

A Control Theoretic Scheme for Efficient Video Transmission over IEEE 802.11e EDCA WLANs

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The EDCA mechanism of the IEEE 802.11 standard has been designed to support, among others, video traffic. This mechanism relies on a number of parameters whose configuration is left open by the standard. Although there are some recommended values for these parameters, they are fixed independent of the WLAN conditions, which results in suboptimal performance. Following this observation, a number of approaches in the literature have been devised to set the EDCA parameters based on an estimation of the WLAN conditions. However, these previous approaches are based on heuristics and hence do not guarantee optimized performance. In this paper we propose a novel algorithm to adjust the EDCA parameters to carry video traffic which, in contrast to previous approaches, is sustained on mathematical foundations that guarantee optimal performance. In particular, our approach builds upon *i*) an analytical model of the WLAN performance under video traffic, used to derive the optimal point of operation of EDCA, and *ii*) a control theoretic designed mechanism which drives the WLAN to this point of operation. Via extensive simulations, we show that the proposed approach performs optimally and substantially outperforms the standard recommended configuration as well as previous adaptive proposals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

IEEE 802.11 based wireless LANs (WLANs) have been widely deployed in the recent years. The use of unlicensed spectrum, the availability of low cost devices, and their ease of management has led to a plethora of WiFi Access Points, used not only in office environments or as public hot-spots but also to connect residential users and their multimedia devices to the Internet. According to the [IEEE 802.11 2007] standard, there are two different channel access mechanisms, a centralized one, known as the Point Coordination Function (PCF), and a distributed one, the Distributed Coordination Function (DCF). However, most of the current WLANs are based on the latter, i.e., a CSMA/CA mechanism that only provides with a best effort service, while the PCF mechanism has received relatively little attention from manufacturers.

Although the first physical layer specification supported only 2 Mbps capacity, due to the increasing bandwidth demands extensions were adopted over the years, such that nominal rates of up to 54 Mbps are achievable with e.g. [IEEE 802.11g 2003]. This rate increase has enabled the use of WLANs also for real-time applications, such as e.g. voice over IP, video streaming or video conferencing.¹ However, these delay and bandwidth sensitive applications are properly supported only in over-provisioned scenarios, where the best-effort based scheme of DCF is enough to fulfill the QoS requirements.

¹Indeed, most of today's new laptops are provided with an integrated video camera.

In order to overcome this limitation, the revised version of the standard specifies an improved channel access scheme, the Hybrid Coordination Function (HCF), which consists of two access mechanisms, the HCF Controlled Channel Access (HCCA) and the Enhanced Distributed Coordination Access (EDCA) [IEEE 802.11e 2005]. The former is based, like PCF, on a centralized controller that schedules the transmissions in the WLAN, while the latter is an extension of DCF that supports service differentiation through four different Access Categories (namely voice, video, best-effort and background). These Access Categories can be configured with different values of the contention parameters, leading to statistical service differentiation. However, the configuration of both mechanisms is left open, as the standard only specifies a simple scheduler to provide CBR services for the case of HCCA, and a set of recommended values of the contention parameters for EDCA.

The EDCA mechanism is intended to be used for video traffic and, indeed, some specific recommendations for this traffic type are given. However, the use of the fixed set of recommended values for the EDCA parameters results in poor efficiency for most scenarios, as the optimal configuration of the channel access parameters depends on the WLAN conditions, including the number of stations and their load [Bianchi 2000; Banchs et al. 2003]. Thus, when the WLAN is heavily loaded, the performance of real-time applications, and in particular the delay experienced by video traffic, is severely degraded. Following this observation, previous work proposed to improve video performance by adapting the channel access protocol to the WLAN conditions. These works can be classified as follows:

- Cross-layer approaches* [Ksentini et al. 2006; Foh et al. 2007; He et al. 2008]. Most of these approaches classify the frames of a layered-encoded video according to their relevance, and map them to different ACs. [He et al. 2008] employs a controller to drive the delay to an application-specific reference, by employing packet classification at a newly introduced middleware layer. A major disadvantage of these approaches is their complexity, as they require rather complex interactions between the application and the MAC layers, and moreover they either require specific video sources, or modifications of the protocol stack.
- Non standard compliant approaches* [Argyriou 2008; Bucciol et al. 2004; Nafaa and Ksentini 2008]. These approaches have the key drawback of requiring additional changes to the MAC layer and therefore cannot be implemented with current WLAN cards.
- HCCA compliant approaches* [Grieco et al. 2003; Boggia et al. 2007; Yang et al. 2007]. These approaches are compliant with the 802.11 specifications and do not require changes to the standard, but they are based on the centralized mechanism (namely HCCA) which has seen a much smaller deployment than the EDCA mechanism. Moreover, some of them [Yang et al. 2007] rely on feedback information from the clients, which is not readily available within current device drivers and do not guarantee system stability.
- EDCA compliant approaches* [Xiao et al. 2004; Xiao et al. 2007; Freitag et al. 2006; Zhang et al. 2008; Chen 2007]. These approaches rely on the EDCA standard mechanism and dynamically update the EDCA parameters and/or the video codec behavior based on the observed WLAN conditions. Their major drawback is that they are based on heuristics and lack analytical support, and hence do not guarantee optimized performance.

In this paper we propose a novel algorithm that dynamically adjusts the EDCA configuration to the conditions of the WLAN with the goal of minimizing the video traffic delay. In contrast to the previous approaches, our proposal has the following strengths:

- (1) It is tailored to video applications, as our goal is to optimize the delay performance, which results in a better quality of experience (QoE) of the video traffic

- (2) It is based on a well established analytical model of the MAC operation [Foh et al. 2007], which provides the foundations to guarantee optimal performance,
- (3) It requires no additional signaling, since the AP drives the WLAN to the optimal point of operation only by observing the behavior of the WLAN and it is fully standard compliant, therefore can be implemented on available EDCA hardware,
- (4) It guarantees simultaneously quick reaction to the changes in the network and stable operation by means of control theory.
- (5) It supports graceful degradation of video flows by implementing a priority based dropping policy, in line with the efforts of [IEEE 802.11TGaa 2010] for robust streaming of audio video transport streams.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 we briefly summarize the IEEE 802.11e EDCA mechanism. In Section 3 we analyze the delay performance of EDCA and derive the optimal collision probability that minimizes the delay performance. In Section 4 we introduce our adaptive algorithm which drives the WLAN to the optimal point of operation, by means of a Proportional Integrator controller. The performance of the proposed algorithm and the accuracy of the analytical model are validated by means of simulations in Section 5. In Section 6 we present a prototype implementation of our algorithm with real devices and finally Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. IEEE 802.11E EDCA

In this section we briefly summarize the EDCA mechanism. This is a CSMA/CA-based protocol which extends DCF to provide service differentiation by means of the parameters that control the way stations access the wireless medium. The channel access of a station is performed by four Channel Access Functions (CAFs), each of them running an independent backoff process which is regulated by a number of configurable parameters. For the configuration of these parameters, the standard groups the CAFs by Access Categories (ACs) and assigns the same configuration to all the CAFs of an AC.

If a station with a new frame to transmit senses the channel idle for a period of time equal to the arbitration interframe space parameter (*AIFS*), the station transmits. Otherwise, if the channel is busy (either immediately or during the *AIFS* period), the station continues to monitor the channel until it is measured idle for an *AIFS* time, and then executes a backoff process. *AIFS* takes a value of the form $DIFS + kT_e$, where *DIFS* and T_e are constants dependent on the physical layer and k is a nonnegative integer.

When the backoff process starts, stations compute a random number uniformly distributed in the range $(0, CW - 1)$, and initialize their backoff time counter with this value. The *CW* value is called the contention window, and depends on the number of failed transmission attempts. For the first transmission attempt the minimum contention window (CW_{min}) is used. In case of a collision its value doubles, up to a maximum value CW_{max} .

