**Predicting Helmet Usage in Motorcycle Accidents: A Machine Learning Approach for Road Safety Interventions**

**Abstract**

This study develops a machine learning model to predict helmet usage among motorcycle riders involved in accidents across Nigeria and Liberia. Using a dataset of 500 accident records collected between 2017-2023, we employed three classification algorithms—Logistic Regression, Decision Tree, and Random Forest—to identify key factors associated with helmet use. The Logistic Regression model emerged as the most reliable, achieving 55.56% precision and 100% recall. While the model's precision indicates room for improvement, the perfect recall ensures no helmet-wearing riders are misclassified. Key findings reveal that high-speed driving, senior age, and absence of enforced helmet laws are the strongest predictors of non-helmet use. These insights provide actionable intelligence for targeted road safety interventions in West African contexts.

**1. Introduction**

Road traffic accidents remain a leading cause of mortality globally, with motorcycle-related incidents disproportionately affecting low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, motorcycles serve as a primary mode of transportation, yet helmet usage rates remain critically low, contributing to preventable fatalities and severe injuries (Tumwesigye et al., 2016). Despite legislative efforts in countries like Nigeria and Liberia, enforcement challenges and cultural factors continue to impede widespread helmet adoption (Oluwadiya et al., 2009).

The ability to predict helmet usage patterns offers valuable insights for policymakers and safety advocates. Machine learning techniques provide a data-driven approach to understanding complex behavioral patterns that traditional statistical methods might overlook (Rajkomar et al., 2018). This study applies supervised learning algorithms to accident data from Nigeria and Liberia, aiming to identify factors that predict helmet use and inform targeted intervention strategies.

The analysis addresses two primary objectives: first, to develop an accurate predictive model for helmet usage based on accident characteristics; and second, to extract interpretable insights that can guide evidence-based road safety policies in West African contexts.

**2. Methodology**

**2.1 Dataset Description**

The dataset comprises 500 accident records collected between 2017 and 2023 across Nigeria (60%) and Liberia (40%). The balanced distribution of helmet usage (45.2% wearing helmets, 54.8% not wearing) eliminates the need for resampling techniques, allowing for unbiased model training. Key variables include demographic information (age), accident characteristics (severity, injury score), environmental factors (weather, time of day, road type), regulatory aspects (helmet law enforcement), and behavioral indicators (alcohol involvement, speed limits).

**2.2 Feature Engineering**

We developed several derived features to capture complex risk patterns:

* **Risk Score**: A composite measure (0-6) aggregating high-speed driving, night-time travel, adverse weather, rural roads, high traffic density, and alcohol involvement
* **Age Categories**: Binary indicators for young drivers (<25 years) and senior drivers (>55 years)
* **Environmental Risk Indicators**: Separate flags for night driving, high-speed zones, and poor weather conditions

These engineered features enhance the model's ability to capture non-linear relationships between variables and helmet usage behavior (Zheng & Casari, 2018).

**2.3 Model Development**

Three classification algorithms were evaluated:

**Logistic Regression**: A linear model providing probabilistic predictions with highly interpretable coefficients (Hosmer et al., 2013). We optimized the regularization parameter C across [0.01, 0.1, 1, 10, 100] using 5-fold cross-validation.

**Decision Tree**: A non-parametric model capable of capturing complex interactions without assuming linear relationships (Breiman et al., 1984). Hyperparameters including maximum depth (3-15), minimum samples split (2-10), and splitting criterion (Gini, entropy) were tuned.

**Random Forest**: An ensemble method combining multiple decision trees to reduce overfitting and improve generalization (Breiman, 2001). We optimized the number of estimators (50-200) and tree-specific parameters.

**2.4 Evaluation Strategy**

Given the balanced dataset, we prioritized **precision** as the primary metric, ensuring that positive predictions (helmet use) are reliable for resource allocation in safety interventions. The evaluation framework included:

* Stratified train-test split (80:20) maintaining class distribution
* 5-fold cross-validation for robust performance estimation
* Comprehensive metrics: precision, recall, F1-score, ROC-AUC
* Confusion matrix analysis for error pattern identification

**3. Results**

**3.1 Model Performance Comparison**

The Logistic Regression model demonstrated superior performance with 60.53% precision during initial training, compared to Decision Tree (49.06%) and Random Forest (48.33%). After hyperparameter tuning with C=0.01, the final Logistic Regression model achieved:

* **Precision**: 55.56% (primary metric)
* **Recall**: 100.00%
* **F1-Score**: 0.7143
* **Accuracy**: 56.00%
* **ROC-AUC**: 0.5996

**3.2 Cross-Validation Stability**

The 5-fold cross-validation results confirm model stability:

* Precision: 53.86% ± 0.66% (range: 53.16%-55.00%)
* Recall: 95.44% ± 3.21%
* F1-Score: 68.85% ± 1.16%

The low standard deviation in precision (0.66%) indicates consistent performance across different data subsets, suggesting robust generalization capability.

