Training-Free Pseudo-Fusion Strategies for Composed Image Retrieval via Diffusion and Multimodal Large Language Models

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Abstract

Composed Image Retrieval (CIR) is an emerging paradigm in Content-based Image Retrieval that enables users to formulate compositional queries by combining a reference image with an auxiliary modality, usually text-based. This approach supports fine-grained search where the target image shares structural elements with the user-provided image but is modified according to the provided auxiliary text. Conventional CIR methods rely on multimodal fusion to combine visual and textual features into a joint query embedding, which requires training modules that align composed queries with the targets. In this work, we propose PeFuse (for pseudo-fusion), a training-free framework that leverages pretrained models to bridge modalities via generative conversion. We introduce two novel strategies: uni-directional and bi-directional conversion, both implemented using diffusion models and multimodal large language models, converting CIR to four single-modality retrieval problems. These methods reformulate CIR as either intra-modal or cross-modal single-query retrieval tasks, bypassing the need for dedicated training. Extensive experiments on standard benchmarks demonstrate that converting CIR into text-to-image retrieval tasks is better than alternative conversion strategies, achieving competitive or superior performance compared with state-of-the-art methods, while maintaining strong time efficiency. These results highlight the effectiveness of the pseudo-fusion paradigm for composed retrieval. Our code is available at: `https://anonymous.4open.science/r/ComposedImageRetrieval-9241`.

1 Introduction

Traditional Content-Based Image Retrieval systems allow users to submit image-based queries, bridging the so-called *semantic gap* (Smeulders et al., 2000). This constraint hinders their ability to accommodate nuanced search intents that are inherently multimodal. Composed Image Retrieval (CIR) addresses this limitation by enabling users to formulate a query using a reference image coupled with an auxiliary modality to specify desired modifications. This approach facilitates fine-grained retrieval, which is particularly valuable in domains like e-commerce (Baldrati et al., 2022), digital asset management (Net & Gomez, 2025), and creative design (Song et al., 2025).

CIR introduces a number of challenges. An effective retrieval system must not only comprehend the individual modalities but also model their compositional semantics, capturing how the modification alters the meaning of the reference image. A prevalent solution involves multimodal feature fusion, in which visual and textual representations are integrated into a unified embedding prior to retrieval. Although recent advances in deep Transformer-based architectures (Vaswani et al., 2017; Dosovitskiy et al., 2021) have improved cross-modal alignment and compositional reasoning, the majority of existing methods rely heavily on dedicated training on large-scale, annotated CIR datasets. To relieve the restrictions, researcher either synthesize triplet datasets (Li et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Xing et al., 2025) or rely on existing image-text pairs (Jiang et al., 2024) to train models. This dependency limits their scalability and adaptability to significant domain shifts, wherein zero-shot CIR (ZS-CIR) is regarded as an effective solution.

In this work, we investigate *training-free pseudo-fusion* strategies for ZS-CIR that circumvent the need for additional task-specific fusion. We propose to pseudo-fuse the multimodal query through *uni-directional* and *bi-directional conversion* techniques, leveraging recent advancements in Diffusion Models (Ho et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021; Rombach et al., 2022) and Multimodal Large Language Models (MLLMs) (Liu et al., 2023; Grattafiori et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). The uni-directional approach reformulates the multimodal query CIR task into a standard uni-modal query problem by converting the reference image and text modification into a synthesized image or a composed description. The bi-directional approach extends this by additionally converting the candidate images into text, enabling a text-based matching paradigm. These strategies facilitate flexible adaptation of existing, off-the-shelf retrieval systems without requiring architectural modifications, fine-tuning, or any training.

Extensive experiments on standard CIR benchmarks demonstrate that converting CIR tasks to text-to-image tasks via the proposed framework achieves competitive or superior performance compared to the state-of-the-art (SOTA) models. Our findings underscore the significant potential of training-free approaches in compositional retrieval. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first work to systematically explore and benchmark modality conversion strategies utilizing both diffusion models and MLLMs for ZS-CIR. In summary, our contributions are as follows:

- Versatile training-free pseudo-fusion strategies for ZS-CIR that seamlessly convert multimodal queries into a single modality, enabling compatibility with existing retrieval systems.
- A systematic study and comprehensive benchmarking of both uni-directional and bi-directional modality conversion paradigms for CIR using diffusion models and MLLMs.
- A quantitative analysis to elucidate the relationship between CIR performance and key hyperparameters of both MLLMs and diffusion models; and a component-based compute analysis when resorting MLLMs and diffusion models to reframe CIR task to single-modality retrieval tasks.
- Empirical evidence that reformulating CIR to text-to-image retrieval is (for now) more effective than other tasks, underscoring the substantial opportunity to further enhance image generation quality through diffusion models.

2 Related Work

Early CIR approaches like TIRG (Vo et al., 2019) relied on joint embedding spaces trained with contrastive objectives (van den Oord et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020; He et al., 2020), where the fused image–text representation was directly compared against candidate image embeddings. Subsequent transformer-based methods (Jia et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; 2023), pretrained on large-scale vision–language datasets, achieved stronger cross-modal alignment. Building on this foundation, Combiner (Baldrati et al., 2022) leverages CLIP (Radford et al., 2021) to compute integrated features from reference images and accompanying textual descriptions.

