

Analysis of the Limitations of WiFi Communications Managed by the IEEE 802.11 Protocol in Data Transmission in Automated Power Distribution Systems

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Abstract—This paper presents a study on the performances of the IEEE 802.11 protocol used in a Medium Voltage networks management system, carried out using a model for the simulation of WiFi chains architectures. The results of the simulations give some practical indications for the use of the IEEE 802.11 protocol also in presence of transmissions characterized by rigid time intervals, for which this protocol is usually not suitable. Finally the whole communications system is presented.

Index Terms—IEEE 802.11, WiFi, Diagnostic.

I. INTRODUCTION

In [1] ÷ [5] an automatic Management System (MS) of a Medium Voltage (MV) network, both in regular conditions and in presence of a fault, has been presented. The MS is based on a diagnostic algorithm that continuously monitors a set of electrical quantities at every secondary substation.

The most efficient configuration of the MS comprises a central processing unit in the HV/MV station and local processing units in the MV/LV substations [6]. The units exchange data on the system status and, when needed, they command the tie-switches of the MV network at the secondary substations. In presence of a fault, the data and commands transmission, must be done in a very short time [7] (less than 1s). The substations at the ending buses of the faulted span send the diagnosis to the central unit of the MS, that elaborates the actions for an efficient service restoration procedure.

In [8], thanks to its limited cost and simplicity, the WiFi systems has been indicated as the most suitable for the on-line transmissions of the data and the commands of the MS. Nevertheless, the WiFi technology is based on the IEEE 802.11 protocol, that does not allow a deterministic evaluation of the data transferring times and is affected by a high delay in data transmission due to the data packet collisions. For these reasons, an analysis of the data receiving times both at the central unit and at local units can not be done following an analytical approach.

In this work, after a presentation of the IEEE 802.11 protocol and of its performances, both in a simple transmission between two WiFi stations, and in a transmission within a WiFi stations chain, are evaluated.

The transmission chain performances are also evaluated using a simulation model made on purpose, the results are presented varying the number of WiFi stations, the transmission rate, and the dimension of the data packet. Since the simulations highlight some of the weak points of the IEEE 802.11 protocol making it less reliable for the MS, suitable interventions for a more adequate utilization of it are proposed. Finally, the whole communication system is defined, some indications on the data transmission times are also given and suitable operative solutions are proposed.

II. THE IEEE 802.11 PROTOCOL

In the IEEE 802.11 protocol, all the information is divided into data packets or service packets. The data packets, whose maximum byte dimension is indicated by the protocol, are transmitted in succession.

The most used channel access type is a Distributed Coordination Protocol, DCP, adopting Carrier Sense Multiple Access, CSMA.

Every station that has data to transmit, checks the channel to determinate if there is a carrier. If the channel is free, the station sends its data packets (using the Mac Protocol Data Unit: MPDU).

If more WiFi stations find the channel free and they are so close that every station can listen to all the others, then the transmission can start in the same moment and data packets collide. In order to limit collisions, the IEEE 802.11 protocol establish that a station, after having found the channel free, does not start immediately the transmission, but after a waiting time T_{Wait} :

$$T_{Wait} = T_{Difs} + T_{Backoff} \quad (1)$$

Usually $T_{Difs} = 50 \mu s$. Time $t_{Backoff}$ is randomly generated, following the expression below:

$$T_{Backoff} = Random[0 \div (CW - 1)] T_{Slot} \quad (2)$$

where $T_{Slot} = 20 \mu s$.

The receiving station, after retrieving the correct packet, sends back, after t_{Sifs} , an acknowledge packet (Ack) in the time t_{Ack} . If the sending station does not receive Ack before Ack-Timeout expiration, it re-transmits the packet. The retry schema allows a

In (2) CW, starting from a minimum $CW_{\min}=32$, is doubled till the maximum $CW_{\max}=256$ at every retransmission of the same packet in the case of no reception of the Ack. Fig. 1 shows, as an example, the sequence of transmission operations in the case of 3 WiFi nodes (a, b, c), belonging to a group of nodes, not represented in the figure but all in the range of the transmission. It is hypothesized that two WiFi nodes (a and b) want to transmit to a third one (c).

