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(54) **VEHICLE INFORMATION/TASK MANAGER**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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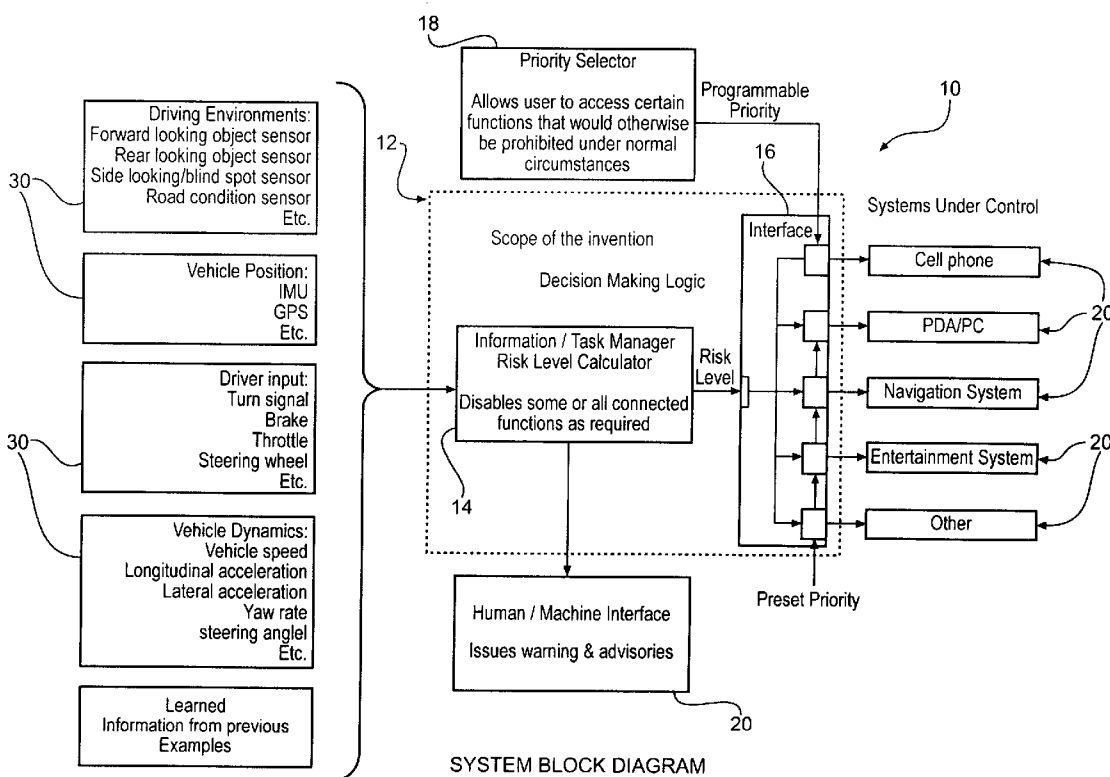
The present invention is operative to disable at least one infotainment device under certain conditions relative to the current driving environment of the user. The system uses a weighted matrix to assign risk to certain sensed conditions while driving. A changed condition is assigned a weight and the weighted risks are summed to calculate risk level information. The risk level information is thereafter compared to priority level information associated with at least one infotainment device. When the risk level information exceeds or is equal to the priority level information of the at least one infotainment device the system temporarily disables the infotainment device until the driving environment changes to a condition where it is safe to operate the infotainment device.

