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AURA: A Comprehensive Survey of AI-Based Assistants for the Visually Impaired

Prof. Gauri Bobade[1], Chaitanya Jadhav[2], Alpha Londhe[3], Atharva Arote[4], Eshita Gangurde[5]
[1]*Lecturer, Department of Information Technology Vidyalankar Polytechnic, Mumbai, India*
[2, 3, 4, 5]*Information Technology Vidyalankar Polytechnic* Mumbai, India

Abstract: Artificial intelligence has played a significant role in improving accessibility for visually impaired individuals by enabling real-time environmental understanding and multimodal interaction. This survey paper examines the design, methodology, and system components of AURA—an AI- powered virtual assistant developed to support individuals with visual impairments. The study evaluates various modules including speech processing, object detection, navigation, sound recognition, wearable technology, and guardian monitoring systems that collectively aim to provide a safe, intelligent, and accessible user experience. The survey further explores the challenges in current assistive solutions and how AURA bridges those gaps by integrating deep learning models, sensor-based feedback, multilingual communication, and real-time danger detection. The paper organizes the technical considerations into specific IEEE template-style sections while aligning them with the practical AI framework of AURA.

Keywords: Assistive Technology, AI Assistant, Computer Vision, Speech Processing, Navigation System, Visually Impaired Users, Real-Time object Detection.

I. INTRODUCTION

Visually impaired individuals face major challenges in navigating their surroundings, identifying objects or people, and accessing real-time information. Traditional tools like white canes provide limited sensory input and cannot detect distant obstacles, identify objects, or interpret spoken language. Commercial voice assistants also fail to deliver real-time environmental awareness, making them unsuitable as complete mobility or safety solutions. AURA addresses these limitations by combining artificial intelligence, computer vision, speech processing, IoT sensors, and navigation algorithms to create a comprehensive support ecosystem.

AURA's design leverages machine learning models for object detection, sound classification, face recognition, and multilingual communication, thereby improving independence and safety for visually impaired individuals. The system incorporates both software and hardware components, including a smart guidance stick with sensors and a web dashboard for guardians. This survey explores AURA's modular architecture, operational workflow, and its contribution to modern assistive technology innovations.

II. EASE OF USE

A. Selecting a Template

Within the context of AURA, selecting the correct architectural template is fundamental to ensuring seamless integration of AI components. The system requires frameworks that support rapid model development, low-latency inference, and multimodal input processing. Python, TensorFlow, PyTorch, OpenCV, and Google APIs were selected as the foundational tools due to their scalability, community support, and compatibility with edge devices such as Raspberry Pi and Jetson Nano. These frameworks ensure that object detection, sound recognition, translation, and navigation can operate concurrently and efficiently. Moreover, the hardware template is equally important. The decision to incorporate ultrasonic sensors, camera modules, microphones, vibration motors, and GPS ensures a versatile input-output ecosystem capable of delivering actionable real-time feedback. This template not only standardizes development but also ensures repeatability, making AURA adaptable for future enhancements such as additional languages or advanced sound classification.

B. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

Maintaining system integrity in AURA requires strict adherence to AI model specifications, hardware constraints, and real-time response requirements. Each module—whether YOLO for object detection, Librosa for audio classification, or Google Maps API for navigation—must comply with defined latency thresholds to ensure timely communication with the user. This specification discipline enables AURA to function consistently in dynamic outdoor and indoor environments where unpredictable obstacles and sounds may occur.

Cybersecurity also forms part of system integrity. AURA implements encrypted communication channels for guardian dashboards and Bluetooth-based notifications. These measures ensure that sensitive data such as user location, audio inputs, and sensor logs remain protected from unauthorized access. The integrity-driven design approach prevents system drift, maintains accuracy, and supports long-term reliability.

III. PREPARE YOUR PAPER BEFORE STYLING

A. *Abbreviations and Acronyms*

AURA incorporates numerous abbreviations and acronyms within its technical framework. Key examples include YOLO (You Only Look Once) for object detection, GPS (Global Positioning System) for navigation, API (Application Programming Interface) for cloud-based services, TTS (Text-to- Speech) for voice output, and STT (Speech-to-Text) for user input processing. These acronyms help describe the modular structure of the system and its integration of computer vision, natural language processing, and sensor-based intelligence.

