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The evolution of embedded systems in automotive industry: A global review

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Abstract

The automotive industry has undergone a revolutionary transformation with the integration of embedded systems, marking a paradigm shift in vehicle design, performance, and safety. This global review explores the evolution of embedded systems in the automotive sector, encompassing the technological advancements, market trends, and the transformative impact on vehicle functionalities. Over the past few decades, the automotive landscape has witnessed a rapid integration of embedded systems to enhance vehicle intelligence and connectivity. These systems, ranging from Engine Control Units (ECUs) to Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), have become pivotal in shaping the modern automotive experience. The review delves into the historical trajectory, starting from the early stages of simple control units to the sophisticated, interconnected systems prevalent in today's vehicles. The adoption of embedded systems has not been uniform across regions, and the review highlights the global trends and regional disparities in implementing these technologies. Different countries and automotive markets have exhibited diverse approaches, influenced by regulatory frameworks, consumer preferences, and the availability of infrastructure. Moreover, the review examines the symbiotic relationship between embedded systems and the emergence of electric and autonomous vehicles. As the automotive industry embraces sustainability and autonomy, embedded systems play a pivotal role in achieving these objectives by optimizing energy consumption, improving safety measures, and enabling seamless communication between vehicles and their environment. The challenges and opportunities associated with the evolution of embedded systems are also scrutinized, including cybersecurity concerns, standardization efforts, and the growing role of artificial intelligence in automotive applications. This comprehensive review contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between embedded systems and the automotive industry, providing valuable insights for researchers, industry professionals, and policymakers navigating the ever-evolving landscape of smart and connected vehicles.

Keyword: Embedded System; Automotive; Industry; Evolution; Review

1. Introduction

The automotive industry has indeed undergone significant transformation in recent years, largely due to the integration of embedded systems. Embedded systems, which are specialized computing systems designed to perform dedicated functions within a larger mechanical or electrical system, have become increasingly vital in the automotive sector. These systems are crucial for controlling a wide range of functions, including engine management, safety features, entertainment systems, and more. The integration of embedded systems has revolutionized the automotive

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industry, leading to advancements in production and management systems (Yazdanifard, 2014). This evolution has been driven by the need to match capacity with volatile demand, prompting original equipment manufacturers to increase plant flexibility (Wittek et al., 2012).

The significance of embedded systems in the automotive industry is underscored by the global perspective on the subject. The automotive industry is constantly evolving, and electronic components, including embedded systems, have played a vital role in this transformation. Moreover, the introduction of embedded systems has led to a shift in production systems from a built-to-stock to a customized built-to-order principle with shortened lead times (Golz et al., 2011). This shift highlights the importance of procurement in cooperation with a widespread network of suppliers, emphasizing the global impact of embedded systems in the automotive industry.

In conclusion, the integration of embedded systems has been a driving force behind the evolution of the automotive industry. This evolution has been characterized by the increasing importance of electronic components, including embedded systems, and their role in enhancing production systems and meeting the demands of a dynamic global market.

1.1. Historical Evolution of Embedded Systems in Automotive

The historical evolution of embedded systems in automotive vehicles has been marked by significant advancements over the decades. In the early stages, the introduction of Engine Control Units (ECUs) revolutionized the automotive industry. These ECUs were initially designed to perform basic functionalities such as controlling the engine, transmission, and other critical systems within the vehicle (Lee et al., 2011). As technology progressed, there was a notable integration of microcontrollers and sensors, leading to the evolution of electronic systems in vehicles (Cioroica et al., 2019). This integration allowed for more sophisticated functionalities and applications, enhancing the overall performance and safety of automotive embedded systems (Moon et al., 2021).

Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of embedded systems in automotive vehicles. The migration of engine ECU software from single-core to multi-core architectures has been a significant development, requiring new methodologies to accommodate these changes (Poon, 2022). Furthermore, the prevalence of multicore processors has enabled high computing performance with low thermal dissipation, contributing to the optimization of task-intensive real-time applications in automotive electronic system design (Mishra & Hegde, 2021). Additionally, the development of open-source-based peripherals for automotive electronic control units has provided educational platforms for understanding the functionalities of these systems (Pancik & Beneš, 2018).

