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(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTENT
PLAYBACK UTILIZING CROWD SOURCED
STATISTICS**

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H04L 29/08 (2006.01)

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CPC **H04L 43/0876** (2013.01); **H04L 67/32**
(2013.01)

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CPC G11B 27/005; H04R 5/02; H04N 21/2662
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See application file for complete search history.

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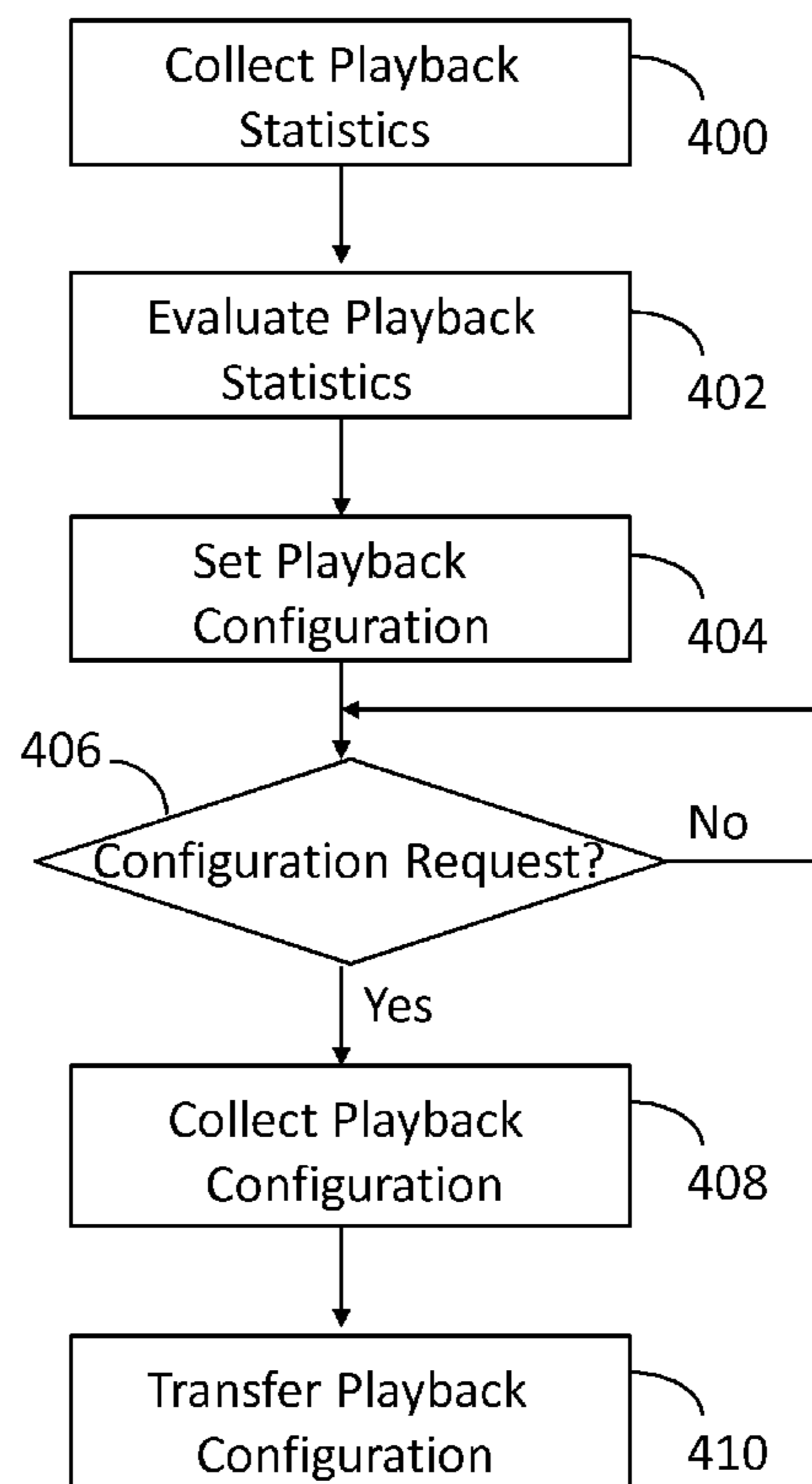
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A server includes a processor and a memory connected to the processor to store instructions executed by the processor to collect playback statistics from network connected content players, perform an evaluation of the playback statistics, and establish a playback configuration for specified content based upon the evaluation of the playback statistics. A request for the playback configuration for the specified content is received from a network connected content player. The playback configuration for the specified content is transferred to the network connected player.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



