

A Systematic Study Traffic Sign Detection System, Different Types of Road Traffic Sign and Various Techniques of Road Traffic Sign Recognition

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Abstract

By giving real-time information on road conditions and regulatory signage, traffic sign detecting systems enable autonomous driving technologies and contribute significantly to traffic flow and safety. To make choices and navigate safely, these systems depend on precise awareness of their surroundings, including traffic signs. Autonomous vehicles can perceive and react to road conditions more effectively by recognizing and understanding traffic signs, which eventually results in safer and more effective transportation. When stop signs or traffic signals are about to appear, when a vehicle is about to violate the speed limit, or when certain road circumstances call for caution, a driver assistance system equipped with traffic sign detection can sound a warning. This facilitates improved situational awareness and decision-making for drivers and driver assistance systems.

Keywords: Traffic Sign Detection System; Traffic Signs; Traffic Sign Recognition

1. Introduction

A traffic sign detection system is a technological solution designed to identify and interpret traffic signs, typically using cameras and image processing algorithms. These systems play a crucial role in enhancing road safety by automatically recognizing various types of signs such as speed limits, stop signs, pedestrian crossings, and more. By analysing visual data captured by cameras mounted on vehicles or at strategic locations, the system can detect signs in real-time, providing valuable information to drivers or integrated autonomous vehicle systems. Through the combination of computer vision techniques and machine learning algorithms, traffic sign detection systems can recognize accurately signs under diverse environmental conditions, contributing to improved traffic management and overall road safety. Traffic sign detection refers to the process of automatically identifying and recognizing traffic signs in images or video streams captured by cameras, typically mounted on vehicles or at fixed locations such as intersections. It is a crucial component of advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and autonomous

vehicles. Traffic sign detection systems play a critical role in enhancing road safety, improving traffic flow, and enabling autonomous driving technologies by providing real-time information about road conditions and regulatory signage.

2. Traffic Signs

Traffic signs play a crucial role in maintaining road safety and ensuring smooth traffic flow. They are designed to provide essential information to drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists on the road. Traffic signs are visual representations of information that guide road users. They are designed to communicate important messages to drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians on the road. Traffic signs are an essential component of road safety and are used to control traffic, give warn directions. of hazards, and provide information. Understanding the different types of traffic signs and their meanings is key for safety on the road; both as a pedestrian and a driver. There is a large variety of road signs you might encounter while driving, and familiarizing yourself with the differences between them will help you make safe



decisions faster and with ease. Each type of sign you encounter on the road serves a purpose.

2.1 Functions of Traffic Signs

Traffic signs serve several functions on the road. They are designed to provide essential information to drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, which include;

- a. **Regulating traffic flow**: Traffic signs are used to control traffic flow, ensure road safety and prevent accidents.
- b. **Hazard Warnings**: Traffic signs warn drivers of potential hazards on the road such as sharp turns, steep inclines, and road works.
- c. **Providing directions**: Traffic signs give directions and provide information on the location of destinations, such as hospitals, petrol stations, and airports.
- d. **Conveying rules and regulations**: Traffic signs convey rules and regulations that drivers must adhere to while on the road, such as speed limits, no-parking zones, and no-entry zones.

2.2 Types of Traffic Signs

2.2.1 Regulatory Signs (White or Red Background)

Regulatory road signs are an important type of traffic sign to know, as they establish rules and regulations that all road users must adhere to. Regulatory signs serve as explicit directives that specify speed limits, parking restrictions, and other mandatory rules essential for maintaining order and safety on the road.

Most regulatory signs have a white background, however, some regulatory signs such as stop signs and yield signs have a red background. Regulatory signs with a red background will have a white legend, and those with a white background will have a red or black legend, or a combination of the two. Examples of Regulatory signs:

- i. **Stop Signs:** Stop signs are regulatory road signs that serve the crucial purpose of instructing drivers to come to a complete stop at an intersection or before crossing a designated point on the road. Their primary function is to control traffic flow and ensure safety at potentially hazardous or busy areas.
- ii. **Speed Limit Signs :** Speed limit signs play an important role in ensuring roadway safety.

These regulatory signs establish the maximum allowable speed for vehicles within specific areas, creating a balance between efficient mobility and accident prevention. Figure 1 shows example of Regulatory Signs.



