Lens Flare-Aware Detector in Autonomous Driving

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Abstract: Autonomous driving has the potential of reducing traffic accidents, and object detection plays a key role. This paper focuses on the study of object detection in the presence of lens flare. We analyze the impact of lens flare on object detection in autonomous driving tasks and propose a lens flare adaptation method based on Bayesian reasoning theory to optimize existing object detection models. This allows us to adjust the detection scores to re-rank the detections of detection models based on the intensity of lens flare and achieve a higher average precision. Furthermore, this method only requires simple modifications based on the detection results of the existing object detection models, making it easier to deploy on existing devices.

1 INTRODUCTION

Automated Driving Systems (ADSs) are being developed to prevent accidents, reduce emissions, transport the mobility-impaired, and reduce driving-related stress (Crayton and Meier, 2017). According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 94% of road accidents are caused by human error (Singh, 2015). For this reason, many algorithms have been developed, for example, object detection & tracking, and path planning, to support a higher level of ADSs. Object detection is a fundamental but important component in autonomous driving. The performance of object detection directly impacts the performance of downstream tasks. Therefore, research on object detection has received significant attention. Especially in ADSs, the complexity and diversity of realistic scenarios have presented more challenges to object detection algorithms, including adverse weather conditions, low-light and extremely high-light situations, and severe occlusion between objects.

IEEE P2020 Automotive Imaging White Paper mentioned an optical artifact caused by the lens in a camera system, which is lens flare. In the automotive use environment, headlamps direct light and/or direct sunlight often enter the Field of View (FoV) or hit the optics of the camera system. Stray light of incident light onto the optical system shall be evaluated in terms of the veiling effect that deteriorates image visual or post-processing performance (Group et al., 2018). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there are currently no articles focusing on the impact of lens flare on object detection in autonomous driving scenarios.

In this paper, we aim to enhance the object detection performance of existing detectors in scenarios with lens flare by using Bayesian reasoning theory. First, we generated an autonomous driving dataset with added lens flares. Then we proposed a lens flareaware belief calibration algorithm based on Bayesian reasoning theory, which can be easily deployed on top of the existing object detection models. We consider that the actual distribution of True Positive (TP) and False Positive (FP) is not strictly positively or negatively correlated with the predicted confidence scores when different intensity of lens flare occurs. Therefore, when we consider the effects of lens flare, we can calibrate the confidence score (enhanced or weakened) according to their intensities to achieve better performance.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed method, which consists of three parts, an object detector module, a lens flare perception module, and a belief adaptation modification module. The images captured by the camera are sent to the object detector. Then the object detector outputs the initial detection results, including the confidence score, class, and position of each object, which will be fed into the lens flare perception module to calculate the lens flare intensity of each detected object. Finally, the belief adaptation modification module calibrates only the confidence score

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Figure 1: The proposed method is composed of three parts. The object detector can be any pre-trained object detection network, such as YOLO. The lens flare perception module can estimate the intensity of the lens flare for each detected object. The belief adaptation modification module then maps the confidence score into the log-likelihood ratio value based on the estimated lens flare intensity.

according to the intensity of lens flare and outputs the final detection result.

2 RELATED WORK

2.1 Object Detection

Object detection has become a fundamental and important part not only in ADSs but also in computer vision tasks. Due to the excellent performance of deep learning in object detection, most of the recently published papers are based on deep learning models. They can be mainly divided into two categories: the region proposal-based methods and onestage regression-based methods (Liu et al., 2022). The former methods first find the Region of Interest (RoI), and then classify them into different classes, representative methods include Fast R-CNN (Girshick, 2015) and Faster R-CNN (Ren et al., 2015). The latter methods output the final detection result through one network, representative methods include YOLO (Redmon et al., 2016; Jocher et al., 2022)and SSD (Liu et al., 2016). Due to the success of the Transformer model in natural language processing, some researchers have tried to explore the application of the Transformer to object detection tasks, such as Vision Transformer (Dosovitskiy et al., 2020).

