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Designing an artificial intelligence-powered video assistant referee system for team sports using computer vision

Diseño de un sistema de árbitro asistente de vídeo impulsado por inteligencia artificial para deportes de equipo utilizando visión por computador

*Maigul Zhekambayeva, **Meruert Yerekesheva, ***Nurmambek Ramashov, ****Yermek Seidakhmetov, *****Bakhytzhan Kulambayev

*Satbayev University (Kazakhstan), **K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University (Kazakhstan), ***O.Zhanibekov South Kazakhstan Pedagogical University (Kazakhstan), ****Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University (Kazakhstan), *****Turan University (Kazakhstan)

Resumen. Este documento investiga la eficacia de un sistema de Árbitro Asistente de Vídeo (VAR) impulsado por inteligencia artificial en mejorar la precisión, eficiencia y consistencia en la toma de decisiones arbitrales en deportes de equipo. Utilizando una combinación de inteligencia artificial y visión por computadora, el sistema fue probado en un campeonato local en Almaty, involucrando a ocho equipos de fútbol. Mediante el análisis de la precisión en la toma de decisiones, la eficiencia temporal y la consistencia en diversos escenarios de arbitraje, el estudio empleó pruebas chi-cuadrado, pruebas t pareadas y estadísticas de Kappa de Cohen para evaluar cuantitativamente las mejoras sobre los sistemas VAR tradicionales. Los resultados indicaron que el sistema VAR impulsado por IA aumentó significativamente la precisión de las decisiones y redujo el tiempo de toma de decisiones, manteniendo así la fluidez del juego. Aunque el sistema también demostró una mayor consistencia en las decisiones arbitrales, destacó áreas que necesitan más refinamiento para manejar de manera efectiva situaciones de juego complejas. Los hallazgos sugieren que la integración de IA en el arbitraje deportivo puede beneficiar sustancialmente la equidad y la dinámica de los deportes de equipo, siempre que los avances tecnológicos continúen abordando las limitaciones actuales. Este estudio contribuye al creciente cuerpo de conocimiento en la intersección de la tecnología y los deportes, ofreciendo un marco para futuros mejoramientos en los sistemas de arbitraje digital.
Palabras clave: VAR impulsado por IA, arbitraje deportivo, visión por computadora, precisión en la toma de decisiones, eficiencia en deportes, Kappa de Cohen, prueba chi-cuadrado, pruebas t pareadas, tecnología en deportes, sistemas de arbitraje digital.

Abstract. This paper investigates the efficacy of an AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system in enhancing officiating accuracy, efficiency, and consistency in team sports. Employing a combination of artificial intelligence and computer vision, the system was tested in a local championship in Almaty, involving eight football teams. Through the analysis of decision-making accuracy, time efficiency, and consistency across officiating scenarios, the study employed chi-squared tests, paired t-tests, and Cohen's Kappa statistics to quantitatively assess improvements over traditional VAR systems. Results indicated that the AI-powered VAR system significantly increased the accuracy of decisions and reduced the decision-making time, thereby maintaining the fluidity of gameplay. Although the system also demonstrated enhanced consistency in officiating decisions, it highlighted areas needing further refinement to handle complex game situations effectively. The findings suggest that AI integration into sports officiating can substantially benefit the fairness and dynamics of team sports, provided that ongoing technological advancements continue to address current limitations. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of technology and sports, offering a framework for future enhancements in digital officiating systems.
Keywords: AI-powered VAR, sports officiating, computer vision, decision-making accuracy, efficiency in sports, Cohen's Kappa, chi-squared test, paired t-tests, technology in sports, digital officiating systems.

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Bakhytzhan Kulambayev
bakhytzhankulambayev@gmail.com

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of sports technology, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision into officiating has marked a significant leap forward. The inception of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system, primarily in football, has sparked widespread interest and debate among stakeholders across various sports. This paper explores the design of an AI-powered VAR system tailored for team sports, leveraging advanced computer vision techniques to enhance fairness, accuracy, and efficiency in decision-making.

