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Do I Smell Coffee? The Tale of a 360° Mulsemedia Experience

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One of the main challenges in current multimedia networking environments is to find solutions to help accommodate the next generation of mobile application classes with stringent Quality of Service (QoS) requirements whilst enabling Quality of Experience (QoE) provisioning for users. One such application class, featured in this paper, is 360° mulsemedia—*multiple sensorial media*—which enriches 360° video by adding sensory effects that stimulate human senses beyond those of sight and hearing, such as the tactile and olfactory ones. In this paper, we present a conceptual framework for 360° mulsemedia delivery and a 360° mulsemedia-based prototype that enables users to experience 360° mulsemedia content. User evaluations revealed that highest video resolutions do not necessarily lead to the highest QoE levels in our experimental setup.

Therefore, bandwidth savings can be leveraged with no detrimental impact on QoE.

In recent years, innovations in electronics have led to a significant increase in demand for new services and use cases. Future wireless networks are expected to enable ubiquitous connectivity for users, machines, and devices and provide support for an unimaginable exchange of data and multimedia content. In such heterogeneous multi-user, multi-machine, multi-device, multi-technology, and multi-application environment, QoE is foreseen to become the main differentiator between network operators and content providers¹⁻².

Given current advances, the shift from content-delivery applications to deftness-delivery applications becomes more popular. According to this new paradigm, human-machine interaction meets a new technological dimension that enables real-time tactile control of remote objects. So-called tactile Internet applications find their usefulness in many domains such as health care, sports, entertainment, gaming, or smart grids³. Providing an enhanced QoE for mulsemmedia applications constitutes an important challenge since ultra-reliable and ultra-responsive connectivity is required. This puts unprecedented pressure on the underlying networks, where reaction times for haptic interactions should be swift⁴.

In addition to haptic communications, the tactile Internet also integrates audio and visual feedback to increase user-perceived quality⁵. In this multi-sensory, multi-information environment, subjective QoE evaluations can be carried out by involving human subjects in order to test, for instance, the user-perceived effect of the speed of system responsiveness, video quality degradation or masking of audio feedback in different application domains. Whilst subjective QoE evaluations can be laborious and time-consuming, QoS parameters related more to the communication system performance can be used to compute objective QoE metrics, which approximate the quality of the auditory, visual and/or haptic feedback in the tactile Internet. Whilst objective QoE metrics have been questioned in respect to their correlation with actual human judgments, it is foreseen that high performance of objective QoE for tactile Internet applications can be obtained if the following challenges are addressed: network slicing, reduced air-interface latency, intelligent radio resource management, and edge-computing⁵.

Besides tactile Internet applications, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR) and omnidirectional or 360° video could also benefit from the availability of high-performance network infrastructures. However, these applications require massive computational capability, high bandwidth communications, and ultra-low end-to-end latency. In interactive 360° video streaming, 360° views of captured scenes can be explored according to the user viewport position. Here, the entire VR system must respond in less than 10ms. Failing to meet this requirement due to overheads associated with factors such as encoding and compression, fast head movement or unfavorable network conditions, will result in users having a poor QoE. To alleviate this, some approaches adopt motion-based predictive models to improve both subjective and objective QoE evaluations of 360° video applications^{6,7}.

Much akin to the case of the tactile Internet, 360° video applications could also benefit from the same principle to improve the overall QoE performance, regardless of other factors such as dynamic network conditions. In this context, we introduce a new application type entitled 360° mulsemmedia⁸. In these applications, the 360° media is enriched with additional sensory effects such as haptic/wind, heat or smell. Being equipped with VR headsets, users can experience different intensities of wind, heat, and scent from the captured scenes according to their viewport positions. In traditional mulsemmedia systems, olfactory and wind capabilities are able to strongly improve the perceived sense of reality when experiencing conventional video content^{9,10}. With this strong premise, it is foreseen that 360° mulsemmedia could revolutionize the streaming technology and enhance the user-perceived quality even when the quality of the 360° video is degraded due to different factors.

