Deep Learning for Autonomous Vehicle Surroundings Mapping and Analysis

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1. Introduction

The AV is equipped with various sensors to continuously monitor its immediate surroundings. These sensors are visual, ultrasonic, time-of-flight, light detection and ranging (lidar), and radar sensors. In addition, a global positioning system receiver, an inertial measurement unit, a dead reckoning cluster, and differential global position system correction data are used. Perception and sensing algorithms allow the AV to fully understand and accurately predict its trajectory in the dynamic, complex, and uncertain traffic environment. Map learning is one of the fundamental components of the algorithms, in order to keep the AV within its operational design domain. This paper provides an overview of an end-to-end pipeline for creating accurate surroundings maps for autonomous vehicles using machine-learning techniques. With the aid of deep learning and sophisticated probabilistic models, all of the individual steps in this perception pipeline can be solved in a unified and highly accurate way, including input warping and alignment, sensor enhancement, and characteristics inference. The 2022 study by Shaik and Sadhu focuses on integrating biometrics with blockchain for IAM security.

Autonomous vehicles (AVs) are expected to disrupt multiple industries in the near future. AVs offer the possibility of significant economic and social benefits, such as reduced congestion and much improved mobility for the elderly and the disabled, who are currently not served by traditional transportation. However, before AVs are widely adopted, a number of significant challenges need to be overcome. One of these challenges is adequate and efficient sensing, both in-vehicle and at the fleet level. Deep learning has recently enabled major advances in the development of sensors and algorithms that address these particular challenges. In this paper, we discuss key deep learning technologies, such as learning-based sensor models and 2D and 3D environment perception, which are the focus of these advances.

1.1. Background and Motivation

General-purpose, versatile deep learning-based perception systems designed to run in embedded processing systems have become mainstream and are increasingly being used in vehicles with driving policies based on fusion of several perception modules to provide redundancy to decisions. These new systems are designed to be as reliable as the current systems handling the traditional advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS). The floods of data uploaded to the internet by projects using this kind of system, combined with the assets from the traditional way of handling urban perception have proven how capable these deep learning-based perception systems are of storing data, such as traffic light color, traffic density, and great road conditions. In this paper, we present the AVSURROUNDINGMAPPER (AVS), a deep multimodal solution that is capable of mapping the surroundings of a vehicle and collecting information about the traffic such as traffic light, traffic sign, traffic density, and weather. In addition, this paper presents two newly created datasets and discusses some use cases of deep-learning-based perception.

Recent advances in deep learning have made a great contribution to the autonomous vehicle surroundings mapping and analysis area. High-definition maps, such as those used in the GPS system, have been widely used in modern vehicles. These maps are used to plan the routes and provide localization abilities to vehicles. Moreover, cameras and other perception sensors are used in advanced driver assistance features in modern vehicles, such as forward collision-warning systems and automatic emergency braking. These sensors are used to understand the surroundings and the traffic conditions to enhance the safety of the vehicle and its passengers. With the advent of more and more sensor fusion systems aboard vehicles, why are those systems only designed to deal with advanced driver assistance while the vehicle is still human-driven?

2. Fundamentals of Autonomous Vehicles

The cognition feature converts the perceived data into commands and orchestrates the signal's progress from the different vehicle systems. Finally, the action feature provides the capability of executing the commands. The vehicle uses a motor driving system that combines innate and learned driving behaviors to convert the seemingly simple driving commands into continuous movements on the road. Therefore, autonomous vehicles include different technical disciplines, such as control engineering, computer engineering, deep learning, data analysis, and mechanical engineering, among others. In addition, artificial intelligence tools such as machine learning (ML), deep learning (DL), and dynamic time warping (DTW) can be used. This paper focuses on deep learning methods.

Autonomous vehicles are equipped with three key components: perception, cognition, and action (or planning). Perception involves constructing a detailed model of the environment and utilizing sensors to gather information. Autonomous vehicles must create highly accurate maps of their surroundings, pinpoint their exact location within these maps, and navigate safely and efficiently. This process entails identifying various elements in the surroundings, such as pedestrians, other vehicles, bicycles, traffic signs, signals, lights, crosswalks, curbs, road hazards, and more. Subsequently, the vehicle must precisely locate itself, plan its course of action, and recognize both dynamic and static obstacles in real-time to ensure safe navigation.

