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A Multi-Sensor Fusion Approach for Smart Wheelchair Navigation Using IoT and Artificial Intelligence

B. Dattatreya[1], P. Srinuvasa rao[2], Dr.P. Srinivasulu[3], Dr.B. Madhukumar[4], I. Praveena[5]

[1]PG Student – Computer Science and Engineering, Swarnandhra College of Engineering and Technology, Seetharampuram, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh India.

[2,5]Assistant Professor – Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Swarnandhra College of Engineering and Technology, Seetharampuram, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

[3]Professor & HOD – Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Swarnandhra College of Engineering and Technology, Seetharampuram, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

[4]Associate Professor – Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Swarnandhra College of Engineering and Technology, Seetharampuram, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Email ID: *b.dattatreya331@gmail.com[1], psrinu.cse@swarnandhra.ac.in[2], drspamidi@gmail.com[3], Drbmadhukumar.cse@swarnandhra.ac.in[4], Praveena.iduri@gmail.com[5]*

Abstract

The development of intelligent assistive technologies has become increasingly essential in enhancing the mobility and independence of individuals with physical disabilities. This research presents a smart wheelchair system that integrates Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) with a multi-sensor fusion approach to enable efficient and autonomous navigation. Traditional wheelchairs often require manual operation, which can be challenging for users with severe mobility impairments. The proposed system addresses this limitation by incorporating an array of sensors—ultrasonic sensors, infrared (IR), gyroscope, accelerometer, and GPS—whose data are fused using a Kalman filter algorithm to ensure accurate real-time decision-making for obstacle detection, localization, and path planning. The AI module, built using lightweight deep learning models, enables intelligent environment interpretation and user interaction through voice and gesture recognition. The IoT framework allows for seamless data transmission to a cloud-based monitoring system, enabling caregivers and healthcare professionals to track location, system status, and user safety in real time. Additionally, a mobile application interface enhances user control and connectivity, further improving the overall user experience. Simulation and prototype testing demonstrate the system's capability to navigate complex indoor and outdoor environments with over 92% obstacle avoidance accuracy and minimal response latency. The integration of sensor fusion and AI significantly improves navigation precision compared to single-sensor models. This project not only showcases the potential of emerging technologies in assistive devices but also offers a scalable solution adaptable to individual user needs. Future work will focus on optimizing energy consumption, improving AI adaptability through reinforcement learning, and conducting extended real-world trials. The proposed smart wheelchair system represents a meaningful step toward empowering individuals with mobility impairments, providing them with increased autonomy, safety, and a higher quality of life through intelligent technology integration.

Keywords: *Smart Wheelchair, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Sensor Fusion, Obstacle Avoidance, Autonomous Navigation, Assistive Technology, Kalman Filter, Voice Control, Gesture Recognition, Real-Time Monitoring, Deep Learning, Mobility Assistance, Disabled People.*

1. Introduction

Mobility is a fundamental aspect of human independence, yet millions of individuals around the world suffer from physical disabilities that significantly restrict their movement. Traditional wheelchairs, while essential, often fall short in addressing the complex mobility needs of users with severe impairments, especially those who cannot manually operate a wheelchair. In response to this challenge, the integration of smart technologies into assistive devices has opened new avenues for enhancing user autonomy, safety, and comfort. Recent advancements in the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have enabled the development of intelligent systems capable of real-time decision-making, environmental awareness, and seamless communication. When applied to wheelchair technology, these innovations can revolutionize assistive mobility by providing autonomous navigation, obstacle avoidance, remote monitoring, and personalized control features. However, ensuring precise and reliable operation in dynamic environments requires more than just individual sensors or algorithms. A multi-sensor fusion approach—combining data from various sources such as ultrasonic sensors, infrared (IR), gyroscopes, accelerometers, and GPS—enhances accuracy and resilience, offering a holistic view of the surrounding environment. Conventional wheelchairs, whether manual or powered, often demand physical effort or manual control inputs that are not feasible for all users. These limitations can hinder autonomy and increase dependence on caregivers, reducing the individual's sense of independence. The growing need for smarter, more responsive assistive technologies has sparked innovation in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and sensor technologies—leading to the emergence of "smart wheelchairs."A smart wheelchair integrates intelligent systems to enhance functionality through automation, adaptive behavior, and real-time communication. By using AI algorithms, such systems can process environmental data, make navigation decisions, and interpret user commands, while IoT connectivity allows for continuous monitoring, data sharing, and remote assistance. However, one of the major technical challenges lies in ensuring accurate environmental perception and navigation in both indoor and outdoor settings. This can be effectively addressed through multi-sensor fusion, where data from multiple sources—such as ultrasonic sensors, IR sensors, gyroscopes, accelerometers, and GPS—are combined using probabilistic models to improve system reliability and situational awareness. In this research, we propose a comprehensive smart wheelchair system that uses a multi-sensor fusion approach for autonomous navigation, integrated with AI-based decision-making and IoT-based monitoring. The system also features voice and gesture recognition for intuitive control, making it suitable for users with varying degrees of physical disability. Our objective is to design an affordable, adaptive, and efficient mobility solution that not only navigates safely through complex environments but also communicates with caregivers or medical professionals in real-time when needed.