Figure 1 Examples of Regulatory Signs

2.2.2 Warning Signs (Yellow Background)

Warning signs are an essential category of road signs designed to inform drivers and other road users of potential hazards, dangers, or changes in road conditions. The primary purpose of warning signs is to provide advance notice and encourage caution, so that drivers can take appropriate steps to avoid accidents or navigate challenges safely. They are also commonly made in diamond shapes, which helps to catch the attention of drivers and ensure they're warned of any upcoming hazards. Examples of Warning Signs:

- i. Chevron Alignment Sign: Chevron alignment signs are road signs used to indicate a sharp change in the direction of the road, such as a curve or bend. A distinctive chevron-shaped arrow points in the direction of the upcoming curve, providing advanced warning to drivers to help them navigate the road safely, reducing the risk of an accident.
- **ii. Deer Crossing Sign:** Deer crossing signs are placed on roadways in areas with high deer populations. These signs alert drivers to the potential presence of deer crossing the road,



prompting them to exercise caution and be prepared to slow down or stop to avoid collisions with these unpredictable wildlife animals.

Dead end sign clearly marks dead end so driver can understand dead end streets. Pedestrian crossing signs warn driver to prepare to slow down or stop in areas of high pedestrian activity. Figure 2 shows example of some warning Signs.



Figure 2 Examples of Warning Signs

2.2.3 Guide Signs (Green, Blue or Brown Background)

Guide signs are a category of traffic signs that provide valuable information to drivers to help them get around safely and efficiently. They offer information about destinations, distances, and directions, guiding motorists to specific locations such as cities, tourist attractions, and services. Additionally, guide signs may include exit numbers and route markers, aiding travellers in making informed choices and staying on the right path.

These signs typically have green backgrounds with white legends, but can also be found with blue or brown backgrounds. These signs are most commonly seen along interstates and highways, especially near exits or junctions. Examples of Guide Signs:

i. East Route Marker Sign: East route marker signs serve as directional indicators to guide road users along a specific route or highway heading east. These signs are instrumental in helping drivers maintain their desired course and stay oriented as they navigate roadways. Other cardinal direction signs can be utilized to indicate other directions, such as North, South, and West.

ii. Truck Route Marker Sign: Truck route marker signs are designed to indicate roads and routes suitable for trucks. These signs are instrumental in guiding commercial truck traffic away from roads with weight or size restrictions, helping to reduce accidents/damage and ensure the safety of all road users. Figure 3 shows example of some guide Signs.



Figure 3 Examples of Guide Signs

2.2.4 Services and Recreation signs (Blue, Brown or White Background)

Service and recreation signs are designed to inform travellers about nearby services and recreational facilities. They guide motorists to essential amenities like gas stations, rest areas, food, and lodging options, ensuring that drivers can make timely and informed stops during their journeys. Similar to guide signs, these signs typically feature white legends on blue, brown backgrounds. In some cases, such as directional parking signs, the background of the sign is white and the legend is green. Examples of services and recreation signs:

i. Parking Area Sign (Diagonal Arrow): Parking are signs are helpful tools to indicate the direction in which parking is found in a specific area. The diagonal arrow helps drivers



easily find the permitted parking direction causing less confusion and easier navigation.

ii. Hospital Sign: Hospital signs are helpful tools designed to guide individuals to healthcare facilities. These signs often feature the universal "H" symbol and/or directional arrows, ensuring that patients, visitors, and emergency services personnel can easily locate hospitals in emergency situations or when seeking medical services. Figure 4 shows example of Service Signs.



Figure 4 Examples of Service Signs

2.2.5 Temporary Traffic Control (Orange Background)



Figure 5 Examples of Temporary Traffic Signs

Temporary traffic control signs are used in a variety of settings. These signs play an important role in managing and redirecting traffic during road construction, maintenance work, or special events. They can provide information on detours, speed limits, lane closures, and any other temporary conditions. Temporary traffic control signs are helpful for minimizing confusion and potential hazards. Since adhering to these signs is critical for safety, they are generally orange in colour to stand out and grab the attention of road users, especially in construction zones. Examples of Temporary Control Signs:

- i. One Lane Bridge Sign: One lane bridge sign is usually displayed to alert drivers to upcoming single-lane bridges. These signs prepare motorists for reduced traffic capacity and navigating the right-of-way on a bridge.
- **ii. Divided Highway Sign:** Divided highway signs are crucial for informing drivers that they are approaching or entering a section of road with a physical barrier, such as a median or barrier, separating the opposing lanes of traffic. Figure 5 shows example of Temporary traffic Signs.
- 2.2.6 Pedestrian and Bicycle (Many Background Colours)



Figure 6 Examples of Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossing Signs

Pedestrian and bicycle signs are designed to enhance the safety of both bicyclists and pedestrians on the road. These include, but are not limited to, pedestrian crossing signs, bicycle crossing signs, yield to pedestrian signs, playground signs, school crosswalk signs, and bike lane signs. These signs provide clear directives for both drivers and other road users to guide them while sharing the roadway.Pedestrian and bicycle signs utilize several different coloured backgrounds because they can serve a wide range of purposes. They also utilize different shapes, depending on if



the sign is meant as a warning, traffic regulation, or guide. Figure 6 shows example of Bicycle and Pedestrian crossing Signs.

3. Research Methodology

A normal road in the middle of most cities in the world like the one shown in Figure 7, presents a complex scene. It may include people, vehicles with different colours, a number of shops and their signs, and a number of traffic signs to control the traffic on this road. Fundamentally, if a person is asked to point out the traffic sign in the image, they can do this easily. However, from the point of view of computer vision, this image contains some difficulties which are addressed here:

- a. The existence of a number of similar objects (either in colour or in shape) in the scene.
- b. The presence of obstacles in the scene which can partially or totally occlude the sign.
- c. The amount of information in the scene is vast and time is needed to analyse the scene and extract the desired information.



Figure 7 Traffic Scene

3.1 Road Traffic Sign Detection and Recognition

The goal of traffic sign detection is to accurately locate and classify various types of traffic signs, such as speed limit signs, stop signs, yield signs, and directional signs. This involves several steps: Figure 8 shows the block diagram of road sign detection and recognition. Detection Phase consist of Image Acquisition, Colour Segmentation and Shape analysis, Road Sign Extraction. Recognition phase consist of features values, classification, validation.

3.1.1 Detection Phase

- **1. Image Acquisition**: This initial step involves capturing images, typically using a camera mounted on a vehicle or along the roadside.
- 2. Colour Segmentation and Shape Analysis: The captured images are processed to identify and segment regions based on color and shape. This helps in isolating potential road signs from the background.
- **3.** Road Sign Extraction: From the segmented image, the actual road signs are extracted. This step isolates the road sign from other objects or noise in the image.

3.1.2 Recognition Phase



Figure 8 Block Diagram of Road Sign Recognition and Classification

- 1. **Features Values**: The extracted road signs are analyzed to determine specific feature values, such as edges, corners, shapes, colors, and other distinctive characteristics.
- 2. Classification: Based on the extracted features, the road signs are classified into predefined categories (e.g., stop sign, speed limit, yield, etc.) using machine learning algorithms or pattern recognition techniques.





Validation: The final step involves validating 3. the classification results to ensure accuracy and reliability. This might include comparing the classified sign with a database of known signs or using additional criteria to confirm the classification. In practical applications, the detected and classified traffic signs are integrated into the larger context of the surrounding environment and used to inform decision-making processes, such as autonomous vehicle navigation or driver assistance systems.

In summary, the figure 8 outlines a systematic approach to detecting, extracting, and recognizing road signs through a series of image processing and classification steps [1-2].

4. Literature Review of Traffic Sign Detection and Recognition

Road sign recognition has become one of the important research fields. From that time until the present day many research groups have been active in the field and have tried to solve this problem using different approaches. There are various methods of detection of road traffic signs, presented by many researchers [4-5].

4.1 Colour-Based Detection of Traffic Signs

- i. Ghica et al. [26] used thresholding to segment pixels in a digital image into object pixels and background pixels. The technique is based on calculating the distance in RGB space between the pixel colour and a reference colour. The unknown pixel is considered as an object pixel if it is close enough to the reference colour.
- Estevez and Kehtarnavas [27] suggested an ii. algorithm capable of recognising the Stop, Yield, and Do-Not-Enter traffic warning signs. consists of six modules: colour It segmentation, edge localisation, RGB differencing, edge detection. histogram extraction, and classification. Colour segmentation is only used to localise red edge areas; the segmentation is performed sparsely; and interpixel segmentation distance is determined.
- iii. Yuille et al. [28] designed a sign finder system to help visually impaired people. The author

assumed that signs consist of two colours (one for the sign, and another for the text), and sign boundaries are stereotyped (rectangle, hexagonal). Based on a set of tests to determine seeds, a region growing algorithm is used to detect hypothesis regions [21-25].

