

A Survey of State of the Art Large Vision Language Models: Alignment, Benchmark, Evaluations and Challenges

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<https://github.com/zli12321/Vision-Language-Models-Overview.git>

Abstract

Multimodal Vision Language Models (VLMs) have emerged as a transformative topic at the intersection of computer vision and natural language processing, enabling machines to perceive and reason about the world through both visual and textual modalities. For example, models such as CLIP [194], Claude [11], and GPT-4V [246] demonstrate strong reasoning and understanding abilities on visual and textual data and beat classical single modality vision models on zero-shot classification [94]. With their rapid advancements in research and growing popularity in various applications, we provide a comprehensive survey of VLMs. Specifically, we provide a systematic overview of VLMs in the following aspects: [1] model information of the major VLMs developed up to 2025; [2] the transition of VLM architectures and the newest VLM alignment methods; [3] summary and categorization of the popular benchmarks and evaluation metrics of VLMs; [4] the challenges and issues faced by current VLMs such as hallucination, alignment, and safety.

1. Introduction

Pretrained large language models (LLMs), such as LLaMA [212], GPT-4 [182] have achieved remarkable success across a wide range of NLP tasks [160, 171]. However, as these models continue to scale [177], they face two challenges: (1) The finite supply of high-quality text data [131, 217]; (2) The inherent limitations of single-modality architectures in capturing and processing real-world information that requires understanding the complex relationships between different modalities [66, 83]. These limitations motivate the efforts to explore and develop VLMs,

which combine both visual (e.g., images, videos) and textual inputs, providing a more comprehensive understanding of visual spatial relationships, objects, scenes, and abstract concepts [23, 74]. VLMs expand the representational boundaries that have previous confined single-modality approaches, supporting a richer and more contextually informed view of the world [53, 158, 218], such as visual question answering (VQA) [4], autonomous driving [211]. Meanwhile, VLMs encounter new challenges distinct from single-modality models, such as visual hallucination, which occurs when VLMs generate responses without meaningful visual comprehension, instead relying primarily on parametric knowledge stored in the LLM component [70, 146]. There are already several reviews on single-modality models [29, 176] while the multi-modality one is still missing. In this paper, we provide a critical examination of research results on VLMs, offering a systematic review of current major architectures of VLMs, evaluation and benchmarks, and challenges faced by VLMs.

2. State-of-the-Art VLMs

In recent years, leading Artificial Intelligence (AI) organizations are consistently releasing new VLMs [145]. From OpenAI’s CLIP [195], Salesforce’s BLIP [122], DeepMind’s Flamingo [9] to GPT-4V [246] and Gemini [10], these models are becoming larger and more interactive and illustrate the integration of chatbot functionality within VLM frameworks to support multimodality user interaction. The SoTA VLMs from 2019 to the end of 2024 are listed in Table 1 according to the following principal research directions.

Vision-Language correlation considers how training objectives or architectural design facilitate multimodal integration [262]. Training objectives such as contrastive learning are exemplified by approaches like SimCLR [33], which

is originally developed for self-supervised vision tasks, adapts neatly to multimodal settings by bringing paired images and text closer together in the embedding space while pushing apart unpaired examples. Vision-language architecture considers how structural choices in model design facilitate or constrain multimodal integration [262]. Older architectural approaches primarily train models from scratch (CLIP [247]), whereas more recent methods (LLaMA 3.2-vision [56]) leverage the power of pre-trained LLMs as a backbone to improve the ability to correlate vision and language to better understand visual content (Section 3).

Benchmarks and evaluation focuses on designing, collecting, and generating multimodal data, primarily in the format of question-answering (QA), to test VLMs on a variety of tasks such as visual text understanding, chart understanding, video understanding (Section 4).

3. Building Blocks and Training Methods

The architectures of VLMs are changing from pre-training from scratch to using pre-trained LLMs as a backbone to align the vision and textual information (Table 1). However, the fundamental components remain largely unchanged. We summarize the most foundational and widely adopted architectural components of VLMs, followed by an explanation of the popular pre-training and alignment methods. Details of SoTA VLM are given in Table 1 to show the shift in basic VLM architectures and newer architecture innovations that fuse visual features with textual features by treating visual features as tokens (Section 3.4).

3.1. Common Architecture Components

Vision Encoder plays a crucial role in projecting visual components into embedding features that align with embeddings from large language models (LLMs) for tasks such as text or image generation [58]. It is trained to extract rich visual features from image or video data, enabling integration with language representations [159, 267].

Specifically, vision encoders used in many VLMs [36, 44, 143, 222], are pretrained on large-scale multimodal or image data: These encoders are jointly trained on image-text pairs, allowing them to capture visual and language relationships effectively. Notable examples include CLIP [194], which aligns images and text embeddings via contrastive learning, and BLIP [123], which leverages bootstrapped pretraining for robust language-image alignment. Pretrained on large scale ImageNet [48] or Similar Datasets: These encoders are trained on vast amounts of labeled visual data or through self-supervised training [185], enabling them to capture domain-specific visual features. While initially unimodal, these encoders, such as ResNet [75] or Vision Transformers (ViTs) [52], can be adapted for multimodal tasks. They excel at extracting meaningful object-level features and serve as a solid foundation for vision-

language models. Many SoTA VLMs, such as Qwen2-VL [222] and LLaVA [142], commonly incorporate pre-trained vision encoders. These encoders not only provide robust and meaningful visual representations but are also highly effective for transfer learning [256]. They outperform randomly initialized encoders [82] by leveraging learned vision knowledge from their training domains.