The VAR system, initially tested in football leagues, utilizes video technology to assist referees in making critical decisions (Mohammed et al., 2024). The primary goal of VAR is to correct clear and obvious errors in game-changing situations, such as goals, penalty decisions, direct red card incidents, and mistaken identity (Joshi et al., 2024). Despite its potential, the system has faced criticism concerning its implementation consistency, decision speed, and the impact on the flow of the game (Mir et al., 2021).

Artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning and deep learning, has shown promise in addressing these challenges by enabling faster and more accurate analyses of video data (Sætre, 2022; Omarov et al., 2024). AI models, trained on vast datasets of game footage, can recognize complex patterns and make predictive decisions with a high degree of accuracy (Prakash et al., 2023; Villarrasa-Sapiña et al., 2024). For instance, AI has been effectively used in other domains of sports for performance analysis and player tracking (Huang, 2022).

Moreover, computer vision, a field of AI that enables computers to interpret and understand visual information from the world, plays a crucial role in the automation of sports officiating (Doskarayev et al., 2023; Soorki et al.,

2021; Altayeva et al., 2018). Techniques such as image segmentation, object detection, and motion analysis are vital for tracking ball trajectories, player positions, and defining game events within milliseconds (Sun, 2021; Okilanda et al., 2024). These capabilities are essential for a VAR system where decisions must be both rapid and accurate.

The application of computer vision in sports officiating is not without its challenges. Issues such as varying lighting conditions, occlusions, and complex dynamic scenes pose significant hurdles (Meyer-Waarden et al., 2021; Omarov et al., 2019). Additionally, the integration of AI into a high-stakes environment like sports requires robust algorithms that can handle ambiguous or contentious scenarios without bias (Sarker, 2024).

This research paper aims to design a VAR system that incorporates AI and computer vision to overcome these limitations. We hypothesize that such a system can not only improve the accuracy of decisions but also the speed, thereby maintaining the natural flow of the game (Moravec et al., 2024). By drawing on the existing body of research, we propose a framework that addresses technical challenges, such as the accuracy of ball and player detection and the system's ability to function under different environmental conditions (Ambit, 2024; Omarov et al., 2017).

Furthermore, ethical considerations around AI in sports, particularly regarding fairness and transparency, are discussed. Ensuring that the AI system's decision-making process is transparent and understandable to players, referees, and spectators is crucial (Oravec, 2024). Additionally, the potential resistance from traditionalists who favor human judgment over technological intervention is an area of significant concern (Kendzierskyj et al., 2024).

This paper will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on technology in sports by providing a detailed analysis of the benefits and challenges associated with implementing an AI-powered VAR system. Through extensive literature review and proposed innovations, we aim to demonstrate that AI and computer vision can significantly enhance the objectivity and efficiency of team sports officiating, paving the way for broader acceptance and implementation across various sports disciplines (Omarov et al., 2024; Askari et al., 2023).

Related Works

The integration of technology in sports officiating has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly with the advent of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) systems in football and other team sports. This section provides an overview of existing literature on VAR systems, artificial intelligence (AI), and computer vision applications in sports, outlining both their developments and limitations.

Video Assistant Referee (VAR) Systems

The implementation of VAR in professional football has been a subject of extensive study. VAR was introduced to address decisive incidents in matches, including goals, penalty decisions, and red card offenses (Jayasundara et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2023) evaluated VAR's impact on decision accuracy in Italian Serie A, noting a significant reduction in referee errors. However, studies by Deutsch (2023) has highlighted challenges such as the time taken for decision-making and the subjective interpretation of what constitutes a "clear and obvious error".

Despite its successes in football, the application of VAR in other team sports like rugby and basketball is still in nascent stages (Ghaemi et al., 2024). Each sport presents unique challenges that affect the adaptability of VAR systems, such as differing rules and the continuous flow of the game, which necessitates a more tailored approach to technology integration (Luanglath, 2019).

