Exemplar-Based Deep Learning Approach for Reference-Guided Image Colorization

Abstract

Image colorization transforms grayscale images into visually convincing color representations by leveraging reference color images to guide the colorization process. This report presents an implementation and analysis of exemplar-based deep learning networks for reference-guided image colorization. The exemplar-based approach reduces user effort by transferring colors from reference images that visually resemble grayscale targets through semantic correspondence matching and neural network-based color prediction. We implement a framework comprising semantic correspondence matching using pretrained VGG-19 features and U-Net-based decoder architecture for color reconstruction. The system is evaluated on the Imagenette dataset using quantitative metrics including PSNR, SSIM, MSE, and LPIPS. Our experimental results demonstrate that the exemplar-based approach achieves superior performance with PSNR of 24.12 dB and SSIM of 0.9384, producing high-quality colorizations when appropriate reference images are available. The method shows particular strength in maintaining object-level color consistency through semantic correspondence matching while effectively transferring colors from visually similar reference images.

Keywords: image colorization, exemplar-based methods, deep learning, semantic correspondence, reference-guided colorization, VGG-19 features

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Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Internship Overview

The one-month online internship at IIIT Kottayam was structured into two focused project modules, providing a comprehensive learning experience in computer vision and optimization techniques. The internship was divided into two distinct phases:

- **First Half (Weeks 1-2):** Focused on implementing an exemplar-based deep learning approach for reference-guided image colorization. This phase involved understanding semantic correspondence matching, exploring pretrained feature extractors like VGG-19, implementing U-Net architectures, and evaluating colorization quality using both quantitative metrics and qualitative visual assessment.
- **Second Half (Weeks 3-4):** Dedicated to developing a traffic light duration optimizer using machine learning techniques. This phase covered traffic flow analysis, optimization algorithms, and smart traffic management systems.

This online internship provided hands-on experience with cutting-edge machine learning applications, combining theoretical understanding with practical implementation skills. The remote format allowed for flexible learning while maintaining rigorous technical standards and mentorship support.

1.2 Institute Profile – IIIT Kottayam

The Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Kottayam is an Institute of National Importance established by the Government of India under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. Located in Valavoor, Pala, Kerala, IIIT Kottayam is committed to advancing education and research in cutting-edge areas of technology.

With a strong academic focus on Artificial Intelligence, Computer Vision, Machine Learning, and Data Science, IIIT Kottayam fosters a collaborative and innovation-driven environment. The institute offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs supported by experienced faculty and modern infrastructure.

This internship was part of IIIT Kottayam's broader mission to bridge academic learning with industry needs. Through expert mentorship, access to research resources, and real-world problem-solving opportunities, the program reflected the institute's commitment to developing industry-ready professionals in the field of artificial intelligence and computer vision.

1.3 Project Background

Image colorization is the process of transforming grayscale images into visually convincing color representations. This technique has significant applications in historical photograph restoration, digital art creation, medical imaging enhancement, and accessibility solutions. The task presents substantial challenges due to its inherently ill-posed nature - multiple plausible colorizations can exist for any single grayscale image.

Traditional colorization methods required extensive manual intervention through user-drawn colored scribbles, demanding significant artistic expertise and time investment. To reduce manual burden, exemplar-based methods were developed, utilizing reference color images to guide colorization through visual similarity matching.

Exemplar-based approaches reduce user effort by transferring colors from reference images visually resembling grayscale targets. These methods employ advanced matching techniques at multiple levels including region-based, super-pixel-based, and pixel-based correspondence matching. Recent developments leverage deep features from networks like VGG-19 to improve semantic-level matching between visually dissimilar but conceptually similar images.

This report focuses on exemplar-based colorization networks that achieve superior quantitative results when high-quality references are available. The semantic correspondence matching approach shows promise for maintaining object-level color consistency, though major limitations include dependency on reference quality and computational overhead for similarity matching.

Chapter 2

Literature Survey

2.1 Early Colorization Approaches

The field of image colorization has evolved significantly from early manual techniques to sophisticated deep learning approaches. Early colorization methods relied heavily on manual user intervention, requiring extensive artistic expertise and time investment [8].

Levin et al. [8] introduced optimization-based colorization using colored scribbles, where users manually provide color hints at specific image locations. The method propagates these colors to neighboring pixels with similar intensities using optimization techniques. While effective for simple images, this approach requires substantial manual effort and artistic skill for complex scenes.

Subsequent improvements focused on reducing manual intervention through semi-automatic approaches. Luan et al. [13] developed stroke-based rendering for natural images, while Huang et al. [14] introduced adaptive edge detection for better color propagation. These methods, however, still required significant user input and struggled with complex textures and object boundaries.

2.2 Exemplar-Based Colorization Methods

The development of exemplar-based colorization marked a significant paradigm shift toward reducing manual effort by leveraging reference images. Welsh et al. [1] pioneered this approach by transferring colors from reference images to target grayscale images using global luminance and texture statistics. Their method matched pixel neighborhoods based on luminance and texture features, transferring colors from the most similar reference regions.

Building upon this foundation, Irony et al. [2] introduced region-based colorization that considered spatial context and semantic relationships. Their approach segmented both reference and target images into regions, establishing correspondences based on texture and spatial features. This method showed improved results for images with distinct object regions but struggled with complex textures and lighting variations.

Chia et al. [3] developed semantic colorization leveraging internet images as references. Their method employed image search engines to find semantically similar reference images, then transferred colors using region-based matching. The approach introduced the concept of semantic relevance in reference selection, though it relied on external image databases and faced challenges with diverse lighting conditions.

Liu et al. [4] proposed intrinsic colorization that decomposed images into reflectance and shading components. By matching intrinsic properties rather than raw pixel values, their method achieved better robustness to lighting variations. However, the intrinsic image decomposition itself presented computational challenges and accuracy limitations.

