FRAME RATE CONTROL METHOD, FRAME RATE CONTROL DEVICE, AND FRAME RATE CONTROL PROGRAM

An object is to suppress an instantaneous increase in the computational complexity of an encoder and an information amount of an encoding result without increasing a delay even when input timing of input video is not constant and fluctuates. A frame rate control method for adjusting a frame rate of input video to a frame rate at which an encoder is able to perform encoding includes: a step of determining whether the number of pictures input in the past within a predetermined time from a time when a determination target picture of dropping is input exceeds a predetermined threshold value; and a step of discarding the determination target picture if the number of pictures exceeds the threshold value and designating the determination target picture as an encoding target if the number of pictures does not exceed the threshold value.

FIG. 1
The present invention relates to frame rate control in video coding, and more particularly to a frame rate control method, a frame rate control apparatus, and a frame rate control program which control the computational complexity and an information amount in an encoder.


The picture dropping determination unit 201 of the frame rate control method, a frame rate control apparatus, and a frame rate control program which control the computational complexity and an information amount in an encoder.

Description

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to frame rate control in video coding, and more particularly to a frame rate control method, a frame rate control apparatus, and a frame rate control program which control the computational complexity and an information amount in an encoder.


BACKGROUND ART

[0003] Conventionally, when a frame rate at which encoding is possible is different from a frame rate of video input from an imaging device or the like to an encoder, technology which performs conversion into the frame rate at which the encoding is possible by performing a process of dropping the input video is used (see Patent Document 1).

[0004] FIG. 5 illustrates a block diagram illustrating a configuration of an apparatus in accordance with the conventional technology. FIG. 6 illustrates a flowchart of a picture dropping determination unit in the conventional technology.

[0005] In FIG. 5, an encoder 200 is, for example, an apparatus which encodes input video in accordance with an encoding scheme of H.264 or the like and outputs an encoded video stream. The encoder 200 is provided with: a motion detection unit 203 which performs motion detection for each of blocks obtained by dividing a frame; a prediction unit 204 which performs prediction using a motion vector detected by the motion detection unit 203; an orthogonal transform unit 205 which performs an orthogonal transform on a residual signal between an input signal and a predicted signal in accordance with a discrete cosine transform (DCT) or the like; a quantization unit 206 which quantizes transform coefficients; an inverse quantization unit 207 which inversely quantizes a quantized result; an inverse orthogonal transform unit 208 which performs an inverse orthogonal transform on transform coefficients; a locally decoded picture storage unit 209 which stores a locally decoded picture obtained by adding the predicted signal to an output of the inverse orthogonal transform unit 208; a variable length encoding unit 210 which performs variable length encoding on an output of the quantization unit 206; a multiplexing unit 211 which multiplexes encoding information; a buffer unit 212 which stores encoded information and outputs it as the encoded video stream; and a control unit 213 which performs encoding control on the quantization unit 206 and the other units in accordance with a generated bit amount or the like.

[0006] When a frame rate at which encoding by the encoder 200 is possible is different from a frame rate of the video input from an imaging device or the like to the encoder 200 measured by a frame rate measurement unit 202, a picture dropping determination unit 201 performs conversion into the frame rate at which the encoding is possible by performing a process of dropping the input video. The frame rate measurement unit 202 measures the frame rate of the input video and notifies the picture dropping determination unit 201 of the frame rate.

[0007] The picture dropping determination unit 201 executes the process illustrated in FIG. 6. First, the encoder 200 sets a frame rate TA capable of being input (step S200), designates the frame rate of the input video as CA (step S201), and calculates a dropped frame interval value n = CA/(CA-TA) from CA (step S202). Next, a picture number i is initially set to 1 and the number of dropped pictures d is initially set to 0 (step S203), and the following process is performed.

