

Internet Traffic based Channel Selection in Multi-Radio Multi-Channel Wireless Mesh Networks

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Abstract: Wireless Mesh Networks (WMNs) are the outstanding technology to facilitate wireless broadband Internet access to users. Routers in WMN have multiple radio interfaces to which multiple orthogonal/partially overlapping channels are assigned to improve the capacity of WMN. This paper is focused on channel selection problem in WMN since proper channel selection to radio interfaces of mesh router increases the performance of WMN. To access the Internet through WMN, the users have to associate with one of the mesh routers. Since most of the Internet Servers are still in wired networks, the major dominant traffic of Internet users is in downlink direction i.e. from the gateway of WMN to user. This paper proposes a new method of channel selection to improve the user performance in downlink direction of Internet traffic. The method is scalable and completely distributed solution to the problem of channel selection in WMN. The simulation results indicate the significant improvement in user performance.

Keywords: Mesh networks, Channel selection, Multi-Radio Multi-Channel, Internet Traffic.

1. Introduction

These days, the usage of mobile devices to access the Internet and using services [57] is increasing. The users want to experience the faster accessing of Internet resources as and when they need from everywhere. Wireless Mesh Networks (WMNs) are the promising technology to facilitate the broadband wireless Internet connectivity[1]–[8]. As shown in Fig. 1, the WMN has 3-level hierarchical architecture in which the gateway nodes are present at the top level-1, mesh routers in the next level-2 and the user devices are at the lowest level-3. Specifically, the WMN has two types of mesh nodes: mesh routers and mesh clients. A mesh router has three different types of functionality based on context of communication. A few of mesh routers will behaves like gateway routers which connects to the outside networks like internet with wired network. A few mesh routers perform routing functionality and connected together to form a complete wireless multi-hop mesh backbone. A few mesh routers act as access points to provide network access to users. A mesh router can have one or more functionalities of gateway, router and access point. WMN is widely used in numerous commercial and civilian applications like home networking, enterprise networks etc[9]–[12].

Usually a mesh router has two or more radio interfaces to provide simultaneous transmissions and receptions with other routers and thereby to improve the capacity of WMN. But proper channel allocation to multiple interfaces is

important in improving the performance of WMN. If orthogonal channels available in the spectrum are assigned to interfaces such that no interference occurs with the communications of adjacent routers, the user throughput will be maximum. But the number of orthogonal channels are limited such as IEEE 802.11b standard supports only 3 orthogonal channels and IEEE 802.11a technology has 12 orthogonal channels. Thus, channel selection problem in multi-radio multi-channel WMN is important to consider in improving user performance [13]–[19].

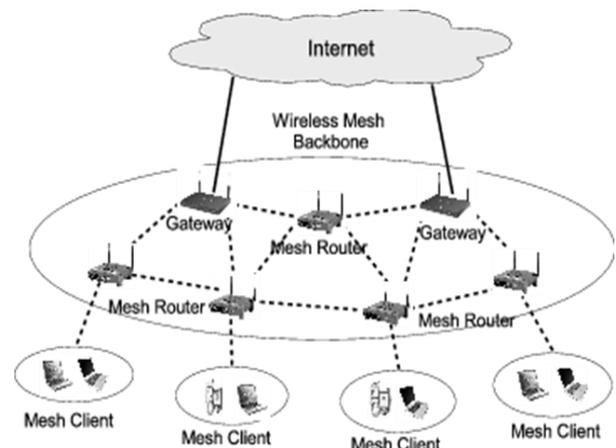


Figure 1: Wireless Mesh Network

The various approaches are specified in literature [13] - [18] [20-30] for allocation of multiple channels and multiple radio interfaces in WMN with each one having its own objective and criteria. This paper proposes a new method, Internet Traffic based Channel Selection (ITCS) with the objective of improving the performance of Internet user in WMN. The basic idea is that most of the Internet traffic of mobile user is in downloading direction than uploading direction because almost all Internet servers are present in wired infrastructure. The proposed method ITCS allocates channels to multi-radio mesh routers in WMN such that the downloading speed of Internet user connected to WMN improves. Simulation results show the significant performance of ITCS than previous related work.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents most relevant previous work done. The mathematical model used for the formulation of ITCS metric is described in section 3. The performance analysis of ITCS method is given in section 4 and finally section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Related Work

The performance of the user device connected to WMN depends on the capacity of WMN. The first generation of WMNs have mesh routers with single radio interface to which single channel was allocated. Since one common channel is assigned to all radio interfaces in the WMN, the user experiences poor performance in single radio single channel WMNs [31]. Later, mesh routers are equipped with multiple radio interfaces but common channel allocation gives same performance as in single radio single channel WMN. Proper channel allocation is important in improving the capacity of WMN. Channel interference frequency range is shown in Fig. 3.

