Innovations

Autonomous All-Terrain Robot for Remote Environmental Monitoring

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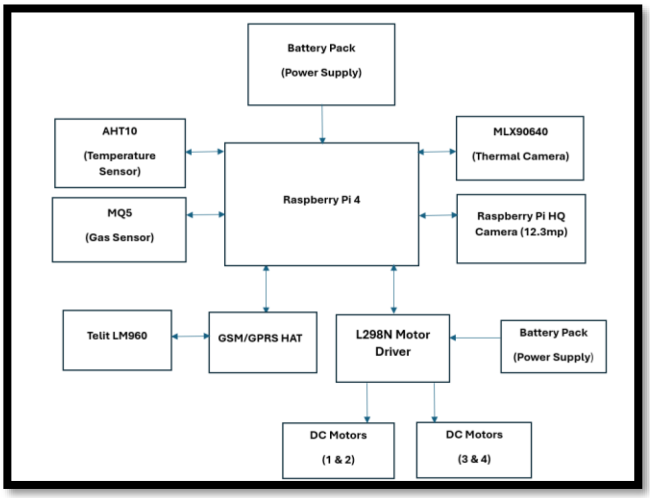
Abstract: *This paper details the development of an autonomous all-terrain robot designed for real-time environmental monitoring in hazardous areas such as landslides or forest fires. The robot is equipped with a thermal camera (MLX90640) for detecting trapped humans, utilizing YOLOv5 and TensorFlow for object detection. A Raspberry Pi HQ Camera enables live streaming and obstacle avoidance. Communication is facilitated by the Telit LM960 4G module, providing reliable internet connectivity in remote locations. Additionally, sensors like the MQ5 gas sensor and AHT10 temperature sensor monitor for toxic gas leaks and high temperatures, ensuring prompt user notifications in emergency situations*

1. Introduction

Natural disasters like landslides, forest fires, and building collapses often trap victims without any reliable means of communication, leading to delayed and inefficient rescue operations. In such situations, the lack of real-time data on the condition of those affected makes human detection nearly impossible, especially in difficult environments like rubble or smoke. Machine learning (ML) and computer vision have revolutionized disaster response by enabling real-time detection of human presence through thermal imaging and advanced algorithms [1],[6]. This project presents an autonomous robot car designed to navigate various terrains, equipped with thermal and visual cameras, and powered by YOLOv5 for precise human detection [5]. The robot uses the MLX90640 thermal camera to detect heat signatures and identify trapped humans, even through obstacles. Additionally, real-time video streaming allows rescue teams to remotely monitor the environment and make informed decisions [6]. ML models also enhance obstacle avoidance, ensuring safe navigation in hazardous areas. With sensors for detecting environmental hazards like gas leaks and fires, this system improves the speed and effectiveness of search-and-rescue operations, ultimately reducing response times and increasing the chances of saving lives in disaster-stricken zones [7].