A notable line of work builds upon the idea of representing images as pseudo-word tokens within a text sequence. Inspired by Textual Inversion (Gal et al., 2023), methods such as SEARLE (Baldrati et al., 2023b), Pic2Word (Saito et al., 2023), and LinCIR (Gu et al., 2024) map reference images into token embeddings that can be processed by language models, achieving SOTA performance through joint training. Other approaches like CLIP4CIR (Baldrati et al., 2024) introduce learnable fusion operators to better capture compositional semantics. More recently, the generative capabilities of diffusion models (Ho et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021; Rombach et al., 2022) have also been explored for CIR. For example, CIG (Wang et al., 2025) uses a pretrained textual inversion network to convert a reference image into tokens that can be employed for target image generation and fused with the query.

Despite these advances, the use of LLMs/MLLMs remains more prevalent. For example, DQU-CIR (Wen et al., 2024) fuses unified textual and visual information extracted via LLMs or VLMs. Notably, Hy-CIR (Jiang et al., 2024) enhances model training by incorporating contrastive learning on synthetic triplets, demonstrating the efficacy of synthetic supervision. Further advancing this approach, Feng et al. (2024) scales

both negative and positive samples for contrastive learning using a MLLM. Furthermore, MRA-CIR (Tu et al., 2025) circumvents error-prone intermediate text generation by using a Multimodal Reasoning Agent to directly construct high-quality triplets from unlabeled images. Similarly, CoLLM (Huynh et al., 2025) mitigates data scarcity by synthesizing training triplets from image-caption pairs using LLMs, enabling multimodal fusion.

A common characteristic of aforementioned methods is their reliance on ad-hoc training, either on synthetic triplets or existing image-text datasets. Although learnable fusion methods achieve strong performance, their requirement for task-specific training limits flexibility and generalizability to new domains or modalities. To generalize to new datasets, training-free CIR methods have been proposed. CIReVL (Karthik et al., 2024) uses an LLM to refine VLM-generated captions by incorporating the text modification to perform text-to-image retrieval. Similarly, WeiMoCIR (Wu et al., 2025) employs an MLLM to caption candidate target images, Moreover, LDRE Yang et al. (2024) leverages LLMs to generate multiple captions that capture diverse semantic aspects of reference images conditioned on modifications, and subsequently weights among these generated captions to enhance image retrieval performance. Another relevant framework, ImageScope (Luo et al., 2025), unifies various language-guided image retrieval tasks into a text-to-image retrieval using descriptions generated by a MLLM. However, it relies on multiple models in stages, leading to cumulative compute and increased inference time. In contrast, we uses only a single MLLM or diffusion model instead of multiple LLMs or MLLMs, resulting in a simpler yet effective pipeline for reformulating CIR to other tasks.

Unlike these prior works, which often involve multi-stage text generation or ensemble multiple models, we reformulate CIR to four tasks at high level and systematically benchmark these tasks via as less as one model, including conversion to one-query intra-modal or cross-modal retrieval tasks, as either text-based or image-based retrieval. By leveraging pretrained diffusion models and MLLMs, our approach offers a flexible, modular, and plug-and-play solution for CIR.

3 Methodology

As depicted in Figure 1, our method employs a dual-strategy pipeline. The *uni-directional conversion* (pink dashed box) facilitates retrieval by projecting the query into a target modality; either by using an MLLM to generate descriptive text from images and modifications or by using a diffusion model to generate images from reference images and MLLM-generated text. Specifically, we use MLLMs to convert reference images plus corresponding modifications to text or use diffusion models to generate alternative target images based on such composed queries. The *bi-directional conversion* (green dashed box) extends this by subsequently using the MLLM to also project target images into the textual modality, enabling a text-based retrieval process. Namely, we additionally generate text based on target images, and then match with generated text or images from uni-directional conversion.

Let $\mathcal{I}$ and $\mathcal{T}$ be the image and text spaces, respectively. Assume we have a retrieval model $\Psi(\cdot)$ that takes both image modality $I \in \mathcal{I}$ and text modality $T \in \mathcal{T}$ as inputs, and outputs a similarity score $s = sim(\Psi(I), \Psi(T)) \in \mathbb{R}$ based on extracted embeddings $\Psi(I) \in \mathbb{R}^m$ and $\Psi(T) \in \mathbb{R}^m$, a MLLM $f(\cdot)$ which can generated textual descriptions T_f based on arbitrary combination of images I and text T given the proper dataset-specific prompt p_d, and a diffusion model $g(\cdot)$ that generates image I_g based on both images I and text T. For CIR, a reference image $I^i_{ref} \in \mathcal{I}$ with corresponding text modification $T_i \in \mathcal{T}$ are paired as a paired query (I^i_{ref}, T^i), to find the most relevant candidate images in dataset $\mathcal{D} = \{I^1_{tar}, I^2_{tar}, \ldots, I^n_{tar}\}$ based on (cosine) similarity scores:

$$\cos(\Psi(I), \Psi(T)) = \frac{\Psi(I)^\top \Psi(T)}{\|\Psi(I)\| \, \|\Psi(T)\|}. \tag{1}$$

For uni-directional conversion, we use the MLLM f to fuse (I^i_{ref}, T^i): $T^i_f = f(I^i_{ref}, T^i, p_d) \in \mathcal{T}$ while diffusion model g is used to synthesize images based on MLLM-generated descriptions T^i_f: $I^i_g = g(I^i_{ref}, T^i_f) \in \mathcal{I}$. To use pretrained retrieval models, we feed the generated text T^i_f to retrieval model Ψ to compute cosine similarity with respect to all candidate images. $s_{ij} = \cos(\Psi(T^i_f), \Psi(I^j_{tar}))$, and similarly for synthesized images I^i_g:

$s_{ij} = \cos(\Psi(I_g^i), \Psi(I_{tar}^j))$, where $j \in \{1, \ldots, n\}$. Through this method, we reformulate CIR to two types of image retrieval tasks: text-to-image and image-to-image as in the pink box of Figure 1.