If the channel becomes busy again before the counting gets to zero, as it happens for a, the reached back-off timer value is frozen and the count starts again when the channel is free again, preceded by an interval T_{Difs} . Node c, after having received each data packet, waits a time T_{Sifs} and sends an Ack packet whose duration is T_{Ack} as confirmation of the reception. The sending time T_{data} of a data packet (MPDU) depends on its dimension in bit (Packet_data) and on the transmission rate “Data.rate”, according to the IEEE 802.11 protocol (Tab. 1). The sending time T_{Ack} of an Ack packet depends only on the transmission rate “Basic.rate”.

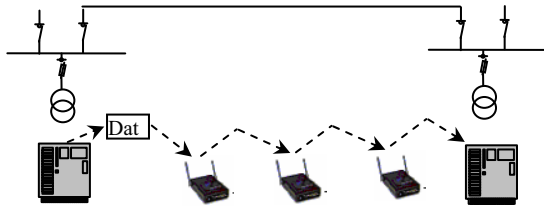


Fig.4. Transmission of the information with more WiFi nodes in series.

The minimum number of WiFi nodes condition implies that the range of a generic WiFi node reaches only the adjacent nodes ($Tx_range=1$). This means that the i^{th} node can listen to the nodes $i-1$ and $i+1$, but not to the nodes $i-2$ and $i+2$.

In this kind of networks, packets often collide and must be retransmitted. A first cause of collision is that two nodes decide to start their transmissions in two instants closer in time than T_{slot} . In this condition, the second node is not acknowledged of the fact that the first node has started the transmission too and therefore they transmit at the same time.

The second cause of collision is the presence of the so-called hidden terminals. Fig. 5, representing three nodes (A, B, C) with $Tx_range=1$, clarifies this problem. If the node B does not transmit, nodes A and C, testing the channel and finding that it is free, can start the transmission at the same time. In this way, B receives simultaneously two packets that collide one with the other.

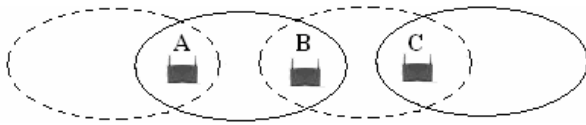


Fig.5. The hidden terminal.

Because of the presence of hidden terminals in a one-way transmission, the following possibilities of collision exist:

- when simultaneously node i sends a data packet towards node $i+1$ and node $i+2$ sends a data packet towards node $i+3$;
- when simultaneously node i sends a data packet towards node $i+1$ and node $i+2$ sends a data packet towards node $i+1$.

In order to evaluate the performance of a chain network, that depend on random mechanisms (Back-off procedure) and on the presence of the collisions, a simulation software must be used. In this work, the ECNS (Easy Chain Network Simulator), developed exclusively for chain networks and tested with NS-2 and WLAN, has been used. Using ECNS some simulations have been done varying the number of nodes and the Data.rate. The simulations have been done under the hypothesis that the starting node 1, after having sent a data packet with a positive outcome, has at its disposal another packet to be sent. In particular, the sequence of arrivals of the packet in the receiving node has been studied. In Fig. 6, the mean value T_{send}^m of the time intervals T_{send} , with which the packets arriving

successfully to the receiving node N, is represented, as the number of nodes N vary, for every value of Data.rate prescribed by the IEEE 802.11 protocol and under the hypothesis that Packet_data=1500 byte.

