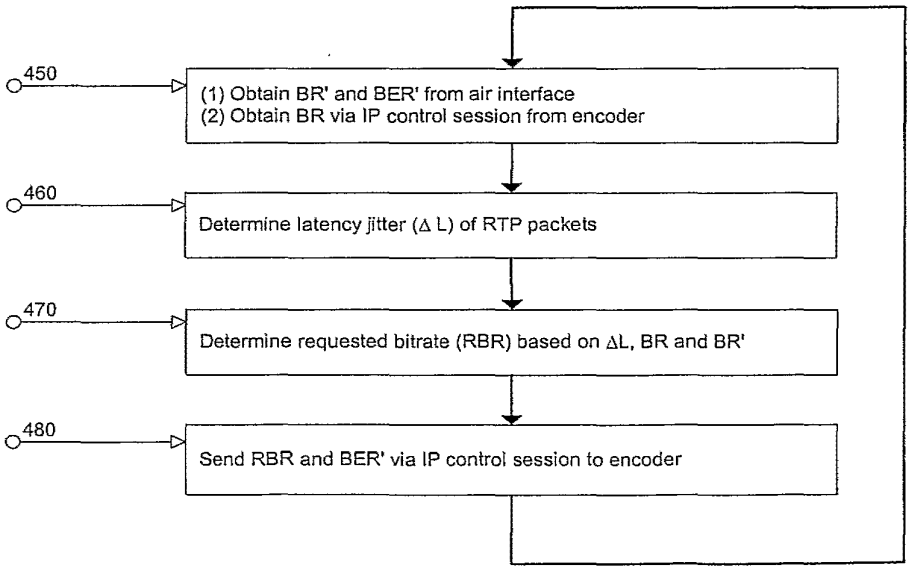


Figure 19

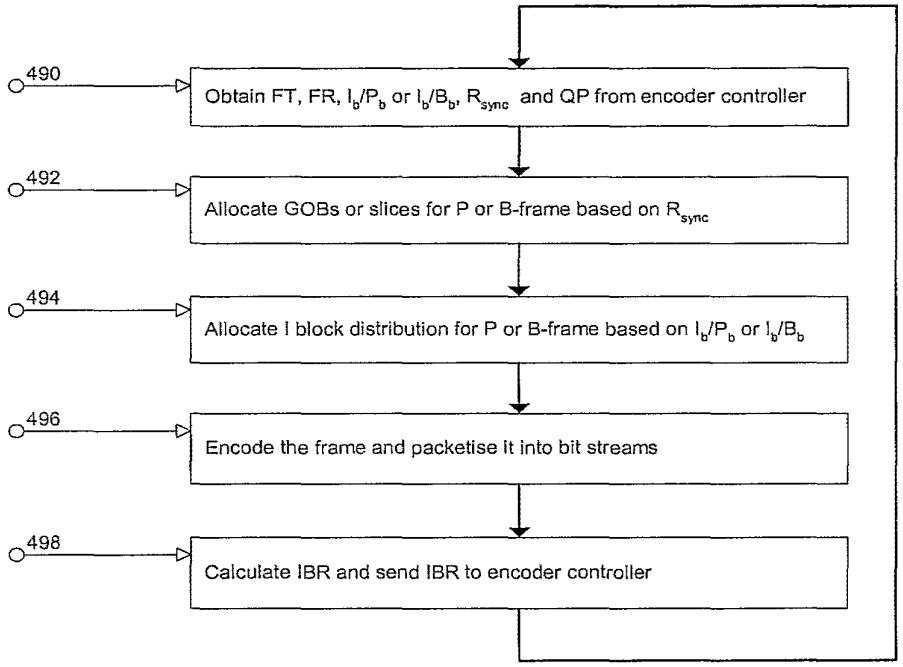


Figure 20

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/GB 01/04924

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 H04N7/24

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 H04N

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6 282 240 B1 (NAKAI TOSHIHISA ET AL) 28 August 2001 (2001-08-28) column 5, line 18 - line 49 ---	1-4, 14-16
X	GUERRI J C ET AL: "A feedback packet-level error control for real-time applications in wireless networks" VEHICULAR TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE, 1999. VTC 1999 - FALL. IEEE VTS 50TH AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS 19-22 SEPT. 1999, PISCATAWAY, NJ, USA,IEEE, US, 19 September 1999 (1999-09-19), pages 879-883, XP010353105 ISBN: 0-7803-5435-4	1,2,4, 6-11,14, 15
A	paragraph '0001! paragraph '0003! --- -/--	3,5,12, 16,17

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

[X] Patent family members are listed in annex.

° Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
10 July 2002	19/07/2002

Name and mailing address of the ISA	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL – 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Marie-Julie, J-M

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Page 868

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication,where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EP 0 757 490 A (MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC IND CO LTD) 5 February 1997 (1997-02-05) page 13, line 3 -page 16, line 17 page 17, line 21 - line 57	1,2,4
A	HOFFMAN D ET AL: "Hierarchical video distribution over Internet-style networks" PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON IMAGE PROCESSING (ICIP) LAUSANNE, SEPT. 16 - 19, 1996, NEW YORK, IEEE, US, vol. 1, 16 September 1996 (1996-09-16), pages 5-8, XP010202065 ISBN: 0-7803-3259-8 paragraph '0001!	1,17,20
A	US 5 825 430 A (ADOLPH DIRK ET AL) 20 October 1998 (1998-10-20) abstract	1,17-20
A	KYUNGRAN KANG ET AL: "Dynamic rate control mechanism for large scale sessions" INFORMATION NETWORKING, 1998. (ICOIN-12). PROCEEDINGS., TWELFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TOKYO, JAPAN 21-23 JAN. 1998, LOS ALAMITOS, CA, USA,IEEE COMPUT. SOC, US, 21 January 1998 (1998-01-21), pages 21-24, XP010265270 ISBN: 0-8186-7225-0 the whole document	1,17-20
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/GB 01/04924

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category °	Citation of document, with indication,where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	RAMANUJAN R S ET AL: "Adaptive streaming of MPEG video over IP networks" LOCAL COMPUTER NETWORKS, 1997. PROCEEDINGS., 22ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON MINNEAPOLIS, MN, USA 2-5 NOV. 1997, LOS ALAMITOS, CA, USA,IEEE COMPUT. SOC, US, 2 November 1997 (1997-11-02), pages 398-409, XP010252445 ISBN: 0-8186-8141-1 the whole document -----	1

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No
PCT/GB 01/04924

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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EP 0757490 A	05-02-1997	CN 1152242 A	18-06-1997
		EP 0757490 A2	05-02-1997
		JP 10028269 A	27-01-1998
		KR 255229 B1	01-05-2000
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		JP 2002511216 T	09-04-2002

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(71) Applicant: **AEROCAST.COM, INC.** [US/US]; 5744 Pacific Center Boulevard, Suite 301, San Diego, CA 92121 (US).

(72) Inventor: **KAUFFMAN, Marc, W.**; 961 Olive Crest Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024 (US).

(74) Agents: **KULAS, Charles, J.** et al.; TOWNSEND AND TOWNSEND AND CREW LLP, 2 Embarcadero Center, 8th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94111 (US).

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(84) Designated States *(regional)*: ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

— *as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, OM, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG)*

— *as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii)) for all designations*

Published:

— *without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: QUALITY OF SERVICE CONTROL OF STREAMED CONTENT DELIVERY

(57) Abstract: According to the invention, a method for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location is disclosed. In one step, an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object is determined. A period for transporting the content object is also determined. A check for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period is performed. If available, the bandwidth is reserved. The content object is streamed to the end-user location.

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QUALITY OF SERVICE CONTROL OF STREAMED CONTENT DELIVERY

This application claims priority to US Application Serial No. 10/002,469 filed on November 14, 2001.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to streamed content delivery and, more specifically, to streaming audio or video content originating across a wide area network.

Currently, audio and video is streamed from the Internet to a computer using proprietary formats and transport protocols to proprietary players that are available from Microsoft™, Apple™ and Real Media™. There are also standard transport protocols such as those defined with MPEG-4 and RTSP/RTP that may be used with some proprietary players. The players run on computers such that a user can listen to audio or watch video streamed from a content provider. Cable modems, DSL modems and other broadband modems interface the computer to the Internet to allow reception of the content streams. Because of the so-called digital-divide, families that cannot afford computers and Internet connections cannot take advantage of audio and video over the Internet.

As part of a cable television subscription, many homes today are provided with cable system set top boxes for little or no additional cost to the consumer. Many of the set top boxes, such as the DCT-2000™ available from Motorola™, allow decoding and displaying programs sent in MPEG-2 format using MPEG-2 transport protocols. Program feeds or tapes are supplied to the headend of the cable operator for distribution to the set top boxes using a hybrid fiber / cable (HFC) plant. The programs are provided in a linear schedule such that the user can select any program for viewing.

[01] Telephone companies are beginning to offer very high speed digital subscriber line (VDSL) service to consumers. VDSL provides an approximately 6 Mbps connection to computers and set top boxes. The computers use the bandwidth to connect to the Internet and the set top boxes use the bandwidth to provide video programs from a linear schedule or in a video on demand (VOD) menu along with services such as VOD. Users of the VDSL set top boxes are limited to selecting programs from the linear schedule or VOD menu.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment, the present invention provides a method for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location. In one step, an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object is determined. A period for transporting the content object is also determined. A check for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period is performed. If available, the bandwidth is reserved. The content object is streamed to the end-user location.

In another embodiment, the present invention provides a method for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location. In one step, an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object is determined. A period for transporting the content object is determined. A check for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period is performed. The bandwidth is reserved if available. A lower bitrate version of the content object is chosen if the check for availability is unsuccessful. The content object is streamed to the end-user location.

In yet another embodiment, the present invention provides a software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location. The software product comprises: code for determining an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object; code for determining a period for transporting the content object; code for checking for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period; code for reserving the bandwidth if available; code for converting the content object to a lower bitrate if the check for availability is unsuccessful; and code for streaming the content object to the end-user location.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is described in conjunction with the appended figures:

FIG. 1A is a block diagram of an embodiment of a content distribution system;

FIG. 1B is a block diagram of another embodiment of a content distribution system that uses video digital subscriber line (VDSL) technology;

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FIG. 2A is a block diagram of an embodiment of a hybrid fiber / coax (HFC) plant interfaced with a headend and content receivers;

FIG. 2B is a block diagram of an embodiment of a hybrid fiber / twisted pair (HFTP) plant interfaced with a point of presence and content receivers;

FIG. 3A is a block diagram of an embodiment of a portion of a headend, which is coupled to content receivers with the HFC plant;

FIG. 3B is a block diagram of an embodiment of another portion of the headend, which is coupled to set top boxes;

FIG. 3C is a block diagram of another embodiment of a portion of the headend, which is coupled to set top boxes;

FIG. 4A is a block diagram of a prior art unassociated content provider;

FIG. 4B is a block diagram of an embodiment of an associated content provider;

FIG. 5A is a block diagram of an embodiment of a content exchange;

FIG. 5B is a block diagram of another embodiment of the content exchange that includes transcoding capability;

FIG. 6A is a block diagram of an embodiment of an associated client computer;

FIG. 6B is a block diagram of an embodiment of an enhanced set top box;

FIG. 6C is a block diagram of an embodiment of a standard set top box that can tune to a channel package for viewing;

FIG. 7 is a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process for streaming a content object to a standard set top box;

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process for streaming a content object to a content receiver; and

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process for controlling quality of service for a streamed content object.

In the appended figures, similar components and/or features may have the same reference label. Further, various components of the same type may be distinguished by following the reference label by a dash and a second label that distinguishes among the similar components. If only the first reference label is used in the specification, the description is applicable to any one of the similar components having the same first reference label irrespective of the second reference label.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

The ensuing description provides preferred exemplary embodiment(s) only, and is not intended to limit the scope, applicability or configuration of the invention. Rather, the ensuing description of the preferred exemplary embodiment(s) will provide those skilled in the art with an enabling description for implementing a preferred exemplary embodiment of the invention. It being understood that various changes may be made in the function and arrangement of elements without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as set for in the appended claims.

