

1 Visual Feedback for In-Car Voice 2 Assistants

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6 ABSTRACT

7 This study presents ambient visual feedback for automotive voice assistants to enhance
8 driver interaction and safety through peripheral visual cues. A user interface proto-
9 type incorporating ambient colour feedback was evaluated through an online survey
10 (N=151 from 28 countries) and a lab-based study (N=24, Belgium). Survey participants
11 strongly preferred smartphone-integrated user interfaces, such as Android Auto and
12 Apple CarPlay, over built-in manufacturer systems, indicating a desire for consistent
13 digital ecosystems. In the lab, 18 participants favoured the ambient feedback over con-
14 ventional or no visual feedback, citing improved visibility and assistance. Statistical
15 analysis revealed that ambient feedback improved user visibility, position, and useful-
16 ness ratings. However, the need for auditory cues remained evident, confirming the
17 importance of multimodal feedback. These findings suggest that ambient visual feed-
18 back is a promising direction for improving the usability of voice assistants and driver
19 satisfaction while supporting safe in-vehicle interaction.

20 **Keywords:** Automotive, User interface, Voice assistant, Visual feedback, Speech commands

21 INTRODUCTION

22 Modern automotive user interfaces (UIs) have evolved beyond physical but-
23 tons and touchscreens, integrating natural input modalities like voice recog-
24 nition, eye-gaze tracking, and gesture controls (BimmerTech, 2020; Cerence,
25 2021; Gonçalves et al., 2024). Recent advances in large language models
26 have enhanced voice control, allowing drivers to operate infotainment sys-
27 tems while keeping their eyes on the road, thereby improving safety com-
28 pared to touchscreens (Naveed et al., 2023; Strayer et al., 2021). However,
29 a study conducted by the British transport consulting and research company
30 TRL found that voice-operated infotainment systems increase driver reaction
31 times (TRL, 2020). Although the improvement in driver reaction times is
32 not as great as when using touch screens, it is worse than the impact of driv-
33 ing under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Ramnath et al., 2020). Poorly
34 designed UIs can distract drivers by increasing cognitive load through com-
35 plex interactions or overwhelming options, contributing to up to 30% of
36 road collisions in Europe (European Commission, 2015). EuroNCAP's strict
37 2026 safety regulations highlight the need for improved infotainment and
38 voice assistant (VA) design (Euro NCAP, 2025).

One solution that has the potential to present visual information without requiring excessive attention is the use of ambient displays and peripheral interactions (Löcken et al., 2017; Pousman and Stasko, 2006). According to Mankoff et al., ambient displays can be defined as “*abstract and aesthetic peripheral displays portraying non-critical information on the periphery of a user’s attention*” (Mankoff et al., 2003). These displays align with design principles like simplified interactions and context-aware responses (Lentz et al., 2018), and adhere to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), emphasising perceivability and avoiding reliance on colour alone (e.g., red for critical alerts) (World Wide Web Consortium, 2018). Ambient displays are already common in mobile devices. In iOS 18, Apple’s mobile operating system, the visualisation of their VA Siri will change from an interactive logo to an interactive ambient colour-changing ring around the screen (Apple, 2024). In Apple CarPlay (Rammnath et al., 2020), the “traditional” Siri logo remains. Some cars, such as the 2024 Mercedes-Benz S-Class and the 2024 Volkswagen ID3 (Volkswagen.nl, 2025) (see Figure 1), also use ambient displays to give visual feedback to the VA or other functions. Moreover, customisable VA visualisations may further optimise effectiveness (Jonsson and Dahlbäck, 2009).



Figure 1: Ambient lighting display in Volkswagen ID3. Left: ambient navigation indicators. Right: lighting variations for different functions, such as charging status or VA feedback.

User experience (UX) in cars balances pragmatic (usability) and hedonic (enjoyment) qualities, critical for both utilitarian and emotional appeal (Hassenzahl, 2010; Ostrosi et al., 2020). Infotainment systems, including screens and voice controls, are central to UX, with electronics projected to account for 45% of a car’s cost by 2030 (Car and Driver, 2020). A study by Matthey et al. has found that nearly half of car buyers would not purchase a car without Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, and that of those who have either of these systems in their car, 85% prefer it over the built-in system of the manufacturer (Matthey et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of phone connectivity in shaping UI preferences.

