AI-Based Smart Parking System for Real-Time Occupancy Detection and Space Availability Display Using YOLOv8 and IoT Integratio

Krushna Ankushrao Kale[1], Madhuri Ganesh Dange[2], Prof. M. K. Jadhav[3], Dr. S. P. Abhang[4]

[1,2,3,4] Department of Computer Science and Engineering
[1,2,3,4] CSMSS' , Chh. Shahu College Of Engineering, Aurangabad (MH) India

Abstract:

Efficient parking management is increasingly critical in urban areas due to the rapid growth of vehicles and limited parking infrastructure. Traditional parking systems often rely on manual supervision or basic sensors, which are prone to inefficiencies and high operational costs. This paper presents an innovative AI-Based Smart Parking System that leverages Artificial Intelligence (AI), Computer Vision, and the Internet of Things (IoT) for real-time parking space occupancy detection. A USB camera continuously monitors parking slots, while the YOLOv8 deep learning model processes the video feed to detect vehicle presence. The system utilizes the MQTT protocol for wireless communication, sending real-time data to an ESP32 microcontroller, which updates the parking status on a 16×2 LCD display. Additionally, a Flask-based web interface provides remote monitoring of parking slot availability. The system reduces the time spent searching for parking, minimizes traffic congestion, and contributes to the smart city infrastructure. The proposed solution is cost-effective, scalable, and can be easily integrated into existing parking systems, offering a significant improvement in parking management efficiency.

Keywords: AI, YOLOv8, Smart Parking, IoT, Real-Time Monitoring, Parking Management, MQTT, ESP32, Computer Vision, Deep Learning, Flask, Wireless Communication.

I. Introduction

Urbanization has led to a significant increase in the number of vehicles, which has exacerbated parking management issues in cities worldwide. Traditional parking systems, often relying on manual supervision, basic sensors, or ticketing methods, are inadequate for handling the growing demand. These conventional solutions are not only inefficient but also result in high operational costs and time-consuming processes for both drivers and parking operators [1]. As cities move toward becoming smarter and more automated, there is a growing need for innovative parking management systems that can handle this demand efficiently and cost-effectively [2][3].

The AI-Based Smart Parking System presented in this paper utilizes Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Computer Vision technologies to automatically detect and monitor parking space availability. This system integrates YOLOv8, a state-of-the-art object detection algorithm, to analyze real-time video feeds from a USB camera. The detected data is wirelessly transmitted via the MQTT protocol to an ESP32 microcontroller, which updates a 16×2 LCD display with the real-time status of available and occupied parking spaces. In addition, the system features a Flask-based web interface, allowing administrators and users to monitor the parking lot remotely [4][5].

AI has made remarkable strides in various domains, including object detection and real-time video analysis. YOLO (You Only Look Once), particularly in its latest version YOLOv8, has proven to be highly efficient in detecting objects in real-time. YOLOv8 processes images in a single pass, offering both high speed and accuracy, making it ideal for time-sensitive applications such as smart parking systems [6][7]. By using YOLOv8 to detect vehicles, this system can quickly and accurately identify occupied and vacant parking spaces in a variety of dynamic environments [8].

The integration of Internet of Things (IoT) technology is another key feature of the system. The MQTT protocol enables seamless communication between the server, the ESP32 microcontroller, and the web interface. This ensures that data on parking space availability is updated and transmitted in real-time. The ESP32 microcontroller, a powerful yet cost-effective IoT device, handles the task of receiving the data and displaying it on the LCD at the parking lot entrance [9][10]. By immediately informing drivers of available spaces, the system reduces time spent searching for parking, which in turn alleviates congestion at parking lot entry points [11].

The Flask web interface serves as a powerful tool for remote monitoring. It provides a graphical user interface (GUI) that displays parking slot status, making it easy for administrators to track real-time occupancy levels. The use of a web-based interface not only enhances the user experience but also reduces the need for manual supervision, allowing for greater scalability and efficiency in parking lot management [12][13]. Additionally, the integration of real-time parking data and user-friendly display systems significantly contributes to reducing driver frustration and improving overall user satisfaction [14].

Moreover, the system is designed to be cost-effective and scalable, leveraging low-cost hardware such as the ESP32 and USB cameras. These affordable components make the system ideal for deployment in various parking environments, from small public parking lots to larger commercial spaces. The system's scalability also allows it to be expanded to multi-level parking garages, where multiple cameras and microcontrollers can be integrated to monitor larger areas with greater accuracy [15][16]. This scalability ensures that the system remains applicable in a variety of urban settings with different parking space capacities [17].