The present invention allows controlling quality of service (QOS) for the so-called "last mile" of content delivery. For example, a set amount of bandwidth is reserved between the headend and a content receiver. The reservation avoids oversubscription of the last mile such that a desired QOS is interrupted. Where a reservation is not possible, the content object may be transcoded to a lower datarate or buffered.

Referring initially to FIG. 1A, a block diagram is shown of an embodiment of a content distribution system 100. In this embodiment, a cable television (TV) system is used to distribute content objects to users. Content objects from either unassociated content providers 108 or associated content providers 112 may be distributed through the Internet 120 or a quality of service (QOS) network 122. Both unassociated and associated content exchanges 116, 124 allow cacheing of content objects before transport of the objects through a headend and hybrid fiber / coaxial plant 132 to the user. Viewing of or listening to the content object is provided by one of a standard set top box 138, an enhanced set top box 136 and an associated client computer 140.

The network operation center 104 provides many functions used by the system 100. Associated client computers 140 sign-up and download viewer object proxy and other software from the network operation center 104. Some billing and logging for the system 100 is also performed in the network operation center 104. Directory information for the system 100 is maintained in the network operation center 104 such that users can see the various content objects registered in the system 100. Requests for those registered objects are routed to the appropriate content provider 108, 112 who originated the content object. Encryption key distribution and management are also performed by the network operation center 104.

A content object can originate from either associated or unassociated content providers 112, 108. Unassociated content providers 108 include any computer

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visible from the Internet 120 that supplies content objects that are streamable. Associated content providers 112 have the ability to use the QOS network 122 in addition to the Internet 120. Further, the associated content providers 112 can route a content object query to various content exchanges 116, 124 for better QOS and can publish directory information to the network operation center 104.

Content exchanges 116, 124 source content objects to users to provide enhanced QOS. When a content object is requested from a content provider 108, 112, either the content provider 108, 112, the network operation center 104 or the viewer object proxy may redirect that request to a content exchange 116, 124 for fulfillment. Under some circumstances, the associated content provider 112 may choose to fulfill the request itself rather than passing fulfillment to a content exchange 116, 124. Content objects requested from content exchanges 116, 124 are located by first, searching the content exchange 116, 124; second, searching other interconnected content exchanges 116, 124; and, third, a request to the originating content provider 108, 112.

Unassociated content exchanges 116 are available to any user in the system 100, but associated content exchanges 124 primarily benefit any enhanced set top box (STB) 136, standard STB 138 or associated client computer 140 linked to those associated content exchanges 124. With the proper software, unassociated client computers 142 can receive content objects from the unassociated content exchanges 116.

Receiving a content object at a desired data-rate that does not exceed the data-rate of the client computer's connection to the Internet 120 is defined as adequate QOS. The maximum QOS a user can expect is defined by the speed, delay, jitter and error rate of their network connection, the processing power of their computer and other factors. The minimum QOS is subjectively defined by the user based upon the quality they desire within certain limits. For example, a user with a 400 Kbps network connection and a fast computer may have a choice of a 28 Kbps, 56 Kbps, or 128 Kbps stream for an audio clip from which the user chooses the 128 Kbps stream. So long as the datarate provided to the client computer is in the range of 128 - 400 Kbps, adequate QOS is possible for that stream.

Typically, an associated content exchange 124 is tightly integrated with a particular headend 128 to provide low latency and fewer hops between the associated content exchange 124 and a content receiver. In this way, the associated content exchange 124 is usually the highest QOS source of a content object for the user. Each associated content exchange 124 is assigned to a group of content receivers associated

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with the headend 128. The content objects sourced by the users of the content receivers are stored in the associated content exchange 124 along with any content objects they request. Associated content exchanges 124 provide their content objects or portions thereof to other content exchanges 116, 124, however, associated content exchanges 124 do not normally stream content objects not originating from its users to unassociated client computers 142.

The cable operator aggregates network traffic and MPEG-2 transported content objects in the headend 128. For example, a cable operator of a large metropolitan area may have one or more headends 128. Network traffic is sent to and received from a wide area network, which is defined to include the Internet 120 and/or the QOS network. The headend 128 interfaces with the Internet 120 and QOS network 122 to send and receive network traffic. Other program feeds are used by the headend to provide a linear schedule of programs to each STB 136, 138. The HFC plant 132 transports the program feeds and network traffic to each STB 136, 138 and each associated client computer 140.

Each set top box 136, 138 receives channel packages of elementary streams in MPEG-2 format with MPEG-2 transport. In MPEG-2 transport, programs are separated into constituent parts or elementary streams and compressed into packets with timestamps for transport in a multiplexed datastream. The multiplexed datastream may include a number of different MPEG-2 program parts for various channel packages distinguished in the datastream by program identifiers (PIDs). By filtering for the PIDs the elemenary stream, channel package is gathered and aligned, where the time stamp is used for alignment. The datastream is transported in an analog TV channel on a carrier signal.

In the above embodiment, the content providers 108, 112 are located remotely to the content exchanges 116, 124. Some embodiments could co-locate the content providers 108, 112 and content exchanges 116, 124. An intranet could link them together.

With reference to FIG. 1B, a block diagram of another embodiment of a content distribution system 150 is shown that uses video digital subscriber line (VDSL) technology. VDSL uses a high bandwidth data link to send and receive data that could include video channels, phone conversations and/or Internet traffic. A point of presence 154 performs the functions of a headend 128 and communicates with VDSL set tops 136 and associated client computers 140. A hybrid fiber / twisted pair (HFTP) plant 158 is

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used for the VDSL data channel and may include fiber and/or twisted pair wire to convey the data where some embodiments could be all twisted pair or all fiber.

Referring next to FIG. 2A, a block diagram of an embodiment of a HFC plant 132 is shown interfaced with the headend 128 and content receivers 216. In this embodiment, the content receivers 216 could include the enhanced STBes 136, the standard STBes 138 and the associated client computers 140. The HFC plant 132 can include a multitude of different configurations to support a unique menu channel for each standard STB 136. The unique menu channel allows the user to choose content objects from a directory supplied by the network operation center 104 or could allow web browsing to find content objects. The menu channel is formulated in the headend 128 and supplied by the HFC plant to the user who can interact with the menu channel to select content objects.

Included for this embodiment of the HFC plant 132 are a neighborhood hub 204 and a number of nodes 208 that receive their content objects from optical fibers. Nodes 208 typically serve around 500 users and interface the optical fibers to coaxial cables. Neighborhood hubs 204 typically serve around 10,000-20,000 users and do the same interfacing of optical fibers to coaxial cables as the nodes 208, but may also include an associated content exchange 124. Further, the neighborhood hubs 204 may serve optical fiber connections to nodes 208. The coaxial cable from either a neighborhood hub 20 or node 208 to a group of content exchanges 216 share a set amount of bandwidth in such a manner that the QOS can be greatly reduced by oversubscription.

With reference to FIG. 2B, a block diagram of an embodiment of a HFTP plant 158 interfaced with a point of presence 154 and content receivers 216 is shown. In this embodiment, the content receivers 216 include VDSL STBes 136 and associated client computers 140 that receive their IP traffic from a twisted pair phone line. Each content receiver 216 gets its own twisted pair conductor from either the central office 254 or neighborhood node 258. Optical fiber feeds the neighborhood nodes 258 and central offices 254. Typically, the central office 254 would include an associated content exhange 124.

Referring next to FIG. 3A, a block diagram of an embodiment 300 of a portion of a headend 128 coupled to content receivers with the HFC plant 132 is shown. The associated content exchange 124 is coupled to a cable modem termination system (CMTS) 304. The depicted embodiment 300 routes network traffic that is IP packet based. The enhanced STBes 136 of this embodiment behaves like a client computer 140

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to allow browsing and to run player software. Some embodiments may have multiple associated content exchanges 124 and/or multiple CMTS with a router to direct network traffic between them. Additionally, a single headend 128 could serve any number of HFC plants 132.

The CMTS 304 includes a router to allow routing traffic to the appropriate enhanced STB 136 or associated client computer 140 by way of a DOCSIS or other cable modem. Data is modulated onto and demodulated off the HFC plant 132 by the CMTS. The CMTS also controls media access and other configuring for the DOCSIS cable modems. Reservations for bandwidth are made with the CMTS to guarantee a particular data rate or QOS between the associated content exchange 124 and content receiver 136, 140. Where a reservation is not possible, the datalink between the CMTS 304 and a content receiver 216 may proceed in a best efforts mode where any non reserved bandwidth is shared among many content receivers 136, 140 sharing a common datachannel.

With reference to FIG. 3B, a block diagram of an embodiment 320 of another portion of the headend 128 is shown coupled to set top boxes 136, 138. This embodiment 320 uses MPEG-2 formatted content objects transported in a multiplexed MPEG-2 data stream carried in a TV channel to each STB 138, 136. The enhanced STB 136 of this embodiment 320 can receive content objects from either the DOCSIS port or the MPEG-2 datastream.

In the case where the STB 136, 138 receives content objects through the MPEG-2 datastream, the navigational proxy 322 provides a menu channel for that purpose. The menu channel can be a list or grid showing available content objects or can be a web browser interface that allows selecting any content objects even if those content objects are not registered with the system 100. By having the menu or browser functionality in the navigation proxy 322 instead of the STB 136, 138, the footprint of the client software for the STB 136, 138 may be reduced. Requested content objects are downloaded to the associated content exchange 124 for buffering and/or cacheing before being streamed in a MPEG-2 datastream.

Once the content object is ready for streaming in the associated content exchange 124, the channel controller 324 configures the MPEG-2 transport to the STB 136, 138 such that the content object is transported in a channel package of elementary streams. To accomplish the transfer, the content object is routed to a transcoder 332 and encrypter 334 corresponding to a chosen channel package. The multiplexer 336 and

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modulator 340 are used to combine a number of channel packages together into a multiplexed datastream and modulate that datastream onto a carrier frequency for the selected TV channel. The channel controller 324 communicates the index of PIDs for the elementary stream and the selected TV channel to the client on the STB 136, 138 by way of a control data transceiver 328 such that the content object can be received and decoded. The channel controller 324 also records usage by STB 136, 138 such that costs associated with the service can be determined. In various embodiments, the usage could be determined based upon the number of reservations made, the amount of bandwidth reserved, the length of the reservation, and/or the portion of the reserved bandwidth that was used.

The transcoder 332 does any required format conversion on the content object. Format conversion may include changing the bit rate and/or the encoding for the content object. For example, the associated content exchange 124 could store a content object that is Quicktime™ encoded at 1 Mbps and the transcoder 332 could convert the content object to a MPEG-2 encoding at 400 Kbps. In this embodiment, some of the set top boxes 138 can only decode content objects in MPEG-2 format so most content objects are transcoded into MPEG-2 format.

The encrypter 334 scrambles a channel package such that it can only be decoded by the STB 136, 138 with the proper key. Although many STBes 136, 138 may receive the channel package, only the one(s) with the key can decode and view the program. Control through encryption allows conditional access of the content object. In some embodiments, encryption is not activated or keys are given to multiple STB 136, 138 such that many can play the content object.

Referring next to FIG. 3C, a block diagram of another embodiment 350 of the portion of the headend 132 is shown coupled to the standard set top box 136, 138. This embodiment does not have external transcoders 332. Any transcoding in this embodiment could be performed on a content exchange 116, 124 or at the content provider 108, 112.

Referring next to FIG. 4A, a block diagram of an unassociated content provider 108 is shown. The unassociated content provider 108 is simply any web site on the Internet 120 that serves web pages from a web server 404 that includes streamable content objects. The content objects are stored on a content server 408 and originate from a content source 416. The content source 416 could be a web cam, tape drive or any other

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mechanism for loading a content object. The web server 404, content server 408 and Internet 120 are all coupled together with a backbone 424.