Text Encoder projects tokenized text sequences into an embedding space, similar to how vision encoders process images. Models such as CLIP [194], BLIP [123], and ALIGN [97] use both an image encoder and a text encoder. These models use contrastive learning to align image and text embeddings in a shared latent space, effectively capturing cross-modal relationships. However, newer models, such as LLaVA [142], often do not include a dedicated text encoder. Instead, they rely on large language models (LLMs) (e.g., LLaMA [212], Vicuna [186]) for text understanding, integrating visual inputs through projection layers or cross-attention mechanisms [137]. This shift shows a growing trend of using the capabilities of LLMs over vision components for more versatile and advanced multimodal reasoning and generation tasks.

Text Decoder leverages LLMs as the primary text generator, using visual encoders to project image features [106]. GPT-4V [182], Flamingo [8], and Kosmos-2 [188] use this approach. These models typically use a minimal visual projection mechanism, allowing the powerful language decoder to generate contextually rich outputs. VisualBERT and ViLBERT [127, 153] provide the foundation to decoder architectures for multimodal pretraining. Training VLMs from scratch typically requires a separate text decoder, whereas using LLMs as the backbone often uses the original decoders from the LLM. (Figure 1).

Cross-Attention Mechanisms enable visual-text interactions by allowing tokens from one modality (vision) to influence tokens from the other modality (text) [137]. These layers compute attention scores across modalities, but not all models use them. VisualBERT [153] and Flamingo [9] employ cross-attention, while CLIP [194] does not.

3.2. Building Blocks of Training From Scratch

Training a VLM from scratch typically uses distinct training objectives and methodologies compared to using an LLM as the backbone. Self-Supervised Learning (SSL) pre-trains without needing human labeled data to scale up pretraining [76]. Variants of SSL techniques include masked image modeling [77], contrastive learning [215], and image transformation prediction [168]. In this section, we delve into contrastive learning, a common pre-training process to scale up VLM training from scratch.

Contrastive Learning employs separate encoders for visual and textual inputs, mapping them into a shared embedding space. The visual encoder extracts features us-

Model	Year	Architecture	Training Data	Parameters	Vision Encoder / Tokenizer	Pretrained Backbone Model
CLIP [194]	2021	Encoder-decoder	400M image-text pairs	63M-355M	ViT[52] / ResNet[75]	Pretrained from scratch
Flamingo [9]	2022	Decoder-only	M3W [9], ALIGN [97]	80B	Custom	Chinchilla [81]
BLIP [122]/2 [125]	2022/23	Encoder-decoder	COCO [139], Visual Genome [112]	223M-400M	ViT-B/L/g [52]	Pretrained from scratch
GPT-4V [246]	2023	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
Gemini [10]	2023	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
LLaVA-1.5 [144]	2023	Decoder-only	COCO [139]	13B	CLIP ViT-L/14 [52]	Vicuna [1]
PaLM-E [54]	2023	Decoder-only	All robots, WebLI [34]	562B	ViT [52]	PaLM [39]
CogVLM [223]	2023	Encoder-decoder	LAION-2B [231], COYO-700M [27]	18B	CLIP ViT-L/14 [52]	Vicuna [1]
InstructBLIP [43]	2023	Encoder-decoder	CoCo [139], VQAv2 [67]	13B	ViT [52]	Flan-T5 [40], Vicuna [1]
InternVL [36]	2023	Encoder-decoder	LAION-en [200], LAION-multi [200]	7B/20B	Eva CLIP ViT-g [52]	QLLaMA [41]
Claude 3 [11]	2024	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
Emu3 [226]	2024	Decoder-only	Aquila [261]	7B	MoVQGAN[269]	LLaMA-2 [212]
NVLM [44]	2024	Encoder-decoder	LAION-115M [123]	8B-24B	Custom ViT	Qwen-2-Instruct [244]
Qwen2-VL [222]	2024	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	7B-14B	EVA-CLIP ViT-L [52]	Qwen-2 [244]
Pixtral [5]	2024	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	12B	CLIP ViT-L/14 [52]	Mistral Large 2 [169]
LLaMA 3.2 vision [56]	2024	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	11B-90B	CLIP[194]	LLaMA-3.1 [56]
Baichuan Ocean Mini [132]	2024	Decoder-only	Image / Video / Audio / Text	7B	CLIP ViT-L/14 [52]	Baichuan [243]
TransFusion [272]	2024	Encoder-decoder	Undisclosed	7B	VAE Encoder [107]	Pretrained from scratch on transformer architecture
DeepSeek-VL2 [237]	2024	Decoder-only	WiT [207], WikiHow [111]	4.5B x 74	SigLIP [108] / SAMB [259]	DeepSeekMoE [42, 221]
Molmo [47]	2024	Decoder-only	PixMo [47]	1B-72B	CLIP ViT-L/14 [52]	OLMoE [174] / OLMo [68] / Qwen-2 [244]
BLIP-3 [242]	2024	Decoder	OBELICS [113], MINT-1T [13]	4B	ViT [52]	Phi-3-mini [2]
OLMo-2 [181]	2024	Decoder-only	OLMo-mix-1124 [181]	7B-13B	GPT-NeoX-20B [22]	Pretrained from scratch
DeepSeek-Janus-Pro [35]	2025	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	7B	SigLIP-Large-Patch16-384 [259]	Pretrained from scratch
QWen2.5-VL [15]	2025	Decoder-only	VQA/long video	3B/7B/72B	Redesigned ViT [52]	Qwen2.5 [193]
LLaMA 4 [6]	2025	Decoder-only	Undisclosed	17B	-	LLaMA 4 MoE [6]