2. System Design and Architecture

Fig 1: **Block Diagram**

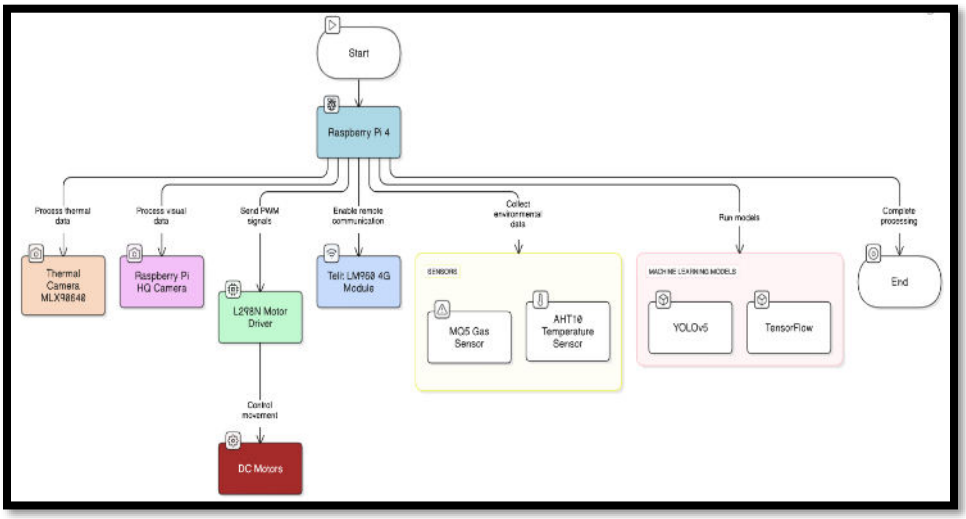


The proposed robot car is designed to be an autonomous, all-terrain vehicle capable of navigating challenging environments, such as landslides, forest fires, and areas affected by natural disasters. The robot is equipped with four rugged all-terrain wheels, which are specifically selected to ensure stability and traction on various surfaces, including rough, rocky, and uneven terrain. These wheels are driven by four high-torque DC motors, which provide the necessary power and control to the robot for both forward and backward movement, as well as turning capabilities. The motors are strategically placed to ensure efficient movement, allowing the robot to maintain its mobility and agility under varying conditions.

The Raspberry Pi 4 Model B acts as the central control unit, integrating all critical system components. The Raspberry Pi executes essential tasks, such as processing data from the thermal and visual cameras, enabling real-time object detection and human recognition using YOLOv5 and TensorFlow [1], [2]. It ensures efficient communication between the robot and the operator through the Telit LM960 4G module, supporting live video streaming and remote-control functionalities. The powerful processing capabilities of the Raspberry Pi allow it to handle complex computations, including sensor data analysis and decision-making for autonomous navigation, crucial for disaster zone operations. The integration of the Raspberry Pi 4 with machine learning models facilitates dynamic obstacle detection and avoidance, as seen in the approach by Redmon et al. (2016) [1], ensuring the robot can adapt to changing environments such as smoke-filled or cluttered terrains.

The L298N motor driver serves as a key element in controlling the robot's movement, enabling precise navigation through rugged and hazardous terrains. By accepting PWM signals from the Raspberry Pi, it regulates the speed and direction of the robot's DC motors, facilitating smooth and accurate maneuvers, such as avoiding obstacles and navigating uneven surfaces [6]. The motor driver works seamlessly with the Raspberry Pi, allowing for real-time adjustments in motor control based on input from sensors and cameras. This combination of the Raspberry Pi and L298N motor driver creates a robust system capable of performing environmental monitoring and human detection tasks, even in challenging disaster zones where traditional human intervention may be unsafe or impossible [5], [3].

Fig 2: **Flowchart of Autonomous All Terrain Robot**



3. Sensors and Payload

The MLX90640 thermal camera is a 32x24-pixel infrared sensor that enables detection of heat signatures in hazardous environments. By providing temperature data with a resolution of 0.5°C, it helps the robot detect human body heat even through obstacles like debris, making it ideal for disaster response scenarios. The thermal data is processed using YOLOv5 for real-time human detection and object localization, as detailed by Redmon et al. (2016) [1]. This integration of thermal imaging with visual data from the Raspberry Pi HQ Camera enhances victim identification and environmental assessment, providing a more robust system for locating people in distress.

Raspberry Pi HQ Camera (12.3 MP) captures high-resolution visual data for live video streaming and real-time obstacle detection. Integrated with object detection algorithms like YOLOv5, the camera enables the robot to identify and avoid obstacles, ensuring safe navigation in complex terrains[2],[3]. According to Lin et al. (2014) [4], this high-quality visual feedback is crucial for situational awareness and decision-making in environments affected by disasters. The camera also complements the thermal camera by providing clearer environmental context, aiding the robot's ability to navigate and identify hazards effectively.

Gas Sensor (MQ5)detects gases such as CO_2 and CH_4 by measuring changes in its electrical resistance when exposed to gas molecules. It interfaces with the Raspberry Pi 4, providing real-time monitoring of gas concentrations to detect potential leaks or hazardous conditions. As noted in Howard et al. (2017) [3], real-time environmental monitoring is essential in autonomous systems for enhancing safety and responsiveness. By integrating this gas sensor, the robot can alert operators to dangerous gas levels, preventing further environmental damage or human exposure in affected areas.