- iv. Yabuki et al. [29] proposed a method to detect the road sign by using the colour distribution of the sign in XYZ colour space. They constructed a colour similarity map from the colour distribution, which is then incorporated into the image function of an active net model. It is possible to extract the road sign when it is wrapped up in an active net [8].
- v. Fang et al. [3] calculated the hue value of the HSI colour space for every pixel, and the similarity between this hue and the stored hue values of particular colours in road signs is calculated. The maximum degree of similarity is then considered. This result is fed into a perceptual analyser to specify the colour of the sign [10].
- vi. Shadeed et al. [30] proposed an algorithm to detect road signs using the HSV and YUV colour spaces. The system is implemented in two stages. In the first stage [13-15], the RGB image is converted into YUV colour space, and a histogram of the Y channel is equalized, and then a new RGB is constructed. Colour segmentation is achieved in the second stage by converting the RGB image generated by the first stage into HSV and YUV colour spaces, and then applying a suitable value of threshold to H and UV values. Then the two results are combined by an AND operation.
- vii. Bénallal and Meunier [31] developed a computer vision system which is embedded in a car and capable of identifying road signs. Many experiments were carried out with several road signs to study the stability of colours under different illumination conditions. Segmentation is achieved by the RGB colour space. It is shown that differences between red and green and blue components respectively are high and could be used with an appropriate threshold for segmentation [18].

4.2 Shape-Based Detection of Traffic Signs

Techniques using shapes could be a good alternative when colours are missing or when it is hard to detect colours. Shape-based techniques should be able to avoid difficulties related to invoking colours for sign detection and robust to handle in-plane transformations such as translation, scaling and rotation. Much effort has been exerted to develop these techniques and the results are very promising. In the following reviewed papers the authors used shapes as the major source of information to detect traffic signs:

- i. Piccioli et al. [32] and Parodi and Piccioli [7] detected road signs by using a priori information of the supposed position of the sign in an image. A Canny edge detector was applied to the search region, and geometrical analysis was carried out on clusters of edgepoints to extract the desired shape. The inner region of each candidate was tested against the database of signs by template matching. The correlation of the edge 28 pixels with an appropriate set of circular masks was used to detect circles. Triangles were detected by grouping edges in vertical, horizontal, and oblique segments.
- ii. Priese et al. [33] suggested a real-time traffic sign recognition system in which traffic signs are identified by the interpretation of their ideograms realised by different modules in the recogniser. There are modules for the position and direction of arrows, a module for the numerals, and another for prohibition signs, speed limits, and arrows on mandatory signs.
- iii. Aoyagi and Asakura [34, 35] proposed a method to detect the traffic signs using brightness only. The object is extracted from the background using the Laplacian filter after using a smoothing filter to remove the noise. To obtain the binary image, a certain threshold is applied and detection is carried out by genetic algorithms with search ability for the circular pattern which is given as gene information.

- iv. Adorni et al. [36] used Cellular Neural Networks to identify road traffic signs. A gradient operator is used to extract the border pixels from the image, followed by the application of a low value threshold to remove small gradient intensity pixels, and then using a 5x5 CNN single–iteration filter to perform the pre-selection of pixel with respect to the neighbouring pixels.
- Gavril [37] described a method to classify v. road signs based on template matching using distance transforms. The method could detect circular and triangular signs. Edge orientations are used as features which the algorithm depends upon. Different templates with radii between 7-18 pixels are used for circles and triangles. Each template is partitioned into 8-typed templates based on edge orientation. The method is used to detect road signs both on-line and off-line with a detection rate of about 90%.
- vi. Schiekel [38] addressed the problem of recognising road signs in poor light conditions such as twilight, where colour information is not sufficient. The original image is processed by two Sobel filters, the gradient magnitude and orientation are calculated, and edge pixels are identified by thresholding the magnitude image. Edge pixels are segmented in two steps organised hierarchically, in which low-level features of pixels such as gradient orientations are linked to high-level features such 29 as triangles and ellipses. The recognition rate is 95% for triangular and elliptical signs, and 93% for rectangular signs.
- vii. Huang and Hsu [39-41] developed a road sign detection and recognition system based on the Matching Pursuit (MP) method. In the detection phase a region of interest is selected according to a priori information. A search to extract triangular or circular shapes is achieved in the region of interest (ROI) area by using template matching. The detection rate of triangular signs is 93% and 95% for circular signs [42-48].