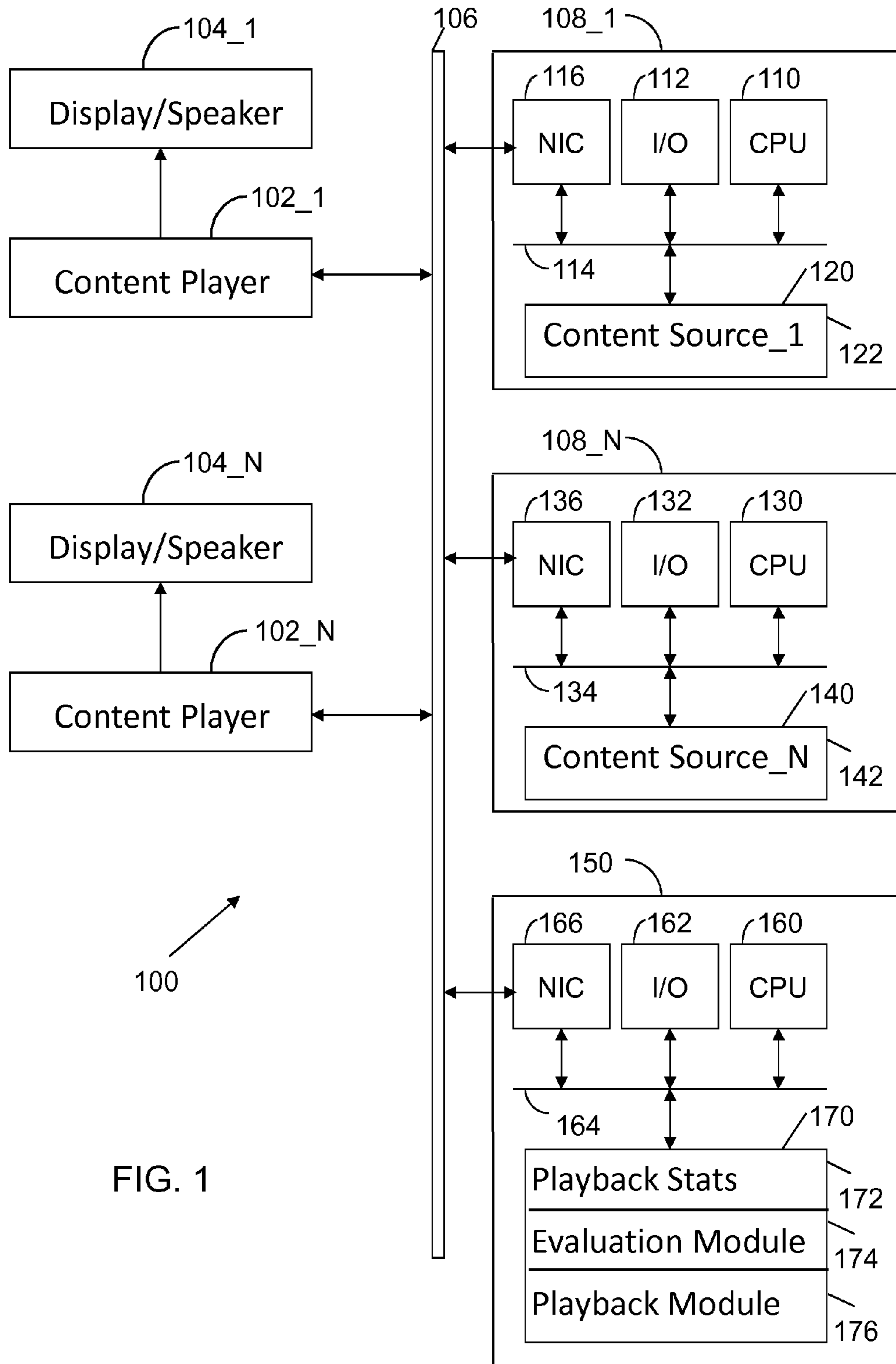


FIG. 1

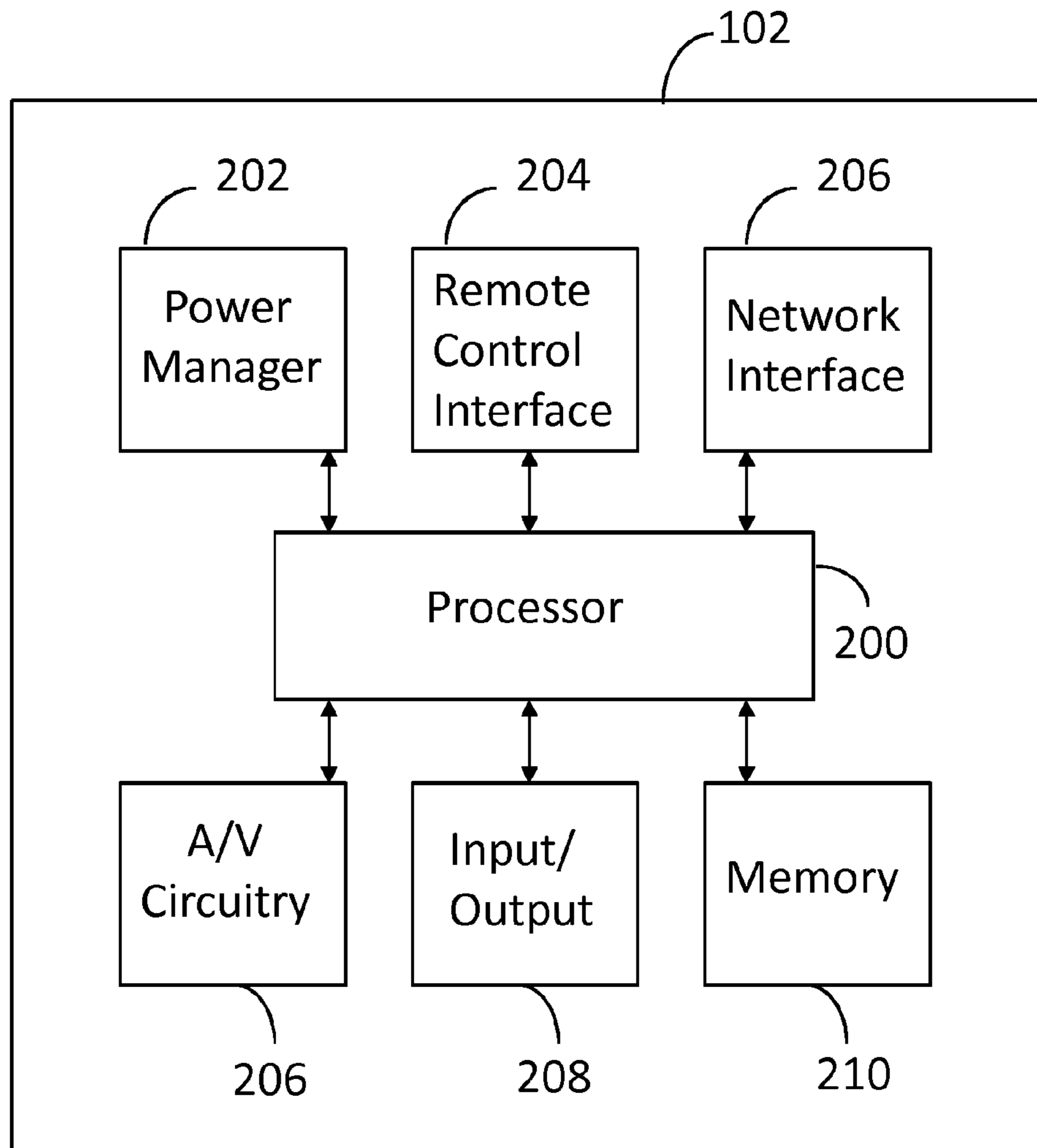


FIG. 2

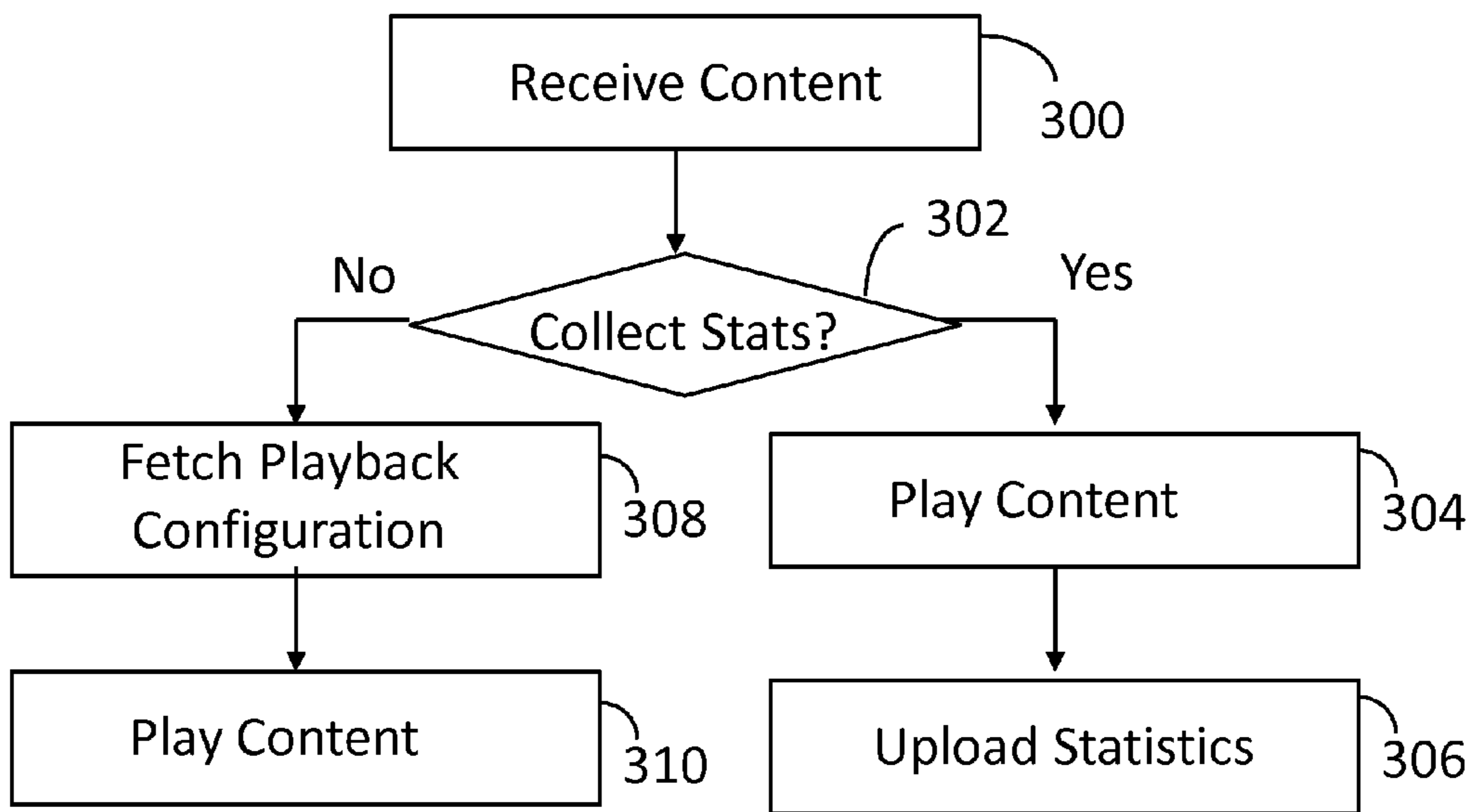


FIG. 3

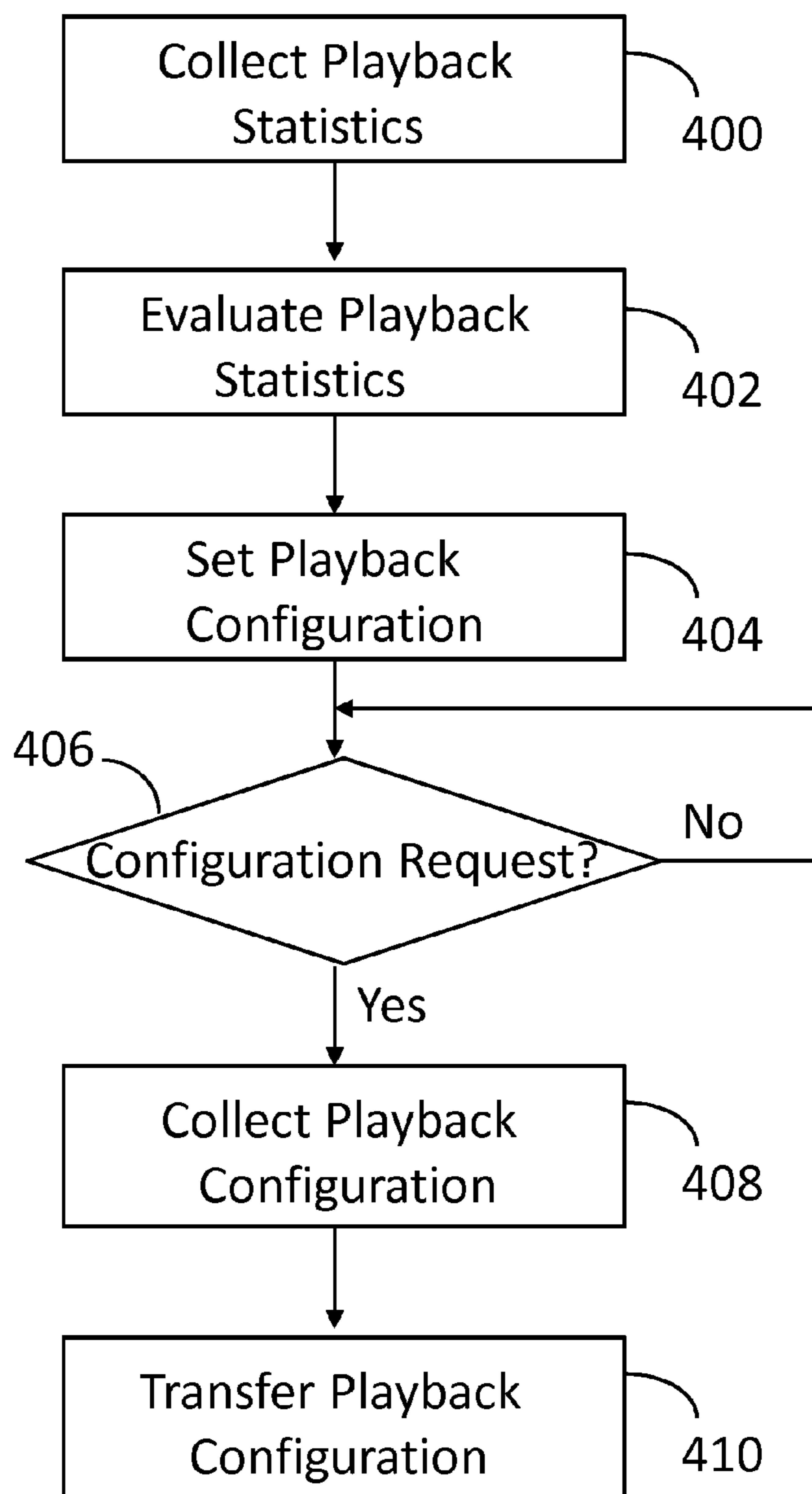


FIG. 4

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APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTENT PLAYBACK UTILIZING CROWD SOURCED STATISTICS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to content distribution and playback in a networked environment. More particularly, this invention relates to content playback techniques utilizing crowd sourced statistics.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When viewing on-demand media (e.g., video, audio, games, etc.) on a device (e.g., a streaming media player, a game console, etc.) the playback parameters are specified. International digital standards exist for playback devices to play all content in a uniform manner, but they are not uniformly applied. For example, in the case of audio a volume level may be specified when mastered