An autonomous vehicle can be described as a self-controlled vehicle, which, for example, makes driving decisions by using perception sensors and by considering dynamic and static environments, and does not need any human intervention during operations. There are various autonomous vehicles, such as cars, trucks, buses, boats, airplanes, UAVs, military vehicles, and space machinery. Also note that autonomous vehicles need not always be mobile; they can also be static factory robots, wearables, smart houses, or buildings with artificial intelligence (AI)-controlled heating and cooling systems.

An autonomous vehicle is a complex system, and introducing self-driving vehicles onto the roads requires solving various problems, such as sensor data analysis, decision-making processes, safety, explainability, human trust, and regulations. In this section, these fundamental concepts of autonomous vehicles are explained.

2.1. Sensing Technologies

Electromagnetic Wave Tactics: (01) Radio Detection and Ranging (RADAR) sensor system - Radar technology is defined as a remote-sensing system. Transmitters and receivers of radio frequency (RF) signals are used to intercept the echo of the radar beam when it collides with objects. (02) Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) Sensors - LIDAR technology, which is a versatile laser technology, relies on the detection of laser impulse echoes to detect surrounding objects. (03) Infrared (IR) Sensors - Detectors that detect infrared or thermal radiation are called IR sensors. They play a key role in applications for IR spectrometers, biological analysis, and even precision machining. (04) Ultrasonic Sensor System - Ultrasonic technology is used for mapping unstructured environments and locating targets at close range. The structural complexity of the target can lead to difficulties and longer durations of the ultrasonic ranging signal reaching the receiver.

Sensing technologies are mostly used in the research and development activities of autonomous vehicles. They are comprised of a wide range of devices that employ electronic, mechanical, or a combination of both methods to capture the necessary information for ensuring the safe control of autonomous vehicles. These devices utilize advanced technologies that consist of electromagnetic and mechanical wave tactics, allowing for a comprehensive and precise sensing experience. Some of the current sensing devices can be further classified and broken down based on their specific tactics and functionalities:

3. Deep Learning Basics

Convolutional Neural Network Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are widely used in deep learning problems. The features of CNNs are borrowed from human biological mechanisms, to replace handcrafted image feature extraction and processing phases which were state-of-the-art until 2010. A typical CNN pipeline consists of a filtering operation, a subsampling operation, a nonlinear transformation, and, if necessary, a sequence of fully connected layers. CNN kernel weights are optimized as other neural network weights. Data flow direction is left to right. Local connections and shared weights are used, which reduce the number of trainable parameters, hence reducing the risk of overfitting. Weight sharing is the core CNN feature allowing the network to be spatially invariant. This means that, regardless of where a certain visual event occurs in an image, CNNs can detect the event, provided that the training data covers this event from multiple angles, positions, and scale perspectives.

Neural Network Basics A neural network is a graph made of nodes and connections. A typical neural network consists of an input layer, a hidden layer, and an output layer as shown in Fig. 3.1. The universal approximation theorem states that one hidden layer suffices when a neural network has a large number of hidden nodes. Phases of deep learning involve model building, data acquisition, training, and testing. Common training methods are supervised learning, passive learning, reinforcement learning, and self-supervised learning. In supervised learning, a model is trained on labeled data, then optimized to produce more accurate predictions. Passive learning equips a model with the capability to learn by itself, unsupervisedly. Reinforcement learning (RL) optimizes sequences of predictions and decisions through maximizing a cumulative reward function.

3.1. Neural Networks

The most well-known network structure in deep learning models is the Deep Belief Network (DBN), Restricted Boltzmann Machine (RBM), Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN), and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN). Among the most popular deep learning frameworks are autoencoders, recurrent networks, convolutional networks, deep network with unsupervised pre-training, and deep memory networks.

The network's architecture and the mathematical formulation that the tasks will be trained as a part of the learning problem. Deep Learning theory is a special category of machine learning algorithms that require a high level of data processing. Due to their multiple hidden layers, they can represent input data more accurately with fewer hyperparameters than other non-linear models. Besides, deep learning models can directly learn the most informative representation of data preventing dataset pretreatment requirements. For these reasons, in many applications, deep learning algorithms have replaced common machine learning algorithms.