As long as the channel is sensed idle the backoff time counter is decremented once every time slot T_e . When a transmission is detected on the channel, the backoff time counter is “frozen”, and reactivated after the channel is sensed idle for a certain period (equal to *AIFS* if the transmission is received with a correct Frame Check Sequence (FCS), and equal to $EIFS - DIFS + AIFS$ otherwise). When the backoff time counter reaches zero, the station transmits its frame in the next time slot.

A collision occurs when two or more stations start transmitting simultaneously. An acknowledgment (Ack) frame is used to notify the transmitting station that the frame has been successfully received. If the Ack is not received within a given timeout, the station reschedules the transmission by reentering the backoff process. After a first failed attempt, all the retransmissions of the same frame are sent with the retry flag set in order to avoid duplicates. If the number of failed attempts reaches a predetermined

retry limit R , the frame is discarded. Once the backoff process is completed (either successfully or unsuccessfully), CW is set again to CW_{min} .

When the station gains access to the channel, it is allowed to retain the right to access it for a duration equal to the transmission opportunity limit parameter ($TXOP$). If this parameter is set to zero, a station is allowed to transmit only one frame upon accessing the channel. Using a larger $TXOP$ value helps minimizing the delay experienced by real-time traffic by ensuring that the transmission queues will not grow.

In order to provide service differentiation [IEEE 802.11e 2005] recommends different values for the channel access parameters. However, these values are statically set, independently of the network conditions, thus yielding suboptimal performance for most scenarios. The standard also specifies that the Access Point (AP) can periodically broadcast through beacon frames (typically every 100 ms) the EDCA parameters to be used by all stations. In this paper we take advantage of this feature to adjust the EDCA configuration, in order to drive a WLAN operating under video traffic to the optimal point of operation.

3. ANALYTICAL MODEL

In this section we present the analytical model upon which our adaptive algorithm is sustained. We first analyze the delay performance of a WLAN under video traffic and then, based on this analysis, we compute the collision probability that provides optimal delay performance. The algorithm proposed in the next section aims at driving the collision probability to this value.

3.1 Parameters Configuration

As discussed in Section 2, the operation of EDCA depends on four configurable parameters, namely $AIFS$, $TXOP$, CW_{max} and CW_{min} . Based on the following arguments, we fix the first three parameters when there is only video traffic present in the WLAN:

- $AIFS = DIFS$. We set this parameter to its minimum possible value, as otherwise additional time is unnecessarily lost after every transmission. Indeed, this parameter aims at providing differentiation between different traffic types and it is not needed when there is only one traffic type present in the WLAN.
- $CW_{max} = CW_{min}$. When all parameters are statically set, CW_{max} is typically set larger than CW_{min} , so that after a collision the CW increases and thus the probability of a new collision is reduced. However, this is not necessary in our case, as our algorithm dynamically adjusts CW_{min} so that the resulting collision probability corresponds to optimal operation. In addition, if we set CW_{max} larger than CW_{min} , the delay of the packets that suffer one or more collision drastically grows, which harms jitter performance.²
- $TXOP = TXOP_{max}$. Considering the strict delay requirements of video traffic, it is desirable that, upon accessing the channel, all the waiting packets in the station's queue are transmitted in order to minimize their delay. To achieve this, we set the TXOP parameter to its maximum allowed value.

The above settings build on our previous works [Serrano et al. 2007; Banchs and Volleró 2006] where we have shown that the optimal operation of the WLAN can be achieved without utilizing the $AIFS$ and CW_{max} differentiation mechanisms, by solely employing an appropriate configuration of the CW_{min} . Additionally, our simulation results included in Appendix B.2 show that the best performance is achieved when TXOP is set to the maximum value. Consequently, we have that the only parameter

²Experiments conducted with $CW_{max} = 2^6 \cdot CW_{min}$ and with $N = 25$ stations, report jitter values of up to 15 times larger than for a fixed CW setting, which is inline with our assumptions.

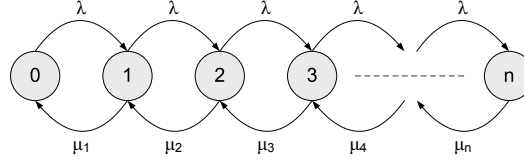


Fig. 1: Markov chain model of the WLAN.

whose configuration is left open is CW_{min} . The rest of this section is devoted to the analysis of performance as a function of this parameter, while in the next section we propose an adaptive algorithm that sets this parameter dynamically. To simplify notation, hereafter we refer to the CW_{min} parameter with CW .

3.2 Average Delay

Following the above, in this paper we aim at finding the optimal value of the CW parameter. This optimal CW corresponds to a tradeoff between too large and too small CW s. Indeed, if stations contend with overly small CW s, the collision rate will be very high and therefore delay performance will be penalized. Similarly, if stations contend with too large CW s, the channel will be idle most of the time and the delay performance will also be degraded. Therefore, it follows from this that there exists an intermediate CW value that minimizes the average delay of the WLAN; hereafter, we refer to this value as the *optimal CW*.

In the rest of the paper we aim at designing an algorithm that drives the CW of the WLAN to its optimal value and thus minimizes the average delay suffered by video frames. As a first step towards this algorithm, we next analyze the delay as a function of the CW . The key assumptions behind our analysis are:

- Following the findings of [Duffy et al. 2005; Malone et al. 2007], we neglect the probability that a station accumulates more than one video frame in its transmission queue.
- We assume that the aggregate arrivals follow a Poisson process. Considering a sufficiently large number of stations, and given their independence, this assumption is sustained by the Palm-Khinchine Theorem [D.P. Heyman and M.J. Sobel 2004].
- We consider that access delays are exponentially distributed. This is supported by the observation that delay is mainly dominated by the number of attempts, which follows a geometric distribution, and that such a discrete distribution can be approximated by an exponential one in the continuous domain.

With these assumptions, the WLAN can be analyzed based on the Markov chain of Fig. 1, where state i represents the case where there are i backlogged stations with a video frame to transmit, λ is the aggregate arrival rate, computed as the individual arrival rate times the number of stations, denoted by n , and μ_i is the aggregate departure rate at state i .

To compute the μ_i 's, we follow the assumption of [Foh et al. 2007] that the aggregate departure rate when there are i backlogged stations can be approximated by the departure rate of the WLAN with i saturated stations, which yields

$$\mu_i = \frac{r_i^{sat}}{L} \quad (1)$$

where L is the average length of a video frame and r_i^{sat} is the total throughput with i saturated stations. r_i^{sat} is computed following [Bianchi 2000]

$$r_i^{sat} = \frac{P_s L}{P_s T_s + P_c T_c + P_e T_e} \quad (2)$$

where P_s , P_c and P_e are the probabilities that a slot time contains a successful transmission, a collision and is empty, respectively, and T_s , T_c and T_e are the corresponding average slot time durations. The probabilities are computed as

$$P_s = i\tau(1-\tau)^{i-1}, \quad P_e = (1-\tau)^i, \quad P_c = 1 - P_s - P_e \quad (3)$$

where τ is the probability that a backlogged station transmits in a randomly chosen slot time, which can be computed as a function of the CW following [Bianchi 2000]

$$\tau = \frac{2}{CW + 1} \quad (4)$$

The average slot time durations T_s and T_c can be computed from the video frame length distribution as follows. Let P_l be the probability that the length of a video frame equals l . Then,

$$T_s = \sum_l P_l T_{s,l} \quad (5)$$

where $T_{s,l}$ is the duration of a transmission of a video frame of length l . Note that, since a video frame may be larger than the maximum size of a layer 2 (L2) frame, which we denote by l_{max} , it may need to be transmitted in several back-to-back L2 frames. Thus,

$$\begin{aligned} T_{s,l} = & (N-1) \left(T_{PLCP} + \frac{H + l_{max}}{C} + SIFS + T_{ack} + SIFS \right) \\ & + T_{PLCP} + \frac{H + l - (N-1)l_{max}}{C} + SIFS + T_{ack} + DIFS \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

where $N = \lceil l/l_{max} \rceil$ is the total number of L2 frames in which the video frame is divided, T_{PLCP} is the Physical Layer Convergence Protocol preamble and header transmission time, H is the L2 overhead (header and FCS), T_{ack} is the duration of the acknowledgment frame and C is the channel bit rate.