In this paper, we introduce a new conceptual framework for 360° mulsemmedia delivery over networks. At the server-side, the 360° video content is enhanced with multi-sensory information like wind and scent and transmitted over the radio interface. At the user side, a prototype is built to playback the 360° mulsemmedia content. The proposed prototype is validated through subjective tests. Furthermore, the impact of different 360° mulsemmedia content is analyzed to find out whether 360° video quality variations, when presented with sensory effects, affect the user-perceived quality.

360° MULSEMEDIA SYSTEM

The 360° mulsemmedia delivery system consists of three main entities: (1) server-side; (2) network delivery side; and (3) the end-user side as depicted in Figure 1. At the server-side, the 360° mulsemmedia content is captured, stored, adapted according to the networking conditions and delivered to end-users. The 360° multi-sensory information is encoded by specialized devices

and synchronized with 360° video scenes in both temporal and spatial dimensions. An alternative would be to derive the scent and wind effects based only on the omnidirectional video content but this approach would involve extra image processing overhead.

Spatially, 360° video content must be decomposed in geometric layouts to be optimally processed by encoders. 360° mulsemmedia can be implemented on any type of 360° video decomposition layouts such as equirectangular, pyramidal, cube map or rhombic dodecahedron¹¹. However, in this article, we opt for the equirectangular decomposition to help the reader to better understand the concept. According to this principle, 360° video frames are decomposed in larger equirectangular panoramic images. The proposed concept is flexible and works within a wired plus wireless environment. However, the user access side is assumed to be wireless in order to enable the VR connectivity. To reduce the bandwidth utilization of such large video content, for transmission over both wired and wireless networks, the tiling approach is mostly used in which case the panoramic images are spatially divided into small equirectangular tiles. Given the fact that most of the existing 2D video encoders are operating on the equirectangular scales¹¹, it is very efficient to use them for panoramic images. Since these encoders operate tile-by-tile, an increased scalability is foreseen to be obtained when varying the tiling granularity. The tiling granularity is supposed to be high enough to cover a wide range of user viewports. An optimal number of tiles must be determined for the video equirectangular representation in order to increase the encoding efficiency and minimize the storage overhead and bandwidth utilization. A study conducted by Zhou et al.¹², for instance, reveals an optimal number of tiles equal to 100 for certain video resolutions (1920 × 960, 3840 × 1920 pixels). The associated 360° multi-sensory effects could follow the same layout and tiling procedure to enhance the user-perceived quality based on the experienced viewports.

