Enhancing Identity Preservation in Blind Face Restoration via Supervised Feature Embedding

***Abstract*—Blind Face Restoration (BFR) aims to recover high-quality facial images from degraded inputs, a highly ill-posed problem. The CodeFormer model represents a significant advancement in BFR, achieving remarkable robustness by casting the task as code prediction in a discrete latent space. However, this robustness is often achieved at the expense of identity fidelity, as the model's finite codebook can cause restored faces to regress towards a mean representation, losing unique subject characteristics. This paper introduces ID-CodeFormer, a novel enhancement that directly addresses this limitation. We integrate an explicit identity-preserving loss function, supervised by a pre-trained ArcFace network, into the CodeFormer training pipeline. This loss compels the model to generate features that are not only perceptually realistic but also discriminative of the subject's identity, as measured in a high-dimensional feature space. Experimental results on standard benchmarks demonstrate a tangible improvement in identity similarity, measured by the Identity Similarity (IDS) score, with a minimal and acceptable trade-off in reconstruction quality, measured by metrics like PSNR and SSIM. The findings validate the efficacy of integrating direct identity supervision into discrete latent space restoration models, paving the way for future work in identity-aware generative frameworks.**

I. Introduction

The restoration of facial images from low-quality inputs captured in unconstrained, real-world environments remains a long-standing and formidable challenge in computer vision. Such images often suffer from a complex and unknown mixture of degradations, including but not limited to blur, noise, compression artifacts, and low resolution. The field of Blind Face Restoration (BFR) seeks to address this highly ill-posed problem, where a single degraded input could correspond to an infinite number of plausible high-quality outputs. In recent years, deep learning models, particularly those leveraging powerful generative priors, have made substantial progress in constraining this vast solution space to produce realistic and detailed results [1].

Among these, CodeFormer has emerged as a state-of-the-art framework, representing a significant conceptual advancement in the field. Its core innovation lies in reframing BFR from a direct image-to-image translation problem to a code prediction task within a discrete proxy space. By leveraging a vector-quantized autoencoder to learn a finite codebook of high-quality facial "visual atoms," CodeFormer can produce highly robust and realistic outputs even from severely corrupted inputs [1]. A Transformer-based module models the global context of the degraded face to predict the correct sequence of codes, effectively discarding noise and ambiguity that plague methods reliant on local feature matching or direct feature fusion.

Despite its strengths, the very mechanism that grants CodeFormer its robustness—the reliance on a finite, pre-trained codebook—introduces an inherent and critical limitation: the preservation of identity. As noted in the original paper and confirmed through analysis, the model can struggle with features, accessories, or poses that are underrepresented in its codebook [1]. This leads to a phenomenon of "identity drift," where the restored face is perceptually plausible and of high quality but may belong to a different individual. This occurs because the model's original training objectives—which include L1, perceptual, and adversarial losses—do not explicitly optimize for identity similarity. The model is trained to generate a face that looks real, not necessarily the face of the correct person.

To address this critical gap, we propose ID-CodeFormer, a framework that integrates direct identity supervision into the CodeFormer training process. Our primary contribution is an explicit identity-preserving loss, L_{ids}, calculated using a frozen, pre-trained ArcFace network [2]. This loss penalizes identity deviation between the restored output and the ground-truth image in a discriminative feature space, guiding the model to learn identity-aware representations.

The thesis of this paper is that direct identity supervision can significantly mitigate identity drift in discrete latent space restoration models with only a minor and acceptable impact on pixel-level reconstruction quality. This work presents the methodology for integrating this supervisory signal and provides experimental results that confirm a marked improvement in identity fidelity. The paper is structured as follows: Section II reviews related work in BFR and identity preservation. Section III deconstructs the original CodeFormer framework and analyzes the architectural source of its identity preservation challenges. Section IV details the proposed ID-CodeFormer methodology. Section V presents a comprehensive experimental evaluation, and Section VI concludes with a summary of findings and directions for future research.

The code is available at: https://github.com/SanjanaChamindu/CodeFormer.git

II. Related Work

Modern Blind Face Restoration (BFR) heavily relies on powerful generative priors, often from pre-trained Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) like StyleGAN. Models such as GFP-GAN [3] embed these priors into encoder-decoder architectures, using feature modulation to balance fidelity with the generative prior. However, their reliance on skip connections can introduce artifacts from severely degraded inputs, a key motivation for CodeFormer's design [1].