With reference to FIG. 4B, a block diagram of an embodiment of an associated content provider 112 is shown. This embodiment adds functions to allow the content objects to be cataloged by the system 100 and to allow routing the content receivers 216 to a content source with adequate QOS for fulfillment of a request for a content object.

The Internet 120 and the QOS network 122 interface to a layer 4 switch 412. Requests to the web server 404 are redirected to the system interface 420 by the layer 4 switch 412. The system interface 420 requests the web page from the web server 404 and rewrites the content object links in the web page before presentment to the content receiver 216. The links are rewritten based upon the system interface 420 knowing where the content objects are distributed among the content exchanges 116, 124 and/or knowing which content exchanges 116, 124 are preferred by the content receiver 216.

Once the content receiver is redirected to a content exchange 116, 124 for fulfillment of the request for the content object, the content exchange 116, 124 may request the content object or portions thereof from the associated content provider 112 if no other content exchanges 116, 124 have the content object or portions thereof. Any request to the associated content provider 112 for the content object is intercepted by the system interface 420. After the system interface requests the content object from the content server 408, it may be processed by the system interface 420. The system interface 420 may transcode the content object to different coding formats or bitrates as it is streamed or all-at-once before streaming. Additionally, the content object may be encrypted to avoid illicit interception before reaching the content exchange 124.

The system interface 420 also supplies directory information to the network operation center 104. When content objects are added, removed or otherwise become unavailable on the content server 408 and/or at predetermined intervals, the system interface 420 reports that directory information back to the network operation center 104. A dynamic directory is maintained in the network operation center 104 that is constantly updated by the reports from the associated content providers 112. The directory may be used in generating the directory menu channel or may be browsed to determine the registered content objects available for streaming by the system 100.

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With reference to FIG. 5A, a block diagram of an embodiment of an unassociated or associated content exchange 116, 124 is shown connected to both the Internet 120 and the QOS Network 122 by way of the backbone 424. The content exchange 116, 124 includes a cache node 504 and a software subsystem 508. The cache node 504 is part of a distributed network of content exchanges 116, 124 interconnected by a high-speed link 528. This high-speed link 528 could include satellite, microwave, optical fiber, Internet, or other network technologies to allow quick sharing of content objects or portions thereof.

The cache node 504 stores content objects and portions thereof for spooling to multiple users. Buffering is provided even if multiple users do not request the content object. Included in the cache node 504 are a tracking server 502 and a content node 506. The content node 506 stores content objects in a cache or a file system and requests missing portions of a content object from other content exchanges 116, 124. Where the content object cannot be found in any of the content exchanges 116, 124, the tracking server 502 is used to get the content object from the content server 108, 112.

The tracking server 502 determines the content objects stored in the content node 506. Additionally, a list of all associated content providers 112 is maintained by the tracking server 502. All the associated content providers 112 are periodically notified by the tracking server 502 of which content objects are currently cached such that the associated content provider 112 knows where all its content objects are stored in the system 100. The tracking server 502 makes queries to the network operation center 104 to determine which content object portions in the content node 506 or requested by the content node 506 originated from which content providers 108. Health check information is also maintained in the tracking server 502.

Access to content objects may be controlled for billing, among other, purposes. The rights management application 512 manages conditional access to the content object. Conditional access is used to prevent others from using a content object that is not free to distribute. The traffic management application 510 tracks usage by content receiver 216. In various situations, either the user, the content provider or other parties are billed for the content object. The billing management application 520 works with the rights management and traffic management applications 512, 510 to bill the appropriate parties for usage.

The network management application 516 gives the network operation center 104 the ability to manage the content exchange 124 and otherwise collect

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information. The network management application 516 may track health information and utilization for network maintenance and other purposes. Also, billing information and rights information may be monitored and reported to the network operation center 104 by the network management application 516.

Referring next to FIG. 5B, a block diagram of another embodiment of the content exchange 116, 124 with transcoding capability is shown. The transcoding function 526 could include hardware and/or software to perform transcoding of bit rates and coding formats for content objects. This processing could be performed while streaming the content object or before a content object is streamed. For example, a VOD movie could be distributed in Quicktime™ format with a 2 Mbps datarate which is transcoded to MPEG-2 format at a 1 Mbps datarate for distribution to a STB 136, 138.

With reference to FIG. 6A, a block diagram of an embodiment of an associated client computer 140 is shown. A network interface 616, such as a cable modem, connects the associated client computer 140 to the HFC plant 132 to send and receive IP packet information. A viewer object proxy 604, a content processing program 620, a digital rights management function 612, and a customizable player skin 624 all run in an application layer 608. The video and/or audio associated with the content object is sent to a player output interface 614 which could include a video function and/or audio function.

The viewer object proxy 604 interfaces with the network interface 616 to determine QOS for content exchanges 116, 124. Suitable content exchanges 116, 124 are ranked in a list and that list is maintained until it is requested by an associated content provider 112. Typically, any associated content exchange 124 would be at the top of the ranked list. Where content objects are sourced from places other than an associated content exchange 124, the unassociated content exchange 116 may receive some compensation.

The digital rights management function 612 works with the content objects to protect copyrighted content objects from unauthorized use. Content objects authorized for use are played by the content processing program 620. Examples of content processing programs 620 include Windows Media Player™, Real Player™, etc. The customizable player skin 624 overlays the content processing program 620 to change the look and feel.

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Referring next to FIG. 6B, a block diagram of an embodiment of an enhanced STB 136 is shown. This enhanced STB 136 operates in a mode similar to the associated client computer 140 of Fig. 6A where an IP packet datalink transports the content objects by way of a DOCSIS modem that may be embedded in the enhanced STB 136. Although not shown in this embodiment, the enhanced STB 136 could also receive content objects from channel package of elementary streams sent on an MPEG channel. This embodiment, does not include a customizable player skin 624, but other embodiments could include one.

With reference to FIG. 6C, a block diagram of an embodiment of a standard set top box 138 is shown that can tune to TV channel for decoding a multiplexed datastream with a channel package for a content object to play that content object. This embodiment receives control data information and datastreams embedded in TV channels or out of band channels. Other embodiments could use a DOCSIS modem or equivalent to receive control data information.

The navigation function 686 is a client application that supports receiving content objects sent as channel package of elemental streams on a TV channel arranged by the channel controller 324. Preference information for a user may also be stored in the navigation function 686 such that content objects are coded at specified data rates or streamed in various preferred modes.

Menu or browser interaction information from the user is gathered by a navigation function 686 from a wireless receiver. The user may have, for example, a keyboard that communicates with infrared to the wireless receiver 682. The menuing or browser interaction information is sent by the control data transceiver 650 back to the navigational proxy 322.

Control data information such as the channel package index is sent to a control data transceiver 650 for decoding. Once the PIDs and TV channel are known from that index, the standard STB is 138 is configured to receive the content object. The TV channel information is sent to a tuner 658 to change its receiver frequency to that channel. A digital datastream is recovered from the carrier signal in the TV channel by a digital demodulator 662. The channel package is recovered by the digital channel select circuit 670 by filtering the packets based upon PIDs. Presuming receiving the content object is authorized, a decryption engine has a key that allows decoding the channel package into plain text.

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A MPEG-2 decoder 674 converts the plain text channel package into a NTSC, PAL or similar video signal. A TV interface 678 provides the video signal to an external monitor for viewing by the user. The above embodiment produces a video program on a TV, but those skilled in the art can appreciate that the invention is easily implemented for audio programs as well.

Referring next to FIG. 7, a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process 700 for streaming a content object to a standard STB 138 is shown. The depicted process picks-up in step 704 where a menu channel is presented by the navigational proxy 322 to the user with a list of possible content objects. The user uses a remote control to select one of the menu choices. The selection is detected by the wireless receiver 682 and relayed to the navigation function 686 in step 708.

In step 712, preparations are made to transport the content object to the standard STB 138. A request is made by the navigational proxy 322 to the content provider 108, 112 that originated the content object. An associated content provider 112 receives a ranking of the content exchanges 116, 124 that could source the content object, whereafter the system interface 420 redirects the request to a content exchange 116, 124 with adequate QOS.

If an unassociated content provider 116 is the source of the content object, the navigational proxy 322 redirects that request to a content exchange 116, 124 with adequate QOS. The content exchange 116, 124 that the request is redirected to will first try to find the content object locally, then request the content object from other content exchanges 116, 124, and last request the content object from the unassociated content provider 116.

The channel controller 324 arranges the transport between the headend 128 and the STB 138 in steps 720 and 724. The multiplexer 336 and modulator 340 for a TV channel with bandwidth available in the datastream for another channel package is determined in step 720. The channel package index of PIDs is communicated with the control data transceivers 328, 650 to the controller 654 in the STB 138. To receive the channel package, the controller 654 configures the STB 138 to tune to the TV channel, demodulate the datastream, filter out the channel package, decrypt that package, and display the content object.

Once the conduit between the headend 128 and the STB 138 is ready, this embodiment uses a transcoder 332 to change the coding format and/or datarate of the

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content object in step 728. For example, a content object in Real™ format could be changed to MPEG-2 format. As the channel package stream is converted to MPEG-2 format, it is streamed to the STB 138 in step 732. The content object is processed and played for the user in step 736. In various embodiments, the navigational proxy 322 may arrange the transcoding at either the headend 128, the content exchange 116, 124 or the associated content provider 112.

With reference to FIG. 8, a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process 800 for streaming a content object to a content receiver 216 is shown. This embodiment uses a browser interface in either the enhanced STB 136 or the associated client computer 140 to select the content object. The depicted process takes-up in step 804 where the user browses for possible content objects. The browsing may be done with the directory information stored in the network operation center 104 or could be done by browsing of content providers 108, 112 directly.

Once a content object is located by the user, the link for that object is selected. Where the content object is from an unassociated content provider 108, the viewer object proxy 604 determines the content exchange 116, 124 to redirect the request to and makes the request from that content exchange 116, 124. Alternatively, a request for a content object from an associated content provider 112 is redirected by that associated content provider 112 based upon preference information to a content exchange 116, 124 with adequate QOS.

In step 816, the selected content exchange 116, 124 gathers the content object. After a local check, the high-speed link 528 to other content exchanges 116, 124 is next used to query for any missing portions of the content object. Where peer content exchanges 116, 124 cannot locate the missing portions, a request is made back to the content provider 108, 112 that originated the content object.

Once the initial portions of the content object are found, streaming of the content object begins in step 828. The content object is streamed using IP packet transport over a broadband connection such as a satellite link, a DSL modem, a cable modem, a power line data modem, a microwave dish, cellular data modem, line-of-sight laser modem, etc. In some embodiments, a reservation may be made to guarantee an amount of bandwidth to support the stream or, alternatively, allow "best efforts" streaming of the content object. The content processing program 620 decodes and plays the streamed content object so long as the digital rights management function 612

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determines viewing is authorized and provides appropriate decryption of the streamed content.

Referring next to FIG. 9, a flow diagram of an embodiment of a process 900 for controlling QOS for a streamed content object is shown. In step 904, a request for a content object is detected by the CMTS 304. The duration, format and bandwidth for the content object is determined by the CMTS 304 such that the bandwidth and duration of a data channel reservation can be discerned. An attempt is made in step 912 to reserve the data channel. If the data channel can be accommodated as determined in step 916, the data channel reservation is negotiated between the CMTS 304 and DOCSIS modem associated with the content receiver 216. The CMTS 304 and DOCSIS modem are capable of arranging a datalink that cannot normally be oversubscribed as is possible when only "best efforts" bandwidth is available.

Where the datalink cannot be reserved, an attempt to located a lower bitrate version of the content object is performed in step 924. If the lower bitrate version is available, a determination is made as to whether the lower QOS version is acceptable to the user in step 928. Preference information previously stored may be used for this determination. If the lower bitrate version is determined acceptable in step 928, processing loops back to step 916 to determine if a reservation is possible.