The automotive industry's increasing focus on safety and security has led to the implementation of systematic methodologies for functional testing of automotive embedded software (Hodel et al., 2022). Moreover, there has been a growing emphasis on simulation-based testing and inspection of engine control units during the manufacturing phase, contributing to the overall quality and reliability of automotive embedded systems (Ham et al., 2017). However, it is important to note that with the advancements in automotive embedded systems, there have been concerns regarding the security risks associated with connected vehicles (Luo et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the historical evolution of embedded systems in automotive vehicles has been characterized by the introduction of ECUs, technological advancements such as the integration of microcontrollers and sensors, and the migration towards multi-core architectures. These advancements have significantly enhanced the functionalities, performance, and safety of automotive embedded systems. However, the industry continues to address challenges related to security and the integration of new technologies to further improve automotive embedded systems.

1.2. Types of Embedded Systems in Automotive

Embedded systems in automotive play a crucial role in enhancing vehicle performance, safety, and entertainment. The types of embedded systems in automotive include engine and transmission control systems, in-car entertainment and infotainment systems, and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) (Sangiovanni-Vincentelli & Natale, 2007).

Engine and transmission control systems significantly impact fuel efficiency and performance. These systems are designed to optimize engine speed, transmission gears, and workload to improve fuel efficiency and ensure smooth operation under various conditions (Lee et al., 2019; Li & Görges, 2019; Ahn et al., 2015). Additionally, the integration of safety analysis tools into the model-based development toolchain for embedded systems has become increasingly important in the automotive industry, emphasizing the significance of safety in these systems (Babarinde et al., 2023; BiehlMatthias et al., 2010).

In-car entertainment and infotainment systems are characterized by their connectivity features and multimedia integration. These systems have evolved to include phone-car connected and IVI systems, which positively influence individual usage intention through facilitating conditions and technographics (Akindote et al., 2023; Yu & Jin, 2021). However, the vulnerability analysis of Android-based infotainment apps highlights the importance of addressing security concerns in these systems (Mandal et al., 2018).

ADAS contributes to enhancing vehicle safety and has evolved from basic to autonomous capabilities. The role of ADAS in improving safety is evident in the development of integrated engine-hydro-mechanical transmission control algorithms for tractors, which utilize artificial intelligence to adapt engine speed and enhance performance (Ahn et al., 2015). Furthermore, the development of an integrated virtual execution platform for large-scale distributed embedded systems has facilitated the validation of ADAS and other embedded systems, ensuring their reliability and safety (Nakamoto et al., 2008).

In conclusion, the types of embedded systems in automotive, including engine and transmission control systems, in-car entertainment and infotainment systems, and advanced driver assistance systems, have a significant impact on fuel efficiency, performance, connectivity features, safety, and autonomous capabilities. The integration of safety analysis tools, addressing security concerns, and the development of advanced control algorithms and virtual execution platforms are essential for ensuring the effectiveness, reliability, and safety of these embedded systems.

1.3. Global Trends in Embedded Systems Adoption

The adoption of embedded systems is influenced by regional disparities, regulatory frameworks, consumer preferences, and market demands. Regional disparities in implementation are evident, with the embedded world significantly lagging behind the general-purpose world (Abbasi et al., 2019; Okoro et al., 2024). This lag may be attributed to the influence of regulatory frameworks and the varying consumer preferences and market demands across different regions. Regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in shaping the implementation of embedded systems. The challenges in designing exploit mitigations for deeply embedded systems highlight the impact of regulatory frameworks on adoption (Abbasi et al., 2019). Additionally, the implementation of local wellness policies in schools is influenced by system and school-level factors, indicating the significance of regulatory frameworks in shaping adoption (Ayo-Farai et al., 2023; Hager et al., 2016).