content is formed. After distribution of the mastered content to various content providers, such content providers may specify distinct audio volume levels. Thus, a single version of mastered content may be delivered by different content providers with different audio parameters. Alternately, or in addition, the content provider does not deliver all content with uniform audio parameters. Consequently, there are non-uniform user experiences as the mastered content is consumed.

In view of the foregoing, it would be desirable to improve user experiences during content playback.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A server includes a processor and a memory connected to the processor to store instructions executed by the processor to collect playback statistics from network connected content players, perform an evaluation of the playback statistics, and establish a playback configuration for specified content based upon the evaluation of the playback statistics. A request for the playback configuration for the specified content is received from a network connected content player. The playback configuration for the specified content is transferred to the network connected player.

A content player has a processor and a memory connected to the processor to store instructions executed by the processor to receive content over a network, play the content, and upload content statistics collected during playback to a server, where the content statistics characterize audio or video attributes of the content.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

The invention is more fully appreciated in connection with the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a system configured in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 illustrates a content player configured in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 3 illustrates processing operations associated with a content player configured in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 4 illustrates processing operations associated with a server configured in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

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Like reference numerals refer to corresponding parts throughout the several views of the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

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FIG. 1 illustrates a system **100** configured in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. The system **100** includes a set of content players **102_1** through **102_N**. Each content player may be a streaming media player, a game console, audio/video receiver and the like. Each content player **102** may have an associated display and speaker **104**. For example, content player **102_1** may have associated display and speaker **104_1**, while content player **102_N** may have an associated display and speaker **104_N**. Each content player **102** is connected to a network **106**, which may be any combination of wired and/or wireless networks.

