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BIOSPECKLE LASER TECHNIQUE: A NOVEL NON-DESTRUCTIVE APPROACH FOR ENHANCING FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY

[1]Divya, C. and [1]Raju, C. A.*

Email
rajuca80@gmail.com

[1]Department of Food Science and Nutrition, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bengaluru, Karnataka – 560065, India

The biospeckle laser technique is a cutting-edge, non-destructive method for evaluating the quality of biological samples, especially in the food industry. It offers rapid assessment, user-friendly operation, and cost-effectiveness while ensuring product freshness and safety. By utilizing numerical processing techniques, it enables the analysis of biological activity influenced by contamination, damage, and maturation. Applications include detecting bruises, monitoring fruit ripening, assessing meat quality, analyzing seed viability, and identifying fungal infections. Challenges such as external noise and interference require standardized procedures for accurate analysis. Overall, the biospeckle laser technique holds immense potential for diverse applications in agriculture and quality control.

In recent years, the quest for innovative non-destructive techniques to assess food quality and safety has intensified, spurred by the growing demands for reliable methods that minimize product loss while ensuring consumer health. Amidst this pursuit, biospeckle laser technique has emerged as a promising frontier, offering a novel approach to scrutinize the biological activity within food samples without compromising their integrity.

Traditional methods for evaluating food quality often involve invasive procedures, such as physical or chemical analyses, which can alter the food's composition or structure, rendering it unsuitable for consumption or further processing. Furthermore, these methods may lack the sensitivity required to detect subtle changes indicative of spoilage or contamination. Recognizing these limitations, researchers have turned their attention to biospeckle laser technique, drawn by its ability to provide real-time, non-invasive insights into the dynamic processes occurring within food matrices. At its core, biospeckle laser technique harnesses the principles of laser speckle phenomena, wherein coherent light interacts with moving particles within a sample, generating interference patterns that encode valuable information about the sample's biological activity. By analyzing changes in these speckle patterns over time, researchers can infer various attributes of the sample, including microbial activity, enzymatic reactions, and structural integrity, among others. One of the most significant advantages of biospeckle laser technique lies in its versatility and adaptability across diverse food types, ranging from fruits and vegetables to meat and dairy products. Its non-destructive nature allows for repeated measurements over time, enabling continuous monitoring of food quality throughout the production, storage, and distribution processes. Moreover, its potential for automation and integration with other analytical tools holds promise for streamlining quality control procedures in food industries, thereby enhancing efficiency and reducing costs.

Biospeckle Laser Technique

The biospeckle laser technique operates on the principle of laser speckle phenomenon, which arises when coherent light, such as that emitted by a laser, interacts with a rough or dynamic surface. When a laser beam illuminates a biological sample, such as fruits, vegetables, or other food products, it encounters various structural and biological elements within the material. These elements can include cells, membranes, fluids, and other microstructures.

As the laser light (of wavelength above 600 nm) interacts with these biological components, it undergoes multiple scattering events, leading to the formation of a random interference pattern known as speckle. This speckle pattern appears as a collection of bright and dark spots, which arise due to constructive and destructive interference of the scattered light waves. Importantly, the intensity and distribution of these speckle patterns are not static but instead fluctuate over time due to the dynamic nature of biological materials. The dynamic fluctuations in the speckle patterns are primarily caused by several biological processes occurring within the sample. These processes can include metabolic activity, respiration, water movement, mechanical vibrations, and other physiological changes. As a result, the speckle patterns captured by a camera or photodetector (**CMOS** = Complementary metal oxide semiconductors, and **CCD** = Charge Coupled Device) exhibit temporal variations, reflecting the underlying biological activity and structural dynamics of the sample. To analyze these speckle patterns, specialized image processing algorithms are employed. These algorithms quantify the temporal changes in the speckle patterns by calculating parameters such as speckle contrast, speckle intensity, or correlation coefficients over time. By tracking these parameters, researchers can derive valuable information about the biological activity, quality attributes, and structural integrity of the food sample.

Importantly, the biospeckle laser technique offers several advantages over traditional methods for assessing food quality and safety. Firstly, it is non-destructive, allowing for repeated measurements without altering or damaging the sample. Secondly, it provides real-time monitoring capabilities, enabling early detection of quality defects or microbial contamination. Additionally, it is economical, rapid and straightforward, and also offers high sensitivity, allowing for the detection of subtle changes in biological samples that may not be visible to the naked eye.