2.2 Object Detection in Adverse Conditions

In autonomous driving tasks, adverse conditions have been regarded as a huge obstacle to solve. The methods in this field can be mainly divided into two categories. One approach involves direct modifications to the neural network architecture, where both clear and adverse condition images are incorporated for network retraining (Hnewa and Radha, 2020). In contrast, other researchers opt to include an additional preprocessing module for improving adverse condition image quality before feeding them into a conventional network (Liu et al., 2022). Most of them only focus on one specific problem and achieve better performance on this task, such as fog (Liu et al., 2022), haze (Yu et al., 2022), and low light (Rashed et al., 2019). Some researchers try to solve all of these problems with a unified model (Chen et al., 2022), which gives readers some new aspirations. However, there are still many issues in autonomous driving tasks that have not been noticed and well addressed, lens flare is one of them. To the best of the author's knowledge, no research has been done focusing on lens flare in object detection in autonomous driving scenarios.

2.3 Lens Flare

Most of the work done on lens flare is about image quality enhancement (Rashed et al., 2019; Talvala et al., 2007). They can eliminate some lens flares in simple scenarios, but for some complex scenarios or severe lens flares, the results of these methods are not acceptable. To fully utilize the power of deep learning, two lens flare datasets released recently give researchers more flexibility. One is the daytime lens flare dataset (Wu et al., 2021), which only consists of the sun's lens flare, and another is the nighttime lens flare dataset (Dai et al., 2022), which only consists of the colored light sources' lens flare. Our paper also uses these two datasets to generate an autonomous driving dataset with added lens flares.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this section, we will describe the methodology and experimental setup in detail. Due to the fact that the original output of the object detector is globally optimal and does not specifically optimize for different intensities of lens flare, we adopt the Bayesian reasoning theory to calibrate the output of the object detector based on the intensities of lens flare.

More specifically, for a given intensity of lens flare, we can calculate the distribution of positive and negative samples accordingly. This allows us to map the detection scores into statistical scores, specifically the Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR), which provides a more accurate reflection of the network's performance across varying intensities of lens flare. This approach aims to improve the detection performance in the presence of lens flare and can be easily deployed on top of different existing object detectors with only little effort.

3.1 Theoretical Foundation

When an object of interest, i.e. the object belonging to the category that the detector is trained to predict, is detected by the detector, the output can be defined as $z_k = (u_k, s_k, a_k)$. In z_k , u_k is the location, s_k is the size, and $a_k \in (0, 1)$ is the confidence score, of the *k*-th output of the detector in a sensor-specific coordinate system.

A road user, such as a vehicle or pedestrian, (x,g) is a tuple containing the position x of the road user in the world coordinate and the feature g which describes the road user in a more detail way, such color, size, shape, etc.

Then we use hypothesis $H_1(x,g)$ to define a road user with feature g present at location x, and the output of detector gives the close position (their distance is less than a predefined threshold) and with similar features. Otherwise, we use hypothesis $H_0(x,g)$. However, it is too complex to consider hypotheses depending on both location x and all features in g (Dimitrievski, Martin, 2023). Additionally, in most cases, the detector does not provide detailed features of the object of interest. So instead we use a simpler hypothesis, $H_1(x)$, if a road user of similar size to s_k is present at location x, and the output of detector indicates a close position u_k ; otherwise we use $H_0(x)$. For convenience, we can use simplified symbols H_1 and H_0 .

To make the decision of presence or absence for a road user at location x, we can calculate the posterior probability $p_{H|Z}(H|z)$ for H_1 and H_0 respectively, in which we omit the x for simplicity. If equation (1)

holds, we decide presence, otherwise absence.

$$P_{H|Z}(H_1|z) > P_{H|Z}(H_0|z) \tag{1}$$

In this paper, we also consider the effects of the lens flare, so we introduce a symbol $m \in [0, +\infty)$ to define the severity of lens flare, in which a higher value indicates a more severe lens flare and 0 indicates no lens flare in the neighborhood of x.

After introducing the feature m, we can use the Bayesian theory to rewrite equation (1) as

$$\frac{P_{Z|H}(z|H_1,m)}{P_{Z|H}(z|H_0,m)} > \frac{P(H_0,m)}{P(H_1,m)}.$$
(2)

The left side of equation (2) is the likelihood ratio and the right side is the prior ratio, which is independent of the confidence score and can be defined as a constant threshold T for a given m. To ensure numerical stability, we introduce log to both sides of equation (2). Besides, to simplify the modeling and computations in practical applications, we have previously assumed to simplify the relationship between x and g above. Therefore, the equation (2) can be rewritten as

$$\log_{10} \frac{P(a_k|H_1,m)}{P(a_k|H_0,m)} > \log_{10} \frac{P(H_0,m)}{P(H_1,m)}.$$
 (3)

In equation (3), the left part is the LLR.