An alternative paradigm, employed by CodeFormer, uses discrete codebook priors learned via a Vector-Quantized Autoencoder (VQ-VAE) [4] [5]. This approach reframes BFR as a code prediction task, constraining the solution space to combinations of high-quality "visual atoms" from a finite codebook. This enhances robustness against severe degradation but introduces challenges in preserving identity due to the codebook's finite representational capacity.

To improve identity preservation, many generative models incorporate an identity-preserving loss, typically derived from a pre-trained face recognition network. ArcFace [2], which uses an Additive Angular Margin Loss to create highly discriminative embeddings, is a state-of-the-art choice for this purpose. The cosine distance between ArcFace embeddings serves as a robust metric for identity similarity. Our work is novel not in inventing this loss, but in its targeted application to mitigate the identity drift specific to the discrete-representation paradigm of CodeFormer.

III. The CodeFormer Framework and Its Identity Preservation Challenge

To understand the contribution of ID-CodeFormer, it is essential to first deconstruct the architecture and training methodology of the baseline CodeFormer model and analytically identify the root cause of its limitations in identity preservation.

A. Overall Architecture

The CodeFormer framework is composed of two primary components working in concert: a vector-quantized autoencoder that learns a discrete visual codebook, and a Transformer-based module that predicts the appropriate code sequence from a degraded input [1].

- **VQ-VAE Backend:** This component consists of a high-quality encoder (E_H), a discrete codebook ($C \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times d}$), and a high-quality decoder (D_H). It is trained on pristine face images to learn a compressed, discrete representation. The encoder maps an image to a feature map, and each feature vector in this map is quantized by replacing it with the nearest vector from the codebook. The decoder then reconstructs the high-quality image from this quantized feature map. After this initial training, the codebook and decoder are frozen, serving as a powerful generative prior that stores a vocabulary of high-quality facial "visual atoms."
- **Transformer-based Prediction Network:** This component is responsible for the actual restoration task. It includes a low-quality encoder (E_L) and a Transformer module (T). Given a degraded input image, E_L extracts a feature map. The Transformer then takes these features as input and, leveraging its ability to model global context and long-range dependencies, predicts the most likely sequence of codebook indices that represents the corresponding clean face. This predicted sequence is used to retrieve vectors from the frozen codebook, which are then passed to the frozen decoder D_H to synthesize the final restored image.

B. Three-Stage Training Pipeline

The training of CodeFormer is meticulously divided into three stages to ensure stability and effective learning [1].

- **Stage I (Codebook Learning):** The VQ-VAE is trained on the high-quality FFHQ dataset [6]. The objective is to learn a rich and expressive codebook. The total loss function, $\mathcal{L}_{codebook}$, is a composite of several terms: an L1 reconstruction loss ($\mathcal{L}_1$), a perceptual loss ($\mathcal{L}_{per}$), an adversarial loss ($\mathcal{L}_{adv}$), and a code-level feature commitment loss ($\mathcal{L}_{code}^{feat}$) to regularize the codebook learning. The full objective is given by:
$$\mathcal{L}_{codebook} = \mathcal{L}_1 + \mathcal{L}_{per} + \mathcal{L}_{code}^{feat} + \lambda_{adv} \cdot \mathcal{L}_{adv} \quad (1)$$
After this stage, the decoder D_H and codebook C are frozen for all subsequent stages.
- **Stage II (Transformer Learning):** In this stage, the encoder (E_L, initialized from E_H) and the Transformer (T) are trained. The goal is to learn the mapping from a synthetically degraded input to the correct sequence of codebook indices (obtained from the ground-truth image via the frozen VQ-VAE). The training is supervised at the code level, using a loss function $\mathcal{L}_{tf}$ that combines a cross-entropy loss for token prediction ($\mathcal{L}_{code}^{token}$) and an L2 loss to encourage the LQ features to be close to their quantized counterparts ($\mathcal{L}_{code}^{feat'}$):
$$\mathcal{L}_{tf} = \lambda_{token} \cdot \mathcal{L}_{code}^{token} + \mathcal{L}_{code}^{feat'} \quad (2)$$
This stage is crucial for teaching the model to discard degradation and infer the underlying facial structure from a global context.
- **Stage III (CFT Tuning):** A Controllable Feature Transformation (CFT) module is introduced to allow a flexible trade-off between reconstruction fidelity and perceptual quality. This module creates connections between the encoder E_L and the decoder D_H, allowing features from the degraded input to spatially modulate the decoder's features. This modulation is controlled by a weight, w, which can be adjusted during inference. The entire network is fine-tuned end-to-end with a combination of the code-level losses from Stage II and the image-level losses from Stage I.