To compute T_c , we neglect the probability that more than two stations collide. With this assumption, T_c can be computed as

$$T_c = \sum_l \sum_k P_l P_k \max(T_{c,l}, T_{c,k}) \quad (7)$$

where $T_{c,l}$ is the duration of a slot time that contains a collision in which the largest colliding frame is of size l . Note that in case the video frame is larger than l_{max} , the collision is detected after the first L2 frame transmission and no further L2 frames are sent. Thus,

$$T_{c,l} = T_{PLCP} + \frac{H + \min(l, l_{max})}{C} + EIFS \quad (8)$$

With the above, we can compute the μ_i values. Once these values have been obtained, the next step is to calculate the state probabilities of the Markov chain. Let P_i be the probability that the Markov chain is in state i . From the balance equations we have

$$P_i = P_{i-1} \frac{\lambda}{\mu_i} \quad (9)$$

and applying this recursively

$$P_i = P_0 \prod_{j=1}^i \frac{\lambda}{\mu_j} \quad (10)$$

By forcing that all P_i 's add to 1, we have

$$P_0 = \frac{1}{1 + \sum_{i=1}^n \prod_{j=1}^i \frac{\lambda}{\mu_j}} \quad (11)$$

From Eqs. (10) and (11), we can compute all state probabilities P_i , and from the P_i 's we then calculate the average number of backlogged stations,

$$n_b = \sum_{i=1}^n iP_i \quad (12)$$

Finally, by applying Little's formula [Kleinrock 1975], we obtain the average delay

$$D = \frac{n_b}{\lambda} \quad (13)$$

which terminates the delay performance analysis.

3.3 Optimal Collision Probability

We next compute the optimal collision probability that minimizes the average delay calculated in the previous section. By collision probability we mean the conditional probability that a station encounters a collision upon attempting a transmission.

Our optimal collision probability computation is based on the observation that, in order to minimize the average number of backlogged stations (and therefore the delay, since the arrival rates of the Markov chain of Fig. 1 are fixed), we need to find the collision probability that maximizes the departure rates μ_i 's.

We next compute the collision probabilities that maximize the different μ_i 's. We first note that in state $i = 1$, where there is only one backlogged station, the collision probability is necessarily zero, since never more than one station will attempt to transmit in this state.

For $i > 1$ we proceed as follows. According to Eq. (1), maximizing μ_i is equivalent to maximizing r_i^{sat} . Eq. (2) can be rearranged to obtain

$$r_i^{sat} = \frac{L}{T_s - T_c + \frac{P_e(T_e - T_c) + T_c}{P_s}} \quad (14)$$

As L , T_s , and T_c are constant, maximizing the following expression will result in the maximization of r_i^{sat} ,

$$\hat{r}_i = \frac{P_s}{P_e(T_e - T_c) + T_c} \quad (15)$$

Given $\tau \ll 1$, \hat{r} can be approximated by

$$\hat{r}_i = \frac{i\tau - \frac{i(i-1)}{2}\tau^2}{i\tau(T_e - T_c) + T_c} \quad (16)$$

The optimal value of τ , τ_{opt} , that maximizes \hat{r} can then be obtained by

$$\left. \frac{d \hat{r}_i}{d \tau} \right|_{\tau=\tau_{opt}} = 0 \quad (17)$$

which yields

$$i^2(i-1)(T_c - T_e)\tau^2 + 2i(i-1)T_e\tau + iT_e = 0 \quad (18)$$

Isolating τ_{opt} from the above yields

$$\tau_{opt} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{T_e}{i(T_c - T_e)}\right)^2 + \frac{2T_e}{i(i-1)(T_c - T_e)}} - \frac{T_e}{i(T_c - T_e)} \quad (19)$$

Given $T_e \ll T_c$, we finally obtain the following approximate solution for the optimal τ ,

$$\tau_{opt} \approx \frac{1}{i} \sqrt{\frac{2T_e}{T_c}} \quad (20)$$

With the above τ_{opt} , the corresponding collision probability is equal to

$$p_{col} = 1 - (1 - \tau_{opt})^{i-1} = 1 - \left(1 - \frac{1}{i} \sqrt{\frac{2T_e}{T_c}}\right)^{i-1} \quad (21)$$

which can be approximated by

$$p_{col} \approx 1 - e^{-\sqrt{\frac{2T_e}{T_c}}} \quad (22)$$

Note that the key result from the above approximations is that p_{col} does not depend on the number of backlogged stations i .

From the above, we conclude that

- When a station transmits in state $i = 1$, the collision probability is always zero.
- When a station transmits in a state $i > 1$, the optimal collision probability is equal to p_{col} , which is a constant independent of i .

The combination of the above two leads to the following collision probability seen by a station in a WLAN under optimal operation:

$$p_{opt} = P(i = 1) \cdot 0 + P(i > 1) \cdot p_{col} = P(i > 1)p_{col} \quad (23)$$

where $P(i = 1)$ is the probability that a transmission by a station is attempted in state $i = 1$ and $P(i > 1)$ is the probability that it is attempted in state $i > 1$.

The remaining challenge to obtain p_{opt} is the computation of $P(i > 1)$. We want to compute this probability by using only data that can be easily measured at the AP. To this aim, we make the following approximations: *i*) we assume an infinite number of stations, and *ii*) we neglect the protocol overhead on the μ_i 's by taking $\mu_i = 1/T_s \forall i$. With these approximations,

$$P_i = \left(\frac{\lambda}{\mu}\right)^{i-1} P_1 \quad (24)$$

and

$$P(i > 1) = 1 - \frac{P_1}{\sum_{j=1}^n P_j} = \frac{\lambda}{\mu} \quad (25)$$

Finally, combining the above equations we obtain

$$p_{opt} = p_{col} \frac{\lambda}{\mu} \quad (26)$$

which terminates the analysis of the optimal collision probability. The above expression represents the theoretical optimal at which we would like our system to operate. We note that the expression obtained in Eq. (26) depends only on the parameters λ , μ and T_c which can be easily measured at the AP as we will show in the next section.

4. ADAPTIVE ALGORITHM

In this section we present our adaptive algorithm. This algorithm runs at the AP and consists of the following two steps which are executed iteratively:

- During each beacon interval (100 ms), the AP measures the collision probability of the WLAN resulting from the current CW configuration.
- At the end of the period, the AP computes the new CW configuration based on the measured collision probability and distributes it to the stations in the new beacon frame.

Our adaptive algorithm relies on a *Proportional Integrator (PI) controller* to drive the WLAN to its optimal point of operation. We note that previous works have successfully employed a PI controller to address performance issues in communication networks [Hollot et al. 2001; Cavendish et al. 2004]. A key advantage of using a PI controller is that it is simple to design, configure and implement with existing hardware, as we show in Section 6.

In the following, we first describe our system from a control theoretical standpoint. Next, we analyze the system by linearizing the behavior of the WLAN. Finally, we use this analysis to adequately configure the parameters of the PI controller.

4.1 Control System

Our system can be regarded from a control theoretic perspective as the composition of the two modules depicted in Fig. 2:

- The *controller* $C(z)$ is located at AP and implements the adaptive algorithm that controls the WLAN. Our proposal uses a classical scheme from discrete-time control theory for the controller module, namely the PI controller. The AP estimates the collision probability and provides it to the controller, which takes as input the difference between the estimated collision probability and its desired value as given by Eq. (26). With this input, the controller computes the CW value.
- The *controlled system* $H(z)$ is the WLAN system itself. As specified by the standard, the AP distributes the new CW configuration to the stations every 100 ms.