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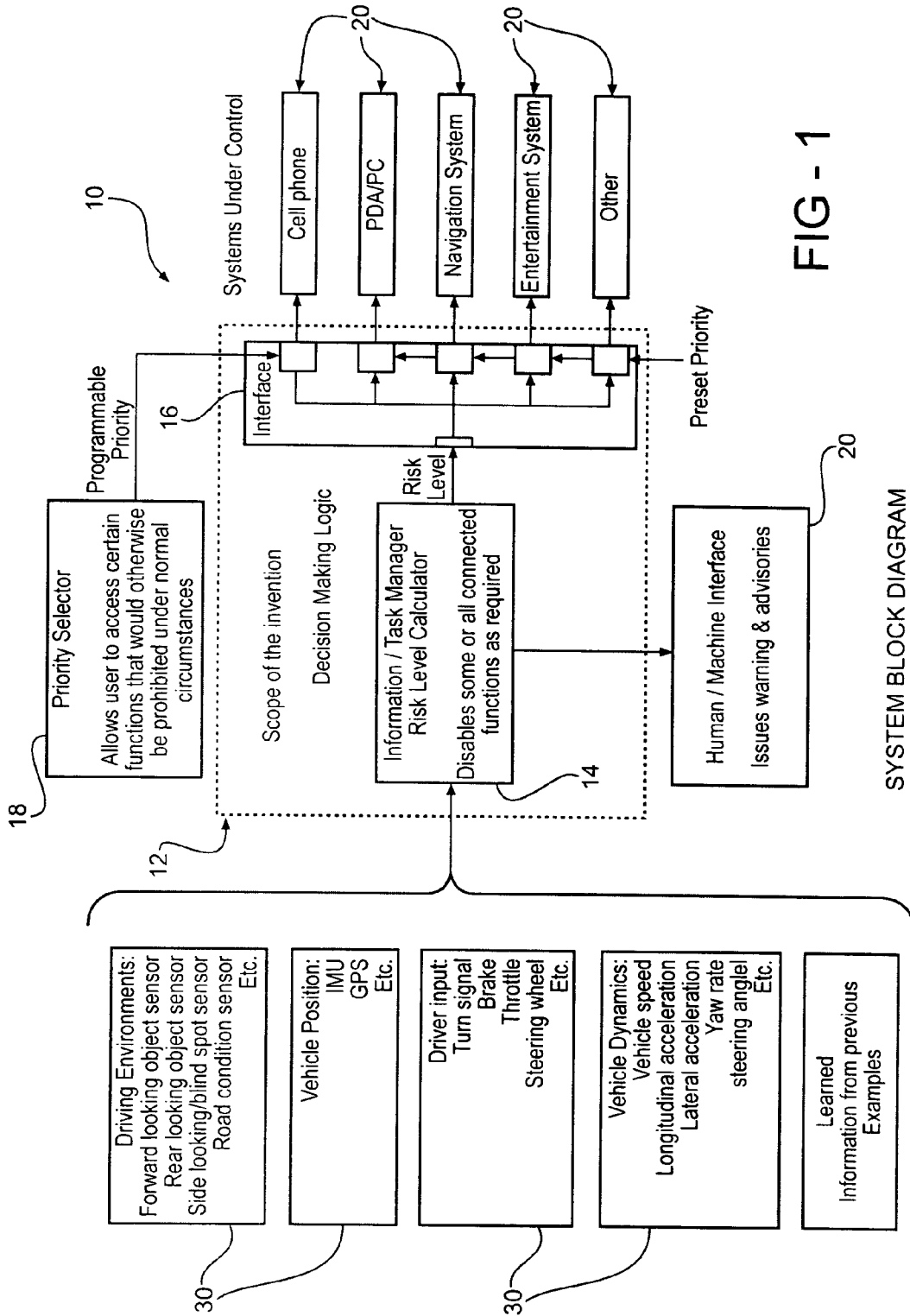


