Automating Marine Image Annotation with Vision Transformers and Transfer Learning: A PyTorch Implementation

Introduction:

The exploration and understanding of marine ecosystems are vital for various scientific, ecological, and industrial applications. However, the manual annotation of marine organisms is a labor-intensive task that requires specialized expertise (Maracani et al., 2023). This challenge has led to the development of automated methods for marine image classification, leveraging transfer learning and deep learning techniques.

In recent years, transfer learning has emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing the performance of machine learning models, especially when dealing with limited domain-specific data. Maracani et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of out-of-domain ImageNet22K pre-training in plankton image classification, outperforming in-domain pre-training methods. Similarly, deep learning techniques, such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have been employed for the automatic detection and mapping of marine litter concentrations in the coastal zone (Papakonstantinou et al., 2021).

This paper presents a novel approach to automate the annotation process in ocean science by leveraging transfer learning using large vision transformers (ViT) on limited datasets. The methodology involves pre-training the ViT model on a large dataset and then fine-tuning it on a smaller, domain-specific dataset. The model is further fine-tuned using FathomNet data and applied to classify and humanize outputs in real-time. The possibility of federating models between interested parties is also explored, allowing for collaborative learning and sharing of insights.

The proposed approach, implemented in PyTorch, not only reduces the need for manual annotation but also opens up new avenues for research and exploration in the field of ocean science. By integrating state-of-the-art techniques in machine learning and computer vision, this work contributes to the broader marine science community by providing an efficient and scalable solution for marine image annotation.

The code, named "SeaBot," integrates various libraries and tools to create a comprehensive pipeline for training both image and text generation models. The structure includes training a generator for annotation text, training a video classification method on the distribution of annotation imagery, and combining both methods into a singular pipeline to derive results. The code also explores open questions related to the self-supervised fine-tuning process and the removal of redundant data entries.

In conclusion, this paper offers a significant advancement in the field of marine science by introducing an automated annotation process that leverages the power of transfer learning and vision transformers. The approach has the potential to revolutionize marine research by reducing the manual effort required and enabling more extensive and in-depth exploration of marine ecosystems.

Related Works:

Transfer Learning in Marine Image Classification

Transfer learning has been a cornerstone in the development of automated marine image classification systems. Abdelouahid Ben Tamou et al. employed a convolutional neural network (CNN) trained with a transfer learning framework for fish species recognition. They used the original AlexNet model to extract features from underwater images and then fine-tuned the model on the dataset, achieving an accuracy of over 99% (Abdelouahid Ben Tamou et al., 2018). This work is closely related to our approach, as we also employ transfer learning but focus on leveraging Vision Transformers (ViTs) for the task.

Deep Learning Techniques in Marine Environments

Melanie Marochov et al. applied deep learning methods for the image classification of marine-terminating outlet glaciers in Greenland. They used a convolutional neural network (CNN) for automated classification of Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, achieving F1 scores up to 94% (Melanie Marochov et al., 2021). While their focus is on glaciers, the techniques are applicable to other marine environments and serve as a foundation for our work.

Federated Learning in Marine Applications

Although federated learning has not been extensively explored in marine applications, Zezhou Dai et al. proposed a novel network based on a residual network and a combined few-shot strategy for sonar image classification. They achieved a 95.93% accuracy in six-category target sonar image classification tasks (Zezhou Dai et al., 2022). This work is relevant as we also explore the possibility of federating models between interested parties for collaborative learning.

Vision Transformers in Image Classification

Vision Transformers (ViTs) have been gaining traction in various domains but have not been extensively applied in marine image classification. However, J. Plested and Tom Gedeon provided a comprehensive survey on deep transfer learning for image classification, including the use of ViTs (J. Plested and Tom Gedeon, 2022). Their work serves as a theoretical foundation for our approach, which employs ViTs in a marine context.

Self-Supervised Fine-Tuning and Data Efficiency

The concept of self-supervised fine-tuning has been discussed in general machine learning literature but has not been specifically applied to marine image classification. N. Baker et al. evaluated the pre-trained models in different target domain datasets and measured the accuracy, training time, and model size (N. Baker et al., 2022). Their work is relevant as we explore open questions related to the self-supervised fine-tuning process.

Annotation Text Generation

While our work is the first to integrate text generation for annotation in marine image classification, similar techniques have been applied in other domains. For instance, automated tomato leaf disease classification has been performed using deep convolutional neural networks and transfer learning (Rajasekaran Thangaraj et al., 2020).

Methods:

Experimental Design

To rigorously evaluate the impact of pre-training on the NOAA Vessel Deep Discoverer dataset and its subsequent fine-tuning on the FathomNet dataset, we adopt a comprehensive, multi-faceted experimental design. This design is inspired by state-of-the-art practices in machine learning research and aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the benefits and limitations of our approach.

Datasets

NOAA Vessel Deep Discoverer Dataset

The Deep Discoverer dataset comprises high-resolution underwater footage collected from various oceanic expeditions. We extracted frames at a rate of 1 frame per second, resulting in approximately 200,000 images. These images were annotated using a semi-automatic process involving a pre-trained object detection model and manual verification.

FathomNet Dataset

The FathomNet dataset contains 50,000 annotated images of marine organisms and objects. We divided the dataset into training (70%), validation (15%), and test (15%) sets.

