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Low-latency video transmission over high-speed WPANs based on low-power video compression

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Abstract—This paper presents latency-constrained video transmission over high-speed wireless personal area networks (WPANs). Low-power video compression is proposed as an alternative to uncompressed video transmission. A video source rate control based on MINMAX quality criteria is introduced. Practical results for video encoder based on H.264/AVC standard are also given.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years a number of high throughput wireless personal area networks (WPANs) have appeared, such as the IEEE 802.15.3c standard [1]. They can provide a transmission of *high definition* video data: sequences of computer graphics, snapshots, natural and mixed images.

The straightforward solution in these networks can be based on uncompressed video transmission [1]. This approach does not require any compression algorithm and provides low processing latency. On the other hand, several disadvantages arise. Firstly, the throughput of a wireless channel is time-varying where, in addition, other traffic such as audio or IP data can be transmitted along with video data. Therefore, it could not be guaranteed that the channel rate is high enough for continuous video playback. Secondly, this approach does not use the channel in an efficient way in the sense of throughput and energy consumption, because it does not take into account the video source redundancy. In the third place, this solution requires technical change of the transmission system like combination of video data unequal error protection (UEP) and special automatic repeat request (UV-ARQ) methods [1]. Fourthly, the pixel partitioning technique which is used for UEP is not efficient in rate-distortion sense especially for desktop snapshot type of the video that contains a lot of details commensurable with pixel size.

In this paper latency-constrained video transmission based on video compression is discussed as an alternative to an uncompressed video transmission. This approach will be better if the following features are provided:

- 1) No changes in physical and data link layers.
- 2) Low latency and continuous video playback.
- 3) Better visual quality of the reconstructed video.
- 4) Video compression requires low power consumption and short processing time.

This paper proposes video source rate control for low-power video encoder based on MINMAX quality criteria that provides low latency and acceptable visual quality for the

given channel throughput. A low-power video compression algorithm is introduced based on H.264/AVC standard [2]. However, the proposed rate control can use other compression algorithms like JPEG2000 [6] or JPEG-LS [7].

This paper is organized as follows. Section II describes low-power implementation of H.264/AVC Encoder. In Sections III–IV end-to-end distortion and end-to-end latency in video compression and transmission systems are discussed. In Section V video source rate control based on MINMAX quality criteria is introduced. Finally, the practical results for different test video sequences are shown.

II. LOW-POWER VIDEO COMPRESSION BASED ON H.264/AVC STANDARD

H.264/AVC compression standard [2] is based on exploiting the spatial and temporal redundancy of video sources. This is achieved by using motion estimation and compensation, intra-frame prediction, discrete cosine transform, quantization, entropy coding and others methods.

To achieve low-power compression, low computation complexity and memory consumption is needed. To decrease the memory size it is proposed to eliminate motion estimation and to use intra-coding only. In this case the encoder can be implemented by using internal memory which is needed to store 32 pixel lines of the input video only. For example, for the resolution size of 1920×1080 180 Kbytes is needed instead of more than 6 Mbytes in the motion compensation case.

In addition to the proposed scheme, even for this small memory size the simple case of the temporal redundancy removal could be used. It is often the case that many regions in the current and the previous frames are the same in computer graphics and desktop snapshots (static regions). Therefore, it is possible to detect “static“ macroblocks at the encoder side by calculating hash function value. If hash function value for the current macroblock is equal to the corresponding hash function value for the previous frame, it can be encoded in SKIP mode and the decoder shows the corresponding macroblock which was transmitted early.

The further decrease of the computational complexity can be achieved with DC intra-prediction, 4×4 DCT and CAVLC (Context-adaptive variable-length coding). For improving the encoding performance and achieving absolutely RGB-lossless compression it is proposed to use reversible YCoCg 4:4:4 color space transform.