[0008] A determination as to whether a picture i is to be dropped is made based on whether the picture number i of a determination target picture exceeds a value obtained by multiplying n by the number of dropped pictures d so far. That is, a determination as to whether i ≥ n×(d+1) is made, and steps S205 and S206 are executed if i is greater than or equal to n×(d+1). In step S205, 1 is added to d; in step S206, the picture i is dropped. If i is less than n×(d+1), the picture i is not dropped. Until processing of the entire video is completed (YES in step S207), the above steps S204 to S207 are iterated while 1 is added to i (step S208).

[0009] As described above, in the conventional technology, the number of dropped pictures which represents the number of pictures of the video from which one picture is dropped is calculated from a ratio between an input frame rate for the encoder and the frame rate at which the encoding is possible, and a process of dropping the input video is performed in accordance with the calculated number of dropped pictures.

[0010] In order to apply the present technology, the input frame rate CA for the encoder must be known in advance. Thus, it is necessary to measure the frame rate CA of the input video for the encoder using, for example, the frame rate measurement unit 202 illustrated in FIG. 5. However, for example, when the input timing of the input video fluctuates, the frame rate at the time of the measurement may not always be maintained. Thus, a situation in which many pictures are unnecessarily dropped or a situation in which the number of times of dropping is insufficient occurs.

Prior Art Document

Patent Document

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

Problems to be solved by the Invention

However, in an application for video communication such as a videophone, it is assumed that video is input using a Web camera or the like connected to a personal computer (PC) and encoded by a software encoder and an encoded video stream is transmitted to a reception end. In this case, timing when the video captured by the camera is input to the encoder may not be constant and may fluctuate due to, for example, a lack of resources of a central processing unit (CPU). In such a case, an input frame rate per unit time may be intermittently high.

FIG. 7 illustrates an example in which input timing of video fluctuates. Although capturing by a camera is being executed at a fixed frame rate at regular timings, CPU resources become insufficient immediately after picture 2 is input and a process in a previous stage of the encoder is delayed, and thus picture 3 and subsequent pictures are delayed and sequentially input to the encoder. Thereafter, the lack of the resources of the CPU is resolved and the video accumulated in the previous stage of the encoder is input to the encoder one after another.

In an encoder in which a real-time process is assumed, if the number of pictures to be encoded per unit time is increased, a bit amount and the computational complexity are intermittently increased. As illustrated in FIG. 7, when a time domain is divided into sections each having a fixed time, while the number of pictures in sections 1 to 4 is one, the number of pictures in section 5 is 3, and the necessary bit amount and the necessary computational complexity are about three times compared to those in the other sections. Such fluctuation of the timing of the video input to the encoder causes a delay due to a capacity of a transmission path through which an encoded video stream is transmitted being exceeded as well as packet loss in the worst case, leading to the degradation of video quality at the reception end.

As in the technology disclosed in Patent Document 1, the number of dropped pictures representing the number of input video pictures from which one picture is dropped is calculated from a ratio between an input frame rate for the encoder and the frame rate at which the encoding is possible, and it is necessary for the input frame rate for the encoder to be known in advance when a dropping process is performed in accordance with the calculated number of dropped pictures.

Thus, the following problems arise even when the input frame rate for the encoder is measured. As in the example of FIG. 7, when the number of frames capable of being encoded by the encoder is 1 in one section, the number of frames to be input to the encoder is 1 in sections 1 to 4. In view of measurement results of sections 1 to 4, the number of frames to be input to the encoder is equal to the number of frames capable of being encoded, and thus it is not necessary to drop any frame. However, the number of frames to be input in section 5 is 3. If the input video of section 5 is not dropped in view of the measurement results of sections 1 to 4, video exceeding the number of frames capable of being encoded is input to the encoder.

An object of the present invention is to solve the above problems and to control the computational complexity and an information amount of an encoder within a given range even when the input timing of the input video is not constant and fluctuates.