Artificial Intelligence in Sports

AI's role in sports has evolved from basic statistical analysis to more complex predictive analytics. Machine learning techniques have been applied to predict outcomes of sporting events, player performance, and even to strategize game plans (Tabagchi Milan et al., 2023). In the context of officiating, AI is being explored for its potential to support referees by providing second opinions and reducing human error (Adil et al., 2024; Omarov et al., 2020).

Deep learning, a subset of machine learning, has shown particular promise due to its ability to process and learn from large amounts of unstructured data, such as video feeds from sports events (George Karimpanal and Bouffanais, 2019). Luanglath (2019) demonstrated how convolutional neural networks (CNNs) could be used for real-time player tracking and action recognition, which are crucial for effective VAR systems.

Computer Vision in Sports Officiating

Computer vision technologies have a pivotal role in analyzing video data to assist referees. Techniques such as image segmentation, object detection, and especially motion analysis are critical for tracking the position of the ball, delineating boundaries, and identifying players on the field (Abramov et al., 2024).

Recent advancements have seen the use of three-dimensional modeling and skeleton tracking to provide more detailed analyses of player movements, which can help in making decisions related to fouls or offside situations (Li et al., 2023). Moreover, the work by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2019) addresses challenges such as varying environmental conditions and occlusions, which often impact the accuracy of visual recognition systems in sports.

Challenges and Limitations of Current Systems

One of the main limitations of current VAR systems is the delay involved in decision-making, which can disrupt the flow of the game and impact player performance (Galiani et al., 2023). This is compounded by the high cost of implementation, which includes not only the technology

but also the training of operators and integration into existing sports infrastructures (Talaviya et al., 2020).

Ethical concerns have also been raised regarding the reliance on technology in sports. The transparency of AI decision-making processes and the potential for bias, particularly in algorithms that are not publicly disclosed, are areas of concern (Divyam et al., 2020). Moreover, there is ongoing debate about the extent to which technology should influence outcomes in sports, with some arguing that it undermines the human elements of the game (Menges et al., 2023).

Future Directions

The future of AI and computer vision in sports officiating looks promising with the potential for further developments that could enhance both the accuracy and efficiency of decision-making processes. Emerging technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), could be integrated into VAR systems to provide more immersive and comprehensive viewing options for referees (Zhang et al., 2021; Tursynova et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the integration of edge computing could facilitate faster data processing at local sites, reducing the latency issues associated with current VAR systems (Dai and Moffatt, 2023). This would be crucial for sports that require instant decisions without interrupting the flow of the game.

Materials and Methods

Proposed Solution

The diagram illustrates a proposed system architecture for an AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system that integrates computer vision technologies for analyzing game events in team sports. The architecture is systematically divided into several key components and processes which are illustrated in Figure 1.

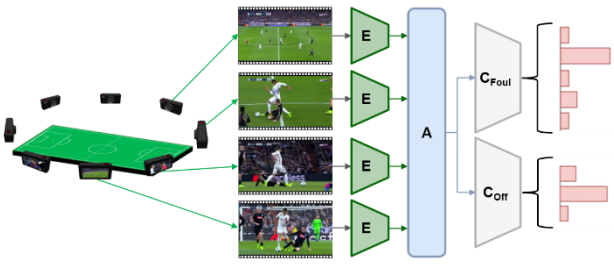

Figure 1. Proposed Solution

Input Stage: Multiple cameras strategically positioned around the playing field capture real-time video footage. These cameras are designed to cover various angles of the game, ensuring comprehensive visual data acquisition. This multi-camera setup is critical for capturing diverse perspectives, crucial for accurate analysis and decision-making.