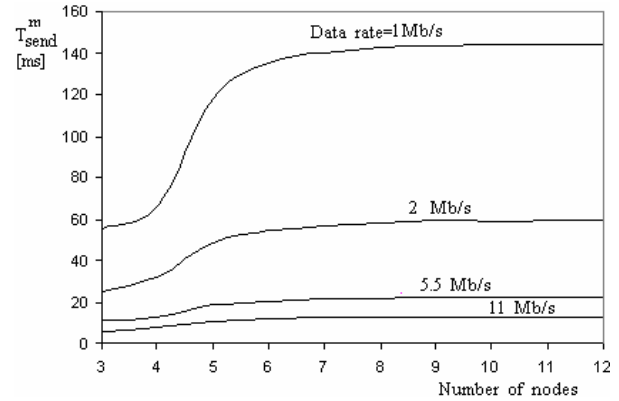


Fig.6. Mean Value of T_{send}^m as function of the number of nodes.

Under the same hypotheses, in Fig. 7, Thr^m , mean value of the throughput Thr evaluated for every sent packet, is represented as a function of the number of nodes for some values of Data.rate.

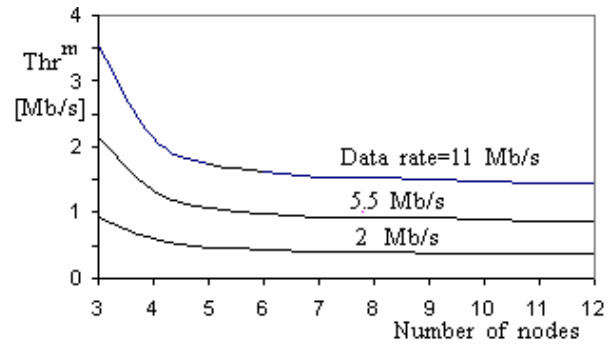


Fig. 7. Mean Value of Thr^m as function of the number of nodes.

From figures 6 and 7 can be deduced that collisions decrease the value of the throughput and increase the time between the reception of two different packets by the receiving station. A bidirectional communications with the same transmission frequency leads to unacceptable values of T_{send}^m and Thr^m if the data dispatch is done continuously, even if only in one direction.

IV. DRAWBACKS OF IEEE 802.11 IN THE USE OF CHAIN NETWORKS FOR ELECTRICAL POWER SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT

A first problem in the use of the IEEE 802.11 protocols for the diagnostic management of an electrical power system is that it would be necessary that the data packets arrive to the receiving node with almost constant time intervals.

However, in the analysis of the simulations done, it was shown that, at the mean values reported in figures 6 and 7, correspond significant excursion between minimum and maximum values of T_{send}^m and Thr^m . As a confirmation of this fact, under the hypothesis of Packet_data=1500 byte, Fig. 8 reproduces the graph of

T_{send}^m for Data.rate =2 Mb/s, comparing it with the minimum and maximum time intervals T_{send} with which the packets arrive successfully to the receiving node.

Since the receiving substation has to perform an on-line diagnosis of the status of the protected span of line, it is not acceptable that the time interval with which the data packets arrive can vary within the limits represented in Fig. 8.

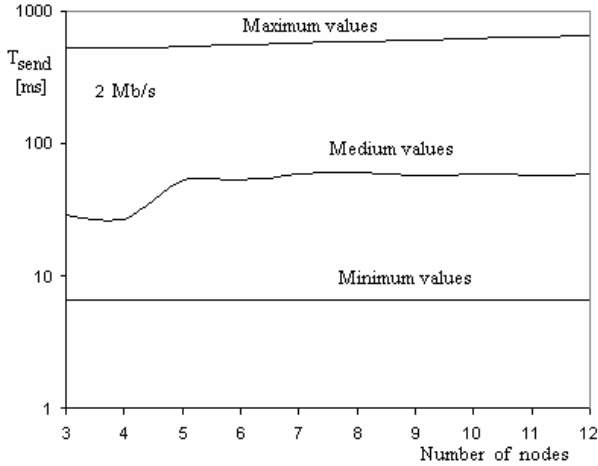


Fig. 8. Maximum, Mean and Minimum values of T_{send} as function of the number of nodes.

Another important consideration must be done about the time interval ΔT_s between the arrival of the generic data packet s-1 at the starting node 1, that saves it before it waits for the retransmission, and the arrival in the same node of the consecutive packet s.