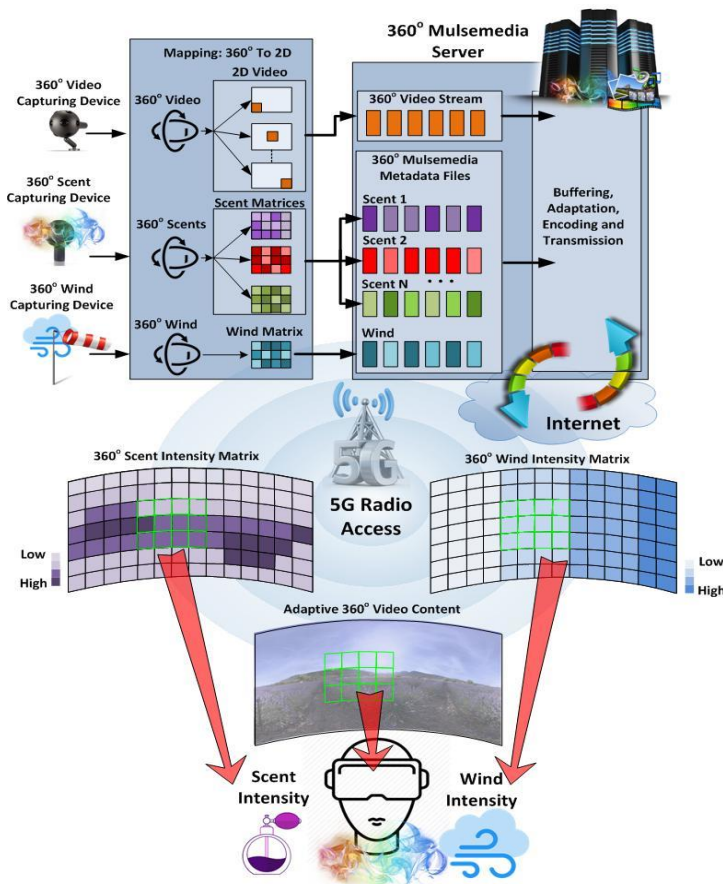


Figure 1. The 360° Mulsemmedia Concept.

360° Mulsemmedia: Concept, Capturing, and Mapping

Alongside video tiles, 360° mulsemmedia considers additional information regarding the types and intensities of the sensorial components of each video tile. An example is shown in Figure 1, where the wind and different scents are considered to be infused from the real world to improve the user experience. Conceptually, for each 360° video frame, a matrix of intensities for each individual sensory effect (wind and many scents, in this case) must be captured. The structures of matrices for wind and scent sensory effects (number of columns and rows) must be identical with the structure of the video matrix. The intensity values of scent and wind matrices represent the captured intensities of each sensory device which makes up the 360° sensory device.

Although in Figure 1 only wind and scents are considered as multi-sensory effects, the proposed system can be extended to incorporate other sensory effects such as vibration, heat or lighting. Vibration can be correlated with the wind intensities, whereas heat and lighting can be derived based on the omnidirectional video content. For example, for a sudden increase of pixels intensity in a certain region of the omnidirectional video, the lighting effect can be activated according to the current user Field of View (FoV).

By using 360° anemometers, the wind directions and intensities can be appropriately captured. As far as scents capture is concerned, one can utilize a specialized odor sensing system employing the principles of scentography. Here, a scent is captured by using a special type of sensor—a Quartz Crystal Microbalance (QCM)—coated with sensing films that are considered stationary phase materials for gas chromatography¹³. For multi-scent capture, several QCMs are needed for each odor and a machine learning-based system is needed to properly detect each scent intensity. The detection system is learned to give the right intensity of each captured scent based on a priori determined calibration curves. When recording 360° scents, an array of sensing systems is used to represent the intensity levels for each video tile.

The 360° intensity matrices for multi-sensory content must be harmonized in both time and spatial domains with the 360° video content. In the example, the capturing devices for both wind and scents sensory objects must work at the same sampling rate as and in sync with the sampling process of the 360° video and audio content. Conceptually, when capturing the multi-sensory effects, each device has its own sampling frequency. Sensory data can be multiplexed with the video content in different data streams, by using MPEG-V TS, for example.

360° Mulsemmedia Server

For bandwidth management reasons, an FoV is defined for each user device, comprising the tiles corresponding to the viewport together with its neighboring tiles, all of which are transmitted with higher quality than the remaining tiles. As shown in Figure 1, the server can have many representations of FoV-based panoramic video according to the viewport position of each end-user. Regarding the 360° multi-sensory effects, all matrices with intensities are delivered together with the FoV-based panoramic video. Due to fast head movements, the system may not react within 10ms and the user viewport could experience scenes located outside of FoV region. In this case, the video quality is poor, but the overall perceived quality could be improved when experiencing additional multi-sensory effects given by the matrices of sensorial intensities.

Different bandwidth adaptation solutions could be implemented at the server-side to match the 360° mulsemmedia content to the momentary networking conditions. One possible solution would be to adopt the Dynamic Adaptive Streaming over HTTP (DASH) protocol. At certain time periods, network conditions may require the server to decrease the FoV-based video quality in order to minimize the ratio of lost packets, and hence, to avoid a strong degradation of user-perceived quality. The information regarding the 360° multi-sensory effects can be sent periodically by using MPEG-V files. Additional specifications can be included here for each sensory effect, such as duration and intensity for each video tile.