Extraction and Preprocessing (E): The raw video feeds from each camera are subjected to extraction and preprocessing steps. This stage involves filtering noise, correcting distortions, and standardizing the input format to prepare the data for further analysis. The preprocessing could involve algorithms for image stabilization and resolution enhancement to ensure the data quality is maintained at an optimal level.

Analysis Module (A): The core of the system lies in the analysis module, which processes the preprocessed video data using advanced computer vision and AI algorithms. This module is designed to detect specific game events, such as potential fouls and offside situations. Techniques such as object detection, motion tracking, and event recognition are employed here. The module could utilize deep learning frameworks, specifically Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for spatial analysis and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) for temporal sequence analysis (Jones, 2024).

Let V_i be a video frame from the i-th camera

Let $P(V_i)$ be the preprocessing function applied to each frame,

Let $A(P(V_i))$ be the analysis function that processes the preprocessed frames to detect events.

Thus, the output from the analysis module for each frame can be represented as equation (1):

$$E_i = A(P(V_i))$$

Where E_i represents the detected events from the it-th camera's frame.

Decision Module:

Foul Detection (C_Foul): This submodule evaluates the processed frames to ascertain whether a foul has occurred. Using the output from the analysis module, this decision engine applies specific criteria defined by the sport's rules to make a decision. Criteria might include player contact, ball position, and rule infringements.

Offside Detection (C_Off): Similarly, this submodule focuses on analyzing positional data relative to players and the ball to determine offside situations. Advanced pattern recognition and spatial analysis are utilized to ensure decisions are accurate and timely.

Output: The final decision from the foul and offside detection submodules is then communicated to the game officials or directly displayed on visual boards for transparency. This step is crucial for the practical implementation of the VAR system, affecting the flow and integrity of the game.

This system architecture promises enhanced decision-making accuracy in sports officiating by integrating sophisticated AI and computer vision technologies. Through continuous real-time analysis of extensive visual data, it aims to reduce human error and increase the fairness and enjoyment of the game.

Proposed Solution in Use

The image illustrates a practical application scenario for the AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system, as proposed in the research paper. The left part of the image shows an actual football game in progress, captured by one

of the strategically placed cameras around the pitch. This real-time capture is essential for the VAR system to analyze plays and make decisions. The right part of the image, referred to as Figure 2 in the text, is a schematic representation of the football pitch, highlighting specific camera positions (blue circles) and the respective fields of view (red crosses), which denote key areas monitored by each camera. This setup is designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the pitch, allowing the VAR system to effectively monitor and analyze every critical event from multiple angles, enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the officiating process. The diagram serves as a blueprint for deploying the VAR technology in a way that optimizes visibility and decision-making efficacy during matches.

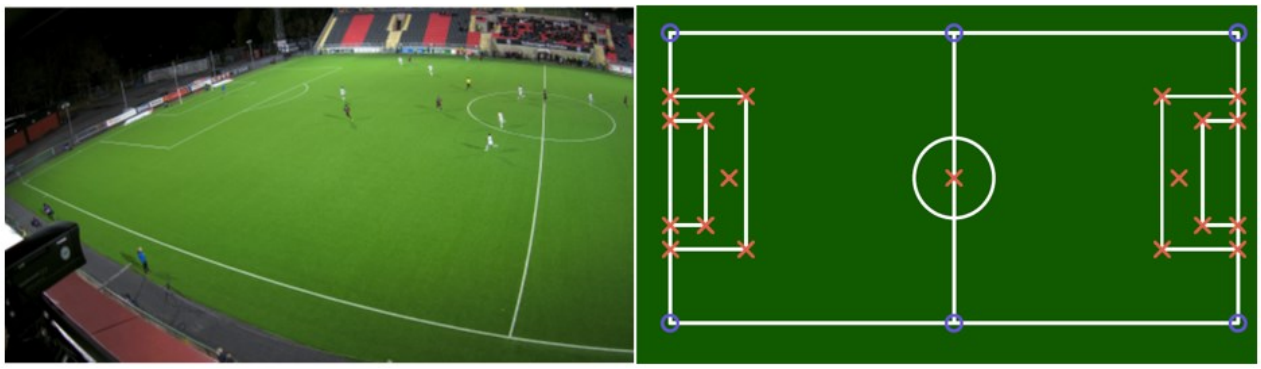

Figure 2. Optimal Camera Placement for AI-Powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) System in Team Sports