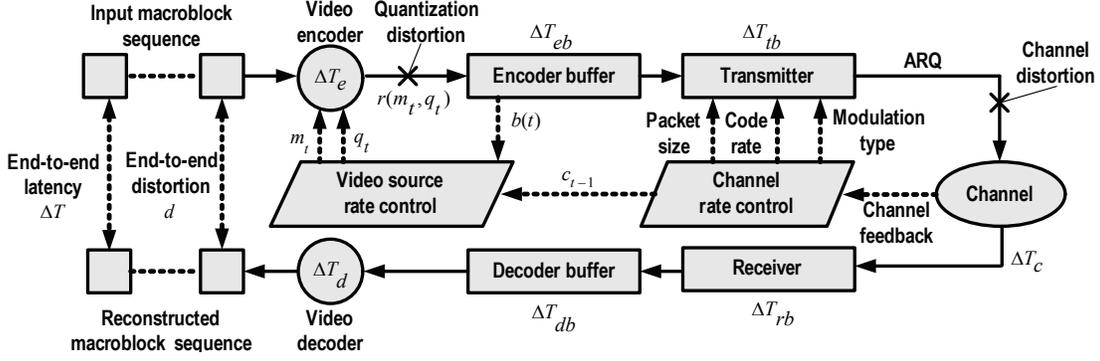


Figure 1. End-to-end distortion and end-to-end latency in video-transmission system

III. END-TO-END DISTORTION IN TRANSMISSION SYSTEM

Let us assume that each video frame is separated into non-overlapping *units* that include several macroblocks. The end-to-end distortion d_t for unit t in wireless video communication systems consists of the two main components:

$$d_t = d(q_t) + d_c, \quad (1)$$

where $d(q_t)$ is distortion caused by quantization at the encoder side and d_c is distortion caused by channel errors. In this paper we describe video transmission based on MINMAX quality criteria [8] that can be interpreted as follows. For each unit t the distortion d_t should be provided, so that

$$\text{minimize } \max_t d_t. \quad (2)$$

Usually the automatic repeat request (ARQ) method is used to achieve reliable data transmission over an unreliable channel. For each packet the receiver sends to transmitter special message (acknowledgement) that indicates if the packet is received correctly or not. If the packet is not received correctly then the transmitter sends it again. The probability of this situation can be defined as $p_t = 1 - (1 - p_b)^l$, where p_b is bit error rate (BER) and l is transport packet length assuming independent bit errors. If the packet is not received after n retransmissions then it is dropped at the transmitter side with the probability p_t^n and the decoder shows the corresponding co-located macroblocks which were transmitted early.

Assume that a *channel rate controller* chooses modulation and coding scheme (MCS) and transport packet size to maximize the throughput depending on channel feedback. In this case the transmission scheme that provide the BER less than $p_b < 10^{-4}$ is chosen. Then the optimal transport packet size for this BER values can be chosen [10] to guarantee that packet loss probability is $p_t^n < 10^{-10}$. Therefore, for further optimization we can disregard packet losses. It means that for end-to-end distortion minimization it is enough to minimize quantization distortion $d(q_t)$ only.

IV. END-TO-END LATENCY IN TRANSMISSION SYSTEM

A. Video transmission system description

The video transmission system model discussed in this paper is shown in the Figure 1. Consider the system timing

is discrete and slotted. The slot time is a part of the system time $[t, t + 1)$ and time moment t refers to the end of this slot. *Channel rate controller* chooses the transmission scheme that maximizes the channel throughput. Taking into account transport packet headers, ARQ and time division between different types of traffic, let us define channel throughput for video data c_t as the number of bits that are transmitted during time slot t . The video source gives the encoder a *unit* that contains M macroblocks of the encoded frame. After compressing unit t into $r(q_t)$ bits, where q_t is a quantization step, encoder places it into the *encoder buffer*. Depending on the number of bits in the encoder buffer and channel state, *video source rate controller* chooses the quantization step q_t and macroblocks type $m_t \in \{\text{intra, skip}\}$ for the next unit.

The number of bits in the encoder buffer $b^e(t)$ after placing there a new compressed unit at t and transmitting over the channel with the throughput c_t , changes as follows:

$$b^e(t) = \max\{0, b^e(t-1) - c_t\} + r_t(q_t, m_t). \quad (3)$$

Data on the receiver side is accumulated for some time L after which the decoding and playing starts.

B. Latency definition, necessary and sufficient conditions

Generally, latency ΔT between the time moment when some unit has been sent into the encoder and the time moment when this unit has been shown at the receiver device display consists of the following components:

$$\Delta T = \Delta T_e + \Delta T_{eb} + \Delta T_{tb} + \Delta T_c + \Delta T_{rb} + \Delta T_{db} + \Delta T_d, \quad (4)$$

where ΔT_e and ΔT_d is the encoding and decoding processing latency, ΔT_{eb} is the encoder buffer latency, ΔT_{tb} is transmitter buffer latency, ΔT_{rb} is receiver buffer latency, ΔT_{db} is the decoder buffer latency, ΔT_c is the channel transmission latency.