Table 1. There is a growing number of VLMS released in recent years, which has expanded rapidly in recent years, with architectural variations enabling better and deeper integration between visual and textual representations. However, most current SoTA models use pretrained language models as the backbone model recently. DeepSeek-VL2 has a mixture of experts (MoE) architecture. The table only shows the primary sources/composition of the training data.

ing convolutional neural networks (CNN) [183] or vision transformers (ViTs) [51]. The text encoder processes textual inputs into embeddings. Contrastive learning aligns related image-text pairs by minimizing the distance between their visual and text embeddings in the shared space, while maximizing the distance between embeddings of unrelated pairs. Pioneering models like CLIP [194], BLIP [124], and ALIGN [97] leverage this approach, pre-training on large-scale image-text datasets to develop robust, transfer-

able representations for downstream tasks.

3.3. Building Blocks of Using LLMs as Backbone

Large Language Models serve as the text generation component that processes encoded visual and textual inputs to produce text outputs autoregressively [25, 182, 212] for VLMS. In the context of VLMS, LLMs include their original text decoders. In this section, we list two common ways to align visual and pre-trained LLM text features.

Projector maps visual features extracted by the vision en-

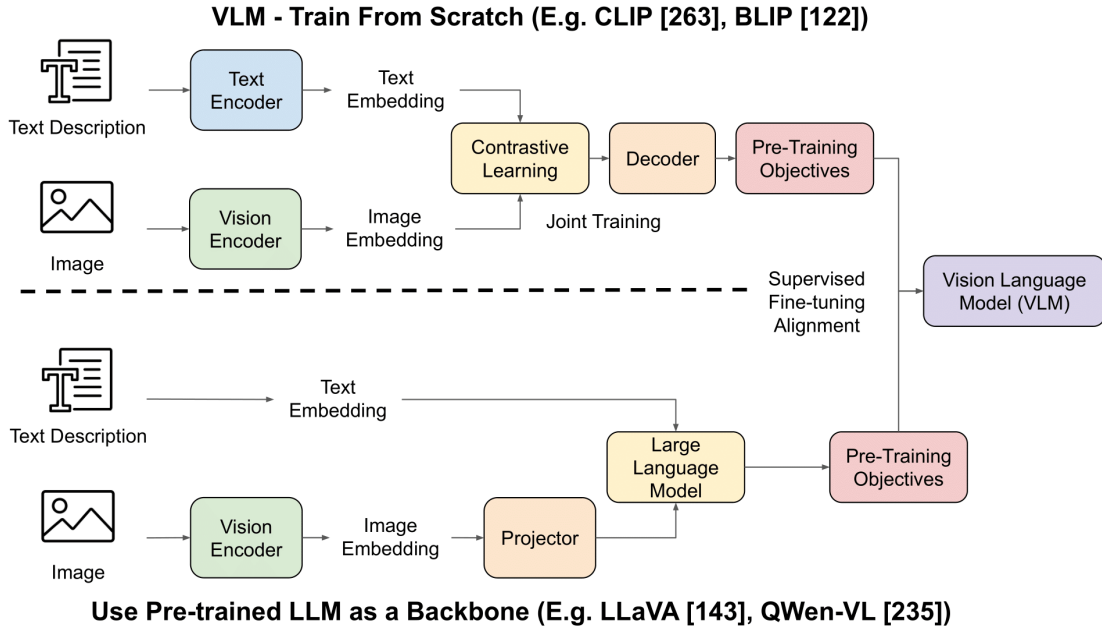


Figure 1. The basic components of common SoTA VLMs are transitioning from joint training from scratch to using a pretrained LLM as the backbone to fully leverage the knowledge of LLMs.

coder into a shared embedding space aligned with the text embeddings from the LLM. It typically consists of multi-layer perceptron (MLP) layers [175], which transform high-dimensional visual representations into compact embedding tokens compatible with the textual modality. The projector can be trained jointly with the rest of the model to optimize cross-modal objectives or freezing certain parts of the model, such as the LLM, to preserve pre-trained knowledge. Most cotemporary examples include LLaVA [143], QWen-2-VL [222], Nvidia VLM [44], Baichuan Ocean-mini [132], Emu3 [226], and Pixtral (multimodal decoder) [5].