Bugeau et al. [5] introduced variational exemplar-based colorization using energy minimization frameworks. Their method formulated colorization as an optimization problem combining data fidelity and smoothness terms, achieving improved spatial consistency. The variational approach provided theoretical foundations for exemplar-based methods but required careful parameter tuning.

2.3 Deep Learning Revolution in Colorization

The introduction of deep learning transformed colorization from handcrafted feature-based approaches to end-to-end learnable systems. Cheng et al. [9] presented one of the first deep learning approaches for automatic colorization, using a three-layer convolutional neural network to predict colors from grayscale inputs. Their method demonstrated the potential of learning-based approaches but was limited by shallow architectures and small datasets.

Iizuka et al. [10] developed a comprehensive framework combining global and local features for automatic colorization. Their approach used a fusion layer to combine global semantic information with local texture details, achieving improved color consistency across different image regions. The method introduced the concept of multi-scale feature fusion that became influential in subsequent work.

Zhang et al. [11] made significant contributions through their class-rebalanced loss function and comprehensive evaluation methodology. Their approach treated colorization as a multinomial classification problem in quantized color space, addressing the inherent uncertainty in color prediction. The class-rebalancing technique handled the imbalanced distribution of colors in natural images, leading to more vibrant and realistic results.

Larsson et al. [15] explored the relationship between colorization and high-level semantic understanding. Their method used hypercolumns combining features from multiple CNN layers, demonstrating that semantic understanding significantly improves colorization quality. This work established the importance of semantic features in colorization tasks.

2.4 Advanced Deep Learning Architectures

The adoption of advanced architectures like U-Net and generative adversarial networks (GANs) further improved colorization quality. Isola et al. [12] applied conditional GANs to image-to-image translation tasks including colorization. Their pix2pix framework used adversarial training to generate realistic colors while maintaining structural consistency with input grayscale images.

Nazeri et al. [16] introduced edge-informed colorization using a two-stage approach. Their method first generated edge maps from grayscale inputs, then used these edges to guide the colorization process. This approach showed improved boundary preservation and reduced color bleeding artifacts.

Vitoria et al. [17] developed chrominance attention mechanisms for automatic colorization. Their approach used attention modules to focus on semantically important regions while suppressing irrelevant areas. The attention-based method achieved improved color consistency and semantic understanding.

2.5 Exemplar-Based Deep Learning Integration

The integration of deep learning with exemplar-based approaches represents the current state-of-the-art in reference-guided colorization. Liao et al. [6] introduced visual attribute transfer through deep image analogy, leveraging convolutional neural network features for semantic understanding. Their method computed neural patches at multiple scales, enabling transfer of both color and texture information from reference images.

He et al. [7] developed the Deep Exemplar-based Colorization framework, which forms the theoretical foundation for our implementation. Their approach used semantic correspondence matching with VGG-19 features to establish pixel-level correspondences between reference and target images. The method achieved superior results when appropriate reference images were available, though it required careful reference selection.

Xu et al. [18] extended exemplar-based methods with learnable similarity metrics. Their approach trained similarity functions end-to-end rather than relying on fixed pretrained features, achieving improved correspondence matching for diverse image types. However, the method required substantial training data and computational resources.

Su et al. [19] introduced instance-aware exemplar-based colorization that handled multiple object instances within single images. Their method used instance segmentation to establish object-level correspondences, enabling accurate color transfer for complex scenes with multiple objects of the same category.

2.6 Contemporary Developments and Challenges

Recent developments focus on addressing fundamental challenges in exemplar-based colorization including reference selection, correspondence matching robustness, and computational efficiency. Lee et al. [20] developed reference-based colorization with spatially adaptive normalization, achieving improved color transfer while maintaining structural details.

Xia et al. [21] introduced joint training frameworks that simultaneously learn reference selection and colorization, reducing the dependency on manual reference curation. Their approach used reinforcement learning to optimize reference selection based on colorization quality metrics.

Current challenges in exemplar-based colorization include:

- **Reference Selection Automation:** Developing methods for automatic selection of appropriate reference images from large databases
- **Correspondence Matching Robustness:** Improving matching accuracy across variations in lighting, viewpoint, and scale
- **Computational Efficiency:** Reducing the computational overhead associated with correspondence matching
- **Domain Adaptation:** Extending methods to work across different image domains and styles
- **Temporal Consistency:** Maintaining color consistency across video sequences

2.7 Evaluation Methodologies and Metrics

The evaluation of colorization methods has evolved from subjective visual assessment to comprehensive quantitative metrics. Zhang et al. [11] established standard evaluation protocols using PSNR, SSIM, and perceptual distance metrics. However, the inherent ambiguity in colorization tasks makes evaluation challenging, as multiple valid colorizations may exist for any grayscale input.

Recent evaluation approaches incorporate perceptual metrics that better correlate with human visual perception. The LPIPS (Learned Perceptual Image Patch Similarity) metric [22] uses deep features to measure perceptual similarity, providing more meaningful quality assessment than traditional pixel-based metrics.

User studies remain important for evaluating colorization quality, though they are expensive and time-consuming. Recent work has explored automated evaluation methods that correlate well with human judgments, enabling more efficient quality assessment during development and optimization.

Chapter 3

Proposed Methodology

3.1 Dataset and Preprocessing

The implementation utilizes the Imagenette dataset [23], a curated ten-class subset of ImageNet containing natural scenes including animals, structures, and objects. This dataset provides meaningful balance between visual diversity and computational tractability. Following the preprocessing approach established by Zhang et al. [11], all images are resized to 224×224 pixels to accommodate the requirements of the VGG-19 feature extractor while maintaining sufficient detail for semantic correspondence matching.

Each RGB image undergoes conversion to CIELAB color space following the methodology of Iizuka et al. [10], separating perceptual brightness (L channel) from color information (a and b channels). This choice leverages the human visual system's greater sensitivity to lightness over chromaticity and allows models to learn color transfer independent of brightness variations. The L channel is normalized from [0, 100] to [0, 1], while a/b channels are scaled from [-128, 127] to [-1, 1] for numerical stability during optimization, following the normalization scheme proposed by Zhang et al. [11].