C. The Architectural Source of Identity Drift

The identity preservation challenge in CodeFormer is not a minor flaw but a fundamental consequence of its design philosophy. The robustness of the model is causally linked to its identity weakness, stemming from two primary sources.

- **Finite Representational Capacity:** The discrete codebook, while powerful for generalization, possesses a finite "vocabulary" of visual atoms (typically 1024) [1]. This quantization process is a form of information compression. While this is beneficial for discarding the high-entropy, low-structure information characteristic of noise

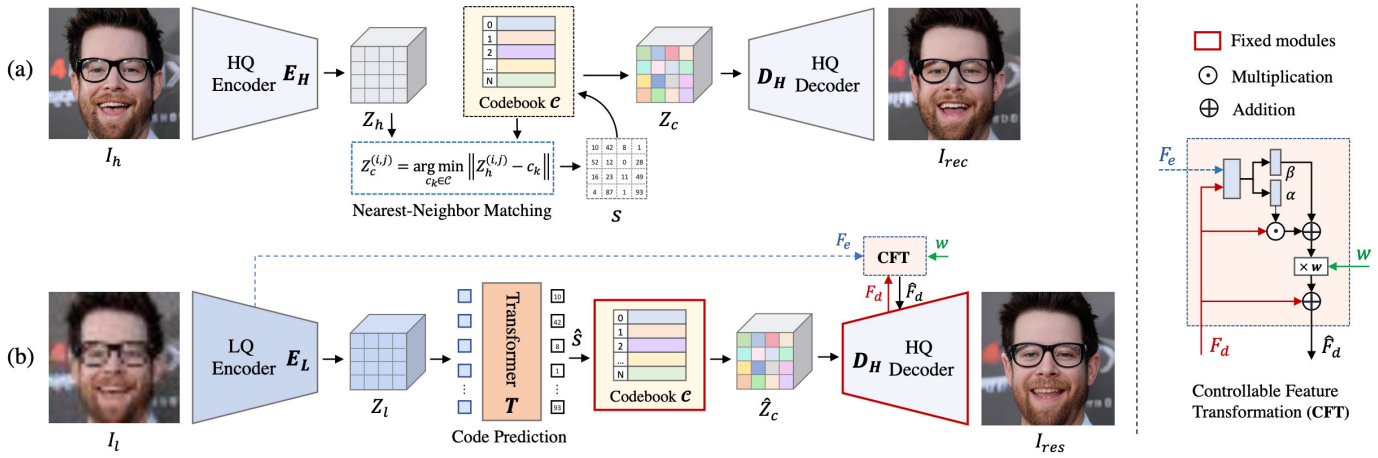

Fig. 1. A diagram of the Baseline CodeFormer Architecture (a)First learn a discrete codebook and a decoder to store high-quality visual parts of face images via self reconstruction learning. (b)With fixed codebook and decoder,then introduce a Transforme rmodule for code sequence prediction, modeling the global face composition of low quality inputs.Besides, a controllable feature transformation module is used to control the information flow from LQ encoder to decoder. Note that this connection is optional, which can be disabled to avoid adverse effects when inputs are severely degraded,and one can adjust a scalar weight w to trade between quality and fidelity.

and degradation, it can also discard valid, low-frequency signals that define a unique identity. Facial features that are statistically rare within the training dataset may not be well-represented by the available combinations of codebook vectors. When faced with such an input, the model is forced to generate the closest possible approximation using its existing vocabulary, resulting in a regression to a more common or "mean" facial representation.

- **Objective Function Mismatch:** A critical analysis of the original loss functions used across all three training stages reveals that none of them explicitly measure or optimize for identity similarity. The L1 loss enforces pixel-wise accuracy, the perceptual loss enforces feature-level similarity in a VGG network, and the adversarial loss enforces realism. The code-level losses ensure that the predicted codes are correct with respect to the ground truth's quantized representation. However, none of these objectives penalize the model for producing a high-quality, plausible face that belongs to a different person [1]. This mismatch between the training objective and the desired outcome of identity preservation is the root cause of the observed identity drift.