360° Multimedia Content Rendering and Synchronization

Much like any other video content, 360° video is represented according to a standard coding format. To this end, the H.264 standard is able to encode/decode the panoramic 360° video frames tile-by-tile, thus ensuring full compatibility with more traditional video formats. Since each tile is decoded independently, the tile synchronization for each frame must be performed properly before view rendering. An important aspect to be addressed here is the synchronization overhead. This can be reduced by setting an optimal number of tiles, that depends on encoding efficiency, storage overhead and bandwidth utilization.

On the end-user side, each user must be equipped with VR glasses connected to devices capable of emitting sensory effects (e.g. olfaction, wind). An appropriate system of software and hardware is then needed to render the 360° multimedia content.

360° MULTIMEDIA: USER PROTOTYPE

With the aim of providing immersion, wearable devices such as VR goggles playing 360° media allow users to freely rotate their heads, to change the angle and look at interest points in the panoramic video. This is a step further compared to by now traditional headsets playing 2D videos, some of which need an attached smartphone to play content whereas others are standalone and work mainly based on content streaming. Despite being successful, these commercial headsets do not support multimedia content yet, albeit there are some incipient proposals¹⁴. To overcome this hurdle, we have designed an end-user prototype as illustrated in Figure 2 that enriches the 360° video viewing by adding other sensory effects like scent and wind, which enables the users to immerse themselves more deeply into the experience.

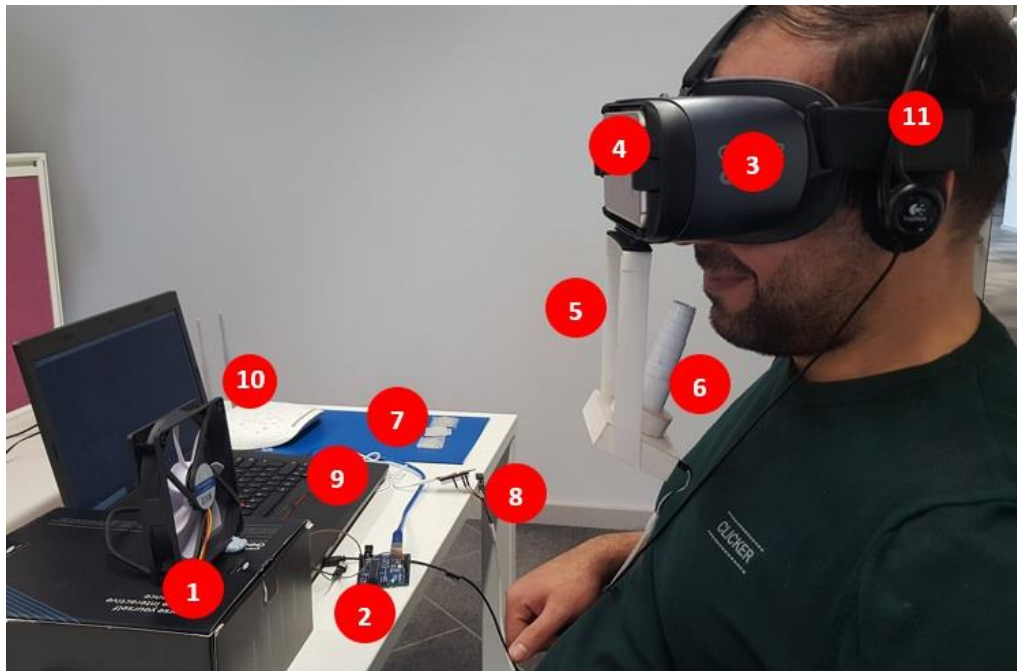


Figure 2. Setup of the experiment. (1) Wind blower fan, (2) Arduino Uno, (3) VR headset, (4) Smartphone, (5) Scent emitter, (6) Conic pipe, (7) Mesh-bags, (8) Arduino Nano, (9) Laptop, (10) Wi-Fi router, and (11) headphones.