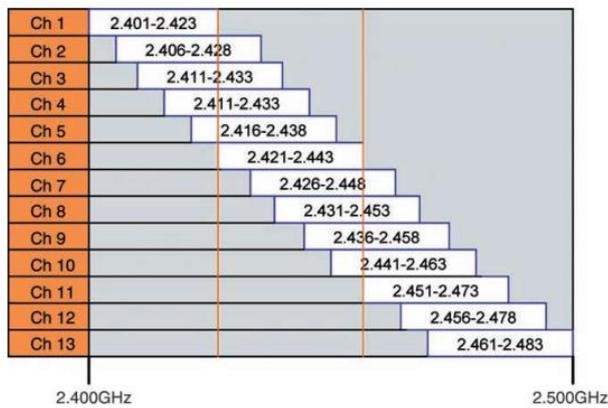


Figure 2: IEEE 802.11 b/g channels [50]

Channel Separation	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8-10
Overlapping Degree	1	0.7272	0.2714	0.375	0.0054	0.0008	0.0002	0	0

Figure 3: Channel overlapping degree (reproduced from [51])

WMNs are deployed using the popular technologies of IEEE 802.11 standard. Specifically, IEEE 802.11b/g provides 3 orthogonal channels as shown in Fig.2, IEEE 802.11a provides 12 orthogonal channels to assign the radio interfaces of mesh routers in the WMN. Since the number of radio interfaces in WMN are less than number of orthogonal channels, there is a strong need of channel assignment schemes with proper utilization of limited number of orthogonal channels. It is also observed that the allocation of partially overlapping channels in addition to orthogonal channels improves further the capacity of WMNs [32]–[40]. In multi radio and multi-channel WMN, there exists a trade-off between the channel interference and network connectivity [49]. To reduce co-channel interference and maintain backhaul connectivity, it is needed to maintain common channel by the all the mesh routers. To maintain mesh backhaul connectivity, all the mesh routers must use a common channel and also to reduce the co-channel interference, a mesh router has to minimize the number of neighbour mesh routers with which it is sharing common channel. It is a big challenge for the researchers to design

channel assignment algorithm that compromise between connectivity and interference issues.

A wide different approach are proposed for channel allocation for multi radio and multi-channel allocation in the WMN literature. Our previous contribution [41] presents the detailed study of various algorithms of channel assignment under different classification schemes. Another study on channel assignment schemes for WMN is presented in [30]. Channel assignment approaches for multi-radio WMN can be widely categorized into distributed and centralized algorithms. In case of centralized schemes [14], [51], one network object controls the entire process of allocation of channels to all radio interfaces present in WMN. On the other hand, in case of distributed schemes [26], [27], there exists no centralized entity control, but each router takes care of itself by self-allocation of channels to its radio interfaces. Depends on time stamp the channel allocation approaches are categorized as static, dynamic and hybrid approaches. In static approach [52], [53], the fixed channels are assigned to fixed interfaces and no reallocation takes place. In dynamic assignment schemes [54], [55], allocation and reallocation of channels to interfaces occurs during the network operation time. Hybrid assignment schemes like [56] utilize the best features of both static and dynamic schemes such that some channels are fixed for some fixed interfaces and remaining channels in the spectrum are dynamically assigned to other interfaces.

Different schemes of channel assignment have different criteria with various parameters. Interference aware channel selection is presented in [18], [13], channel selection scheme to optimize throughput is given in [17], joint scheme of routing and channel assignment is provided in [25], [20], [29], channel assignment scheme to improve multimedia traffic QoS requirements is given in [28].

Unlike the previous work, this paper proposes a novel scheme of channel assignment with the objective of improving the performance of Internet user connected to the WMN.

3. ITCS Design

This paper presents a novel protocol called Internet Traffic based Channel Selection (ITCS) with the objective of improving the performance of Internet user connected to the WMN.

