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Published in:
Physical Review Letters

DOI:
10.1103/PhysRevLett.112.163001

Published: 01/01/2014

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of Record (includes final page, issue and volume numbers)

Please check the document version of this publication:
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Download date: 12. Sep. 2017
Wireless Network Control of Interacting Rydberg Atoms

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(Received 12 December 2013; published 22 April 2014)

We identify a relation between the dynamics of ultracold Rydberg gases in which atoms experience a strong dipole blockade and spontaneous emission, and a stochastic process that models certain wireless random-access networks. We then transfer insights and techniques initially developed for these wireless networks to the realm of Rydberg gases, and explain how the Rydberg gas can be driven into crystal formations using our understanding of wireless networks. Finally, we propose a method to determine Rabi frequencies (laser intensities) such that particles in the Rydberg gas are excited with specified target excitation probabilities, providing control over mixed-state populations.

Stochastic processes play a ubiquitous role in interacting particle systems. Glauber initiated a study of the stochastic Ising model in 1963 [1], and similar models are actively investigated in probability theory, often applied to very different systems [2,3]. The two seemingly disparate interacting particle systems we study in this Letter, are a gas of ultracold Rydberg atoms [4] accompanied by a dissipative mechanism, and a wireless random-access network, made up of for example electronic transmitters in communication networks [5]. It turns out that their dynamics can be described, under certain conditions, with the same equations. Indeed, Rydberg atoms exhibit a strong interaction, while simultaneously active transmitters would lead to interference at receivers, both resulting in complicated large-scale system behavior.

Rydberg gases consist of atoms that can be in either a ground state or an excited state with a high principal quantum number. When an atom is excited, the energy levels of neighboring atoms shift. This makes it unlikely for neighboring atoms to also excite, and we call this effect the dipole blockade [6,7]. The dipole blockade is at the basis of quantum information and quantum gate protocols [6,8,9], while also the first ordered Rydberg structures have been observed [11]. Recent experiments are geared towards leveraging the dipole blockade to create Rydberg crystals, i.e. formations of regularly spaced excited atoms. A proposed method is to use chirped laser pulses [12–14], and another utilizes a dissipation mechanism, specifically spontaneous emission [15].

Nowadays, transmitters in wireless networks share a transmission medium through the use of distributed random-access protocols. We focus on wireless networks operating according to the CSMA protocol [16], which lets transmitters autonomously decide when to start a transmission based on the level of activity in their environment, usually estimated through measurements of interference and signal-to-noise ratios. If too many neighbors are sensed to be transmitting, the transmitter postpones its activation and tries again at a random later point in time. We see that transmitters experience blocking effects similar to the Rydberg dipole blockade, which sparked our original interest to compare their mathematical models [17]. Mathematical models of wireless networks were already being studied because of our increasing demands on our communication infrastructures, and we focussed our attention on stochastic models of CSMA that were originally considered in [5,18,19].

This Letter uses the fact that rate equations adequately describe the Rydberg gas when spontaneous emission is introduced to the model [20], and we interpret the rate equations as Kolmogorov forward equations [21] that describe the transient evolution of a stochastic model reminiscent of CSMA.

Regarding the Rydberg gas, we consider a gas of $N$ atoms in the $\mu$-Kelvin regime, to which we apply the frozen gas approximation by neglecting the kinetic energy of the system. The atoms are thus considered fixed at positions $r_i \in \mathbb{R}^3$ for $i = 1, \ldots, N$. The ultracold atoms are subjected to two lasers with associated Rabi frequencies $\Omega_+^r, \Omega_-^r$, respectively, that facilitate excitation from the ground state $|g\rangle$ to an intermediate state $|e\rangle$, and from the intermediate state $|e\rangle$ to a Rydberg state $|r\rangle$. We also assume that the intermediate state decays with rate $\Gamma$, through spontaneous emission. In principle, detuning of the laser frequencies could be taken into account, but here we leave it out for simplicity.

The system description of a wireless random-access network is similar to that of the Rydberg gas, but with different terminology. A wireless random-access network can be modeled as consisting of $N$ transmitter-receiver pairs, and each transmitter can be either active (1) or nonactive (0). When active, a transmitter transmits data for an exponentially distributed time with mean $1/\mu$. Similarly, a nonactive transmitter repeatedly attempts to become active after exponentially distributed times with mean...
1/ν. Figure 1 summarizes our modeling assumptions thus far.