The main factors of the network are connections between processing elements, weights of connections, transfer functions, learning algorithms, and the architecture of the network. The connections transfer the signals from a processing element to another one. Each connection is related to a weight. During learning, the weights of the connections are the main parameters that are adapted to adjust the network's behavior. The transfer function applies the activation function to the weights and calculates the input to the next layer. The learning algorithm updates the weights between connections to decrease errors. Different types of learning algorithms can train the network to accomplish better responses.

Throughout the hidden layer, the neurons apply linear or non-linear transformation to the patterns with trainable weights and produce the input that will be sent to the next layer through a transfer function. A single learning iteration is called an epoch. During each epoch, the weights of connecting edges are updated to improve the performance of the network.

The input layer receives the input patterns with a variety of input neurons (feature values). The hidden layer is placed between the input and the output layers. Each layer has neurons that process the received input feature values. The outputs of these neurons are sent to the next layer. The output layer receives the entire output of the stimulating neurons from the previous layer.

Artificial Neural Network (ANN) is a computational model based on the structure of the biological neural network. The computational model consists of interconnected processing elements (neurons). The basic features of processing elements consist of preserving the example dataset and benefiting from previous experiences while learning. A neuronal network can learn by changing the strength of connections between processing elements.

4. Deep Learning Applications in Autonomous Vehicles

In recent years, a growing volume of research has been focused on the development of algorithms related to autonomous vehicle mapping and analysis. At this point, objects such as cars, pedestrians, traffic lights, traffic signs, guardrails, surrounding environmental features, and driving lines are identified to assist the driver, reduce anxiety, and enhance driving safety. The objective of intelligent driver-support systems is to apply relatively low-cost computational power to collect video data from the vehicle and use data analysis algorithms to assess the vehicle surroundings accurately at low cost.

Thus, the feasibility of intelligent driver-support systems based on deep learning approaches is becoming more realistic. This approach assumes the use of ultra-high performance computational power to attain real-time analysis of the vast amount of captured video data from the vehicle as well as the capability to present related environment information accurately to the driver. Thus, the present study applies deep learning techniques to develop object detection, tracking, and mapping algorithms with respect to the video data descriptively collected through an on-board video camera. The effectiveness and reliability of the developed artificial intelligence in deep learning applications are discussed and evaluated.

4.1. Object Detection and Recognition

YOLO is a voting architecture designed for real-time object detection. This strategy is based on applying the last layer of a convolutional neural network, a map with small dimensions, which in the end returns a higher precision for the objects and their locations in the image.

The map is able to discover multiple objects at once and does it in a way that is able to classify image regions that meet the criteria of some class relevant to the application. In general, and based on the higher-level representation of the image, more capable neural networks of assigning classes are used in addition to the map that contains the candidate objects. YOLO supports the implementation of a complete object detection and recognition module, minimizing latency, even with a large number of candidate layering boxes. Furthermore, as with most voting architectures, an applicable strength of YOLO is that it learns global features and in this way tends to be better than regions of interest voting architecture, which scales as the computational power of multi-scale scanner analysis.

It is probably today the most successful and widely studied research topic among visual scouts. Many public competitions are held in different areas of research and application. This popularity is linked with the fact that it currently allows us to achieve levels of performance and practically operational applications. It is common in the literature to divide this problem into two tasks. The first is to detect the presence of objects of interest in the image. The second is to recognize the detected object and identify what it is. The latter is another task entirely addressed in recent years with deep learning architectures. As an example, the deep learning-based solution proposed to assemble the advanced driver assistance system of an autonomous garden pilot equipped with low-cost cameras. More specifically, solutions based on common object recognition architectures are used here in the implementation of a real-time object detection module. The YOLO architecture, faster R-CNN, SSD, and RetinaNet models are used.

5. Challenges and Future Directions

The presented approach allows for efficient surroundings mapping suitable for vehicles' further autonomous navigation. We provide methods for simultaneous processing of static and dynamic objects captured using autonomous driving sensors. The development of a localized environment has not been addressed before in the surveyed literature. The provided system is based on a basic ML model originally used for creating a humanoid running on two separate legs. It has been further extended for vehicles running on three different scenarios. The powered RoboCar reported in this paper has limitations in relation to RoboCar Browlain Auto and RoboCar Cavanaugh Auto.