As cities continue to embrace smart technologies, AI-based systems like the one proposed in this paper are playing an increasingly important role in solving urban mobility issues. By improving parking efficiency and reducing traffic congestion, these systems contribute to smart city initiatives that focus on sustainability and intelligent infrastructure management [18][19]. The system's ability to integrate AI, IoT, and real-time monitoring demonstrates the potential for smarter, more sustainable urban living solutions [20].

Motivation

As urbanization accelerates, the demand for parking spaces in cities continues to rise, leading to increased traffic congestion, higher fuel consumption, and frustration for drivers searching for available spots. Traditional parking management systems, often reliant on manual supervision or basic sensor-based solutions, are unable to meet the growing demand effectively. This has created a pressing need for innovative, automated solutions that can efficiently manage parking spaces, reduce congestion, and improve overall urban mobility. Leveraging AI and IoT technologies offers a promising path forward, as these systems can enhance parking efficiency and reduce operational costs while providing real-time data for drivers and administrators alike [1][2][3].

Objectives of the study

1. To study the implementation of YOLOv8 for real-time vehicle detection in parking slots.
2. To study the integration of IoT technologies for seamless communication between the parking system components.
3. To study the effectiveness of MQTT protocol for wireless data transmission between the server and microcontroller.
4. To study the scalability and cost-effectiveness of the AI-based parking system for different sizes of parking facilities.
5. To study the impact of real-time parking space monitoring on reducing traffic congestion and improving driver satisfaction.

Scope

The scope of this study is to design, develop, and evaluate an AI-based Smart Parking System that utilizes YOLOv8 for real-time vehicle detection and IoT integration for monitoring parking space availability. The study focuses on:

1. Implementing computer vision techniques for accurate vehicle detection and parking space classification.
2. Evaluating the MQTT protocol for efficient and reliable wireless communication between the parking system components.
3. Analyzing the system's scalability and its ability to be adapted for various parking lot sizes, from small commercial spaces to large multi-level parking garages.
4. Investigating the real-time data transmission and display through an ESP32 microcontroller and Flask web interface.
5. Exploring the impact of automated parking systems on traffic flow, fuel consumption, and user experience, contributing to smart city initiatives.

II. Existing System

1. A Systematic Review of Computer Vision and AI in Parking Space Allocation in a Seaport
Authors: Hoon Lee, Indranath Chatterjee, Gyusung Cho
Journal: *Applied Sciences*
Year: 2023
Paper Title: "A Systematic Review of Computer Vision and AI in Parking Space Allocation in a Seaport"
This paper provides an extensive review of AI and computer vision (CV) applications in optimizing parking spaces at seaports. The authors analyze how these technologies can improve seaport operations by optimizing space allocation and enhancing traffic flow. AI and CV offer significant benefits in real-time parking management, particularly in seaports where space optimization is crucial due to limited space and high traffic volumes. The review

emphasizes future innovations and the role of AI in achieving sustainable solutions for seaport logistics.

2. Smart Parking Systems: A Comprehensive Review Based on Various Aspects
Authors: Abrar Fahim, Mehedi Hasan, Muhtasim Alam Chowdhury
Journal: *Heliyon*
Year: 2021
Paper Title: "Smart Parking Systems: A Comprehensive Review Based on Various Aspects"
This paper explores the evolution of Smart Parking Systems (SPS), focusing on the integration of various technologies such as IoT, wireless sensor networks, and machine learning. It reviews different approaches to smart parking solutions, including sensor-based systems, image processing, and smartphone applications for efficient parking management. The paper also identifies the advantages and challenges of these systems, providing a detailed comparison of the technological approaches used in different SPSs.

3. A Smart Real-Time Parking Control and Monitoring System
Authors: Abdelrahman Osman Elfaki, Wassim Messoudi, Anas Bushnag, Shakour Abuzneid, Tareq Alhmiedat
Journal: *Sensors*
Year: 2023
Paper Title: "A Smart Real-Time Parking Control and Monitoring System"
This paper presents a real-time smart parking management system that uses AI and IoT to optimize parking space utilization in urban environments. The system integrates motion sensors and range-finder sensors to detect parking space occupancy, while an AI-based application helps allocate parking spaces dynamically. A license plate recognition (LPR) system enhances security by tracking vehicle entry and exit in real-time. The system aims to reduce congestion, improve parking efficiency, and provide a better user experience.