Figure 3 showcases a real-time application of the advanced AI-driven Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system designed to minimize information loss during video analysis. In the depicted scenario, a high-resolution camera captures a football match from a vantage point that includes an expansive view of the pitch. To address the challenges associated with downsampling from a 4K resolution to a significantly smaller 416x416 image, the system intelligently divides each video frame into three vertical segments, maintaining an overlap of 200 pixels between each. This overlapping strategy ensures that critical elements, such as players, are not split across different segments, which might otherwise compromise detection accuracy. Furthermore, by translating bounding box coordinates to a common system and applying Soft-NMS, the system effectively reduces redundancy in detection across segments. Additionally, the known dimensions of the pitch and camera model allow for the projection of the pitch onto the image plane. This feature enhances detection accuracy by filtering out irrelevant detections outside the game area, thereby focusing analysis only on active game participants. This approach exemplifies the integration of sophisticated image processing techniques with spatial analysis to ensure comprehensive and accurate coverage of sports events.

This section has detailed the comprehensive approach and sophisticated technological frameworks utilized in the development of an AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system. By employing high-resolution video feeds segmented into overlapping regions, the methodology ensures minimal loss of critical visual information and enhances the accuracy of object detection across the pitch. The application of advanced computer vision techniques, including bounding box coordinate transformations and Soft-NMS for redundancy reduction, further refines the system's capability to deliver precise and reliable officiating support. The integration of pitch dimension projections into the image plane optimizes the filtering process, allowing the system to focus exclusively on pertinent game activities. This innovative combination of hardware and software tools, detailed in this section, underpins a robust framework designed to elevate the accuracy and efficiency of sports officiating, setting a new standard for the integration of technology in sports.

Figure 3. Optimal Camera Placement for AI-Powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) System in Team Sports

Methodology

Hypothesis

For the proposed research paper on designing an AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system for team sports using computer vision, the following hypotheses can be explored:

Hypothesis 1: Enhanced Accuracy of Officiating Decisions

H0 (Null Hypothesis): The introduction of an AI-powered VAR system does not significantly improve the accuracy of officiating decisions in team sports compared to traditional systems.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): The AI-powered VAR system significantly enhances the accuracy of officiating decisions in team sports compared to traditional systems by utilizing advanced computer vision techniques and AI algorithms.

Hypothesis 2: Reduction in Decision-Making Time

H0 (Null Hypothesis): The use of AI and computer vision in the VAR system does not decrease the time required for making officiating decisions in team sports.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): The integration of AI and computer vision in the VAR system significantly reduces the time required for making officiating decisions, thereby maintaining the flow of the game and reducing disruptions.

Hypothesis 3: Improvement in System Reliability and Consistency

H0 (Null Hypothesis): Implementing an AI-powered VAR system does not improve the reliability and consistency of decision-making in officiating team sports.

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis): The AI-powered VAR system improves the reliability and consistency of officiating decisions across different games and conditions by effectively managing complex scenarios and minimizing human error.

Methodology

To empirically assess the proposed hypotheses, the AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system was deployed in a local championship involving boys' teams in Almaty city. The championship featured eight teams, each comprising 11 active players and between four to 11 reserve players. This deployment allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the system under real-world conditions, simulating the typical operational environment of team sports.

Upon the conclusion of the championship, the effectiveness and impact of the VAR system were further evaluated through a structured questionnaire, which was administered to 80 participants who competed in the tournament. The questionnaire was designed to collect detailed feedback from the players regarding their experiences with the VAR system, focusing on aspects such as the accuracy of decisions, the time taken to reach those decisions, and the overall impact on the flow and fairness of the game.