Let us suppose that the encoder and the decoder work real-time and values ΔT_e , ΔT_d and ΔT_{tb} , ΔT_{rb} are significantly less than L . In [3] it was shown that

$$\Delta T_{eb} + \Delta T_c + \Delta T_{db} = L, \quad (5)$$

if the number of bits in the encoder buffer is

$$b^e(t) \leq b_{eff}(t) = \sum_{i=t+1}^{t+L \cdot f \cdot N} c_i, \quad (6)$$

where $b_{eff}(t)$ is the *effective buffer size* [9], N is a number of units in the frame and f is a frame rate.

For time-varying wireless channel $b_{eff}(t)$ is equal to the sum of the future channel rates in the time interval $[t, \dots, t+L]$ and it can not be calculated at the time moment t , because future channel rates are not known yet. Therefore, effective buffer size is usually estimated at the encoder side by using channel model [4]. However, for time-varying wireless channel it is not possible to guarantee that estimated value $\hat{b}_{eff}(t) \leq b_{eff}(t)$ for any time moment t . Then the situation when $b^e(t) > b_{eff}(t)$ is possible and latency requirements (5) do not hold.

C. Required latency restoration approach

If required L value is low (e.g. 1ms) then we can use the following approach to restore the required latency. At the time moment $t+L$ we can calculate effective buffer size $b_{eff}(t)$. If at the time moment $t+L$ inequality (6) does not hold then at the time moment t latency requirements (5) does not hold. It means that at the time moment $t+L$ number of bits in decoder buffer is $b^d(t+L) = 0$ and decoder can not start the reconstruction process.

Assume that decoder works in real-time, therefore decoding time for INTRA unit is less than $\Delta T_d^{intra} \leq \frac{1}{f \cdot N}$ and decoding time for SKIP unit is close to zero $\Delta T_d^{skip} \approx 0$.

To restore equation (5) we propose the following approach. **Theorem 1.** *If at the time moment $t+L$ inequality (6) does not hold then for latency restoration the encoder should accomplish the following steps:*

Step 1. Compress all units in SKIP mode until at the time moment t^* encoder buffer will be emptied $b^e(t^*) = 0$.

Step 2. Compress all units in SKIP mode at the time interval $[t^*, \dots, t^* + L + \frac{1}{f \cdot N}]$.

Proof. At the time moment $t+L$ encoder buffer contains not more than $n = L \cdot f \cdot N + 1$ units. At the time moment t^* all these units will be available at the decoder side together with SKIP units that were formed in the time interval $[t+L, t^*]$. To decompress it decoder spends time

$$\Delta T_d(n) \leq (L \cdot f \cdot N + 1) \cdot \Delta T_d^{intra} \leq L + \Delta T_d^{intra}. \quad (7)$$

It means that at the time moment $t^* + L + \frac{1}{f \cdot N}$ encoder buffer will contain SKIP units and decoder buffer will be empty. This event is equivalent to the system state at the time moment $t = 0$. ■

V. VIDEO SOURCE RATE CONTROL ALGORITHM

A. MINMAX optimization task description

Note that for high-speed video transmission we can use high-resolution quantization hypothesis [5] that defines distortion as $d(q) = q^2/12$, therefore MINMAX criteria (2) corresponds to

$$\text{minimize} \max_t q_t. \quad (8)$$

Suppose that despite statistical properties of the units in the frame may be quite different from each other, statistical properties of all frames vary insignificantly. It means that there is only one scene in the input video sequence. This assumption does not hold true generally, because video sequence usually consists of subsequences (scenes) with different statistical properties. However, so that the understanding of the algorithm with several scenes will be easier, let us initially take into account the case when video sequence has only one scene.