For a single atom, we can write down the optical Bloch equations. As in \cite{20}, we then conclude that if (i) the upper transition is much more weakly driven than the lower one (Ω_e ≪ Ω_0), and (ii) the decay rate of the intermediate level is much larger than the Rabi frequency driving between |e⟩ and |r⟩ (Ω_e ≪ Γ), that then the excitation dynamics are described using the rate equation,

$$\frac{dp_i(t)}{dt} = ν p_0(t) - μ p_i(t).$$

Here, \(p_0(t)\) and \(p_i(t)\) denote the probabilities that the atom \(i\) is (effectively) in the ground state or the Rydberg state, respectively. Furthermore,

$$μ = \frac{2ΓΩ_0^4}{(Ω_e^2 - 2Ω_0^2)^2 + 2Γ^2(Ω_e^2 + Ω_0^2)}, \quad ν = \frac{Ω_e^2}{Ω_0^2}μ.$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

denote the transition rates between the ground and Rydberg state. It is noteworthy that Eq. (1) also describes the time evolution of a single, noninteracting transmitter. The \(p_0(t)\) and \(p_i(t)\) are then the probabilities that the transmitter \(i\) is nonactive or active, respectively.

When dealing with many-particle systems, however, we have to take particle interactions into account. The atoms in Rydberg gases, and the transmitters in wireless networks, interact with each other. Specifically, if an atom is in the Rydberg state, other nearby atoms experience a dipole blockade \cite{14}. Transmitters that detect high levels of interference and low signal-to-noise ratios (because of their neighbors) postpone their activation.

We will model the dipole blockade, as well as the interference constraints on transmitters, using a unit-disk interference model. The unit-disk interference model involves the assumption that atoms (transmitters) within a distance \(R\) of each other cannot simultaneously be in the Rydberg state (active). For Rydberg gases, this assumption is in line with measurements and simulations of pair correlation functions between atoms in the Rydberg state, which show a sharp cutoff when plotted as a function of the distance between the atoms \cite{11,22}. The collection of possible configurations is thus

$$S = \{σ ∈ \{0, 1\}^N | d(r_i, r_j) > R ∀ i ≠ j: σ_i = σ_j = 1\},$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

and these configurations \(σ = (σ_1, ..., σ_N)^T\) will be called feasible. The notation is such that if \(σ_i = 0\) or \(1\), atom \(i\) is in the ground or Rydberg state, respectively. Similarly, \(σ_i = 0\) or \(1\) if transmitter \(i\) is nonactive or active, respectively.

There are certainly practical differences between Rydberg gases and wireless networks. In wireless networks, every transmitter can have its own activation \(ν_i\) and deactivation rate \(μ_i\). To achieve the same effect in Rydberg gases, we will assume that the two-step laser can be split into \(M ≪ N\) spots with radius \(S\), and that each spot \(i = 1, ..., M\) has a different laser intensity \(E_i\). Each laser spot contains a cluster of atoms, and with this setup, the atoms within each cluster may be subjected to a different Rabi frequency. We assume that \(S ≪ R\), so that we can treat each spot as being synonymous to one atom, and we will replace the symbol \(M\) by \(N\) for notational convenience.

Each atom (spot) \(i = 1, ..., N\) will thus experience its own transition rates \(ν_i, μ_i\). Figure 2 summarizes the blockade effect, our assumptions on the laser spots, and the unit-disk interference model.

For both models, the probability of observing the system in state \(σ \in S\) at time \(t\), denoted by \(p_σ(t)\), is described by the master equation

$$\frac{dp_σ(t)}{dt} = \sum_{η ∈ S} Q_{ση} p_η(t),$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

where \(Q\) denotes a transition rate matrix. The master equation Eq. (4) can be interpreted as a Kolmogorov forward equation, which characterizes a Markov process \cite{21,23}.

The off-diagonal elements of \(Q \in \mathbb{R}^{|S|×|S|}\) describe the dynamics of this stochastic process. Denoting the \(N\)-dimensional vector with a one in the \(i\)th position by \(e_i\), we have that when the system is in state \(σ \in S\), it jumps to states \(σ + e_i\), \(i = 1, ..., N\), with rate \(Q_{σσ+e_i} = ν_i\) if \(σ + e_i \in S\), and to states \(σ - e_i\), \(i = 1, ..., N\), with rate...
converges to the equilibrium probability of observing the system in state \( \sigma \) for instance an equilibrium distribution depends solely on the ratios \( \nu_i/\mu_i \), and proving that it is in fact the equilibrium distribution can be done by observing that it satisfies the detailed balance equations [23], \( \pi_\sigma Q_{\sigma\eta} = \pi_\eta Q_{\eta\sigma} \), for all \( \sigma, \eta \in S \).