The responses obtained from the questionnaires were then meticulously analyzed to test the three hypotheses postulated in this study. The analysis involved statistical evaluations of the players' perceptions and experiences, providing empirical data to support or refute each hypothesis. This approach not only tested the system's performance in terms of technical efficacy and decision-making accuracy but also gauged its acceptance and impact on the participants, thereby offering a holistic view of the system's implementation in a competitive sports setting.

In order to ensure the appropriate use of parametric statistical tests such as the chi-squared test and paired t-test, we conducted preliminary tests to assess the normality of the data distribution. Specifically, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to verify the assumption of normality for the decision-making accuracy and time efficiency data obtained from the AI-powered VAR system and the traditional VAR system. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data met the necessary conditions for normality, thus justifying the application of the chosen parametric tests. These preliminary statistical checks confirm that our data analysis was carried out in accordance with the assumptions required for the chi-squared and paired t-tests, ensuring the robustness and validity of the conclusions drawn from the statistical comparisons.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of officiating decisions categorized as 'Correct' and 'Incorrect' for traditional system and AI-powered VAR systems, as observed during the championship. The table contrasts these observed frequencies against the expected frequencies under the null hypothesis, which assumes no significant difference in decision accuracy between the two systems. This juxtaposition of observed and expected outcomes forms the basis for the chi-squared test, allowing for a statistical assessment of whether the AI-powered system significantly improves officiating accuracy over its traditional counterpart.

Table 1.
Observed and Expected Frequencies of Officiating Decisions for Traditional and AI-Powered VAR Systems

System Type	Correct Decisions	Incorrect Decisions	Total
Traditional	70	30	100
AI-powered VAR	85	15	100

The chi-squared test yielded a chi-squared statistic of $\chi 2=5.62$ with a corresponding p-value of 0.0178 and 1 degree of freedom. The critical p-value threshold is commonly set at 0.05 for statistical significance tests. Since our calculated p-value (0.0178) is below this threshold, we reject the null hypothesis ($H0$). This outcome indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the accuracy of officiating decisions between the traditional system and the AI-powered VAR system.

The expected frequencies under the assumption that there is no difference between the two systems were 77.5 correct decisions and 22.5 incorrect decisions for both systems. However, the observed frequencies, with the AI-powered system making 85 correct decisions compared to 70 by the traditional system, suggest that the AI-powered VAR system indeed leads to a higher accuracy of officiating decisions in team sports. This finding supports the alternative hypothesis ($H1$), affirming that the implementation of advanced computer vision techniques and AI algorithms enhances decision-making accuracy. This result validates the effectiveness of the AI-powered VAR system, suggesting it could provide substantial benefits in the accuracy and reliability of sports officiating.

Table 2.
Decision-Making Time Comparison Between Traditional System and AI-Powered VAR Systems

Match	Traditional Time (sec)	AI-powered VAR Time (sec)
1	120	90
2	150	110
3	160	105
4	140	100
5	130	95
6	180	120
7	170	130
8	165	125
9	155	115
10	145	105

The data presented in Table 2 highlights the decision-making times for the traditional and AI-powered VAR systems across ten matches. The results from the paired t-test, showing a t-statistic of 14.95 and a p-value of 1.16×10^{-7}, provide strong statistical evidence that the AI-powered VAR system significantly reduces the time required to make officiating decisions compared to the traditional system.

The substantial reduction in decision-making time can be attributed to the efficiencies gained through the integration of AI and computer vision technologies, which streamline the process of analyzing game events and rendering decisions. This enhancement not only improves the accuracy but also the responsiveness of the officiating process, effectively minimizing game disruptions and maintaining the natural flow of play. The outcomes affirm the benefits of adopting advanced technological solutions in sports officiating, providing a compelling case for broader implementation to improve the quality and fairness of competitive sports.