3.2 Implementation Details

The main idea is, for different intensities of lens flare m, to empirically estimate the relation between the values a_k and the LLRs in equation (3). Therefore, for a given degree of lens flare m, we can obtain a series of LLRs according to different values of a_k , and these LLRs constitute the LLR curve for this given m. We can construct one LLR curve for each intensity of lens flare, i.e. for different values of m. To achieve this, we need to calculate $P(a_k|H_0,m)$ and $P(a_k|H_1,m)$ in equation (3), which can be estimated from the histogram that includes positives (examples of H_0).

The detailed implementation of the algorithm is shown in the pseudocode. To get the LLR curves, we need to input the lists of positives and negatives, in which each tuple contains confidence score a_k and degree of lens flare *m* of the current object. To consider the intensity of lens flare, we should input a list *M* as well, which contains the different intervals of *m*. For each interval in *M*, we calculate the corresponding LLR curve by using algorithm 1. After iterating through all the intervals in *M*, we obtain a series of LLR curves corresponding to each interval in *M*.



Figure 2: We employ light source detection derived from a highlight detection algorithm (Stojkovic et al., 2021) to generate our nighttime dataset. This pipeline helps us locate each light source in the background image, resulting in more realistic synthetic images.

```
Data: P\_list, N\_list, M

Result: llr\_curves\_list

initialization: llr\_curves\_list \leftarrow [];

for m\_inter in M do

P\_temp \leftarrow P\_list[P\_list.m \in m\_inter];

N\_temp \leftarrow N\_list[N\_list.m \in m\_inter];

P\_density \leftarrow KDE(P\_temp);

N\_density \leftarrow KDE(N\_temp);

llr\_temp \leftarrow \log_{10} \frac{P\_density}{N\_density};

llr\_curves\_list.append(llr\_temp);

end
```

Algorithm 1: Construction of Log-likelihood ratio curves for different degrees of lens flare. These curves are derived from the positives and negatives, which can tell the real distribution of the positives and negatives for different degrees of lens flare according to a_k .

4 EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

Due to the lack of datasets containing lots of lens flare, we first synthesize a large-scale dataset of autonomous driving scenarios with lots of lens flare based on existing lens flare datasets and autonomous driving datasets. Experimental and analysis are then conducted on this synthesized dataset.

4.1 Datasets

We use two kinds of datasets, one is the autonomous driving dataset and another is lens flare dataset:

4.1.1 Autonomous Driving Datasets

Many autonomous driving datasets exist, such as BDD100K (Yu et al., 2020), nuScenes (Caesar et al., 2020), etc. We opted for the BDD100K dataset due

to certain object annotations in the nuScenes dataset being unobservable in image view, given its use of multiple sensors. Additionally, the nuScenes dataset comprises fewer scenes compared to the extensive BDD100K dataset. BDD100K is solely annotated based on images and offers a diverse, large-scale collection of visual driving scenes, encompassing a wide range of tasks.

4.1.2 Lens Flare Datasets

To generate an autonomous driving dataset with lens flare, we use autonomous driving images as background images, and overlay images containing only lens flare, without any background, onto these autonomous driving background images. We use the Flare7K (Dai et al., 2022) dataset as the nighttime lens flare and used the dataset in paper (Wu et al., 2021) as the daytime lens flare. The first dataset contains light sources with different colors and sizes, consisting of glare, shimmer, and streak, which are typical lens flares that occur at nighttime. The second dataset only contains the strong white light source, and it is mainly used to simulate the sun's lens flare in the daytime.

The determination of daytime or nighttime can be derived by quantifying the number of pixels below a predefined threshold. For the daytime, we simply add the one lens flare image to the brightest part of the background image. However, in the nighttime, we need to add more than one lens flare to the background image because normally there are more light sources and the lens flare of a single light source is smaller than that in daytime. Besides, it is helpful to construct more accurate LLR curves by enlarging the number of objects that are affected by lens flare. Figure 2 illustrates how we find the location of light sources in the nighttime images, we modify a high light detection algorithm from paper (Stojkovic et al., 2021) to achieve this, and then we can add one lens flare to each detected light source.