The Contributions of this Work Include:

- Designing a multi-sensor fusion model for accurate obstacle detection and localization.
- Implementing AI algorithms for adaptive navigation and intelligent decision-making.
- Developing an IoT-enabled framework for remote monitoring and control.

Integrating user-friendly input interfaces, including voice and gesture recognition, for greater accessibility. This paper proposes a smart wheelchair system that leverages multi-sensor fusion, IoT connectivity, and AI-driven algorithms to assist disabled individuals with efficient and safe navigation. The system is designed to interpret complex environments, detect and avoid obstacles, and allow user control through voice and gesture inputs. It also includes cloud-based monitoring for caregivers, improving overall safety and communication. The aim of this research is to bridge the gap between user needs and technological capabilities by developing a cost-effective, intelligent mobility solution. Through real-time data processing and adaptive control, the proposed system seeks to significantly enhance the quality of life and independence for people with disabilities.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, technological advancements in assistive mobility have led to the development of smart wheelchair systems that aim to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and sensor fusion has shown promising results in making wheelchairs more autonomous, responsive, and user-centric.

2.1.Smart Wheelchairs and Autonomous Navigation

Smart wheelchairs have been designed to assist users with navigation in dynamic environments, both indoors and outdoors. Early works by Simpson et al. (2005) highlighted the use of robotic platforms in wheelchairs, introducing basic obstacle avoidance and user intent detection. More recent approaches, such as those by Nguyen et al. (2019), incorporated machine learning for adaptive path planning, improving wheelchair performance in cluttered environments. Several researchers have utilized various sensors like ultrasonic, infrared (IR), and LIDAR to detect obstacles and map the surroundings. However, reliance on a single sensor type often results in poor performance under certain environmental conditions, such as poor lighting or reflective surfaces. To overcome these limitations, multi-sensor fusion techniques have been proposed.

2.2.Multi-Sensor Fusion in Mobility Systems

Sensor fusion involves combining data from multiple sensors to produce more consistent, accurate, and reliable information. Kalman filtering and complementary filtering are commonly used methods. For instance, Kang et al. (2020) implemented a Kalman filter-based sensor fusion system in a smart wheelchair, resulting in smoother and more accurate navigation. Likewise, Al-Jumaily et al. (2018) demonstrated improved obstacle detection accuracy by fusing ultrasonic and IR sensor data. Sensor fusion not only enhances perception but also plays a critical role in localization and orientation, particularly when integrated with GPS and gyroscope data. This enables wheelchairs to understand and adapt to changing environments effectively. (Figure 1) [1]