This study investigates the effectiveness and satisfaction of a peripheral ambient feedback visualisation for automotive VA, compared to traditional VA visualisation and no visual feedback. The research questions are: RQ1: *How does peripheral ambient visual feedback to automotive voice assistants*

75 *impact driver satisfaction and effectiveness compared to traditional visual
76 feedback methods?* and RQ2: *What effect do smartphone operating system,
77 usage, and preferences have on user preferences for automotive user inter-
78 faces and voice assistants?* Overall, this study aims to design ambient visual
79 VA feedback that users prefer over conventional feedback visualisations and
80 can contribute to safer roads.

81 **METHOD**

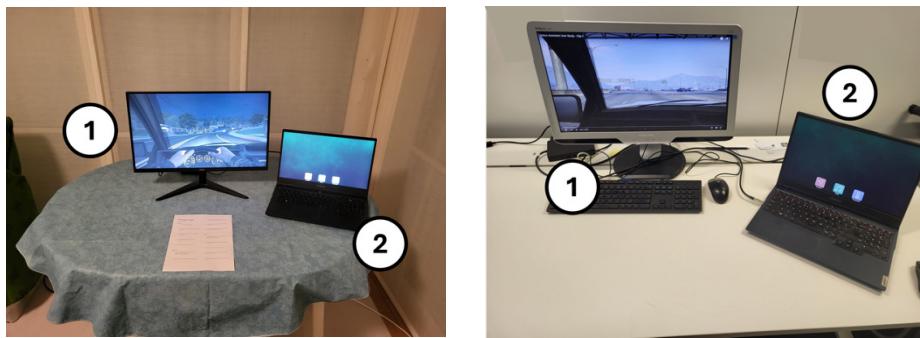
82 **Online Questionnaire**

83 The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of
84 the Eindhoven University of Technology, and the participants gave their
85 informed consent to use their data. To gain insights into people's preferences
86 for infotainment systems and VA in cars, we created an online questionnaire.
87 Participants were asked about their preferences for and usage of VAs in cars
88 and smartphones, and their preferences for visual feedback from VAs. The
89 full list of questions can be found in the supplementary material. This ques-
90 tionnaire was shared using Google Forms (<https://docs.google.com/forms>)
91 and posted on the Appen crowdsourcing platform (<http://appen.com>). In
92 Google Forms, no financial compensation was provided to the participants.
93 In Appen, participants received €0.50. A total of 151 people from 28 coun-
94 tries answered a questionnaire between July 5 and July 19, 2024. All partic-
95 ipants (59 female and 92 male) were older than 18 with a mean age of 34.8
96 years (SD=13.3, median=29). 24 participants did not have a driver's license,
97 26 participants owned a driver's license for less than five years, and 100 par-
98 ticipants owned a driver's license for more than five years.

99 **User Study**

100 A total of 24 people from eight different nationalities (Belgian, Brazilian,
101 Dutch, Greek, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Taiwanese) participated in a user
102 study in July 2024. All participants (11 female and 13 male) were older than
103 18 with a mean age of 43.1 years (SD=12.9, median=46.5). 23 participants
104 had a driver's license, one did not. The participants participated in Leuven
105 and Brussels, Belgium.

106 Figure 2 shows the apparatus for the user study in the two closed rooms
107 used as test environments: location A in Leuven, Belgium and location B
108 in Brussels, Belgium. The numbered items represent the following compo-
109 nents: (1) primary screen with driving footage AOC 24B1H (23.6" monitor)
110 in location A or Philips Brilliance 235PL (23" monitor) in location B, and
111 (2) secondary (laptop) screen with automotive UI prototype and integrated
112 microphone Lenovo Legion 5 15ACH6H (15.6" monitor). This screen was
113 positioned as close as possible to the position of the infotainment display in
114 a left-hand drive car, offset to the right of the driver. The sound level in these
115 rooms, measured shortly before each participant arrived, varied 35–50 dB in
116 both locations.