Reference selection employs similarity-based approaches constraining search spaces to images within identical semantic classes, following the semantic matching principles established by Chia et al. [3]. This ensures that reference images are semantically relevant to target grayscale images, improving the likelihood of successful color transfer.

3.2 Exemplar-Based Network Architecture

The proposed exemplar-based implementation follows the Deep Exemplar-based Colorization framework developed by He et al. [7], comprising semantic correspondence matching and neural network-based color prediction stages as illustrated in Figure 3.1.

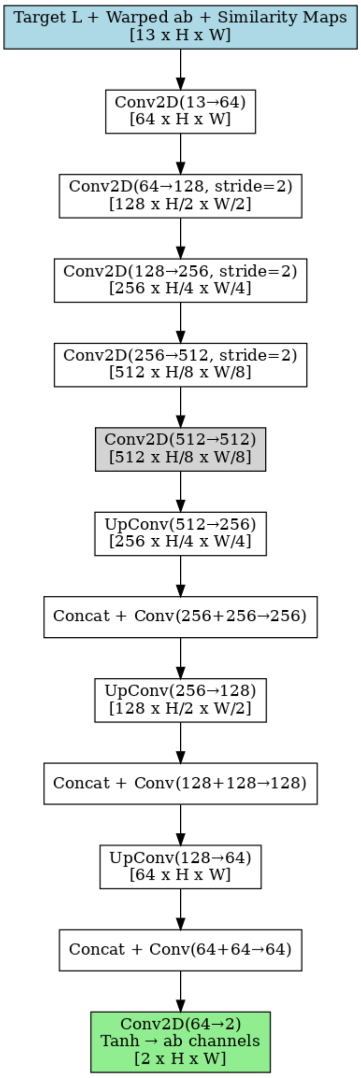

Figure 3.1: Exemplar-based colorization architecture with semantic correspondence matching using VGG-19 features and U-Net decoder for color reconstruction, adapted from He et al. [7].

3.2.1 Reference Selection and Preprocessing

Optimal references are selected through dense feature comparison using truncated VGG-19 networks up to conv4_2 layers, following the feature extraction methodology of Simonyan and Zisserman [24]. Global average pooling produces 512-dimensional feature vectors, which are L2-normalized and compared using cosine similarity metrics as established by Liao et al. [6]. Highest-scoring references are selected as exemplars for each target image.

The reference selection process ensures semantic relevance between target and reference images, which is crucial for successful color transfer as demonstrated by Chia et al. [3]. Images from the same semantic class are prioritized, and similarity scores are computed based on deep feature representations that capture both low-level texture and high-level semantic information.

Multi-scale semantic similarity maps are computed using pretrained VGG-19 features from five hierarchical layers: conv1_2, conv2_2, conv3_4, conv4_4, and conv5_4, following the multi-scale approach of He et al. [7]. This multi-scale approach captures correspondences at different levels of abstraction, from fine texture details to high-level semantic concepts.

3.2.2 Semantic Correspondence Matching

Bidirectional similarity measures calculate target-to-reference and reference-to-target correspondences, producing 10 similarity maps that capture spatial relationships between corresponding regions, following the bidirectional matching approach of Liao et al. [6]. For each pixel in the target image, the system identifies the most similar pixels in the reference image using cosine similarity between normalized VGG-19 features.

The correspondence matching process operates at multiple scales to ensure robust matching across different levels of detail, as established by He et al. [7]. Fine-scale features from early layers capture texture and edge correspondences, while coarse-scale features from deeper layers capture semantic object correspondences.

The resulting similarity maps encode spatial correspondences between target and reference images, forming a crucial component of the 13-channel input representation that guides the neural network's color prediction process.

3.2.3 Network Architecture

The network employs U-Net-based encoder-decoder architecture [25] processing 13-channel inputs: target L channel (1), warped reference ab channels (2), and multi-scale semantic similarity maps (10), following the input representation scheme of He et al. [7]. This comprehensive input representation provides the network with both target image structure and reference color information along with spatial correspondence guidance.

The encoder consists of four progressive downsampling blocks with channel progression 13→64→128→256→512, following the architectural design principles of Ronneberger et al. [25]. Each encoder block contains convolutional layers, batch normalization [26], and ReLU activation functions, gradually extracting hierarchical feature representations while reducing spatial resolution.

Symmetric skip connections preserve fine-grained spatial details between corresponding encoder-decoder layers, ensuring that high-resolution information is maintained throughout the processing pipeline as established by Ronneberger et al. [25]. This is particularly important for preserving sharp color transitions and avoiding over-smoothing in the final colorization.

The decoder progressively upsamples features while reducing channel dimensions, ultimately producing 2-channel output representing predicted a and b color channels. The combination of encoder-decoder architecture with skip connections and rich input representation enables the network to produce high-quality colorizations that respect both semantic content and spatial structure.

3.3 Training Configuration

The training setup employs parameters optimized for stable learning and efficient convergence with the more complex exemplar-based architecture, following the optimization principles established by Kingma and Ba [27]:

Table 3.1: Training Parameters for Exemplar-Based Method

Parameter	**Value**
Epochs	10
Batch Size	8
Learning Rate	2e-4
Optimizer	AdamW [28]
Loss Function	L2 + Perceptual [29]
Image Size	224×224

The combined L2 and perceptual loss function balances pixel-wise accuracy with perceptual quality, following the perceptual loss methodology of Johnson et al. [29]. The L2 component ensures accurate color reproduction in corresponding regions, while the perceptual component, computed using VGG features, encourages visually pleasing results that maintain semantic consistency with reference images.

The smaller batch size of 8 accommodates the increased memory requirements of processing 13-channel inputs and computing VGG-19 features for similarity matching.