For bi-directional conversion, we additionally convert target images I_{tar} to text via MLLM given another dataset-specific prompt q_d: $T_f^j = f(I_{tar}^j, q_d)$ and compute the cosine similarity based on previously generated modalities, either by $s_{ij} = \cos(\Psi(T_f^i), \Psi(T_f^j))$ or $s_{ij} = \cos(\Psi(I_g^i), \Psi(T_f^j))$ for $j \in \{1, \ldots, n\}$, which reformulates the CIR tasks to text-to-text retrieval and image-to-text retrieval tasks in the green box of Figure 1, respectively. Based on the ranked scores, we return the top-K candidate image IDs for performance evaluation.

Our framework is pseudo-fusion as it relies on generative models to synthesize new data (images or text) from pairs of elements within a triplet, thereby achieving an implicit fusion of modalities. This approach is distinct from typical early fusion paradigms, which explicitly combine modalities into intermediate embeddings. In contrast, our method directly generates coherent and interpretable data in a target modality, preserving latent semantics throughout the process.

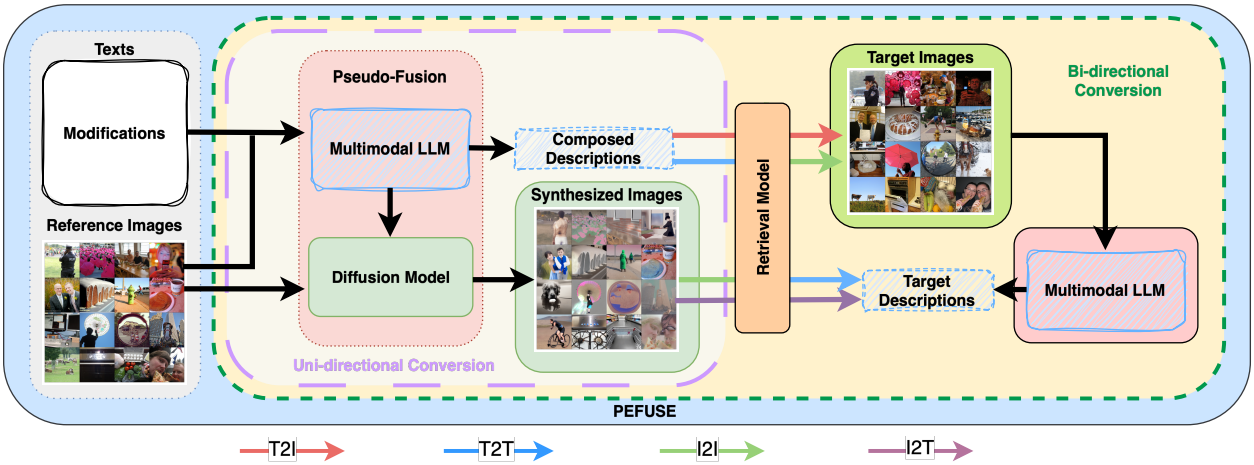

Figure 1: Training-free pseudo-fusion framework for Composed Image Retrieval. Dashed green box indicates bi-directional conversion, while the dashed purple box is uni-directional conversion. T2I: text-to-image; T2T: text-to-text; I2T: image-to-text; I2I: image-to-image.

4 Experiments

We first describe the experiment setups, including the datasets and models used, and then present the experimental results for different conversion methods. Note that multi-round conversion or using multiple models can also be incorporated into our pipeline for improved performance, whereas we minimize the number of models used to investigate which different pathway is the most effective when converting CIR task to single-modality retrieval task. Specifically, our experiments use only either a MLLM or a diffusion model for uni-directional conversion, while both a MLLM and a diffusion model are used for bi-directional conversion.

4.1 Data and Models

We employ four standard CIR benchmark datasets: Fashion-IQ (Wu et al., 2021), CIRR (Liu et al., 2021), CIRCO (Baldrati et al., 2023a), and GeneCIS (Vaze et al., 2023). Fashion-IQ is designed for interactive fashion image retrieval using natural language feedback, incorporating human-written relative captions and derived visual attributes. CIRR extends the scope to open-domain images with human-annotated modifying text, though it is known to contain a significant number of false negatives (Baldrati et al., 2023a). To mitigate this issue, CIRCO provides multiple ground-truth images per query, with all images sourced from

the MS-COCO (Lin et al., 2014) dataset. In addition, GeneCIS measures models' ability to adapt to a range of similarity conditions in terms of attributes and objects. In line with standard evaluation protocols, we report recall@K for Fashion-IQ, CIRR, and GeneCIS, and mean average precision (mAP@K) for CIRCO, reflecting their respective annotation structures.

For image synthesis based on textual and visual inputs, we utilize the pretrained `sdxl-instructpix2pix` model from the `diffusers` library, which is an instruction-tuned variant of InstructPix2Pix (Brooks et al., 2023), for its strong generative performance. Text generation is handled by `Qwen2.5-VL-7B-Instruct`, an advanced instruction-tuned SOTA MLLM based on Qwen (Yang et al., 2025). We later include other MLLMs and diffusion models to compare retrieval performance and analyze computational overhead incurred by our pipeline in section 5.