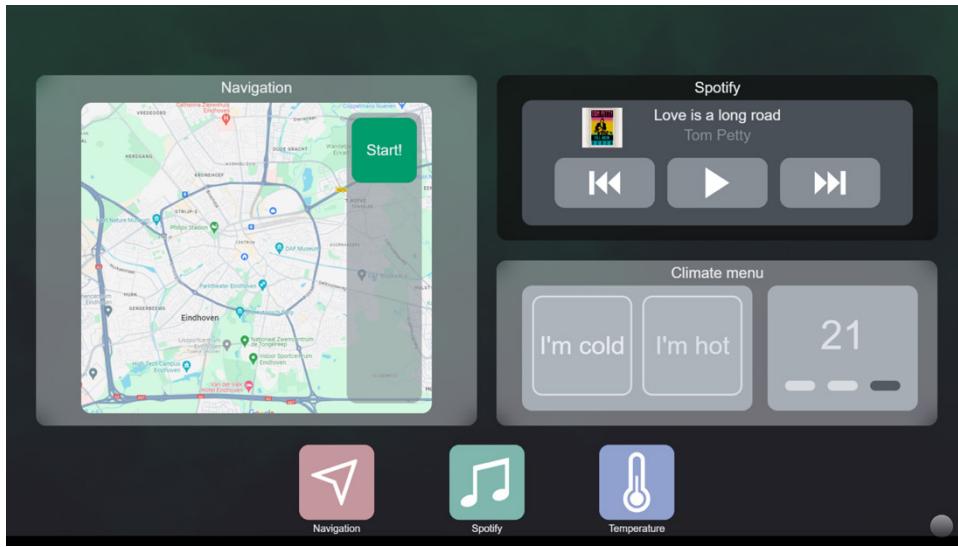
117 **Figure 2:** User study setup. Left: location A, right: location B.

118 The primary screen displayed first-person driving footage to simulate a real-
 119 life driving scenario in which the user must pay attention to the road. Three
 120 videos, recorded while driving according to the speed of traffic in first-person
 121 view in an unmodified version of the game Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar
 122 Games, 2024), were shown to the participants. These videos, found in the
 123 supplementary material, were shown as videos playing on YouTube ([https://
 124 www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)). The participants were aware that the examiner started
 125 the videos through a wireless keyboard. They saw the YouTube UI briefly
 126 before and after watching the videos. Each video lasted 5 minutes, consisted
 127 of mixed driving conditions (rural roads and highways in the southern half
 128 of the game map), and contained audible traffic and engine sound. A screen-
 129 shot of each video can be seen in Figure 3.



130 **Figure 3:** Screenshots of the driving footage shown on the primary screen. Left:
 131 nighttime driving (video A), middle: daytime driving (video B), right: driving during
 sunset (video C).

132 The secondary screen displayed a simple automotive UI prototype, seen
 133 in Figure 4. This UI was created in the paid basic subscription version of
 134 ProtoPie (<https://www.protopie.io>). The UI contained three usable appli-
 135 cations: a navigation app, a music player, and temperature controls. These
 136 applications had limited functionality and could only be controlled by voice
 137 commands (see Table 1). By pressing a dedicated hotkey, the system was
 138 activated to start listening (supplementary material contains hotkey map-
 139 ping). The standard ProtoPie speech recognition was used for the voice com-
 140 mands, i.e., only preprogrammed commands were recognised. The standard
 141 US English female voice of ProtoPie was selected to give spoken feedback
 142 (confirmation when a task was understood or completed correctly) or to
 143 answer questions from participants.



401 **Figure 4:** UI prototype in the passive state with all apps opened simultaneously.

402 The UI was created with two variations for the visual feedback of the VA,
 403 Concept 2 (C2) and Concept 3 (C3), which could be independently switched
 404 on or off through dedicated hotkeys. Turning both off resulted in no visual
 405 feedback: Concept 1 (C1). The selected visual feedback was automatically
 406 displayed when the space bar hotkey was pressed to start voice recognition.
 407 It could also be displayed by the click of another hotkey that did not start
 408 the voice recognition. The error and success states could also be triggered by
 409 separate hotkeys.

410 **Table 1:** Voice commands for giving instructions to the prototype
 411 during the user study.