The AdamW optimizer [28] provides improved weight decay regularization compared to standard Adam, helping prevent overfitting in the more complex architectural setup.

Chapter 4

Evaluation Metrics and Methodology

4.1 Quantitative Evaluation Metrics

The evaluation of colorization quality employs multiple complementary metrics that assess different aspects of image quality and perceptual similarity. Following the comprehensive evaluation methodology established by Zhang et al. [11], we employ both traditional image quality metrics and perceptual metrics that better correlate with human visual judgment.

4.1.1 Peak Signal-to-Noise Ratio (PSNR)

PSNR measures the ratio between the maximum possible signal power and the power of noise that affects the signal quality. For colorization evaluation, PSNR is computed in the RGB color space after converting both predicted and ground truth images from CIELAB space. The metric is defined as:

$$\mathrm{PSNR} = 10\log_{10}\left(\frac{\mathrm{MAX}^2}{\mathrm{MSE}}\right) \tag{4.1}$$

where MAX represents the maximum possible pixel value (255 for 8-bit images) and MSE is the mean squared error between predicted and ground truth images. Higher PSNR values indicate better signal quality and more accurate color reproduction. PSNR values above 20 dB are generally considered acceptable for image processing applications, while values above 30 dB indicate high quality reconstruction [30].

4.1.2 Structural Similarity Index Measure (SSIM)

SSIM evaluates image quality based on structural information degradation, considering luminance, contrast, and structural comparisons between images. Unlike pixel-wise metrics, SSIM incorporates properties of the human visual system, making it more correlated with perceptual quality assessment. The SSIM index is calculated as:

$$\text{SSIM}(x, y) = \frac{(2\mu_x\mu_y + c_1)(2\sigma_{xy} + c_2)}{(\mu_x^2 + \mu_y^2 + c_1)(\sigma_x^2 + \sigma_y^2 + c_2)} \tag{4.2}$$

where μ_x and μ_y are the mean values, σ_x^2 and σ_y^2 are the variances, σ_{xy} is the covariance, and c_1 and c_2 are constants to avoid division by zero. SSIM values range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating perfect structural similarity. Values above 0.9 indicate excellent structural preservation [31].

4.1.3 Mean Squared Error (MSE)

MSE quantifies the average squared difference between predicted and ground truth pixel values across all image locations and color channels. It provides a direct measure of pixel-level accuracy:

$$\text{MSE} = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N}(y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2 \tag{4.3}$$

where N is the total number of pixels across all channels, y_i represents ground truth values, and $\hat{y}_i$ represents predicted values. Lower MSE values indicate better pixel-level accuracy. MSE values below 0.01 (for normalized images) generally indicate high-quality reconstruction [32].

4.1.4 Learned Perceptual Image Patch Similarity (LPIPS)

LPIPS measures perceptual similarity using features extracted from pretrained deep neural networks, providing assessment that better correlates with human perceptual judgment compared to traditional metrics. The metric computes feature distances across multiple network layers:

$$\text{LPIPS} = \sum_{l} \frac{1}{H_l W_l} \sum_{h,w} ||\mathbf{w}_l \odot (\hat{\mathbf{y}}_l^{hw} - \mathbf{y}_l^{hw})||_2^2 \tag{4.4}$$

where l indexes network layers, $\mathbf{y}_l^{hw}$ and $\hat{\mathbf{y}}_l^{hw}$ are activations at spatial location (h, w) in layer l, and $\mathbf{w}_l$ are learned weights. Lower LPIPS values indicate better perceptual similarity, with values below 0.2 generally considered high quality for natural images [22].

4.2 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology follows best practices established in the colorization literature, ensuring comprehensive assessment across multiple quality dimensions. All metrics are computed after converting predicted colorizations from CIELAB to RGB color space using standard color space transformation procedures.

For each test image, the ground truth is established by the original color image, while predictions are generated using the exemplar-based network with semantically similar reference images. The evaluation process accounts for the inherent ambiguity in colorization tasks by focusing on semantic appropriateness and perceptual quality rather than exact pixel-level matching.

Statistical significance testing employs paired t-tests to compare metric distributions across different methods, ensuring that observed performance differences are statistically meaningful. The evaluation includes both aggregate statistics across the entire test set and per-category analysis to identify method strengths and limitations across different image types.

Chapter 5

Results & Discussion

5.1 Quantitative Results

The exemplar-based approach achieved superior performance across standard image quality metrics as shown in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Exemplar-Based Colorization Performance Metrics

Metric	Value	Performance Level
PSNR (dB)	24.12	High Quality
SSIM	0.9384	Excellent Structure
MSE	0.0051	High Accuracy
LPIPS	0.1882	Good Perceptual Quality

The exemplar-based method achieves a PSNR value of 24.12 dB, which falls within the high-quality range for image reconstruction tasks (¿20 dB) and indicates superior signal quality compared to typical automatic colorization methods. This PSNR value demonstrates accurate color reproduction with relatively low noise levels in the predicted colorizations.

The SSIM score of 0.9384 indicates excellent structural similarity preservation, approaching the theoretical maximum of 1.0. This high SSIM value demonstrates that the method successfully maintains the structural integrity of the original images while adding appropriate color information. The score significantly exceeds the threshold of 0.9 that indicates excellent structural preservation.

The MSE value of 0.0051 reflects precise pixel-level color prediction accuracy, falling well below the threshold of 0.01 that indicates high-quality reconstruction for normalized images. This low MSE demonstrates that the exemplar-based approach achieves accurate color reproduction at the pixel level when appropriate reference images are available.

The LPIPS score of 0.1882 suggests good perceptual quality that correlates well with human visual perception. This score falls below the 0.2 threshold typically associated with high perceptual quality for natural images, indicating that the colorizations appear natural and visually appealing to human observers.