Temperature Sensor (AHT10)measures ambient temperature and humidity with high accuracy, providing valuable data to detect abnormal temperature conditions like fires or extreme heat in disaster zones. Integrated with the Raspberry Pi 4, it supports real-time monitoring of the environment. According to Melexis (2020) [6], temperature sensors like the AHT10 are vital in environments where rapid changes in temperature can indicate dangerous conditions. By detecting high-temperature zones, the robot can autonomously navigate away from fire risks or alert operators about hazardous conditions.

4. Communication System

The Telit LM960 4G LTE module plays a critical role in ensuring reliable internet connectivity, even in remote and disaster-prone locations. Utilizing 4G LTE technology, the module provides data transfer speeds of up to 1 Gbps (downlink) and 150 Mbps (uplink), enabling continuous communication between the robot and remote-controlcenters, as highlighted by TensorFlow (2015) [2]. The LM960 module operates at a voltage range of 3.3V to 4.3V and consumes a current of approximately 500 mA during active transmission, ensuring that it remains power-efficient in the field. Integrated with the Raspberry Pi 4, which operates at 5V and can supply up to 3A of current, the connection allows for seamless internet access through the USB interface. This high-speed connection facilitates real-time data exchange, making remote operation and monitoring of the robot possible, as noted by Howard et al. (2017) [3].

Additionally, the 4G GSM module ensures cellular data transfer using a SIM card and operates within a voltage range of 3.3V to 5V. The GSM module consumes a current of about 100 mA during idle operation and up to 300 mA during data transmission. It acts as an intermediary to connect the LM960 module to the mobile network, even in areas without traditional network infrastructure, ensuring that the robot remains connected and functional in isolated regions, as described by Melexis (2020) [6]. This setup supports live video streaming from both the Raspberry Pi HQ Camera (12.3 MP) and the MLX90640 thermal camera, each requiring a stable 5V power supply to operate effectively. The video feed is transmitted at 30 frames per second (fps), ensuring smooth streaming for real-time situational awareness and human detection. This connectivity empowers the robot to operate autonomously in hazardous environments, allowing operators to monitor its actions and intervene, when necessary, a key aspect of the system's design as emphasized by Redmon et al. (2016) [1].

5. Machine Learning for Human Detection

YOLOv5 (You Only Look Once) is a state-of-the-art real-time object detection algorithm renowned for its speed and accuracy, making it suitable for human detection in disaster zones. It divides the image into grids and predicts bounding boxes and class probabilities for each grid cell, enabling efficient and precise detection. YOLOv5 has been trained on standard datasets like COCO and optimized for fast object detection [5]. For human detection in thermal images, YOLOv5 processes thermal data to classify heat signatures corresponding to human bodies. The architecture utilizes Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) to extract features and predict bounding boxes around detected humans. The model outputs class probabilities (Phuman) and bounding box coordinates (x, y, w, h), where x and y are the center of the box, and w and h are the width and height. In the context of thermal imaging, the human body's heat signature is effectively used to train the model, enabling the robot to detect humans even in conditions of low visibility, such as smoke-filled environments or disaster zones [6].

TensorFlow, an open-source machine learning framework, is used to implement and deploy the YOLOv5 model within our system. TensorFlow's efficient GPU-accelerated computation allows for faster training and inference, essential for real-time human detection in disaster scenarios [2]. The model is implemented using TensorFlow 2.x, where custom datasets, specifically thermal images, are fed into the network using tf.data pipelines for efficient data loading and augmentation. For human detection in thermal images, TensorFlow processes the input thermal frames and applies bounding box regression and classification layers to identify human targets. The model is optimized using stochastic gradient descent (SGD), minimizing the loss function. Lobj is the objectness loss, and LclsL is the classification loss. This loss function helps fine-tune the model for optimal performance in detecting humans in thermal images under challenging environmental conditions [1], [3].

