Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Mechatronics and Smart Systems
DOI: 10.54254/2755-2721/62/20240382

Foldable display technology and wearable device integration design

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Abstract. This paper explores the latest advancements in foldable display technology and its integration into wearable devices. By synthesizing relevant literature, the paper introduces the development history, principles, and application domains of foldable display technology. It subsequently discusses the advantages and challenges of incorporating foldable display technology into wearable devices, presenting various integration design approaches and future directions. The paper concludes by envisioning the potential applications of foldable display technology and wearable device integration in fields such as smart healthcare, fitness tracking, and fashion technology.

Keywords: Foldable Display, Wearable Device, Overview.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a substantial surge in mobile data consumption, primarily attributable to the proliferation of faster network infrastructures and advancements in mobile hardware, exemplified by the integration of larger screens into portable devices. This burgeoning trend has engendered a concomitant demand for even more expansive display screens in compact handheld gadgets. In response to this exigency, foldable displays have emerged as a prospective solution, affording the feasibility of accommodating a sizable screen within a portable device. These innovative displays eschew traditional rigid glass substrates in favor of flexible plastic substrates, thereby conferring the ability for the display to undergo bending and folding maneuvers.

Notably, various corporate entities such as Polymer Vision, Sony, and Samsung have proffered prototypes showcasing the potential of foldable displays. Electrophoretic and electrowetting display technologies are particularly well-suited for the realization of foldable displays owing to their intrinsic thinness and dispensation with the need for backlighting or polarizers. While organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) also present a viable option, their integration onto plastic substrates entails a myriad of technical challenges.

The advent of foldable displays holds the promise of ushering in novel form factors, exemplified by the concept of a phone that can seamlessly unfold to unveil a tablet-sized screen. However, it is imperative to underscore that the deployment of products featuring foldable displays is currently entrenched within the research and development (R&D) phase, primarily due to the exigency for the development of novel manufacturing processes meticulously optimized for plastic substrates. Consequently, it is anticipated that the first commercial manifestations of foldable displays will materialize in the form of 5-8 inch electrophoretic eReaders within the ensuing 3-5 years. Subsequently, the market may witness the emergence of full-color foldable OLED or electrowetting displays, engendering the prospect of foldable phones and tablets [1].

Wearable devices can be taxonomically classified based on their mode of wear, encompassing contact, implantation, or utilization in conjunction with additional wearable apparatus [2]. The selection of materials for wearable device construction commonly encompasses the utilization of flexible substrates such as polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), paper-based materials, nanomaterials exemplified by carbon nanotubes, and organic materials. These materials collectively provide the necessary structural adaptability and biocompatibility to facilitate their integration into diverse applications.

Divergent sensing modalities are a hallmark of wearable devices, encompassing chemical sensors, optical sensors, and electromechanical sensors. Chemical sensors function to transduce physical or chemical signals into optical or electrical outputs, while optical sensors exploit principles of light absorption and scattering to effectuate signal detection. Electromechanical sensors, conversely, are adept at detecting changes in resistance or capacitance.

The preeminent domains of application for wearable devices are primarily rooted in physiological and motion detection. These applications encompass an extensive spectrum of functionalities, including the monitoring of physiological parameters through perspiration analysis for the quantification of glucose, lactate, pH, and electrolyte levels. Respiratory monitoring, predicated on the detection of humidity variations, is instrumental in assessing pulmonary function. Moreover, wearable devices are instrumental in the continuous monitoring of vital parameters, such as heart rate and blood oxygen levels, by leveraging photoplethysmography techniques. Additionally, motion sensing is facilitated through the integration of strain and pressure sensors, thus enabling the precise quantification of physical activity and posture [3].

Despite the strides made in wearable technology, several formidable challenges endure in this domain, notably pertaining to power consumption optimization, biocompatibility enhancement, user comfort and mitigation of irritative factors, and the expansion of detection capabilities. However, it is salient to underscore that wearable devices continue to derive substantial benefits from concurrent advancements in wireless communication technologies, materials science, and other allied fields. Consequently, there is a palpable and ongoing thrust of research endeavors aimed at the refinement and augmentation of wearable devices, thereby heralding the potential for further innovation and application expansion in this field.