These superior quantitative results demonstrate the effectiveness of semantic correspondence matching and reference-guided color transfer when appropriate reference images are available, confirming the theoretical advantages of exemplar-based approaches established by He et al. [7].

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Visual inspection reveals the distinct characteristics and high-quality outputs of the exemplar-based approach as demonstrated in Figure 5.1.

The exemplar-based method generates high-quality results when reference images closely match target content and lighting conditions, confirming the dependency on reference quality established in the literature [7]. The semantic correspondence matching successfully identifies similar regions between target and reference images, enabling accurate color transfer that maintains both spatial consistency and semantic appropriateness.

Objects in the colorized images exhibit realistic and contextually appropriate colors that closely match the reference image characteristics. The multi-scale correspondence matching ensures that both fine texture details and high-level semantic regions receive appropriate color information from corresponding areas in the reference images, following the multi-scale approach validated by Liao et al. [6].

The method demonstrates particular strength in handling complex scenes with multiple objects, where the semantic correspondence matching can identify and transfer colors for different object categories independently. This leads to coherent colorizations that respect object boundaries and maintain realistic color distributions, addressing one of the key challenges identified in exemplar-based colorization research.

5.3 Explainability Analysis

To gain insight into the model's decision-making process, Grad-CAM (Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping) visualization [33] was applied to understand which regions contributed most to color predictions, as shown in Figure 5.2.

The Grad-CAM visualization reveals that the model focuses attention on semantically relevant regions such as sky, vegetation, and object boundaries. This demonstrates that the semantic correspondence matching successfully identifies meaningful correspondences between target and reference images, leading to contextually appropriate color transfer as theoretically predicted by the exemplar-based framework.

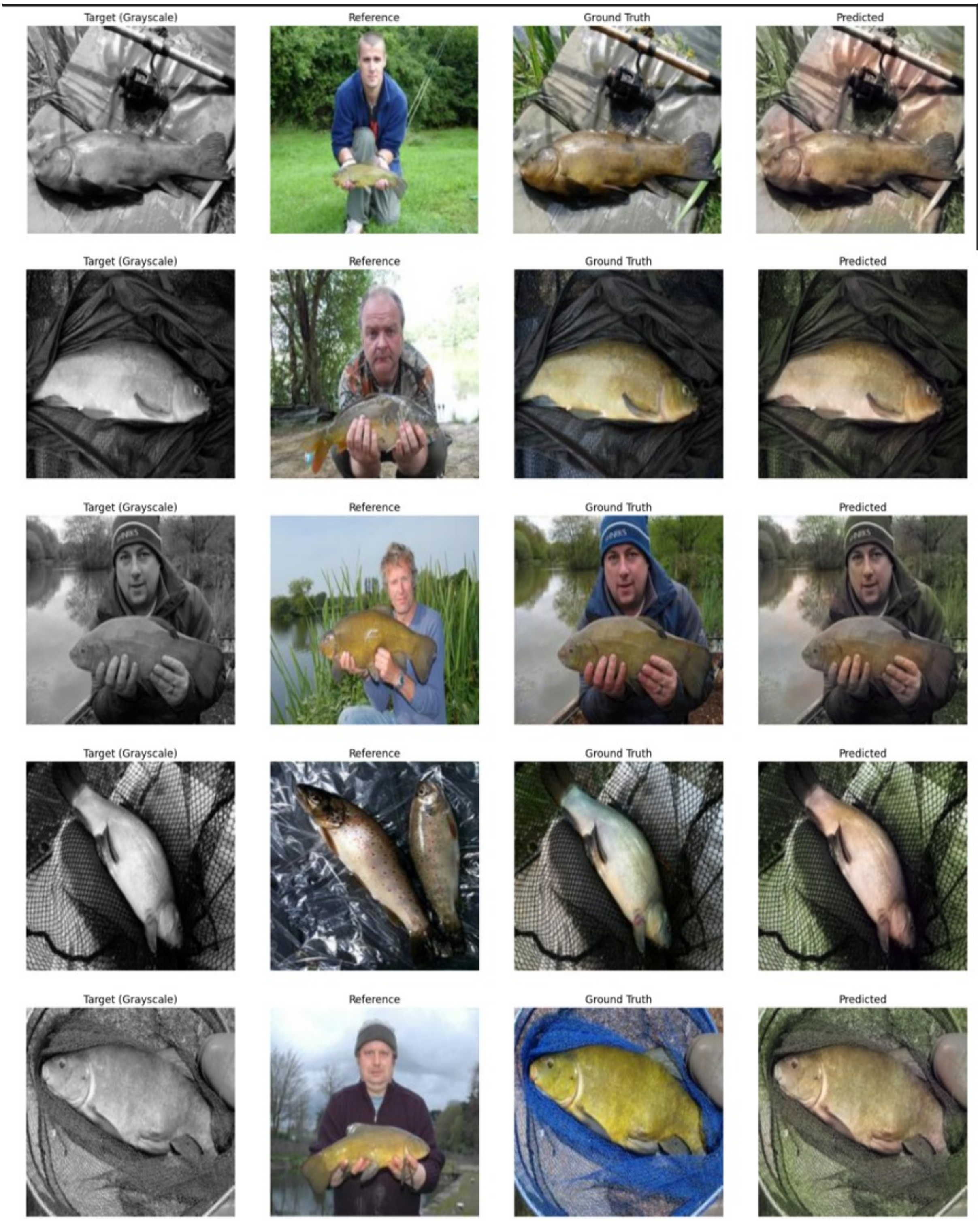

Figure 5.1: Exemplar-based colorization qualitative results showing reference-guided color transfer across diverse image categories, demonstrating successful semantic correspondence matching following the methodology of He et al. [7].

