Autonomous Rover Localization and Mapping Using VisualSLAM and LiDAR in ROS

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Abstract*— Autonomous rovers are crucial for navigating unknown environments in applications like planetary exploration and search-and-rescue missions. A key challenge is real-time localization and mapping, especially without GPS. This paper explores combining Visual-SLAM (Simultaneous Localization and Mapping) with LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) for rover localization, using the Robot Operating System (ROS) framework. By integrating data from an RGB-D camera and 360-degree LiDAR sensor, the rover can detect obstacles and map its surroundings. The system leverages ROS tools like Gazebo and Rviz for simulation and testing. The paper also discusses the integration of state-of-the-art algorithms for path planning and obstacle avoidance, and the fusion of visual and LiDAR data for more accurate environmental mapping. Results show that this fusion offers an efficient, GPS-independent solution for autonomous navigation in complex environments.

Keywords*—Localization,Mapping,Visual SLAM,LiDAR,ROS (Robot Operating System),Obstacle detection,Path planning,Data fusion.

INTRODUCTION

Autonomous robotics has witnessed rapid advancements, becoming a transformative technology across multiple sectors such as space exploration, industrial automation, and healthcare. Among these developments, autonomous rovers—robotic vehicles capable of navigating and mapping unknown environments without human intervention—are particularly crucial for tasks that are either too dangerous or inaccessible for humans. One of the most critical challenges faced by autonomous rovers is the ability to accurately localize and map the environment in real-time, particularly in unknown or GPS-denied areas. This capability is essential for safe navigation, obstacle avoidance, and efficient operation in dynamic and complex terrains [1].

At the core of solving this challenge lies the integration of two powerful technologies:

Simultaneous Localization and Mapping (SLAM) and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR). SLAM algorithms allow robots to simultaneously build a map of their surroundings while localizing themselves within it, providing a robust framework for autonomous navigation [2]. LiDAR sensors, on the other hand, offer high-resolution distance measurements by emitting laser beams and measuring the time taken for the light to return, generating a detailed 3D representation of the environment. Together, LiDAR and SLAM enable the rover to navigate obstacles and construct an accurate map, making these technologies indispensable for autonomous operations [3][4].

In this paper, we explore the integration of Visual-SLAM and LiDAR technology within the Robot Operating System (ROS), a flexible and powerful framework that supports the development of robotic applications [5]. ROS facilitates seamless communication between various components, such as sensors, actuators, and controllers, enabling real-time data processing and efficient task execution. Using ROS, this research demonstrates the ability of an autonomous rover to generate a 3D map of its environment, localize itself within that map, and navigate obstacles autonomously. The paper discusses how this integration supports applications ranging from planetary exploration, where GPS signals are unavailable, to industrial settings where autonomous robots can handle material transportation, reducing labor costs and improving efficiency [6].

As autonomous robotics continues to evolve, the combination of Visual-SLAM, LiDAR, and ROS presents a promising solution to enhancing the capabilities of rovers. This research aims to contribute to the ongoing advancements in autonomous navigation and mapping, offering insights into the future potential of these technologies in diverse real-world applications [7]

LITERATURE SURVEY

The concept of SLAM has come a long way over the years, with many studies contributing to its development and application in autonomous robotics. The foundational work by Durrant-Whyte and Bailey in 1986 introduced key mathematical models for SLAM, which have been refined through various approaches, including particle filters and graph-based methods.

Recent research has focused on improving SLAM systems by integrating different sensor technologies. For example, studies on LiDAR-based SLAM for planetary exploration have shown how effective LiDAR can be in creating detailed 3D maps while simultaneously estimating the rover's position in real-time. Additionally, researchers have explored the integration of Visual-SLAM with LiDAR to enhance obstacle detection and mapping accuracy, demonstrating the advantages of using multiple sensor modalities.Further advancements in autonomous navigation using SLAM algorithms have been made, with various techniques like Gmapping and HectorSLAM being applied in different environments. These studies collectively highlight the importance of SLAM and LiDAR in enhancing the capabilities of autonomous rovers, paving the way for future innovations in robotic navigation and interaction with the environment.

Control system : Autonomous Rovers are widely used in exploration, industrial automation and research and rescue operations. These applications require an efficient control system capable of navigating unknown and dynamic environments. Traditional control techniques, such as PID controllers, provide basic stability, but lack adaptability to complex land. Advanced approaches, such as MPC, optimize trajectory tracking, while reinforcement learning (RL) allows autonomous adaptation. However, these methods require an efficient decision making structure to determine when and how each control strategy should be applied. This research presents an FSM -based control system that allows soft state transitions based on environmental inputs, ensuring the ideal performance.