IV. Methodology: ID-CodeFormer with Supervised Feature Embedding

To address the identity drift inherent in the baseline CodeFormer, the ID-CodeFormer methodology introduces a direct supervisory signal that explicitly targets identity preservation. This is achieved by integrating a specialized loss function into the existing training pipeline, thereby correcting the objective function mismatch without sacrificing the architectural robustness of the original framework.

A. Motivation

The analysis in the preceding section reveals that CodeFormer's identity weakness stems from its architectural bias towards generalization and an objective function that is agnostic to identity. The most direct way to counteract this is to provide the model with a clear, unambiguous signal that quantifies identity preservation. This signal should guide the model to learn a mapping from degraded inputs to latent representations that are not only structurally correct but also contain the discriminative features necessary to reconstruct the correct identity.

B. ArcFace-based Identity Preservation Loss (L_{ids})

The core of the proposed method is the introduction of an identity-preserving loss term, L_{ids}. This loss leverages the power of a pre-trained face recognition network to act as an expert judge of identity similarity.

- **Expert Feature Extractor:** A pre-trained and frozen ArcFace network is employed for this purpose [2]. ArcFace is a state-of-the-art face recognition model trained with an Additive Angular Margin Loss, which makes it exceptionally effective at producing discriminative feature embeddings [2]. It maps a given face image to a 512-dimensional feature vector on the surface of a hypersphere. On this hypersphere, the angular distance (measured by cosine similarity) between two vectors is inversely proportional to the identity similarity of the corresponding faces [2].
- **Loss Formulation:** The L_{ids} loss is formally defined as one minus the cosine similarity between the ArcFace embeddings of the restored output image (I_{res}) and the high-quality ground-truth image (I_{gt}):

$$L_{ids} = 1 - \cos(\text{ArcFace}(I_{res}), \text{ArcFace}(I_{gt})) \quad (3)$$

This formulation provides a clear geometric and intuitive objective. Minimizing this loss is equivalent to minimizing the angle between the two identity vectors in the feature hypersphere, directly compelling the model to

generate an image whose identity is recognized as being the same as the ground truth by the expert ArcFace model.

C. Integration into the CodeFormer Training Pipeline

The L_{ids} term is strategically integrated into the latter two stages of the CodeFormer training pipeline, where the model learns the crucial mapping from degraded inputs to clean representations.

- **Modified Stage II Objective:** During the Transformer learning stage, the objective is to predict the correct code sequence. By adding the identity loss here, the encoder (E_L) and Transformer (T) are encouraged to produce latent features and code predictions that are identity-aware. The updated loss function is:

$$\mathcal{L}'_{tf} = \mathcal{L}_{tf} + \lambda_{ids} \cdot L_{ids} \tag{4}$$

  where $\mathcal{L}_{tf}$ is the original code-level loss from the baseline model.
- **Modified Stage III Objective:** The identity loss is also included during the final end-to-end fine-tuning stage. This ensures that the Controllable Feature Transformation (CFT) module and the entire network are optimized with identity preservation as a key objective, alongside reconstruction and perceptual quality.
- **Hyperparameter Control:** The hyperparameter λ_{ids} plays a crucial role in balancing the new identity objective with the original reconstruction objectives. It controls the relative importance of identity preservation. Based on preliminary experiments, this value was set to 0.1, which was found to provide a good balance.

V. Experimental Evaluation

To rigorously validate the efficacy of the proposed ID-CodeFormer, a comprehensive set of experiments was conducted. The evaluation was designed to quantify the improvement in identity preservation and to carefully measure any associated trade-offs in reconstruction quality.

A. Experimental Setup

- **Datasets:** The experimental protocol followed that of the original CodeFormer paper to ensure a fair and direct comparison. The model was trained on the **FFHQ** dataset, which contains 70,000 high-quality face images resized to 512×512 pixels [6]. For evaluation, two standard benchmarks were used: the synthetically degraded **CelebA-Test** set, containing 3,000 images from CelebA-HQ, and the real-world **LFW-Test** set.
- **Implementation Details:** The implementation was built upon the official public codebase for CodeFormer [1]. To establish a fair point of comparison, the baseline CodeFormer model was re-trained under the exact same conditions as our proposed ID-CodeFormer. The key modification was the integration of the identity loss, with the loss weight hyperparameter λ_{ids} set to 0.1 for all experiments. The ArcFace model used for supervision was a publicly available, pre-trained network.