Joint Training is an end-to-end approach that updates weights of all components of the model in parallel without freezing any weights, including the LLM and projector layers. This approach has been used in models such as Flamingo [9].

Freeze Training Stages involves selectively freezing model components during training, preserving pre-trained knowledge while adapting to new tasks [84]. Common strategies include freezing pre-trained vision encoders while fine-tuning projector layers, and implementing gradual unfreezing of components [189] or freezing LLM layers while only updating vision encoder weights [213].

3.4. Newer Architectures

Recent works have focused on enhancing the fusion of visual and textual features, which we will discuss in this section.

Treating all modalities as tokens is a more recent approach that reads and encodes visual inputs (images and videos) as tokens similar to text tokens. Emu3 [227] uses SBERT-MoVQGAN to encode visual inputs into tokens and employs special separators, such as *[SOT]* and *[EOV]*, to mark the start and end of visual tokens.¹ It still retains the LLMs architectures such as Llama [212], but comes with an expansion of the embedding layer to accommodate discrete vision tokens (Root Mean Square Layer Normalization [260] and Multi-query attention [7]). Additionally, it treats the generation of both visual and textual outputs as a token prediction task for a unified multimodal representation.

Transfusion processes different modalities simultaneously within a single transformer architecture [272]. This method treats discrete text tokens and continuous image vectors in parallel by introducing strategic break points. While not yet perfected, this approach shows promising potential for developing more unified multimodal models that can handle diverse input types.

3.5. VLM Alignments

Alignment can improve the downstream task performance, safety, and reliability of VLMs. Alignment has been a success in the LLM domain, as demonstrated by examples such as GPT-4 [182] and DeepSeek R1 [45]. The general alignment algorithm is Reinforcement Learning from Hu-

¹<https://github.com/ai-forever/MoVQGAN>

man Feedback (RLHF) that uses human annotations to train models to generate responses that align with human preferences and values. Specifically, Direct Preference Optimization (DPO) [196], Proxy Policy Optimization (PPO) [201] align LLMs with human preferred responses to generate outputs that better align with human preferences, where GRPO uses rule-based reward to leverage models’ chain-of-thought abilities to solve a problem step by step to improve the model’s reasoning ability and final task performance.

Title	Year	Model Size	RL
MM-Eureka [167]	2025	8/38B	RLOO [110]
MM-RLHF [266]	2025	8B	DPO
LMM-R1 [187]	2025	3B	PPO
Vision-R1 [89]	2025	72B	GRPO
R1-VL [264]	2025	2/7B	GRPO
Video-R1 [57]	2025	7B	GRPO

Table 2. A line of recent works show that RL can also improve VLMs downstream reasoning performance on visual math reasoning, video understanding and image understanding.

While RLHF succeeds on LLMs, VLMs’ multimodal nature adds additional layers of complexity for alignment. For instance, when a model handles image inputs alongside text, it can reveal or even infer sensitive details about a person in an image or misinterpret visual context. The alignment problems of VLMs are still less considered than those of their text counterparts. RLHF is adopted to VLM and has become one of the most popular and effective ways to align VLMs [167, 266]. The key to RLHF is to collect human feedback and design reward models. In [266], authors introduce a high-quality, human-annotated dataset with 120k preference comparison pairs to enhance the alignment of VLMs. It proposes a Critique-Based Reward Model that improves interpretability by generating critiques before assigning scores. By contrast, [167, 273] extends large-scale rule-based reinforcement learning to multimodal scenarios and reproduces key characteristics of text-based RL (like DeepSeek-R1 [72]) in visual contexts. Despite using only simple, sparse rewards (format and accuracy) and minimal data filtering, the authors achieve stable improvements in accuracy and response length.

In addition to RLHF, Reinforcement Learning with Verifiable Rewards (RLVR) is also getting attention [152]. RLVR bypasses the need for training a reward model by utilizing a direct verification function to evaluate correctness. This method streamlines the reward process while ensuring strong alignment with the task’s correctness criteria.

4. Benchmarks and Evaluation

The number of VLM benchmarks has grown rapidly with the quick development of new VLMs since 2022 [37, 263]. Comprehensive benchmarking is important for evaluating

model performance and ensuring robust training across different capabilities various aspects such as math reasoning, scene recognition, etc [67, 154]. Modern VLM benchmarks have moved beyond simple tasks like basic visual question answering to include a wider range of tests that better evaluate the models’ multimodal abilities from more aspects [61]. In this section, we summarize and categorize existing 54 vision-language benchmarks for evaluating VLMs, including image-text and video-text benchmarks. We then summarize the commonly used evaluation metrics for these benchmarks, the typical methods for creating benchmark datasets, and the strengths and weaknesses of current benchmarks and evaluation practices. We highlight how most benchmarks prioritize data diversity and quantity while often overlooking improvements in evaluation quality, which hinders the effective assessment of VLMs.

Benchmark Categorization. Benchmarks are designed with specific testing objectives, and we classify to ten primary categories (Table 3).