Returning to step 924, in some cases a lower bitrate version of the content object is not readily available. In those cases, the next smaller bit rate that could be produced by the transcoding function 526 is determined in step 932. Some embodiments could store a content object in a number of transcoded formats and datarates to anticipate the desire for different encoding. A determination is made in step 928 to see if the reduced QOS is acceptable to the user. If so, the reservation is once again attempted. Presuming the reservation is fulfilled, the transcoding is performed to comply with the reservation.

Under some circumstances, the user may be unwilling to accept a reservation with lower QOS in step 928. If so, a determination is made in step 940 to see if the user will accept a delayed start time. If accepted, a buffer in the content receiver 216 is populated with enough of the content object to overcome interruptions or bandwidth bottlenecks. In some circumstances, "best efforts" delivery may be used and a determination is made on the system 100 loading such that an appropriate buffer size is chosen. In other situations, a reservation for a datarate less than the desired datarate of

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the content object is made and the buffer size required is determined such that the content object can be played from beginning to end without interruption.

In some circumstances, the user may further decide that a delayed start is not acceptable in step 940. The user can accept "best efforts" delivery in step 942 and receive the content object in step 922. In "best efforts" mode, there may be skips and other QOS issues experienced during playback. The user would always have the option of pausing playback when QOS deteriorates too far such that buffering is done. Resuming playback after buffering in pause mode results in better QOS. If the user decides that "best efforts" mode is not desired back in step 942, a busy message is displayed in step 944.

In some embodiments, a service plan for the content receiver 216 may limit the amount of bandwidth that can be reserved. Different service levels could allow for differing amounts of reserved bandwidth. These service levels could correspond to service tiers. Various service levels could limit the reservation authority of the user based upon the time of day requested for the reservation, the length of reservation, the bandwidth requested for the reservation, how many other reservations are pending, total time requested for other pending reservations, prioritization of all reservations, etc. Further, the service levels could restrict the duration and/or data rate that can be reserved. Some embodiments could impose a charge to the content receiver 216 for each reservation made, the bandwidth reserved, the length of time for the reservation and/or the amount used of the reserved bandwidth.

The above embodiment attempts to reserve bandwidth as the content object is requested. Other embodiments could allow the user to reserve bandwidth for use at a particular future time. For example, a two-hour block of bandwidth could be reserved for 8:00 on Saturday night in anticipation of watching a movie. In an alternative example, a live event could be selected from a program guide for viewing at the top of the hour.

Some embodiments may include the facilities to record performance statistics. These statistics could include success rate in receiving the content object, bandwidth usage per reservation, actual wait time before receiving a reservation versus expected wait time, actual versus granted bandwidth for a reservation, duration of delayed start, rate at which a content object viewing session is abandoned by users, etc. Information such as this could be used for the purposes of billing, maintenance, capacity engineering, etc.

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A number of variations and modifications of the invention can also be used. For example, a reservation for bandwidth may be enlarged in period to accommodate pausing and rewinding of the content object during playback. Other embodiments may buffer the remainder such that the reservation period can remain the same. In still other embodiments, the reserved data rate between a headend and a content receiver can dynamically change along with the encoded bitrate within defined QOS ranges.

In the above embodiments, a HFC or HFTP plant is used to distribute the streamed objects to the set top boxes or client computers that play the streamed objects. Other embodiments could use other distribution plants. For example, a wireless plant could be used that provides wireless data transmission using UHF, microwave, satellite, cellular, or other wireless technologies.

While the principles of the invention have been described above in connection with specific apparatuses and methods, it is to be clearly understood that this description is made only by way of example and not as limitation on the scope of the invention.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location, the method comprising step of:

determining an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object;

determining a period for transporting the content object;

checking for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period;

reserving the bandwidth if available; and

streaming the content object to the end-user location.

2. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising a step of beginning to buffer the content object before the streaming step.

3. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising a step of beginning to cache the content before the streaming step.

4. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising a step of converting the content object to a lower bitrate if the check for availability is unsuccessful.

5. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising a step of determining if a lower QOS is acceptable to an end-user if the check for availability is unsuccessful.

6. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising steps of:

determining the amount of bandwidth available over the period, where the amount of bandwidth is less than that required for adequate QOS;

determining a buffer amount to provide adequate QOS; and

storing the buffer amount corresponding to a portion of the content object proximate to the end user location.

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7. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 1, further comprising a step of determining usage by the end-user location based upon at least one of a number of reservations made, an amount of bandwidth reserved, a length of a reservation, and a portion of bandwidth used for the amount of bandwidth reserved.

8. A method for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location, the method comprising step of:

determining an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object;

determining a period for transporting the content object;

checking for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period;

reserving the bandwidth if available;

choosing a lower bitrate version of the content object if the check for availability is unsuccessful; and

streaming the content object to the end-user location.

9. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of beginning to buffer the content object before the streaming step.

10. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of beginning to cache the content before the streaming step.

11. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of determining if a lower QOS is acceptable to an end-user if the check for availability is unsuccessful.

12. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising steps of:

determining the amount of bandwidth available over the period, where the amount of bandwidth is less than that required for adequate QOS;

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determining a buffer amount to provide adequate QOS; and

storing the buffer amount corresponding to a portion of the content object proximate to the end user location.

13. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of reserving the bandwidth at a future time.

14. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of checking the service plan associated with the end-user location before allowing the reserving of bandwidth.

15. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of checking the service tier associated with the end-user location before allowing the reserving of bandwidth.

16. The method for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 8, further comprising a step of converting the content object into versions that have different bit rates.

17. A software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing a content object over a broadband connection to an end-user location, the software product comprising code for:

determining an amount of bandwidth for adequate quality of service (QOS) to transport the content object;

determining a period for transporting the content object;

checking for availability of the amount of bandwidth to the end-user location over the period;

reserving the bandwidth if available;

converting the content object to a lower bitrate if the check for availability is unsuccessful; and

streaming the content object to the end-user location.

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18. The software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 17, further comprising code for beginning to buffer the content object before the streaming step.

19. The software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 17, further comprising code for beginning to cache the content before the streaming step.

20. The software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 17, further comprising code for determining if a lower QOS is acceptable to an end-user if the check for availability is unsuccessful.

21. The software product embodied on a computer-readable medium for distributing the content object over the broadband connection to the end-user location as recited in claim 17, further comprising code for:

determining the amount of bandwidth available over the period, where the amount of bandwidth is less than that required for adequate QOS;

determining a buffer amount to provide adequate QOS; and

storing the buffer amount corresponding to a portion of the content object proximate to the end user location.

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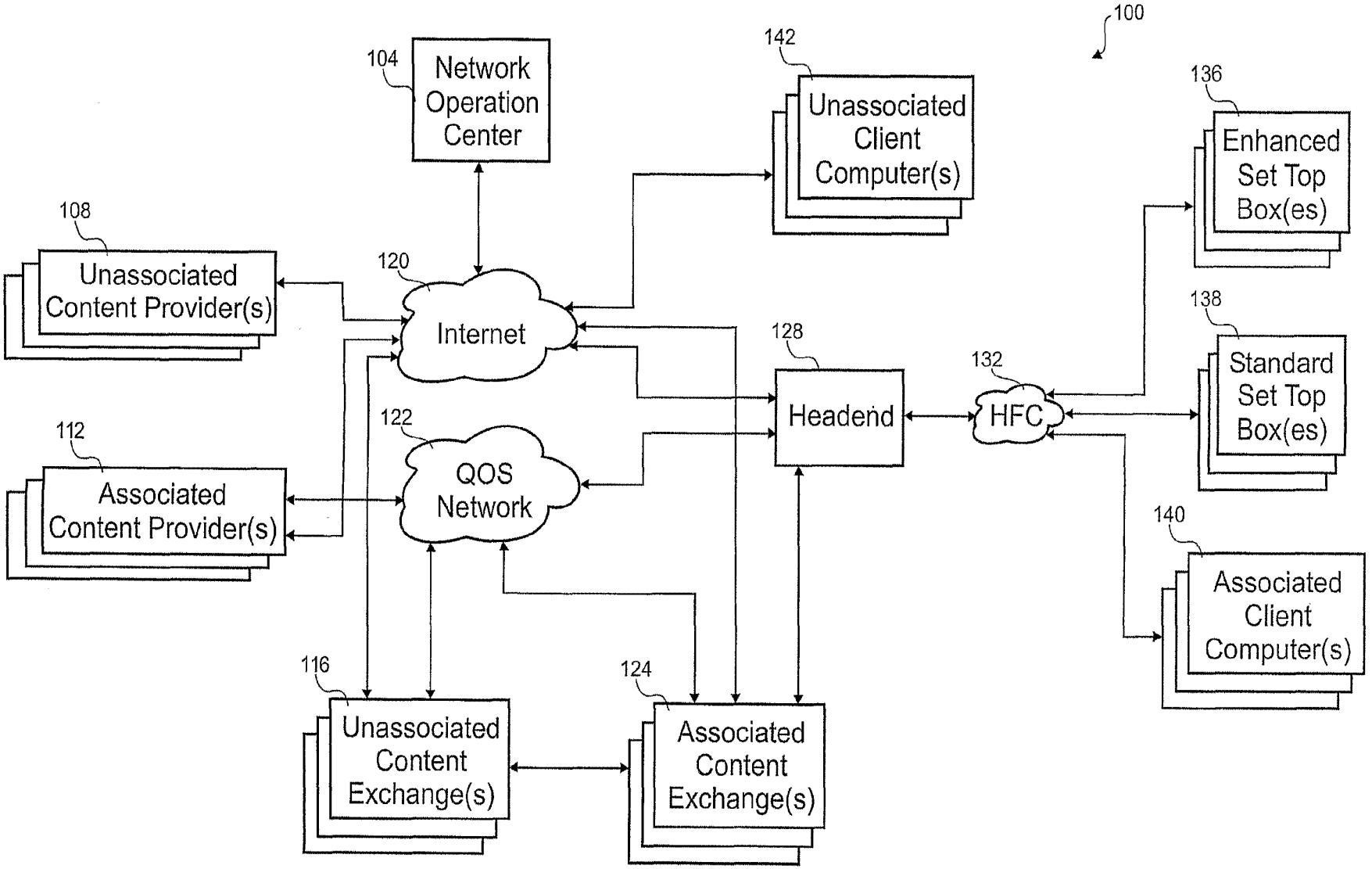

100
104
Network Operation Center
142
Unassociated Client Computer(s)
136
Enhanced Set Top Box(es)
108
Unassociated Content Provider(s)
120
Internet
128
Headend
132
HFC
138
Standard Set Top Box(es)
112
Associated Content Provider(s)
122
QOS Network
140
Associated Client Computer(s)
116
Unassociated Content Exchange(s)
124
Associated Content Exchange(s)