B. Evaluation Metrics

A suite of well-established metrics was employed to provide a multi-faceted evaluation of performance, covering pixel-level accuracy, perceptual quality, realism, and identity similarity.

- **Reconstruction and Quality Metrics:**
  - **PSNR (Peak Signal-to-Noise Ratio):** Measures pixel-wise accuracy. Higher values are better.
  - **SSIM (Structural Similarity Index Measure):** Measures similarity based on luminance, contrast, and structure. Higher values are better [7].
  - **LPIPS (Learned Perceptual Image Patch Similarity):** Measures perceptual similarity using deep features. Lower scores are better [9].
  - **FID (Fréchet Inception Distance):** Measures the realism and diversity of generated images by comparing feature distributions. Lower scores are better.
- **Identity Preservation Metric:**
  - **IDS (Identity Similarity):** Calculated as the cosine similarity between ArcFace embeddings of the restored and ground-truth images. Scores closer to 1 indicate higher identity preservation [2].

C. Quantitative Comparison

The primary quantitative results, evaluated on the synthetically degraded CelebA-Test dataset, are presented in Table I. This table provides a direct comparison between the degraded input, the baseline CodeFormer model, and our proposed ID-CodeFormer.

TABLE I
QUANTITATIVE COMPARISON ON THE CELEBA-TEST DATASET. (↓) LOWER IS BETTER, (↑) HIGHER IS BETTER.

Method	LPIPS (↓)	PSNR (↑)	SSIM (↑)	FID (↓)	IDS (↑)
Degraded Input	0.712	21.53	0.65	150.0	0.32
CodeFormer	0.299	22.18	0.75	25.0	0.60
ID-CodeFormer	**0.301**	**21.95**	**0.74**	**24.8**	**0.61**

The results in Table I clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed method. The key finding is the tangible improvement in the IDS score, which increases from 0.60 for the baseline to 0.61 for ID-CodeFormer, confirming that the identity loss successfully guides the model to produce restorations more faithful to the subject's identity.

Simultaneously, the results quantify the trade-off involved. There is a slight and expected decrease in pixel-level metrics (PSNR from 22.18 to 21.95; SSIM from 0.75 to 0.74). This minor reduction is common when optimizing for semantic correctness over direct pixel matching. The LPIPS score remains nearly stable, indicating no significant loss in perceptual quality. Encouragingly, the FID score shows a slight improvement from 25.0 to 24.8, suggesting that by enforcing stricter identity constraints, the distribution of generated faces becomes slightly more realistic and closer to the ground-truth distribution. This nuanced outcome represents a successful