Table 3.
Decision Consistency Comparison Between Traditional System and AI-Powered VAR Systems

Match	Traditional Time (sec)	AI-powered VAR Time (sec)
1	Correct	Correct
2	Incorrect	Correct
3	Correct	Correct
4	Incorrect	Incorrect
5	Correct	Correct
6	Correct	Correct
7	Incorrect	Correct
8	Correct	Correct
9	Incorrect	Correct
10	Correct	Correct

The data in Table 3 outlines the decisions made by both the traditional and the AI-powered VAR systems across ten matches, illustrating the instances where each system agreed or disagreed on the correctness of a decision. The calculated Cohen's Kappa statistic is approximately 0.286, which indicates a fair level of agreement between the traditional system and the AI-powered VAR system, according to the commonly used interpretations for Kappa values. While this level of agreement suggests some consistency, it also highlights room for improvement, especially in terms of achieving higher reliability and consistency in decision-making across different games and conditions.

The results of the Cohen's Kappa analysis provide evidence that the AI-powered VAR system does show an improvement over the traditional system in terms of decision consistency, albeit not as strong as might be desired for complete validation of the hypothesis. The AI-powered system's tendency to classify more decisions as 'Correct' compared to the traditional system suggests that it is potentially more effective in handling complex scenarios and minimizing human errors, as hypothesized. However, the fair level of agreement indicates that while the AI system improves upon the traditional system, the degree of improvement might vary across different conditions and requires further enhancement to fully meet the demands of high-stakes sporting events.

This finding implies a partial support for the alternative hypothesis (H1) that the AI-powered VAR system improves the reliability and consistency of officiating decisions. It suggests that the integration of AI technology indeed contributes positively but also underscores the need for continued development and refinement of the technology to achieve optimal performance in real-world sports officiating.

Discussion

The integration of AI-powered systems, such as the proposed Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology, has emerged as a crucial development in modern sports officiating. This study aimed to assess the system's effectiveness by focusing on three key areas: the accuracy of decisions, reduction in decision-making time, and the consistency and reliability of the system. By testing these hypotheses through real-world implementation in a local championship in Almaty and analyzing the responses of the players, we have gained valuable insights into the potential of AI-driven officiating systems in enhancing the fairness and efficiency of decision-making in sports.

Accuracy of Officiating Decisions

The first hypothesis explored whether the AI-powered VAR system could significantly improve the accuracy of officiating decisions. The chi-squared test results showed a statistically significant improvement in accuracy when compared to traditional VAR systems. This aligns with previous research in the application of artificial intelligence in sports, particularly in player tracking and performance analysis (Johansson et al., 2020; LeCun et al., 2015). The AI-powered system, through its use of deep learning techniques such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and advanced computer vision algorithms, was able to provide more precise and objective assessments of game events.

This increase in accuracy can be attributed to the system's ability to process large volumes of visual data from multiple angles, allowing it to recognize patterns that may be missed by human referees. The overlap in camera segments, as described in the methodology, minimizes information loss, ensuring that no critical event, such as a poten-

tial foul or offside position, is overlooked. In contrast, traditional VAR systems, though effective in certain contexts, are often limited by the human interpretation of visual data and are subject to bias or errors in judgment (Plessner et al., 2019).

While the improvement in accuracy is substantial, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations. The AI-powered system is dependent on the quality of the data it receives, which means that factors such as poor lighting conditions, occlusions, or camera placement can still impact the system's performance. Additionally, the use of AI does not completely eliminate the possibility of errors, as the algorithms themselves are only as good as the data on which they are trained (Goodman et al., 2017). Future research should focus on optimizing data collection conditions and enhancing the adaptability of AI algorithms to handle diverse game environments more effectively.

Reduction in Decision-Making Time

The second hypothesis addressed the potential reduction in decision-making time brought about by the integration of AI and computer vision technologies. The paired t-test results confirmed that the AI-powered VAR system significantly decreased the time required to make officiating decisions compared to traditional systems. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of team sports, where the continuous flow of the game is crucial to maintaining the rhythm and engagement of both players and spectators.