FIG - 1

SYSTEM BLOCK DIAGRAM

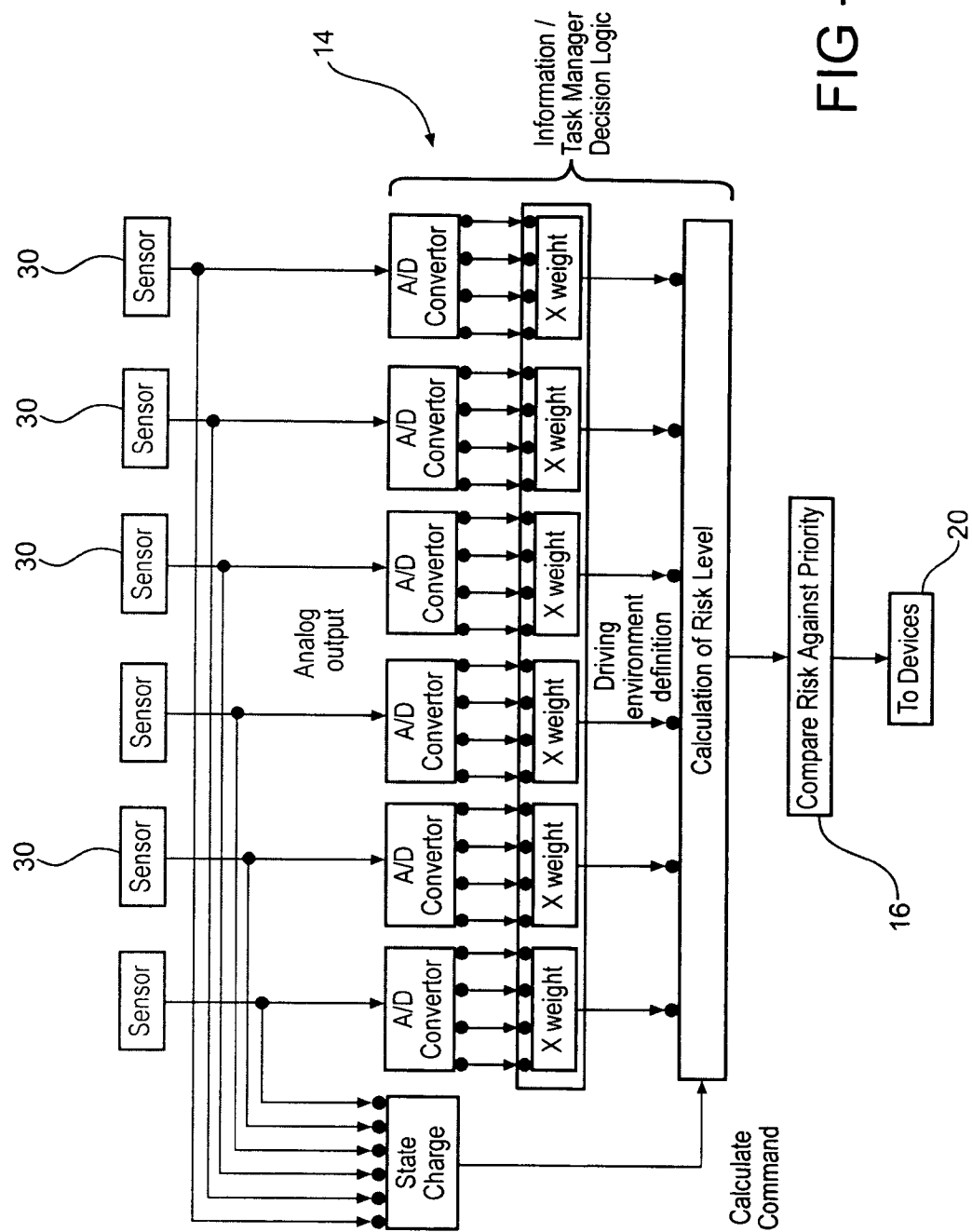


FIG - 2

## VEHICLE INFORMATION/TASK MANAGER

### FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to vehicle safety and management of vehicle infotainment systems. More particularly, the invention relates to a vehicle information and task manager that reduces the probability of vehicle crashes due to distractions caused by the driver operating communication/multimedia devices while driving.

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] To drive safely, a driver needs to give priority attention to the driving task. Even a momentary distraction can lead to a crash. The distraction can be caused by anything that draws the driver's attention away from the road.