4.3 Colour-Shape-Based Detection of Road Signs

By invoking a combination of colour and shape, it is possible to take advantage of both techniques to detect traffic and road signs. Each approach has its own positive properties and difficulties. However, an adaptive hybrid approach can invoke one technique under certain circumstances and invoke the other under different circumstances. Even when this adaptive approach is not in use, combining colour and shape in any sign detection method has the advantage of using the information available from both sides of the problem. As both colour and shape represent information which should not be neglected, it is also possible to avoid many problems and disadvantages. Colour-shape-based systems were used in the following papers:

- i. Hibi [49] used hue and saturation in an improved HSL colour space to recognise road signs in night images. Dynamic thresholds are used for both hue and saturation histograms. The final binary image is generated by combining hue and saturation images by logical addition. Pixels of the binary image are allocated into seven boundaries depending on the target pixel and its neighbours. These boundary patterns are used to specify the outline shapes of the road sign.
- ii. Piccioli et al. [50] showed two different algorithms for the detection of road signs. In the first one, grey-levels are used to detect road signs according to simple geometrical criteria. In the second one, hue and saturation in a HSV colour space are used. The 31 image is divided into 16×16 pixel regions, and each region is classified as 1 or 0 depending on whether the number of labelled pixels exceeds a certain threshold. A search is carried out only for regions labelled with '1'. Shape detection is based on the geometrical analysis of edge contours.
- iii. Azami et al. [51] used the HSV colour space to detect the route guidance sign (RGS). Automatic threshold is chosen for hue, saturation, and value. A connected

component analysis is applied to choose the RGS candidate according to size and shape.

- iv. Jiang and Choi [9] used Fuzzy rules to transform the colour image into a grey-scale function, and a binary image is obtained to find any landmark in the enhanced colour image, in which enhancement is achieved by hue invariance. They used Nrgb colour space, thresholds, and fuzzy rules to detect the red and blue colours. Warning signs, which are considered here, are identified by extracting the three corners of triangles. A fuzzy method is developed to detect these corners by defining two member functions to specify the possibility of pixels inside two masks to create a corner. The other two corners are detected in the same way. The masks are rectified to eliminate the problem caused by damaged signs.
- Vitabile and Sorbello [6] proposed a road sign v. recognition system which consists of two modules: a sign detection module and a sign classification module. Detection is based on sign colour and shape. RGB images are converted into HSV colour space which is divided into a number of subspaces (regions). The S and V components are used to find the region in which the hue is located. The binary image generated by the former step is sent to the shape extractor to extract the road sign depending on the shape knowledge of the road sign. The image is compared with an internal database containing different sign shape templates and the template with maximum correlation is selected.
- vi. Miura et al. [17] used area filters to binarise white regions in speed signs. Since binarization is sensitive to threshold, they binarised multiple times using different thresholds. By analysing the actual distribution of data in the YUV colour space, they could determine the right threshold. Shape information is used for the screening of 32 candidates. A search area is set around each candidate detected by the previous step

and edges are extracted and tested for the presence of a specific shape [52].

- vii. Paclik et al. [12] segmented colour images by using HSV colour space and selecting a certain threshold. The thresholds are setup by using real scene images which are collected under different illumination conditions. Shape analysis is carried out by calculating several moment invariant features such as unscaled spatial moments, unscaled central moments, normalised unscaled central moments, and compactness which are used to construct the feature vector used in the shape analysis [54].
- Vitabile et al. [20] proposed a dynamic, viii. optimised HSV sub-space, according to the s and v values of the processed images. Colour segmentation is achieved by applying standard HSV colour filtering, generating sub-images to calculate seed pixels, and aggregating pixels depending on the seed saturation values by applying a region growing algorithm. Shape detection took place by using similarity coefficients between the segmented region and sample images for road signs. A segmentation rate of 94.6% for red circular signs, 86.3% for red triangular signs, and 95.7% for blue circular signs is achieved.