Figures 6 and 7 have been represented in the case of variable ΔT_s , since the simulations are done considering that node 1 receives a new data packet after having sent with positive outcome the previous one. Therefore, the time interval ΔT_s depends on how much time is necessary for sending the data packet s-1, as function of:

- the values of CW at node 1;
- the occupation of the channel by node 2;
- the collision phenomena that force the retransmission of packet s-1.

The minimum value of ΔT_s corresponds to CW=0, channel 2 free and no collisions. In Tab.2 some values of the minimum ΔT_s , as function of Data.rate and for some values of Packet_data, are reported.

TABLE II. MINIMUM VALUES OF ΔT_s [μ s]

Data.rate	1 Mb/s	2 Mb/s	5.5 Mb/s	11Mb/s
Packet_data				
500 byte	4,8	2,6	1,2	0,8
1500 byte	12,8	6,6	2,7	1,6
2500 byte	20,8	10,6	4,1	2,3

For a steady-state condition, the mean values of the ΔT_s related to the packets leaving node 1 do not have to be less than the mean value T_{send}^m with which the packets arrive successfully to node 1. Simulations have instead demonstrated the contrary.

And then, since in a time interval a number of packets greater than that arriving at node N leaves from node 1, overstocks occur at the intermediate nodes (in particular at node 2). Of course, for a transmission with a continuous dispatch of the packets, as it must be in electrical networks management, this condition can not be accepted.

V. A SOLUTION FOR THE MITIGATION OF THE DRAWBACKS OF IEEE 802.11 PROTOCOL

The aim is to manage the WiFi nodes so as to (see the system in Fig. 4):

- the sending frequency of the packets in the starting node corresponds to that of the packets at the arriving node and no overstocks occur;
- the difference between the minimum and maximum time of transmission of a packet to the node N is low.

For obtaining these results, having imposed the value of ΔT_s related to each data packet s equal to ΔT , some simulations have been done varying ΔT . As an example in Fig. 9 T_{send}^m as function of ΔT is reported, with Packet_data=1500 byte, N=7 and Data.rate =11 Mb/s.

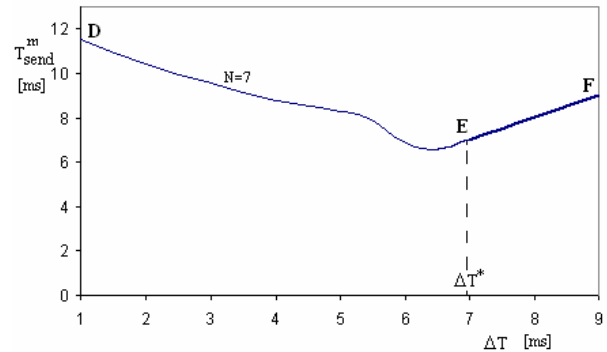


Fig. 9. Mean value of T_{send} as function of ΔT .

Fig. 9 shows that the trend of T_{send}^m is characterised by two parts:

- DE with $T_{\text{send}}^m > \Delta T$ where there is overstock of packets in the nodes upstream the arriving one;
- EF with $T_{\text{send}}^m = \Delta T$, without overstocks.

Of course, the maximum communication rate without packets overstock, is in the first part of EF, indicated with ΔT^* . For studying how ΔT^* varies as the number of nodes increases, in Fig. 10 the course of T_{send}^m deduced from Fig. 8 corresponding to N=7 nodes, has been compared with the courses corresponding to N = 3; 5; 12 nodes.

Fig. 10 shows that, if $N > 4$, ΔT^* slowly increases as the number of nodes increases.

Sending packets with period equal to ΔT^* give a positive response also to the need of keeping low the difference between the minimum and maximum times of transmission of a packet to the node N. Indeed, Fig. 11 shows the maximum and minimum of T_{send} , with the

mean value T_{send}^m in Fig. 9, with which the packets successfully arrive to N.

Therefore the difference between the minimum and maximum value of T_{send} strongly decreases when $\Delta T \geq \Delta T^*$, becoming acceptable for diagnostic communications in electrical networks.