[0003] Most people are limited in the amount of information that they can process during any given period of time. To cope with the multiple demands that occur during driving, drivers have to shift their attention back and forth to attend to each of them. Most of the time, drivers are able to do this quite well, but, if a distraction occurs at an inappropriate time or if it is prolonged, attention to driving is reduced and safety can be jeopardized.

[0004] There have always been distractions while driving; tuning a radio, eating, or attending to a child, and most recently, and most commonly, talking on a cellular or mobile phone. Additionally, a new set of distractions are associated with the ever-growing array of new in vehicle electronic devices, sometimes referred to as infotainment systems. These types of devices are rapidly being developed by the electronics and automobile industries.

[0005] Many of these new devices provide safety benefits and, in some cases, have been attributed to saving lives. However, lawmakers have been weighing the benefits of this new technology of infotainment devices in cars against the growing evidence of their potential to increase driver distraction and the risk to driver's safety.

[0006] In light of the above circumstances, the present invention seeks to provide an apparatus that reduces the probability of vehicle crashes due to distraction caused by the driver operating infotainment devices while driving.

### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention provides an infotainment device disabling system and method which is activated when the driver's work load is large in relation to the external driving environment and the drivers use of at least one of the infotainment devices disposed in the vehicle.

[0008] The apparatus comprises an electronic device having memory wherein the electronic device is operative to receive information from at least one information source disposed on the vehicle and output risk level information relative to the present driving environment.

[0009] An information interface is in data communication with the electronic device and at least one infotainment device disposed in a vehicle wherein the information interface is operative to receive the risk the level information from the electronic device and transmit the information to the at least one infotainment device disposed in the vehicle.

[0010] A computer program is disposed within the electronic device and operates to calculate the risk level information based on the information received from the at least one information source. It is appreciated that the at least one information source provides information to the electronic device that is relative to driver's external driving environment in addition to other information, such as, vehicle dynamics relative to speed, vehicle location and information learned from previous experience by the system while the vehicle is being driven.

[0011] The apparatus is operative to compare the risk level information calculated with priority level information associated with the at least one infotainment device and thereafter generates a signal that causes the at least one infotainment device to be disabled when the risk level information calculated by the electronic device exceeds the priority level information of the at least one infotainment device. Likewise, the apparatus is operative to re-enable the at least one infotainment device when the risk level information returns to a value less than the priority level information associated with the infotainment device.

[0012] A user interface is in communication with the electronic device that is operative to allow the user to input user-defined priority information relative to at least one function of the at least one infotainment device. In this manner, the at least one function designated by the user will not be disabled by the apparatus when the risk level information exceeds the priority level information associated with the infotainment device.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] A better understanding of the present invention will be added upon reference to the following detailed description. When read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like parts are given like reference numerals and wherein:

[0014] **FIG. 1** is a system block diagram of the information task manager as according to the invention; and

[0015] **FIG. 2** is a schematic block diagram of the information task manager and communication with information sources and infotainment devices as accorded to the invention.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0016] By implementing the present invention in vehicles, it may be possible to avoid restrictive regulations covering the use of some types of infotainment devices upon driving in vehicles. This is because the system can judge such situations when devices could be used and when drivers need to maintain their undivided attention to the road, and for this reason, the system will temporarily disable use of the some devices.

[0017] The proposed system focuses on the external driving environment to determine the level of risk that the driving environment poses to the driver in the event the driver does not have their full attention directed toward the road.

[0018] With reference to **FIG. 1**, the apparatus provides an information task manager system **12** operative to disable at

least one infotainment device under certain driving conditions. The system **12** uses a weighting matrix to assign a risk level to certain sensed conditions such as the external driving environment, vehicle position, driver actions and vehicle dynamics. Each changed condition is assigned a weight and each of the weighted risks is summed together to comprise risk level information.

[0019] The risk level information is thereafter compared against a priority level information associated with the at least one infotainment device and a disable signal is generated to disable those infotainment devices that have priority level information that is less than or equal to the risk level information calculated by the system **12**.