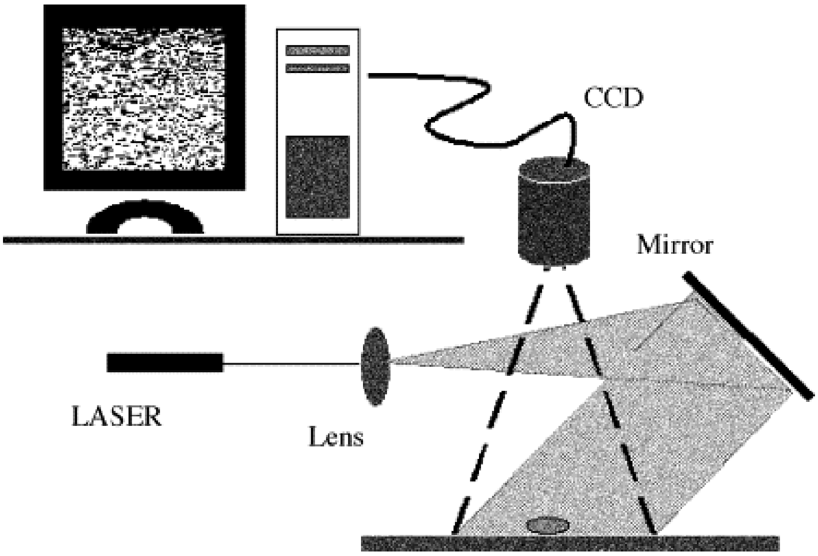

Figure 1: Illumination and image capture set-up.

Application of Biospeckle Laser Technique in Agro-Products

The biospeckle laser technique finds diverse applications in the assessment and monitoring of agro-products, including:

- **Detection of Mechanical Damage:** Biospeckle laser techniques are employed for detecting mechanical damage in horticultural produce such as fruits and vegetables during harvesting, transportation, and storage. This includes identifying bruises, tissue breakage, and other forms of damage that compromise the quality and safety of the produce. By analyzing speckle patterns, alterations in biological activity associated with damaged areas can be detected.
- **Detection of Microbial Contamination:** Biospeckle techniques are used for detecting

microbial contamination in agro-products. This includes identifying pathogenic microorganisms in fruits, vegetables, and seeds. By analyzing biospeckle patterns, changes associated with microbial growth can be quantified, aiding in early detection and quality control measures.

- **Quality Monitoring and Assessment of Storage Conditions:** It can be used to monitor the ripening process of fruits and vegetables by detecting changes in biological activity, helping to determine the optimal harvest time and post-harvest handling procedures. And also helps to predict ripening stages, shelf life, and quality parameters such as firmness and sugar content. And it also assesses the aging process in meat, particularly beef. By correlating enzyme activity with parameters like tenderness and color, the technique helps in quantifying biological changes during meat aging. The technique can evaluate the effects of storage conditions (e.g., temperature, humidity) on the quality and shelf life of agro-products, facilitating optimal storage management practices.
- **Evaluation of Processing Techniques:** It can assess the impact of different processing techniques (e.g., drying, freezing) on the quality attributes of agro-products, aiding in the optimization of processing parameters to maintain product quality.
- **Quality Assurance in Food Packaging:** Biospeckle analysis can be employed to evaluate the integrity of food packaging materials and the efficacy of packaging systems in preserving the quality and freshness of agro-products during storage and transportation.
- **Assessment of Seed Viability:** In agriculture, the technique can be used to assess seed viability by monitoring metabolic activity and physiological changes in seeds, aiding in seed quality testing and selection for optimal crop production.

Challenges in Biospeckle Laser Technique

While the biospeckle laser technique offers numerous advantages for evaluating food quality and safety, it also has certain limitations:

- **Lack of Standardization and Specialized Equipment:** Standard methods and dedicated equipment for agricultural use are lacking. Additionally, the penetration depth of laser light into biological samples is limited, typically ranging from a few micrometers to a few millimeters depending on the wavelength (632.8 nm wavelength) used. This restricts the technique's applicability to surface or thin samples, making it less suitable for assessing the quality of thicker or opaque food products.
- **Sensitivity to Environmental Conditions:** Biospeckle measurements can be influenced

by environmental factors such as temperature, light, humidity, and vibrations. Variations in these conditions may introduce noise into the speckle patterns, affecting the accuracy of the analysis.

- **Hardware and Software Challenges:** Maintaining laser stability is crucial for accurate measurements. He-Ne (Helium-neon) lasers are common but face transportation difficulties, while diode lasers require stable power sources. Camera adjustments can affect speckle formation, emphasizing the need to disable automated functions. Portability is vital for outdoor use, and standardization efforts aim to categorize analysis methods.
- **Interpretation Challenges:** Analyzing biospeckle patterns requires expertise in image processing and interpretation. Differentiating between biological activity and noise within the speckle patterns can be challenging, potentially leading to misinterpretation of results.

Despite these limitations, ongoing research and advancements in technology hold promise for addressing some of these challenges and expanding the applicability of biospeckle laser technique in food quality and safety assessment.

Conclusion

The biospeckle laser technique stands as a revolutionary method for enhancing the assessment of food quality and safety within agriculture. This non-destructive approach offers a plethora of benefits, including swift evaluation, user-friendly operation, and cost-effectiveness, all while upholding the freshness and safety standards of agricultural products. Nevertheless, challenges such as the need for standardization, technological limitations, and hardware/software complexities must be overcome to fully exploit the potential of this technique. Ongoing research and innovation in biospeckle laser techniques hold tremendous promise for revolutionizing the assessment of food quality and safety in agriculture. With continued advancements and standardization efforts, biospeckle laser techniques are poised to become indispensable instruments in ensuring the quality, safety, and sustainability of agricultural products in the years ahead.

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