4.1. How Are Benchmark Data Collected

Benchmark datasets are typically created using one of three common data collection pipelines: fully human-annotated datasets; partially human-annotated datasets scaled up with synthetic data generation and partially validated by humans; and partially human-annotated datasets scaled up with synthetic data and fully validated by humans.

Fully human-annotated datasets are created by having humans collect or generate adversarial or challenging test questions from diverse subjects and fields. For example, MMMU[254] has 50 college students from various disciplines to collect existing test questions from textbooks and lecture materials, often in multiple choice format. Another approach involves humans creating questions and having annotators provide answers to these questions. In VCR[257], Mechanical Turks are tasked with using contexts, detected objects, and images to write one to three questions about each image, along with reasonable answers and explanations. Fully human annotated datasets are time-consuming and hard to scale up, which brings inspiration to automatic question generation with human validation.

Synthetic question generation has become a more popular part of benchmark generation pipeline on various disciplines such as chart understanding [163], video understanding [162] to quickly scale up dataset sizes. Common practices include using human written examples as seed examples, giving a powerful LLM to generate more adversarial example questions and answers [116]. Often, the generation process is only involved with texts. Chart and video data are often paired with visual content and captions, which are often used by authors as context to prompt LLMs to extract answers and generate questions [126, 162]. However, LLMs are not always accurate and may produce unfaithful content

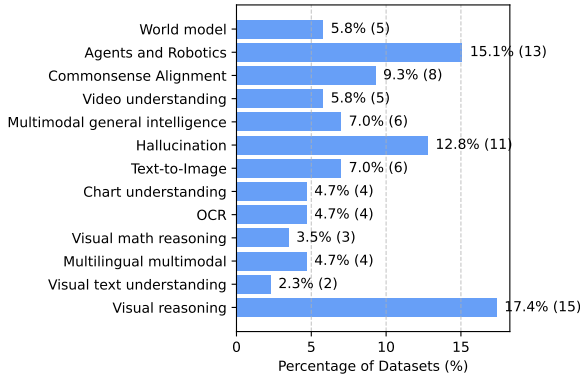
Category	Description	Datasets
Visual text understanding	Evaluates models’ ability to extract and understand texts within visual components	TextVQA [204], DocVQA [165]
Multilingual multimodal understanding	Evaluates VLMs on different languages on different tasks such as question answering and reasoning	MM-En/CN [150], CMMLU [121], C-Eval [90], MTVQA [210]
Visual math reasoning	Tests models’ ability to solve math problems in image forms	MathVista [154], MathVision [220], MM-Vet [252]
Optical Character Recognition (OCR)	Test models’ ability to extract objects from visual inputs	MM-Vet [252], OCRBench [151], MME [59], MMT-Bench [250]
Chart graphic understanding	Evaluates models’ ability to interpret graphic-related data	infographic VQA [164], AI2D [105], ChartQA [163], MMMU [254]
Text-to-Image generation	Evaluates models’ ability to generate images	MSCOCO [139], GenEval [65], T2I-CompBench [88], DPG-Bench [87], VQAScore [140], GenAI-Bench [117]
Hallucination	Evaluates whether models are likely to hallucinate on certain visual and textual inputs	HallusionBench [70], POPE [129], CHAIR [198], M-HalDetect [71], Hallu-Pi [50], Halle-Switch [258], BEAF [249], AutoHallusion [236], GAIVE [141], Hal-Eval [98], AMBER [219]
Multimodal general intelligence	Evaluates models’ ability on diverse domains of tasks	MMLU [79], MMMU [254], MMStar [32], M3GIA [206], AGIEval [271]
Video understanding	Evaluates models’ ability to understand videos (sequences of images)	EgoSchema [162], MLVU [275], MVBench [126], VideoMME [60], MovieChat [205], Perception-Test [191],
Visual reasoning, understanding, recognition, and question answering	Evaluate VLMs’ ability to recognize objects, answer questions, and reason through both visual and textual information	MMTBench [250], GQA [92], MM-En/CN [150], VCR [257], VQAv2 [67], MM-Vet [252], MMU [150], SEEDBench [116], Real World QA [238], MMMU-Pro [255], DPG [87], MSCOCO-30K [139], MM-Vet [252], ST-VQA [21], NaturalBench [118]
Alignment with common sense and physics	Evaluate the alignment between the AIGC images and videos generated by VLMs and the real world	VBench [91], PhysBench [38], VideoPhy [20], WISE [179], VideoScore [78], CRAVE [208], WorldSimBench [192], WorldModelBench [120]
Robot benchmark, web agent benchmark	Evaluate the embodied VLMs’ abilities online in rule-based simulators or offline datasets recording collected interactions	Habitat [199], Gibson [239], iGibson [119], Isaac Lab [170], WebArena [276], CALVIN [166], VLM-Bench [270], GemBench [64], VIMA-Bench [99], VirtualHome [190], AI2-THOR [109], ProcTHOR [46], ThreeDWorld [63]
Generative model, world model	Evaluate the embodied AI models’ abilities with interactive models representing the environments	GAIA-1 [85], UniSim [245], LWM [147], Genesis [12], RoboGen [228]

Table 3. We collect 95 benchmarks covering 13 basic categories to evaluate VLMs. However, most of these categories test VLMs’ general abilities to understand visual contents, and many of them are still far from practical evaluations in real-world applications, such as scene understanding in autonomous driving [148, 232].