4.4 Recognition and Classification of Traffic Sign

There are several techniques used for the recognition and classification of road and traffic signs. These techniques are summarised follows: **Neural Networks:** Neural networks are widely used to classify traffic signs. There are many reasons for this, but primarily because of the high accuracy achieved by this classifier. Research in neural networks was at its peak in the 1990s as knowledge of using neural networks was very fashionable at that time. A review of the papers using neural networks as a classifier is given here:

i. Kellmeyer and Zwahlenused back propagation neural network to recognise warning signs. The input to the network which was a 10x10 boundary square representing the yellow region inside the warning sign, is fed to a 100 neuron input layer. The output-layer contains two outputs either "sign" or "non-sign". A hidden layer of 30 nodes was used. The system could detect 55% of warning signs in 55 images. For large signs, 86% of the signs could be detected.

- Ghica et al. [26] carried out recognition by a neural network which consisted of three sub-networks, a classification sub-network, winner-takes-all sub-network (Hopfield network), and a validation sub-network.
- iii. Aoyagi and Asakura [34] used neural networks with an input pattern of 18x18 pixels fed to a three-layer network consisting of 324 neurons in the input layer, fifteen neurons in the hidden layer, and three neurons in the output layer. The system could detect and classify 23 out of 24 speed signs, and 23 out of 24 other signs.
- iv. In Vitabile and Sorbello's [6] system, classification is carried out by normalising the sign image to 36x36 pixels, and using two different multi-layer neural networks designed with a similar topology of 432-144-10 to extract the pictograms of the road sign under consideration. The first one is used to extract the circular red signs, and the second to extract the red triangular warning signs. Depending on the shape of the sign which is extracted in the former stage, one of these two classifiers is invoked.
- v. Vitabile et al. [20] used a neural network to classify the candidate sign regions according to the information inside it. Classification is carried out by a feed forward neural network classifier, where a 36x36 pixels candidate is fed to the neural network input. A classification rate of 84% for red circular signs, 88% for red triangular signs, and 100% for blue circular signs are achieved respectively.
- vi. Vitabile et al. [11, 19] used a multi-layer perceptron neural network to classify the road signs. The system consists of three

unrelated MLP neural network classifiers. The adopted topology is 432-144-O, where O=11 for warning sign, O=8 for prohibitory signs, and O=5 for mandatory direction signs. The system was tested on 620 outdoor images in 24 pictogram classes. o de la Escalera et al. [16, 53] used neural networks for the classification of the traffic signs following the Adaptive Resonance Theory ART1.

- vii. Fang et al. [3] carried out classification using the conceptual component module in which an ART2 network with a configurable long term memory was used to extract certain patterns from the categorical feaItures fed from the perceptual module. These patterns are fed to another two-layer neural network to extract the road signs.
- viii. Nakamura et al. [56] used neural networks to detect the position and size of speed limit signs. A neural network classifier is used for character recognition of speed limits. A detection rate of 100% and a recognition rate of 98.3% were achieved.

Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving field of autonomous vehicle systems, traffic sign detection plays a crucial role in ensuring safe and efficient navigation. Various detection systems, including machine learningbased methods, deep learning algorithms, and sensor fusion techniques, have been developed to this challenge. Traditional machine address learning methods utilize features such as color, shape, and texture to classify traffic signs, while deep approaches, learning particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have significantly enhanced accuracy and robustness by learning complex features directly from images. Sensor fusion combines data from cameras, LiDAR, and radar to improve detection reliability under diverse environmental conditions. Despite these advancements, challenges remain in handling occlusions, varying lighting conditions, and weather impacts. Continuous research is aimed at improving real-time performance and reducing computational requirements, making traffic sign detection systems increasingly reliable. The integration of advanced AI techniques with highresolution sensors promises to further enhance the capabilities of autonomous vehicles, ensuring safer roads and more efficient traffic management in the future.

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e ISSN: 2584-2854 Volume: 02 Issue: 07 July 2024 Page No: 2457-2469

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e ISSN: 2584-2854

Issue: 07 July 2024

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