To evaluate the effectiveness of our approach, we employ several retrieval models as feature extractors, starting with models using ViT-B/32 backbone: CLIP (ViT-B/32) (Radford et al., 2021), OpenCLIP (ViT-B/32) (Cherti et al., 2023), and SigLIP2 (Base-Patch16) (Tschannen et al., 2025). Both CLIP and OpenCLIP adopt the softmax function in their loss functions, with OpenCLIP additionally benefiting from training on substantially larger datasets. In contrast, SigLIP2 improves semantic understanding over SigLIP (Zhai et al., 2023) that was trained with sigmoid-based contrastive loss. We investigate scaling behavior of larger model variants in subsection 4.4.

All retrieval models operate on input images resized to 224×224 pixels, normalized to the $[0, 1]$ range using model-specific normalization parameters. The diffusion model requires 768×768 pixel inputs and produces outputs at the same resolution. For consistency, all images across datasets are resized to 768×768 and normalized to $[0, 1]$ prior to diffusion processing. During image generation with the diffusion model, we use a guidance scale of 7.5, image guidance scale of 3.0, and 30 denoising steps for performance. For text generation with the MLLM, we set the temperature to 0.1, top-P to 0.9, top-K to 50, and a maximum of 128 new tokens to ensure deterministic outputs with reasonable length. A sensitivity study in subsection 4.5 examines the impact of varying these hyperparameters. Our implementation uses `PyTorch` on a single NVIDIA A100 with 40 GB memory.

4.2 Uni-directional conversion

As introduced in section 3, uni-directional conversion can be implemented using either MLLMs or diffusion models as pseudo-fusion methods for queries, converting CIR to single modality image-based retrieval tasks.

Top rows (PeFuse (T→I) and PeFuse (I→I)) in Table 1 present the text-to-image and image-to-image retrieval results on the Fashion-IQ dataset. We mainly compare with zero-shot training-free methods: CIReVL, LDRE, WeimoCIR, and ImageScope, while training-based methods are reported in Table 8 and Appendix B. When reformulating CIR as a text-to-image retrieval task, both CLIP and OpenCLIP, that utilize the ViT-B/32 backbone, outperform CIReVL. Notably, employing OpenCLIP as the retriever surpasses the performance of most zero-shot methods that necessitate model training, with results comparable to, though slightly lower than LinCIR, which uses larger ViT-L/14 backbone and that of WeiMoCIR.

In general, when comparing PeFuse (T→I) and PeFuse (I→I), text-to-image retrieval demonstrates superior performance compared to image-to-image retrieval; the sole exception is observed with the SigLIP2 model. Across all retrieval models evaluated, we note a significant inconsistency in performance: SigLIP2 yields the weakest results for text-to-image retrieval, yet achieves the strongest performance for image-to-image retrieval. This disparity underscores the substantial variation in semantic understanding capabilities among retrieval models on varying tasks, highlighting their critical and impactful role in the effectiveness of CIR systems.

The image retrieval performance on the CIRR and CIRCO datasets is further detailed in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. Training-based baseline methods are reported in Table 9, Table 10, andAppendix B. On the CIRR dataset, for the text-to-image retrieval task, the CLIP model slightly underperforms compared to other methods while being notably better on CIRR subsets. In contrast, SigLIP and OpenCLIP achieve significantly stronger performance, on both the CIRR and its subsets, although they fall behind ImageScope in some cases. For the image-to-image task on CIRR, all retrieval models fall behind the established baselines,

Table 1: Performance (%) on **Fashion-IQ** validation split using different retrieval models via PeFuse. **Best** and second best highlighted. *: reproduced results; †: results from original papers. Training-based baselines are reported in Table 8 in Appendix B.

Method	Retrieval Model	Shirt		Dress		Toptee		Average	
		R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50
CIReVL*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	18.40	30.82	14.25	30.45	18.00	34.33	16.88	31.87
LDRE†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	27.38	46.27	19.97	41.84	27.07	48.78	24.81	45.63
WeiMoCIR†	OpenCLIP (ViT-B/32)	**29.20**	**47.15**	**26.23**	**46.31**	**34.17**	**55.99**	**29.86**	**49.82**
ImageScope†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	24.29	37.49	18.00	35.20	24.99	41.41	22.42	38.03
PeFuse (T→I)	CLIP	20.62	37.11	13.99	32.54	19.93	39.58	18.18	36.41
	OpenCLIP	28.30	46.19	24.05	44.11	32.46	53.94	28.27	48.08
	SigLIP2	6.49	13.61	7.32	17.05	7.23	16.93	7.01	15.86
PeFuse (I→I)	CLIP	8.97	17.01	4.95	13.82	7.71	16.76	7.21	15.87
	OpenCLIP	14.28	24.48	10.33	22.43	12.69	24.37	12.43	23.76
	SigLIP2	15.00	26.39	9.25	20.93	13.77	25.01	12.67	24.11
PeFuse (T→T)	CLIP	14.33	25.57	8.82	20.55	16.01	29.57	13.06	25.23
	OpenCLIP	16.39	26.96	13.23	27.92	19.39	34.33	16.34	29.74
	SigLIP2	2.53	5.88	1.72	5.38	3.05	7.61	2.43	6.29
PeFuse (I→T)	CLIP	10.67	20.93	5.16	16.41	8.94	20.03	8.26	19.12
	OpenCLIP	14.28	26.55	8.18	19.96	12.32	25.44	11.59	23.98
	SigLIP2	8.61	17.27	5.59	15.33	8.94	19.34	7.72	17.31

underscoring the superiority of reformulating CIR as a text-to-image rather than an image-to-image retrieval task.