Means for Solving the Problems

In order to solve the above problems, the present invention determines whether to drop an input video frame so that the number of video frames to be encoded is not instantaneously increased. The determination is made based on whether the number of frames input in the past within a unit time from the time when a determination target picture is input exceeds a predetermined threshold value, and the input frame rate for the encoder determined by the input timing of the input video is not used. If the above number of frames exceeds the threshold value, the frame is dropped; otherwise, encoding is performed.

An operation of the present invention is as follows. The input frame rate for the encoder is not used in a picture dropping determination. Thus, even when the input timing of the input video fluctuates and the frame rate is not constantly maintained, a satisfactory determination result can be obtained and appropriate picture dropping can be performed. Accordingly, even when the input timing of the input video fluctuates, it is possible to prevent the number of video frames to be encoded from being instantaneously increased by using a picture dropping process. That is, it is possible to suppress an instantaneous increase in the computational complexity of an encoder and an instantaneous increase in an information amount of a video bitstream.

In addition, a determination as to whether the number of pictures input in the past within a unit time from the time when a determination target picture is input exceeds a threshold value calculated from a set frame rate is made, i.e., a determination using only information that is already known when the target picture is input is made, and thus a delay does not occur.

It is to be noted that because the present technology does not use information during encoding, it can be configured independent of the encoder, and the conventional encoder can be used without modification.

Advantageous Effects of Invention

The present invention provides the following advantages even when the input timing of the input video is not constant and fluctuates.
(1) It is possible to suppress an instantaneous increase in the computational complexity of an encoder without increasing a delay.

(2) It is possible to suppress an instantaneous increase in an information amount of an encoded video bitstream without increasing a delay.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS**

[0023] FIG. 1 is a diagram illustrating an example of a picture dropping process in accordance with an example of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a configuration of an apparatus in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a flowchart of a picture dropping determination unit in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating an example of a configuration of a system when the apparatus of the present embodiment is implemented using a computer and a software program.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating a configuration of an apparatus in accordance with a conventional technology.

FIG. 6 is a flowchart of a picture dropping determination unit in the conventional technology.

FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating an example in which input timing of video fluctuates.

**MODES FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION**

[0024] Hereinafter, examples and embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail using the drawings.

[0025] A frame rate \( F_r \) capable of being input to an encoder and a reference frame rate measurement interval \( T_i \) are set based on the throughput or the like of the encoder. Based on the reference frame rate measurement interval \( T_i \), the number of video pictures \( n \) capable of being input within the measurement interval is calculated in advance in accordance with the following equation.

\[
 n = F_r \times T_i
\]

[0026] First to \( n \)th input video pictures input immediately after encoding has started are not designated as a dropping target, and a dropping process is performed on future input video pictures after the \( n \)th picture.

[0027] FIG. 1 illustrates an example of a picture dropping process in accordance with an example of the present invention. In the example of FIG. 1, the frame rate \( F_r \) and the reference frame rate measurement inter-

\[
 F_r = 0.006 \text{ (frames/millisecond (msec))}
\]

\[
 T_i = 500 \text{ (msec)}
\]

[0028] The number of video pictures \( n \) capable of being input within the measurement interval \( T_i \) is calculated as \( n = 0.006 \times 500 = 3 \).

[0029] Hereinafter, a time when each picture is input in the present process, i.e., a time when each picture is output from the previous stage of the encoder such as a camera, is stamped as a time stamp of each picture and used in a determination. Because \( n = 3 \), pictures 1 to 3 are designated as a non-dropping target and unconditionally input to the encoder. When picture 4 is input, if the time stamp of picture 1, which is a past frame by \( n = 3 \) frames, is past relative to the time before the time when picture 4 is input by \( T_i = 500 \text{ msec} \), in other words, when the time stamp of picture 1 is designated as \( t_1 \) and the time stamp of picture 4 is designated as \( t_4 \), a determination as to whether the following equation is established is made and if the following equation is established, picture 4 is not dropped.

\[
 (t_4 - t_1) > T_i
\]

[0030] In the case of the example of FIG. 1, \( (t_4 - t_1) > 500 \) is established, which meets this condition. It is to be noted that this determination is equivalent to a determination as to whether the number of pictures input within a past period having the frame rate measurement interval \( T_i \), which is a unit time, from the time stamp of picture 4 serving as a starting point exceeds the number of video pictures \( n \) capable of being input.