The transfer function of the controller is given by

$$C(z) = K_p + \frac{K_i}{z-1} \quad (27)$$

With the above transfer function, at every beacon interval t , the controller will take as input the estimated error signal $e = p - p_{opt}$ and give as output the new CW value to be used by the contending stations.

$$CW[t] = K_p \cdot e[t] + K_i \sum_{k=0}^{t-1} e[k] \quad (28)$$

Note that implementing the above equation would be highly inefficient as it would require storing all error samples in the past. A much more efficient implementation that only requires storing the previous values of CW and e is:

$$CW[t] = CW[t-1] + K_p \cdot e[t] + (K_i - K_p) \cdot e[t-1] \quad (29)$$

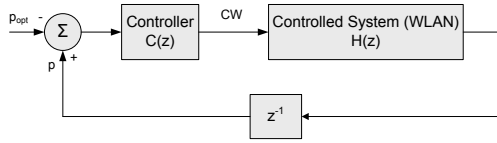


Fig. 2: Control system.

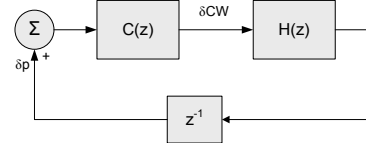


Fig. 3: Linearized system.

The estimated error signal e is the difference between the actual collision probability p observed in the WLAN and the target value p_{opt} given in Eq. (26) which yields the optimal performance. In order to compute the error signal e , we first need to estimate the collision probability p considering only information available at the AP without requiring any modifications to the station nodes. The estimation of the collision probability is performed at the AP over a 100 ms period as follows. Let S be the number of frames received by the AP during this period with the retry flag unset, and R be the number of frames received with the retry flag set. Then, if we assume that no frames are discarded due to reaching the retry limit, the collision probability p can be computed as

$$p = \frac{R}{R + S} \quad (30)$$

since the above is precisely the probability that the first transmission attempt of a frame collides.

In addition to the above, the AP also needs to compute the optimal collision probability p_{opt} as given by Eqs. (22) and (26), which requires the computation of λ , μ and T_c . These parameters are estimated by the AP over each 100 ms period as follows: λ is measured by counting the number of video frames received ($R + S$) during the period, μ is computed from the average length of the frames received during the period, and T_c is calculated by applying Eq. (7) to the received frames.

Note that with the above, the AP can measure the collision probability and compute its optimal value by simply analyzing the frames successfully received, which can be easily done with no modifications to the AP's firmware and hardware.

Based on the measurements taken by the AP, the controller adjusts the CW parameter to drive the collision probability to the optimal value. In order to provide a safeguard against too large and too small values of the CW , we force that CW can neither take values below $CW_{lb} = 16$ (which is the minimum standard recommendation for video traffic) nor larger than $CW_{ub} = 1024$ (which is the maximum CW value for best-effort traffic). In the rest of the paper we assume that the CW always takes values within these bounds and do not further consider this effect.

4.2 Transfer Function Characterization

In order to analyze our system from a control theoretic standpoint, we need to characterize the WLAN with a transfer function that takes the CW as input and gives the collision probability p as output. Since the collision probability is measured every 100 ms interval, we can safely assume that the obtained measurement corresponds to stationary conditions and therefore the system does not have any memory. With this assumption and the analysis of Section 3,

$$p = \sum_i P(i) (1 - (1 - \tau)^{i-1}) \quad (31)$$

where $P(i)$ is the probability that a transmission is attempted at state i and τ is a function of the CW ,

$$\tau = \frac{2}{CW + 1} \quad (32)$$

Thus there exists a nonlinear relationship between p and CW . In order to express this relationship as a transfer function, we further proceed with linearizing it when the system is perturbed around its stable point of operation (note that a similar approach has been used in e.g. [Hollot et al. 2001; Patras et al. 2009]),³

$$CW = CW_{opt} + \delta CW \quad (33)$$

where CW_{opt} is the CW value that yields the optimal collision probability p_{opt} given by Eq. (26).

The oscillations of the collision probability around its point of operation p_{opt} can be approximated by

$$p \approx p_{opt} + \frac{\partial p}{\partial CW} \delta CW \quad (34)$$

The above partial derivative can be computed as

$$\frac{\partial p}{\partial CW} = \frac{\partial p}{\partial \tau} \frac{\partial \tau}{\partial CW} \quad (35)$$

Eq. (31) can be approximated by

$$p \approx \sum_i P(i)(i-1)\tau \quad (36)$$

from which

$$\frac{\partial p}{\partial \tau} \approx \sum_i P(i)(i-1) \quad (37)$$

Additionally, we have

$$\frac{\partial \tau}{\partial CW} = -\frac{2}{CW^2} \quad (38)$$

By taking the above two partial derivatives and using the approximation $\tau \approx 2/CW$, we obtain

$$\frac{\partial p}{\partial CW} \approx -\sum_i P(i)(i-1) \frac{\tau^2}{2} \quad (39)$$

Since at the stable point of operation $\tau = \tau_{opt}$ we have from Eq. (21) $p_{col} \approx (i-1)\tau_{opt}$ for $i > 1$, the above can be expressed as

$$\frac{\partial p}{\partial CW} \approx -P(i > 1) p_{col} \frac{\tau_{opt}}{2} \quad (40)$$

and combining it with Eq. (23) yields

$$\frac{\partial p}{\partial CW} \approx -\frac{p_{opt}\tau_{opt}}{2} \quad (41)$$

If we now consider the transfer function that allows us to characterize the perturbations of p around its stable point of operation as a function of the perturbations in CW ,

$$\delta P(z) = H(z) \delta CW(z) \quad (42)$$

we obtain from Eqs. (34) and (41) the following expression for the transfer function,

$$H(z) = -\frac{p_{opt}\tau_{opt}}{2} \quad (43)$$

³By linearizing the WLAN behaviour around its stable point of operation, we accurately model the behavior of the transfer function around the point of operation, but we may not be accurate in regions far from this point. As a result, our analysis guarantees only local stability

The above linearized model is depicted in Fig. 3. Note that, as compared to the model of Fig. 2, only the perturbations around the stable operation point are considered:

$$\begin{cases} p = p_{opt} + \delta p \\ CW = CW_{opt} + \delta CW \end{cases} \quad (44)$$

4.3 Controller Configuration

In what follows we compute the configuration of the PI controller. According to Eq. (27), the transfer function of the PI controller depends on two parameters which need to be configured: K_p and K_i . The objective when configuring these parameters is to achieve a proper tradeoff between speed of reaction to changes and stability. For this purpose we use the Ziegler-Nichols method [Franklin et al. 1997]. This method works as follows. First, we compute the parameter K_u , defined as the K_p value that leads to instability when $K_i = 0$, and the parameter T_i , defined as the oscillation period under these conditions. Then, K_p and K_i are configured as follows:

$$\begin{cases} K_p = 0.4K_u \\ K_i = \frac{K_p}{0.85T_i} \end{cases} \quad (45)$$

In order to compute K_u we proceed as follows. The system is stable as long as the absolute value of the closed-loop gain is smaller than 1,

$$|H(z)C(z)| = K_p \frac{p_{opt}\tau_{opt}}{2} < 1 \quad (46)$$

which yields the following upper bound for K_p ,

$$K_p < \frac{2}{p_{opt}\tau_{opt}} \quad (47)$$

The above expression depends on τ_{opt} , which is not known by the AP. Since we want to find an upper bound that can be computed at the AP, we proceed as follows. From Eq. (21), we have that τ_{opt} is never larger than p_{col} . With this observation, we obtain the following tighter upper bound:

$$K_p < \frac{2}{p_{opt}p_{col}} \quad (48)$$

Following the above, we take K_u as the value where the system may turn unstable (given by the previous equation),

$$K_u = \frac{2}{p_{opt}p_{col}} \quad (49)$$

and set K_p according to Eq. (45). Thus,

$$K_p = \frac{0.4 \cdot 2}{p_{opt}p_{col}} \quad (50)$$

For the K_p value that turns the system unstable, the following holds:

$$H(z)C(z) = -1 \quad (51)$$

With such a closed-loop transfer function, a given input value changes its sign at every time interval, yielding an oscillation period equal to two intervals ($T_i = 2$). Consequently, from Eq. (45) we obtain

$$K_i = \frac{0.4}{0.85p_{opt}p_{col}} \quad (52)$$

which completes the configuration of the PI controller. The stability of this configuration is guaranteed by Theorem 1, included in the Appendix.

5. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

We validated the proposed algorithm by conducting an extensive set of simulations in order to assess the delay performance of the adaptive scheme, the robustness of the underlying analytical model and the configuration of the controller. For this purpose we have extended the simulator used in [Patras et al. 2009; Banchs and Vollero 2006]; this is an event-driven simulator developed in OMNET++⁴ that closely follows the details of the MAC protocol of 802.11e EDCA. The source code of the simulator and basic use instructions are available online at our OWSiM project page.⁵

For all the experiments we have used the physical layer parameters of [IEEE 802.11b 1999]. In order to evaluate the performance of our adaptive scheme under video traffic we considered three of the most widely used codec types: H.263, MPEG-4 and H.264. The frame size distribution of the H.263 and MPEG-4 streams were extracted from the video traces of the films *Aladdin* and *Star Wars IV*, respectively, which are available from the Video Traces Library.⁶ The H.263 video was a VBR encoded sequence with an unspecified target bitrate and a 20 fps average frame rate. The MPEG-4 trace had a fixed frame rate of 25 fps. We have also analyzed the operation of the adaptive algorithm under CBR video, using one of the 30 fps encoded H.264 test sequences of [Lambert et al. 2006]. The average bitrates of these video sequences are 245 kbps, 288 kbps and 300 kbps, respectively. In our simulations we consider that all active stations are transmitting video traffic and no other traffic types are present in the WLAN. For the obtained results, averages and 95% confidence intervals are given.⁷

5.1 Validation of the Analytical Model

We first validated the accuracy of the proposed analytical model upon which the adaptive algorithm is based. In particular, we verified that delay is minimized when the collision probability equals the optimal value given by Eq. (26), which is the basis of our analysis. To this aim, we simulated the average delay and collision probability from two different *CW* configurations:

- The *CW* value that yields a collision probability equal to the optimal collision probability given by our analysis (hereafter we refer to this configuration as the *analytical model configuration*).
- The *CW* value that gives the smallest average delay, obtained from an exhaustive search on all the possible configurations of the *CW* parameter (hereafter the *optimal configuration*).

Following our analysis of Section 3, the configuration resulting from the optimal collision probability should minimize the average delay, and therefore the delay resulting from the two above configurations should be very similar. Fig. 4 shows the delay performance resulting from the two configurations for a varying number of stations and the different codecs considered. We observe that in all cases the two configurations provide a very similar delay performance, which validates our analytical model.

To show that the collision probability resulting from the optimal configuration is close to the optimal collision probability computed by our analysis, we plotted in Fig. 5 the average delay as a function

⁴<http://www.omnetpp.org/>

⁵<http://enjambre.it.uc3m.es/~ppatras/owsim/>

⁶<http://trace.eas.asu.edu/>

⁷Additional results that validate the performance of our proposal under mixed traffic conditions can be found in the appendix.

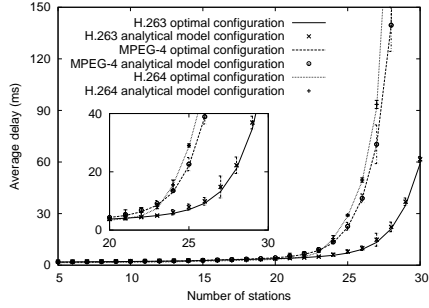


Fig. 4: Validation of the delay model.

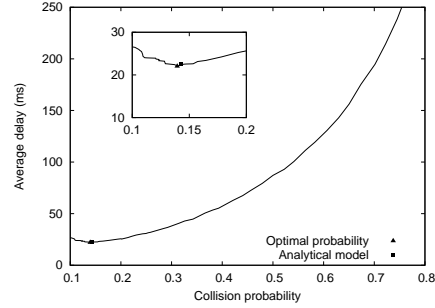


Fig. 5: Optimal collision probability.

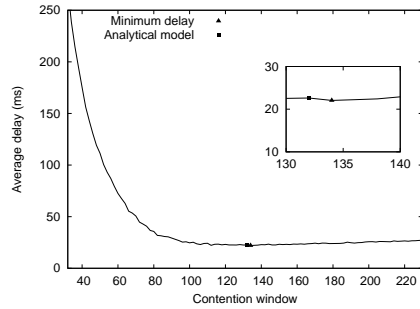


Fig. 6: *CW* configuration.

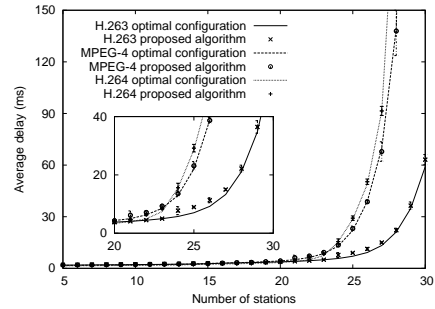


Fig. 7: Delay performance of the proposed algorithm.

of the collision probability, for a WLAN with 25 stations sending each of them MPEG-4 video traffic. From the plot, we can see that the optimal collision probability given by our analysis (shown with a square) is very close to the collision probability for which the average delay is minimized (shown with a triangle).

To gain further insight into the *CW* configuration resulting from our analytical model, we plotted in Fig. 6 the average delay as a function of the *CW* for the same scenario as above with 25 stations and MPEG-4 traffic. We observe that the *CW* configuration resulting from our analytical model is very close to the optimal one that yields the minimum delay, which further validates our analysis.

5.2 Adaptive Algorithm Performance

The main objective of our adaptive algorithm is to minimize the average delay of the WLAN. In order to validate that this objective is met, we compared the delay performance of a WLAN which implements our adaptive algorithm against the optimal configuration resulting from the search performed in the previous subsection. Results are depicted in Fig. 7. We observe that the proposed mechanism achieves a delay performance almost identical to the minimum given by the optimal configuration, regardless of the codec used. We conclude that our algorithm fulfills its main objective of minimizing the delay for any video traffic pattern.

Note that the optimal configuration against which we compare our approach is the result of an exhaustive search and requires a priori knowledge of the number of active stations and their traffic pattern, which challenges its practical use. In contrast, the adaptive algorithm that we propose does not require any kind of a priori knowledge since it adjusts the WLAN configuration based only on the measurements taken by the AP.

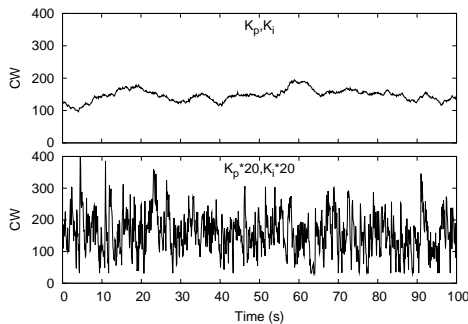


Fig. 8: Stability evaluation.

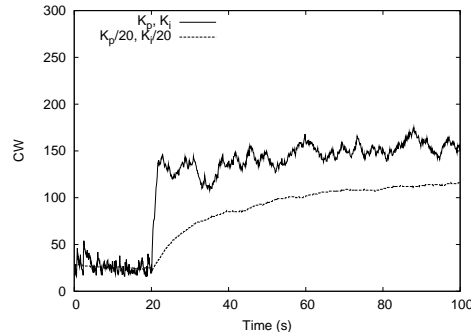


Fig. 9: Speed of reaction to changes.