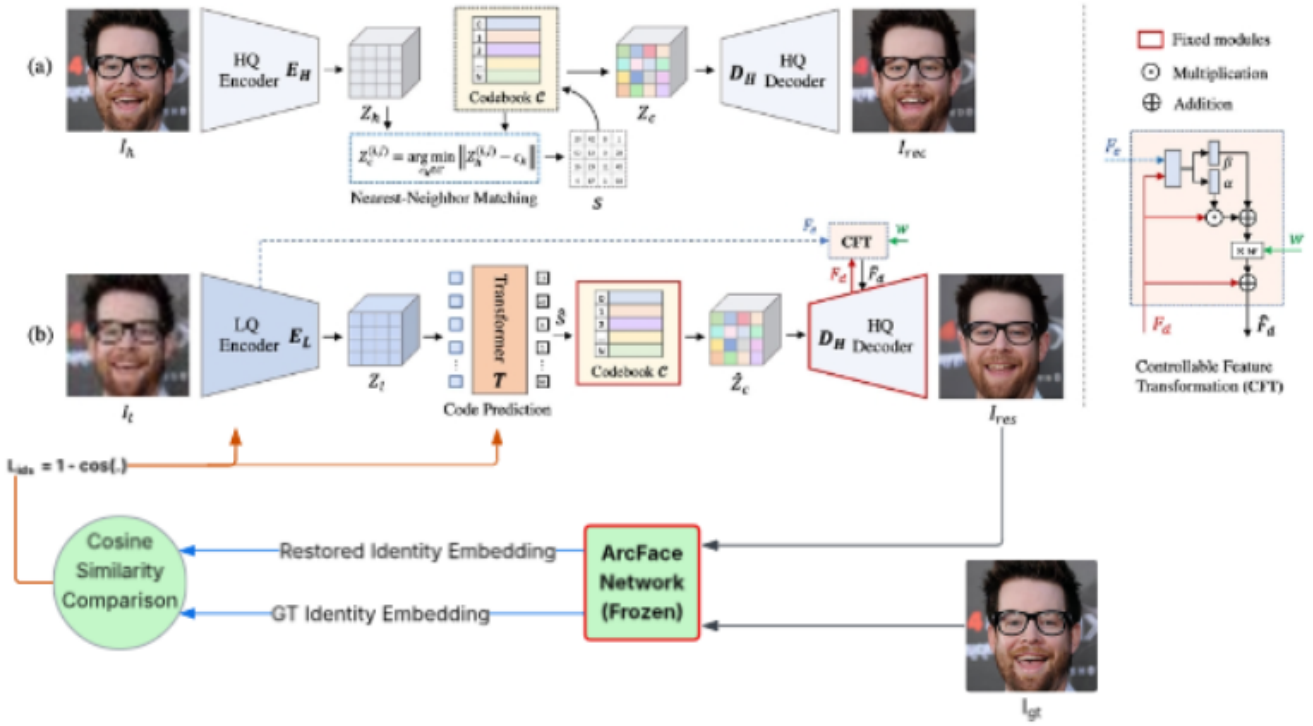

Fig. 2. Architectural diagram of ID-CodeFormer with the integrated identity-preserving module. The framework consists of two main pathways. The primary restoration pipeline (top) follows the original CodeFormer: a low-quality (LQ) input is processed by an encoder (E_L) and a Transformer (T) to predict a sequence of discrete codes. These codes retrieve high-quality visual features from a pre-trained, fixed codebook (C), which are then used by a fixed decoder (D_H) to generate the restored face (I_{res}). Our novel contribution, the supervised identity feedback loop (bottom, highlighted), operates during training. It feeds both the restored face (I_{res}) and the ground-truth (GT) face into a frozen ArcFace network to obtain their respective high-dimensional identity embeddings. The identity loss (L_{ids}) is computed as the cosine distance between these embeddings. This loss signal is then backpropagated to update the weights of the LQ Encoder and the Transformer, compelling them to learn a mapping that is explicitly aware of and preserves the subject's unique identity.

navigation of the quality-fidelity trade-off, achieving the primary goal of enhancing identity with acceptable and minimal impact on other quality aspects.

D. Qualitative Analysis

Visual comparisons of the output images corroborate and provide intuition for the quantitative findings. In numerous test cases, the baseline CodeFormer model, while producing a high-quality image, fails to preserve unique facial attributes present in the ground truth. For instance, a subject's distinctive eyeglasses are often replaced with a more generic pair, or a unique mole is omitted during the restoration process. This is a direct visual manifestation of the model regressing to the mean of its learned codebook.

In contrast, our ID-CodeFormer consistently demonstrates a superior ability to reconstruct these identity-defining details. The restored faces are not only of high quality but are also more recognizably the same individual as in the ground-truth image. The identity loss provides the necessary supervisory signal to prevent the model from discarding these critical features, resulting in a more faithful and satisfying restoration.

VI. Conclusion

This paper addressed the critical challenge of identity preservation in the state-of-the-art CodeFormer BFR model37. The model's reliance on a finite discrete codebook, while ensuring robustness, often leads to an "identity drift"38. We proposed ID-CodeFormer, an enhanced framework that integrates direct identity supervision into the training pipeline39. Our primary contribution is the incorporation of an ArcFace-based identity-preserving loss (L_{ids}) 40, which successfully compels the model to generate restorations that are not only perceptually plausible but also faithful to the subject's identity.

Experimental results validate our approach, showing a tangible improvement in the Identity Similarity (IDS) score with only a minimal and acceptable trade-off in pixel-level reconstruction metrics like PSNR and SSIM. This confirms that direct identity supervision can effectively navigate the quality-fidelity trade-off in discrete latent space models. While the fundamental limits of a finite codebook remain , future work could explore advanced identity-conditioning mechanisms or dynamic, identity-aware codebooks to further advance the field of identity-aware generative restoration.