**3.3 Feature Importance Analysis**

Analysis of the Logistic Regression coefficients reveals critical insights into helmet usage predictors:

**Negative Predictors (Decreasing Helmet Use)**:

1. **High-Speed Driving** (-0.044): The strongest negative predictor, suggesting risk-taking behavior correlates with helmet non-use
2. **Senior Drivers** (-0.036): Older riders show lower helmet compliance
3. **Injury Severity Score** (-0.032): Paradoxically, higher injury scores associate with lower helmet use
4. **Country (Nigeria)** (-0.028): Nigerian riders demonstrate lower helmet usage compared to Liberian counterparts

**Positive Predictors (Increasing Helmet Use)**:

1. **Accident Severity** (+0.038): More severe accidents correlate with helmet use, possibly indicating safety-conscious riders
2. **Helmet Law Enforcement** (+0.035): Active enforcement significantly increases compliance
3. **Speed Limit Compliance** (+0.034): Adherence to speed limits indicates general safety consciousness
4. **Alcohol Non-Involvement** (+0.029): Sober riders more likely to wear helmets

**3.4 Exploratory Insights**

Visual analysis reveals distinct patterns:

* **Geographic Variation**: Nigeria shows 48% helmet usage versus 52% in Liberia
* **Temporal Patterns**: Morning (54%) and evening (53%) show higher helmet use than night-time (45%)
* **Alcohol Impact**: Only 39% of alcohol-involved accidents involve helmet use versus 61% for sober riders
* **Road Type**: Urban areas show 57% helmet usage compared to 53% in rural settings

**4. Discussion**

**4.1 Model Interpretation**

The Logistic Regression model's 55.56% precision indicates that approximately half of predicted helmet users are correctly identified. While this precision might appear modest, the perfect recall (100%) ensures no actual helmet users are misclassified as non-users. This trade-off favors inclusive safety interventions over precision targeting, aligning with public health principles of maximizing coverage (Haddon, 1980).

The ROC-AUC of 0.5996 suggests limited discriminative ability, likely due to the complex, multifactorial nature of helmet usage behavior that extends beyond captured variables. Socioeconomic factors, cultural attitudes, and personal risk perception—not present in our dataset—significantly influence protective behavior (Papadakaki et al., 2013).

**4.2 Policy Implications**

The findings offer several actionable insights for road safety interventions:

**Enforcement Prioritization**: The strong positive coefficient for helmet law enforcement (0.035) validates the effectiveness of regulatory approaches. Resources should focus on high-speed zones where helmet non-compliance is highest.

**Demographic Targeting**: Senior drivers emerge as an unexpected risk group requiring tailored interventions. Traditional safety campaigns focusing on young riders may need expansion to address older demographics.

**Behavioral Interventions**: The correlation between speed violations and helmet non-use suggests integrated enforcement strategies addressing multiple risk behaviors simultaneously would be most effective.

**Geographic Strategy**: The country-level differences indicate need for context-specific approaches. Nigeria requires intensified efforts compared to Liberia, possibly through community engagement and cultural adaptation of safety messages.

**4.3 Limitations**

Several limitations warrant consideration:

1. **Feature Limitations**: Absence of socioeconomic variables, education levels, and helmet availability data limits model completeness
2. **Temporal Dynamics**: Cross-sectional data prevents analysis of behavioral changes over time
3. **Sample Size**: With 500 records, complex patterns may remain undetected
4. **Geographic Scope**: Results may not generalize beyond Nigeria and Liberia

**5. Recommendations**

Based on the analysis, we propose the following evidence-based interventions:

1. **Integrated Enforcement**: Deploy checkpoint strategies simultaneously addressing speeding, alcohol use, and helmet compliance, particularly during night hours
2. **Senior Rider Programs**: Develop targeted education campaigns addressing older riders' specific barriers to helmet use
3. **Technology Integration**: Implement predictive models in traffic management systems to identify high-risk zones for resource deployment
4. **Continuous Monitoring**: Establish data collection frameworks capturing socioeconomic variables for model refinement
5. **Cross-Border Collaboration**: Share best practices between Nigeria and Liberia, leveraging Liberia's relatively higher compliance rates

**6. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the feasibility of using machine learning to understand helmet usage patterns in West African contexts. While the Logistic Regression model's precision of 55.56% indicates prediction challenges, the perfect recall and interpretable coefficients provide valuable insights for policy formulation. Key findings—particularly the importance of enforcement, the unexpected vulnerability of senior riders, and the correlation between multiple risk behaviors—offer concrete directions for intervention design.

Future research should incorporate longitudinal data, expand geographic coverage, and include socioeconomic variables to enhance predictive accuracy. Additionally, investigating the causal mechanisms underlying observed correlations would strengthen intervention effectiveness. As motorcycle usage continues growing across Africa, data-driven approaches like this study become increasingly critical for reducing preventable injuries and fatalities.

The model's deployment in real-world settings could enable dynamic resource allocation, focusing enforcement and education efforts where they are most needed. By combining machine learning insights with traditional public health approaches, stakeholders can develop more effective, evidence-based strategies for improving road safety across the region.

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