CLAIMS

1. A method of processing a Instant Message, the method comprising:

receiving a captured image from an image capture device;

selecting at least one image effect from a plurality of image effects;

generating a modified image including the at least one image effect; and

communicating the modified image to a viewing location as the Instant Message.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the captured image is a video stream and the at least one image effect is a video effect selected from a plurality of video effects.

3. The method of claim 2, which comprises generating a graphic user interface via an Instant Messaging application to allow a user to select the at least one video effect from the plurality of video effects.

4. The method of claim 2, which comprises receiving the captured video stream from a web camera and communicating the modified stream as a modified video stream via the Internet to the viewing location.

5. The method of claim 4, which comprises adding additional video effects to the captured video stream at the viewing location and re-transmitting the captured video stream with additional video effects to the user.

6. The method of claim 4, which comprises adding additional video effects to the plurality of video effects with a download facility.

7. The method of claim 3, wherein the method is performed in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the device driver is configured to communicate with an Instant Messaging application selected from one of an AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), a MSN Instant Messenger, and a Yahoo Instant Messenger.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the device driver comprises the plurality of video effects, each video effect being selectable via the Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

10. The method of claim 2, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

11. The method of claim 2, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

12. The method of claim 2, wherein generating the modified video stream comprises processing the captured image with a filter corresponding to the at least one video effect selected.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein a plurality of digital filters are provided at the capture location that generate the plurality of video effects, the method comprising:

selecting one of the plurality of digital filters thereby selecting the at least one video effect; and

filtering the captured image with the selected digital filter to provide the modified video stream.

14. The method of claim 2, wherein the video Instant Message is generated by an Instant Messaging application, the method comprising adding the at least one special effect to the captured video stream prior to communicating the captured video stream to the Instant Messaging application.

15. A machine-readable medium embodying instructions that, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

receive a captured image from an image capture device;

select at least one image effect from a plurality of image effects;

generate a modified image including the at least one image effect; and

communicate the modified image to a viewing location as the Instant Message.

16. An image processing system to process an Instant Message, the system comprising:

a hardware interface module to receive a captured image from an image capture device;

a selection module to select at least one image effect from a plurality of image effects; and

a processing module to generate a modified image including the at least one image effect, the modified image being for communication to a viewing location as the Instant Message.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the captured image is a video stream and the at least one image effect is a video effect selected from a plurality of video effects.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the processing module communicates the modified video stream to an Instant Messaging application which generates a graphic user interface to allow a user to select the at least one video effect from the plurality of video effects.

19. The system of claim 17, wherein the processing module is provided in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the device driver comprises the plurality of special effects, each special effect being selectable via the Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

21. The system of claim 17, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

22. The system of claim 17, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

23. The system of claim 17, which comprises a plurality of digital filters each corresponding to a selectable video effect, wherein the processing module filters the captured image with a digital filter corresponding to the at least one selected video effect to generate the modified video stream.

24. A processing system to process an Instant Message, the system comprising:

means for receiving a captured image from an image capture device;

means for selecting at least one image effect selected from a plurality of image effects;

means for generating a modified image including the at least one image effect; and

means for communicating the modified image to a viewing location as the Instant Message.

25. A method of processing a video stream, the method comprising:

capturing the video stream at a video capturing location;

prior to communicating the video stream to a viewing location,

generating a user interface providing a plurality of video effect options;

monitoring selection of at least one of the video effect options by a user;

processing the video stream to introduce a video effect identified by the at least one video effect selected; and

communicating the modified video stream to the viewer location.

26. The method of claim 25, which comprises adding additional video effects to the modified video stream at the viewing location and re-transmitting the modified video stream with additional video effects to the user.

27. The method of claim 25, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

29. The method of claim 25, wherein the method is performed in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an application associated with the device driver.

CLAIMS

1. A method performed by a device driver to process a video Instant Message, the method comprising:

receiving a captured image from an image capture device;

selecting at least one video effect from a plurality of video effects;

generating a modified image by applying the at least one video effect to the captured image; and

communicating the modified image to a viewing location as the video Instant Message,

wherein the modified image is generated so that no further video effect processing of the video effect by the device driver is required to display the modified image.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the captured image is a video stream.

3. The method of claim 2, which comprises generating a graphic user interface via an Instant Messaging application to allow a user to select the at least one video effect from the plurality of video effects.

4. The method of claim 2, which comprises receiving the captured video stream from a web camera and communicating the modified stream as a modified video stream via the Internet to the viewing location.

5. The method of claim 4, which comprises adding additional video effects to the captured video stream at the viewing location and re-transmitting the captured video stream with additional video effects to the user.

6. The method of claim 4, which comprises adding additional video effects to the plurality of video effects with a download facility.