We took into account the work of Saleme et al.^{14,15}, who have explored both multimedia hardware and software solutions and have found gaps in the literature mainly related to reuse and adaptability of multimedia solutions. They proposed a framework named PlaySEM Sensory Effects Renderer (SER) to integrate different applications to varied devices in a straightforward

fashion by reusing their mulsemmedia renderer that supports MPEG-V, a standard to describe Sensory Effects Metadata (SEM), and provides the necessary protocols to interact with our application. From that perspective and considering the fact that PlaySEM SER has been successfully applied to different scenarios of usage not only for its authors⁴, it catered for our prototype. Thus, the integration of our system reflects the end-user side of the conceptual approach introduced in Figure 1 and follows the tutorial proposed by Saleme et al.¹⁴. First, we annotated in the temporal domain only the videos with sensory effects, that is, 360° audiovisual content written in MPEG-V. The spatial annotation is currently under investigation and makes the objective of future work. Therefore, videos are encoded by using the tiling approach but only the temporal synchronization with multi-sensory components is deployed at this stage. The annotation files were not encoded with the videos, but instead they were embedded into a Unity solution for Android capable of reproducing equirectangular videos and communicate via a wireless network with PlaySEM SER.

PlaySEM SER and the 360° application communicates via WebSocket. After opening the videos on the 360° application, their correspondent SEMs were sent to PlaySEM SER, which in turn, pre-processed the SEMs converting them to commands to handle the specific devices configured for the experiment, as described by Saleme et al.¹⁵. Upon the end of this process, the mulsemmedia renderer sent a cue to the 360° mulsemmedia application to start playing the video. Finally, PlaySEM SER, which was connected via Bluetooth to the Scent Device and via USB to the Wind Device, rendered the wind and scent effects synchronized with the 360° audiovisual content.

The prototype depicted in Figure 2 comprises: (1) Wind blower fan used to render the wind effect; (2) Arduino Uno which controls the wind blower fan; (3) Samsung Gear VR headset that provides a virtual reality experience; (4) Smartphone used to play the 360° videos on the VR headset; (5) Scent emitter prototype with a small size cooling fan inside and the scent cartridge; (6) Extensible spiral conic pipe to direct the scent from the fan towards the user's nose; (7) Mesh bags with scent crystals that are going to be placed in the scent cartridge; (8) DFRobot Bluno Nano is employed to control the scent emitter; (9) Laptop running a mulsemmedia renderer; (10) WiFi router for wireless connectivity between the smartphone and the laptop; and (11) Headphone to enable the sound of the video and immerse the user fully into the experience. One of the most exciting novelties of the proposed prototype is the scent emitter and the spiral conic pipe shape which were attached to the VR headset. The conic shape helps to direct the scent towards the subject's nose and avoids the reduction in intensity and the spreading of the scent into the environment due to the wind blower fan which creates the air-flow. Moreover, the spiral shape enables us to adjust the pipe length accordingly based on the subject.

SUBJECTIVE QUALITY ASSESSMENT

In order to evaluate the performance of the proposed prototype, subjective quality assessment was carried out. A total of 48 participants (27 male, 21 female) aged from 16 to 65 participated in the study. Most participants had prior VR experiences; 24 self-reported as unfamiliar with subjective video quality evaluation, 16 were familiar, whilst 8 had worked in the field before.

Three types of 360° mulsemmedia content were used in our study. These comprised three 360° videos coupled with airflow (of varying intensities) and scent (diesel (grease and oil?), coffee, and lavender) effects. They are further classified and described as follows: (1) Static: Lavender Field—the user is standing in a fixed position in the middle of a lavender field. There is no movement in the background and the user can only feel the wind and the lavender smell. (2) Semi-dynamic: Coffee Shop—the user is standing in a fixed position inside a coffee shop. However, this time there is movement in the background where the waiter is preparing the coffee. The user smells the coffee aroma and experiences a gust of air coming from the coffee machine signaling that the coffee preparation process had ended. (3) Dynamic: Roller Coaster—the user is located inside a fast-moving carriage. The background moves along with the carriage. The user experiences a whiff of diesel (grease and oil) as well as the wind in the face as he or she is riding the roller coaster. Table 1 presents a timeframe when the sensory effects are started and stopped as well as their corresponding intensity. A value of 100% intensity for wind or for scent effect corresponds to the maximum power of the sensory device. The variations occur in func-