5.3 Stability

One of the objectives of the configuration of the PI controller presented in Section 4.1 is to guarantee stable behavior of the system. To validate whether this objective is met, we analyzed the evolution of the CW (our control signal) with our $\{K_p, K_i\}$ setting and for a larger configuration of these parameters, in a WLAN with 25 stations, each sending MPEG-4 video traffic. From the results given in Fig. 8 we observe from this figure that with the proposed configuration (label “ K_p, K_i ”), the CW only has minor deviations around its stable point of operation, while if a larger setting is used (label “ $K_p * 20, K_i * 20$ ”), the CW has a strong unstable behavior with drastic oscillations. We conclude that the proposed configuration achieves the objective of guaranteeing stability.

5.4 Speed of Reaction to Changes

The other objective of the designed PI controller is to react quickly to changes in the WLAN. To verify whether this objective is fulfilled we ran the following experiment. We had a WLAN with 20 active stations sending MPEG-4 traffic and at $t = 20$ s we added 5 more stations. We plot the evolution of the CW for our $\{K_p, K_i\}$ setting in Fig. 9 (label “ K_p, K_i ”). The system reacts fast to the changes on the WLAN, as the CW reaches the new value almost immediately.

We have already shown in the previous section that large values for the parameters of the controller lead to unstable behavior. To analyze the impact of small values for these parameters, we plot on the same figure the behavior of the CW for a $\{K_p, K_i\}$ setting 20 times smaller (label “ $K_p/20, K_i/20$ ”). We observe that with such setting the system reacts too slow to the changes of the conditions on the WLAN.

5.5 Graceful Degradation of Video Quality

The recently created [IEEE 802.11TGaa 2010] is standardizing a set of mechanisms to better support video streaming in WLANs. One of these mechanism consists of the so-called graceful degradation of video flows, whose purpose is to first discard less critical frames in case of congestion. Following these lines, in this section we illustrate how our algorithm can be extended to support this new feature. This extension consists of introducing a queue size threshold Q_{th} which, if reached, triggers the discard of arriving frames marked with low priority. To assess the advantages of this enhancement, in Fig. 10 we measure *i)* the dropping probability when there is no support for graceful degradation, and *ii)* the dropping probability of high-priority and low-priority frames, respectively, for the case of $Q_{th} = Q_{max}/2$. As the figure illustrates, this mechanism prevents high priority frames from being discarded even in case of large traffic loads, thereby showing its ability to support a graceful degradation of video traffic.

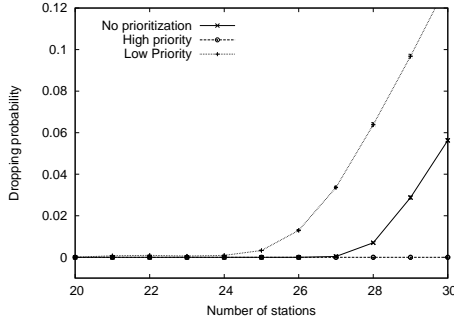


Fig. 10: Dropping probability evaluation.

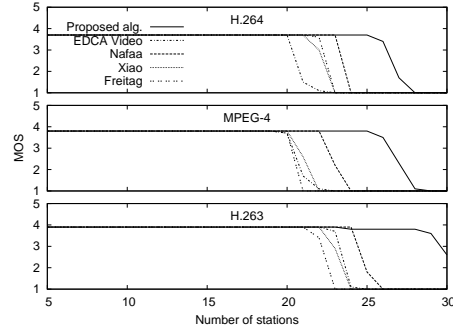


Fig. 11: MOS evaluation.

Codec	Total throughput [Mbps]				
	Proposed alg.	EDCA	Nafaa	Xiao	Freitag
H.263	7.365	5.890	5.892	5.636	5.396
MPEG-4	8.062	6.334	6.329	6.050	5.758
H.264	8.095	6.896	6.598	6.595	6.297

Table I. : Throughput evaluation

5.6 Comparison Against Other Approaches

In order to better assess the advantages of our proposal, we compared it against the following approaches: *i*) the recommended configuration of [IEEE 802.11e 2005], *ii*) the scheme proposed by [Nafaa and Ksentini 2008] (labeled as “Nafaa”) and *iii*) two other standard compliant proposals, namely the one by [Xiao et al. 2004] (labeled as “Xiao”) ⁸ and the one in [Freitag et al. 2006] (labeled as “Freitag”), respectively.

Fig. 12 depicts the average delay resulting from each of the above approaches as a function of the number of stations in the WLAN, and Table I shows the average total throughput that can be supported by each of the approaches while guaranteeing an average delay below the playback deadline of 150 ms. ⁹ We conclude from these results that our algorithm substantially outperforms all other approaches both in terms of delay and throughput.

Additionally we compared the performance of our algorithm against the EDCA configuration and the other approaches in terms of perceptual quality of the reconstructed video, by evaluating the Mean Opinion Score (MOS) for different number of stations. For this purpose we assumed the same playback deadline of 150 ms. Based on this constraint we considered that the frames which experience delays above this limit are discarded by the decoder. With the obtained packet loss ratio we computed the MOS of the received sequence according to the method given in [ITU-T 2007]. The results are shown in Fig. 11. We conclude that our algorithm outperforms the standard recommended configuration as well as the other similar approaches, both in terms of average delay and perceptual video quality, being able to accommodate a substantially larger throughput (approximately 20%).

⁸The approaches in [Xiao et al. 2004; Xiao et al. 2007] are very similar and thus yield comparable performance.

⁹This is the maximum one-way delay as recommended by [ITU-T 2001].

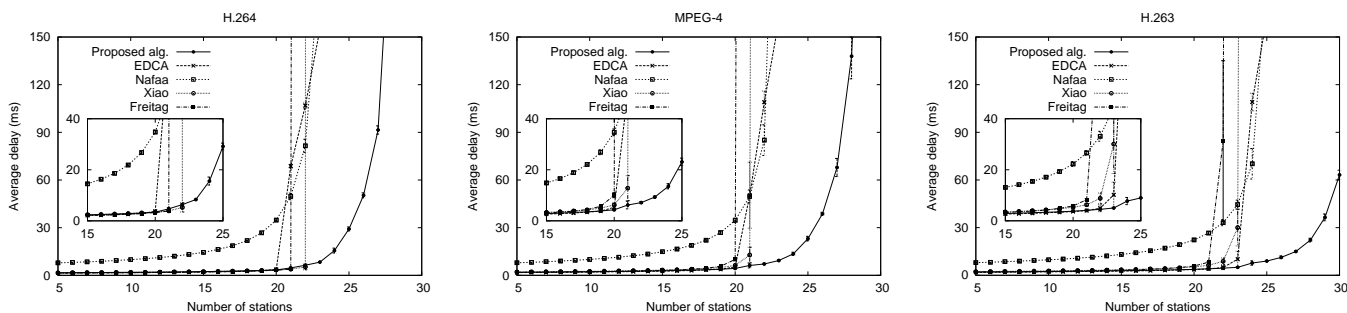


Fig. 12: Comparison against other approaches.

6. PROTOTYPE IMPLEMENTATION

A key advantage of our proposal as compared to existing approaches is that it can be implemented with current off-the-shelf devices without introducing any modifications into their hardware or driver. In order to show this feature, we have developed a prototype implementation of our algorithm and assessed its performance with real video traffic and real users. In this section, we provide a description of this implementation and discuss the results of the conducted experimental evaluation under a mixed traffic scenario.

Our implementation is based on Debian Linux kernel 2.6.26 and the popular open source MadWifi v0.9.4 driver.¹⁰ The source code of our prototype is available online.¹¹ Note that a similar implementation approach has been used in [Patras et al. 2010] for the distributed optimal configuration of 802.11 stations under data traffic. As depicted in Fig. 13, our algorithm runs at the AP as a user-space application and relies on existing IOCTL calls to communicate with the driver and to signal the CW configuration to the stations. We also exploit the capability of the MadWifi driver to support multiple virtual devices operating in different modes (master/monitor) with a single physical interface.