Consumer preferences and market demands also play a pivotal role in the adoption of embedded systems. The viability of remanufacturing practice in the automotive industry is influenced by consumer preferences and market demands, with Chinese firms showing a keen interest in adopting remanufacturing practice in-house (Abdulrahman et al., 2015). Furthermore, the future of the automotive industry is expected to trigger the reorganization of the global value chain, affecting the regionalization of production and the comparative advantage of nations, thus reflecting the influence of consumer preferences and market demands on adoption (Simonazzi et al., 2020).

A comparative analysis of key automotive markets, including North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region, reveals distinct trends in embedded systems adoption. The greater importance of market factors in North America relative to Europe confirms the influence of consumer preferences and market demands on adoption (Moon & Orliczky, 2011). Moreover, the challenges in designing exploit mitigations for deeply embedded systems highlight regional disparities in implementation, with the embedded world lagging behind the general-purpose world (Abbasi et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the adoption of embedded systems is influenced by regional disparities, regulatory frameworks, consumer preferences, and market demands. These factors play a crucial role in shaping the implementation of embedded systems, with distinct trends observed across different regions.

1.4. Integration of Embedded Systems with Electric Vehicles (EVs)

The integration of embedded systems with electric vehicles (EVs) has a significant impact on electric vehicle performance and the synergy between embedded systems and EV charging infrastructure. Qing et al. (2018) emphasize the role of charging infrastructure in the implementation of electric vehicles within smart grids, underscoring the interlinkage between EV fleets and the power grid, which affects the impacts of EV operation on the smart grid. Furthermore, Schuss et al. (2021) discuss the potential integration of photovoltaics into hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs) and battery-powered electric vehicles (BEVs) to extend the electrical driving range of these vehicles. This demonstrates the potential for enhanced range and efficiency through the integration of embedded systems with EVs.

In conclusion, the integration of embedded systems with electric vehicles has a substantial impact on electric vehicle performance, optimizing energy consumption, and enhancing range and efficiency. Moreover, there is a clear synergy

between embedded systems and EV charging infrastructure, emphasizing the interlinkage between EV fleets and the power grid, which affects the impacts of EV operation on the smart grid.

1.5. The Role of Embedded Systems in Autonomous Vehicles

Autonomous vehicles, often hailed as the future of transportation, heavily rely on embedded systems to achieve the advanced capabilities necessary for safe and efficient self-driving operation. This article explores the multifaceted role of embedded systems in autonomous vehicles, focusing on their contributions to autonomous capabilities and the challenges they help address.

Embedded systems play a crucial role in the sensor fusion and perception systems of autonomous vehicles, integrating multiple sensors such as cameras, radar, lidar, and ultrasonic sensors (Jahromi et al., 2019). These systems process and fuse data from these sensors in real-time to create an accurate representation of the vehicle's surroundings (Jahromi et al., 2019). This sensor fusion enhances the vehicle's perception and reliability by combining information from various sensors (Jahromi et al., 2019). The embedded processors analyze incoming data streams, identify objects, predict their movements, and generate a cohesive situational awareness for the autonomous vehicle (Jahromi et al., 2019). This real-time processing is essential for making split-second decisions and ensuring the vehicle can navigate through dynamic and unpredictable environments (Jahromi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, embedded systems facilitate seamless communication within autonomous vehicle fleets, enabling them to operate cohesively and share critical information (Jahromi et al., 2019). Vehicular communication networks, supported by embedded processors, allow autonomous vehicles to exchange data related to traffic conditions, road hazards, and their own status (Jahromi et al., 2019). This shared information enhances the overall efficiency and safety of the autonomous fleet (Jahromi et al., 2019). The embedded systems manage the communication protocols, ensuring robust and secure data exchange between vehicles (Jahromi et al., 2019). This interconnectedness is particularly valuable in scenarios where one vehicle's awareness can benefit others, such as communicating road closures or adverse weather conditions (Jahromi et al., 2019).

In conclusion, embedded systems are integral to the functioning of autonomous vehicles, playing a pivotal role in sensor fusion, real-time data processing, and seamless communication within autonomous vehicle fleets.