A similar phenomenon is observed on the CIRCO dataset, where text-to-image retrieval outperforms most baseline methods except ImageScope, while all the baselines surpass performance of image-to-image conversion. Specifically, text-to-image retrieval using CLIP performs competitively, exceeding training-free methods such as CIReVL, though it remains behind LinCIR and HyCIR, both of which employ a larger ViT-L/14 backbone and demand training. Notably, within the same task, using OpenCLIP and SigLIP with a ViT-B/32 backbone improves the performance siginificantly, and SigLIP surpasses most baseline methods by a considerable margin while being behind the top performer ImageScope. This indicates that employing a more powerful retrieval model can substantially enhance system performance. Conversely, experiments on image-to-image retrieval for CIRCO demonstrate inferior results, highlighting a need for improvement in diffusion-based conversion methods. We show results on GeneCIS in Table 4 and those of training-based methods in Table 11 in Appendix B. From Table 4, we find text-to-image still performs the best while other conversion modes still be competitive with the baselines, which further corroborates our analysis on PeFuse (T→I) and PeFuse (I→I).

The experimental results across all datasets demonstrate that the framework is effective for ZS-CIR tasks, despite its simplicity and training-free nature. Although CLIP has been widely adopted in previous studies, our results indicate that it is a suboptimal choice for CIR systems compared to OpenCLIP, emphasizing the importance of choosing appropriate retrieval models for the CIR performance. We further note that methods which separately generate captions via an image captioner and then combine them with modification text using a LLM (e.g., CIReVL) can be effective for simple images, such as fashion items. However, in complex scenarios like those in CIRCO, which involve a large pool of candidate images (123K), such pipelines often fail to adequately capture the intricate interactions between reference images and textual modifications, leading to inferior retrieval performance. Consequently, employing a MLLM proves to be both sufficient and less error-prone, outperforming lengthy, chained pipelines for complex image retrieval task. Additionally applying methods from LDRE for MLLM-generated captions can further improve image retrieval performance.

4.3 Bi-directional Conversion

Besides leveraging a MLLM to fuse the information from reference images and their corresponding modification text into textual descriptions, now the same model is additionally employed to generate descriptive captions for target images. This methodology effectively reformulates the CIR task into a text-to-text re-

Table 2: Performance (%) on **CIRR** test split using different retrieval models via PeFuse. **Best** and second best highlighted. *: reproduced results; †: results from original papers. Training-based baselines are reported in Table 9 in Appendix B.

Method	**Retrieval Model**	**Recall**					**Recall$_{\text{subset}}$**		
		@1	@2	@5	@10	@50	@1	@2	@3
CIReVL*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	21.40	31.86	47.74	60.72	84.99	56.27	77.08	88.63
LDRE†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	25.69	—	55.13	69.04	89.90	60.53	80.65	90.70
WeiMoCIR†	OpenCLIP (ViT-B/32)	26.31	—	57.69	70.36	91.01	53.35	75.57	87.76
ImageScope†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	**34.36**	—	60.58	71.40	88.41	**74.63**	87.93	93.83
PeFuse (T→I)	CLIP	22.58	32.96	49.81	63.59	87.47	63.28	82.27	91.76
	OpenCLIP	34.00	**47.49**	**65.57**	**77.47**	**93.28**	71.59	**88.39**	**95.04**
	SigLIP2	30.65	43.13	60.60	72.43	91.35	70.00	86.48	93.64
PeFuse (I→I)	CLIP	2.77	9.78	23.06	35.42	64.58	29.90	52.19	70.96
	OpenCLIP	3.28	11.64	27.76	41.45	71.37	31.01	53.83	72.12
	SigLIP2	3.78	12.72	28.39	42.12	70.07	32.43	54.15	71.35
PeFuse (T→T)	CLIP	21.81	31.13	45.06	56.72	78.51	59.47	79.66	90.48
	OpenCLIP	30.65	42.96	58.99	70.68	89.25	69.45	86.00	93.81
	SigLIP2	16.07	24.19	37.40	47.81	68.82	52.77	72.39	84.65
PeFuse (I→T)	CLIP	6.80	13.76	28.27	42.12	72.27	36.12	57.83	74.80
	OpenCLIP	7.40	15.86	31.71	45.16	74.29	36.10	58.72	75.47
	SigLIP2	7.52	14.12	26.82	39.13	67.49	34.41	56.63	74.41

Table 3: Performance (%) on **CIRCO** test split using different retrieval models via PeFuse. **Best** and second best highlighted. *: reproduced results; †: results from original papers. Training-based baselines are reported in Table 10 in Appendix B.