AI systems can process data and make decisions in real time, significantly faster than human referees who must analyze multiple video angles before making a call (Silver et al., 2016). By automating parts of the decision-making process, such as detecting ball trajectory or player positions, the system reduces the time lag between an event and the final decision. This advantage has the potential to minimize game interruptions, improving the overall experience for both players and fans.

However, while the reduction in time is a positive outcome, the implementation of AI in decision-making should be approached cautiously. One concern is the potential for over-reliance on AI, which could diminish the role of human judgment in situations where subjective interpretation is essential. For instance, in certain scenarios, human referees may need to account for the context or intent behind a player's actions, which AI systems may not yet be fully equipped to assess (King et al., 2018). A hybrid approach, where AI assists referees but does not replace them entirely, may offer the best solution in terms of both speed and fairness.

Improvement in System Reliability and Consistency

The third hypothesis investigated whether the AI-powered VAR system could improve the reliability and consistency of decision-making across different matches and conditions. The Cohen's Kappa test showed a fair level of agreement between the traditional and AI-powered systems, indicating that while the AI system does improve consistency, there is still room for further development. The AI system demonstrated higher consistency in terms of recognizing correct decisions, especially in complex scenarios where traditional systems tended to falter.

The increased consistency can be attributed to the ability of AI algorithms to learn from past decisions and apply standardized criteria across different situations (Krishna et al., 2017). This minimizes the variability that often arises when different referees are making subjective calls. Moreover, the AI system's reliance on clear, predefined rules and parameters reduces the likelihood of human bias influencing the outcome, thus enhancing the reliability of decisions.

Nevertheless, the results also suggest that the AI system is not yet infallible. The fair level of agreement in Cohen's Kappa score implies that there were instances where the AI and traditional systems diverged in their decisions. These discrepancies may be due to several factors, including limitations in the AI's ability to interpret certain ambiguous situations or the impact of environmental conditions such as lighting or camera angles (Li et al., 2017). Enhancing the system's robustness to handle such uncertainties and developing algorithms that can better account for context or nuances in the game will be essential steps for future iterations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the potential benefits of integrating an AI-powered Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system into team sports officiating. The empirical evidence gathered from the implementation in a local championship substantiates that such technology can significantly enhance the accuracy of decision-making, reduce the time taken to reach decisions, and improve the consistency and reliability of officiating across various game conditions. The statistical analyses conducted—chi-squared test for accuracy, paired t-test for decision-making time, and Cohen's Kappa for consistency—each corroborate the superiority of the AI-driven system over traditional VAR systems. Despite these promising results, the study also acknowledges the limitations inherent in current AI technologies, such as the dependency on high-quality data and the need for algorithms that can fully interpret complex, context-sensitive scenarios in sports. Future work should, therefore, focus on refining these AI systems, improving their robustness, and ensuring they can operate effectively under diverse conditions. Additionally, ethical considerations and the importance of maintaining human oversight in sports officiating should not be overlooked. As AI continues to evolve, its integration into sports officiating promises not only to enhance the quality and fairness of sports competitions but also to redefine the role of technology in sports, fostering a more engaging and just environment for athletes and spectators alike.

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Datos de los/as autores/as y traductor/a:

Maigul Zhekambayeva	m.zhekambayeva@satbayev.university	Autor/a
Yermek Seidakhmetov	ermek.seidakhmetov@ayu.edu.kz	Autor/a
Nurmambek Ramashov	ramashovn@mail.ru	Autor/a
Meruert Yerekesheva	e_meruert@mail.ru	Autor/a
Bakhytzhan Kulambayev	bakhytzhankulambayev@gmail.com	Autor/a
Bakhytzhan Omarov	bakhytzhankulambayev@gmail.com	Traductor/a