Video	Command	Actions	Error
A	A1	Open navigation & Take me to Brussels	no
	A2	Give me a traffic update & Close navigation	no
	A3	What is the estimated time of arrival?	yes
	A4	Open navigation & Take me home	no
B	B1	Open Spotify & Play Michael Jackson	no
	B2	Close navigation	no
	B3	Play rock music & Close Spotify	yes
	B4	Open Spotify & Play Michael Jackson	no
C	C1	Open temperature & Temperature 20 degrees	no
	C2	Set fan speed to medium & Close temperature	no
	C3	Weather forecast & Close Spotify	yes
	C4	Open Spotify & I'm cold	no

412
 413 The participants' task was to give voice commands to the VA prototype.
 414 After every one-minute interval, the examiner told the participants which
 415 command to give (see Table 1), after which they had to repeat the command

to trigger the system. Communication between the examiner and the participants was conducted in English, Dutch, or Portuguese, depending on the preferences of the participants, but all voice commands were given exclusively in English. A “Hey car” command always preceded the voice commands, as participants were told that was the required trigger for the system to start listening to other voice commands; in reality, the examiner pressed a key on a separate keyboard to trigger the VA to start listening. This happened out of the participant’s eyesight, and they were not made aware of this so as not to break the immersion of the VA. After the trigger command “Hey car”, the prototype accepted commands to control the UI. For Commands A3, B3, and C3, the examiner introduced one false error for the VA: instead of pressing the space bar after the trigger command “Hey car” was given, the hotkey was pressed, which did not start the voice recognition system and only provided the visual feedback of the listening state. This gave the participants the impression that the system was listening to their command but did not recognise it. This was done to ensure that each participant experienced an error scenario at least once for each visual feedback variation.

At the same time, participants were asked to complete a secondary task: a list of questions about the driving footage was provided on a printed sheet of paper (see supplementary material). Participants were given as much time as they needed to read the questions before the video started, could reread the questions during the video, and were allowed to write the answers on paper during the video or do it afterwards. The purpose of the secondary task was to create the immersion of driving in a car and to give participants a reason to focus on the primary screen rather than the secondary screen. Participants were free to look at the secondary screen whenever they wanted, at the risk of missing an answer to the driving footage questions found on the primary screen; this mimicked a real-life driving scenario in which drivers can only keep their eyes off the road and on the infotainment screen for a short time. The order in which the visualisation variants were shown was randomised. The order of voice commands and videos was the same for all participants.

The examiner monitored whether the prototype correctly interpreted participants’ voice commands, as it did not log data. Commands understood on the first attempt were marked “pass”, on the second or third attempt as “eventual pass”, and after three failed attempts as “fail”. Answers to driving footage questions were marked “correct” or “incorrect”. Participants filled in questionnaires (supplementary material contains printouts of the forms used): (1) pre-experiment: demographic data (age, gender) and smartphone/car usage, (2) after each condition: questions on the qualities and rating of feedback, the Acceptance scale (Van Der Laan et al., 1997), and open feedback, and (3) post-experiment: questions on VA usage likelihood and preferred visual feedback variant.

Data from both the online questionnaire and the user study were analysed in MATLAB 2024A. The chi-square test or ANOVA test was performed to determine the significance of categorical and numerical data. An alpha level of 0.05 was used.

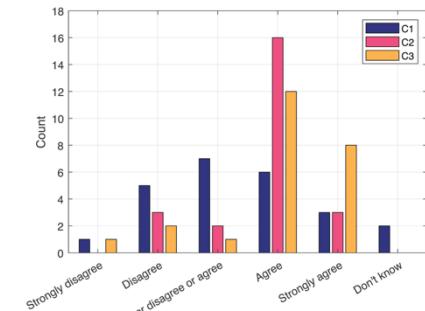
RESULTS**Results From Online Questionnaire**

The questionnaire resulted in a total of 286 responses, 79 from Google Forms and 207 from Appen. The results of Google Forms were all accepted as genuine data. On Appen, people from Venezuela were barred from joining the questionnaire: Onkhar et al. showed an extreme case of Venezuelan people being overrepresented in the participant pool (Onkhar et al., 2022). The ongoing economic crisis there may mean that the primary motivation for participants to participate would be financial compensation, which could lead to people answering questions randomly to reach the end of the questionnaire quickly. Not all Appen participants were trustworthy or suitable for the study. The questionnaire was filled out 85 times in two seconds with the same age and nationality. Although the responses came from different IP addresses, it was assumed that these results were not trustworthy and were therefore excluded from the final data set. Furthermore, 122 participants were excluded based on two additional filters: (1) not being able to respond to four test questions and (2) not meeting the age criteria allowed for 18 to 100 years. Among the responses from Appen, 72 met the requirements to be trusted as genuine participant data. After filtering, the online questionnaire resulted in a combined total of 151 participants. Among them, 23 participants did not have access to a car, and the remaining 128 did, either their own car or one from others. Out of the 128 participants who have access to a car, 54 participants did not have a VA in their car, and the remaining 74 did. Out of the 74 participants who can use a VA in their car, 25 participants do not use it, and 49 participants do.

