ColPali: EFFICIENT DOCUMENT RETRIEVAL WITH VISION LANGUAGE MODELS

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ABSTRACT

Documents are visually rich structures that convey information through text, but also figures, page layouts, tables, or even fonts. Since modern retrieval systems mainly rely on the textual information they extract from document pages to index documents -often through lengthy and brittle processes-, they struggle to exploit key visual cues efficiently. This limits their capabilities in many practical document retrieval applications such as Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG). To benchmark current systems on visually rich document retrieval, we introduce the Visual Document Retrieval Benchmark *ViDoRe*, composed of various page-level retrieval tasks spanning multiple domains, languages, and practical settings. The inherent complexity and performance shortcomings of modern systems motivate a new concept; doing document retrieval by directly embedding the images of the document pages. We release *ColPali*, a Vision Language Model trained to produce high-quality multi-vector embeddings from images of document pages. Combined with a late interaction matching mechanism, *ColPali* largely outperforms modern document retrieval pipelines while being drastically simpler, faster and end-to-end trainable. We release models, data, code and benchmarks under open licenses at https://hf.co/vidore.

1 INTRODUCTION

Document Retrieval consists of matching a user query to relevant documents in a given corpus. It is central to many widespread industrial applications, either as a standalone ranking system (search engines) or as part of more complex information extraction or Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) pipelines.

Over recent years, pretrained language models have enabled large improvements in text embedding models. In practical industrial settings, however, the primary performance bottleneck for efficient document retrieval stems not from embedding model performance but from the prior data ingestion pipeline. Indexing a standard PDF document involves several steps. First, PDF parsers or Optical Character Recognition (OCR) systems are used to extract words from the pages. Document layout detection models can then be run to segment paragraphs, titles, and other page objects such as tables, figures, and headers. A chunking strategy is then defined to group text passages with some semantical coherence, and modern retrieval setups may even integrate a captioning step to describe visually rich elements in a natural language form, more suitable for embedding models. In our experiments (Table 2), we typically find that optimizing the ingestion pipeline yields much better performance on visually rich document retrieval than optimizing the text embedding model.

Contribution 1: *ViDoRe*. In this work, we argue that document retrieval systems should not be evaluated solely on the capabilities of text embedding models (Bajaj et al., 2016; Thakur et al., 2021; Muennighoff et al., 2022), but should also consider the context and visual elements of the documents to be retrieved. To this end, we create and openly release *ViDoRe*, a comprehensive benchmark to evaluate systems on page-level document retrieval with a wide coverage of domains, visual elements, and languages. *ViDoRe* addresses practical document retrieval scenarios, where

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