3.1 Assumptions

The hierarchical architecture of WMN is assumed as shown in Fig. 1. Mesh routers have at least two radio interfaces: routing interface and access interface. Routing interface is connecting other routers and used for forwarding the packets in mesh backbone. Access interface is used to provide network access to the user. A mesh router can provide network access to numerous users and one user can associate with only one router. A few of mesh routers will behaves like gateway routers which connects to the outside networks like

internet with wired network. The users can connect to the any one of the mesh routers to get access of internet. A complete wireless mesh backhaul is formed by interconnecting the mesh routers in a multi-hop fashion.

The formulation of channel selection metric is inspired from the work [42] and [58], which is defined for WLAN users and we extend the work for WMN environment. Since most of the Internet servers are still residing in the wired infrastructure, we assume that the major dominant mode of wireless usage is the downlink traffic. To simplify the derivation process of channel selection metric, we consider the saturated WMN with Internet traffic flowing from the gateway to the users through their associated mesh routers and each user is always waiting for a packet to receive. This situation simplifies the MAC layer modelling as the mesh routers are the only senders in the network and the amount of interference caused by mesh routers does not depend on the number of their users. Under these conditions, the long-term average throughput measured at MAC layer is same for all users associated with a mesh router [43].

We also assume that the mesh router implements multi-rate adaptation scheme of IEEE 802.11 standard. The user with poor quality link takes more time to receive a packet from the associated mesh router compared to other users associated with the same router using good quality links if the packet size is assumed to be same for all users.

We consider the WMN system with 'm' routers and 'n' users. The set of 'm' mesh routers is represented as $R = \{r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_m\}$ and the set of 'n' users is $U = \{u_1, u_2, u_3, \dots, u_n\}$. The user u_i associated with a mesh router r_j is represented as u_i^j and if the router, r_j , is sending information to all its users in the packets of same size L, then the transmission delay $T_D(u_i^j)$ experienced by the user u_i^j is given by:

$$T_D(u_i^j) = \frac{1}{f(\text{SINR}(u_i^j))} \dots \dots (1)$$

where $f(\text{SINR}(u_i^j))$ gives instantaneous transmission rate of access link from router r_j to user u_i expressed usually in data units per second.

As per our model, the mesh routers are the only senders transmitting data packets to the users and the users are waiting to receive the packets. According to IEEE 802.11 MAC CSMA/CA scheme, the mesh router has to compete with other routers for accessing the radio channel. Hence the medium utilization MU_j of router r_j will not be 100% if other routers are present in its contention domain and the capacity C_j of router r_j will only be a fraction of the medium capacity. Under these assumptions, the long-term average throughput $Th_{avg}(u_i^j)$ obtained by the user

u_i associated with router r_j measured in a reference time period T is given by

$$Th_{avg}(u_i^j) = \frac{MU_j * C_j * T}{\sum_{i \in U_j} T_D(u_i^j)} \quad (2)$$

where U_j is the set of all active users associated with mesh router r_j . The parameter C_j is the nominal capacity of the router r_j which is based on the supporting physical layer and is conveyed in the beacon/probe response frames. In order to measure the medium utilization, each router measures the number of slots it spends in the transmission/reception, back off and idle states. The measurement period, T, can be defined with five transmissions/receptions as in [42]. The channel utilization fraction is estimated (busy slots/total slots) and maintained as a weighted moving average. Due to the performance anomaly of multi-rate users associated with the same router, the long-term average throughput is same for all users [44]. Since the low rate users degrade the performance of high rate users associated with the same router, the long-term average number of packets received by all users is same. In other words, the denominator of equation (2), $\sum_{i \in U_j} T_D(u_i^j)$ is observed to be almost same for

all users, u_i , associated with the same router r_j .

End-to-end throughput of a user is the aggregated throughput of access link throughput and backhaul link throughput. The access link throughput of user u_i associated with a router r_j is calculated as shown in equation (2) and is given as

$$Th_{access-link} = Th_{avg}(u_i^j)$$

It is also assumed that each mesh router r_j calculates throughput on its routing interface as

$$Th(r_j) = \frac{DATA * L}{T}$$

where DATA is the number of data packets received with size L in a reference time-period T.

Average backhaul link throughput of user u_i connected to router r_j is given as:

$$Th_{avg}^b = \frac{Th(r_j)}{|U_j|}$$

where $|U_j|$ is the number of active users connected with router r_j .