Fig. 1A

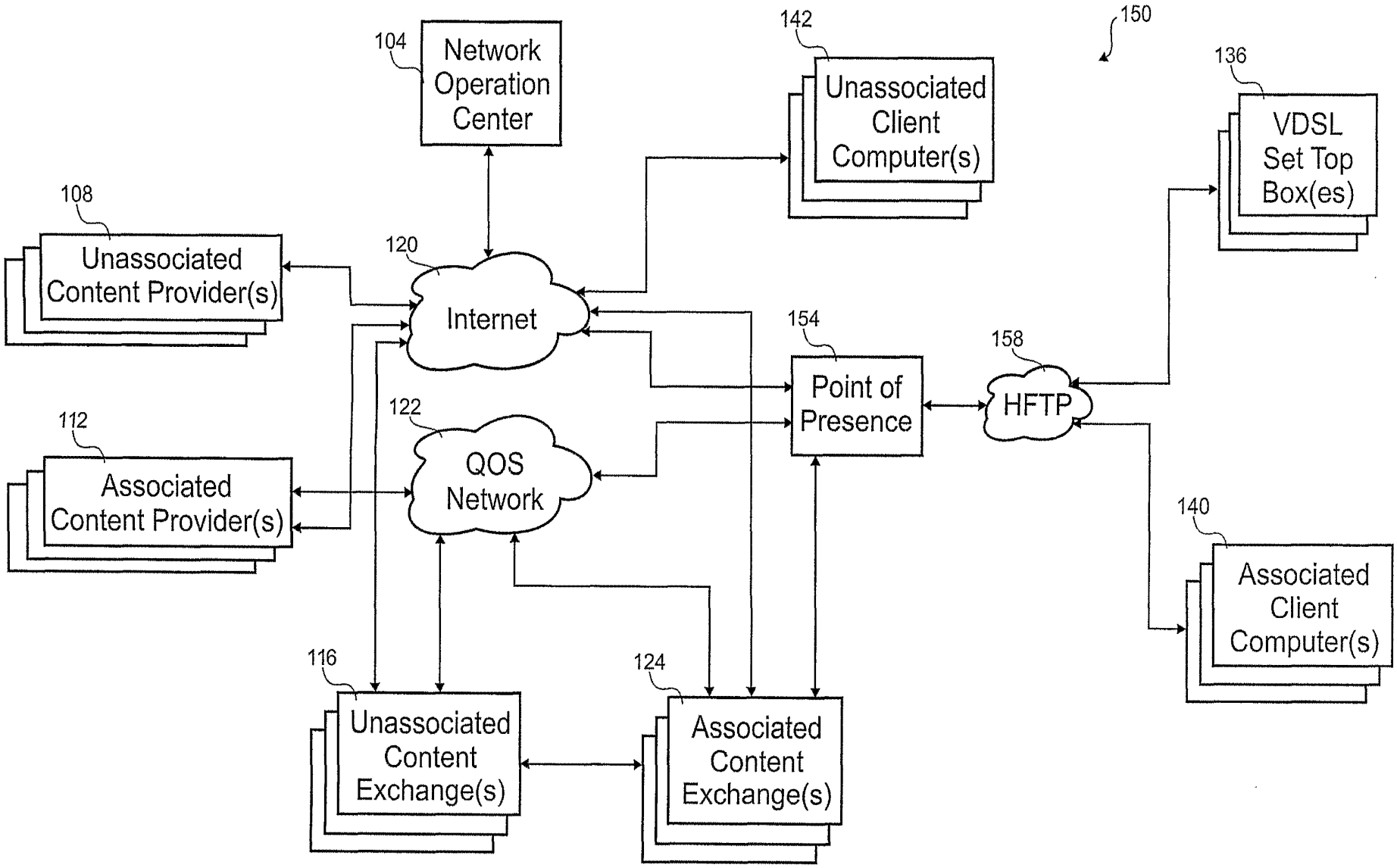


Fig. 1B

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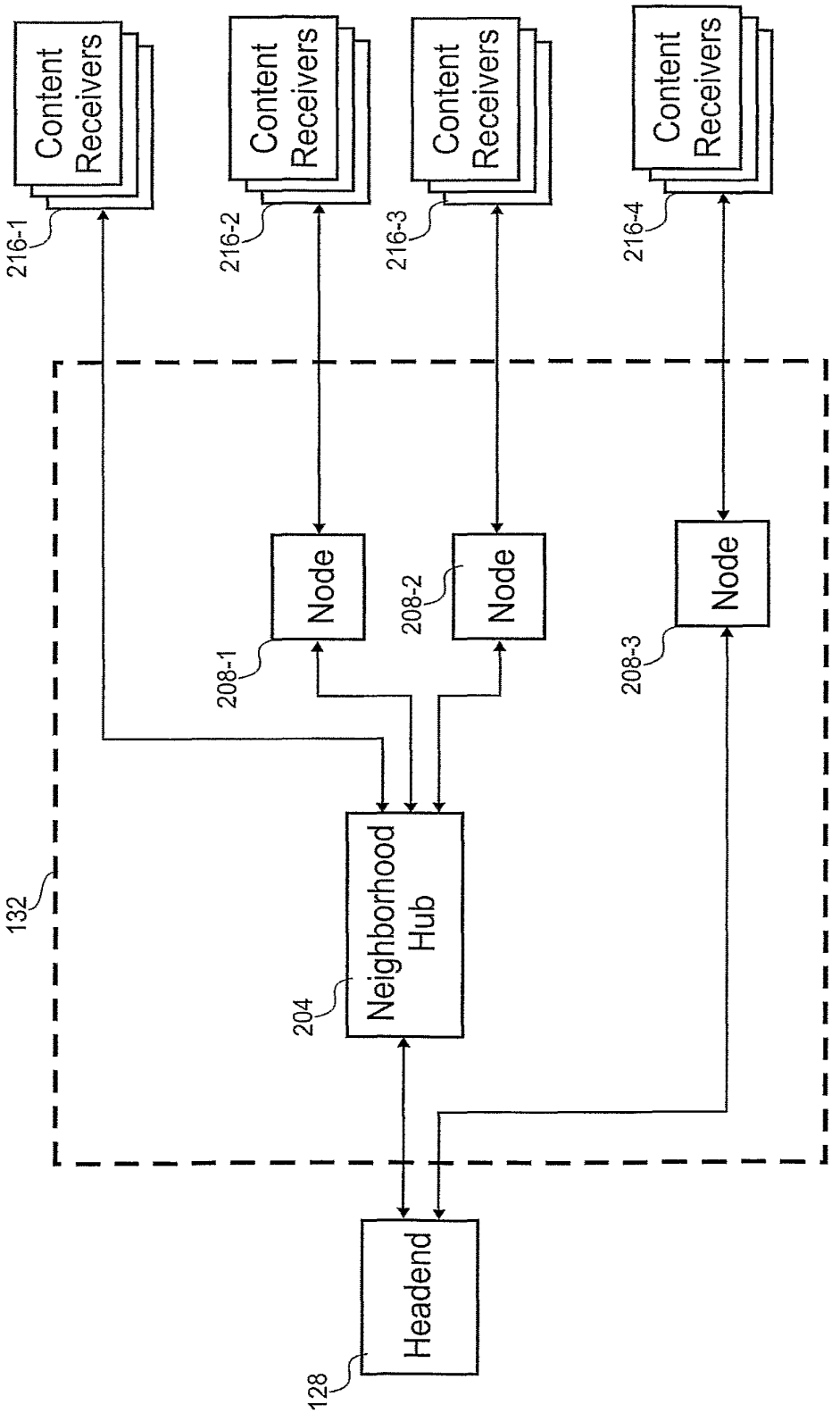


Fig. 2A

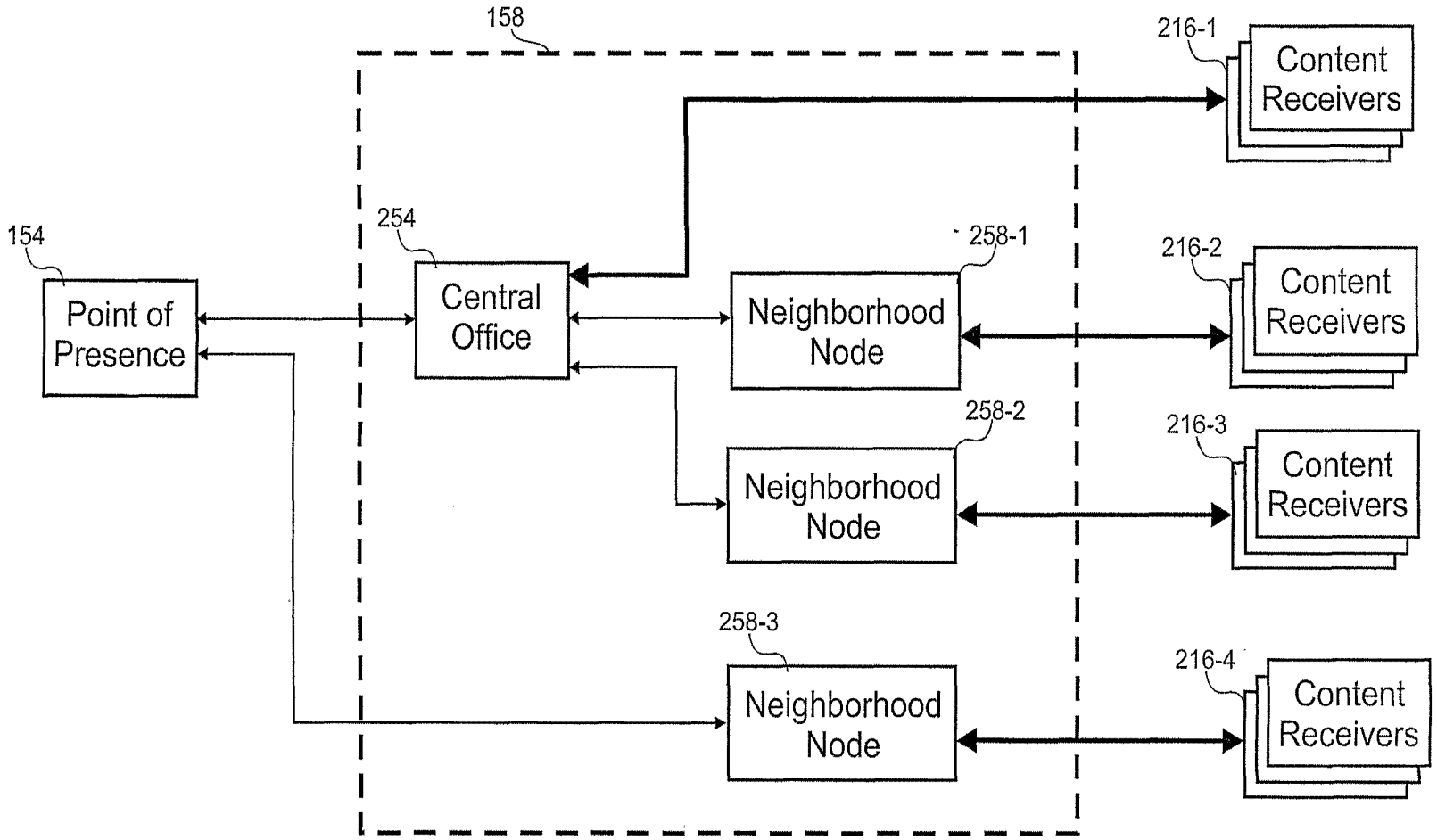

158
216-1
Content Receivers
254
154
258-1
216-2
Point of Presence
Central Office
Neighborhood Node
Content Receivers
258-2
216-3
Neighborhood Node
Content Receivers
258-3
216-4
Neighborhood Node
Content Receivers