In our project, transfer learning is employed by leveraging a pre-trained YOLOv5 model, initially trained on general datasets like COCO [4], and adapting it to our specific task of human detection in thermal images. Fine-tuning involves replacing the final layers of the pre-trained model and re-training it with a custom thermal image dataset. The dataset is curated by collecting thermal frames from the MLX90640 camera that contain labeled human targets with bounding box annotations. During fine-tuning, a smaller learning rate ηfine-tune\eta_{\text{fine-tune}}ηfine-tune is used to update the weights selectively in the final layers, allowing the model to learn from the thermal-specific data without overfitting. The fine-tuned model is trained using the objective function where the loss terms are recalculated for the new thermal dataset. This fine-tuning process ensures the model's effective learning of human heat signatures, crucial for accurate human detection in thermal environments, and allows it to adapt to various thermal conditions in disaster zones [5], [6].

To prepare the custom thermal dataset for transfer learning, thermal images captured by the MLX90640 camera are annotated with bounding boxes around human targets. These images are augmented using techniques such as scaling, cropping, and rotation to improve the model's ability to generalize across various thermal conditions. TensorFlow's ImageDataGenerator is employed for on-the-fly data augmentation during training, generating diverse views of human heat signatures to enhance the robustness of the model.

The fine-tuned YOLOv5 model is then trained using this augmented dataset, adapting general object detection knowledge to the specific domain of thermal human detection. This integration allows the model to work efficiently under varying environmental conditions, providing real-time human detection capabilities, critical for the robot's operation in disaster zones where thermal conditions fluctuate rapidly [1], [5].

Fig 3: **Object detection result**

6. Control and Navigation

The robot car leverages sensors and cameras for autonomous navigation, using YOLOv5 for obstacle detection and avoidance. The Raspberry Pi HQ Camera and thermal sensor provide real-time environmental data, enabling the robot to detect obstacles and navigate safely through unknown terrains, as demonstrated by Redmon et al. (2016) [1]. The integration of object detection models ensures dynamic decision-making, allowing the robot to avoid obstacles. These models process visual data in real-time, facilitating the detection of hazards and enabling safe navigation even in low-visibility conditions, similar to the approach discussed by Howard et al. (2017) [3]. The system supports both manual and autonomous control, where the user can switch between control modes via live video feed and data transmission. This flexibility allows for remote operation or automated decision-making, offering enhanced control for operators in varying environments [2].

Real-time sensor data, including thermal, gas, and temperature readings, is processed by the Raspberry Pi to respond quickly to environmental changes. The robot continuously monitors for issues like high temperatures, gas leaks, or human presence, similar to the integration techniques in TensorFlow (2015) [2]. When anomalies are detected, the system sends emergency notifications via mobile app, email, or other channels, ensuring immediate action in critical situations. This real-time processing is crucial for timely alerts, reflecting the efficient data handling demonstrated by Melexis (2020) [6].

7. Power Consumption

- Total Voltage for Motors: 6V
- Total Voltage for Electronics: 5V

- Total Current for Motors: 2A to 4A
- Total Current for Electronics: 2.2A to 4.5A

For Raspberry Pi 4, 4G GSM Module, Telit LM960, AHT10, MQ5, MLX90640, and Raspberry Pi HQ Camera:

- Voltage: 5V (since most of these components operate at 5V)
- Current (total sum):
  - Raspberry Pi 4: 1.2A to 2.5A
  - 4G GSM Module: 50mA to 200mA
  - Telit LM960: 400mA to 800mA
  - AHT10: 10mA to 20mA
  - MQ5: 150mA
  - MLX90640: 100mA to 200mA
  - Raspberry Pi HQ Camera: 250mA to 350mA

Total estimated current requirement for Raspberry Pi and peripherals:
Current: 2.2A to 4.5A

8. Conclusion

The robot car system successfully integrates advanced technologies for real-time environmental monitoring and human detection in hazardous areas. With high accuracy(90-95%) in human detection using YOLOv5, fast detection times (200-300 ms), and reliable 4G LTEcommunication through the Telit LM960, it ensures smooth operation in remote environments. The system effectively combines thermal imaging, object detection, and real-time video streaming, offering a reliable solution for disaster response, obstacle avoidance, and immediate human detection, making it a valuable tool for autonomous rescue operations in challenging terrains.

9. References:

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