Now the end-to-end throughput of user u_i^j is given as

$$Th_{E2E}(u_i^j) = w(Th_{access-link}) + (1-w)Th_{avg}^b \quad (3)$$

where W is the weighing factor of access link and it has the value between 0 and 1. The value of W can be determined based on network conditions and application requirements.

Each mesh router r_j calculates average throughput $Th_{E2E}(u_i^j)$ of active user u_i connected with it and if the throughput falls below the predefined threshold value $Th_{threshold}$ then the router r_j recalculates $Th_{E2E}(u_i^j)$ for all channels (except routing channel and current channel) and selects a channel in which $Th_{E2E}(u_i^j)$ is maximum and the new channel number is conveyed through beacon/probe response frames to all its users. Threshold value $Th_{threshold}$ is determined based on network conditions and application requirements.

3.2 Algorithm: ITCS algorithm

Input:

$R = \{r_1, r_2, r_3, \dots, r_m\}$ given a set of 'm' routers

$U = \{u_1, u_2, u_3, \dots, u_n\}$ given a set of 'n' users

begin

(i) each mesh router r_j calculates access link throughput of its active users u_i^j as

$$Th_{access-link} = Th_{avg}(u_i^j)$$

(ii) each mesh router r_j calculates backhaul link throughput for each of its active users u_i^j as

$$Th_{avg}^b = \frac{Th(r_j)}{|U_j|}$$

(iii) each mesh router r_j calculates end-to-end average throughput for each of its active users u_i^j as

$$Th_{E2E}(u_i^j) = w(Th_{access-link}) + (1-w)Th_{avg}^b$$

(iv) if $(Th_{E2E}(u_i^j) \leq Th_{threshold})$ then repeat steps (i) to (iii) for all channels except current channel and routing channel.

(v) select channel with maximum $Th_{E2E}(u_i^j)$ and inform the same to all users through beacon/probe response frames. end of algorithm

4. ITCS Performance Analysis

The proposed method is evaluated using NCTUns 6.0 [45] simulator which is an open source simulator and emulator of networks. It is very easy to extend. The NCTUns is advanced network simulator consists of extensible unique features then the classical network emulator and simulators which uses the technology of kernel re-entering simulation. The NCTUns 6.0 is a Linux based network simulator/emulator upon which

real world applications can be executed without modifications and a wide range of networking devices can be modelled using real TCP/IP network protocol stack to produce high-fidelity simulation results. In NCTUns, the configuration and operation for a simulated network are exactly the same as those for a real-life IP network. Using integrated GUI, it is easy for the user to create, edit and control the simulations/emulations and easily collect the results. The node conflicts of the wireless medium is accurately modelled in IEEE 802.11 standard MAC protocol DCF which is implemented in NS-2 simulation. The MAC layer of the NS-2 is imported to NCTUns to define complete functions of the standard MAC protocol. Moreover, it supports more realistic wireless signal propagation models. As per IEEE 802.11 standard, an user associates with a mesh router that has highest received signal strength (RSS) and when the user throughput falls below the threshold value, the router scans the remaining channels and selects a channel for an access interface which provides the highest throughput of user. This RSS based channel selection method is also simulated to analyse the performance of our method ITCS. We consider the simulation scenario with users and routers distributed randomly in the WMN as shown in Figure 4. We consider the IEEE 802.11b WMN with 9 routers and 20 users and one gateway node connected to the Internet with high speed (1 Gbps) wired link. Each mesh router utilizes "Open Shortest Path First (OSPF)" routing protocol to route the packets and the default metric in routing is hop-count. Access interface and routing interface are the two network interfaces utilized by each router in the network. As most of the Internet Servers are still present in wired infrastructure, the dominant wireless usage is the downlink traffic. So, we considered the "User Datagram Protocol (UDP)" under the saturated internet traffic through gateway to all users with standard packet size 1000 bytes. The transmission rate of each traffic flow is set to 1Mbps and the simulation runs for 100 seconds.