tion of the scenes in each video sample. Each 360° panoramic video was encoded at four different quality levels: HD, Full HD, 2.5K, and 4K. The framerate was 60 fps (Coffee Shop), 25 fps (Lavender Field), and 30 fps (Roller Coaster), except for 4K that was limited to 30fps due to restriction on the Unity Application to reproduce the videos on the smartphone. Furthermore, the following codecs were used: H264 - MPEG-4 AVC (part 10) (avc1); chroma location: left; and projection: equirectangular. The duration of each video sample was 60 seconds.

In Table 1, timeframes are set based on a consensus among a group of researchers after watching the videos and experiencing them on the developed prototype. According to Murray et al.¹⁶, the timeframe setting for multi-sensorial effects is critical from the perspective of user QoE enhancement in traditional mulsemmedia applications and can be considered further as part of future work in 360° mulsemmedia.

Each participant watched all three 360° mulsemmedia content types at the same quality level in a randomized order. After watching each video, participants rated its overall quality level on a 5-point scale (1-Bad, 2-Poor, 3-Fair, 4-Good, 5-Excellent). Apart from assessing the user-perceived quality of the 360° content, subjects were also asked to rate the impact of the airflow and olfactory effects on the sense of reality and enjoyment on a 5-point scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree.

Table 1. Timeframe of Sensory Effects Associated with the Scenes in the Video Samples.

360° Video	Wind Effect			Scent Effect		
	Start	Stop	Intensity	Start	Stop	Intensity
Lavender Field	0s	60s	30%	0s	60s	100%
Coffee Shop	5s	6s	100%	37s	60s	100%
Roller Coaster	0s	27s	30%	27s	37s	100%
	27s	37s	100%			
	37s	60s	50%	43s	48s	100%

Impact of Sensory Effects and User Enjoyment on the Experience

Participants' responses highlighted positive to very positive attitudes to the 360° mulsemmedia experience— more than 80% of users agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the experience, as seen in Figure 3. This is also reflected in a Mean Opinion Score (MOS) value of 3.9063, which a *one-sample t-test* highlights as being statistically significant ($t= 16.463, p=.000$). The same trend can be observed in terms of participants' agreement with the statements that olfaction and airflow effects heighten the sense of reality—76% of users agreeing or strongly agreeing with this in respect of olfaction and 70% as far as airflow is concerned. The MOS for the two types of sensorial effects are 3.9028 and 3.833 respectively and again *one sample t-test* confirm the statistically significant nature of these results ($t=10.847, p=.000$ for olfaction; $t=10.254, p=.000$ for airflow). All underline the enhanced QoE that 360° mulsemmedia affords users.

Impact of Video Encoding Quality on Human Perceived Visual Quality

To study the impact of the user-perceived quality of the four encoding qualities of the 360° videos (Lavender, Coffee, and Roller Coaster) the participants were asked to rate the overall quality on a 1 to 5 point scale (Bad to Excellent). For each encoding quality, the mean value represented by the MOS as well as the standard deviation (STDEV) of the statistical distribution of the as-

assessment scores were computed and illustrated in Figure 4, respectively. The average values (AVG) of the results for the four encoding qualities are also listed.