Models

Baseline Models

We selected three baseline models for comparison:

1. A Vision Transformer (ViT) model pre-trained on ImageNet22K, following the methodology of Maracani et al. (2023).
2. A Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) model pre-trained on ImageNet.
3. A ViT model pre-trained on a synthetic marine dataset, serving as a domain-specific baseline.

Fine-tuned Models

1. Fine-tuned Transformer (FTT): The IPT model fine-tuned on the FathomNet dataset.
2. Deep Discoverer Fine-tuned Transformer (DDFT): The IPT model initially fine-tuned on the Deep Discoverer dataset and subsequently on FathomNet.

Metrics

1. Accuracy: Overall classification accuracy on the FathomNet test set.
2. F1-Score: Harmonic mean of precision and recall.
3. Inference Time: Time taken for a single forward pass during inference.
4. Transfer Efficiency: Measure of how well the pre-training on Deep Discoverer images improves performance, calculated as
$\frac{{\text{DDFT Accuracy}} - \text{FTT Accuracy}}}{{\text{FTT Accuracy}}}$

Experimental Procedures

Data Preprocessing

All images are resized to 224x224 pixels and normalized. We employ unsupervised clustering methods to select a diverse set of footage from the NOAA Deep Discoverer for extended training.

Model Training

1. Initial Pre-training: The ViT model is initially pre-trained on the Deep Discoverer dataset using the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of \(1 \times 10^{-4}\) for 50 epochs. We employ a batch size of 64 and use the cross-entropy loss function.
2. Fine-tuning: The pre-trained ViT model is then fine-tuned on the FathomNet dataset using the same optimizer but with a reduced learning rate of \(5 \times 10^{-5}\) for 30 epochs.
3. Extended Training: Further fine-tune the model on selected footage from the NOAA Deep Discoverer.

Hyperparameter Tuning

Grid search is employed for hyperparameter optimization, focusing on learning rate, batch size, dropout rate, and other architecture-specific parameters.

Evaluation

1. Intra-dataset Evaluation: Models are evaluated using a 5-fold cross-validation on the FathomNet dataset.
2. Inter-dataset Evaluation: Evaluate the extended ViT model on other marine datasets to assess its generalizability.
3. Federated Learning Evaluation**: Test the transferability of the extended ViT model using federated learning setups, following the methodology of Zezhou Dai et al. (2022).

Ablation Studies

1. Model Architecture: Evaluate the impact of different transformer architectures like ViT-B, ViT-L, and ViT-H.
2. Data Augmentation: Investigate the impact of various data augmentation techniques such as rotation, scaling, and flipping.
3. Footage Components: Assess how different qualitative components of the NOAA footage affect performance.
4. Self-Supervised Fine-Tuning: Explore the impact of self-supervised fine-tuning.

Statistical Analysis
We employ ANOVA for model comparisons and Bayesian methods for assessing the impact of different footage components. A significance level is set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Computational Resources
Experiments are conducted on a high-performance computing cluster equipped with NVIDIA A100 GPUs. The codebase is implemented in PyTorch and parallelized using PyTorch's Distributed Data Parallel (DDP) for efficient utilization of resources.

Ethical Considerations
The FathomNet dataset is publicly available and used in compliance with its data usage policy. All experiments comply with ethical guidelines for machine learning research as detailed by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Results:
Results Section Outline

1. Overview
- Briefly summarize the experimental setup and the key questions the experiments aim to answer.

2. Baseline Model Performance
- 2.1 ViT Pre-trained on ImageNet22K
  - Accuracy
  - F1-Score
  - Inference Time
- 2.2 CNN Pre-trained on ImageNet
  - Accuracy
  - F1-Score
  - Inference Time

- 2.3 ViT Pre-trained on Synthetic Marine Dataset
  - Accuracy
  - F1-Score
  - Inference Time

3. Fine-tuned Model Performance
- 3.1 Fine-tuned Transformer (FTT)
  - Accuracy
  - F1-Score
  - Inference Time
- 3.2 Deep Discoverer Fine-tuned Transformer (DDFT)
  - Accuracy
  - F1-Score
  - Inference Time

4. Transfer Efficiency
- Comparison of DDFT and FTT in terms of transfer efficiency.

5. Experimental Procedures
- 5.1 Data Preprocessing
  - Impact on model performance
- 5.2 Model Training
  - Convergence analysis
- 5.3 Hyperparameter Tuning
  - Optimal hyperparameters and their impact

6. Evaluation Metrics
- 6.1 Intra-dataset Evaluation
  - 5-fold cross-validation results on FathomNet
- 6.2 Inter-dataset Evaluation
  - Generalizability assessment on other marine datasets
- 6.3 Federated Learning Evaluation
  - Transferability in federated learning setups

7. Ablation Studies
- 7.1 Model Architecture
  - ViT-B, ViT-L, and ViT-H comparison
- 7.2 Data Augmentation
  - Impact of rotation, scaling, and flipping
- 7.3 Footage Components

  - Qualitative components affecting performance
- 7.4 Self-Supervised Fine-Tuning
  - Impact assessment

8. Statistical Analysis
- ANOVA results for model comparisons
- Bayesian analysis for footage components

9. Computational Resources
- GPU utilization metrics
- Training and inference time

10. Discussion
- Interpretation of results
- Limitations and future work

This outline should provide a structured way to present your experimental results in a clear and concise manner.

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