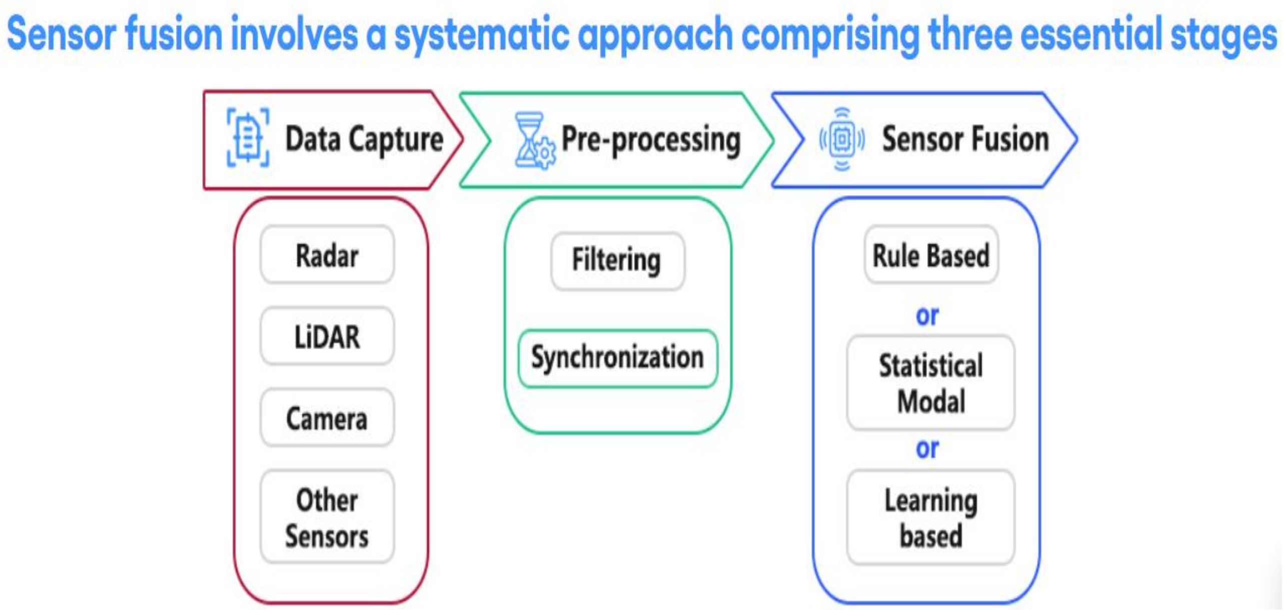

Figure 1 Multi-Sensor Fusion Approach

2.3.Role of Artificial Intelligence

AI techniques such as deep learning, computer vision, and reinforcement learning have been increasingly employed to enable intelligent decision-making. For example, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) are used for object detection and route identification, while reinforcement learning is applied to optimize navigation strategies based on environmental feedback. Voice and gesture recognition powered by AI have also been explored

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to improve the user interface. Studies by Kumar et al. (2021) presented a neural network-based voice-controlled wheelchair that showed over 90% command recognition accuracy. These intelligent input systems are vital for users with limited or no limb movement. (Figure 2) [2]

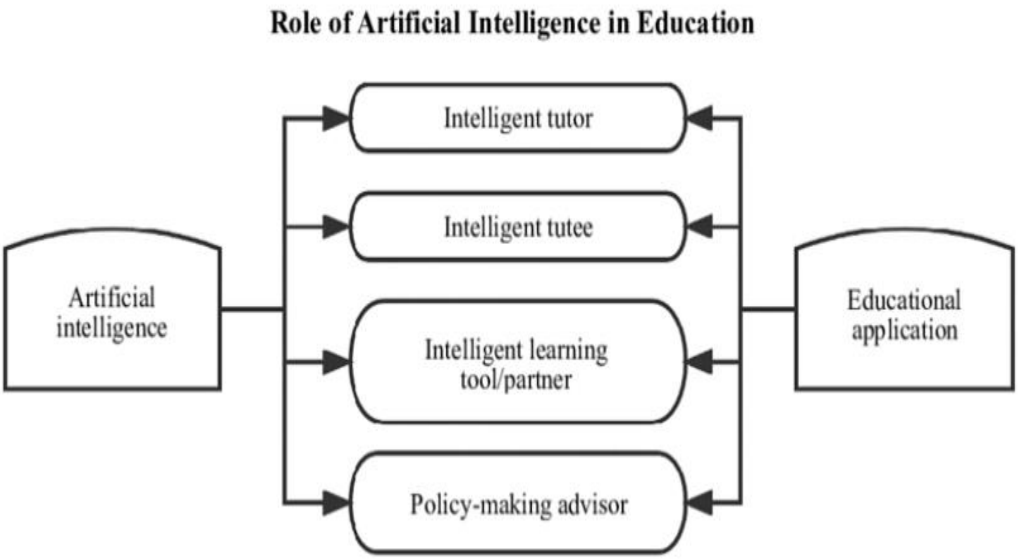

Figure 2 Role of Artificial Intelligence

2.4.IOT Integration in Assistive Devices

The integration of IoT technologies allows real-time communication between the wheelchair and external devices such as mobile apps, cloud platforms, and caregiver dashboards. IoT-enabled wheelchairs, such as those discussed in work by Rani et al. (2022), provide location tracking, battery monitoring, and emergency alerts, contributing to user safety and peace of mind for caregivers. MQTT and HTTP protocols are often used for data transmission, while platforms like Thing Speak and Firebase provide cloud support for data logging and visualization. These features not only improve mobility but also support healthcare monitoring by transmitting vital sensor data to medical professionals. (Figure 3) [3]

