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Fuzzy Integral With Particle Swarm Optimization for a Motor-Imagery-Based Brain–Computer Interface

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Abstract—A brain–computer interface (BCI) system using electroencephalography signals provides a convenient means of communication between the human brain and a computer. Motor imagery (MI), in which motor actions are mentally rehearsed without engaging in actual physical execution, has been widely used as a major BCI approach. One robust algorithm that can successfully cope with the individual differences in MI-related rhythmic patterns is to create diverse ensemble classifiers using the subband common spatial pattern (SBCSP) method. To aggregate outputs of ensemble members, this study uses fuzzy integral with particle swarm optimization (PSO), which can regulate subject-specific parameters for the assignment of optimal confidence levels for classifiers. The proposed system combining SBCSP, fuzzy integral, and PSO exhibits robust performance for offline single-trial classification of MI and real-time control of a robotic arm using MI. The main contribution of this paper is that it represents the first attempt to utilize fuzzy fusion technique to attack the individual differences problem of MI applications in real-world noisy environment. The results of this study demonstrate the practical feasibility of implementing the proposed method for real-world applications.

Index Terms—Brain–computer interface (BCI), electroencephalography (EEG), fuzzy integral, motor imagery (MI), particle swarm optimization (PSO).

I. INTRODUCTION

BRAIN–COMPUTER interfaces (BCIs) [1] based on the user’s voluntary modulations of electroencephalography (EEG) [2] signals provide an alternative method of communication between humans and machines. Despite the many pivotal

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techniques developed by the pattern recognition community that have been applied and evaluated within the context of EEG-based BCI, the overall performance of BCIs is still not robust because of inter- and intrasubject variability. This variability introduces a large number of uncertainties that severely degrade the performance of BCIs.

Among existing BCIs [3], efforts to develop EEG-based BCI systems relying on motor imagery (MI) [4] have attracted increasing attention in recent years. The brain dynamics of MI are predominantly observed in the primary sensorimotor area and resemble those observed during the actual execution of movement. A variety of feature extraction methods have been proposed to differentiate between the brain dynamics of left- and right-hand MI. In addition to event-related potentials [5], many methods [6], [7] focus on observing the difference in spectral power between the cerebral hemispheres during MI. Among the existing feature extraction methods [8]–[11], the common spatial pattern (CSP) method is one of the most effective approaches for constructing optimal spatial filters that are sensitive to differences between left and right imagery [12], [13]. However, the performance of these spatial filters depends on the operational frequency band. Searching for the optimal frequency range for each subject can be very time-consuming. To address this issue, the subband CSP (SBCSP) method [14] employs a filter bank to decompose EEG signals into different subbands as inputs to the CSP analysis. The SBCSP approach is used to extract useful features of brain activity during MI tasks; subsequently, multiple linear discriminant analysis (MLDA) [15] is applied to recognize the EEG signals in each subband spectrum. After the subband decisions are obtained from each LDA, a classifier ensemble is constructed for each subband, and a fusion algorithm is then employed to obtain a final decision. Because the decision is derived from different subband classifiers, a combination of classifiers promises to offer better uncertainty identification performance than a single classifier.

Recently, the fuzzy fusion approach [16], [17] has been shown to improve the BCI performance in terms of classification accuracy and system stationarity. One commonly used fuzzy fusion approach is fuzzy integral [18], [19], which allows the uncertain, imprecise, and incomplete information available from EEG signals to be represented and processed using the concept of fuzzy measures introduced by Sugeno [20]. This study attacks the misclassification problem that many current BCI systems experience because of variations among individuals. A judicious use of multiple sources effectively reduces individual uncertainty, and serves to enhance the reliability of the system’s performance. Because the fuzzy integral [21]–[25] integrates