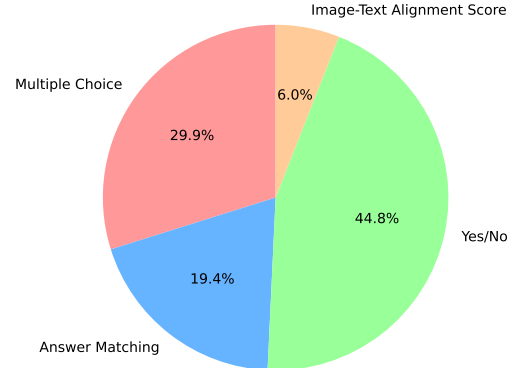
or hallucinations without human supervision [69, 134, 241]. To address this, pipelines typically include automatic filters to remove low-quality outputs, followed by crowdworker validation of either randomly sampled or all generated examples [116, 162, 163]. Automatic benchmark generation helps scale dataset size with reduced human effort. However, current automatic question-generation methods primarily rely on captions and textual contexts, which can lead to the creation of questions that are easy to answer without requiring significant visual reasoning [70, 172], which undermines the benchmark’s primary goal—evaluating a VLM’s ability to comprehend and reason about visual content.

Interaction in the Simulator is mainly targeted at VLM benchmarks in robotics. It gathers data for training and evaluation by assessing the VLM-powered agents online. As a data generation method stemming from reinforcement learning, such a data generation method is applicable for

those scenarios that human-labeled datasets or synthetic datasets are hard and expensive to acquire, while the data construction follows some common rules like the physical law or some other common sense. With this rule-based data acquisition method, the outcome VLMs are more robust to the deviation within the multimodal inputs. During recent years, many works focus on realistic simulators for either robotics [64, 119, 166, 170, 199, 239, 270] and web agents [276] to simulate human agents or robots’ interactions with the physical world. Nonetheless, benchmarks [119, 199, 239] based on the interaction data records from the simulator are also widely used for VLM agents training and evaluation. Notably, more efforts have been used for generative model [245] or even world model [12, 85, 147] to replace the previous simulators or datasets in generating more practical and better-quality datasets for VLMs. Though simulators are widely used in training and evaluating the VLM-power agents, the potential sim2real gap might exist when



(a) Most of our surveyed data tests VLMs’ visual reasoning abilities.



(b) Majority of the benchmarks are designed in multiple choice or yes/no format for ease of evaluations.

Figure 2. Our surveyed (a) benchmark dataset categories and (b) common evaluation practices. Most existing benchmarks focus on Yes/No and multiple choice format for the ease of evaluation. However, multiple choice and Yes/No questions also have their limitations that VLMs/LLMs can blindly answer above random guessing probability without giving them the questions [19]. Current scope of VLM benchmark and evaluation is broad but not comprehensive due to the challenges of reliability of answer matching.

transplanting the terminal VLM into real-world applications, *i.e.* the VLM-powered agents might not be able to handle some real-world situations. More efforts towards the mitigation of these issues are still expected in this direction.

4.2. Evaluation Metrics

Benchmarks are designed for evaluation, with metrics established during their creation. VLM evaluation metrics are automatic to support repeated use at scale, and they often influence the question formats used in the benchmarks. We show the common evaluation metrics used in our surveyed benchmarks (Figure 2b, 3).

Answer matching is widely used for open-ended and closed-ended question types, where the answers are *short-form entities, long-form answers, numbers, or yes/no*. Generative VLMs are more verbose than extractive LLMs and VLMs, where they often generate verbose but correct answers [133], containment exact match [95] is a more practical version used more often in the evaluation, which includes removing articles and space of predicted answers and check whether the normalized predicted answer is contained in the normalized gold answer [31, 115]. However, exact match tends to have high recall, which often fails to account for semantic equivalence between the gold and predicted answers, frequently misjudging human-acceptable correct answers as incorrect [26, 30, 133] and becomes impossible for benchmarks that seek long-form answers [240]. Prior to the instruction following success of LLM period, standard token overlapping scores such as F_1 , ROUGE [136], BLEU [184] to measure the similarity score between the gold and predicted answers, but start failing when generative models are generating more complex and diverse but correct answers [26, 30, 133, 240].

Thus, some of the benchmarks like MM-Vet [252] adopt LLMs to evaluate generated responses when the responses are long-form answers that requires semantic understanding to judge correctness. LLM evaluations are shown to have the highest correlations to human evaluation, but they also face the struggles of producing consistent outputs with internal model updates or changing prompt instructions [102, 161, 268]. While no current answer-matching evaluation method is perfect, *yes/no* questions are the easiest to evaluate compared to open-ended ones. As a result, most benchmarks rely on a multiple-choice format to assess VLMs (Figure 2b).