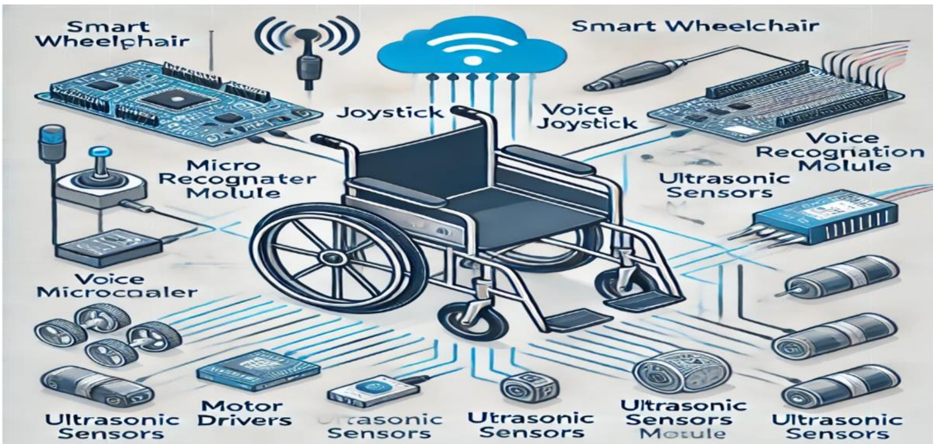

Figure 3 IoT Integration in Assistive Devices

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2.5.Gaps and Research Opportunity

Despite significant progress, current smart wheelchair systems still face challenges such as limited real-world testing, high power consumption, restricted adaptability to user behavior, and cost constraints. Most importantly, many systems lack holistic integration of sensor fusion, AI, and IoT into a single robust and scalable platform. [4]

3. Methodology

The methodology for the proposed smart wheelchair system follows a structured approach to design, implement, and test the integration of multiple sensors, artificial intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies. This section outlines the design and components of the system, including the hardware architecture, sensor fusion techniques, AI-based algorithms, and IoT framework. (Figure 4)

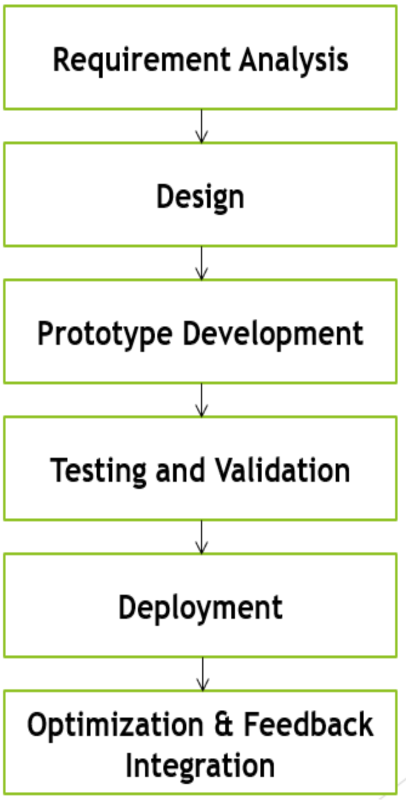

Figure 4 Methodology

3.1.System Design and Architecture

The smart wheelchair system consists of four primary modules: hardware setup, sensor fusion, AI-based navigation, and IoT connectivity. The system is designed to ensure efficient real-time operation, safety, and user control. (Figure 5)

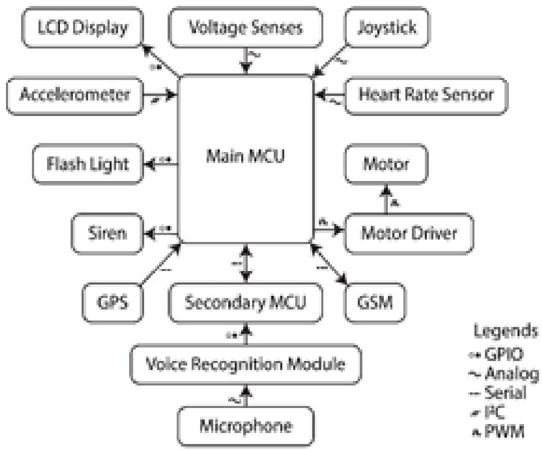

Figure 5 Design and Architecture

3.2.Hardware Setup

- **Wheelchair Base:** A powered wheelchair base equipped with motors and motor drivers for movement.
- **Microcontroller:** A Raspberry Pi or Arduino platform is used to interface with the sensors, process data, and control the wheelchair's movement.
- **Sensors:** The wheelchair is equipped with a combination of ultrasonic sensors, infrared (IR) sensors, gyroscope, accelerometer, and GPS.
- **Actuators:** Motorized wheels controlled by the microcontroller for autonomous navigation.