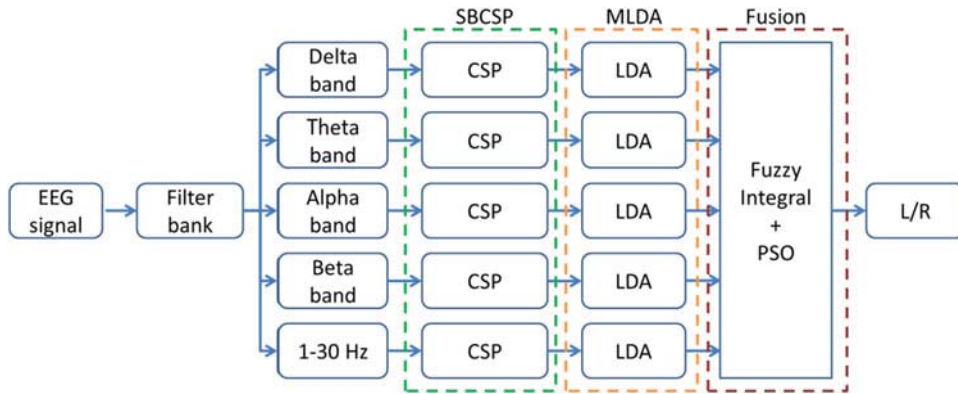


Fig. 1. System architecture of the proposed MI-based BCI fuzzy fusion.

80 decisions from different sources, using a combination of clas-
 81 sifiers holds the promise of achieving better performance in
 82 uncertainty identification than the recognition technique based
 83 on the single feature. The fuzzy integral [26] is regarded as a
 84 numeric-based connective aggregation approach for obtaining
 85 collaborative decisions by integrating information from multiple
 86 classifiers.

87 In MI tasks, there are two main difficulties in real-world MI
 88 applications: individual difference and noisy environment. The
 89 individual differences include not only inter- but also intrain-
 90 dividual differences, which arise from the fact that individuals
 91 continually change over time due to factors such as fatigue,
 92 attention, and stress. Likewise, physiological signals are non-
 93 stationary and can change over time due to movement artifacts,
 94 sensor configuration, and intrinsic noise in the environment.
 95 Accordingly, features obtained from different subjects under
 96 different tempo-spatial environments might vary widely. That
 97 is, some effective features can be found in recordings from one
 98 subject but not from another. Hence, each possesses its own set
 99 of reliabilities and potential uncertainties. As a result, the per-
 100 formance of traditional MI systems using a single classifier to
 101 recognize all the feature usually degraded obviously under the
 102 situations of individual differences and noisy environments. To
 103 solve this problem, the proposed MI-based BCI system in this
 104 paper employs the fuzzy integral with particle swarm optimiza-
 105 tion (PSO) to classify EEG feature vectors. The fuzzy integral is
 106 a fusion technique that exploits multiple decisions from different
 107 sources to reap collaborative inferences to achieve the objectives
 108 under investigation, a result that is infeasible to achieve from
 109 each individual source separately.

110 In this paper, diverse LDA classifiers following the SBCSP
 111 approach are established as an ensemble of classifiers to collab-
 112 oratively recognize the user's mental representation of move-
 113 ments from EEG patterns recorded during an MI task. Two
 114 fuzzy integral methods, i.e., the Sugeno integral [27], [28] and
 115 the Choquet integral [29], are applied to integrate the informa-
 116 tion from this ensemble of classifiers and then make a joint
 117 decision. To effectively assign confidence levels to particu-
 118 lar classifiers, PSO [30] is employed to determine the confi-
 119 dence of the employed classifiers. The proposed method is
 120 demonstrated in the real-time MI control of a robotic arm.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In
 Section II, the proposed BCI for deciphering the mental re-
 hearsal of motor actions is introduced. In Section III, an MI
 experiment is presented. The classification results obtained us-
 ing the proposed approach are compared with those obtained
 using conventional ones. Finally, a brief conclusion is presented
 and future studies are suggested in Section IV.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The proposed MI-based BCI system is schematically illus-
 trated in Fig. 1. During the MI task, the EEG signals are mea-
 sured by a wireless acquisition device with dry electrodes. A
 filter bank is then used to extract frequency components (rang-
 ing from 1 to 30 Hz) from the EEG recordings. The CSP method
 leads to optimal variances for the discrimination of two popula-
 tions of EEG related to left- and right-hand MI. Multiple LDA
 classifiers are established that employ CSP features to integral
 multiclassifiers. Finally, a fuzzy integral with PSO is then ap-
 plied to fuse the decisions of classifiers and decipher the mental
 rehearsal of motor actions.