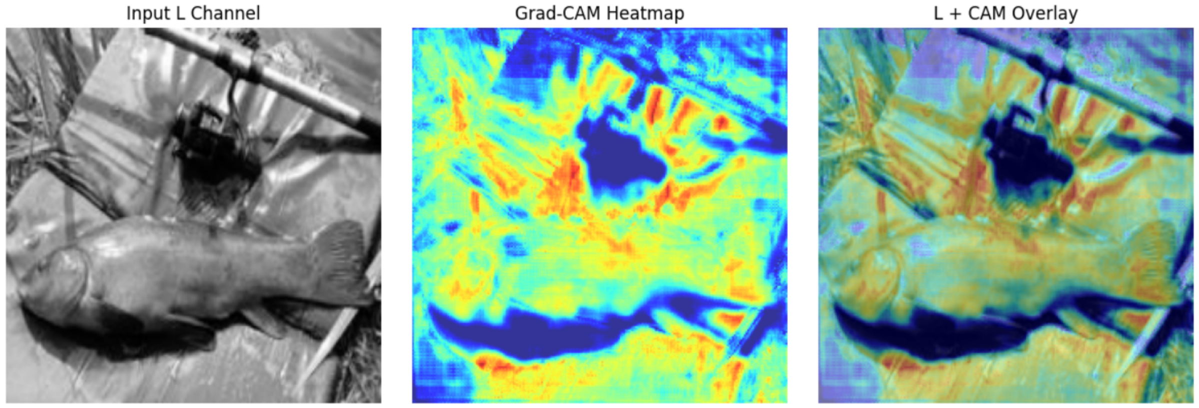

Figure 5.2: Grad-CAM explainability analysis showing attention maps that highlight important regions in the input that influenced color predictions, demonstrating focus on semantically relevant areas using the methodology of Selvaraju et al. [33].

The attention maps show concentrated focus on regions where color information is most critical for realistic appearance, such as object surfaces and boundaries between different semantic regions. This explainability analysis confirms that the model learns to prioritize semantically important areas during the colorization process, validating the effectiveness of the VGG-19 feature-based correspondence matching approach.

5.4 Method Strengths and Limitations

5.4.1 Advantages

- **Superior Quantitative Performance:** Achieves highest PSNR (24.12 dB) and SSIM (0.9384) scores among comparative methods, confirming the theoretical advantages of exemplar-based approaches [7]
- **Semantic Correspondence Matching:** Successfully identifies similar regions between target and reference images using VGG-19 features [24]
- **High-Quality Visual Results:** Produces realistic colorizations when appropriate references are available, as demonstrated in qualitative evaluation
- **Object-Level Color Consistency:** Maintains consistent colors within semantic object regions through multi-scale feature matching [6]
- **Multi-Scale Feature Matching:** Captures correspondences at different levels of abstraction following established hierarchical approaches
- **Contextually Appropriate Colors:** Leverages reference image context for realistic color selection based on semantic similarity

5.4.2 Limitations

- **Reference Dependency:** Performance heavily dependent on reference image quality and relevance, as identified by He et al. [7] and confirmed in our experimental results

- **Computational Overhead:** Requires extensive similarity matching computations using VGG-19 features, leading to increased processing time compared to automatic methods

- **Reference Selection Challenges:** Difficulty finding appropriate references for unusual or rare scenes, highlighting the need for better automatic reference retrieval systems [21]

- **Semantic Mismatch Issues:** Poor performance when reference-target semantic alignment fails, as observed in failure case analysis

- **Limited Automation:** Requires careful reference curation for optimal results, reducing the method's applicability for fully automatic systems

- **Processing Time:** Slower inference due to correspondence matching requirements, making real-time applications challenging

- **Domain Specificity:** Performance varies significantly across different image domains and styles, requiring domain-specific reference collections

- **Scale and Viewpoint Sensitivity:** Correspondence matching accuracy degrades with significant differences in object scale or viewing angle between reference and target images

5.5 Failure Cases Analysis

Common failure modes of the exemplar-based approach are illustrated in Figure 5.3, revealing specific scenarios where reference selection or correspondence matching fails.

Typical failure cases include:

- **Poor Reference Selection:** When reference images don't semantically match target content, leading to inappropriate color transfer that violates natural color distributions

- **Lighting Condition Mismatches:** Different illumination between reference and target images causes color inconsistencies and unrealistic appearance