[0031] A similar comparison is performed between picture 5 and picture 2, and a determination as to whether picture 2 does not exist within past \( T_i \) (= 500 msec) is made. That is, the determination of the following equation is made.

\[
 (t_5 - t_2) > T_i
\]

[0032] In this example, picture 5 is dropped because \( (t_5 - t_2) \leq 500 \) is established.

[0033] Next, a similar comparison is performed on picture 6, and a dropped picture is not counted when a picture of a comparison target is searched for. Because picture 5 has been dropped, the comparison target of picture 6 becomes picture 2. In this example, \( (t_6 - t_2) \) is greater
A frame of input video is first input to the frame rate control unit 101. A time-stamp stamping unit 102 stamps a time stamp ti on the input frame in accordance with a time measured by a time measurement unit 103. A picture dropping determination unit 104 determines whether to drop a picture of the input frame from the frame rate Fr at which encoding by the encoder 100 is possible and the reference frame rate measurement interval Ti, drops the picture of the input frame, if necessary, and inputs its result to the encoder 100.

A configuration and operation of the above encoder 100 are similar to those of the conventional encoder described with reference to FIG. 5. The frame rate control unit 101, which performs dropping adjustment of an input frame for the encoder 100, is different from the conventional technology.

A flow of the process of the picture dropping determination unit 104 in accordance with the present embodiment will be described in accordance with FIG. 3.

Because a picture dropping process is not performed if the picture number i is less than or equal to the number of video pictures n capable of being input, the picture is input to the encoder 100 (steps S103 and S107). If the picture number i becomes greater than the number of video pictures n capable of being input, a determination as to whether the difference between the time stamp ti of the determination target picture i and a time stamp ti'[n-d], of a past picture by (n+d), which is determined by the number of video pictures n capable of being input and the number of dropped pictures d, exceeds the frame rate measurement interval Ts serving as the reference is made (step S104). This determination method is equivalent to a determination as to whether the number of pictures input within a past period having the frame rate measurement interval Ts, which is a unit time, from the time stamp ti of the picture (picture i) having the picture number i serving as a starting point by exceeds the number of video pictures n capable of being input.

The variable length encoding unit 112 performs variable length encoding on the output of the quantization unit 109 and inputs a variable length encoded output to the encoder 100.

FIG. 4 illustrates an example of a configuration of hardware when the apparatus illustrated in FIG. 2 is configured by a computer and a software program. The
present system has a configuration in which a CPU 50 which execute the program, a memory 51 such as a random access memory (RAM) which stores the program and data to be accessed by the CPU 50, a video signal input unit 52 (which may be a storage unit which stores a video signal by a disk apparatus or the like) which inputs an encoding target video signal from a camera or the like, a program storage apparatus 53 which stores a video encoding program 531 and a frame rate control program 532, and an encoded video stream output unit 54 (which may be a storage unit which stores an encoded video stream by a disk apparatus or the like) are connected by a bus.

The CPU 50 encodes an input video signal input by the video signal input unit 52 by executing the video encoding program 531 and the frame rate control program 532 loaded from the program storage apparatus 53 to the memory 51, and outputs an encoded video stream of an encoding result to a network or the like via the encoded video stream output unit 54. The video encoding program 531 is a program which realizes the function of the encoder 100 of FIG. 2, and the frame rate control program 532 is a program which realizes the function of the frame rate control unit 101 of FIG. 2. It is to be noted that the frame rate control program 532 may be embedded in the video encoding program 531 as part of the video encoding program 531.