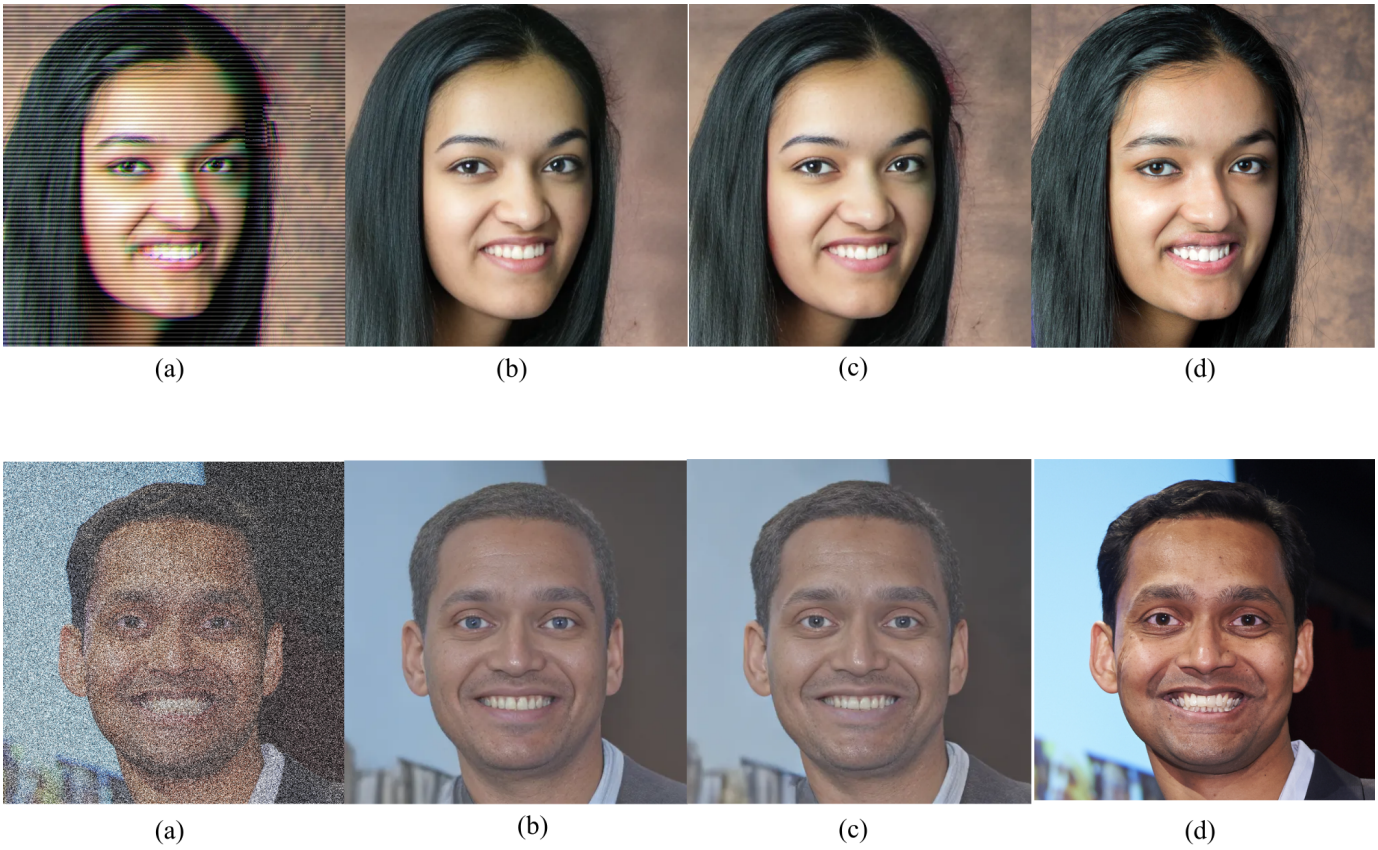

Fig. 3. Qualitative comparison on challenging real-world degraded faces. From left to right: (a) Degraded Input, (b) Baseline CodeFormer result, (c) Our ID-CodeFormer result, and (d) Ground Truth. In the top row, our method successfully removes the severe compression artifacts while preserving the subject's unique facial structure more faithfully than the baseline. In the bottom row, ID-CodeFormer demonstrates superior robustness to heavy noise, generating a cleaner and more identifiable restoration that is significantly closer to the ground truth.

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