Fig. 2B

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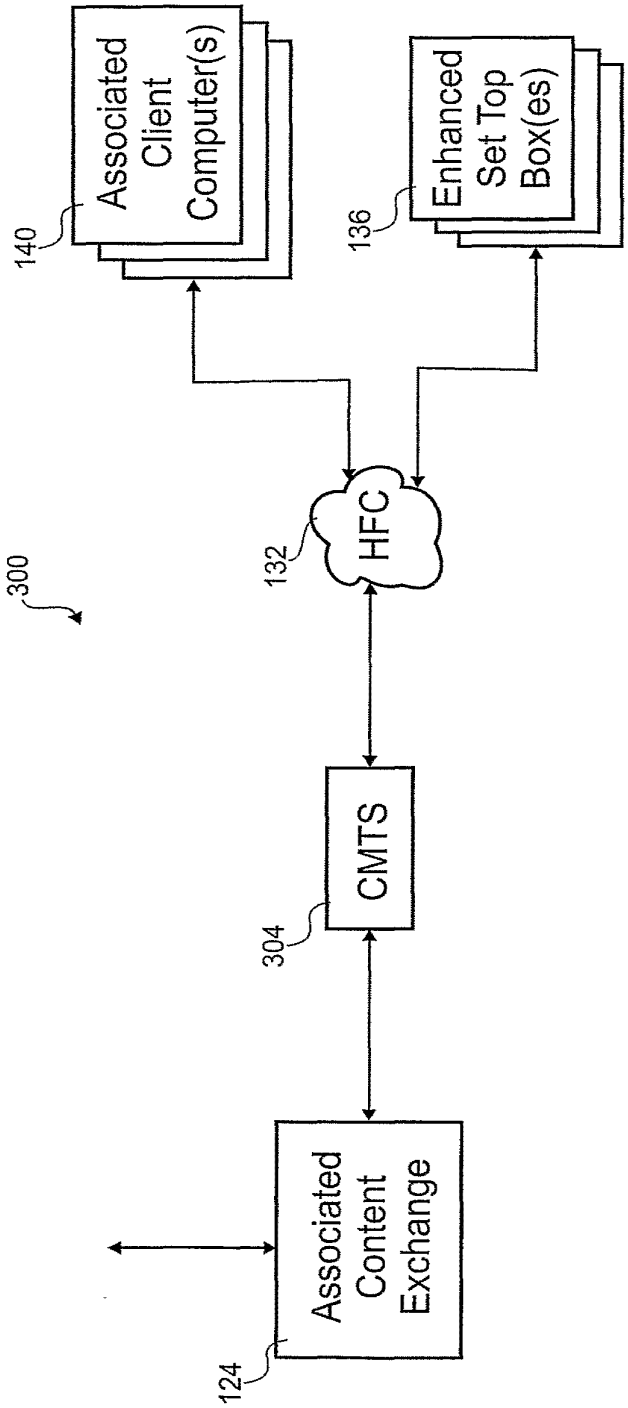


Fig. 3A

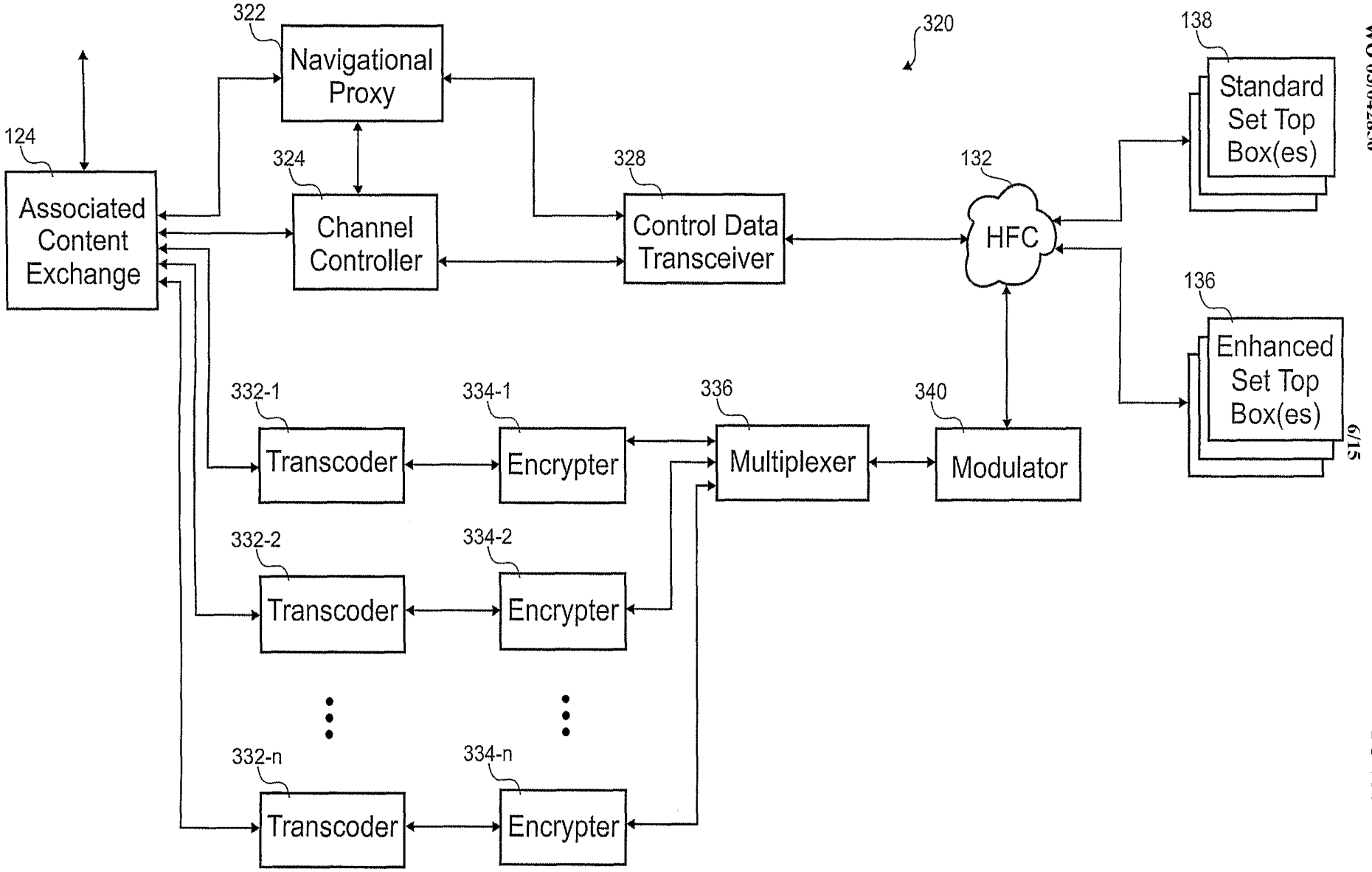


Fig. 3B

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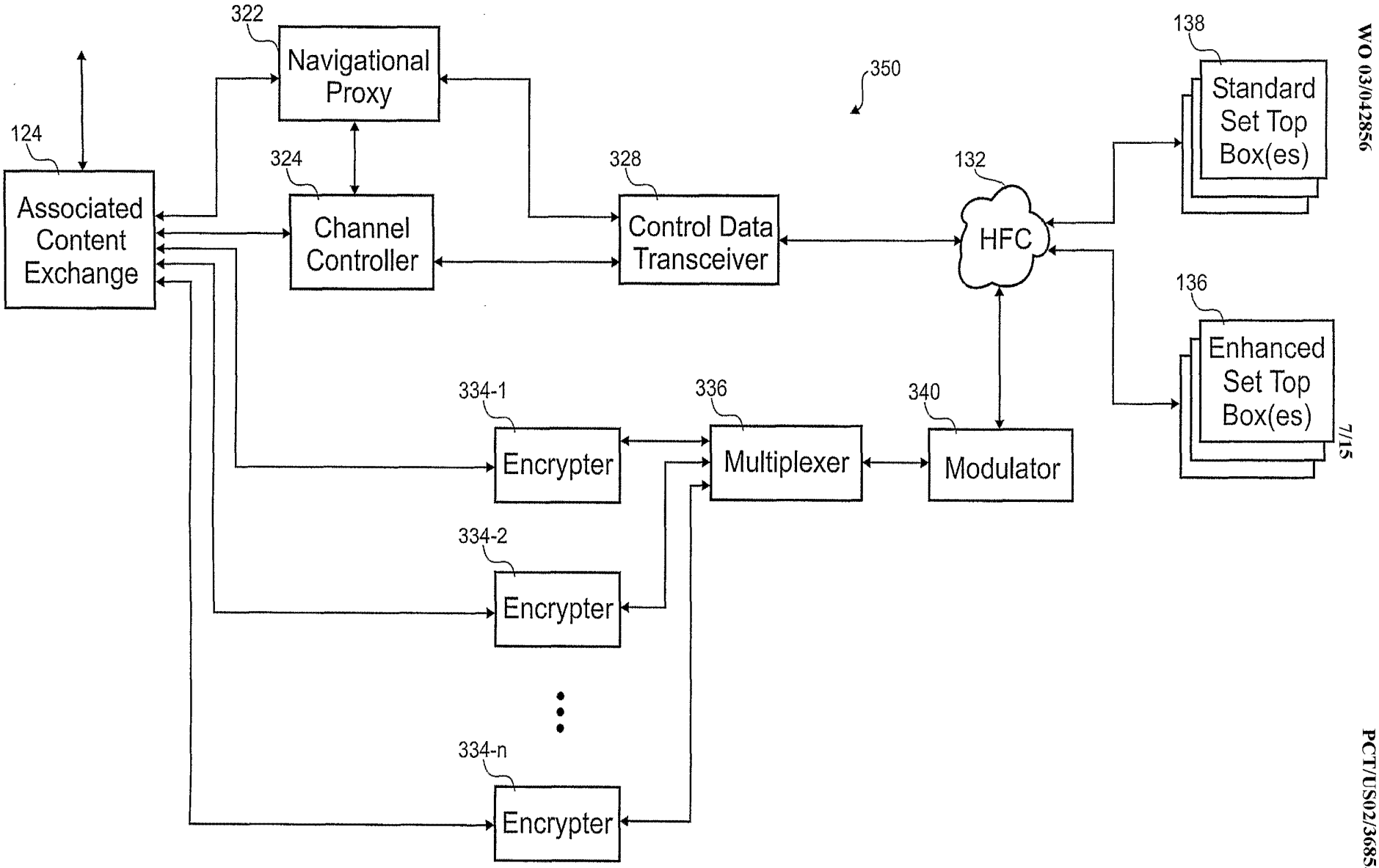


Fig. 3C

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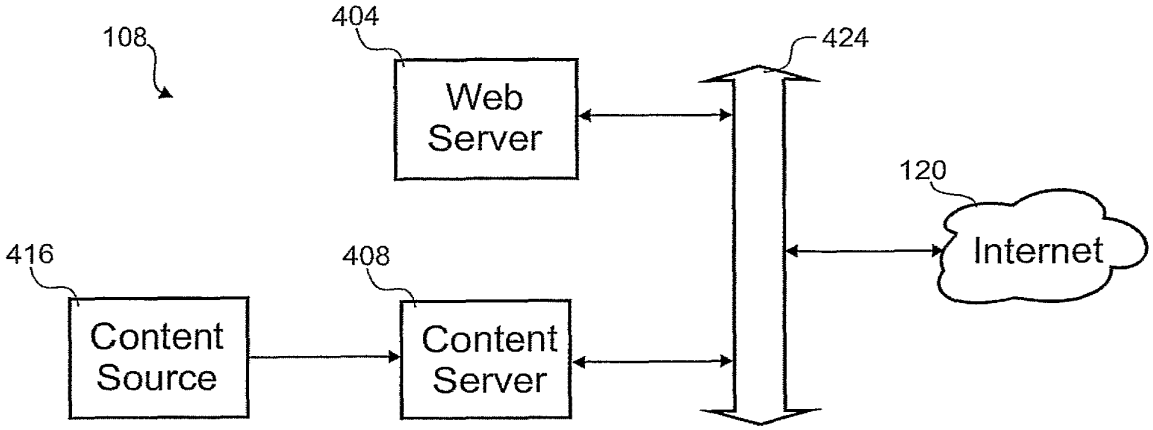


Fig. 4A
(Prior Art)