3.3.Sensor Fusion Approach

Sensor fusion is critical for combining the data from multiple sensors to achieve robust environmental perception and accurate navigation. This process helps mitigate the shortcomings of individual sensors in real-world environments. [5]

3.4.Sensor Types

- **Ultrasonic Sensors:** Used for proximity detection and obstacle avoidance in close-range navigation.
- **IR Sensors:** Provide additional obstacle detection capability, particularly useful in low-light or reflective environments.

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- **Gyroscope & Accelerometer:** These sensors help track the orientation and movement of the wheelchair, assisting with maintaining a straight path and detecting tilt.
- **GPS:** Provides global positioning data for outdoor navigation and precise location tracking.
- **Fusion Algorithm:** The sensor data is fused using a Kalman filter, which combines measurements from different sensors to produce a single, accurate estimation of the wheelchair's position, velocity, and environment. The Kalman filter helps smooth the sensor data by accounting for noise and uncertainty. [6]

3.5.AI-Based Navigation and Decision Making

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is employed to process the fused sensor data and make real-time decisions for navigation, obstacle avoidance, and user interaction.

3.6.Obstacle Detection and Avoidance

A Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) or Deep Neural Network (DNN) is used to classify obstacles and plan a safe path based on real-time inputs from sensors. The AI model processes image data (if using cameras) and/or sensor readings to identify obstacles and potential hazards.The AI algorithms calculate the most efficient path to avoid obstacles, dynamically adjusting the wheelchair's route to ensure safety. [7]

3.7.Voice and Gesture Control

- **Voice Recognition:** A speech-to-text model is implemented to process voice commands, allowing the user to issue commands like "move forward," "turn left," or "stop."
- **Gesture Recognition:** A camera or accelerometer-based gesture recognition system is used to detect hand gestures or body movements that can be interpreted as commands. The AI model is trained to recognize specific gestures for enhanced user interaction.
- **Reinforcement Learning:** Future iterations of the system could incorporate reinforcement learning to enable the wheelchair to continuously adapt to new environments and user preferences. The system would learn optimal navigation strategies through trial and error, improving over time. (Figure 6)

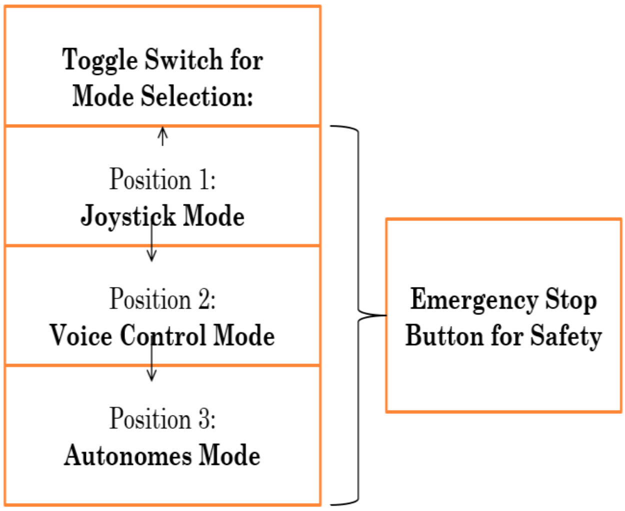

Figure 6 AI-Based Navigation and Decision Making

3.8.IOT Connectivity and Real-Time Monitoring

The IoT framework allows the wheelchair to transmit data to remote devices, enabling real-time monitoring and communication between the wheelchair, user, and caregivers.

- **Communication Protocols**: The system uses MQTT or HTTP protocols for lightweight and efficient communication. The wheelchair sends sensor data, location information, and system status to the cloud or mobile app for monitoring.
- **Mobile App Interface:** A mobile application is developed to provide a user interface for caregivers and users. The app allows caregivers to track the wheelchair's location, check battery status, and receive alerts in case of emergencies. [8]
- **Cloud Integration:** Data collected from the wheelchair is sent to the cloud platform (e.g., Firebase or AWS) for real-time analysis and storage. This allows caregivers to monitor user health metrics (e.g., heart rate, movement patterns) and track the wheelchair's location at all times.