We analyse the performance of ITCS method by measuring the system throughput by gradually increasing the number of users accessing the Internet through WMN and compared with the RSS-based method. In the RSS method, the router always selects the channel to the access interface based on the user throughput measured using received signal strength. The signal strength alone is not a sufficient parameter to determine the user throughput because there are many other parameters like channel conditions, interference, medium contention, etc to estimate accurate throughput. Moreover, the delay sensitive applications like VoIP, Video Conference etc., are used majorly over the Internet. It is observed that ITCS method performs better than RSS-based method because ITCS method uses the channel selection metric which measures end-to-end throughput achievable from the router in presence of other interfering routers. We also measured the average end-to-end delay of the users and the system. It is observed that ITCS method outperforms the

RSS based method because selecting the highest signal strength channel does not guarantee the highest throughput and required Quality of Service. The received signal strength cannot reflect the actual throughput because it not only depends on the distance between user and router but also on the transmission power of router. It might happen that a distant user can associate with the router that has highest transmission power and use low bit rate transmission. Therefore, the users already associated with the router and using higher bit rate might have to wait until the low bit rate and distant user communication is finished. In the proposed ITCS method, the router calculates the end-to-end throughput for all users on both access link and backhaul link by considering various parameters like channel conditions, access interface load, interference etc., and selects the channel which is providing highest throughput and thereby providing required end-to-end Quality of Service. The results are averaged over 10 simulation runs and shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Unlike the previous work [20], [25], [29], the proposed channel selection metric is independent of wireless mesh routing protocol and routing metric. To observe the impact of routing metric on the user performance, the simulation is repeated with two different routing metrics: hop count and expected transmission count (ETX) [46], for the same routing protocol OSPF. The simulation results for different routing metrics are presented in Figure 7. As the hop count metric does not consider link conditions like ETX metric, the system aggregate throughput is more when ETX routing metric is used with OSPF routing protocol. As specified in [47], [48], when the routing metric optimized for WMN environment is used along with our channel selection metric, a significant improvement in system throughput will be observed.

As the proposed method ITCS considers the access interface load and routing interface load into channel selection decision, we analysed the performance of ITCS method by varying network traffic load. By gradually increasing the load for all users in the network, we measured system throughput and average end-to-end delay. The simulation results are shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9. The method ITCS outperforms RSS method because the RSS method does not consider the access interface and routing interface load into channel selection decision and it solely depends on the received signal strength. Therefore the user associated with congested router cannot experience better performance compared to other users associated with nearby lightly loaded routers.

In the previous simulation scenario, the mesh routers and users are randomly placed in the WMN. We perform simulations with two more scenarios where the routers are placed as a grid and the users are distributed uniformly and non-uniformly as shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11 respectively and we consider 9 routers and 20 users in the WMN. The routers are separated by a distance of 200 meters

from each other and the users are uniformly distributed in the network. In fact, the channel load is not the number of users associated with it, but in order to capture the impact of load distribution, we simulate that each router is transmitting the packets of 1000 bytes and with a fixed rate of 1 Mbps to all users. The simulation runs for 100 seconds. The results are shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13 and the performance of ITCS method is better than RSS-based method. Similarly, the results of non-uniform distribution of users in WMN are shown in Figure 14 and Figure 15. Clearly, the RSS-based channel selection method fails in achieving better user throughput in this hot-spot congested scenario. ITCS method selects the channel based on achievable end-to-end throughput, and it outperforms the RSS-based method.