[0020] Under certain conditions, the user is allowed to define a priority level for at least one function associated with at least one infotainment device such that the at least one function defined will not be disabled by the system **12** as it normally would be under the circumstances when the priority level information associated with a particular infotainment device is less than or equal to the current risk level information.

[0021] With reference to **FIG. 1**, the system **12** includes an electronic device **14** or information task manager that is operative to receive information from at least one information source **30** and calculate risk level information relative to the information received from the at least one information source **30**.

[0022] The system **12** includes an information interface **16** in data communication with information task manager **14** and at least infotainment device **20**. The information interface **16** is operative to receive information from the at least one information source **30** and transmit risk level information to the at least one infotainment device **20**. The information interface **16** may be in the form of a data router having memory and data processing capability.

[0023] Preferably, priority level information relative to at least one infotainment device **20** is disposed in the memory of the information interface **16**. The priority level information is indicative of the level of importance of sustaining the activation of the at least one infotainment device **20** during high-risk level situations. Illustratively, a navigation system may have a priority of one, an audio system component such as a radio may have a priority level of three, and a cell phone may have a priority level of five. In this fashion, risk level information equivalent to a value a four would disable both the audio system component and the navigation system while the cell phone will remain active.

[0024] It is appreciated that the above example is merely illustrative of an assignment of priority level information to the above-described infotainment devices and that the priority levels and devices may vary from the values and components described. The priority level information may be pre-set at pre-defined levels or may be selectively changed as desired by a system user.

[0025] The processing capability of the information interface **16** is preferably operative to receive risk level information from the electronic device **14** or information task manager and compare the risk level information to priority level information associated with at least one of the infotainment devices **20**. When the information interface **16** receives risk level information from the information task

manager **14** that is higher than the priority level information relative to the at least one infotainment device **20**, the at least one infotainment device **20** will be disabled by the system **12**. Thereafter, when the information task manager **14** transmits risk level information to the information interface **16** that is less than the priority level information of the at least one infotainment device **20**, the infotainment device will be re-enabled to normal operation.

[0026] A computer program is disposed within the information task manager **14** and is operative to calculate the risk level information based on the information received from the at least one information source **30** and information disposed in memory of the information task manager **14**.

[0027] The at least one information source may be a sensing device that senses the driving environment. Illustratively, the sensing devices may include forward, rear, side or blind spot looking optic sensors, road condition sensors, proximity detection sensors, external temperature sensors and rain detection sensors. Other information sources may include GPS, vehicle electronic systems, such as ABS, engine controller, throttle position sensor, steering position sensor, vehicle speed sensor, longitudinal acceleration, steering angle, yaw rate or the like.

[0028] Most importantly, the information task manager **14** preferably utilizes learned information derived from previous experiences relative to the driving environment. The system **12** can compare previous experiences with a current situation to modify the system response to a given set of inputs from the at least one information sources **30**.

[0029] The present invention utilizes the at least one information source **30** to accomplish a form of artificial learning. The at least one information source **30** constantly provides the information task manager **14** with information concerning the external driving environment surrounding the vehicle. The system **12** uses the information from the at least one information source **30** to assess the driving environment and select the best course of action based on current conditions and previously learned behavior. In this manner, the computer is constantly updated or learns from previous experiences, and as such, the information task manager **14** provides the basis for an efficient and flexible system and method of decision-making compared to more traditional methods that utilize look-up tables.

[0030] With look-up tables, a traditional system conducts a search until it finds results that best fit current circumstances in the driving environment. The look-up table is predefined and updating the table requires a software change, and as such, the decision-making process of conventional systems does not change until the system has been reprogrammed.

[0031] With artificial learning, the system **12** of the present invention can essentially make decisions on its own as to the best course of action to take in terms of disabling the at least one infotainment device **30** under various circumstances encountered in the ever-changing driving environment.