Consider the special case in which all particles make their transition at the same rate, and set \( \nu_i = \nu \) and \( \mu_i = \mu \) for \( i = 1, \ldots, N \) accordingly. When \( \nu/\mu \to \infty \), the equilibrium probability of observing the system in state \( \sigma \in S \) converges to

\[
\pi_\sigma(\nu, \mu) = \frac{1}{Z(\nu, \mu)} \prod_{i=1}^{N} \left( \frac{\nu_i}{\mu_i} \right)^{\sigma_i}, \quad \sigma \in S, \tag{5}
\]

where \( Z(\nu, \mu) \) denoting the normalization constant. The equilibrium distribution depends solely on the ratios \( \nu_i/\mu_i \), and it is noteworthy that simulations of a driven dissipative Rydberg gas confirmed the formation of crystalline structures in [15,25,26], and here we have explained how such formations appear using our connection to wireless networks.

We are also able to investigate the time \( \tau \) it takes until the process reaches a dominant configuration. The hitting time \( \tau \) of the dominant configuration is the first moment at which the system reaches the even or odd dominant configuration. The random variable \( \tau \) is of interest, because it is a measure for how long the experimentalist has to wait before a dominant configuration has appeared.

To illustrate this, we have simulated sample paths of \( X(t) \) on even \( n \times n \) lattice topologies. Histograms of the hitting time distributions for grids of several sizes are shown in Fig. 4, as well as the normalized average number of excited particles. Note that the average hitting time increases as lattices become larger.

We now describe a wireless network algorithm in the context of Rydberg gases, to determine Rabi frequencies (laser intensities) such that particles in the Rydberg gas are excited with specified target excitation probabilities. The algorithm was developed in [27] to achieve maximum throughput in wireless networks in a distributed fashion, and was later generalized for implementation in product-form networks [28]. In Supplemental Material [29], we provide a short discussion of the algorithm in its original context, and we explain that the algorithm is solving an inversion problem that can be NP hard.

The wireless network algorithm can be applied to the Rydberg atoms by iteratively setting
for atoms \( i = 1, \ldots, N \). Here, \( n \in \mathbb{N}^+ \) indexes each iteration, and the \( \alpha^n \) denote algorithm step sizes that are typically chosen as a decreasing sequence. The \( \hat{\theta}_i^{[n+1]} \) denote empirically obtained estimates of the probabilities of observing atom \( i = 1, \ldots, N \) in the Rydberg state, \( \theta_i \), and \( \phi_i \) denotes the target probability of observing atom \( i \) in the Rydberg state. The algorithm in Eq. (7) seeks \( \Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}} \) such that \( \theta_i (\Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}}, \Omega_x) = \phi_i \).

In wireless networks, an estimate \( \hat{\theta}_i \) can be obtained through online observation of a transmitter’s activity [Supplemental Material [29], Eq. (1)]. Experimentally observing the evolution of a particle system through time however is difficult. Instead, we can (i) determine an estimate \( \hat{\theta} \) of \( \theta \) using simulation, or (ii) use repeated experimentation to determine an estimate \( \hat{\theta} \) of \( \theta \). With the latter approach, we forego our mathematical guarantee of convergence, but the design principles that guaranteed the convergence in the former method still hold. That is, we need to improve the quality of \( \hat{\theta} \) as the number of iterations \( n \) increases.

For every \( n \)th iteration of the algorithm, we can for example reinitialize the process \( m^{[n]} \) times and determine the state the process is in at some time \( T^{[n]} \). Denoting these samples by \( X_i^{[n,s]} (T^{[n]}) \), with \( n \in \mathbb{N}^+ \) and \( s \in \{1, \ldots, m^{[n]}\} \), we can calculate

\[
\hat{\theta}_i^{[n]} = \frac{1}{m^{[n]}} \sum_{s=1}^{m^{[n]}} 1 \{ X_i^{[n,s]} (T^{[n]}) = 1 \}, \quad i = 1, \ldots, N, \tag{8}
\]

which, for sufficiently large \( T^{[n]} \) and \( m^{[n]} \), provides an estimate of the equilibrium probability that particle \( i \) is in the Rydberg state. Intuitively, we expect that \( T^{[n]} \) should be at least of the order of the mixing time (that is to say, the system should be close to equilibrium).