Method	**Retrieval Model**	**mAP@5**	**mAP@10**	**mAP@25**	**mAP@50**
CIReVL*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	10.36	10.70	11.88	12.47
LDRE†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	17.96	18.32	20.21	21.11
ImageScope†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	**22.36**	**22.19**	**23.03**	**23.83**
PeFuse (T→I)	CLIP	11.12	11.47	12.86	13.61
	OpenCLIP	16.89	17.56	19.14	20.16
	SigLIP2	18.53	19.68	21.58	22.62
PeFuse (I→I)	CLIP	2.39	2.57	3.08	3.37
	OpenCLIP	3.03	3.49	4.10	4.44
	SigLIP2	4.06	4.63	5.47	5.94
PeFuse (T→T)	CLIP	7.71	7.97	8.76	9.26
	OpenCLIP	11.52	11.86	13.07	13.71
	SigLIP2	6.68	6.56	7.14	7.48
PeFuse (I→T)	CLIP	3.89	4.35	4.88	5.29
	OpenCLIP	4.10	4.62	5.26	5.74
	SigLIP2	3.65	3.84	4.40	4.78

trieval problem. Together with generated images via diffusion models, CIR task is reframed as image-to-text retrieval task. Formerly, we reformulated the CIR to either image-to-image retrieval via a diffusion model or text-to-image retrieval via a MLLM. Now, we show the results when reformulating CIR to single-modality text retrieval tasks, i.e., PeFuse (T→T) and PeFuse (I→T), with additional conversion on targeting images using MLLM. We report results in bottom rows of Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 respectively.

We observe that reformulating CIR as a text-to-text retrieval task generally yields stronger performance compared to image-to-text retrieval. This could be caused by artifacts in generated images, which introduce a larger semantic gap between modalities for retrieval models, whereas text generated by MLLMs retain more semantically meaningful information. Furthermore, both text-to-text and image-to-text retrieval underperform relative to text-to-image retrieval. However, image-to-text retrieval generally surpasses image-to-image performance. These findings further instantiate that reformulating CIR as a text-to-image retrieval task is generally more effective than other conversion strategies under the same settings.

Table 4: Performance (%) comparison on **GeneCIS** test split using different retrieval models via PeFuse. **Best** and second best highlighted. †: results from original papers. Training-based baselines are reported in Table 11 in Appendix B.

Method	Retrival Model	Focus Attribute			Change Attribute			Focus Object			Change Object			Average
		R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1
CIReVL†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	17.90	29.40	40.40	**14.80**	25.80	35.80	14.60	24.30	33.30	16.10	27.80	37.60	15.90
PeFuse (T→I)	CLIP	18.20	31.15	41.85	14.54	25.76	35.89	13.67	25.26	34.90	17.40	29.03	38.67	15.95
	OpenCLIP	**19.55**	**31.95**	**43.70**	14.73	26.28	**36.51**	17.96	28.27	38.06	16.73	30.97	41.33	17.22
	SigLIP2	17.00	29.35	39.65	14.63	**26.70**	36.17	**18.27**	**29.34**	**38.27**	**19.59**	**31.58**	**42.24**	**17.37**
PeFuse (I→I)	CLIP	15.90	27.15	37.50	11.03	20.36	27.60	9.18	18.88	27.35	8.16	17.60	27.65	11.07
	OpenCLIP	17.60	30.65	41.70	11.22	21.07	29.36	10.41	19.90	28.42	9.08	18.83	28.06	12.08
	SigLIP2	17.95	29.15	40.00	11.17	21.69	30.21	10.20	19.49	27.91	9.90	20.71	30.71	12.31
PeFuse (T→T)	CLIP	16.55	28.80	39.65	10.18	20.45	29.02	14.85	24.44	33.27	12.30	23.98	32.60	13.47
	OpenCLIP	16.60	30.90	41.95	12.26	22.44	32.81	16.53	27.35	35.87	16.17	27.91	37.96	15.39
	SigLIP2	14.60	25.75	35.65	9.42	17.95	25.95	11.84	20.00	28.37	11.02	19.64	29.44	11.72
PeFuse (I→T)	CLIP	17.45	30.70	41.00	10.94	21.07	30.45	10.97	19.74	28.16	11.58	20.82	29.64	12.74
	OpenCLIP	17.45	30.45	41.75	10.84	21.40	31.20	11.84	21.89	30.77	11.22	21.07	30.26	12.84
	SigLIP2	17.40	29.60	39.80	9.90	20.69	31.11	11.22	20.61	28.78	10.51	19.80	29.54	12.26

Table 5: Scaling law when using different backbones for OpenCLIP for text-to-image retrieval on each benchmark.

Backbone	Fashion-IQ		CIRR					CIRCO				GeneCIS
	R@10	R@50	R@1	R@2	R@5	R@10	R@50	mAP@5	mAP@10	mAP@25	mAP@50	R@1
ViT-L/14	29.49	48.37	36.17	50.07	67.13	78.72	94.17	21.69	22.99	25.07	26.14	16.85
ViT-H/14	30.40	50.09	38.55	52.02	69.49	80.29	94.29	23.78	24.78	27.10	28.24	17.50
ViT-g/14	30.15	50.12	38.41	52.15	70.15	80.27	94.58	22.62	23.93	26.39	27.42	17.39
ViT-bigG/14	30.44	49.49	40.41	54.63	71.13	81.06	94.89	25.03	26.63	29.17	30.28	17.99

4.4 Scaling Law

Having evaluated performance of different conversion strategies using retrieval models with a ViT-B/32 backbone in subsection 4.2 and subsection 4.3, a subsequent question arises regarding the potential benefits of larger backbone architectures. To investigate this, we assess the performance of OpenCLIP, which is selected for its superior overall performance among the three retrieval models, using ViT backbones of varying sizes across all datasets for text-to-image retrieval tasks due to their superior performance than other conversion modes. The overall results are presented in Table 5, with detailed category-specific results for Fashion-IQ and CIRR subsets provided in Table 12 in Appendix C, and category results of GeneCIS can be found in Table 13 in Appendix C.