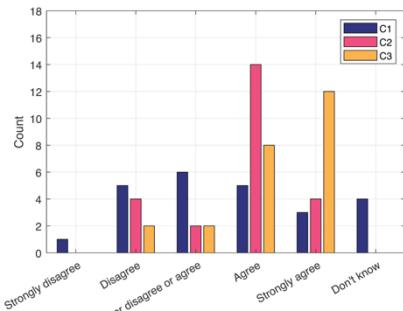
Of 77 Android users, 34 prefer Android Auto and 13 prefer the manufacturer's interface. Of 72 iOS (iPhone) users, 42 preferred Apple CarPlay and 13 preferred the manufacturer's UI. 33 Android users favoured to use the same VA in the car as they used on their phone, and 13 preferred to use the manufacturer's own VA. 37 iOS users preferred to use the same VA in the car as they use on their phone, and eight preferred to use the manufacturer's own VA. Out of 128 participants, in their ideal car, 79 wished to use Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, and 70 wished to use the same VA as on their phone. Table S1 in the supplementary material shows a significant correlation between the participant's smartphone operating system (OS) and the preferred car UI and VA. When asked how they expect to receive feedback from a VA, 82 participants required both visual and auditory feedback, 49 chose only auditory feedback, 12 only visual, 3 neither, and 5 had no preference. For visual feedback placement, "context-dependent" (n=49) and "feedback on top of the screen" (n=36) scored the highest, "on the function/app I am using" was chosen by 21 participants, while the background visual feedback scored the lowest (n=12), 33 participants had no preference. The concept of personalising the VA was received mostly positively by the participants.

233 **Results From User Study**

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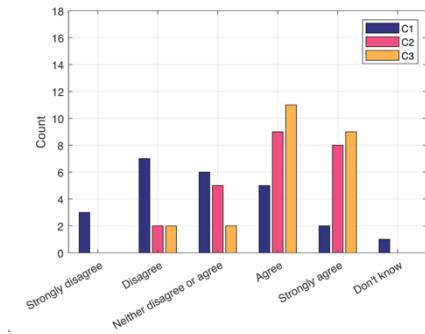


a) The visual feedback of the VA was clearly visible.

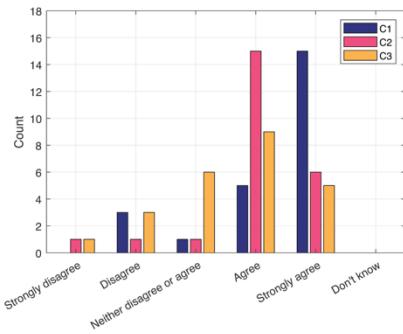


b) The visual feedback of the VA was located in a well-suited position on the screen.

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237
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c) The visual feedback of the VA helped me understand what the system was doing.



d) Auditory feedback is necessary with this specific type of visual feedback.

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Figure 5: Participant responses for questions regarding visual aspects of VA visualisations.

241 The data of all participants were retained. Supplementary material contains
242 all anonymised data. Figure 5 presents the results for the aspects of each
243 visual feedback method, and the Usefulness and Satisfaction scores on the
244 Acceptance scale. C3 is rated higher than C1 and C2 in these three met-
245 rrics. Table S2 (supplementary material) shows that, on average, C3 scored
246 higher than C1 and C2 for the visibility, suitability of position, helpfulness,
247 grade out of 10, and the Satisfying and Usefulness scores of the Acceptance
248 scale. C3 scored lower than C1 and C2 in the need for auditory feedback. In
249 the categories of visibility, helpfulness, grade, satisfaction and usefulness, C3
250 scored significantly higher than C1. C3 scored significantly lower than C2
251 for needing auditory feedback.