A. EEG Acquisition Device

The EEG acquisition device [31] was designed to measure
 scalp EEG signals using dry electrodes [32] [see Fig. 2(a)-
 (c)] from the sensorimotor area [see Fig. 2(d)]. The acquisition
 device consists of a preamplifier unit, a microcontroller unit,
 and a Bluetooth transmission unit. The wireless integrated-
 circuit-based acquisition module has dimensions of approxi-
 mately $55.08 \times 38.8 \times 5 \text{ mm}^3$. The gain of the preamplifier
 unit is set to 1361 V/V, and the cut-off frequency is regulated
 to 0.2 Hz by a high-pass filter. The microcontroller unit is used
 to regulate the signal sampling rate and for noise reduction.
 The microcontroller unit digitizes the analog EEG signal at a
 sampling rate of 512 Hz. A sinc filter is used to remove frequen-
 cies above 128 Hz. Moreover, the ac power line noise (60 Hz)
 in the amplified EEG signal is reduced by the microcontroller
 unit using a moving average. Then, the processed EEG signal is
 transmitted to the computer using Bluetooth (v2.1+ enhanced
 data rate). The power is supplied by a commercial 700 mAh
 Li-ion battery, which provides over 10 h of operation.

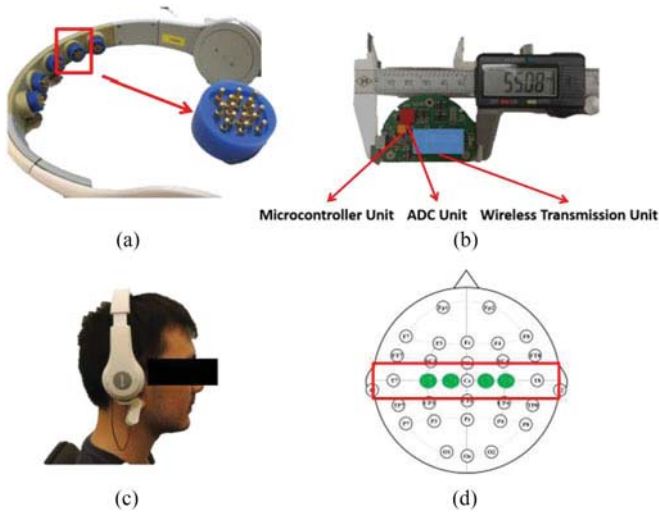


Fig. 2. Wireless and portable EEG device. (a) Dry electrodes. (b) Wireless EEG acquisition system, which consists of a preamplifier, a filter, a microcontroller, and a wireless module. Each circuit board has a width of 55.08 mm. (c) EEG headset. (d) Placement of the four recording electrodes.

159 B. CSP and Linear Discriminant Analysis

160 Applying the proper spatial filter can improve the discrimi-
 161 nation of data from different classes, thereby facilitating classi-
 162 fication. The CSP approach [33] is a popular method that yields
 163 the optimal variances for the discrimination of two EEG popu-
 164 lations related to left- and right-hand MI. In this study, the CSP
 165 method is applied to each set of filtered data E to find a spa-
 166 tial filter matrix W that maximizes the variance of the spatially
 167 filtered data of one class Σ_1 , and simultaneously minimizes the
 168 variance of the spatially filtered data of the other class, Σ_2 .
 169 Mathematically, the CSP criterion is written as

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{maximize } \text{tr}(W^T \Sigma_1 W) \\ & \text{subject to } W^T (\Sigma_1 + \Sigma_2) W = I \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

170 where

$$\begin{aligned} \Sigma_1 &= \exp_{E_n \in \{\text{class 1}\}} \frac{E_n E_n^T}{\text{tr}(E_n E_n^T)} \quad \text{and} \\ \Sigma_2 &= \exp_{E_n \in \{\text{class 2}\}} \frac{E_n E_n^T}{\text{tr}(E_n E_n^T)}. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

171 This problem can be solved as a generalized eigenvalue prob-
 172 lem. With the spatial filter transformation W thus obtained, the
 173 spatially filtered data $Z = W^T E$ are then used as the feature
 174 vector for LDA classifiers.