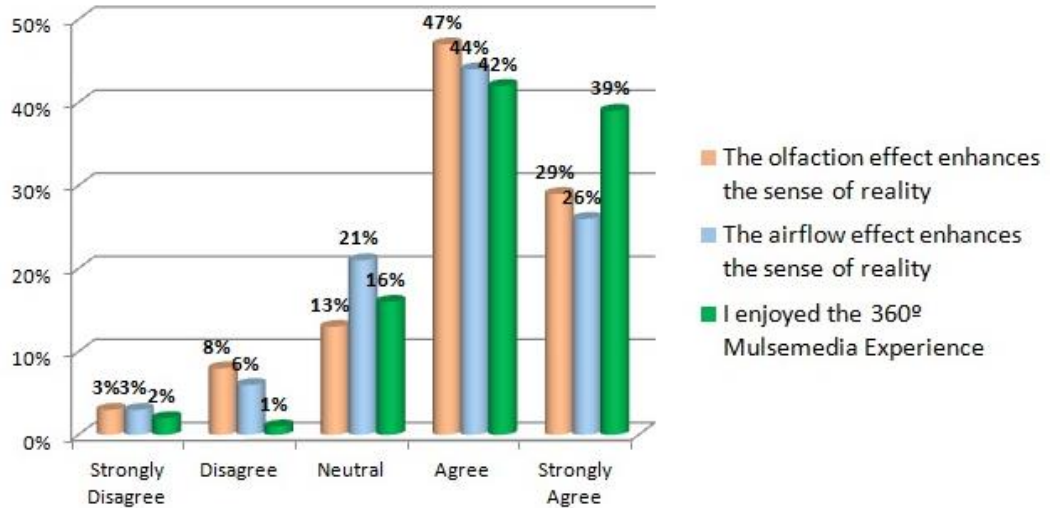


Figure 3. Results on the Sensory Effects and User Enjoyment.

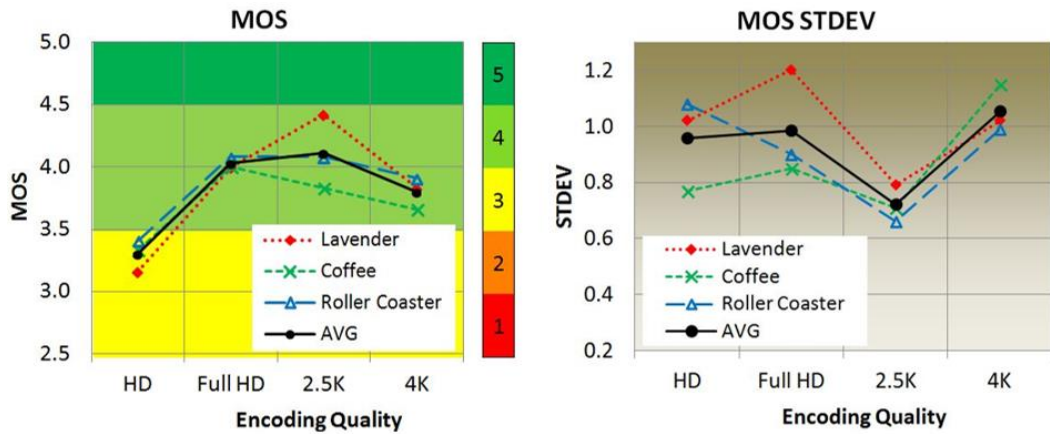


Figure 4. Subjective Assessment Results: on the left side MOS, on the right side MOS Standard Deviation.

Analyzing the subjective assessment results, we give the following interpretations and remarks:

1. More data does not necessarily mean an increase in user-perceived quality. The results show that the Full HD, 2.5K and 4K encoding qualities are all perceived as ‘Good’ by the participants while the HD encoding quality is perceived as ‘Fair’. This means that we can safely say that there is a threshold above which, even if we generate more data, it does not make a significant difference in the user-perceived quality. Thus, in our set-up, this threshold is somewhere between Full HD and 2.5K as the MOS scores for 4K start decreasing. The *Pearson correlation* further indicates that there is a weak decreasing relationship between MOS and STDEV values ($r=-0.31226$). Consequently, the scores across the participants tend to have a higher variation for the videos with lower perceived quality.