2. Development and Principles of Foldable Display Technology

2.1. Progress and Technical Challenges of In-folding Display

The advent of foldable and flexible display technology has witnessed substantial advancements in recent years, thereby facilitating the emergence of novel form factors such as foldable smartphones. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the persistence of formidable technical hurdles that impede the attainment of durability and thinness in foldable displays. The focal point of this scholarly exposition is in-folding display technology, characterized by the inward folding of the screen to safeguard its integrity when in a closed configuration. The present paper seeks to expound upon the array of solutions devised to mitigate the challenges associated with in-folding displays, including issues of screen fracturing and encapsulation failure [4]. One pivotal approach entails the incorporation of intricate groove designs along the edges of individual pixels, strategically devised to disperse mechanical stresses and thus thwart the formation of cracks induced by the rigors of repeated folding. Furthermore, the strategic placement of apertures within the metal lines of the display serves as an effective countermeasure against the propagation of cracks, effectively blocking the transmission of mechanical stresses throughout the display. In addition to these measures, the reliability of the encapsulation process is notably enhanced by meticulous optimization of gas atmosphere ratios employed during the thin film encapsulation procedures.

An additional paramount consideration in the pursuit of excellence in foldable displays is the imperative of reducing the overall thickness of the display module stack. To this end, the utilization of on-cell touch technology emerges as a pivotal strategy for diminishing the stack's thickness, achieved through the elimination of discrete touchscreen layers. However, it is noteworthy that the integration of on-cell touch technology invariably engenders vulnerabilities in the polarizer film, which necessitates adept mitigation strategies. This is adeptly addressed through meticulous adjustments to the thin film encapsulation process and the adept calibration of gas concentrations. The outcome of these measures is reflected in the limitation of reflectivity increments to a mere 2.3% following rigorous reliability tests encompassing bending and humidity assessments. In the culmination of these advancements in reliability and technological prowess, the paper ultimately materializes the realization of a prototype phone with an in-folding display, featuring an aesthetically captivating "waterdrop" design when folded. This achievement is underpinned by the optimization of the neutral layer's position and design to seamlessly accommodate the desired waterdrop configuration.

Furthermore, the robustness of the prototype is subjected to comprehensive testing procedures, encompassing 200,000 fold cycles, 240-hour static bending at an impressive 2.5mm radius, hardness assessments, and drop tests [5]. These rigorous examinations collectively attest to the considerable strides made in advancing in-folding technology to meet the exacting demands of consumer electronic devices. Notably, the prototype phone attains an extraordinarily svelte thickness of 13.3mm when folded, an achievement made feasible through the ingenious innovations in reliability that facilitate the creation of thin yet robust display modules. The adoption of the waterdrop configuration also yields significant improvements in the aesthetics and ergonomics of the device, contributing to a seamlessly cohesive exterior surface compared to the traditional clamshell design. In summation, this scholarly discourse stands as a testament to the diligent and systematic approach in addressing critical challenges plaguing in-folding displays, encompassing issues of screen fractures, encapsulation failures, and touchscreen integration.

The implementation of pioneering module and pixel designs markedly elevates the reliability of in-folding displays, thereby fortifying their resilience against the mechanical stresses inherent in frequent folding and enhancing their suitability for thin form factors. The development of such robust in-folding technology paves the way for new horizons in the realm of smartphones and analogous devices boasting foldable screens. The prototype phone's strikingly slender 13.3mm folded thickness, coupled with its sleek waterdrop configuration, epitomizes the substantial progress achieved toward the commercialization of compact yet unswervingly durable in-folding displays, poised to redefine the landscape of consumer electronics.

2.2. Foldable AMOLED Display Development: Progress and Challenges

The introduction of foldable Active Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode (AMOLED) displays signifies a substantial paradigm shift in the domain of display technology, affording newfound possibilities for flexible form factors, notably exemplified by tri-fold devices [6]. Nonetheless, the attainment of robust and dependable foldable displays is a formidable endeavor, entailing the exploration of innovative solutions spanning materials, mechanical engineering, and manufacturing processes.

The intrinsic self-emissive characteristics inherent to AMOLED technology confer distinct advantages upon bendable displays when juxtaposed with their Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) counterparts. This advantage arises from the elimination of backlights and light-guiding films, inherently reducing structural complexity. Nevertheless, the act of repetitive bending imposes considerable stress concentration within the folding region, a phenomenon with the potential to significantly undermine the operational lifespan of the display if the stress levels surpass the yield strength thresholds of the constituent functional layers. Finite element simulations corroborate the emergence of substantial mechanical stresses in instances where folding radii dip below the threshold of 3 millimeters. Consequently, there is an imperative to devise strategies that alleviate folding-induced stresses through judicious choices in materials and structural design.