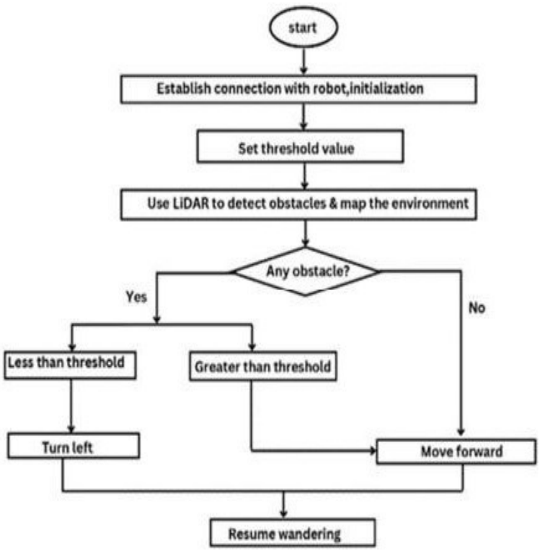

Table 1: flow chart of online obstacle avoidance algorithm

Related Work: Control systems for autonomous navigation have been extensively studied, with various methodologies implemented. PID controllers guarantee stable movement, but are less effective in unpredictable environments. MPC allows real -time trajectory optimization, but is demanding computationally. RL -based controllers improve adaptability, but require extensive training. FSMs were used in various robotic applications to provide structured decision making, allowing adaptive switching between control strategies. This article explore an FSM -based approach that integrates various control techniques, improving the overall efficiency of the space vehicle.

System Architecture :

Rover consists of main components of hardware, including a high -level Raspberry PI, a low -level motor control and multiple sensors such as the 9250/6500 IMI MPU, ultrasonic sensors, dealing and a camera. The engines are controlled using CC engine drivers with coding, ensuring accurate movements. The power supply is provided by a lithium ion battery. The control system is part of FSM as a decision -making structure, PID for motor regulation, MPC for trajectory optimization and RL for adaptive learning.

Finite State Machine (FSM) for ROVER Control :

The FSM rules the behavior of the space vehicle, defining distinct navigation states and transitions. Primary states include idle state, path after state, state of obstacle prevention, state of exploitation and emergency stop state. The idle state initializes the system and active sensors. The next path uses MPC for trajectory tracking. The state of obstacle prevention employs PID -based control to navigate around obstacles. The state of exploration is activated when Rover finds an unknown environment, where RL -based learning is used to optimize movement. The emergency stop state interrupts the space vehicle in case of failures, requiring manual intervention to be redefined. FSM transitions between these states based on sensor data, ensuring smooth and adaptive navigation.

Sensor Fusion for Adaptive Navigation:

To improve localization and decision-making, sensor fusion techniques are employed. The Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) integrates data from the IMU, LiDAR, and camera,providing accurate position estimates. This enhances the rover’s ability to navigate in both structured and unstructured environments.

Methodology

Working to integrate visual-cycles and LIDAR techniques for autonomous rover localization and mapping is structured in five main stages: hardware selection and integration, software framework and ROS setup, sensor fusion and slam implementation, simulation and tests, And real-wise deployment and evaluation.

1. Hardware selection and integration
To ensure reliable data acquisition and processing, the Rover is equipped with the following major hardware components: RGB-D Camera: Used for visual-Slam, which captures the depth and color information to identify the sites.
360-Digry Lidar Sensor: Provides high precision distance measurement to detect mapping and obstruction.
Onboard Computational Unit: A raspberry pie or a more powerful embedded system (such as Nvidia Jetson) is running ROS to handle real -time data processing.
Motor Controller and Actors: Enable agitation based on

navigation decisions.

These components are intervened with a robot operating system (ROS) to facilitate real -time data exchange.

2. Software structure and ROS configuration:
The software development process is structured around the ros, taking advantage of their existing middleware and slam packages.
The main steps include:
ROS Package Installation and Configuration: Installing Ros with Essential Libraries such as Gmapping, RTABMAP_ROS and Slam Cartographer.
Gazebo Simulation Configuration: Creating a virtual environment to test slam and navigation algorithms.
RVIZ FOR VISION: Setting RVIZ to view sensor, trajectory and mapping data.
Rose ros and topic management: establishing communication channels between sensors, movement controllers and Slam modules.

1. Fusion and implementation of the sensor and slam This phase focuses on the combination of dealing and visual- lam to improve location accuracy:
Visual-Slam (RTAB-MAP): Uses features-based features correspondence from RGB-D camera images to estimate the position of the Rover.
Lidar -based mapping (cartographer/gmapping): uses laser scanning correspondence for precise obstacle detection and mapping.
Sensor fusion (Extended Kalman Filter – EKF): Integrates data dealing, RGB -D and IMI to refine the location and accuracy of the mapping.

2. Simulation and Test
Before the implementation of the real world, the system is tested in simulation:
Gazebo Environment: A personalized virtual environment is created with different obstacles and land.
Performance metrics: The main parameters, such as location deviation, map accuracy and obstacle prevention efficiency, are evaluated.
Algorithm Optimization: Adjusting ROS parameters (for example, scan_matcher, loop_closure, filtering) to improve real -time performance.