252 Table S2 shows that having some form of visual feedback from the VA
253 (such as in C2 and C3) significantly increases the grade and the Satisfying
254 and Usefulness scores of the Acceptance scale over not having visual feed-
255 back (such as in C1). C3 does not improve significantly over C2 for these
256 three metrics. The final question of the user study asked participants to mark
257 their favourite visual feedback method. 18 participants marked C3 as their
258 favourite visual feedback method, 4 responded C2, 1 responded C1, and 1
259 participant had no preference.

260 In open feedback, the visibility and position of the visual feedback were
261 mentioned too: for C2, 4 participants mentioned that the position of the
262 visual feedback should be closer to the driver to better appear in the periph-
263 eral vision. Not all changes in colour for the different states of the system
264 were perceived by the participants (mentioned 13 times for C2 and 7 times for
265 C3): the error state (orange flashes) was generally perceived and understood,
266 but the confirmation state was not seen by the participants who made these
267 remarks. The movement of the screen was better detected in the peripheral
268 vision than the colour changes: for C3, some participants did not remember
269 how the system changed visually when switching from the passive state to the
270 listening state, but they were aware that the system had responded to their
271 voice command. One participant wrote: "*I did notice something was chang-
272 ing when the car was listening, but I was not fully aware of which colour and
273 how it changed on the screen exactly. When the car flashed yellow, I knew I
274 had to repeat my command*". The blinking effect of the listening state in C2
275 was specifically mentioned as a positive by 3 participants. One participant
276 wrote for C2: "*The pulsing animation raised my attention, but the dimen-
277 sion of the dot and the position made it not as visible as it was for other
278 feedback*". For C1, 8 participants gave negative feedback on not having any
279 visual feedback: there were mentions of needing auditory feedback as well
280 as visual feedback and that this method might not be safe. One participant
281 wrote: "*I need some kind of feedback from the system, which does not stay
282 quiet when it does not understand me. In this way, we can interact better
283 when it did not understand me or if there is a delay*".

284 DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

285 This study evaluated a novel ambient visual feedback system (C3) for voice
286 assistants (VAs) in cars, compared to conventional visual feedback (C2) and
287 no visual feedback (C1). Addressing RQ1, results showed a strong prefer-
288 ence for C3 (n=18) over C2 (n=4) and C1 (n=1), aligning with literature that
289 ambient displays enhance user experience and safety (Pousman and Stasko,
290 2006). However, an online questionnaire indicated lower popularity for
291 background VA visualisation, contrasting with user study findings. For RQ2,
292 participants favoured Apple CarPlay and Android Auto over proprietary car
293 UIs for their seamless integration and familiarity (Matthey et al., 2023), sug-
294 gesting automotive UIs should prioritise smartphone platform compatibility.

295 C3 outperformed C1 and C2 in visibility, positional suitability, and assis-
296 tance value, likely due to its less intrusive nature and integration with periph-
297 eral vision. Improvements over C2 were not statistically significant in overall
298 grade, satisfaction, and usefulness, indicating conventional methods remain
299 effective in low-cognitive-load scenarios. It is in alignment with a crowd-
300 sourced survey in the context of feedback for automated driving, where
301 1,692 participants emphasised the need for auditory feedback alongside
302 visual cues, as purely visual feedback lacks the immediacy required when
303 driving where 1,692 participants emphasised the need for auditory feedback
304 alongside visual cues, as purely visual feedback lacks the immediacy required
305 when driving (Bazilinskyy et al., 2018). Thus, ambient visual feedback shows

306 strong potential to enhance driver interaction with VAs, but multimodal
307 feedback is essential for effective use.

308 The prototype's secondary screen is misaligned with typical infotainment
309 displays, affecting visibility. Limited voice recognition required command
310 repetition, highlighting the need for improved natural language processing.
311 The prototype lacked features of systems like Apple CarPlay, potentially
312 skewing perceptions. The absence of gesture or gaze tracking limited objec-
313 tive data. Future studies should incorporate on-road or AR/VR testing, fea-
314 ture-complete UIs, and naturalistic settings to simulate real-world driving.
315 Exploring multimodal feedback and VA roles in automated driving is also
316 recommended.

317 **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

318 The supplementary material containing the questionnaire, videos and
319 analysis code can be found at <https://doi.org/10.4121/608d5a43-47a1-4f12-ba8e-994767218ee5>. The ProtoPie prototype: <https://cloud.protopie.io/p/4dfbded4fb1d4793a626cf6c>.

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