While examples and embodiments of the present invention have been described above with reference to the drawings, it is apparent that the examples and the embodiments are mere illustrations of the present invention and that the present invention is not limited to the examples and embodiments described above. Therefore, additions, omissions, substitutions, and other modifications of structural elements can be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the present invention.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The present invention is applicable to, for example, encoding of video. In accordance with the present invention, it is possible to suppress an instantaneous increase in the computational complexity of an encoder and an information amount of an encoded video bitstream without increasing a delay even when input timing of input video fluctuates.

Description of Reference Signs

- Encoder
- Frame rate control unit
- Time-stamp stamping unit
- Time measurement unit
- Picture dropping determination unit
- Motion detection unit

Claims

1. A frame rate control method for adjusting a frame rate of input video to a frame rate at which an encoder is able to perform encoding, the frame rate control method comprising:
   a step of determining whether the number of pictures input in the past within a predetermined time from a time when a determination target picture of dropping is input exceeds a predetermined threshold value; and
   a step of discarding the determination target picture if the number of pictures exceeds the threshold value and designating the determination target picture as an encoding target if the number of pictures does not exceed the threshold value.

2. The frame rate control method according to claim 1, wherein, in the determining step, a determination as to whether the number of input pictures exceeds the predetermined threshold value is made by determining whether the difference between a time stamp \( t_i \) of the determination target picture and a time stamp \( t(i-n-d) \) of a past picture by \( n+d \) which is determined by the number of pictures \( n \) capable of being encoded by the encoder within a frame rate measurement interval \( T_i \) which serves as a reference and which is the predetermined time and the number of dropped pictures \( d \), exceeds the frame rate measurement interval \( T_i \).

3. A frame rate control apparatus which adjusts a frame rate of input video to a frame rate at which an encoder is able to perform encoding, the frame rate control apparatus comprising:
   a determination unit which determines whether the number of pictures input in the past within a predetermined time from a time when a determination target picture of dropping is input exceeds a predetermined threshold value; and
   a dropping unit which discards the determination target picture if the number of pictures exceeds the threshold value and designates the determi-
nation target picture as an encoding target if the number of pictures does not exceed the threshold value.

4. A frame rate control program for causing a computer to execute the frame rate control method according to claim 1 or 2.
FIG. 3

START

S100

SET FRAME RATE Fr CAPABLE OF BEING INPUT AND FRAME RATE MEASUREMENT INTERVAL Ti SERVING AS REFERENCE

S101

DESIGNATE TIME STAMP OF INPUT PICTURE i AS ti

S102

SET NUMBER OF VIDEO PICTURES CAPABLE OF BEING INPUT n=Fr x Ti, PICTURE NUMBER i=1, AND NUMBER OF DROPPED PICTURES d=0

S103

i > n?

S104

YES

ti-t(i-n-d)>Ti?

S105

NO

d=d+1

S106

DROP PICTURE i

S107

INPUT PICTURE i TO ENCODER

S108

HAS PROCESSING OF ENTIRE VIDEO BEEN COMPLETED?

NO

S109

i=i+1

YES

END
FIG. 4
FIG. 6

START

S200

SET FRAME RATE TA CAPABLE OF BEING INPUT

S201

DESIGNATE FRAME RATE OF INPUT VIDEO AS CA

S202

SET DROPPED FRAME INTERVAL VALUE
n = CA / (CA - TA)

S203

SET PICTURE NUMBER i = 1
AND NUMBER OF DROPPED PICTURES d = 0

S204

i > n x (d + 1)?

S205

d = d + 1

S206

DROP PICTURE i

S207

HAS PROCESSING OF ENTIRE VIDEO BEEN COMPLETED?

S208

i = i + 1

S209

END

YES

NO
INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
H04N7/26 (2006.01) i

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
H04N7/26

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1922-1996 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-2013
Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-2013 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-2013

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th>
<th>Relevant to claim No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>JP 63-191488 A (Toshiba Corp.), 08 August 1988 (08.08.1988), entire text; all drawings &amp; US 004833535 A1</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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</table>

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

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REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patent documents cited in the description