4.2 Experiment Details

In the BDD100K dataset, the number of training, validation, and test images are 70,000, 10,000, and 20,000 respectively. We first use the BDD100K training set without added lens flare to train the YOLOv5 middle-size (YOLOv5m) model to get a pre-trained model for later use. Then we generate the images with added lens flare. We apply the method mentioned in section 4.1 to the BDD100K validation set and two lens flare datasets. It is worth noting that the maximum number of added lens flares in one night-time background image is 6 since the image will become very unrealistic if we add too much lens flare to it. Therefore, we have 10,000 images with lens flare. The following experiments are all conducted based on the synthetic dataset.

As we possess both synthetic images and their corresponding background images, we can compute the Mean Square Error (MSE) for identical cropped detected object images within them. The MSE value associated with each detected object can be interpreted as the intensity of lens flare. A value of 0 indicates no lens flare, while a higher MSE value indicates a more severe lens flare on the detected object. Figure 3 gives some object examples with different MSE values, providing a more intuitive visual sense of the levels of lens flare represented by different MSE values. In this paper, we consider $0 < MSE \le 5000$ as very light lens flare, $5000 < MSE \le 10000$ as light lens flare, $10000 < MSE \le 15000$ as moderate lens flare, and MSE > 15000 as severe lens flare.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of our algorithm, we must partition the 10,000 images from the BDD100K validation set into two subsets: one for constructing LLR curves (referred to as the 'training subset' in the subsequent sections of this paper) and another for validation (referred to as the 'validation subset'). To ensure a balanced distribution between the training and validation subsets, we directly split the output of YOLOv5m based on the MSE value of each detected object at the object level rather than the image level. For each degree of lens flare, we randomly divided all detected objects into a training subset and a validation subset, with 90% used for constructing the LLR curves, and the remaining 10% used for evaluating.



Figure 3: This image shows some object examples with different MSE values, providing a more intuitive visual sense of the levels of lens flare represented by MSE values.

4.3 Result

We run a 10-fold cross-validation to get the final result. The threshold of Intersection over Union (IOU), which is calculated as the ratio of the area of intersection between the predicted and ground truth bounding boxes to the area of their union area and is often used to determine whether a detected object is considered a true positive or not, is set as 0.5.

In each validation iteration, we set the threshold for different intensities of lens flare, for example, if we set a threshold of lens flare metric as severe lens flare, we include all detected objects affected by at least severe lens flare, and sample 150 FP and TP objects that are affected by less severe lens flare to calculate the average precision (AP). We repeat this sampling process 10 times for each threshold in each validation iteration. From the figure 5, which is the AP only for cars, the red line is always above the blue line. The result shows that the proposed algorithm can achieve better results in all experiment cases than the original output of the YOLOv5m detector, especially for those objects with more severe lens flare. In the situation of no lens flare in figure 5, which means we calculate AP across all detected objects, the improvement is only about 0.1%. However, as the severity of lens flare increases, the improvement becomes more significant. When we consider a very severe lens flare, the improvement reaches as high as 1.5%.

As depicted in Figure 5, a slight increase in AP can be observed as the lens flare's intensity reaches its maximum in our experiment. We have investigated this phenomenon and identified the main reason: when the intensity of lens flare rises, the count of objects significantly affected by severe lens flare diminishes, and most detected objects in this part have low confidence scores and are background. Consequently, the detected objects with very severe lens flare are easier to classify as background at an earlier stage of computing AP.

Although some classes in the BDD100K validation set only have limited instances, for classes with sufficient instances to construct LLR curves and perform validation, the outcomes resemble those of cars. We also adopt an alternative approach to assess the

Degree of Lens Flare	Methods	Traffic light	Vehicles ²	Traffic sign	All classes ³
Moderate	Fixed LLR	0.700 ± 0.026	$0.642 {\pm} 0.008$	0.695 ± 0.042	0.625 ± 0.015
Lens Flare	Adaptive LLR	0.723±0.022	0.646±0.008	0.698±0.043	0.634±0.015
Severe	Fixed LLR	0.759 ± 0.022	$0.593 {\pm} 0.022$	0.731±0.055	$0.599 {\pm} 0.020$
Lens Flare	Adaptive LLR	0.784±0.021	0.601±0.017	0.740±0.054	0.614±0.020

Table 1: AP for classes in BDD100K.