175 LDA [34] is a well-known binary classification method based
 176 on the estimation of the mean vectors and covariance matrices
 177 of individual classes to find the linear combination of features
 178 that maximizes the separability between distinct classes. LDA
 179 can be formulated in terms of a Bayes rule that aims to assign
 180 each sample to the class with the maximal posterior probability.
 181 In this study, multiple LDA classifiers are trained from each
 182 subband to serve as base classifiers constituting an ensemble
 183 system. The decisions derived from each LDA classifier, i.e.,

the posterior probabilities of left- and right-hand movements,
 are then fused by means of a fuzzy integral.

C. Fuzzy Integrals

The purpose of fuzzy integral is to utilize information regard-
 ing the uncertainty or confidence of various candidate informa-
 tion sources during the decision-making process as represented
 using a fuzzy measure. For classifier fusion, an extension of the
 integral operator is used in the fuzzy integral to gather the objec-
 tive evidence supplied by the classifiers in the form of certainty
 measures. Given the aforementioned benefits of this approach,
 the combination of classifiers based on fuzzy measures and inte-
 grals can enhance the robustness and reliability of BCI systems.
 In this paper, the combination of classifiers is performed by
 means of the Sugeno integral [27], [28] and the Choquet inte-
 gral [29], which have been successfully implemented in the
 pattern recognition community.

The Sugeno integral is a type of integral with respect to a fuzzy
 measure that is defined for functions whose range is 0–1. Given
 the outputs of k classifiers $x_k \in [0, 1]$, the Sugeno integral over
 the set $A = \{x_1, \dots, x_i, \dots, x_k\}$ of a membership function h
 with respect to the confidence g is defined as

$$S_g(h) = \int_A h(x_i) \circ g = \sup_{\alpha \in [0,1]} [\min(\alpha, g(A \cap F_\alpha))] \quad (3)$$

where $F_\alpha = \{x | h(x) \geq \alpha\}$.

The Choquet integral is another type of integral with respect
 to a fuzzy measure. The choice of this integral is inspired by
 both a theoretical property and a practical one. Specifically, it is
 a proper generalization of the normal integral operator. In addi-
 tion, the learning task can be regarded as a convex quadratic
 program and can therefore be solved using well-known
 algorithms. The Choquet integral is defined as

$$C_g(h) = \sum_{i=1}^k [h(x_i) - h(x_{i-1})] g(A_i) \quad (4)$$

where $h(x_0) = 0$.

Note that the confidence g of each classifier is heuristically
 assigned. In this study, g is proposed to be determined via PSO
 (see Section II-D).

The joint confidence of the entire set of sources $g(A_i)$ can be
 obtained as

$$\begin{aligned} g(A_i) &= g(\{h_1, \dots, h_{i-1}\}) + g(\{h_i\}) \\ &+ \lambda \times g(\{h_1, \dots, h_{i-1}\}) \times g(\{h_i\}) \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

where $\lambda \in (-1, \infty)$ and λ can be obtained by solving the
 following equation:

$$\lambda + 1 = \prod_{i=1}^k (\lambda g_i + 1). \quad (6)$$

Then, the final decision is determined by the class with the
 largest fuzzy probability.

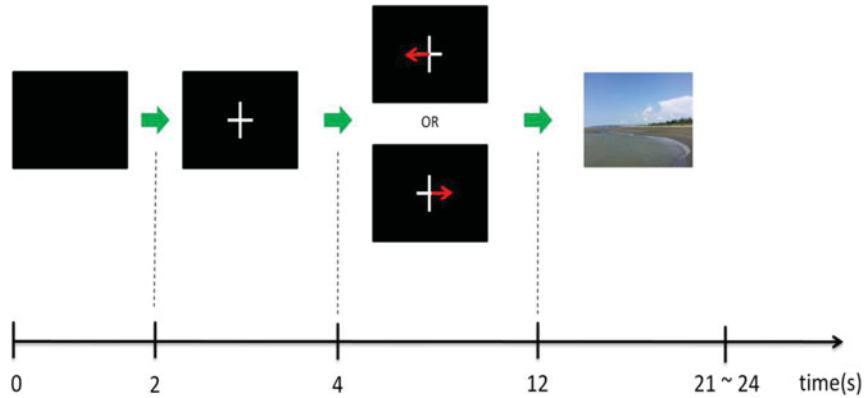


Fig. 3. Experimental paradigm.