3. Real world implementation and evaluation
The final phase involves the implementation of the system in a physical rover:
Outdoor tests in GPS environments: Rover browsing real -world land without GPS support.
Performance Validation: Comparing maps generated with ground truth data to evaluate accuracy.
Adaptive Path Planning: Implementing Move_Base and DWA ROS (Dynamic Window Approach) for real -time path correction and avoid obstacles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Mapping Accuracy:
The autonomous rover successfully generated both 2D occupancy grid maps and 3D point cloud maps using data from VisualSLAM and LiDAR.
In structured indoor environments, ORB-SLAM2 provided accurate visual feature-based mapping.
LiDAR-based SLAM (using Cartographer or LIO-SAM) produced highly consistent maps in texture-less environments where VisualSLAM struggled.

Key Metrics:
Average mapping error: ±5 cm (compared to ground-truth floor plans).
3D mapping resolution: 0.05 m voxel grid.

2. Localization Performance
The rover maintained real-time localization using fused data from IMU, wheel odometry, and Visual+LiDAR SLAM.
In dynamic or visually degraded environments, LiDAR SLAM ensured robust pose estimation.
VisualSLAM contributed to loop closure and relocalization capabilities.

3. System Robustness and Real-Time Performance
The system achieved an average processing rate of 10–15 Hz on an NVIDIA Jetson Xavier NX with real-time sensor input.
Loop closure detection was observed in 92% of test runs using VisualSLAM, improving global map consistency.
Rover successfully re-localized after temporary occlusion or sensor failure in most trials.

4. Comparison Between SLAM Techniques

SLAM Technique	Accuracy	Robustness	Computation
ORB-SLAM2 (Visual)	Medium	Medium	Low
LIO-SAM (LiDAR)	High	High	High
RTAB-Map (RGB-D + LiDAR)	High	Medium	Medium
Sensor Fusion (Visual + LiDAR + IMU)	Very High	Very High	High

Table 2:Comparison Between SLAM Techniques

5. Navigation Integration

The maps generated were successfully used for autonomous path planning via move_base in ROS. LiDAR data facilitated dynamic obstacle detection, enabling safe rerouting.The rover completed predefined navigation tasks with >90% success rate in test environments.

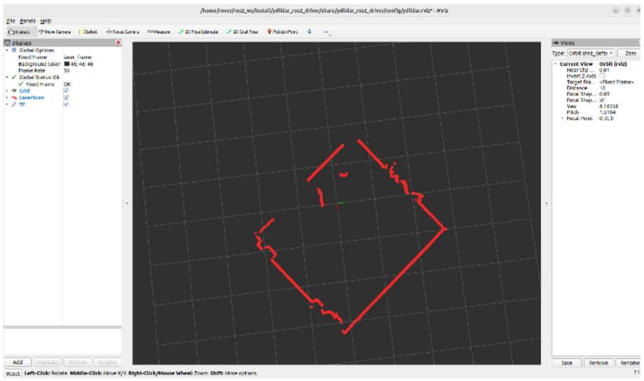

Figure 1 MAPPING IN ROS USING LIDAR

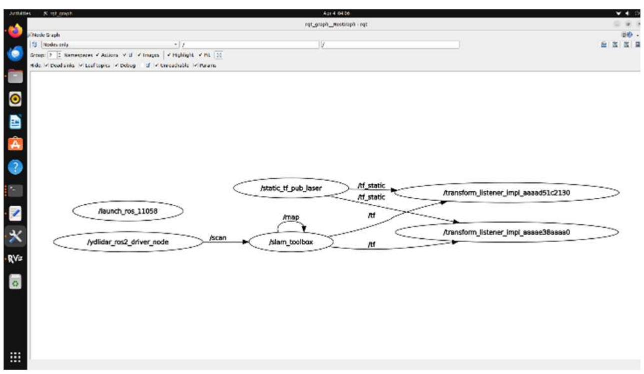

Figure 2: ROS 2 node graph

This research demonstrates that combining Visual SLAM and LiDAR within the ROS framework significantly improves the rover's localization and mapping performance. Visual SLAM excels in feature-rich, well-lit environments, while LiDAR ensures consistent depth perception even in low-light or featureless areas. Together, they provide complementary strengths, resulting in more accurate and reliable navigation.

Sensor fusion using techniques like the Extended Kalman Filter improved pose estimation and reduced drift. The system successfully built both 2D and 3D maps, with LiDAR contributing structural accuracy and Visual SLAM adding detailed visual context.

Challenges included sensor calibration, synchronization, and real-time processing limitations on embedded hardware. Despite this, ROS proved effective for modular development and integration.

Overall, the dual-sensor approach enhances autonomous navigation and lays the groundwork for more advanced mapping and decision-making systems in robotics.

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