Understanding these abbreviations is essential when analyzing system performance or modifying code modules, as they represent essential pipeline components. They also streamline communication in technical documentation and research since they are industry-standard terms in AI and IoT engineering. Proper definition of acronyms ensures clarity and prevents ambiguity during system development and evaluation.

B. *Units*

1) Units play a fundamental role in AURA’s functionality, particularly in distance measurement, navigation, and sound classification.
2) For obstacle detection, AURA uses meters and centimeters to identify the proximity of objects, enabling the system to instruct the user through precise voice alerts such as “Object 2 meters ahead.”
3) GPS-based navigation incorporates kilometers for larger-scale routing and real-time traffic updates, ensuring that users receive meaningful guidance as they move through various environments.
4) Sensor-based systems such as ultrasonic modules rely on time and distance calculations, using meters per second to determine obstacle positioning.
5) Similarly, sound recognition involves frequency units (Hertz) to classify alarms, vehicles, or human speech. Proper use of units ensures consistent interpretation of environmental data and accurate communication between system modules.

C. *Equations*

The computational backbone of AURA relies on equations that support object detection, sensor measurement, and navigation algorithms. For example, distance calculation using ultrasonic sensors is governed by the formula: Distance = (Speed of Sound × Time) / 2. This equation allows the system to compute obstacle proximity with high accuracy and deliver immediate feedback to the user. In computer vision models, loss functions and confidence scores determine object classification reliability, ensuring that AURA minimizes false positives and maximizes detection accuracy.

Navigation algorithms use graph-based equations to compute optimal routes. GPS signals and coordinate transformations rely on trigonometric and geospatial formulas to identify user location. Though these equations operate behind the scenes, they are essential to maintaining AURA’s operational precision and real-time capabilities.

D. *Some Common Mistakes*

1) Common mistakes in assistive AI systems include inaccurate sensor calibration, misclassification of objects, and latency issues during speech processing.
2) In many systems, a failure to preprocess environmental noise leads to poor audio recognition accuracy.
3) AURA mitigates this by integrating Librosa-based feature extraction and CNN models trained to classify distinct sound patterns, thereby reducing confusion in noisy environments.
4) Another common issue is insufficient real-world testing. AI models may perform well in laboratory conditions but fail in diverse environments.
5) AURA addresses this through iterative user testing with visually impaired individuals, enabling refinement of its object detection thresholds, danger detection logic, and navigation accuracy.
6) This reduces deployment errors and increases user trust in the system.

IV. USING THE TEMPLATE

A. Authors and Affiliations

1) In AURA's context, the "authors and affiliations" equivalent reflects the collaborative nature of its development. The project involves contributions in AI modeling, hardware integration, navigation design, cybersecurity, and user-interface engineering.
2) Each team member contributes domain-specific knowledge, ensuring balanced development across hardware, software, and usability components.
3) Collaboration across technical subfields is critical in assistive technology systems.
4) Combining expertise in computer vision, speech processing, and embedded systems leads to a highly functional and reliable product.
5) This multidisciplinary team structure parallels the academic format of multiple authors contributing unique capabilities.

B. Identify the Headings

AURA's documentation and architecture use clear hierarchical headings to organize system components such as speech processing, computer vision, navigation, connectivity, security, and hardware requirements. These structured headings mirror IEEE formatting, enabling clarity when presenting the system's functional breakdown. This organization is necessary for managing complex interactions between AI modules and sensors.

Structured headings also simplify debugging and upgrading individual modules. For instance, separating object detection from sound recognition allows targeted performance tuning. Similarly, navigation and dashboard components can evolve independently without disrupting the overall system architecture.

C. Figures and Tables

Figures and tables play a key role in visualizing AURA's system workflow. The block diagram on page 12 of your report illustrates the interaction between the user, sensors, AI core, dashboard, and response modules, showing how each component contributes to the feedback loop. This figure helps readers understand how multimodal data flows through the system from input (camera, microphone, sensors) to output (voice, vibration, dashboard).