As shown in Table 5, we observe a general trend of improving performance for the text-to-image retrieval task as the backbone size increases, although performance fluctuates across specific model sizes. Notably, on Fashion-IQ, Recall@10 decreases and Recall@50 saturates when using the ViT-g/14 backbone. Performance on CIRR also improves consistently with model scale, with the exception of a slight decrease in Recall@1 and Recall@10 for ViT-g/14. A similar performance drop with ViT-g/14 is observed on the CIRCO dataset. Similar trend holds for GeneCIS. Furthermore, this trend of scaling benefits extends beyond text-to-image retrieval; larger models consistently achieve superior performance on image-to-image, text-to-text, and image-to-text retrieval tasks as well when using our proposed methods to reformulate CIR task.

4.5 Sensitivity Analysis

We study how the model performance can be impacted by varying values for hyperparameters of the MLLM and the diffusion model we used. We quantify the relationship between CIR performance and these hyperparameters via experimental studies.

4.5.1 Multimodal Large Language Models

For MLLM, temperature controls the determinism of the LLM when generating tokens, Top-P is the probability that model selects tokens up to probability P, and Top-K sampling limits the model to consider only

the k most likely tokens at each step. For consistency with previous experiments, we use 0.1 for temperature, 0.9 for top-P, 50 for top-K as base combination and only alter one parameter while the other are fixed. For example, when we investigate how temperature would impact the retrieval performance, we fix top-P to 0.9 and top-K to 50, and change values for temperature in range (0, 1). We use the average of mAP@K for y-axis, where $K \in \{1, 5, 10, 25, 50\}$.

We investigate the performance of different values of hyperparameters on CIRCO validation dataset (due to its manageable size and diverse nature of images) using OpenCLIP as the retrieval model in Figure 2. From Figure 2 we inspect that retrieval performance is much impacted by temperature instead of top-P or top-K. For higher temperature, the model will produce more diverse tokens, which hurts retrieval performance when matching with images, whereas the performance of top-P and top-K are very stable overall. The figure indicates that a lower temperature and a moderate top-P with higher top-K would result in better retrieval performance.

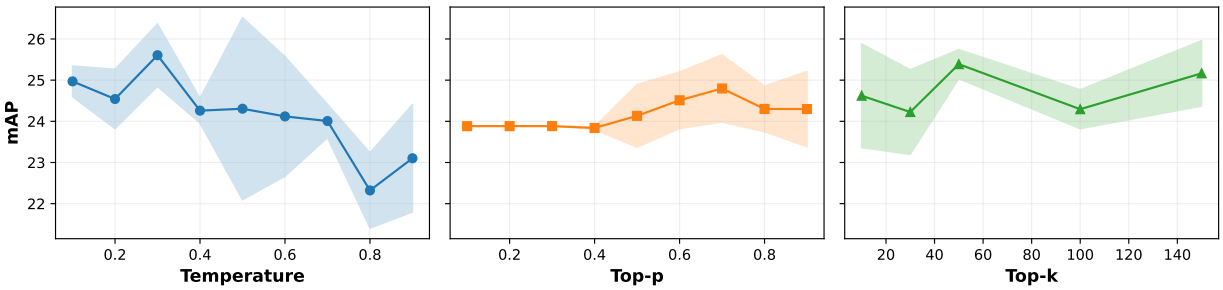

Figure 2: CIR performance (%) of PeFuse (T→I) via the MLLM under varying values for hyperparameters on CIRCO validation split using OpenCLIP with ViT-B/32 backbone to perform text-to-image task for 3 runs. Shadowed regions indicate standard deviation.

4.5.2 Diffusion Models

In the inference process of diffusion models, a strong correlation exists between key hyperparameters and the properties of the synthesized output. Specifically, a larger number of inference steps correlates strongly with the enhanced photorealism of the generated images. Furthermore, increasing the image guidance scale elevates the fidelity of the output to a given reference image. Conversely, a higher text guidance scale promotes stricter adherence to the input text prompt, often at the expense of output diversity. We use 7.5 for guidance scale, 3.0 for image guidance scale, and 30 for inference steps as base combination and only change one hyperparameter and fix the rest.

We show the retrieval performance when using different values for hyperparameters in diffusion models on CIRCO validation dataset *with* and *without* MLLM in Figure 3. From Figure 3, we observe that using MLLM generated descriptions for generating images improves the retrieval performance for all three hyperparameters, which validates the importance of using MLLM-generated descriptions as prompts instead of the original captions from datasets. We also show qualitative results with and without MLLM for diffusion models in Appendix D. From the synthesized images, we observe more distinguishable artifacts when directly using raw modifications from CIRCO dataset.

The performance gap of using and not using MLLM is increasing for stronger guidance scale and more inference steps while the performance gap is closing with larger values for image guidance scale. Across three hyperparameters, image guidance scale has the most significant impact on retrieval performance, and higher values cause much worse performance. With larger image guidance scale, the generated images would be more like original input images instead of intended target images, thus deviating from target images and leading to worse performance. This indicates the importance of low values for image guidance scale to achieve good performance when reformulating CIR task to image-to-image task.

We also noticed that retrieval performance is slightly increasing for varying number of inference steps, as more inference step produces more photorealistic images but takes longer time. For time efficiency, a moderate number of inference steps should be sufficient, as indicated from the figure. Finally, we acknowledge that carefully tuning values for hyperparamters is labor-intensive, as different datasets and models might perform differently for the same setting of hyperparameters.