As an example, we focus on a system of \( i = 1, \ldots, N \) atoms positioned on a line, that block the first \( b \) neighbors on both sides. We consider the problem of determining \( \Omega_x \) such that each atom is excited with equal probability \( \phi \in (0, 1) \). This problem is nontrivial because the atoms at the border have fewer neighbors that block them and are therefore excited with higher probability. Moreover, this effect propagates through the system, which can be verified by an analytical evaluation of the probabilities of observing atom \( i \) in the Rydberg state.

![FIG. 5 (color online). The \( \theta_i (\nu, \mu) \) for \( N = 9, b = 1, \) and \( \nu_i / \mu_i = 10 \).](image1)

![FIG. 6 (color online). Algorithm output when \( N = 9, b = 4, \) \( \Gamma = 2 \times 6 \) MHz, and \( \Omega_{e,i} = 2 \pi \times 1 \) MHz. The dotted lines indicate \( \Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}} \).](image2)

We consider this particular example because we can again utilize our connection to wireless networks and provide an analytical expression for \( \Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}} \). As shown in [30], we need to set

\[
\Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}} = \frac{\phi}{1 - (1 + b) \phi} \left( \frac{1 - b \phi}{1 - (1 + b) \phi} \right)^{w(i)-w(1)} \tag{10}
\]

for \( i = 1, \ldots, N \), in order to have \( \theta_i (\Omega_{e,i}^{\text{opt}}, \Omega_x) = \phi_i \) for \( i = 1, \ldots, N \). Here, \( w(i) = \min \{ i + b, N \} - \max \{1, i - b\} \) denotes the number of other atoms that atom \( i \) blocks if it is excited.

In order to illustrate the algorithm applied to this system, we utilize the following simulation procedure. We repeatedly simulate the Rydberg gas by generating sample paths \( X_i^{[n,s]} (T^{[n]}) \) using the generator matrix in Eq. (4). Subsequently, we calculate an estimate of the excitation probabilities through Eq. (8), and update the Rabi frequencies according to the algorithm in Eq. (7). In every \( n \)th iteration of our algorithm, we set the maximum simulation time to \( T^{[n]} = 250 \) ms, produce \( m^{[n]} = 25n^2 \) samples, and choose step size \( \alpha^{[n]} = 100/(10 + \sqrt{n}) \). The target excitation probability of the algorithm is set to \( \phi = 1/6 \). The resulting Rabi frequencies are shown in Fig. 6 and approach the exact solution given by Eq. (10), \( \Omega_e^{\text{opt}} = (1, \sqrt{2} \times 2, 2 \sqrt{2}, 2, 2 \sqrt{2}, 2, \sqrt{2}, 2, 2 \sqrt{2})^T \times 2 \pi \text{MHz} \). The excitation probabilities approach the target \( \phi \), which can be verified by evaluating Eq. (9) after several iterations, as shown in Fig. 7.

![FIG. 7 (color online). The excitation probabilities \( \theta_i (\nu^{[n]}, \mu) \) after iterations \( n = 0, 3, \) and 10.](image3)
By manipulating excitation probabilities, we control the populations of mixed states. This can be of interest to (for example) mixed state quantum computing, which lies in between classical computing and quantum computing based on pure, entangled states [31,32]. Creating mixed states can also be a first step towards efficient preparation of large qubit entangled states.

In conclusion, we studied the relations between a physical model of ultracold Rydberg atoms and a stochastic process that models certain wireless random-access networks. This allowed us to identify interesting connections between research fields in physics and mathematics, and to transfer techniques and insights to the realm of Rydberg gases. Our approach can be applied to many other particle systems and stochastic processes as well. Furthermore, the algorithm can be applied to a much larger class of product-form networks, with different adjustable parameters [28,33]. Whenever dynamical systems are well described using rate equations, it can be worthwhile to explore possible relations with stochastic processes and cross-pollinate ideas.

This research was financially supported by an ERC Starting Grant, as well as The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), and is part of the research program of the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM). The authors are grateful for the support from Sem Borst and Johan van Leeuwaarden.

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