Currently, Low-Temperature Polycrystalline Silicon (LTPS) thin-film transistors (TFTs) reign supreme as the preferred backplane technology. This dominance stems from their enhanced mobility and stability in comparison to alternative technologies such as amorphous silicon or organic TFTs. Nevertheless, the requisite elevated temperatures necessitated by LTPS processing impose constraints upon the choice of plastic substrates. Herein, the FlexUP technology emerges as a pioneering solution, predicated upon the deployment of specialized polyimide materials that can withstand temperatures soaring up to 450 degrees Celsius.

The strategic orchestration of design configurations that position the TFT array and OLED layers in close proximity to the neutral plane of the bending stress profile is pivotal in curbing the cumulative stress. Empirical evidence substantiates the viability of foldable modules that can withstand bending radii as compact as 5 millimeters for over 100,000 fold cycles, all without manifesting any discernible performance deterioration [7]. To facilitate this resilience, a mechanical debonding methodology is employed, effectively enabling the reliable detachment of flexible AMOLED panels from the carrier glass post-device fabrication while minimizing the risk of damage.

In the pursuit of realizing durable and space-efficient foldable displays, with folding radii measuring below the 5 millimeter threshold suitable for consumer products, it becomes evident that further advancements in materials are of paramount importance. These innovations extend to substrates, passivation layers, and polymers capable of absorbing mechanical stresses. Furthermore, the exigency of innovations in the domains of packaging, module design, and manufacturing tools attuned to the unique demands of flexible substrates cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of high-volume production. However, despite these multifarious challenges, the advent of foldable AMOLEDs emerges as a promising foundation upon which to manifest the longstanding vision of transformative, shape-shifting mobile devices.

3. Future Directions

3.1. Further Breakthroughs in Flexible Electronics

The study “Advancements in Aligned Zinc Oxide Nanostructures on Paper Substrates for Flexible Electronic Applications” [8] marks a significant milestone in the realm of flexible and eco-friendly electronics, as it unveils the pioneering achievement of directly cultivating highly aligned zinc oxide (ZnO) nanostructures on paper substrates. Subsequently, this report discusses the successful fabrication of flexible electronic devices utilizing these synthesized ZnO nanostructures. The motivation for this research is deeply rooted in the contemporary pursuit of flexible electronic systems that can be deployed on paper or paper-like substrates, thereby aligning with the broader objective of environmentally sustainable electronic technologies. While preceding research endeavors have achieved notable successes in creating electronic devices such as thin film transistors and circuits on paper, the direct growth of one-dimensional (1D) nanostructures on paper substrates has hitherto remained an uncharted domain.

The introductory section of this study serves as a prelude to the groundbreaking work undertaken. It situates the research within the context of an expanding interest in harnessing paper as a substrate for flexible electronics. This introductory segment acknowledges previous milestones where electronic devices have been realized on paper substrates, emphasizing a crucial void in the literature—the lack of reports on the direct growth of 1D nanostructures. This novel approach to electronic device fabrication holds immense promise. The distinctive properties exhibited by zinc oxide (ZnO) designate it as a highly attractive functional material with diverse applications, spanning sensors, transistors, and energy harvesting devices. However, the idiosyncratic composition and surface characteristics of conventional paper substrates pose formidable challenges for nanostructure growth. The authors contend that the successful alignment of ZnO nanostructures on paper represents a pivotal step toward realizing a new era of flexible, lightweight, and ecologically sustainable nanoelectronics.

The ensuing section, "Results and Discussion," is bifurcated into two segments to present a comprehensive exposition of the research findings. In the initial portion, the authors provide a detailed

DOI: 10.54254/2755-2721/62/20240382

account of the hydrothermal growth process employed to synthesize highly aligned ZnO nanowires and nanoneedles. These were synthesized on paper substrates composed of cellulose and calcium carbonate. To validate the single crystallinity of the ZnO nanorods along the c-axis direction, electron microscopy analyses were conducted. In response to the intricate challenges posed by the inherent surface roughness and insulating properties of paper, innovative methods were devised to modify the paper's surface characteristics. This involved rendering the paper either conducting, through a gold coating, or semiconducting, through a silicon coating. These surface modifications paved the way for a more uniform and higher-density growth of ZnO nanorods on paper, a phenomenon substantiated by scanning electron microscopy images. To delve deeper into the structural and optical attributes of the synthesized nanostructures, a battery of analytical techniques was employed, including X-ray diffraction, X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy, and cathodoluminescence characterization [9].