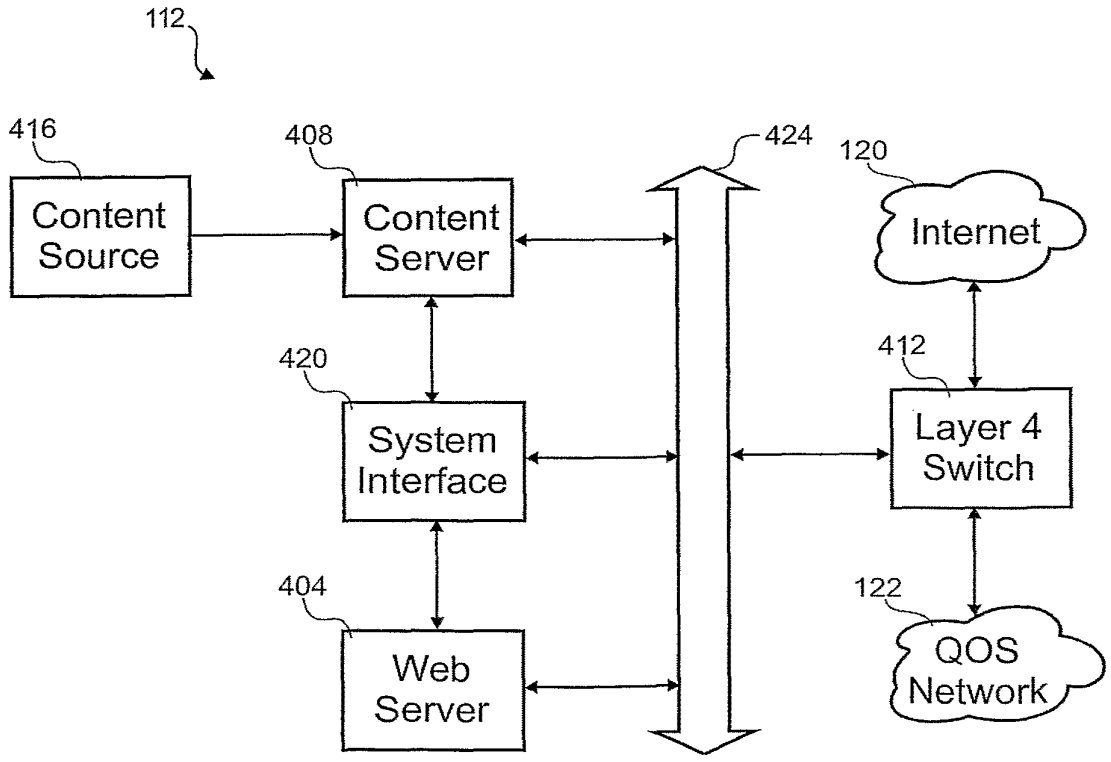


Fig. 4B

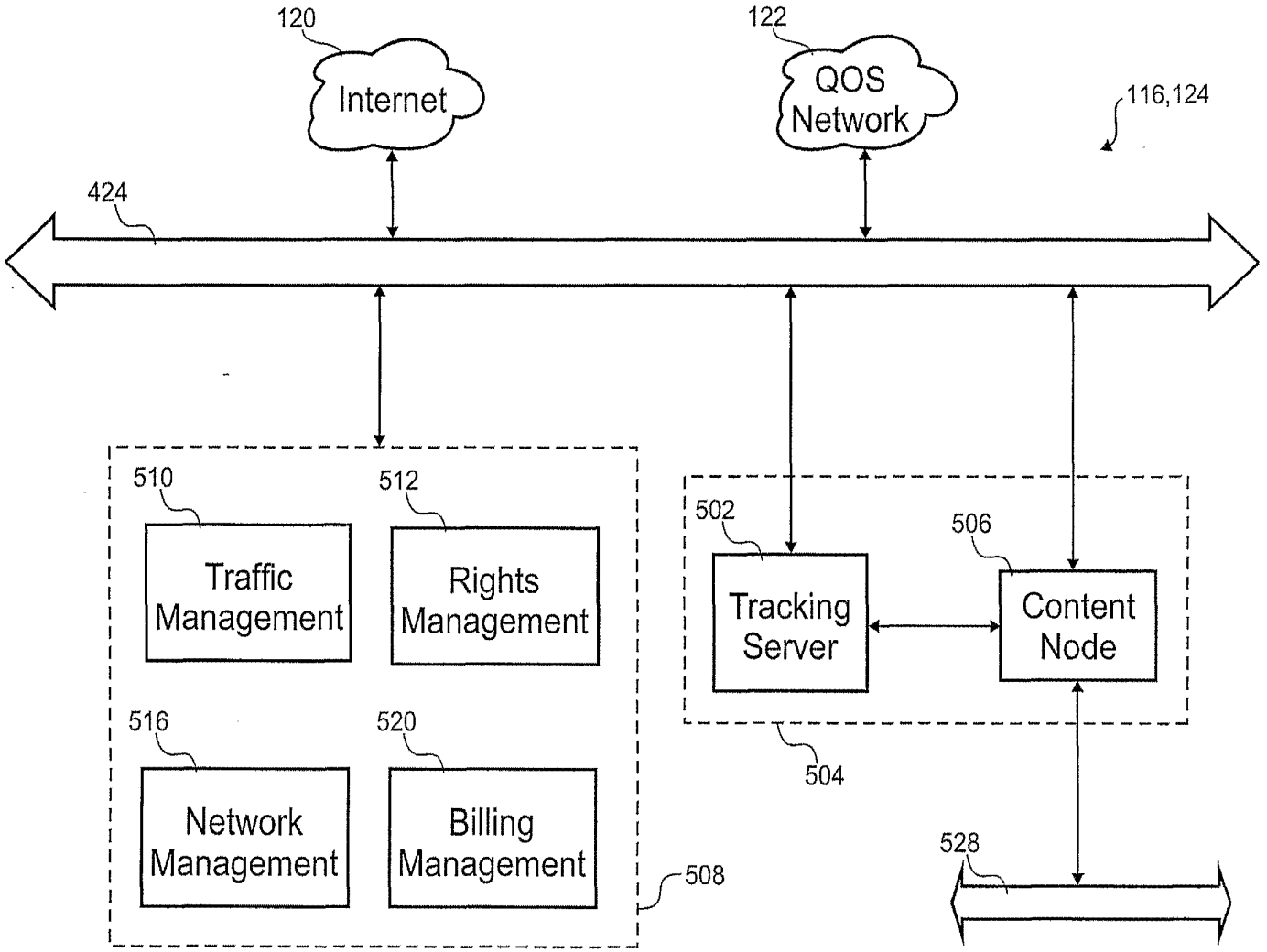


Fig. 5A

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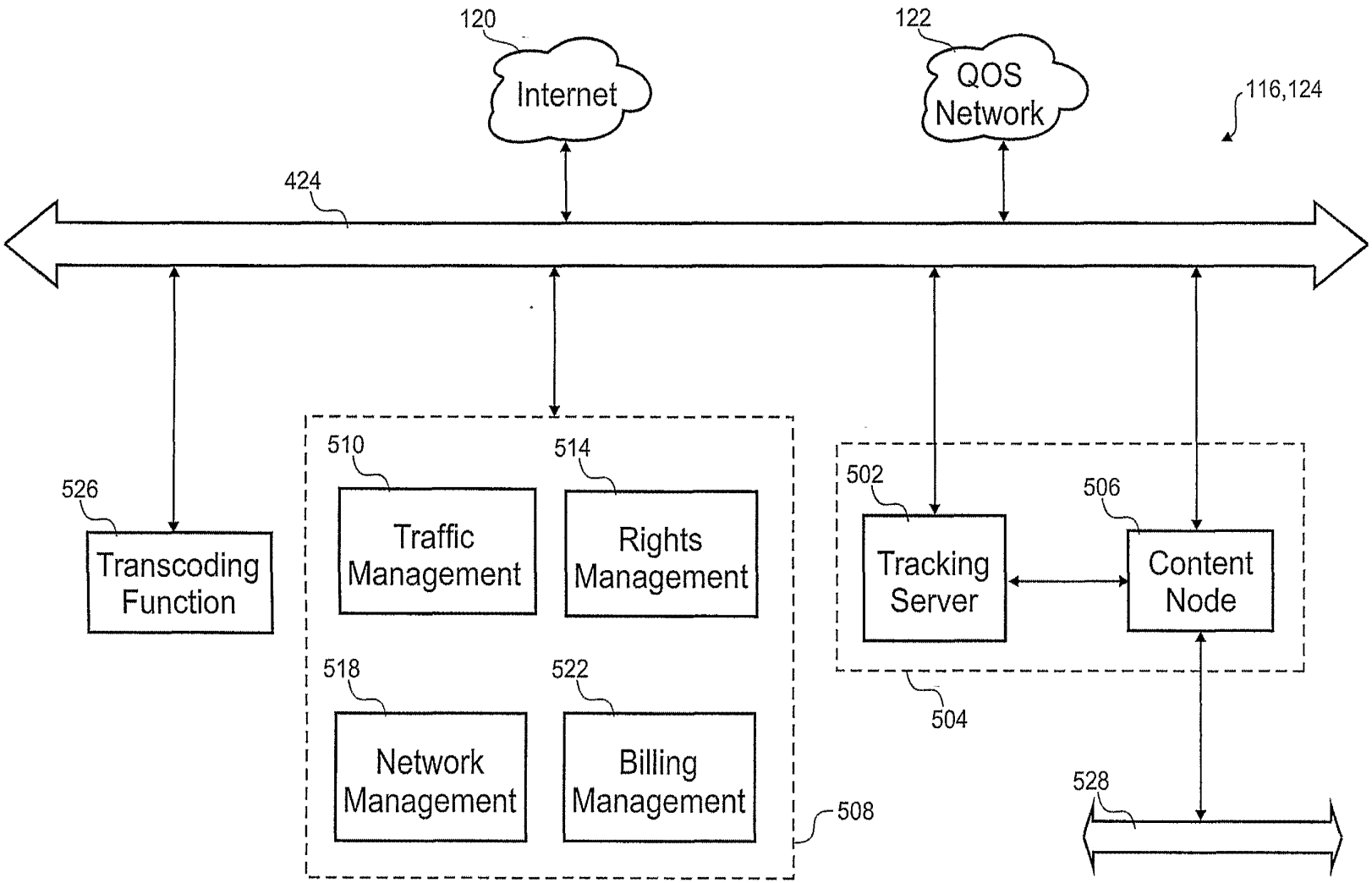

120
Internet
122
QOS Network
116,124
424
526
Transcoding Function
510
Traffic Management
514
Rights Management
518
Network Management
522
Billing Management
508
502
Tracking Server
506
Content Node
504
528

Fig. 5B

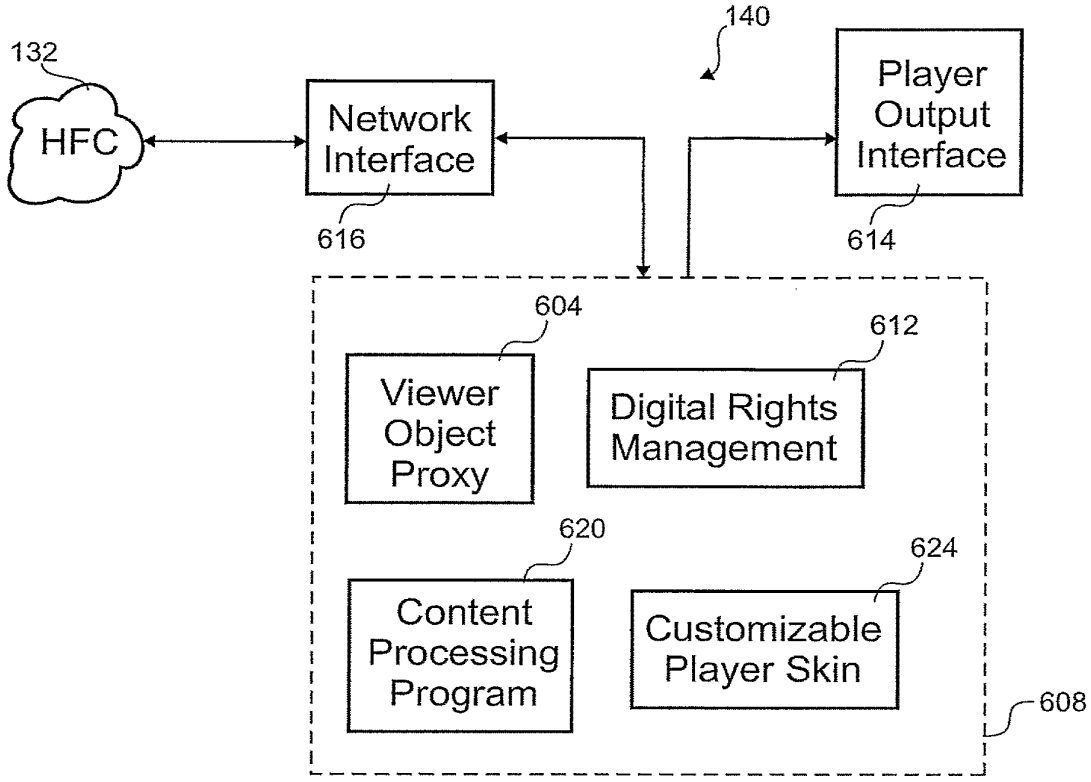

132
HFC
Network Interface
616
140
Player Output Interface
614
604
Viewer Object Proxy
612
Digital Rights Management
620
Content Processing Program
624
Customizable Player Skin
608