Multiple Choice format involves selecting an answer from a set of options, including distractors, for a given visual question [116, 238, 250, 257]. This format provides definitive answers and is among the easiest to evaluate, as it measures the percentage of questions a VLM answers correctly. However, LLMs have demonstrated an unusual ability to select correct answers even without access to the actual questions [19]. Since VLMs incorporate an LLM component for generating responses (Section 3), further research is required to assess the robustness and reliability of current VLM benchmarks.

Image/text similarity scores are commonly used in image generation benchmarks like T2I-CompBench, GenEval [65, 88] to evaluate the alignment between generated images and their corresponding textual descriptions. They often rely on measures such as CLIPScore [80] for image-text alignment or ROUGE for caption matching to assess the semantic and lexical similarity between the outputs and the references.

In summary, VLM benchmarks encompass a wide range of question types, fields of expertise, and tasks, with MMLU [79] alone covering 57 distinct tasks. However,

1) Answer Matching



Q: What is the price of the bananas per kg?
A: \$11.98

Q: What does the red sign say?
A: Stop

ST-VQA [20]

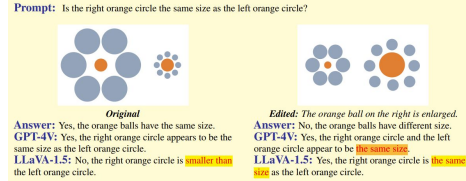
Evaluation: Accuracy
Metric: Exact Match
Format: Specific short-form answers, such as objects...



Q: Can you explain this meme?
GT: This meme is a humorous take on procrastination and the tendency to delay tasks until a specific time.

MM-Vet [245]

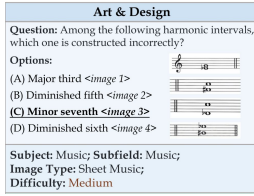
Evaluation: Average Score
Metric: ROUGE, LLM Eval
Format: Long-form open-ended answers



HallusionBench [67]

Evaluation: Accuracy / Precision / Recall
Metric: Exact Match
Format: Yes/No question

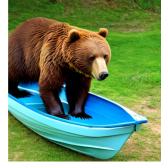
2) Multiple Choice



MMMU-Pro [248]

Evaluation: Accuracy
Metric: Exact Choice Match
Format: Multiple choice questions

3) Image-Caption Similarity



a brown bear? → 0.9925
a blue boat? → 0.9878
Score: 0.9804

"A brown bear and a blue boat"

T2I-CompBench [63]

Evaluation: Average Similarity
Metric: CLIPScore, GenEval
Format: text to image generation

Figure 3. Common benchmark evaluation metrics restrict the formats of most benchmarks, which mostly evaluate whether a VLM can generate a short-form answer that matches the correct answers.

popular evaluations remain largely confined to simple answer matching or multiple choice formats, far from the broader general intelligence of the Turing test [214].

5. Challenges of VLMS

This section examines key challenges in VLM research, including hallucination, safety, fairness, alignment, efficiency in training and fine-tuning, and data scarcity. Despite recent advancements, understanding these limitations is crucial to mitigating risks and ensuring ethical, reliable deployment, particularly for marginalized users.

5.1. Hallucination

Hallucination in VLMS refers to referencing nonexistent objects in images [198]. Despite benchmark-setting performance, hallucination is still a pervasive issue in VLMS, especially in visual-text tasks. Researchers have proposed datasets and metrics to quantify hallucination, with early efforts tending to require human annotation. CHAIR [198] quantifies hallucination in image captioning using per-instance and per-sentence metrics. POPE [128] assesses hallucination with Yes-No questions on object existence. M-HalDetect [71] provides 16K fine-grained VQA samples for training VLMS to detect and prevent hallucinations.

Subsequent research investigated hallucination in finer detail. Halle-Switch [258] evaluates hallucination based on data amount, quality, and granularity, balancing contextual

and parametric knowledge. Hallu-Pi [50] provides 1,260 images with detailed annotations to detect perturbation-induced hallucinations. BEAF [249] examines before-and-after image changes, introducing new metrics: true understanding, ignorance, stubbornness, and indecision. HallusionBench [70] tests VLM visual reasoning with dependent, unanswerable questions across diverse topics and formats. AutoHallusion [236] automates hallucination benchmark generation, probing VLM language modules for context-based hallucination examples.

The advent of more sophisticated LLMs has also assisted the development of larger benchmark datasets in this area. GAIVE [141] uses GPT-4 to generate 400K samples across 16 vision-language tasks, covering hallucinations like nonexistent object and knowledge manipulation. Hal-Eval [98] constructs 2M image-caption pairs, leveraging GPT-4 for fine-grained hallucination induction. AMBER [219] is an LLM-free multi-dimensional benchmark designed for generative and discriminative tasks, annotating four types of hallucination.

5.2. Safety

Given VLMS' versatility, safeguarding against unethical use is crucial. Jailbreaking [100] allows malicious circumvention of ethical boundaries, posing risks in robotics and other downstream tasks [55, 103, 197, 235, 253]. SafeBench [251] introduces harmful queries across 23 risk scenarios using an LLM-based jury deliberation framework. MM-

SafetyBench [149] evaluates VLM safety with image-text query pairs in unsafe contexts. JailbreakV [155] introduces 28K malicious image-based queries, testing attack transferability across models. SHIELD [203] evaluates face spoofing and forgery detection using True-False queries in zero- and few-shot settings. HADES [130] exploits gradient updates and adversarial methods to conceal and amplify harmful content, breaking multimodal alignment. imgJP [180] bypasses refusal guardrails using images instead of prompts, demonstrating high transferability across VLMs.