2. Transmitting high data rates traffic puts significant pressure on the underlying networks. Thus, the findings in the first interpretation could help the network operators in accommodating more users at lower encoding qualities while maintaining an acceptable user-perceived quality. However, to be able to meet the strict QoS requirements of the 360° mulsemmedia traffic class and to maximize the overall QoS satisfaction, the integration of new mechanisms such as Machine Learning⁸ needs to be considered. In this sense, two-stage reinforcement learning can be potentially used to improve the QoS provisioning when scheduling heterogeneous traffic in 5G access networks¹⁷. In the first stage, the scheduling order of different traffic classes is decided at each time instant to avoid the over-provisioning of higher prioritized traffic classes such as 360° mulsemmedia and the starvation of some lower prioritized services. In the second stage, the most convenient scheduler is selected in the frequency domain for each ordered traffic class to perform the radio resource allocation.
3. The decrease in user-perceived quality between the 2.5K and 4K video encoding rates as illustrated in Figure 4 highlights the fact that the use of 4K resolution in 360° mulsemmedia might be excessive considering our setup, and therefore, this can be explored as proposed in the second interpretation. Whilst this might have been influenced by hardware limitations of the HMD device, such as the field of view and screen-door effect¹⁸, it nonetheless reinforces (but in the mulsemmedia arena) issues with which the community has been aware of.

Impact of Video Content on the 360° Mulsemmedia Experience

Looking at the impact of the video content on the MOS obtained from the subjective tests, and illustrated in Figure 4, it can be noticed that regardless of the video content, the user-perceived quality follows nearly the same distribution with the HD video levels perceived as ‘Fair’ and the remaining of Full HD, 2.5K and 4K video levels perceived as ‘Good’. According to the user profiles, 52% of the participants are mainly interested in watching dynamic video content, 23% are mainly watching semi-dynamic video content and 25% are mainly watching static video content on a regular basis on their mobile devices. However, the results indicated that on average the Lavender video was more enjoyable, followed by the Roller Coaster and then the Coffee video. The increase in MOS scores for the Lavender video can be related to the pleasant lavender smell and the static nature of the content. It was also noted that on average the participants found the intensity of the olfaction effect ‘Just Fine’ towards ‘Strong’ for Lavender and ‘Just Fine’ for Coffee and Roller Coaster videos. For the airflow effect, the average intensity was reported as ‘Just Fine’ across all contents. Moreover, the MOS results for each video content class still validate our first interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

With the advent of next-generation wireless networks come also the promise of delivering innovative user experiences that will take advantage of the significant improvements in terms of throughput and latency that 5G has in stock. However, this pressurizes the network operators in trying to understand the QoS requirements for these new applications in order to provide an acceptable level of QoE to their customers. In this context, this paper introduces a new type of application class referred to as 360° mulsemmedia, which enriches the 360° video by adding other sensory effects like scent and wind to enable the end-users to immerse themselves more deeply into the 360° video experience. Indeed, we developed a prototype to enable the users to experience 360° mulsemmedia content in an unprecedented fashion. User evaluations revealed that 360° mulsemmedia delivered enhanced levels of QoE, but also that more data does not necessarily attract an increase in user-perceived quality. Indeed, 4K video quality used in a 360° mulsemmedia context was found to lead to lower QoE levels than when a 2.5K video was employed to the same end taking into account our setup. This highlights and suggests that network operators could exploit significant bandwidth savings in the delivery of 360° mulsemmedia with no consequent degradation in user QoE. The precise amount of network resources that can be saved will

depend on the length and encoding parameters of the video that will be transmitted as well as the device characteristics on which it is experienced (e.g. VR Gear). This warrants further investigation. Also, as part of our future work, we are planning to find out the optimal number of tiles for the FoV and the optimal number of neighboring tiles that must be transmitted at a higher quality than the rest of the tiles from the panoramic video in order to get an acceptable QoE level. A worthwhile future study should also examine the impact of human factors in 360° mulsemmedia QoE. Last but not least, future work will consider extending the prototype to an end-to-end solution integrating omnidirectional wind effects as well as other sensorial data. All our worthy future pursuits.

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