[0032] Referring again to **FIG. 1**, a user interface **22** is provided in communication with the system **12** and is operative to allow the user to input user defined priority information relative to at least one function of the least one

infotainment device **30**. In this manner, the user is allowed to access certain functions that will otherwise be inhibited under normal circumstances.

[0033] Illustratively, for some devices such as cell phones, the user interface allows the user to define at least one incoming call phone number as critical and not to be disabled by the system **12**. Accordingly, when a call comes from one of the user-defined critical numbers, the system **12** allows the call to come through despite the current circumstances of the driving environment. For all other numbers, the system **12** disables the cell phone. Conversely, the user-defined priority information may include outgoing phone numbers such as 911 or other emergency contact phone numbers.

[0034] The system **12** is also programmable to recognize a driver's use of at least one of the infotainment devices **20** such that when a high-risk condition exists, the system **12** will prompt the driver to complete his or her usage of the least one infotainment device **20** as soon as possible, but will not disable the device until the current use is completed. As an example, when a driver is on a call in progress and the state of the driving environment changes to a high-risk state, the system **12** will prompt the driver to complete the call as soon as possible but will not disable the cell phone until the call is completed.

[0035] The information task manager **14** calculates risk level information by first combining data relative to information received from the least one information source **30** with a weighted value or grade. Thereafter, all of the weighted data is combined to define the risk level information associated with the condition of the driving environment at the particular instant in time. This risk level information is thereafter used by the system **12** to disable the at least one infotainment device **20** that has an assigned priority level information that is lower than the calculated risk level information. The information task manager **14** does this by sending the risk level information to the information interface **16**. The information interface **16** outputs a trigger signal to each infotainment device **20** such that any infotainment device **20** having priority level information that is less than or equal to the risk level information will be disabled.

[0036] With reference to **FIG. 2**, a schematic illustration of the inventive apparatus **10** as provided. It is appreciated that the system **12** may be a single unit that comprises both the information task manager **14** and the information interface **16** in a single unit. Alternatively, the information task manager **14** and information interface **16** may be provided as separate units as best illustrated in **FIG. 2**.

[0037] **FIG. 2** is exemplary of the components and process whereby the unique apparatus **10** is provided for reducing the probability of vehicle crashes due to distractions caused by the driver operating infotainment devices while driving. However, it is appreciated that other component architectures and processes may become apparent to those skilled in the art without exceeding the scope of the present invention.

[0038] Referring again to **FIG. 1**, the apparatus **10** preferably includes a user interface **20** that is operative to provide the user a visual indicator to notify the user that a device has been temporarily disabled due to the present

driving conditions or that the use of such device should be discontinued as soon as possible. Other indicators may be incorporated into the user interface such as audible alarms, tactile indicators, verbal indicators or other types of indicators suitable for such purpose.

[0039] Preferably, the information interface **16** includes at least one timing device wherein the at least one infotainment device **20** that has disabled will only be re-enabled after the expiration of a predetermined time period following the trigger signal that is generated when the risk level information returns to a value less than the priority level information associated with the particular infotainment device **20**.

[0040] As illustrated in **FIG. 2** the risk level information is calculated by the information task manager **14**, and the priority level information is calculated by the information interface **16**. However, it is appreciated that these tasks may be allocated to either one or both of the information task manager **14** and information interface **16** without exceeding the scope of the invention. It is also appreciated that these tasks may be allocated to some other device having the capability to perform such function.

[0041] A method for facilitating a safe operation of a vehicle in relation to a driver's use of at least one infotainment device **20** disposed in a vehicle as according to an invention may be described as a process comprising the steps of providing an electronic device having memory in communication with at least one infotainment device **20** whereas the electronic device is operative to disable some or all of the functions of the least one infotainment device.

[0042] The process continues by providing information relative to the external driving environment of the vehicle to the electronic device for calculating risk level information as described above. Wherein the risk level information is preferably calculated using the information received relative to the external driving environment and the information learned from previous experience.