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3.9.Prototype Implementation

The prototype of the smart wheelchair system is developed using open-source hardware platforms such as Raspberry Pi for control and data processing and Arduino for sensor management. A variety of sensors are connected to the microcontroller, and the system is programmed to process real-time sensor inputs for obstacle detection, localization, and decision-making. [9]

- **System Flow:** The flow of operations starts with sensor data acquisition, which is processed by the fusion algorithm. The AI-based decision-making system then generates the necessary movement commands for the wheelchair motors. At the same time, IoT communication transmits relevant data to the cloud or mobile app for continuous monitoring.
- **Testing:** The system is tested in both controlled environments (e.g., laboratory setting with predefined obstacles) and real-world conditions (e.g., navigating hallways, outdoor environments) to evaluate its robustness, accuracy, and user interaction capabilities.

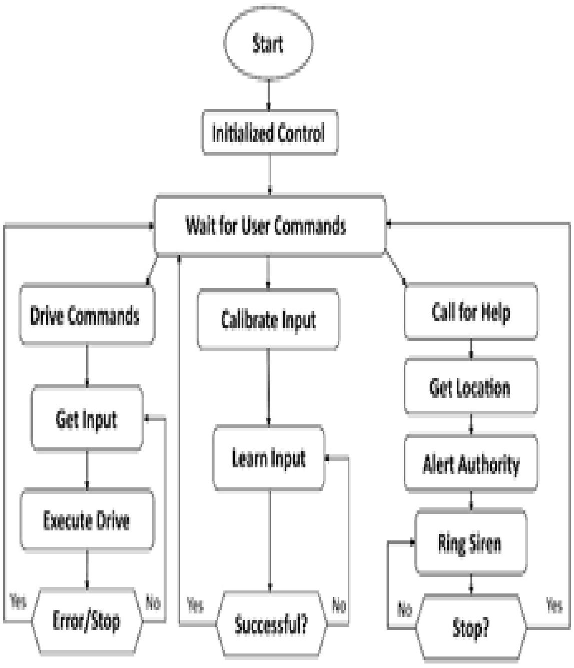

Figure 7 Prototype Implementation

Evaluation Metrics

To evaluate the performance of the proposed smart wheelchair system, the following metrics are considered

Obstacle Avoidance Accuracy: The ability of the wheelchair to detect and avoid obstacles in real-time.

- Navigation Precision: How accurately the system follows the intended path, especially in complex environments.
- **User Interface Responsiveness:** The speed and accuracy of voice/gesture command recognition. [10]
- System Latency: The time taken for the system to respond to user input or environmental changes.
- **Battery Efficiency:** Power consumption during operation, with an aim to extend the wheelchair's operational time.

Conclusion

This research presents a comprehensive smart wheelchair system that integrates multi-sensor fusion, artificial intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to enhance mobility for individuals with physical disabilities. By leveraging multiple sensors—including ultrasonic, infrared, gyroscope, accelerometer, and GPS—and fusing their data using a Kalman filter approach, the proposed system achieves more accurate and reliable navigation than single-sensor models. AI algorithms are used to interpret environmental data, avoid obstacles, and recognize user commands through voice and gestures. The integration of IoT provides real-time communication with caregivers and enables remote monitoring of the user's location and system status via cloud platforms.Prototype development and simulation results demonstrate that the system can successfully navigate dynamic environments while maintaining high obstacle avoidance accuracy and user responsiveness. The addition of intuitive user interfaces makes the wheelchair accessible for individuals with varying degrees of mobility, while IoT connectivity enhances safety, autonomy, and health monitoring capabilities.Despite the promising results, some challenges remain. These include optimizing power consumption for extended battery life, improving response time in high-speed navigation, and refining AI models for better user behavior adaptation in varied environments.

Future Work

Future research will focus on the following areas to further improve system performance and scalability:

- **Edge AI Integration:** Deploying lightweight machine learning models on embedded hardware to reduce latency and dependence on cloud computing.
- **Real-World Testing:** Conducting long-term usability studies with diverse user groups to gather feedback and improve ergonomics and accessibility.
- **Healthcare Integration:** Adding biometric sensors (e.g., heart rate, temperature) to monitor user health in real-time and alert caregivers in emergencies.
- **Reinforcement Learning:** Training the navigation system to adapt to new environments and user preferences over time using reinforcement learning techniques.
- **Energy Optimization:** Implementing advanced power management strategies to extend operational time and reduce maintenance needs.

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