A set of content servers **108_1** through **108_N** are connected to the network **106**. Content server **108_1** includes standard components, such as a central processing unit **110** connected to input/output devices **112** via a bus **114**. The input/output devices **112** may include a keyboard, mouse, display and the like. A network interface circuit **116** is also connected to the bus **114** to provide connectivity to network **106**. A memory **120** is also connected to the bus **114**. The memory **120** has an associated content source **122**. The content source **122** may include individual instances of content, such as on-demand video, on-demand music, on-demand games and the like.

Similarly, server **108_N** has standard components, such as a central processing unit **130**, input/output devices **132**, a bus **134**, a network interface circuit **136** and a memory **140**. Memory **140** has an associated content source **142**. The content source **142** may include individual instances of content, such as on-demand video, on-demand music, on-demand games and the like. The content in content source **122** and content source **142** may be identical, may be completely different or may have some overlap.

A server **150** is also connected to network **106**. The server **150** is configured as a content player master. That is, each content player **102** is configured to access and receive instructions from server **150**.

The server **150** includes standard components, such as a central processing unit **160**, input/output devices **162**, a bus **164**, a network interface circuit **166** and a memory **170**. The memory **170** stores instructions executed by the central processing unit **160** to implement operations associated with an embodiment of the invention. In one embodiment, the memory **170** stores a set of playback statistics **172**. The set of playback statistics **172** are collected from individual content players **102**. In particular, a content player **102** plays a piece of content. The content player subsequently uploads playback statistics associated with the content to the content player master **150**. The playback statistics characterize audio or video attributes of the content. The playback statistics from the different content players **102_1** through **102_N** are aggregated to form playback statistics **172**.

The memory **170** also includes an evaluation module **174**. The evaluation module **174** includes instructions executed by the central processing unit **160** to evaluate the playback statistics **172**. Consider the case of volume level statistics. The playback statistics **172** may include N instances of volume level statistics for a single set of content. The single set of content may be identified using a uniform resource indicator. Such statistics may be aggregated to form a distribution of volume levels associated with the playback of the content. The evaluation module **174** may identify a mean volume level and use that value as a playback configuration parameter for

future instances in which the content is requested for playback. The playback configuration may have any number of parameters formed in this manner.

The playback configuration may be stored by the playback module 176. The playback module 176 stores a playback configuration for each identified content instance. When a specified instance of content is identified for playback on a content player 102, the content player 102 may fetch a playback configuration from the playback module 176. The playback module 176 transfers the playback configuration to the requesting content player 102. The requesting content player utilizes the playback configuration for the playback of the content.

Thus, the invention provides a system in which content players gather playback statistics which can be utilized to create a more uniform playback experience. Thus, crowd-sourcing is used to create a more uniform playback experience.

FIG. 2 provides an example configuration for a content player 102. In one embodiment, the content player 102 is configured to stream on-demand content into the device. The content streamed into the content player 102 may be audio content, visual content, applications and games. In one embodiment, the content player 102 is utilized to transmit instructions and selections to the server 150.

In one embodiment, the content player 102 includes a processor 200, power manager 202, remote control interface 204 and network interface 206. The content player 102 may also include audio/visual circuitry 206, input/output ports 208 and memory 210. Memory 201 stores instructions to upload playback statistics to server 150 and instructions to fetch playback configurations from server 150.

The processor 200 may utilize a central processing unit (CPU). In another embodiment, the processor 200 also utilizes a graphics processing unit (GPU), which may be integrated with the CPU or be configured to be physically separate. In one embodiment, the internal memory 210 includes one of or a combination of random access memory (RAM), flash memory, and read only memory (ROM). Additional memory and memory interfaces may be provided in various embodiments to support memories such as external storage, which may include hard disks, Universal Serial Bus (USB) drives, Secure Digital (SD) cards, and the like. These memories may also be used for storage of applications, programs, buffered media, media, executable computer code, and software keys.

The remote control interface 204 enables an input device (e.g., a web browser interface, a smartphone application or remote control) to interface with the content player 102. In one embodiment, the remote control interface 204 is configured to communicate with the input device through a wireless interface such as Bluetooth (BT), radio frequency (RF) and infrared (IR). In one embodiment, the remote control interface 204 supports the functionality through an input device including any combination of virtual buttons embodied on a customization screen, physical buttons, accelerometer, gyroscope, pressure sensor, tilt sensor, magnetic sensor, microphone, and light sensor.