Let us formulate rate control optimization task according to the latency requirements (6) and the MINMAX quality criteria (8). For each unit t it is necessary to choose the quantization step q_t , so that

$$\begin{cases} \text{minimize} \max_t q_t \\ b(t) \leq b_{eff}(t). \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

B. Solution of MINMAX task by consecutive search algorithm

Solution of the task (9) can be found by the following hypothetic algorithm which consists of the following two steps:

Step 0. (Initialization)

0.1 Set $\{q_i\} = \{0, 1, \dots, q_{max}\}$, $i \leftarrow 0$.

0.2 Go to step 1.

Step 1.

1.1 $\tilde{q} \leftarrow q_i$, $\tilde{b}(0) \leftarrow 0$.

1.2 For units $t = 0, 1, \dots$ calculate

$$\tilde{b}(t) \leftarrow \max\{0, \tilde{b}(t-1) - c_t\} + r_t(\tilde{q}).$$

1.3 If $\max_t \tilde{b}(t) > b_{eff}(t)$ then $i \leftarrow i + 1$ and go to Step 1.1 else \tilde{q} is the solution of the MINMAX optimization task (9).

The algorithm described above is called the *consecutive search algorithm*.

Theorem 2. *Consider \tilde{q} the MINMAX solution found by the consecutive search algorithm. There is no sequence of quantization steps y_1, y_2, \dots for which $\max_t y_t < \tilde{q}$ that does not lead to the transmitter buffer overflow.*

Proof. Suppose that *consecutive search algorithm* has stopped at the step i . Then for each step $j < i$ for every unit t quantization step $x_t = q_j$ was chosen. From consecutive search algorithm description follows that after encoding unit τ number of bits in encoder buffer $\tilde{b}(\tau) > b_{eff}(\tau)$.

Let us choose any sequence of quantization steps y_1, y_2, \dots , where $y_t \leq q_j$, and $b(t)$ is the number of bits in encoder buffer, when unit t is encoded with y_t value. Then $y_t \leq x_t$, consequently,

$$r(y_t) \geq r(x_t) \quad (10)$$

So if $\tilde{b}(0) = b(0) = b_0$, then from (3) and (10) follows that $\tilde{b}(t) \leq b(t)$. It means that exists such $\tau' \leq \tau$ that

$$b(\tau') > b_{eff}(\tau'). \quad \blacksquare \quad (11)$$

C. Single-scene MINMAX rate control algorithm

Consecutive search algorithm is a hypothetic one that shows the solution of (9), but can not be implemented in a real-time

system, because it is impossible to rerun data transmission after buffer overflowing.

Therefore, this paper proposes an algorithm that allows to find the estimation of \tilde{q} for the consecutive search algorithm. Consider \hat{q}_t to be the estimation of \tilde{q} value. It is supposed to estimate \tilde{q} value as follows. All units are compressed with quantization step \hat{q}_t until the number of bits in the buffer $b^e(t)$ will not exceed effective buffer size $b_{eff}(t)$. This exceeding means that it is impossible to hold the \hat{q}_t value for the given channel throughput for fixed end-to-end latency without increasing it. So, the end-to-end latency exceeds its initial value L and, consequently, the required latency restoration approach is used and the estimation of \hat{q}_t increases. The algorithm consists of the following three steps.

Step 0. (Initialization)

0.1 Set $\hat{q}_0 \leftarrow q_0$, $t \leftarrow 0$, $b^e(0) \leftarrow 0$.

0.2 Go to step 1.

Step 1. (Buffer accumulation)

1.1 $t \leftarrow t + 1$, $\hat{q}_t \leftarrow \hat{q}_{t-1}$.

1.2 $b^e(t) \leftarrow \max\{0, b^e(t-1) - c_t\}$.

1.3 Compress unit t with quantization step \hat{q}_t .

1.4 If $b^e(t) > b_{eff}(t)$ go to Step 2.1
else $b^e(t) \leftarrow b^e(t) + r(\hat{q}_t)$ and go to Step 1.1

Step 2. (Latency restoration)

2.1 Compress all units in SKIP mode until at the time moment t^* encoder buffer size $b^e(t) = 0$.

2.2 Compress all units in SKIP mode at the time interval $[t^*, \dots, t^* + L \cdot f \cdot N + 1]$.

2.3 $t \leftarrow t^* + L \cdot f \cdot N + 1$, $\hat{q}_t \leftarrow \hat{q}_t + \Delta q^+$ and go to Step 1.1
else go to Step 2.1

Theorem 3. Consider that consecutive search algorithm finds the quantization step value \tilde{q} . Then for the proposed algorithm with initial value $\hat{q}_0 \leq \tilde{q}$, the inequality $\hat{q}_t \leq \tilde{q} + \Delta q^+$ holds true for any time moment t .