The first step in the execution of the adaptive algorithm is the estimation of the collision probability p in the WLAN. In our implementation this is computed according to Eq. (30) by the *Frame Sniffer* module, which uses a virtual device configured in promiscuous mode to monitor the retry flag of all the frames transmitted by the stations during a beacon interval. With the estimated collision probability resulting from the current CW configuration and the target optimal value given by Eq. (26), the CW configuration module computes the new CW setting every 100 ms, by applying Eq. (29). The CW configuration is then updated using a private IOCTL call and propagated to the stations with the next scheduled beacon frame. As specified by the standard, the stations will extract the configuration provided by the AP and employ it to access the channel until the next update.

In order to validate our implementation, we deployed a simple testbed consisting of three laptops equipped with Atheros AR5212 cards operating in 802.11b mode, one acting as an AP and the other two as stations. The algorithm ran at the AP, while the two stations were unmodified 802.11 nodes that streamed video towards the AP using the VLC multimedia framework¹² and, simultaneously, transmitted saturated UDP flows using the iperf tool,¹³ thus emulating best effort data transfers. As test video sequences we utilized a 30 seconds fragment from an Ice Age 3 trailer, encoded in MPEG-2

¹⁰<http://madwifi-project.org/>

¹¹http://enjambre.it.uc3m.es/~ppatras/code/adaptive_video.tar.gz

¹²<http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>

¹³<http://sourceforge.net/projects/iperf/>

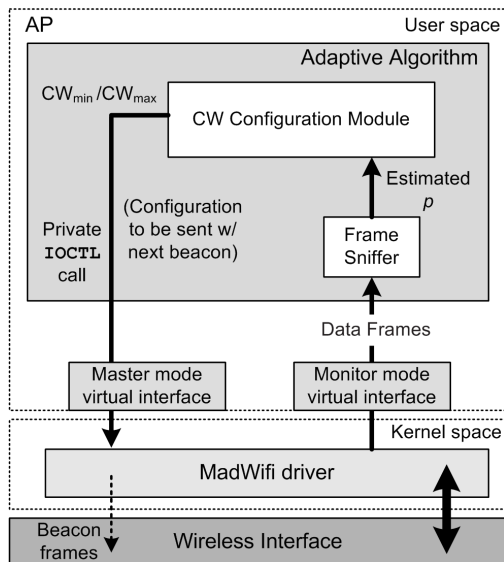


Fig. 13: Prototype Implementation.

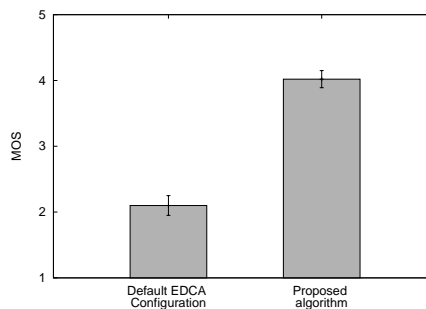


Fig. 14: MOS evaluation of the prototype.

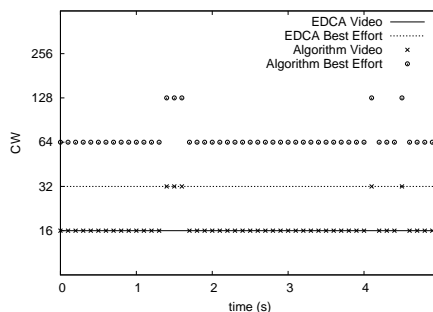


Fig. 15: CW differentiation.

format at 2 Mbps. We ran 2 sets of experiments: in the first set we employed our algorithm, while during the second one we used the default EDCA configuration. In each case we launched 10 consecutive streaming sessions, recording the received sequences and logging the broadcast CW configuration for the video and best-effort access categories.

To assess the improvement of the video performance provided by our algorithm, a group of 20 people watched in random order the sequences streamed with both approaches and subjectively ranked the perceived quality for each video session on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 corresponding to the maximum QoE. With these ratings we computed the resulting MOS for the transmissions with the default EDCA configuration and with our algorithm, respectively. As shown in Fig. 14, which depicts the average MOS values and their standard deviation for each case, our algorithm is able to significantly improve the quality of the received video by providing users with substantially better QoE.

To gain further insights into the behavior of our algorithm in a real environment and understand how the improved performance is achieved, we examined the evolution of the CW employed by our proposal throughout the duration of the experiments for video and best effort traffic, as compared to the configuration used by the standard. As depicted in Fig. 15, our approach ensures a higher level of differentiation between the two types of traffic by employing larger CW values for the best effort flows, and thus enhances the quality of video. In contrast, the default EDCA setting is not sufficient to ensure proper quality for video traffic as previously shown.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have proposed a novel algorithm to optimally adjust the configuration of the EDCA parameters for a WLAN operating under video traffic. The key design features of our approach are:

i) we do not require any a priori knowledge about the number of active sources or their traffic patterns, *ii*) the approach is fully compatible with the 802.11e EDCA standard, and *iii*) the AP only needs to look at the successfully received frames, which can be easily done with no modifications of the hardware and firmware, as our prototype implementation demonstrates.

To design our algorithm, we have analyzed an 802.11e EDCA WLAN under video traffic and computed its optimal point of operation. A key observation resulting from our analysis is that the collision probability that yields optimal performance can be computed as a function of few data that can be easily measured at the AP. Following this observation, our approach adaptively adjusts the EDCA configuration to drive the collision probability to the optimal value as given by the analysis. The proposed mechanism is based on a PI controller, which has the key advantage being simple to design, configure and implement with existing hardware.

The performance of our approach has been exhaustively validated by means of simulations and a prototype implementation. From this study, we conclude that: *i*) the optimal point of operation corresponds to the collision probability resulting from our analysis, which validates the analytical model upon which the approach is sustained, *ii*) our adaptive algorithm yields optimal performance, as there is no other configuration that provides (significantly) better performance, *iii*) the chosen settings of the PI controller perform well both in terms of stability and speed of reaction to changes, *iv*) the proposed approach outperforms very substantially the standard's recommended configuration, *v*) our algorithm is easily deployable with existing hardware.

ELECTRONIC APPENDIX

The electronic appendix for this article can be accessed in the ACM Digital Library.

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Online Appendix to: A Control Theoretic Scheme for Efficient Video Transmission over IEEE 802.11e EDCA WLANs

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A. PROOF OF STABILITY

THEOREM 1. The system is stable with the proposed K_p and K_i configuration.

PROOF. The closed-loop transfer function of the system is

$$S(z) = \frac{-C(z)H(z)}{1 - z^{-1}C(z)H(z)} = \frac{z(z-1)\frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}K_p + z\frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}K_i}{z^2 + (\frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}K_p - 1)z + \frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}(K_i - K_p)} \quad (53)$$

A sufficient condition for stability is that the poles of the above expression fall within the unit circle $|z| < 1$. This can be ensured by choosing coefficients $\{a_1, a_2\}$ of the characteristic polynomial that belong to the stability triangle [Aström and Wittenmark 1990]:

$$\begin{cases} a_2 < 1 \\ a_1 < a_2 + 1 \\ a_1 > -1 - a_2 \end{cases} \quad (54)$$

where

$$a_1 = \frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}K_p - 1 \quad (55)$$

$$a_2 = \frac{\tau_{opt}p_{opt}}{2}(K_i - K_p) \quad (56)$$

With K_p and K_i given by Eq. (45) we obtain

$$a_1 = 0.4 \frac{\tau_{opt}}{p_{col}} - 1 \quad (57)$$

$$a_2 = -0.16 \frac{\tau_{opt}}{p_{col}} \quad (58)$$

Given $\tau_{opt} \leq p_{col}$, it can be easily seen that the above $\{a_1, a_2\}$ satisfy the conditions of the system (54). The proof follows. \square

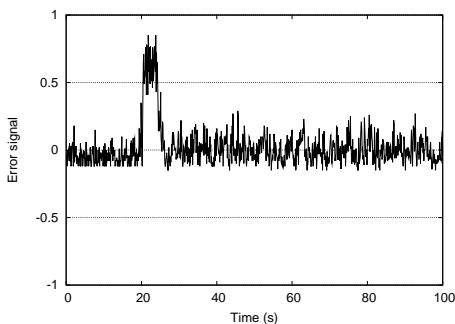


Fig. 16: Time evolution of the error signal.