223 D. Particle Swarm Optimization

224 To effectively assign confidence levels to the classifiers used
 225 in the fuzzy integral, PSO [21] is employed to update the
 226 confidence of the classifiers. The PSO algorithm is a well-known
 227 swarm intelligence technique that was developed to imitate the
 228 behavior of a flock of birds or a school of fish. The objective of
 229 PSO is to optimize a model by iteratively attempting to improve
 230 upon a candidate solution with regard to a given measure of
 231 quality. The PSO algorithm involves two critical steps, which
 232 are as follows:

- 233 1) Initialize a population of particles with a random
 234 distribution within the desired range of the search space.
- 235 2) Update the particle positions and velocities as follows:

$$v_{i,d} \leftarrow \omega v_{i,d} + \phi_p r_p (p_{i,d} - g_{i,d}) + \phi_f r_f (f_d - g_{i,d}), \quad g_i \leftarrow g_i + v_i \quad (7)$$

236 where f is the best known position of the entire swarm and $p_{i,d}$
 237 is the best known position of particle i . When ω is less than 1,
 238 the particle velocities may tend toward 0, causing the particles
 239 to fall into a local minimum and delaying convergence.

240 The confidential weights g of the Sugeno integral and the
 241 Choquet integral are determined by PSO in this study. The initial
 242 vector that contains the fuzzy integral parameters is randomly
 243 chosen; ω is the inertial weight, ϕ_p and ϕ_f are acceleration
 244 constants, and r_p and r_f are random numbers drawn from the
 245 uniform distribution $U(0,1)$. The confidential weights updated
 246 via PSO are calculated according to (7). When a particle finds
 247 a better position than its previous best position, the previous
 248 position is dropped and the new one is stored in the population.
 249 This value is called the personal best position of that particle,
 250 i.e., p_{best} . The mechanism retains a satisfactory confidential
 251 weight until the predefined number of iterations is reached.
 252 Meanwhile, the global best position, i.e., f_{best} , of the particle
 253 swarm as a whole is updated by the particle swarm optimizer
 254 based on the particles that exist in the population. The distances
 255 between the positions of the particles and the values of f_{best}
 256 and p_{best} decrease during optimization. This procedure allows
 257 us to search for the optimal weights for each information source
 258 to obtain an optimized output during the training phase.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

259

260 Ten male subjects, aged 22–26 years old, were recruited to
 261 participate in the MI experiment. All participants were neuro-
 262 logically healthy. Before the experiment, the participants were
 263 required to complete an informed consent form. Each partic-
 264 ipant was seated comfortably in front of a monitor, and the
 265 MI task was explained via written instructions on the screen.
 266 Five dry electrodes were used (four channels to record the
 267 EEG signals and one for reference) to measure EEG signals
 268 from the sensorimotor area. The MI experiment consisted of
 269 three phases. The first phase was a baseline-constructing task
 270 to establish an individual MI model of the proposed system,
 271 with the aim of constructing the features for the imagery of
 272 left- and right-hand movements. Twenty trials were performed
 273 in this baseline-constructing phase for the imagery of both
 274 left- and right-hand movements. The second phase was designed
 275 to train the participants in imaging left- and right-hand move-
 276 ments for EEG measurements. Each of the two directions was
 277 tested 40 times. In each training trial, an arrow pointing either
 278 to the left or to the right would randomly appear on the screen.
 279 After each imagery trial, a picture was displayed on the screen
 280 for a randomly determined period of time to help the subjects
 281 relax between trials. The training phase was used to calibrate
 282 the parameters of the proposed measurement system for each
 283 user, with the aim of identifying each user's EEG features. The
 284 last phase was the actual experiment, also with 40 MI trials per
 285 direction. Upon seeing an arrow indicating a direction, the users
 286 were instructed to perform imagery of the corresponding left-
 287 or right-hand movement. The wireless EEG acquisition device
 288 was used during the MI experiment.

A. Experimental Procedure

289

290 The experimental paradigm is illustrated in Fig. 3. A subject
 291 was seated in a comfortable chair, with his hands placed on
 292 a table. A blank screen was displayed for 2 s, followed by a
 293 cross displayed at the center of the screen for 2 s. Then, the
 294 subject was instructed to perform left/right MI as indicated by a
 295 left/right-pointing arrow, which was presented for 8 s. Finally,
 296 a picture was shown on the screen for 9–12 s to allow the subject
 297 to rest.