Ensuring the safety of autonomous vehicles is a paramount concern, and embedded systems are integral to implementing the necessary safety measures. Redundant systems, fail-safe mechanisms, and rigorous testing protocols are embedded into the vehicle's architecture to mitigate the risk of system failures or malfunctions. Embedded safety features include real-time monitoring of critical components, such as sensors and actuators, to detect anomalies and trigger corrective actions. Additionally, embedded systems are instrumental in implementing advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) that act as safety nets, intervening when the vehicle encounters potential hazards or when the autonomous system requires human intervention.

Regulatory compliance is another challenge in the autonomous vehicle landscape. Embedded systems aid in incorporating the necessary features to meet regulatory standards, such as collision avoidance systems, emergency braking, and compliance with traffic laws. The adaptability of embedded systems allows manufacturers to update and upgrade software to meet evolving regulatory requirements, ensuring the long-term compliance of autonomous vehicles.

The ethical considerations surrounding autonomous vehicles pose a significant challenge that embedded systems help address. Decision-making algorithms embedded in the systems must navigate complex moral and ethical dilemmas, such as determining how the vehicle should respond in the event of an unavoidable collision or prioritizing the safety of occupants versus pedestrians. Embedded systems contribute to the development of ethical frameworks and decision-making algorithms that align with societal values. Manufacturers and developers can fine-tune these algorithms to prioritize safety, fairness, and ethical considerations, aiming to build public trust in autonomous vehicle technology. Moreover, embedded systems enable continuous monitoring and data collection, facilitating post-incident analysis and refinement of algorithms based on real-world scenarios.

Public acceptance is a crucial factor in the successful deployment of autonomous vehicles. Embedded systems contribute to building trust by ensuring the reliability, safety, and transparency of autonomous systems. The communication between embedded systems and users, through user interfaces and feedback mechanisms, helps demystify the technology and foster understanding and acceptance among the general public.

In conclusion, the role of embedded systems in autonomous vehicles is indispensable for realizing the ambitious vision of self-driving transportation. From enhancing sensor capabilities to managing communication networks and addressing complex challenges, embedded systems form the technological backbone that propels autonomous vehicles forward. As the industry continues to innovate, the symbiotic relationship between embedded systems and autonomous capabilities will shape the future of transportation, bringing about safer, more efficient, and ethically grounded autonomous vehicles.

1.6. Challenges and Opportunities

The evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry presents both challenges and opportunities. One of the major challenges is cybersecurity concerns in embedded systems (Sommer et al., 2019). With the increasing connectivity and autonomy in vehicles, the attack surface is expanding, leading to a higher risk of security attacks (Sommer et al., 2019). This necessitates a security-driven automotive development lifecycle to address these crucial challenges (Dobaj et al., 2021). Additionally, there is a need for an architectural approach to integrate safety and security requirements in smart products and systems design (Ezeigweneme, et al., 2024; Riel et al., 2018). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in embedded systems also poses challenges, as highlighted in a study on the automotive cybersecurity landscape and challenges in adopting AI/ML (Anamu et al., 2023; Siddiqui et al., 2021). The study emphasizes the architectural and ecosystem challenges in adopting AI and ML-driven decision making in automotive systems (Siddiqui et al., 2021).

However, amidst these challenges, there are opportunities for standardization efforts in the automotive industry to address safety and security concerns. Integrated design approaches have been proposed to tackle safety and security challenges of smart products, emphasizing the reduction of design complexities through integration (Riel et al., 2017). Furthermore, there are systematic pattern approaches for safety and security co-engineering in the automotive domain, which can open up new opportunities for realizing innovative safety functions (Amorim et al., 2017). Efforts such as the Automotive SPICE for cybersecurity assessment model and tools contribute to continuous improvement in system, software, and services, addressing the challenges faced by the automotive industry (Messnarz et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry presents challenges related to cybersecurity, standardization, and the integration of artificial intelligence. However, these challenges also bring opportunities for the development of security-driven lifecycles, integrated design approaches, and systematic pattern co-engineering. Addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities will be crucial for the advancement of embedded systems in the automotive industry.