Proof. Let $\tilde{b}(t)$ be the buffer size for the consecutive search algorithm. From its description

$$\tilde{b}(t) \leq b_{eff}(t). \quad (12)$$

Let us suppose that $\hat{q}_0 \leq \tilde{q}$ and at the time moment τ this inequality holds true firstly:

$$\tilde{q} \leq \hat{q}_\tau < \tilde{q} + \Delta q^+. \quad (13)$$

So at this moment the number of bits in the buffer (see Step 2.3) is:

$$b^e(\tau) = 0. \quad (14)$$

From (13) for $t \geq \tau$ the following inequality holds true:

$$r(\hat{q}_t) \leq r_t(\tilde{q}), \quad (15)$$

so that from (3), (12), (14) and (15) follows that at the time moment $t \geq \tau$ the number of bits in the buffer is:

$$b^e(t) \leq \tilde{b}(t) \leq b_{eff}(t). \quad (16)$$

Thereby, from the time moment τ the statement of Step 1.4 of this algorithm fails. Consequently, the algorithm will not reach Step 2.3 and parameter \hat{q}_t will not be increased. ■

D. Scene change and virtual buffer concept

Now let us take a look at the video sequences that consist of several scenes s_0, s_1, \dots, s_n . Then MINMAX optimization task (9) should be applied for each scene. Let $\tilde{q}(s_i)$ be a solution provided by consecutive search for scene s_i . If $\tilde{q}(s_{i+1}) \geq \tilde{q}(s_i)$, then algorithm proposed above will adapt to a new scene. However, if $\tilde{q}(s_{i+1}) < \tilde{q}(s_i)$, then algorithm will not decrease \hat{q}_t , that means that the quality will not be improved.

Therefore, to overcome this problem we introduce an heuristic approach based on a *virtual buffer* concept. For each unit t the following value is calculated:

$$b_v^e(t) \leftarrow \begin{cases} b^e(t), & \text{if } t = t^*, \\ \max\{0, b_v^e(t-1) - c_v(t)\} + r(\hat{q}_t - \Delta q^-), & \\ \text{if } t \neq t^*, \end{cases} \quad (17)$$

where t^* is a number of the first unit in the current frame, $c_v(t)$ is a virtual channel rate that is calculated as follows:

$$c_v(t) = \frac{b_{eff}^{min}(w, t)}{L \cdot f \cdot N}, \quad (18)$$

where $b_{eff}^{min}(w, t)$ is a minimum of the effective buffer size for the previous w frames

$$b_{eff}^{min}(w, t) = \min_i b_{eff}(i), i \in \{t^* - w \cdot N, \dots, t^* - 1\}. \quad (19)$$

In addition, the difference between the number of bits that is placed into the buffer and maximum number of bits that could be transmitted is accumulated:

$$\Delta r_v \leftarrow \sum_{i=t^*}^{t^*+N-1} r(\hat{q}_t - \Delta q^-) - c_v(t). \quad (20)$$

Let us take a look on the virtual buffer conception. If $\Delta r_v > 0$, the number of bits sent to the transmission buffer is more then the number of bits sent to the channel and this can lead to the effect of latency exceeding the limit during the transmission of the next frames. On the other side, the bit size distribution for units in each frame may be so, that this can happen even if $\Delta r_v \leq 0$. Therefore, in addition $b_v^e(t)$ is calculated. Thus, if before the encoding of the unit t^* the following statements are fulfilled:

$$\begin{cases} \max_i b_v^e(i) \leq b_{eff}^{min}(w, t^* - 1), & i \in \{t^* - N, \dots, t^* - 1\}, \\ \Delta r_v \leq 0, \end{cases} \quad (21)$$

and rate control was not in the latency restoration mode during coding of previous frame, the quantization step value is modified as follows:

$$\hat{q}_t \leftarrow \max\{0, \hat{q}_t - \Delta q^-\}. \quad (22)$$

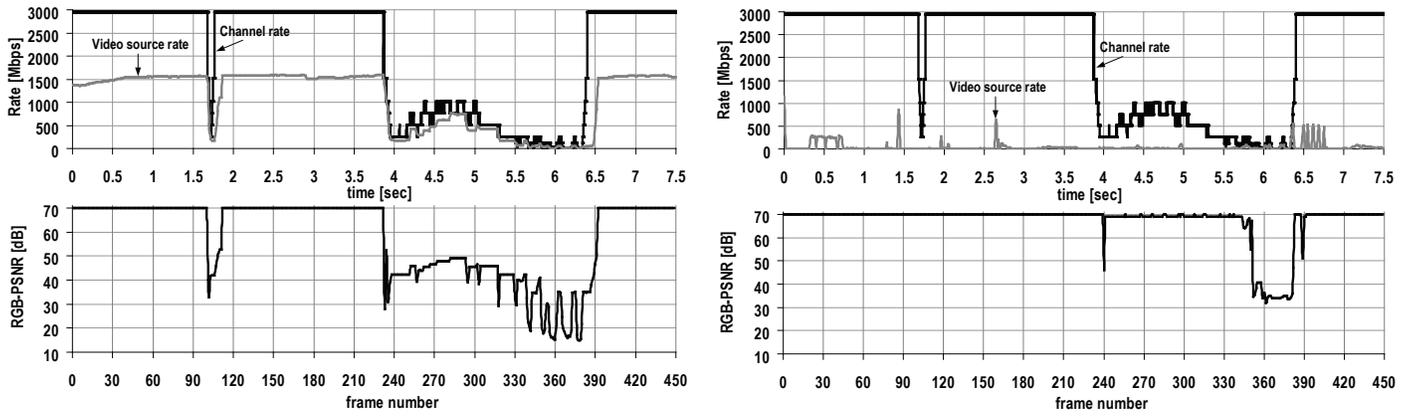


Figure 2. Practical results for “Breeze” (on the left side) and “Desktop” (on the right side) video sequences

E. Using static units detection in rate control

For improving video quality for the low channel throughput case, static units can be transmitted repeatedly in lossless mode. However, we have to take into account that the types of the units (static or non-static) in the future are unknown. Therefore we should keep a significant part of the encoder buffer free for non-static units. Thus, if rate control works in buffer accumulation mode then lossless mode is used for static units, if they were not transmitted as lossless early and number of bits in encoder buffer $b^e(t) \leq \alpha \cdot b_{eff}(t)$, $\alpha \in [0, \dots, 1]$.

VI. PRACTICAL RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

To obtain practical results the suggested rate control algorithm was embedded into the low-power H.264/AVC encoder that was shortly described in Section II. In the rate control algorithm the following parameters were used: $L = 1$ ms, $M = 2$, $w = 5$, $\Delta q^+ = 3$, $\Delta q^- = 2$, $\alpha = 0.15$.

Channel throughput c_t simulation is executed as following. At first, propagation measurements in the presence of human activity for a 60 GHz channel [11] were used for obtaining of the temporal variations of the channel SNR(t). Secondly, SNR(t) vs p_t dependencies for each MCS were calculated based on transport packet length $l = 4092$, number of retransmissions $n = 10$ and SNR/BER curves from IEEE 802.15.3c standard proposals documents [12]. Finally, for each SNR(t) value one of the MCS was chosen that provide $p_t^n < 10^{-10}$.

The performance of the discussed algorithm was tested on two video sequences with 1920×1080 frame resolution, frame rate $f = 60$. The first test video sequence (“Breeze”) is a typical movie which contains natural images. The second test video sequence (“Desktop”) corresponds to computer desktop snapshots: running office applications and dragging windows. Figure 2 shows video source rate and peak signal-to-noise ratio (PSNR) for the given channel throughput. For the convenience of graphic expression PSNR = 70 dB corresponds to the absolutely lossless compression.

Practical results show that in good channel condition case the low-power encoder provides lossless video source rate equal to 1.5 Gbps for natural video sequences that allows to economize channel throughput or use it for other data traffic.

In bad channel state the proposed rate control algorithm provides adaptation to varying channel conditions and guarantees acceptable video quality for the given channel throughput. Greater effect is obtained for desktop video sequences that contain a lot of static regions.

Results presented in this paper shows that latency-constrained video transmission based on low-power data compression can be preferable for high-speed WPANs compared to approaches based on uncompressed video transmission.

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