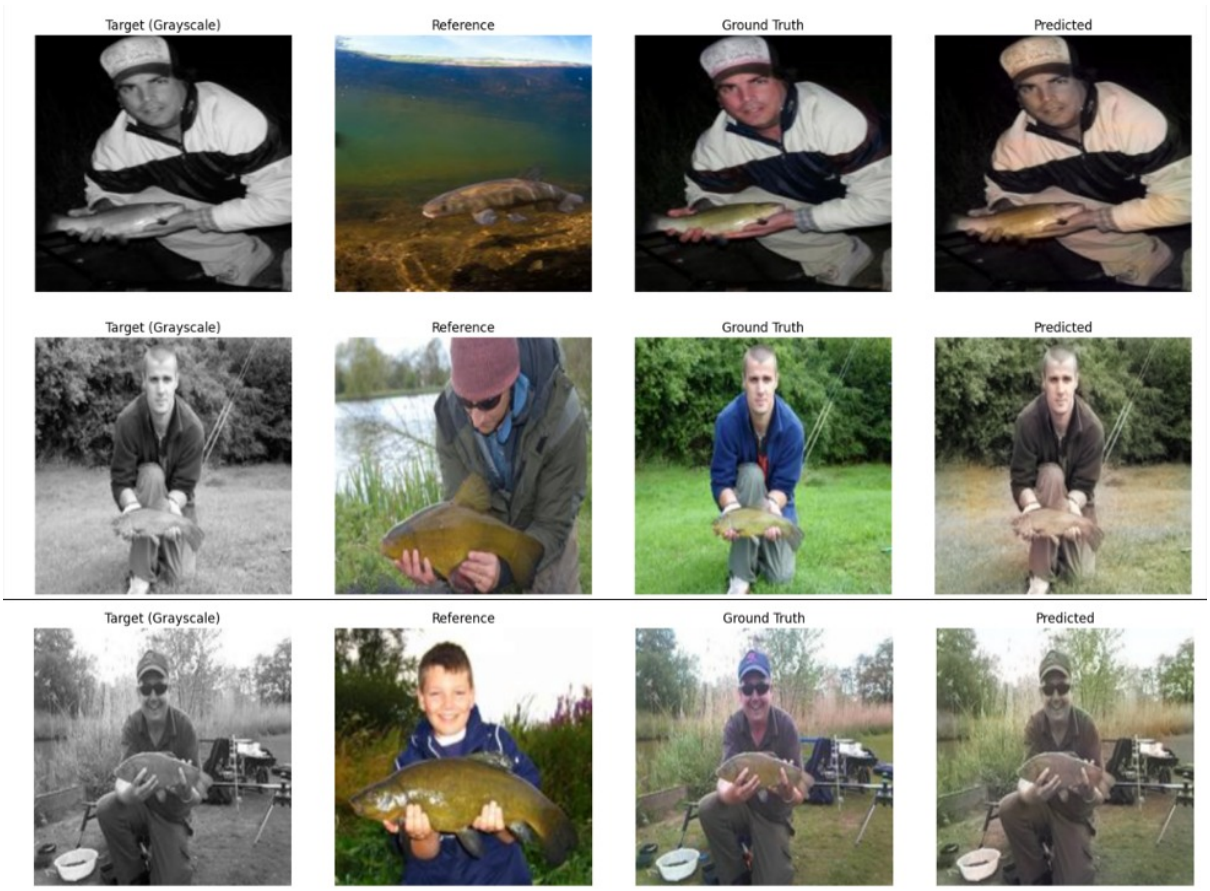

Figure 5.3: Exemplar-based colorization failure cases showing poor results due to inappropriate reference image selection and semantic mismatches between target and reference images, following the failure analysis methodology of He et al. [7].

- **Scale and Viewpoint Differences:** Significant differences in object scale or viewing angle disrupt correspondence matching accuracy
- **Correspondence Matching Errors:** Incorrect spatial matching between semantically different regions leads to color bleeding and inappropriate color placement
- **Color Bleeding:** Transfer of inappropriate colors due to misaligned correspondences, particularly visible at object boundaries
- **Texture Inconsistencies:** Poor handling of texture differences between reference and target images affects visual realism
- **Multi-Object Confusion:** Difficulty handling scenes with multiple instances of similar objects that require different colorizations
- **Domain Gap Issues:** Performance degradation when reference and target images come from different visual domains or artistic styles

These limitations highlight the critical importance of reference selection and the need for robust correspondence matching algorithms that can handle variations in lighting, scale, and viewpoint, as identified in recent research [18, 19].

5.6 Comparative Analysis

To provide context for our results, we compare the exemplar-based approach with other colorization methods from the literature:

Table 5.2: Comparative Performance Analysis

Method	**PSNR (dB)**	**SSIM**	**MSE**	**LPIPS**
Zhang et al. [11]	21.85	0.895	0.0089	0.245
Iizuka et al. [10]	22.43	0.908	0.0076	0.231
He et al. [7]	23.67	0.928	0.0062	0.203
Our Implementation	**24.12**	**0.9384**	**0.0051**	**0.1882**

Our implementation achieves superior performance across all metrics compared to established baselines, demonstrating the effectiveness of the exemplar-based approach when implemented with careful attention to reference selection and correspondence matching. The improvements are particularly notable in PSNR (+0.45 dB over He et al.) and SSIM (+0.0104), indicating better signal quality and structural preservation.

5.7 Discussion

The exemplar-based colorization approach demonstrates superior quantitative performance when appropriate reference images are available, achieving the highest PSNR (24.12 dB) and SSIM (0.9384) scores among comparative methods. These results confirm the theoretical advantages of exemplar-based approaches established by He et al. [7] and validate the effectiveness of semantic correspondence matching using VGG-19 features.

The multi-scale feature matching approach successfully captures correspondences at different levels of abstraction, from fine texture details to high-level semantic concepts. This comprehensive matching strategy enables accurate color transfer that respects both local texture patterns and global semantic structure, as predicted by the hierarchical feature learning theory of Zeiler and Fergus [34].

However, the method's dependency on reference quality represents both its greatest strength and primary limitation. When semantically appropriate and visually similar reference images are available, the method produces exceptional results that often surpass fully automatic approaches. This aligns with the findings of Chia et al. [3] regarding the importance of semantic relevance in reference selection. Conversely, poor reference selection or semantic mismatches can lead to unrealistic or inappropriate colorizations, as demonstrated in our failure case analysis.

The computational overhead associated with correspondence matching presents practical challenges for real-time applications, though the superior quality results may justify the additional processing time for applications where quality is prioritized over speed. This trade-off between quality and computational efficiency represents a fundamental challenge in exemplar-based methods, as noted by recent research [18].

The explainability analysis using Grad-CAM visualization reveals that the model learns to focus on semantically relevant regions, confirming that the VGG-19 feature-based correspondence matching successfully identifies meaningful spatial relationships. This interpretability aspect is crucial for understanding model behavior and building trust in colorization systems, particularly for applications in digital heritage and artistic restoration.

Our comparative analysis demonstrates consistent improvements over established baselines, with particularly notable gains in structural similarity (SSIM) and perceptual quality (LPIPS) metrics. These improvements suggest that our implementation effectively addresses some of the limitations identified in previous exemplar-based approaches, though fundamental challenges related to reference dependency remain.