In one embodiment, the I/O interface 208 supports multiple video output options such as High Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI), Red-Green-Blue (RGB) component video, Separate Video (S-video), Digital Visual Interface (DVI), Video Graphics Array (VGA), Mobile High-Definition Link (MHL), and composite video. In one embodiment, USB and Apple® Thunderbolt® enabled displays are also supported.

In one embodiment, network interface 206 supports multiple network interfaces such as Ethernet, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth. In another embodiment, the network interface 206 also supports coaxial, digital TV antenna, and satellite television.

FIG. 3 illustrates processing operations associated with an embodiment of the content player 102. Initially, a content player 102 receives content 300. The content is received over network 106 from any of the content servers 108_1 through 108_N.

The content player then asks server whether it should collect statistics 302. That is, instructions stored in memory 210 are executed by processor 200 to make a call to the content player master 150 through network interface circuit 206, which is connected to network 106. The content player master 150 may require that a certain number of initial statistics be available before a playback configuration may be specified. The content player master 150 may periodically want to update statistics even after a playback configuration is established. Thus, the collection of statistics need not be limited to the initial evaluation of new content.

If statistics are to be collected (302—Yes), the content player then plays the content 304. Typically, the content is compressed, in which case the content player decompresses the content during the playback process. Playback statistics are then uploaded 306. That is, the content player 102 uploads playback statistics to the content player master 150.

If statistics are not to be collected (302—No), then the playback configuration is fetched 308. The playback configuration specifies optimal settings for playback based upon collected statistics. The content is then played 310 in accordance with the playback configuration.

The aggregation of statistics may be done on a device-specified or a device-anonymous basis. For example, in the case of a known content player master server, device-specified data may be maintained. In an alternate embodiment, the content player master server may be an open source server that aggregates playback statistics on an anonymous basis.

As previously indicated, the playback statistics characterize audio or video attributes of the content. The audio attributes may be selected from volume level, peak volume, equalization, dynamic range, speaker configuration, room acoustics and codec used. The video attributes may be selected from video histogram, colorimetry information, scene changes detected, codec used, container format, raw video data and metadata.

FIG. 4 illustrates processing operations associated with the content player master server 150. The server 150 collects playback statistics 400. This collection is performed via network 106. Content players 102_1 through 102_N may provide such statistics, as may other device connected to network 106. The collected playback statistics constitute playback statistics 172.

Next, playback statistics are evaluated 402. This operation may be performed by evaluation module 174, as discussed above. The evaluation process results in a playback configuration to equalize user experiences across content players for a specified instance of content. The server 150 may then service a configuration request 406. If such a request exists (406—Yes), a playback configuration is collected 408. That is, a playback configuration is collected for specified content. The playback configuration is then transferred 410 to the requesting content player. The playback configuration may include playback configuration information for individual segments of the content and aggregated playback configuration information for the content. It should also be appreciated that the server may perform the operation of block 402 in response to a specific request. That is, playback statistics may

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be evaluated in response to a discrete query, not simply in connection with the collection of playback statistics.

An embodiment of the present invention relates to a computer storage product with a non-transitory computer readable storage medium having computer code thereon for performing various computer-implemented operations. The media and computer code may be those specially designed and constructed for the purposes of the present invention, or they may be of the kind well known and available to those having skill in the computer software arts. Examples of computer-readable media include, but are not limited to: magnetic media, optical media, magneto-optical media and hardware devices that are specially configured to store and execute program code, such as application-specific integrated circuits (“ASICs”), programmable logic devices (“PLDs”) and ROM and RAM devices. Examples of computer code include machine code, such as produced by a compiler, and files containing higher-level code that are executed by a computer using an interpreter. For example, an embodiment of the invention may be implemented using JAVA®, C++, or other programming language and development tools. Another embodiment of the invention may be implemented in hardwired circuitry in place of, or in combination with, machine-executable software instructions.

The foregoing description, for purposes of explanation, used specific nomenclature to provide a thorough understanding of the invention. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that specific details are not required in order to practice the invention. Thus, the foregoing descriptions of specific embodiments of the invention are presented for purposes of illustration and description. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed; obviously, many modifications and variations are possible in view of the above teachings. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical applications, they thereby enable others skilled in the art to best utilize the invention and various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the following claims and their equivalents define the scope of the invention.

The invention claimed is:

1. A system, comprising:
a processor; and

a memory connected to the processor to store instructions executed by the processor to:

retrieve playback statistics from a plurality of different network connected content players,

perform an evaluation of the playback statistics,

establish a playback configuration for individual instances of content based upon the evaluation of the playback statistics,

receive, from a first network connected content player of the plurality of different network connected content players, a request to select a playback configuration corresponding to a specified instance of the content, the selected playback configuration including an aggregate of the playback statistics, and

transfer the selected playback configuration corresponding to the specified instance of the content to the first network connected player.