1.7. Future Outlook and Emerging Trends

The evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry has been marked by significant advancements and emerging trends. The rapid evolution of automotive embedded systems has necessitated flexible system architectures to accommodate future changes (Zhang et al., 2017). This is particularly important as road vehicles have incorporated several functionalities over the last decade, with an increasing incorporation of electronic embedded systems (Hodel et al., 2022). The state-of-the-art design strategies and upcoming hardware/software solutions for the next generation of automotive systems, with a special focus on embedded and networked technologies, have been comprehensively reviewed, highlighting the need for further research in this area to address emerging issues and ensure sustainable growth of the automotive industry (Bello et al., 2019). Furthermore, the automotive industry has a growing demand for the seamless integration of safety analysis tools into the model-based development toolchain for embedded systems (BiehlMatthias et al., 2010).

The significance of embedded software systems in the automotive domain has increased dramatically over the last decade, with one of the few research contributions dealing with the architecture of embedded systems (with examples from the automotive domain) rather than just software (Axelsson, 2009). Additionally, the increasing complexity and criticality of software and electronics, namely the embedded systems, required by advanced automotive functions have motivated the need for verifying system behaviors in EAST-ADL2 with the SPIN model checker (Feng et al., 2010). Moreover, the Architecture Analysis and Design Language (AADL) has been adopted as an industry standard for embedded real-time systems by the International Society for Automotive Engineers (SAE) in 2004, emphasizing the need for standardized approaches in the development of automotive embedded systems (Xu & Lu, 2015).

In conclusion, the future outlook and emerging trends of the evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry are characterized by the need for flexible system architectures, seamless integration of safety analysis tools, standardized approaches, and the increasing complexity of software and electronics to meet the demands of advanced automotive functions.

1.8. Recommendation

In our comprehensive review on the evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry, several key findings have emerged. The historical trajectory of embedded systems in vehicles has witnessed a transformative shift from basic control units to sophisticated, interconnected systems. The adoption of these systems has not been uniform globally, with regional disparities influenced by regulatory frameworks, consumer preferences, and infrastructure availability.

The integration of embedded systems has played a pivotal role in shaping vehicle intelligence, connectivity, and safety. We explored their diverse applications, from Engine Control Units (ECUs) to Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), and their impact on different facets of the automotive experience.

As we look to the future, the automotive industry is poised for continuous innovation in embedded systems. The following emerging technologies and trends are likely to shape the trajectory of embedded systems; With the ongoing development of autonomous vehicles, embedded systems will continue to evolve, focusing on sensor fusion, real-time decision-making, and communication networks within autonomous fleets. The rise of electric vehicles (EVs) will necessitate further optimization of embedded systems for energy management, charging infrastructure compatibility, and improved overall efficiency. With the increasing connectivity of vehicles, embedding robust cybersecurity measures will be imperative to safeguard against potential threats and ensure the integrity of embedded systems. The infusion of artificial intelligence (AI) into embedded systems will lead to enhanced predictive capabilities, adaptive functionalities, and improved user experiences in future automotive applications.

The evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry carries significant implications for various stakeholders; Future research endeavors should focus on advancing embedded system technologies, addressing challenges such as cybersecurity, standardization, and ethical considerations. Collaborative efforts can contribute to the development of more intelligent, efficient, and secure embedded systems. Automotive industry professionals should remain vigilant about staying abreast of technological advancements, especially in the context of emerging trends like electric and autonomous vehicles. This involves continuous training, adaptation to new standards, and collaboration to ensure successful implementation.

Policymakers play a crucial role in fostering an environment conducive to the integration of advanced embedded systems. Regulations must be dynamic, accommodating technological advancements while prioritizing safety, cybersecurity, and ethical considerations. Collaborative initiatives with industry stakeholders can help create a regulatory framework that encourages innovation while ensuring public safety and acceptance.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of embedded systems in the automotive industry is an ongoing journey that promises to redefine the future of transportation. The symbiotic relationship between technological advancements, regulatory frameworks, and industry initiatives will shape a dynamic landscape. By embracing emerging technologies and collaborating across sectors, researchers, industry professionals, and policymakers can collectively contribute to the continued evolution of embedded systems, driving the automotive industry toward a safer, more connected, and sustainable future.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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