TABLE I
CLASSIFICATION RESULTS (AUC) FOR THE BASE CLASSIFIERS AND VARIOUS
CONVENTIONAL AND FUZZY FUSION APPROACHES WITH FOURFOLD
CROSS-VALIDATION APPLIED TEN TIMES

		Area Under ROC Curve	T Test
Single LDA	Delta LDA	0.915 ± 0.020	–
	Theta LDA	0.904 ± 0.027	–
	Alpha LDA	0.890 ± 0.050	–
	Beta LDA	0.880 ± 0.044	–
	All-band LDA	0.900 ± 0.040	–
Conventional Methods	Voting	0.962 ± 0.082	$p < 0.05$
	Weighted Summation	0.990 ± 0.015	$p < 0.05$
	SVM	0.993 ± 0.022	$p < 0.05$
Fuzzy Fusion	Sugeno Integral	0.968 ± 0.063	$p < 0.05$
	Choquet Integral	0.992 ± 0.014	$p < 0.05$

TABLE II
CLASSIFICATION RESULTS FOR THE SUGENO INTEGRAL AND THE CHOQUET
INTEGRAL AFTER PSO TRAINING WITH FOURFOLD CROSS-VALIDATION
APPLIED TEN TIMES

		Fuzzy Fusion	w/o PSO	w/ PSO
Fuzzy Fusion	Sugeno	0.968 ± 0.063	0.998 ± 0.040	
	Choquet	0.992 ± 0.014	0.998 ± 0.003	

298 B. Fuzzy Fusion Performance

299 In MLDA, classifiers are constructed using a combination of
300 features from multiple frequency bands, including four separate
301 frequency bands (i.e., the delta, theta, alpha, and beta bands) and
302 the full-band signal ranging from 1 to 30 Hz. In each frequency
303 band, an LDA classifier is constructed using features extracted
304 via CSP projection. Consequently, the MLDA is established using
305 the spatial pattern features from these five frequency bands.
306 The separate frequency bands provide the features of each band
307 in greater detail and allow more features to be obtained. Ac-
308 cordingly, the Sugeno integral or the Choquet integral is used
309 for fuzzy fusion to integrate the MLDA decisions constructed
310 using the five base classifiers, namely, the delta, theta, alpha,
311 beta, and all-band LDA classifiers, in the proposed system. Af-
312 ter the aggregation of the results from different bands, the fuzzy
313 fusion mechanism is applied to make the final decision. Ini-
314 tially, the weights of each classifier in the Sugeno integral and
315 the Choquet integral are all set to 0.2. The PSO algorithm is
316 later applied to update these weights.

317 The performances of the two fuzzy integrals and of several
318 conventional fusion methods were evaluated in terms of the area
319 under the ROC curve (AUC). As shown in Table I, each fusion
320 technique outperformed each single classifier, with the proposed
321 fusion architecture yielding not only higher AUC values but also
322 smaller standard deviations. In comparison with existing fusion
323 techniques, the weighted summation approach, the support vec-
324 tor machine (SVM) approach [35], and the Choquet integral
325 outperformed the voting approach [36] and the Sugeno integral.
326 As shown in Table II, after the application of PSO to update
327 the weights of the classifiers, the results of both the Sugeno and
328 Choquet integrals exhibited improvements, from 0.968 ± 0.063

to 0.998 ± 0.040 and from 0.992 ± 0.014 to 0.998 ± 0.003 ,
respectively. The AUC was improved and the standard devia-
tion was reduced, indicating that the system achieved higher
accuracy and better stability.

C. Proposed Online BCI System and Its Application

The flow chart for a subsequent online experiment is shown
in Fig. 4. The offline experiment reported above was initially
required for advance model generation. The models thus gen-
erated could subsequently be applied in an online experiment
using the proposed BCI system. When performing the online
experiment, each subject wore an EEG acquisition system on
the top of his head along the central sulcus, and the reference
was recorded at the earlobes on both sides. Each subject was
required to perform a full experiment consisting of four sessions
(160 trials), and the model previously derived for that subject
was applied in the online system.