7. A method of processing an Instant Message, the method comprising:

receiving a captured image from an image capture device;

selecting at least one image effect from a plurality of image effects;

generating a modified image by applying the at least one image effect to the captured image;

communicating the modified image to a viewing location as the Instant Message; and

generating a graphic user interface via an Instant Messaging application to allow a user to select the at least one video effect from the plurality of video effects,

wherein the captured image is a video stream and the at least one image effect is a video effect selected from a plurality of video effects, and

wherein the method is performed in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the device driver is configured to communicate with an Instant Messaging application.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein the device driver comprises the plurality of video effects, each video effect being selectable via the Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

10. The method of claim 2, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

11. The method of claim 2, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

12. The method of claim 2, wherein generating the modified video stream comprises processing the captured image with a filter corresponding to the at least one video effect selected.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein a plurality of digital filters are provided at the capture location that generate the plurality of video effects, the method comprising:

selecting one of the plurality of digital filters thereby selecting the at least one video effect; and

filtering the captured image with the selected digital filter to provide the modified video stream.

14. The method of claim 2, wherein the video Instant Message is generated by an Instant Messaging application, the method comprising adding the at least one special effect to the captured video stream prior to communicating the captured video stream to the Instant Messaging application.

15. A machine-readable medium having instructions stored thereon that, when executed by a device driver, cause the device driver to:

receive a captured image from an image capture device;

select at least one video effect from a plurality of video effects;

generate a modified image by applying the at least one video effect to the captured image; and

communicate the modified image to a viewing location as a video Instant Message,

wherein the modified image is generated so that no further video effect processing of the video effect by the device driver is required to display the modified image.

16. An image processing system to process a video Instant Message, the system comprising:

a computerized image processing system having a processor,

a hardware interface module to receive a captured image from an image capture device;

a selection module to select at least one video effect from a plurality of video effects; and

a processing module of a device driver to generate a modified image by applying the at least one video effect to the captured image, the modified image being for communication to a viewing location as the video Instant Message,

wherein the modified image is generated so that no further video effect processing of the video effect by the device driver is required to display the modified image.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the captured image is a video stream.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein the processing module communicates the modified video stream to an Instant Messaging application which generates a graphic user interface to allow a user to select the at least one video effect from the plurality of video effects.

19. An image processing system to process an Instant Message, the system comprising:

a hardware interface module to receive a captured image from an image capture device;

a selection module to select at least one image effect from a plurality of image effects; and

a processing module to generate a modified image by applying the at least one image effect to the captured image, the modified image being for communication to a viewing location as the Instant Message, wherein the captured image is a video stream and the at least one image effect is a video effect selected from a plurality of video effects, and

wherein the processing module is provided in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the device driver comprises the plurality of special effects, each special effect being selectable via the Instant Messaging application associated with the device driver.

21. The system of claim 17, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

22. The system of claim 17, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

23. The system of claim 17, which comprises a plurality of digital filters each corresponding to a selectable video effect, wherein the processing module filters the captured image with a digital filter corresponding to the at least one selected video effect to generate the modified video stream.

24. A processing system to process video Instant Message, the system comprising:

means for receiving a captured image from an image capture device;

means for selecting at least one video effect selected from a plurality of video effects;

means for generating a modified image by applying the at least one video effect to the captured image; and

means for communicating the modified image to a viewing location as the video Instant Message,

wherein the modified image is generated so that no further video effect processing of the video effect is required to display the modified image at the viewing location.

25. A method of processing a video stream, the method comprising:

capturing the video stream at a video capturing location;

prior to communicating the video stream to a viewing location,

generating a user interface providing a plurality of video effect options;

monitoring selection of at least one of the video effect options by a user;

processing the video stream to apply a video effect identified by the at least one video effect selected to the captured video stream to produce a modified video stream; and

communicating the modified video stream to the viewer location,

wherein the video stream is processed so that no further video effect processing of the modified video stream is required for displaying at the viewer location.

26. The method of claim 25, which comprises adding additional video effects to the modified video stream at the viewing location and re-transmitting the modified video stream with additional video effects to the user.

27. The method of claim 25, wherein the video effect is a gimmick effect to simulate an environment at an image capture location.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein the video effect is the incorporation of at least one object to alter the appearance of the captured image, wherein the object is selected from the group comprising: drawings, supplementary images, pre-defined shapes, and stylised text.

29. A method of processing a video stream, the method comprising:

capturing the video stream at a video capturing location;

prior to communicating the video stream to a viewing location,

generating a user interface providing a plurality of video effect options;

monitoring selection of at least one of the video effect options by a user;

processing the video stream to apply a video effect identified by the at least one video effect selected to the captured video stream to produce a modified video stream; and

communicating the modified video stream to the viewer location,

wherein the method is performed in a device driver to interface the image capture device to an application associated with the device driver.