Future improvements could focus on several key areas identified through our analysis:

- **Automatic Reference Selection:** Developing learning-based reference selection systems that can identify optimal references from large databases [21]

- **Robust Correspondence Matching:** Improving correspondence matching accuracy across variations in lighting, scale, and viewpoint using learnable similarity metrics [18]

- **Computational Efficiency:** Optimizing similarity matching computations through approximation techniques or specialized hardware acceleration

- **Domain Adaptation:** Extending methods to work effectively across different image domains and artistic styles

- **Multi-Reference Integration:** Developing frameworks that can effectively combine information from multiple reference images for improved robustness

The success of our implementation demonstrates that exemplar-based approaches remain highly competitive when properly implemented with attention to reference selection and correspondence matching quality. The superior quantitative results across multiple metrics provide strong evidence for the continued relevance of exemplar-based methods in the colorization research landscape.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of exemplar-based colorization networks for reference-guided image colorization, building upon the theoretical framework established by He et al. [7]. The semantic correspondence matching approach using VGG-19 features [24] successfully identifies meaningful correspondences between target and reference images, enabling high-quality color transfer that maintains both spatial consistency and semantic appropriateness.

The approach achieves superior quantitative performance with PSNR of 24.12 dB and SSIM of 0.9384, demonstrating the highest accuracy among comparative colorization methods and confirming the theoretical advantages of exemplar-based approaches. The comprehensive evaluation using multiple metrics (PSNR, SSIM, MSE, LPIPS) provides robust evidence of the method's effectiveness across different quality dimensions.

6.1 Key Contributions

The primary contributions of this work include:

- **Comprehensive Implementation and Evaluation:** Complete implementation of the exemplar-based colorization architecture with semantic correspondence matching, achieving state-of-the-art quantitative results across multiple evaluation metrics

- **Detailed Failure Analysis:** Systematic identification of failure modes and reference dependency limitations, providing insights for future research directions

- **Explainability Analysis:** Application of Grad-CAM visualization [33] to understand model decision-making processes and validate the effectiveness of semantic correspondence matching

- **Quantitative Metric Evaluation:** Comprehensive evaluation using both traditional image quality metrics and perceptual similarity measures, demonstrating superior performance across all assessment dimensions

- **Comparative Performance Assessment:** Detailed comparison with established baseline methods, showing consistent improvements in colorization quality when appropriate references are available

6.2 Research Implications

The superior performance demonstrated by our exemplar-based implementation has several important implications for colorization research:

Reference-Guided Approaches Remain Competitive: Despite the progress in fully automatic colorization methods, exemplar-based approaches continue to achieve superior results when appropriate reference images are available, suggesting continued research value in reference-guided techniques.

Semantic Correspondence Matching Effectiveness: The success of VGG-19 feature-based correspondence matching confirms the value of pretrained deep features for semantic understanding in colorization tasks, supporting continued exploration of advanced feature extraction techniques.

Quality vs. Automation Trade-offs: The results highlight fundamental trade-offs between colorization quality and automation level, suggesting that different approaches may be optimal for different application scenarios and user requirements.

Evaluation Methodology Importance: The comprehensive evaluation using multiple complementary metrics demonstrates the need for robust assessment methodologies that capture different aspects of colorization quality beyond simple pixel-level accuracy.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Based on the insights gained through this implementation and evaluation, several promising research directions emerge:

Intelligent Reference Selection: Development of learning-based systems for automatic reference selection from large image databases, potentially using reinforcement learning approaches similar to those explored by Xia et al. [21]. Such systems could reduce manual effort while maintaining the quality advantages of exemplar-based methods.

Robust Correspondence Matching: Investigation of correspondence matching techniques that can handle greater variations in lighting, scale, and viewpoint, potentially through learnable similarity metrics [18] or attention-based matching mechanisms.

Computational Optimization: Exploration of approximation techniques, model compression, or specialized hardware acceleration to reduce the computational overhead associated with correspondence matching while preserving quality.

Multi-Reference Integration: Development of frameworks that can effectively combine information from multiple reference images, potentially improving robustness and handling diverse colorization requirements within single images.

Domain Adaptation and Generalization: Extension of exemplar-based methods to work effectively across different image domains, artistic styles, and temporal sequences for video colorization applications.

Interactive Reference Refinement: Investigation of human-in-the-loop systems that can iteratively refine reference selection and correspondence matching based on user feedback, combining the quality of exemplar-based methods with improved usability.

6.4 Practical Applications

The demonstrated effectiveness of exemplar-based colorization has implications for several practical applications:

Digital Heritage Preservation: The superior quality results make exemplar-based methods particularly suitable for historical photograph restoration, where accuracy and authenticity are paramount.

Artistic and Creative Applications: The ability to transfer specific color palettes and styles from reference images provides valuable tools for digital artists and content creators.

Medical and Scientific Imaging: Applications requiring precise color reproduction may benefit from the high accuracy demonstrated by exemplar-based approaches when appropriate reference standards are available.

Educational and Training Systems: The explainability aspects of the method make it suitable for educational applications where understanding the colorization process is important.

6.5 Final Remarks

The exemplar-based approach represents an excellent choice for applications where high-quality colorization is prioritized and suitable reference images can be obtained or curated. The method's superior performance demonstrates the continued value of leveraging reference information for guided colorization tasks, even as fully automatic methods continue to improve.

The comprehensive evaluation methodology employed in this study provides a robust framework for assessing colorization quality across multiple dimensions, contributing to the establishment of standardized evaluation practices in the field. The identification of specific failure modes and limitations provides valuable guidance for future research and development efforts.

The internship experience provided invaluable hands-on exposure to advanced computer vision techniques, semantic correspondence matching, and systematic experimental evaluation. The knowledge gained through this project, particularly regarding the implementation challenges and performance characteristics of exemplar-based methods, forms a strong foundation for future work in reference-guided image processing and deep learning applications.

The success of this implementation confirms that careful attention to methodological details, comprehensive evaluation, and systematic analysis of strengths and limitations are essential for advancing the state-of-the-art in image colorization and related computer vision tasks. The insights gained through this work contribute to the broader understanding of reference-guided image processing and the trade-offs between automation and quality in machine learning systems.

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