In each trial, the user interface of the online system presented
a randomly generated cue, namely, an arrow pointing to the left
or to the right at the center of the screen. Each classification re-
sult was recorded as a score of +1 or –1; the total accumulated
score was calculated after every trial. If the final score was above
+ 25 or below –25, the system made a final decision of either
a left command or a right command, respectively. Because the
computing speed of the online system was 25 Hz, if the subject
wished to issue a left or right command, he was required to con-
tinuously think about the same direction for 1 s. After each trial,
the classification result accumulated over 1 s was plotted as a
bar. The accuracy rate was recorded at the top of the window.
The processing time (from the input of the raw data to the output
of the result) was 40.1715 ms, as shown in Fig. 5. In other words,
this system is capable of computing at a rate of approximately
25 Hz when performing online computations. This computation
rate was the basis for the selection of a value of 25 points as the
threshold for the online interface. The accuracy rate achieved in
the online test was approximately 86%. Depending on the clas-
sification result, a robotic arm would immediately grasp a glass
to either the left or the right. The robotic arm used in this ex-
periment is commercially available on the rehabilitation market
(Kinova, Canada). It consists of a six-axis robotic manipulator
arm with a three-fingered hand. This robotic arm can perform a
wide variety of functions with graceful movements.

D. Reliability Test

A further test was performed to confirm the model reliability.
In this test, the performance of the algorithm was evaluated us-
ing data acquired from the same subject but on a different day.
The training set included data recorded continuously from four
experimental sessions (160 trials) in a single day for one sub-
ject. The test set included data from two experimental sessions
(80 trials) recorded on a different day for the same subject. Af-
ter a model was generated from the training set, that model was
applied to the test data to evaluate its performance. The accu-
racy rate of prediction was found to be 91.25%, indicating good
model stability.

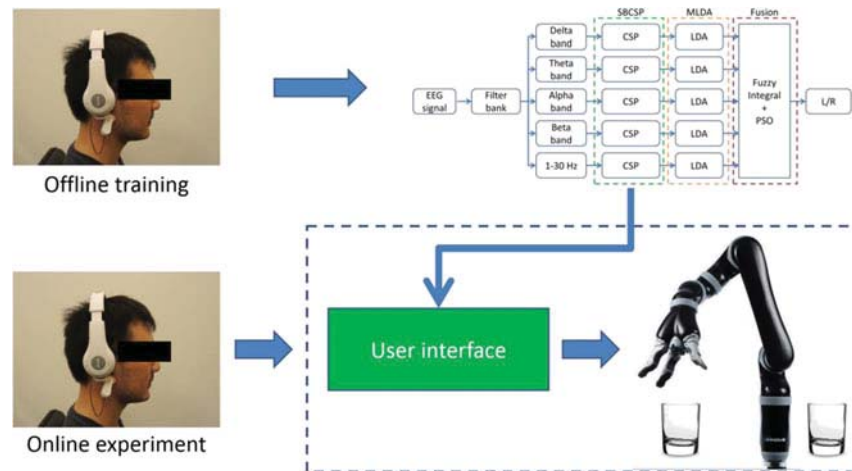


Fig. 4. Flow chart of the proposed MI-based BCI system application.

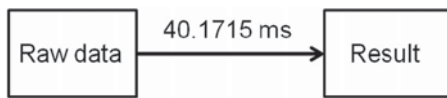


Fig. 5. Signal processing time within the proposed online system.

IV. CONCLUSION

382
383 In this study, we propose an innovative ensemble method with
384 swarm-optimized fuzzy integral for an MI recognition task. The
385 fuzzy integral provides an effective mechanism for represent-
386 ing and processing the uncertainty of the outputs of individual
387 ensemble members using the concept of fuzzy measures. Fur-
388 thermore, PSO is used to update the confidence of the employed
389 classifiers. The experimental results derived from a typical MI
390 task show that the best classification accuracy is achieved when
391 applying the Choquet integral with PSO training in the fusion
392 phase. Additionally, the results demonstrate the feasibility of
393 implementing the proposed system in real-time robotic arm
394 control. In the future, developing a more advanced BCI sys-
395 tem with fuzzy theory will be necessary to enable the execution
396 of multidirectional movements.

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