5.3. Fairness

Extensive literature has explored inequities in LLMs and VLMs [17, 62]. Like unimodal LLMs, VLMs show disparate performance, particularly affecting marginalized groups [3, 14, 93]. MMBias [96] presents a human-annotated image dataset targeting bias in religion, nationality, disability, and sexual orientation. FMBench [234] proposes a benchmark using medical images to assess gender, skin tone, and age bias. Harvard-FairVL [156] shows CLIP and BLIP2 favor Asian, Male, and Non-Hispanic groups. FairmedFM [101] integrates 17 datasets to evaluate fairness in medical tasks. CulturalVQA [178] (2,378 image-question pairs) shows better performance for North American cultures and worse performance for African and Islamic ones.

5.4. Alignment

Multi-modality Alignment. The alignment issue in multi-modal models arises from contextual deviation between modalities, leading to hallucinations [225]. Many efforts to mitigate this include leveraging VLM reasoning for self-reflection [224] or designing projectors to bridge modalities. SIMA [224] improves L-VLM alignment via self-critique and vision metrics. SAIL [265] aligns pretrained unimodal models for better multimodal learning. Ex-MCR [230] enables paired-data-free semantic alignment using contrastive representation. OneLLM [230] unifies eight modalities to language through a unified encoder and progressive multimodal alignment. SeeTRUE [248] benchmarks text-image alignment, proposing VQA-based and end-to-end classification methods for better misalignment detection and ranking.

Commonsense and Physics Understanding. The LVLMS used for AI-generated content (AIGC) images and videos, sometimes known as World Models [73], like SORA [24] and Veo2 [216], attract much attention throughout the community. However, these LVLMS face challenges in commonsense alignment and physics adherence. Many recent benchmarks and evaluation models aim to address these issues. VBench [91] evaluates video generative models across structured quality dimensions. PhysBench [38] and VideoPhy [20] assess VLMs and text-to-video models on physical understanding and commonsense adher-

ence. WISE [179] introduces WiScore for T2I knowledge-image alignment. CRAVE [208] focuses on AIGC video quality assessment, aligning textual prompts with video dynamics. VideoScore [78] tracks model progress using VideoFeedback, a large-scale human-annotated dataset. WorldSimBench [192] and WorldModelBench [120] evaluate World Simulators for video-action consistency and decision-making applications. GPT4Motion [157] integrates LLMs, physics engines, and diffusion models for physics-aware text-to-video synthesis. Despite these efforts, key challenges remain in advanced video evaluation and bridging the gap between AIGC and real-world fidelity.

Training Efficiency. Efficient training and alignment of VLMs remain a very heated research topic due to their high cost and difficulty in training. Recent studies explore the impact of different pre-training settings over modules [138] or supervision [229] on the ultimate performance of VLMs. However, many applications require specialized rather than multi-task capabilities. Low-Rank Adaptation (LoRa) [49, 86] enables efficient fine-tuning with fewer parameters. RLHF [16, 114] integrates human or model feedback for alignment. Rule-based RL, requiring multiple input generations, increases computational costs, limiting its use to small VLMs [187]. Alternative RL methods (PPO, DPO) reduce computation but demand extensive human annotation to trade for computation resources [167, 266].

5.5. Data Scarcity

The abilities and reliabilities of VLMs are highly depending on the availability and diversity of the training datasets. However, the massive scale of current advanced VLMs and the scarcity of high-quality training datasets add up to the difficulty in continuously improving the performance of the future VLMs. One potential method to mitigate this issue is to use self-supervised learning (SSL) [173] that learns the representation automatically from the unlabelled dataset. Another major direction is to use the synthetic data generated by following some rules [18] or utilizing some third-party tools [202]. In VLM, specifically designed for physical world-related purposes, like robotics [209] or web agents [28], another option is to gather datasets from the interactions with the physical simulators or world model [12, 104, 228, 233], or learning from videos with human demonstrations [135, 274]. Though a lot of efforts have been made in all three directions, more insights are still expected into the breakthrough of the mass-scale training for LVLMS and the alternatives to the internet-scale data, given Ilya Sutskever’s quote that “Pre-training as we know it will unquestionably end.”

6. Conclusion

Developments of VLMs and LLMs are happening at a break-neck pace with more sophisticated applications and use

cases being introduced in quick succession. This paper aims to capture the most notable architectures, trends, applications along with prominent challenges in this area. We hope that our survey provides a solid general overview for practitioners as a road map for future works.

7. Limitation

Given the rapid growth of VLM research, our survey is not exhaustive. We focus on the most popular and representative models to provide a comprehensive overview. However, as the field evolves quickly, newer models, benchmarks, and techniques will emerge. While we cannot update this paper continuously, the latest VLM developments will be reflected on our website.

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