[0043] Thereafter, the process continues by comparing the risk level information with priority level information associated with the least one infotainment device **20**, such that, the infotainment device **20** is disabled when the priority level information is less than or equal to the calculated risk level information.

[0044] Finally, the process ends with the system re-enabling the at least one infotainment device **20** when the priority level information of the infotainment device is higher than the present risk level information.

[0045] The foregoing figures and descriptions thereof are provided as illustrated of a preferred embodiment of this invention and are not intended to be all-inclusive. It is understood that various changes to essential components and additions to the system and/or method may be resorted to without departing from the spirit of the invention or scope of the claims as presented.

1. An apparatus to measure and manage information for the purpose of facilitating the safe operation of a vehicle in relation to a driver's use of at least one infotainment device disposed in the vehicle, said apparatus comprising:

an electronic device having memory and operative to receive information from at least one information source and output risk level information;

an information interface in data communication with said electronic device and the at least one infotainment device wherein said information interface is operative to receive said risk level information and transmit a trigger signal to the at least one infotainment device;

a computer program disposed within the electronic device operative to calculate said risk level information based on the information received from the at least one information source and information disposed in said memory, and wherein said apparatus is operative to compare said risk level information with priority level information relative to the at least one infotainment device, and wherein the apparatus generates the trigger signal that causes the at least one infotainment device to be disabled when said risk level information exceeds said priority level information and enabled when said risk level information returns to a value less than said priority level information; and

a user interface in communication with the electronic device, said user interface operative to allow the user to input user-defined priority information relative to at least one function of the at least one infotainment device wherein the at least one function will not be disabled by the apparatus.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the infotainment device is a phone or audio system component.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one information source is a vehicle sensor operative to monitor the external driving environment.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one information source is a global positioning system.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one information source is at least one driver input.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one information source monitors at least one vehicle dynamic parameter.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein calculating the risk level comprises grading the information received from the at least one information source and combining the graded information to determine the risk level information.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the information interface includes at least one timer device.

9. The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the at least one infotainment device is enabled after the expiration of a predetermined time period that follows said signal generated when said risk level information is less than said priority level information.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said comparison between the risk level information and the priority level information is accomplished by the information interface.

11. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the user interface further comprises a visual indicator operative to notify the user that the device has been disabled.

12. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the user defined priority information comprises a list of incoming call phone numbers.

13. The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the at least one function that will not be disabled is an incoming call made

from an incoming call phone number that matches a phone number in the user defined priority information.

14. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a portion of the information disposed in the memory is information learned from previous experience.

15. A method for facilitating the safe operation of a vehicle in relation to a driver's use of at least one infotainment device disposed in the vehicle, said method comprising the steps of:

- providing an electronic device having memory in communication with the at least one infotainment device wherein the electronic device is operative to disable some or all functions of the at least one infotainment device;
- providing information relative to an external driving environment of the vehicle to said electronic device;
- calculating risk level information using said electronic device wherein said risk level information is calculated using said information relative to the external driving environment and information disposed in said memory of the electronic device;
- comparing said risk level information with priority level information relative to the at least one infotainment device;
- disabling the at least one infotainment device when said priority level information is less than or equal to said risk level information; and
- re-enabling the at least one infotainment device when said priority level information is higher than said risk level information.

16. The method of claim 15 further comprising the step of providing a user interface operative to allow the user to define at least one infotainment function that will not be disabled.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein the at least one infotainment function is an incoming call.

18. The method of claim 16 further comprising providing the user a visual indication at said user interface operative to notify the driver that the at least one infotainment device has been disabled or re-enabled.

19. The method of claim 15 further comprising the step of providing a timer in the electronic device.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein re-enabling the at least one infotainment device occurs after the expiration of a predetermined period of time.

21. The method of claim 15 wherein a portion of the information disposed in the memory of the electronic device is information learned from previous experiences.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the information learned from previous experiences is updated during operation of the vehicle.

23. The method of claim 22 further comprising the step of comparing the information learned from previous experience to the information relative to said external driving environment.

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