4. Smart Parking Solutions: A Review of Emerging Technologies and Challenges for Sustainable Smart Cities
Authors: Sarathambekai S., Vairam T., Sharath S. T., Abilash A., Mohamed Shuaib M., Megachandran V.
Journal: *Journal of Transportation Engineering and Traffic Management*
Year: 2025
Paper Title: "Smart Parking Solutions: A Review of Emerging Technologies and Challenges for Sustainable Smart Cities"
This paper provides a review of AI-driven smart parking solutions and their role in promoting sustainable urban mobility. The paper highlights the use of IoT sensors, deep learning, and computer vision in parking space management and traffic optimization. It also discusses the potential for smart parking systems to address urban challenges like congestion, fuel consumption, and air pollution. The paper identifies key trends in AI-powered parking solutions and suggests future research directions for improving system efficiency and scalability.

5. Parking Space Detection System: A Smart Solution for Urban Parking Challenges
Authors: Jahnvi Srivastava, Ishita Khare, Dr. Ashish Baiswar
Journal: *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*
Year: 2025
Paper Title: "Parking Space Detection System: A Smart Solution for Urban Parking Challenges"
This paper focuses on a Parking Space Detection System (PSDS) using OpenCV, a popular computer vision library. The system uses image processing and object detection techniques to detect vacant and occupied parking spaces in real-time. The authors discuss the use of machine learning algorithms for improving the accuracy of parking space detection, addressing the challenge of inefficient space utilization in urban areas. The paper also highlights the potential for real-time parking data to enhance user experience and reduce traffic congestion.

III. Proposed System

The proposed AI-Based Smart Parking System is designed to automatically detect, count, and display the number of occupied and vacant parking spaces in real time using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) integration. The system leverages YOLOv8, an advanced deep learning algorithm for object detection, and ESP32, a microcontroller equipped with wireless communication capabilities. The core idea is to automate parking management and enhance driver convenience while promoting sustainable urban infrastructure.

A. System Overview

The architecture of the system comprises three main layers Perception Layer, Processing Layer, and Application Layer.

- The Perception Layer includes a USB camera that continuously captures live video streams of the parking area.
- The Processing Layer runs the YOLOv8 model on a computing unit (laptop or edge device) to identify vehicles and determine parking slot occupancy.
- The Application Layer handles real-time visualization, data transmission, and user interaction via the Flask web interface and an LCD display.

The system ensures efficient data flow between these layers through the MQTT (Message Queuing Telemetry Transport) protocol, which enables lightweight and reliable communication between the AI module and IoT hardware components.

B. Functional Description

1. **Image Capture and Vehicle Detection**

   A USB camera is strategically placed above the parking area to capture continuous video streams covering multiple parking slots. The frames are processed using the YOLOv8 deep learning algorithm, which performs real-time object detection to identify vehicles and classify each slot as either occupied or vacant. The system ensures high accuracy under varying lighting and environmental conditions.

2. **Data Processing and Communication**

Once the parking status is determined, the computed results are sent wirelessly to the ESP32 microcontroller via the MQTT protocol. The ESP32 acts as a data receiver and controller that updates the 16×2 LCD display located at the parking entrance. The display provides instant feedback to drivers regarding the availability of parking spaces, minimizing search time and reducing congestion.

3. **Web Interface and Real-Time Monitoring**

A Flask-based web server runs concurrently on the same computing device to provide remote access to parking information. The web interface visually represents each slot using color indicators — typically green for vacant and red for occupied — allowing administrators and users to monitor parking occupancy in real time from any connected device.

4. **Integration and Automation**

The integrated system ensures seamless communication between hardware and software components. The AI module handles object detection, the IoT module manages wireless data transmission, and the Flask server supports visualization and control. Together, these modules create a fully automated, intelligent parking management solution.