Tables summarizing tools, APIs, and hardware components provide a structured comparison of required technologies. They also clarify system dependencies and justify the choice of frameworks such as TensorFlow, YOLOv8, Google Maps API, and Raspberry Pi for on-device processing. These visuals are essential in a survey paper to present technical data concisely.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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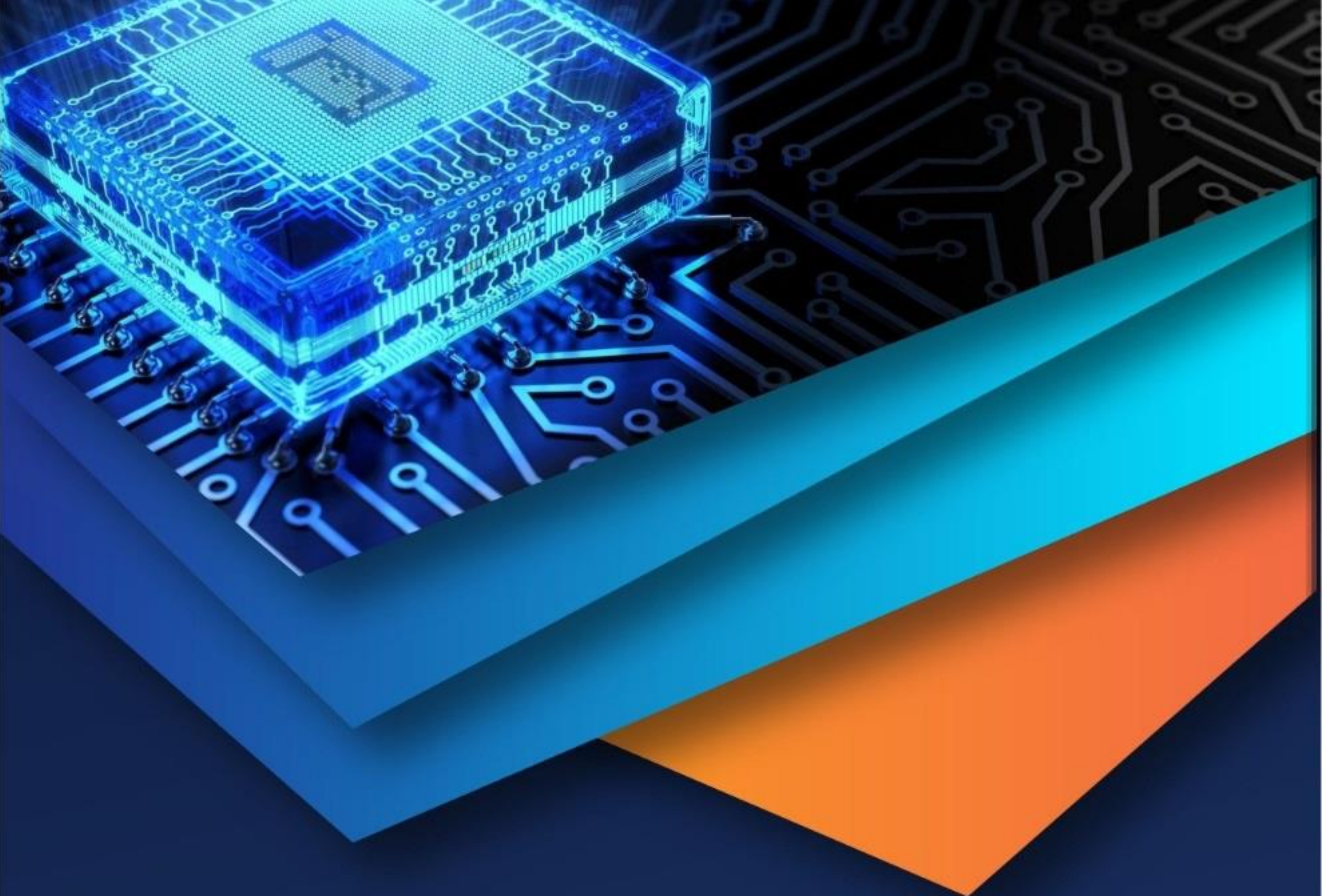

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