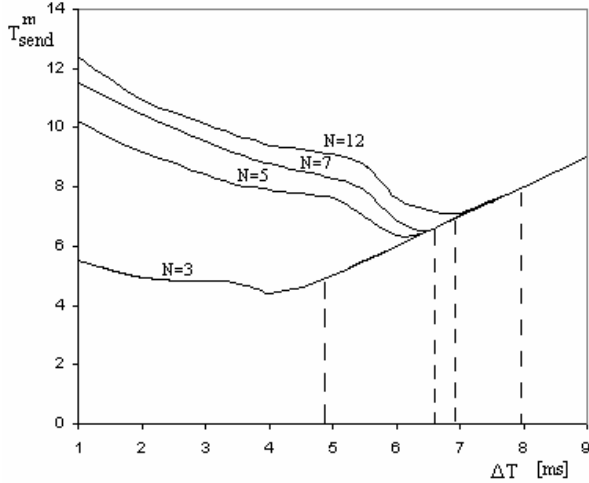


Fig. 10. Mean Value of T_{send} for various values of N.

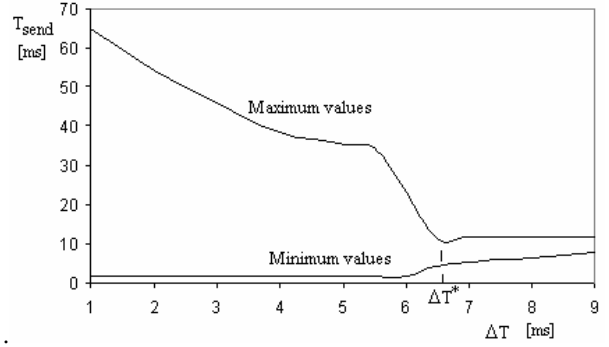


Fig. 11. Maximum and Minimum Values of T_{send} as function of ΔT .

VI. THE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Taking into account the considerations in the previous sections, the communication system has been defined. A MV line, radially managed, with two HV/MV stations at the extremity (A and B) is considered in Fig. 12.

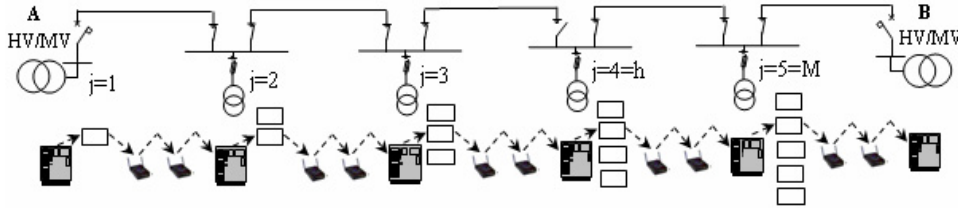


Fig. 12 Representation of the MV line.

A. Regular working conditions

In this case, the characteristics of the communications are the following:

- Every secondary station sends with regular time intervals towards one of the HV/MV stations (for example B), a packet containing the measured data. Transmission is unidirectional (from A to B) and the frequency of the radio signal is f_1 .
- Station B sends the received data to the remote-control centre using a communications system different from WiFi.
- Station A, also communicating with the remote-control centre, transmits towards the secondary substations a packet for the variation of the network asset. This packet could be sent also from B with a different frequency f_2 .
- The architecture in Fig. 12 allows the system to work also in presence of a fault in the transmission system at one of the HV/MV stations. Indeed, if a fault occurs in station B, the transmission direction of the data packets inverts and the eventual packet for the variation of the asset is sent by B with frequency f_2 .