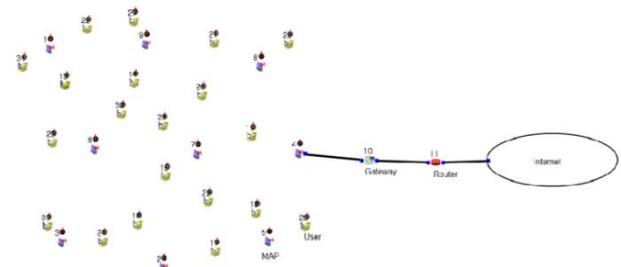


Figure 4: WMN simulation model

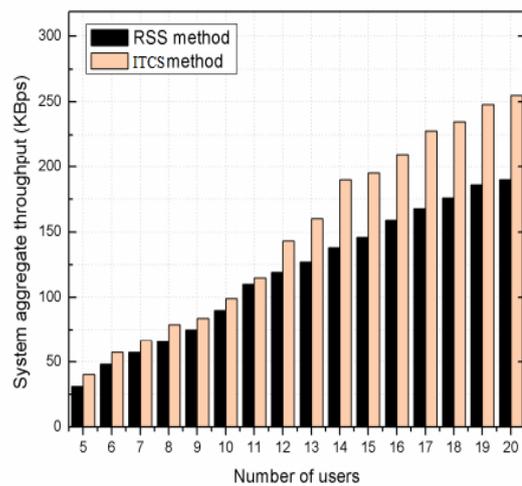


Figure 5: Number of users Vs System aggregate throughput

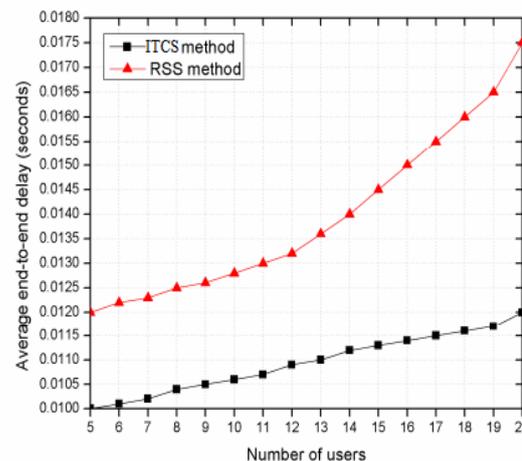


Figure 6: Number of users Vs Avg E2E delay

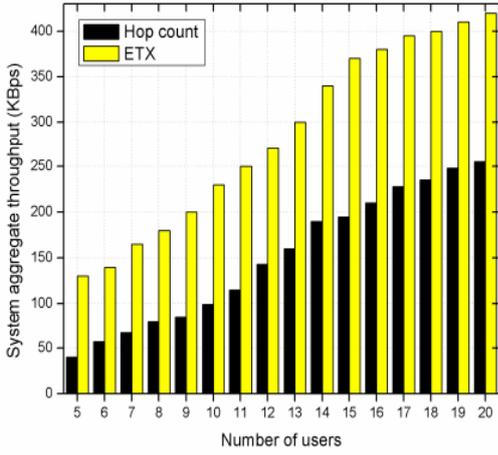


Figure 7: Impact of routing metric

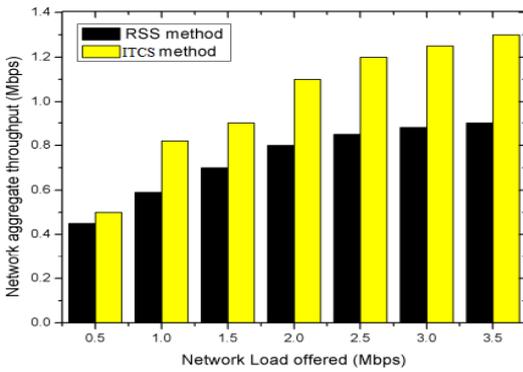


Figure 8: Impact of network load

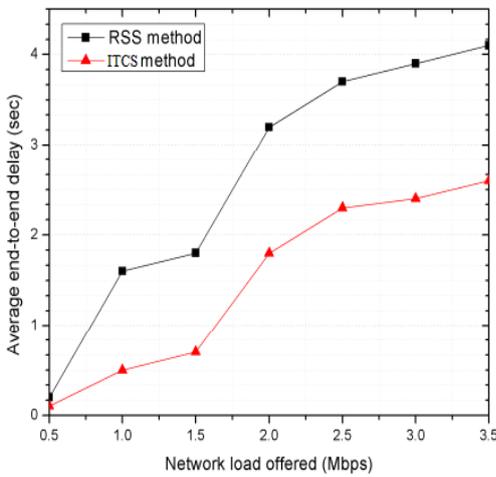


Figure 9: Network load vs E2E delay

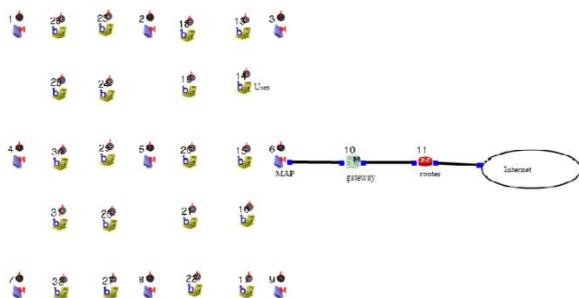


Figure 10: Uniform distribution of routers in WMN

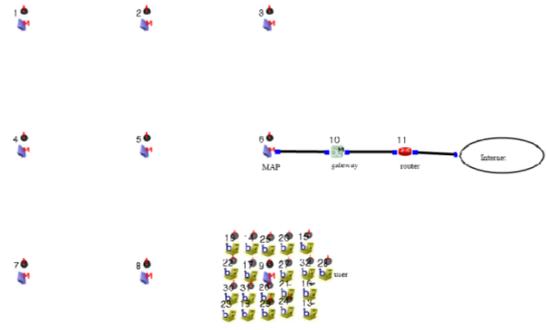


Figure 11: Non-uniform distribution of users

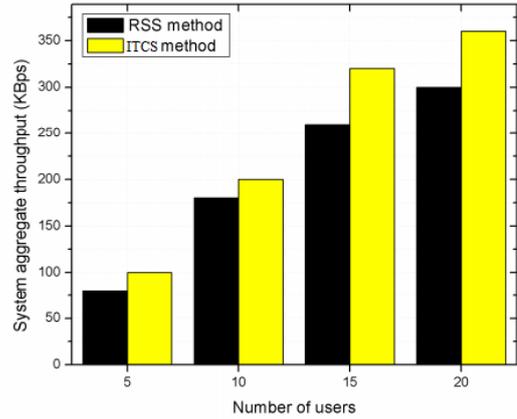


Figure 12: Impact of number of users

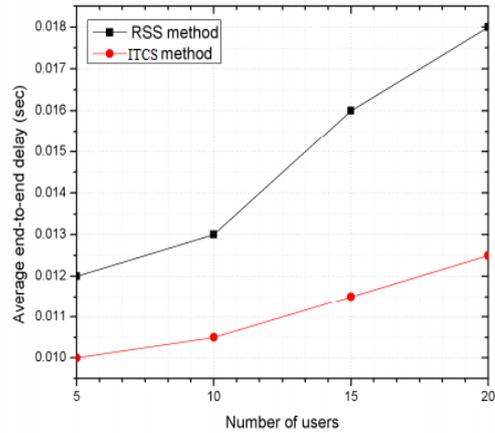


Figure 13: Number of users vs Avg E2E delay

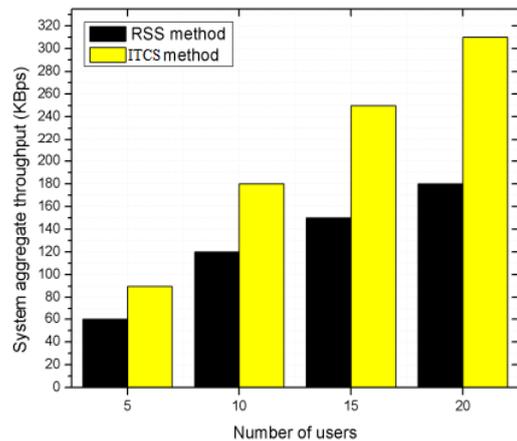


Figure 14: Number of users vs System throughput

