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WHEELCHAIR CONTROL THROUGH INTENTIONAL EYE BLINK

Mohammad Hafeez, Manasa R Chouta, Fathimath Fidhana, and Shamith

Department of Computer Science and Engineering, P. A. College of Engineering, Karnataka, Mangalore, India

E-mail:

Abstract

In today's fast-paced world of technology, assistive devices are becoming increasingly important in helping people with disabilities lead more independent lives. One of the biggest challenges faced by individuals with physical impairments—especially those who are paralyzed or elderly—is mobility. While electric wheelchairs have made movement easier for many, they often rely on manual controls like joysticks or voice commands, which aren't suitable for everyone. This project introduces a smart electric wheelchair that can be controlled using eye blinks, offering a hands-free and voice-free solution for users who are unable to operate traditional controls. The system uses sensors to detect specific eye-blink patterns, allowing the user to move and navigate the wheelchair with minimal effort. Our approach addresses common limitations found in existing systems. For instance, voice-controlled wheelchairs may not work well in noisy environments and aren't usable by those who are deaf or non-verbal. By focusing on eye-blink detection, we provide a more inclusive and accessible option that enhances user independence and comfort. This innovation is a step forward in the field of assistive technology and Human-Machine Interaction (HMI), helping to improve everyday life for those who need it most.

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2 Introduction

In recent years, rapid advancements in technology—especially in the field of the Internet of Things (IoT)—have opened up new possibilities in communication, automation, and assistive devices. One area where this progress can have a life-changing impact is in the development of smart mobility aids for individuals with physical disabilities. Among the millions of people around the world who face mobility challenges, many struggle with basic movement due to conditions such as paralysis, muscular disorders, or age-related limitations.

While electric wheelchairs have greatly improved mobility for some users, they are not always accessible or practical for everyone. Most models require manual control through joysticks, hand gestures, or voice commands—options that may not be feasible for individuals who have limited motor control or speech impairments. For users who are paralyzed, elderly, or have severe physical disabilities, these conventional control methods can be extremely difficult or impossible to use.

To address these challenges, this project presents the design and development of a smart electric wheelchair controlled through eye-blink detection. The goal is to create a more inclusive and user friendly solution that allows individuals to operate a wheelchair without relying on hand movement or speech. Eye-blink control offers a simple, non-invasive way to provide mobility assistance, especially for those who cannot use traditional methods.

This introduction sets the stage for exploring the limitations of existing wheelchair technologies and how eye-blink control can offer a meaningful improvement in terms of accessibility, independence, and quality of life.

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3 Methodology

Controlling a wheelchair using eye blinks involves integrating eye-tracking technology that can accurately detect and interpret the user's blinking patterns. These blinks are then translated into specific commands to control the movement and direction of the wheelchair. This system is especially helpful for individuals who have limited mobility or are unable to use traditional control methods like joysticks or voice commands.

3.1 Eye-Blink Detection Hardware Setup

This system uses a thermal sensor to detect intentional eye blinks as control signals for the wheelchair. It includes two main components: a transmitter that emits safe, invisible infrared rays toward the eye, and a receiver that captures the reflected signals.

When the eyes are open, the reflected signal stays consistent. However, during a deliberate blink, the eyelid briefly blocks the infrared rays, causing a noticeable change. The receiver detects this change and sends a high output signal, which the system recognizes as a command. To avoid false signals, the system filters out normal, involuntary blinks by analysing the timing and duration of each blink.

The system works by detecting and interpreting the user's intentional eye blinks, which are then translated into commands that control the wheelchair's movement. Here's a general overview of how the system functions:

4 Eye Blink Detection

The system uses specialized sensors—such as infrared cameras or blink sensors—to detect when the user blinks. These devices either sense changes in infrared light reflection caused by blinking or pick up the tiny electrical signals produced by the eye muscles during a blink.

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5 SignalProcessing

The raw data from these sensors is processed by a microcontroller or computer. This step involves analysing the signal to determine whether a blink is intentional or just a normal, involuntary one. This helps prevent accidental movements of the wheelchair.

3. Command Generation

Once an intentional blink is identified, the system translates it into a specific control command. For instance, a long blink might signal the wheelchair to move forward, a double blink might indicate a left turn, and a triple blink could mean turning right. These blink patterns can be customized based on the user's comfort and preferences.

6 Wheelchair Control

Finally, the generated command is sent to the wheelchair's control unit, which operates the motors to move the wheelchair in the desired direction.

7 Master Slave Bluetooth:

Master-slave Bluetooth wireless communication plays a vital role in helping individuals with mobility impairments control a wheelchair using simple eye blinks. This technology provides an easy and effective alternative for people who have limited or no use of their hands or arms. By using eye blinks as input, users gain greater freedom and independence in their daily lives.Here's a step-by-step explanation of how the system works:

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8 Master Device–Eye Blink Sensor

The eye blink sensor acts as the master device. Worn by the user, it tracks eye blinks—specifically intentional ones—which are used to issue commands. Blinking is a relatively easy action for many people with limited mobility and can be reliably used as a form of input.

9 Slave Device–Motorized Wheelchair

The motorized wheelchair functions as the slave device. It includes a built-in Bluetooth module that receives commands sent wirelessly from the master device.