IV. System Design

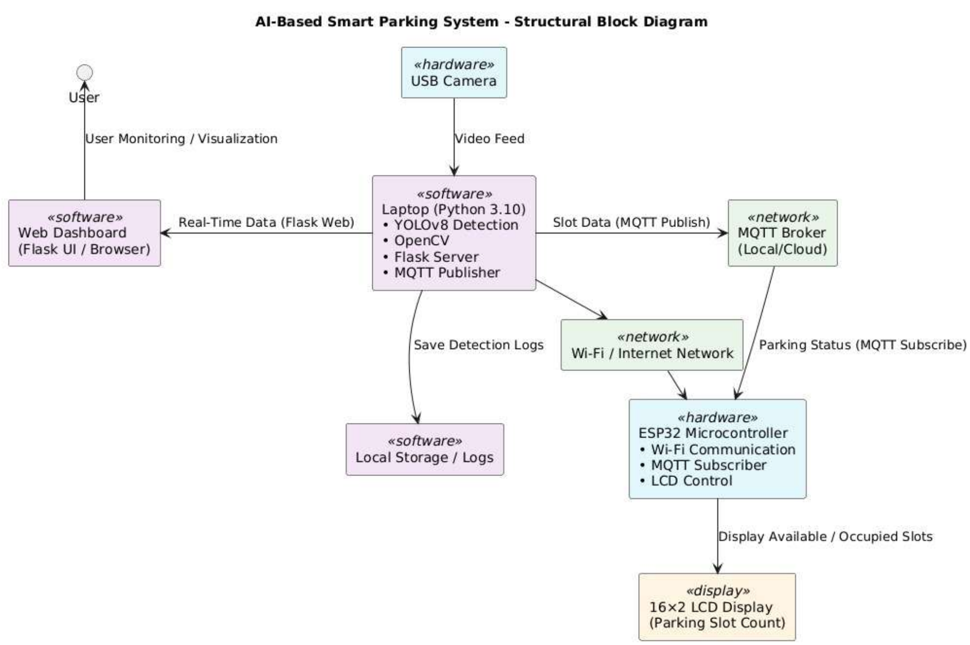

Fig. 1 System Architecture

The architecture of the AI-Based Smart Parking System is designed to provide an intelligent, automated, and scalable framework for real-time parking management. The architecture consists of four primary layers Sensing Layer, Processing Layer, Communication Layer, and Application Layer that work together to detect, process, transmit, and display parking information efficiently.

A. System Architecture Overview

The system architecture is composed of interconnected hardware and software components that collectively perform end-to-end smart parking operations. The USB camera acts as the visual sensing unit, continuously capturing live video of the parking area. The video stream is fed into a Python-based processing system running the YOLOv8 deep learning algorithm for vehicle detection and slot classification.

The processed data, which contains information about the number of empty and occupied parking spaces, is transmitted to an ESP32 microcontroller via the MQTT (Message Queuing Telemetry Transport) protocol. The ESP32 module updates a 16×2 LCD display located at the parking entrance, providing drivers with real-time availability information. Simultaneously, the same data is published to a Flask-based web dashboard, allowing administrators to monitor and control the system remotely from any network-connected device.

This modular architecture ensures low latency, high scalability, and seamless integration between AI-based computer vision and IoT communication technologies.

B. Hardware Components

- **ESP32 Microcontroller:** Handles Wi-Fi communication and controls the LCD display.
- **USB Camera:** Captures real-time parking area images or video for analysis.
- **16×2 LCD Display:** Displays available and occupied parking slots at the entrance.
- **Laptop/Edge Device:** Runs YOLOv8 detection, Flask web application, and MQTT broker.
- **Power Supply Module:** Provides regulated power to the ESP32 and connected components.
- **Connecting Wires and Breadboard:** Used for interconnections.
- **Wi-Fi Router/Hotspot:** Enables seamless communication between devices.

C. Software Components

- **Python 3.10:** Programming environment for developing the AI and IoT integration modules.
- **YOLOv8:** Deep learning framework for vehicle detection and slot classification.
- **Flask Framework:** Builds the web dashboard for real-time monitoring.
- **MQTT (Paho-MQTT Library):** Enables message communication between Python and ESP32.
- **OpenCV:** Used for image processing and frame manipulation.
- **NumPy and Matplotlib:** Support numerical operations and data visualization.
- **Arduino IDE/Thonny IDE:** Used for programming the ESP32 microcontroller.
- **Web Browser:** Provides the user interface for live parking monitoring.

D. Major Components and Their Roles

1. **USB Camera (Sensing Layer)**
   - Captures continuous live video of the parking area.
   - Provides raw input for vehicle detection and slot monitoring.
   - Placed strategically to cover multiple parking slots under varying light conditions.
2. **YOLOv8 Detection Module (Processing Layer)**
   - Executes object detection on the captured video frames.
   - Accurately classifies each parking slot as *occupied* or *vacant*.
   - Processes multiple frames per second for real-time responsiveness.
3. **ESP32 Microcontroller (Communication Layer)**
   - Acts as an IoT node to receive data from the Python server via MQTT.
   - Displays real-time slot status on the 16×2 LCD at the parking gate.
   - Provides wireless communication and local control functions.
4. **MQTT Protocol (Data Transmission Layer)**
   - Ensures lightweight and reliable communication between the AI detection system and ESP32.
   - Operates in publisher–subscriber mode for efficient data exchange.
   - Minimizes network latency and power consumption.
5. **16×2 LCD Display (User Notification Layer)**
   - Displays the number of available and occupied parking slots to incoming drivers.
   - Provides immediate visual feedback for improved user experience.
6. **Flask-Based Web Interface (Application Layer)**
   - Provides real-time visualization of parking slot occupancy.
   - Allows remote access for monitoring and management.
   - Displays color-coded slots (green for vacant, red for occupied).
   - Enhances system accessibility and administrative control.