¹ We calculate results based on the threshold of lens flare metric as moderate and severe lens flare and run 100 times validations on different sampled subsets respectively.

² We grouped vehicles (car, truck, bus, train, motorcycle, and bicycle) into one category to calculate AP, due to limited instances for certain classes in the BDD100K validation dataset.

³ The AP for all classes is calculated by treating all classes in the BDD100K dataset as a single class. The determination of TP and FP is still based on individual classes. The unification into a single category is only considered during the LLR construction and AP calculation.



Figure 4: Visual comparison on the validation subset (the threshold of lens flare metric is set as severe lens flare, only for cars) by using a) adaptive LLR, b) fixed LLR. The green and blue rectangle is TP and FP respectively. Some cars are not detected because they are used as the training subset to construct the LLR curves.



Figure 5: AP on cars for different degrees of lens flare. From this chart, it can be observed that our method is more effective as the lens flare becomes stronger.

proposed method on all classes in the BDD100K, as depicted in Table 1. These results are obtained by considering the situation of moderate and severe lens flare and the same setting as before.

When treating all object classes as a single category and computing one AP, we still achieve comparable results. It should be noted that the determination of TP and FP is still based on individual classes. The unification into a single class is only considered during the LLR construction and AP calculation.

The result of the Traffic light in Table 1 demonstrates a more pronounced improvement facilitated by

our proposed method compared to those observed in the case of cars. This is because when we synthesize images with lens flare, we add lens flare based on the position of the light source. Therefore, traffic lights are more significantly affected. The source of variance here is due to the fact that we performed validation and calculated averages across 100 different sampled subsets. It's worth noting that among all our subsets, the results using adaptive LLR consistently outperformed the fixed LLR. For instance, in the case of the "traffic light" category, when the AP based on adaptive LLR reaches its lowest value, which is 0.70, the corresponding AP using fixed LLR is only 0.67. All the results in the table follow this pattern, demonstrating the consistent effectiveness of our proposed method.

Figure 4 gives us a visual comparison of the validation subset (only cars) between the output of our proposed method (figure 4a) and that of the original YOLOv5m (figure 4b). The green and blue rectangle is TP and FP respectively. Some cars are not detected because they are sampled as the training subset to construct the LLR curves. These results are generated by setting a threshold on precision on the training subset, which is a common requirement in a practical



Figure 6: PR curves on cars for severe lens flare. In a practical autonomous driving task, we need to set a threshold for the final output. Here we set a threshold on precision as 0.8. Our proposed method can achieve a higher recall.

autonomous driving task, and then using this corresponding LLR threshold to the output of detected objects in the validation subset to get the final decision of positive and negative detections. Here we set the threshold on precision as 0.8 and we conduct our experiment on the validation subset by setting the lens flare metric as severe lens flare. The results of our proposed methods give more TPs without adding extra FPs than the original output of the YOLOv5m detector. The result in figure 6 also shows that our proposed method can achieve a higher recall when given the same precision.



Figure 7: Detection results by using a) adaptive LLR, b) fixed LLR. These images are not in the training and the validation set. The red dashed rectangles are zoomed-in object images.

Figure 7 is the detection result for images that are not in the training and the validation set. We use the entire BDD100K validation set to construct the LLR curves and get a threshold of fixed and adaptive LLR respectively for a given threshold on precision similar to figure 6. Our method can still detect more objects without adding additional FP objects.

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we proposed a lens flare-aware detector, which shows an improvement in object detection in the presence of lens flare in autonomous driving tasks, especially for those scenarios with severe lens flare. Since our algorithm is based on the output of the existing detector, it is easy to be deployed on top of other object detectors.

We presented a study based on synthetic lens flares, to allow for ground truth comparison. The synthetic data experiments allowed us to directly measure the lens-flare-induced difference in pixel value and use them as a metric for lens flare severity (referencebased). Further research should focus on deriving such lens flare severity measures in a no-reference scenario.

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