2. The system of claim **1** wherein the playback statistics characterize audio attributes or video attributes of the content.

3. The system of claim **2** wherein audio attributes are selected from volume level, peak volume, equalization, dynamic range, speaker configuration, room acoustics and codec used.

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4. The system of claim **2** wherein video attributes are selected from video histogram, colorimetry information, scene changes detected, codec used, container format, raw video data and metadata.

5. The system of claim **1** wherein the playback configuration includes playback configuration information for individual segments of the specified content and aggregated playback configuration information for the specified content.

6. The system of claim **1**, wherein the memory stores instructions executed by the processor to:
aggregate different playback statistics from the plurality of different network connected content players to form a distribution for different characteristics associated with playback the individual instances of content.

7. The system of claim **6**, wherein the memory stores instructions executed by the processor to:
generate a value for each of the different characteristics, wherein the value is used as a playback configuration parameter for future individual instances of the content.

8. The system of claim **1**, wherein the playback configuration includes playback configuration information for individual segments of the specified instance of content and aggregated playback configuration information for an entirety of the specified instance of content.

9. A content player, comprising:
a processor; and
a memory connected to the processor to store instructions executed by the processor to:
receive content over a network,
receive, from a crowdsourcing server, an indication to collect statistics in response to an inquiry about whether to collect statistics,
play the content, and
upload, in response to the indication, content statistics collected during playback to the crowdsourcing server, wherein the content statistics characterize audio or video attributes of the content and are used by the crowdsourcing server to generate a playback configuration for the content player and different content players connected to the crowdsourcing server, the playback configuration including an aggregate of playback statistics from the different content players.

10. The content player of claim **9** wherein the memory stores instructions executed by the processor to:
fetch a playback configuration from the crowdsourcing server, wherein the playback configuration includes playback parameters calculated based on an aggregated analysis of playback statistics from the different content players, and
play content in accordance with the playback configuration.

11. The content player of claim **9** wherein audio attributes are selected from volume level, peak volume, equalization, dynamic range, speaker configuration, room acoustics, and codec used.

12. The content player of claim **9** wherein video attributes are selected from video histogram, colorimetry information, scene changes detected, codec used, container format, raw video data and metadata.

13. The content player of claim **9** wherein the playback configuration includes playback configuration information for individual segments of the content and aggregated playback configuration information for the content.

14. A method comprising:
retrieving, by a computing device, playback statistics from a plurality of different network connected content players;

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performing, by the computing device, an evaluation of the playback statistics;

establishing, by a computing device, a playback configuration for individual instances of content based upon the evaluation of the playback statistics;

receiving, by the computing device, from a first network connected content player of the plurality of different network connected content players, a request to select a playback configuration corresponding to a specified instance of the content, content, the selected playback configuration including an aggregate of the playback statistics; and

transferring, by the computing device, the selected playback configuration corresponding to the specified instance of the content to the first network connected player.

15. The method of claim **14**, wherein the establishing comprises:

aggregating different playback statistics from the plurality of different network connected content players to form a distribution for different characteristics associated with playback the individual instances of content.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the establishing further comprises:

generating a value for each of the different characteristics, wherein the value is used as a playback configuration parameter for future individual instances of the content.

17. The method of claim **14**, wherein the playback configuration includes playback configuration information for individual segments of the specified instance of content and

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aggregated play configuration information for an entirety of the specified instance of content.

18. A method comprising:

receiving, by a computing device, content over a network; receiving, from a crowdsourcing server, an indication to collect statistics in response to an inquiry about whether to collect statistics;

playing, by the computing device, the content; and uploading, by the computing device, in response to the indication, content statistics collected during playback to the crowdsourcing server, wherein the content statistics characterize audio or video attributes of the content and are used by the crowdsourcing server to generate a playback configuration for the content player and different content players connected to the crowdsourcing server, the playback configuration including an aggregate of playback statistics from the different content players.

19. The method of claim **18**, further comprising:

fetching a playback configuration from the crowdsourcing server, wherein the playback configuration includes playback parameters calculated based on an aggregated analysis of playback statistics from the different content players; and

playing content in accordance with the playback configuration.

20. The method of claim **18**, wherein the playback configuration includes playback configuration information for individual segments of the content and aggregated playback configuration information for the content.

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