E. Data Flow Explanation

1. The USB camera captures continuous video streams of the parking lot.
2. The YOLOv8 module running on a laptop processes each frame to identify parked vehicles.
3. The occupancy data is converted into numerical form representing *occupied* and *vacant* slots.
4. This data is published via MQTT from the Python server to the ESP32 microcontroller.
5. The ESP32 subscribes to the MQTT topic, receives updates, and updates the 16×2 LCD display with the current slot status.
6. Simultaneously, the same processed data is rendered on the Flask web dashboard, providing real-time visualization to administrators.
7. The user can access this dashboard through any web browser to monitor parking availability remotely.

V. Expected Outcome

The proposed AI-Based Smart Parking System is expected to demonstrate significant improvements in the efficiency, automation, and reliability of parking management compared to traditional methods. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Computer Vision, and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies is anticipated to provide real-time monitoring and intelligent control of parking operations with high accuracy.

The expected outcomes of this research can be summarized as follows:

1. **Accurate Detection of Parking Occupancy:**

   The system is expected to accurately identify and differentiate between occupied and vacant parking slots using the YOLOv8 deep learning algorithm, even under variable lighting and environmental conditions.

2. **Real-Time Data Transmission and Display:**

   Through the use of the MQTT communication protocol and ESP32 microcontroller, the system is expected to transmit parking data wirelessly with minimal latency. The 16×2 LCD display will update instantly at the parking entrance, showing the current count of available and occupied spaces.

3. **Remote Monitoring via Flask Web Interface:**

   A real-time Flask-based dashboard will allow administrators and users to remotely visualize parking slot occupancy from any internet-enabled device. This enhances accessibility, reduces human supervision, and improves decision-making efficiency.

4. **Reduction in Congestion and Driver Effort:**

   By guiding drivers to available slots quickly, the system is expected to reduce the average search time for parking, minimize fuel wastage, and alleviate traffic congestion within parking premises.

5. **Cost-Effective and Scalable Design:**

   The use of affordable components such as the ESP32, USB camera, and open-source frameworks like Python and Flask ensures a low-cost implementation. The modular design allows scalability for deployment in larger parking facilities or smart city infrastructures.

6. **Contribution to Smart City Development:**

   The proposed system is expected to align with smart city objectives by providing an intelligent, automated, and environmentally friendly parking solution that optimizes space utilization and enhances urban mobility.

Overall, the expected outcome of this study is to establish a proof-of-concept system capable of performing real-time vehicle detection, IoT-based communication, and web-based visualization of parking data. The anticipated results will validate the feasibility of using AI and IoT integration for developing a sustainable and intelligent parking management system suitable for urban and semi-urban applications.

VI. Conclusion

The proposed AI-Based Smart Parking System presents a modern, intelligent, and efficient solution to the challenges faced in urban parking management. By combining Artificial Intelligence (AI) for vehicle detection, IoT technology for real-time communication, and a Flask-based web interface for visualization, the system ensures seamless monitoring and control of parking spaces. The utilization of the YOLOv8 algorithm enhances the accuracy of vehicle detection, while the ESP32 microcontroller and MQTT protocol enable reliable data transmission between the camera unit and the central dashboard.

The system aims to reduce the manual effort of monitoring parking areas, minimize vehicle search time, and optimize space utilization. Furthermore, the proposed approach is cost-effective and easily deployable in various environments, from college campuses to large commercial complexes. The overall outcome of this work contributes to the development of sustainable smart city infrastructure and demonstrates the practical potential of integrating AI and IoT in daily life applications.

VII. Future Scope

The system can be enhanced further to achieve broader applicability and higher intelligence in real-world deployments. Potential directions for future development include:

1. **Mobile Application Integration:**

   Developing an Android/iOS application to provide real-time parking availability updates and navigation assistance to drivers.
2. **Automated Payment and Reservation System:**

   Incorporating digital payment gateways and reservation modules for slot booking to create a fully automated parking experience.
3. **Cloud-Based Data Analytics:**

   Storing parking data on cloud platforms to analyze long-term usage patterns, peak hours, and predictive availability using AI analytics.
4. **License Plate Recognition (LPR):**

   Adding an LPR module for vehicle identification, enabling access control and enhanced security within the parking premises.
5. **Renewable Energy Integration:**

   Powering the parking setup through **solar panels** to make the system energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable.
6. **Smart City Connectivity:**

   Integrating the system with other smart city modules, such as traffic management systems and public transportation networks, for real-time urban mobility optimization.

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