B. Fault in a span of line.

The characteristics of the communications are the

following:

- Substation j, downstream the faulted span reveals the abnormal condition on the basis of the comparison of its data with those received by substation j-1 upstream the faulted span.
- Substation j opens the tie-switch downstream the faulted span and sends two command packets: the first towards A with frequency f_2 , for opening the tie-switch in the substation j-1, the second towards B with frequency f_1 , for closing the tie-switch in the boundary substation h.
- Substation j-1, once received the command from j, opens the tie-switch upstream the faulted span and communicates its status in the successive data packet sent to B.
- Substation h, once received the two packets, the first from j for command and the second from j-1 for confirmation of the opening of the tie-switch, closes the boundary tie-switch and restores the service.

In Fig. 11, in the boundary substation $j=4$, a tie-switch open for dividing the line into two radial ones is evidenced.

In the HV/MV station and in every secondary substation a microprocessor and a WiFi node are installed. Along the line, various WiFi nodes are installed.

Station A and every other sub station, send toward

station B a packet with the data of the measures done and the status of the station. Going towards station B, the number of data packet to be transmitted increases. Indeed from station A only one packet is sent. To the latter are added the other packets sent by the secondary substations. In this way, the last secondary substation has to send five packets.

In the following, with M and N are indicated, respectively the number of spans of the MV line and the number of WiFi nodes in a span.

In every communication cycle the secondary substation at the beginning of the span M must send in sequence N packets, each one containing the data from the substations upstream. For this purpose, as input of its own WiFi node, the sub station will receive a packet every $\Delta T_M = \Delta T^*$. In this way, the time interval T_{cycle} with which the substation terminates the sending of all its data and of the substations upstream is given by:

$$T_{\text{cycle}} = M \cdot \Delta T_M = M \cdot \Delta T^* \quad (5)$$

In the same way, the generic substation j must send a sequence of j packets, each one related to all its data and of the substations upstream. For keeping the synchronism these packets must be sent in the same time interval T_{cycle} given by (5). Therefore the generic substation j will send a packet every:

$$\Delta T_j = M \cdot \Delta T^* / j \quad (6)$$

In this way, the time required by two consecutive substations to send the data is T_{cycle} .

The total time spent for completing the sending of a cycle of data from all the substations towards the HV/MV station is:

$$T_{\text{tot}} = M \cdot T_{\text{cycle}} = M^2 \cdot \Delta T^* \quad (7)$$

The time T_{com} necessary for sending a packet with an opening command to a tie-switch with a frequency f_2 from the substation j is equal to the value T_{send} evaluated in Fig.2. A command packet from a HV/MV station travels along the whole line in a time $M \cdot T_{\text{com}}$.

VII. APPLICATION EXAMPLE

The line AB in Fig. 12, with 15 span, $M=15$ substations and $N=5$ WiFi nodes per span, is considered. In Tab. 3, for the Data.rate values of the IEEE 802.11 protocol and $\text{Pachet_data} = 1500$ byte, the values of the time interval characterizing the transmission are considered. The chosen ΔT^* must be higher than the values in Tab.3. The other relevant transmission parameters are widely acceptable.

TABLE III. RESULT OF THE SIMULATION

Data.rate [Mb/s]	ΔT^* [ms]	T_{cycle} [s]	T_{tot} [s]
1	58	0.87	13.1
2	30	0.45	6.7
5.5	12	0.18	2.7
11	6.6	0.1	1.5

VIII. CONCLUSION

The performances of the WiFi communication system to be implemented for an automatic management of the MV networks have been studied. With this purpose, with a suitable simulation model, the behaviour of the IEEE 802.11 protocol has been studied, and its very low reliability has been appreciated. It has been shown that this protocol can be used for power systems diagnostic applications only if the transmission time of the data packet is higher than ΔT^* . The design of the whole communication system has lead to the definition of some parameters for the evaluation of its efficiency. An application example has highlighted that the proposed values of ΔT^* , T_{cycle} and T_{tot} are widely compatible with the diagnostic management of the faults with innovative strategies.

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- ※ 成立于 2004 年,10 多年丰富的行业经验,
- ※ 一直致力并专注于微波射频和天线设计工程师的培养,更了解该行业对人才的要求
- ※ 经验丰富的一线资深工程师讲授,结合实际工程案例,直观、实用、易学

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