The subsequent segment of the "Results and Discussion" section focuses on the practical implications of this pioneering research. Here, the researchers showcase the real-world applications of their innovative work by fabricating two proof-of-concept devices on paper substrates: a ZnO/PEDOT:PSS hybrid junction diode and a ZnO nanorod UV photodetector. The former exhibited commendable rectifying behavior, thus confirming the formation of a p-n junction—a critical feature for numerous electronic applications. The latter, a UV photodetector, manifested a notably high photoresponse and swift switching response when subjected to UV illumination. Notably, both devices demonstrated remarkable mechanical flexibility and remained steadfast in performance even when subjected to bending and twisting—a testament to the potential utility of ZnO nanostructures on paper in the realm of flexible electronics.

In conclusion, this study represents a pivotal milestone in the field of flexible and environmentally sustainable electronics. It underscores the pioneering achievement of directly growing highly aligned ZnO nanostructure arrays on paper substrates—an unprecedented feat. The successful fabrication of flexible photodetectors and diodes provides compelling evidence of the immense potential of ZnO nanostructures on paper for the development of disposable, ecologically sustainable, and wearable electronic devices. The authors anticipate that the innovative growth strategies elucidated in this study will catalyze further exploration and research into the realm of flexible nanoelectronics that leverage paper substrates. This work engenders the promise of a future where lightweight, malleable, and environmentally conscious electronic devices become a tangible reality, revolutionizing the landscape of modern electronics [10].

4. Conclusion

In summary, this academic paper provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving landscape of flexible and portable electronic devices, with a particular focus on the development of foldable displays and wearable technology. The discussion begins by addressing the escalating demand for larger screens in handheld devices, driven by advancements in network infrastructure and mobile hardware. The emergence of foldable displays, characterized by their flexible plastic substrates, is introduced as a potential solution to meet this demand, paving the way for innovative form factors.

Noteworthy prototypes from companies like Polymer Vision, Sony, and Samsung are highlighted, emphasizing the transformative potential of foldable displays. These displays are compared in terms of technologies such as electrophoretic and electrowetting, which are conducive to thinness and flexibility, while acknowledging the challenges associated with organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) on plastic substrates.

The timeline for the commercial adoption of foldable displays is discussed, with expectations of initial 5-8 inch electrophoretic eReaders in the near term, followed by full-color foldable OLED or electrowetting displays enabling foldable phones and tablets in the future.

The paper then transitions into the domain of wearable devices, categorizing them by wear mode and discussing the materials commonly used in their construction. Diverse sensing modalities employed in wearables, such as chemical, optical, and electromechanical sensors, are explored in detail. The primary applications of wearable devices, including physiological and motion detection, are highlighted, showcasing their versatility in healthcare and activity monitoring.

Challenges in wearable technology, such as power consumption, biocompatibility, user comfort, and expanding detection capabilities, are identified. However, the paper underscores that ongoing advancements in wireless communication technologies and materials science are facilitating ongoing progress and innovation in wearable devices.

Moving on to the development of foldable display technology, the paper delves into in-folding displays and the associated technical challenges. Solutions to address issues like screen fracturing and encapsulation failure are elucidated, including groove designs along pixel edges and strategic apertures in metal lines. The utilization of on-cell touch technology to reduce display stack thickness is explored, along with strategies to mitigate vulnerabilities in the polarizer film.

The paper concludes with the realization of a waterdrop-shaped prototype phone as a testament to the progress made in in-folding display technology. Rigorous testing, including extensive fold cycles and bending assessments, underscores the durability and reliability of this innovation. The svelte folded thickness of 13.3mm and enhanced aesthetics further emphasize the potential of in-folding displays for consumer electronics.

The discussion then extends to foldable AMOLED displays, which offer unique advantages but face challenges related to stress concentration during bending. The integration of Low-Temperature Polycrystalline Silicon (LTPS) thin-film transistors and the utilization of FlexUP technology for elevated temperature resistance are highlighted. The importance of positioning TFT arrays and OLED layers close to the neutral bending plane is emphasized, leading to robust foldable modules.

In the final section, the paper envisions the future of flexible electronics, emphasizing ongoing breakthroughs and the potential for further innovation in this domain. It underscores the pivotal role of advancements in wireless communication technologies and materials science in driving progress in wearable devices. Additionally, it highlights the transformative potential of foldable displays in reshaping the landscape of consumer electronics.

In conclusion, this paper provides a comprehensive exploration of the evolving fields of foldable displays and wearable technology. It underscores the transformative potential of these technologies, the challenges they face, and the ongoing efforts to overcome these challenges. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader goal of achieving flexible, lightweight, and environmentally sustainable electronic devices that could revolutionize the way we interact with technology in the future.

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