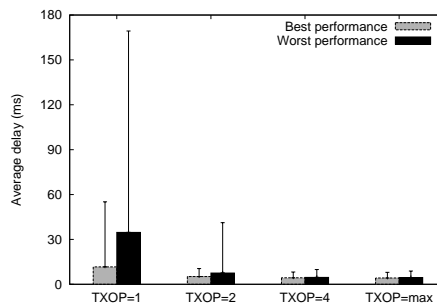


Fig. 17: Delay performance for different TXOP.

B. EXTENDED PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

In the following we present additional simulation results that complement the ones presented in Section 5 and provide additional insights into the performance of the proposed algorithm.

B.1 Steady State Error

In order to validate that the WLAN is operating around its optimal point of operation and our designed system has no steady state error, we plot in Fig. 16 the error signal fed to the PI controller for the same experiment of Section 5.4. We observe that the error signal exhibits small variations around the zero value and is able to return rapidly to this state upon a change in the network conditions at time $t = 20$ s. We conclude that the designed PI controller indeed yields zero steady state error and is able to drive the collision probability in the WLAN to the optimal value.

B.2 Impact of TXOP setting

In order to verify whether the large setting for the TXOP parameter used by our algorithm could introduce fairness issues we studied the impact of the TXOP on the average and standard deviation of the delay, as experienced by individual stations. For this purpose, we considered a scenario with 20 nodes sending MPEG-4 traffic and plotted in Fig. 17 the values of these metrics as experienced by the best and worst performing station for different values of the TXOP parameter. We show that with our setting ($TXOP = TXOP_{max}$) stations are provided with almost the same average delay performance (plotted with bars), while the standard deviation (depicted with lines) is kept small. In contrast, for smaller TXOP values, the stations are experiencing significantly different average delay values, while the increased delay jitter further harms the performance. More specifically, with a low TXOP setting some of the stations would experience average delays that are up to 3 times larger than the values experienced by others, thus incurring severe fairness issues. Additionally, the performance of the stations is further degraded by significantly high jitter values provided with lower TXOP values.

B.3 Delay Distribution

Although we have shown that our algorithm minimizes the average delay, it is also relevant to analyze the probability distribution of the delay samples given by our configuration. For this purpose we evaluated the 90th and 95th percentiles of the access delay as a function of the CW . As shown in Fig. 18, the CW configuration provided by our algorithm not only minimizes the average delay, but also holds 90th and 95th percentiles very close to the minimum values. From this, we conclude that the proposed scheme does not only minimize the average delay but also the distribution of the delay.

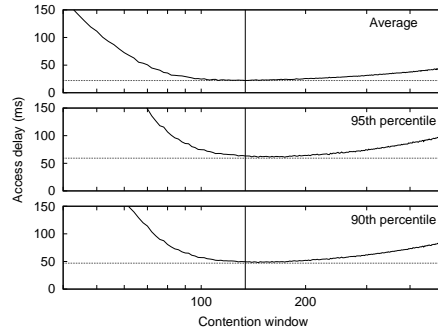
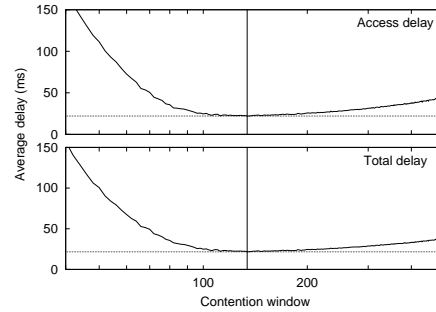
Fig. 18: Avg., 90th and 95th p. of the access delay.

Fig. 19: Total delay vs. access delay.

B.4 Total Delay

So far we have evaluated delay performance in terms of access delay, i.e. the time elapsed since a station starts contending until it successfully accesses the channel. This delay coincides with the total delay experienced by video frames if frames do not accumulate in the transmission queue and are transmitted in different accesses, but it is slightly different from the total delay when several video frames are transmitted together. In order to show that achieving the minimum access delay also minimizes the delay experienced by the video frames, in Fig. 19 we compare the CW configuration that minimizes the channel access delay with the one that minimizes the per video frame delay. Since the two configurations are identical, we conclude that, by minimizing the access delay, our algorithm also minimizes the delay experienced by video frames.

B.5 Mixed Traffic Scenario

So far we have considered that only video traffic was present in the WLAN. In what follows we investigate the performance of our algorithm under a scenario where other traffic coexists with the video transmissions. For this purpose, we have extended our algorithm to also consider data traffic. In the proposed extension, when computing the EDCA configuration for video, our algorithm also provides a CW_{BE} setting for the best effort AC, which is much larger than the one used for video ($CW_{BE} = k \cdot CW_{VI}$). To validate our proposal for such a mixed traffic scenario we conducted the following experiment. We considered a WLAN where 5 backlogged nodes send best effort traffic and an increasing number of stations are transmitting MPEG-4 video streams. For the best-effort category, our algorithm uses a TXOP parameter equal to one packet and a CW setting ten times larger than the one used by the video AC (i.e. $k = 10$) to ensure that video traffic is prioritized. As shown in Fig. 20, the presence of best effort traffic does not harm the delay performance of the videos significantly, since the throughput of the data traffic (shown in subplot) will be sacrificed in order to better accommodate the video flows as the number of stations increases. We conclude that with the proposed algorithm the video quality can be preserved even when data traffic coexists in the WLAN.

B.6 Impact of Channel Errors

Since our algorithm estimates the collision probability by solely relying on the retry flags of the correctly received frames, it is not able to distinguish whether the retransmission were caused by collisions or channel errors. Channel errors may be wrongly interpreted as collisions, leading to an unnecessary increase of the contention window and therefore to a suboptimal configuration. In order to assess the impact of channel errors upon our approach we performed the following experiment. We varied the

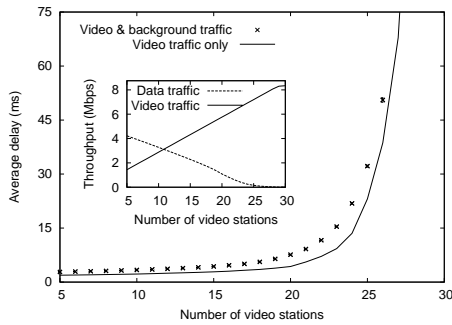


Fig. 20: Delay performance under mixed traffic.

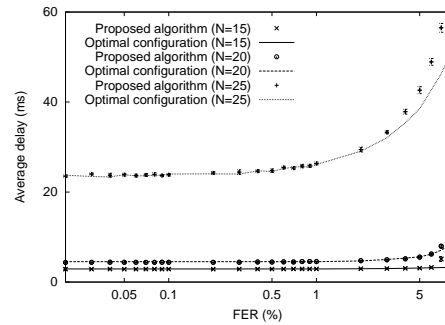


Fig. 21: Delay performance under channel errors.

frame error rate (FER) up to 8%, which is the minimum radio performance imposed by the [IEEE 802.11b 1999] specification to ensure satisfactory performance between equipment manufactured by different system vendors for different number of stations in the WLAN. We compared the performance of our proposal against the static optimal configuration obtained through numerical search, which does not change the configuration upon failed transmissions and therefore uses always the optimal contention window value. From the results illustrated in Fig. 21 we conclude that with the proposed scheme errors have a minimal impact on the performance.