10 Bluetooth Connection

A wireless Bluetooth connection links the eye blink sensor and the wheelchair. This allows real time communication between both devices without the need for physical connections.

11 Blink Pattern Interpretation

The software on the master device analyses the blink patterns detected by the sensor. Each pattern corresponds to a different command—for example: A single long blink could move wheelchair forward

- A double blink could move the wheelchair forward
- A triple blink might turn it left
- A quadruple blink could signal a right turn
- A single long blink could stop the wheelchair

These patterns can also be customized to fit the user's needs.

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12 Sending Commands to the Wheelchair

Once a blink pattern is recognized, the system sends the corresponding command to the wheelchair via Bluetooth. The wheelchair receives and processes this input immediately.

13 Wheelchair Response

The wheelchair responds by performing the requested action—whether it's moving forward, turning, or stopping—based solely on the user's eye blinks. This setup allows the user to move around without needing to touch or operate any physical controls.

13.1 Motors and Drives

The system uses specialized eye blink sensors to detect intentional blinks from the user, which are then converted into movement commands. The wheelchair is equipped with motors and drive systems that respond to these commands, allowing it to move in the desired direction. Once a blink command is processed, the appropriate signal is sent to the wheelchair's motors, enabling it to move forward, turn, or stop. This integration between the sensor input and motor response allows users to navigate their surroundings independently, using only eye blinks for control.

13.2 Arduino Uno for Eye Blink-Based Wheelchair Control

The Arduino Uno acts as the central control unit that connects the eye blink detection system with the wheelchair. It processes the signals and helps manage communication through IoT. Here's a breakdown of how the system works:

14 Eye Blink Detection

The first step is to detect the user's eye blinks. This can be done using a webcam or specialized eye-tracking sensors. These devices monitor the eyes and recognize blink patterns that serve as control inputs.

15 Signal Processing with Arduino Uno

Once a blink is detected, the information is sent to the Arduino Uno. It acts as the main controller, receiving signals from the sensor and identifying when and how the user blinked.

16 Enabling IoT Communication

Since the Arduino Uno doesn't have built-in internet capabilities, it needs to be connected with a Wi-Fi or Bluetooth module. These modules allow the system to wirelessly connect with a smartphone, computer, or cloud server.

17 Data Transmission

The blink data (e.g., whether a blink occurred and what type it was) is sent from the Arduino to an IoT platform or cloud service like AWS IoT or Google Cloud. This allows the system to process the information more effectively.

18 Processing and Command Decision

On the cloud or server side, the system analyses the blink data and interprets what the user wants to do—such as move forward, stop, or turn. Each blink pattern is mapped to a specific command.

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19 Sending Commands Back to the Arduino

After deciding the command, the server sends it back to the Arduino through the Wi-Fi or Bluetooth module. The Arduino then forwards the command to the wheelchair's motor system.

20 Wheelchair Movement

Based on the received command, the wheelchair moves in the desired direction—whether it's forward, left, right, or stop. The entire system allows the user to control the wheelchair just by blinking, offering a simple and efficient mobility solution.

21 Results and Discussion

The prototype of the eye blink-controlled wheelchair was successfully developed and tested under controlled conditions. The main objective—enabling wheelchair movement using intentional eye blinks—was achieved using a combination of eye blink sensors, Arduino Uno, Bluetooth module, and a motorized wheelchair setup.

21.1 Blink Detection Accuracy

During testing, the system was able to accurately detect intentional eye blinks in more than 90% of cases under well-lit, distraction-free environments. False detections caused by involuntary blinks were minimized by adjusting the blink duration threshold and using signal filtering in the code. However, accuracy slightly dropped in dim lighting or if the user wore glasses with glare.

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21.2 Response Time

The system's response time from blink detection to wheelchair movement was observed to be less than 1 second, making it quite responsive. The wireless communication via Bluetooth provided stable performance within a range of up to 10 meters, ensuring freedom of movement without delay.

21.3 Command Differentiation

Three types of blink commands were tested:

- Double long blink for forward movement
- Triple blink for left turn
- Quadruple blink for right turn
- Single long blink for stop

21.4 User Feedback

Test users found the system simple and intuitive, especially for individuals with limited or no hand movement. Users appreciated the non-invasive design and hands-free control. The only limitation noted was the learning curve in controlling blinking patterns accurately, which improved with practice.

21.5 Conclusion

The development of an eye blink-controlled wheelchair offers a smart and accessible mobility solution for individuals with physical disabilities, especially those who have limited or no use of their hands. By using intentional eye blinks as input commands, the system allows users to control the movement of the wheelchair without any physical effort.

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Through the successful integration of eye blink sensors, Arduino Uno, Bluetooth communication, and motor controls, the prototype proved to be responsive, accurate, and user-friendly. It empowers users with greater independence and improves their quality of life by enabling hands-free navigation

While the current version works well in controlled environments, future improvements such as better sensor calibration, support for outdoor use, and enhanced blink recognition algorithms can make the system more robust and widely applicable. Overall, this project demonstrates how technology can be effectively used to create meaningful assistive devices for those in need.

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