Fig. 6A

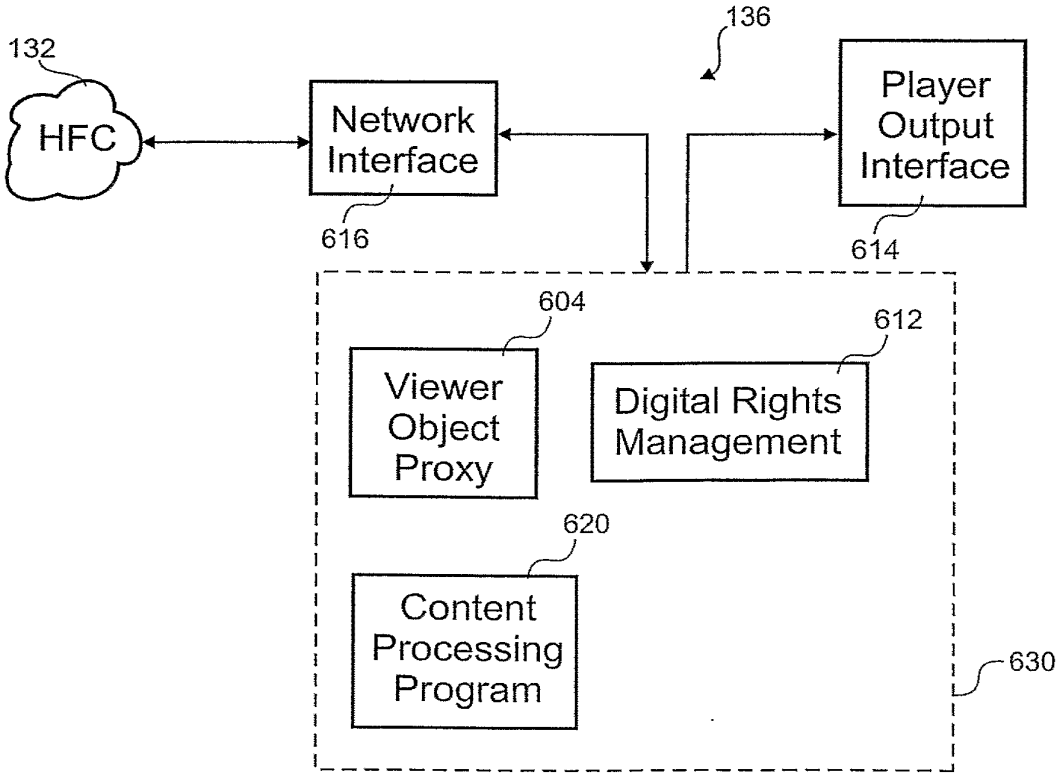

132
HFC
Network Interface
616
136
Player Output Interface
614
604
Viewer Object Proxy
612
Digital Rights Management
620
Content Processing Program
630

Fig. 6B

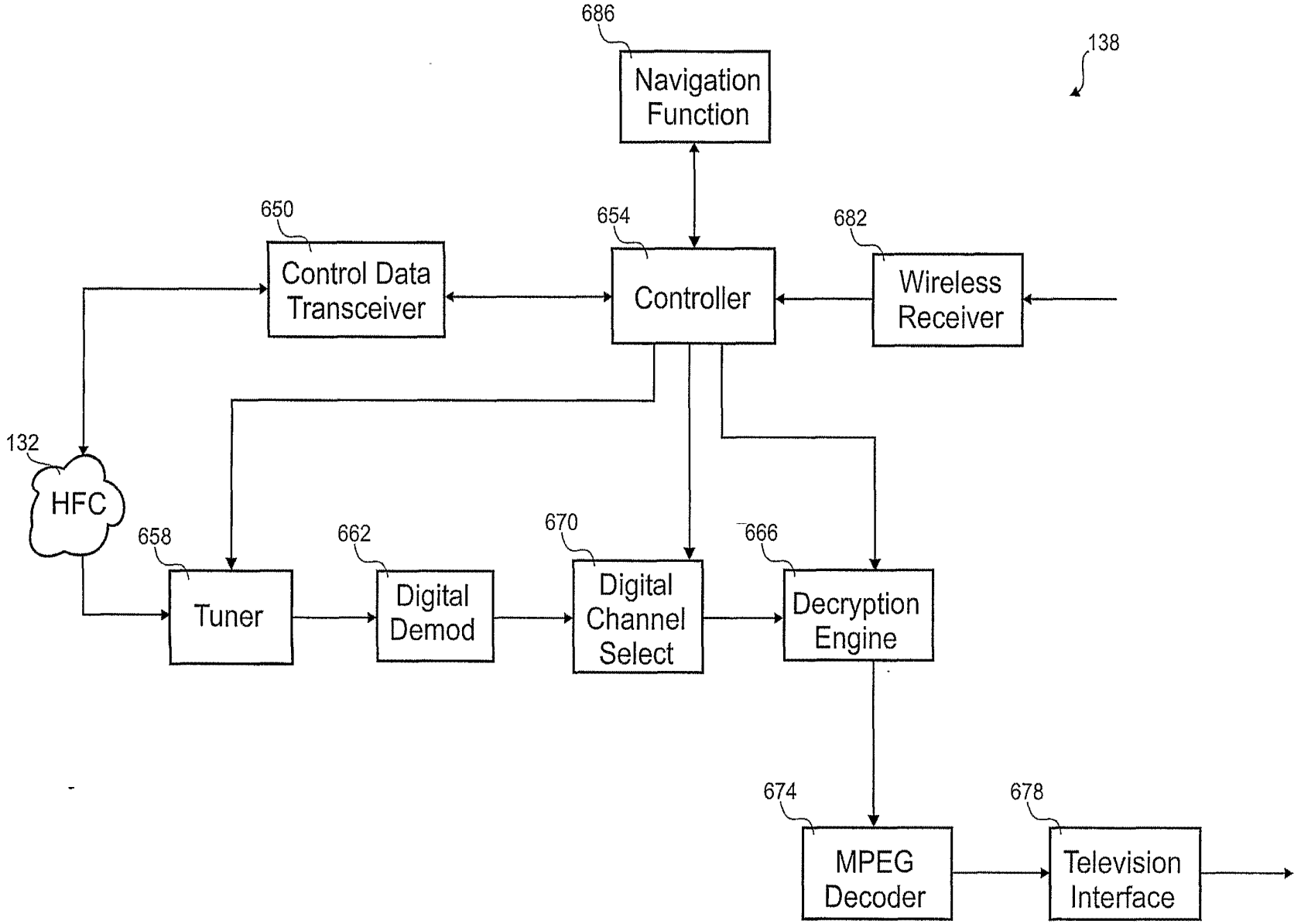

686
Navigation Function
138
650
Control Data Transceiver
654
Controller
682
Wireless Receiver
132
HFC
658
Tuner
662
Digital Demod
670
Digital Channel Select
666
Decryption Engine
674
MPEG Decoder
678
Television Interface

Fig. 6C

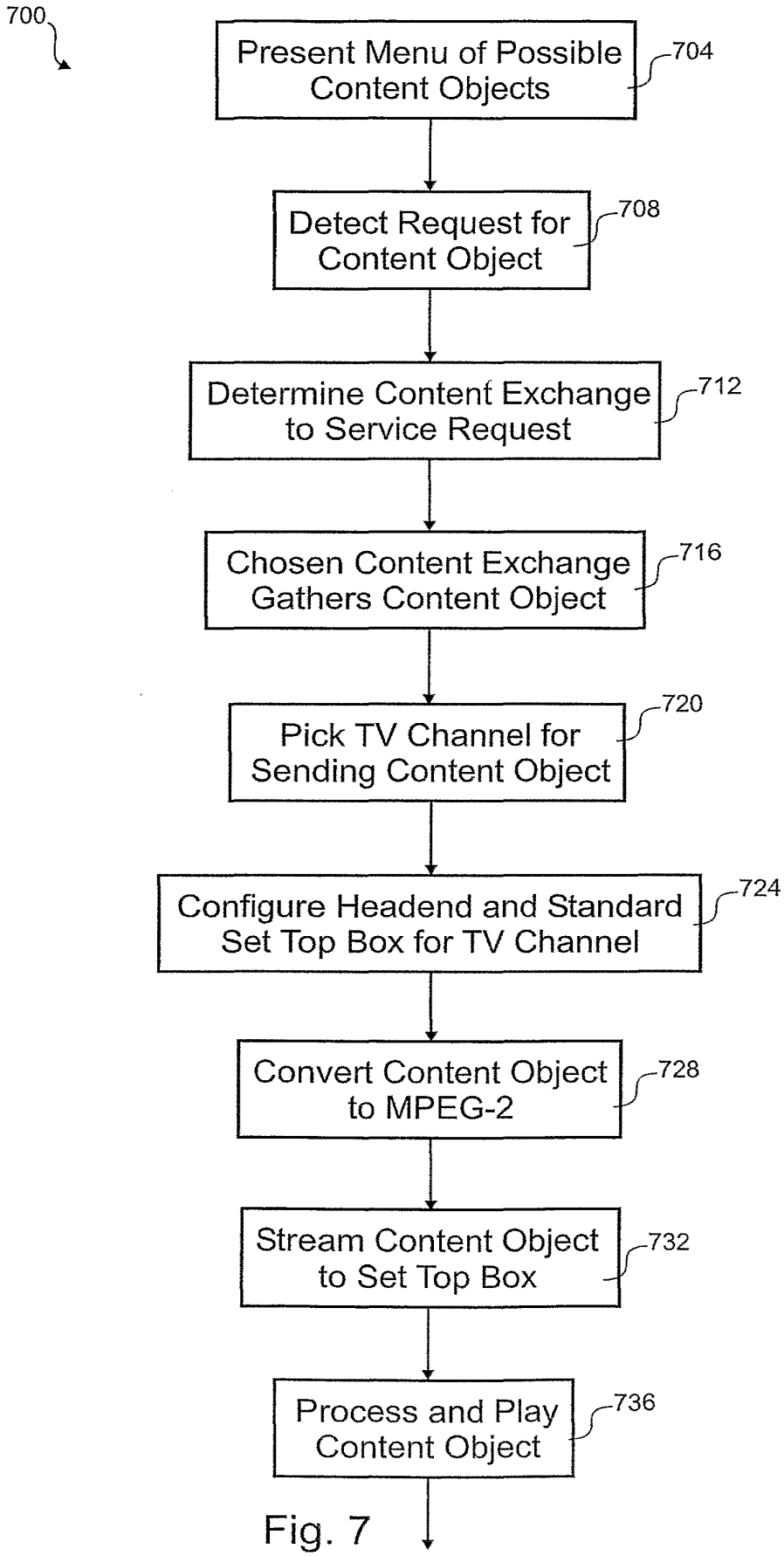

700
Present Menu of Possible Content Objects
704
Detect Request for Content Object
708
Determine Content Exchange to Service Request
712
Chosen Content Exchange Gathers Content Object
716
Pick TV Channel for Sending Content Object
720
Configure Headend and Standard Set Top Box for TV Channel
724
Convert Content Object to MPEG-2
728
Stream Content Object to Set Top Box
732
Process and Play Content Object
736

Fig. 7