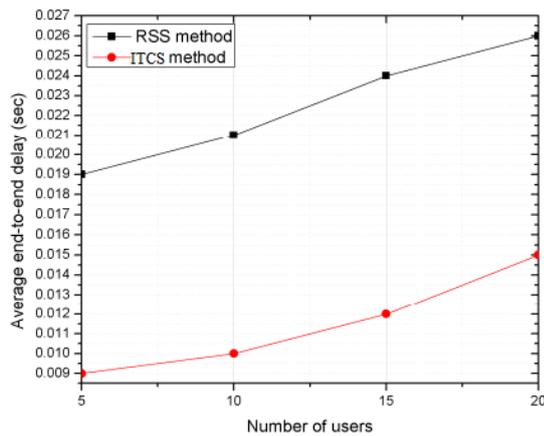


Figure 15: Impact of number of users on avg. E2E delay

5. Conclusions

Wireless Mesh Network is the promising technology to facilitate wireless broadband Internet connectivity to the mobile users. Proper channels must be assigned to numerous radio interfaces of mesh router to improve the performance of Internet user. This paper proposes a novel method ITCS of channel selection to the access interface of mesh router keeping fixed channel for routing interface of mesh router assuming that the mesh router has two interfaces. The model of ITCS can be generalized to mesh router with more than two interfaces. Moreover, the general framework of ITCS ensures that ITCS is independent of mesh routing protocol and routing metric. The performance analysis of ITCS shows significant results. Further enhancement of ITCS includes node mobility, better model of user throughput, etc.

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