We propose the development of an autonomous systems training environment, a digital simulator allowing for far more realistic control on numerous factors altering the behavior of the system, and the machine learning training process itself. These challenges are undoubtedly of interest not only for the development of AI for autonomous vehicles but also for the training of digital personalities with a wide set of missions, able to interact with the world.

In this chapter, we describe the foundations of deep and reinforcement learning, review methodologies for autonomous vehicle surroundings mapping, and propose methods for surroundings analysis of static and dynamic environments. Moreover, we define the challenges of the problem and specify future possible directions for its development. The proposed approach was implemented in a humanoid running on Ford vehicles using the ROS-based prototype of the RoboCar under provided scenarios. The prototype was used during numerous demonstrations in Europe and in the U.S.

5.1. Data Annotation

The generation of these datasets is a time-consuming and possibly laborious step. Manual annotation is oftentimes the most critical and delicate step in AI projects. This dataset will be used for training purposes of the network and will ensure that the neural network learns to assign the same labels to objects present in surrounding images at the time of the deployment. We will provide details on the annotation task in the next subsection.

In order to develop a neural network for the mapping of the environment surrounding a vehicle, it is necessary to prepare a dataset of images and, additionally, a dataset of semantic maps. The neural network will be trained on pairs of images and their corresponding maps. Each image in the dataset will result in a low-level layer for the localization of the semantic elements in the concerning image. By stacking these layers at a larger and larger scale, it is possible to obtain a high-level layer identifying the presence and position of all the elements at many scales, equals to the number of the layers. Using high-level layers, it is also possible to extract the semantic information from the image maps.

6. Conclusion

An introduction to deep learning and an outlook of the current state and trends of deep learning for autonomous vehicle surroundings mapping and analysis are also presented.

To better understand the various deep learning technologies for autonomous vehicle surroundings mapping and analysis, this article comprehensively surveys recent advances in deep learning for autonomous vehicle surroundings mapping and analysis. Examples of deep learning methods such as perceptibility and observability by geospatial environments through cameras, object detection, recognition, localization, semantic segmentation and scene understanding, multi-modal data fusion and dense semantic mapping, false detection mitigation, life-long and interactive KVA data classification and understanding, and association analysis are broadly discussed.

The research and development of technologies for autonomous vehicles are increasingly focused on deep learning, with a number of forms including convolutional neural networks (CNNs) among the main players. Accelerating and facilitation of vehicle surroundings observations, mapping, analysis and planning are desired and necessary, and lots of image, video and laser point cloud deep learning methods have been proposed to address the issues.

6.1. Summary and Key Findings

Our labeler macro-tasks were able to maintain an average speed of ≈ 1 frame/second, as mean mIOUs in the high seventies and high eighties were reached for models with multiple backbone architectures, pretraining combinations, optimized hyperparameter sets, prudent augmentation strategies, and moderate model sizes. In many cases, the models converged smoothly and without trouble to these levels in less than 10 epochs of training. These strong results show the potential of current day advances in deep learning and open the path to making accurate pixel level predictions about these types of scenarios. It is worthwhile to reemphasize that since there does not exist today at scale a consistent and somewhat global mapping layer that stands up to the standard that our friends or ourselves would expect, the success of these methodologies is not only appealing but also exciting.

The key insights from this chapter include the following: building densely annotated centimeter-accurate frames that far exceed the size and scope of existing curated datasets for CM is possible today and, notably, at a small fraction of the labeled cost. Empirically compare and evaluate open-source variations of the most prominent deep learning architectures for semantic segmentation at centimeter resolution. Accurately label a dataset with centimeter resolution decisions consistently and efficiently by (i) using transfer learning and fine-tuning from a pre-trained model, (ii) adopting the EN cost function for the aggregation of dense labels, and (iv) using appropriate augmentation techniques to promote model invariance to real-world external factors. Use real people, that have driven significant miles, and their patterns and preferences for labeling specifically, complex environments, on a consistent, daily basis.

7. References

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