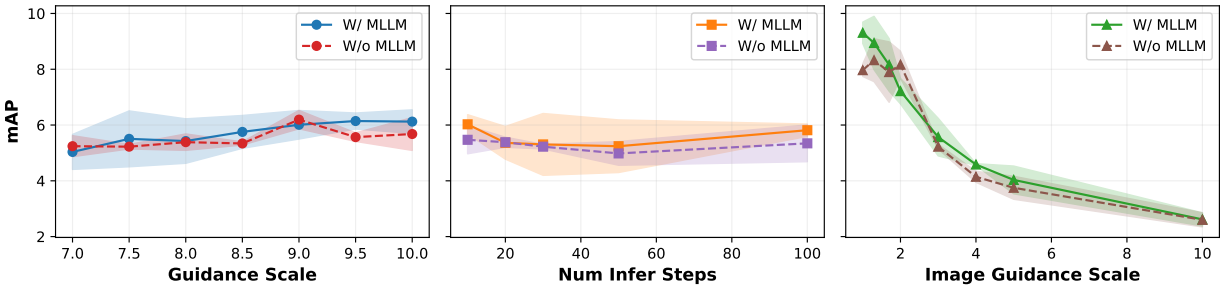

Figure 3: CIR performance (%) of PeFuse (I→I) via diffusion models *with* and *without* using composed descriptions from the MLLM on CIRCO validation split using OpenCLIP with ViT-B/32 for 3 runs. Shadowed regions indicate standard deviation.

5 Ablation and Compute Analysis

We analyze the computational overhead of the proposed framework for the CIR task. We focus on PeFuse (T→I) and PeFuse (I→I), as they involve both MLLMs and diffusion models. The former leverages MLLMs to compose target descriptions, while the latter employs diffusion models, either guided by MLLM-generated descriptions or by raw modifications, to generate target images. It is worth noting that both settings involve image-retrieval-based uni-directional conversion, without converting the generated target images into text.

For consistency, we use OpenCLIP on CIRCO validation split for both tasks across experiments. Specifically, we additionally employ the Qwen2.5-VL-3B to examine the latency incurred by scaling effects of MLLMs, and the similarly sized LLaVA-1.5-7B-hf (Liu et al., 2024) to investigate the impact of different training strategies. Notably, Qwen2.5-VL-7B is trained with large-scale joint vision-language pretraining, whereas LLaVA-1.5-7B-hf aligns visual features with those of a frozen LLM. In addition, we include SDXL-Turbo (Sauer et al., 2024) with a comparable parameter scale to SDXL-InstructPix2Pix, but supporting faster inference, thereby illustrating the trade-off between inference speed and output quality.

We report the GPU memory consumption of each model during inference under `torch.bfloat16`, the average inference time per sample, and the entire pipeline time, defined as the average end-to-end processing time per sample, including: dataset loading, model loading, data generation, feature extraction, and performance evaluation, etc. We adopt the same metric (the average mAP across $\{1, 5, 10, 25, 50\}$), a batch size of 8 (for limited memory), and the same MLLM and diffusion sampling hyperparameters as in subsection 4.5. For SDXL-Turbo we use 60 denoising steps and an image guidance scale of 0.5, resulting in $60 \times 0.5 = 30$ effective inference steps.[1]

We show the compute information in Table 6. In Table 6, for PeFuse (T→I), we observe that Qwen2.5-VL-3B has the best performance among three MLLMs, while LlaVA-1.5-7B-hf performs worst, which stresses the important role of proper MLLMs when converting multimodal queries to text. Another valuable observation is, Qwen2.5-VL-3B surpasses Qwen2.5-VL-7B by 0.18% for average mAP while being slower by 0.28 seconds per sample at inference time. On the other hand, we utilize Qwen2.5-VL-7B for PeFuse (I→I), for consistency. From Table 6, SDXL-Turbo is more than 3× faster and outperforms SDXL-InstructPix2Pix by 2.18% when using raw modifications. When employing generated descriptions by Qwen2.5-VL-7B, similar phenomenon is observed. Interestingly, using the MLLM produce performance gains for SDXL-InstructPix2Pix

[1] `https://huggingface.co/stabilityai/sdxl-turbo`

(↑ 0.11%) whereas the performance of SDXL-Turbo drops by 0.22% when conditioned on generated target descriptions.

Table 6: Compute analysis on the CIRCO validation split over 3 runs. Inference time and pipeline time are reported **per sample**, with mean and standard deviation. "SDXL-Instr." denotes SDXL-InstructPix2Pix.

Method	**Models**	**Memory** (MB)	**Inference Time** (s)	**Pipeline Time** (s)	**Avg mAP** (%)
PeFuse (T→I)	Qwen2.5-VL-3B	7162	0.69 (± 0.03)	1.70 (± 0.11)	25.15 (± 0.80)
	Qwen2.5-VL-7B	15818	0.41 (± 0.03)	1.70 (± 0.14)	24.97 (± 0.37)
	LlaVA-1.5-7B-hf	13472	0.70 (± 0.04)	3.01 (± 0.10)	17.11 (± 1.09)
PeFuse (I→I)	SDXL-Instr.	6725	3.95 (± 0.02)	6.24 (± 0.05)	5.22 (± 0.08)
	SDXL-Turbo	6725	1.25 (± 0.02)	3.07 (± 0.27)	7.40 (± 0.56)
	Qwen2.5-VL-7B + SDXL-Instr.	15818 + 6725	4.40 (± 0.03)	6.33 (± 0.23)	5.33 (± 0.70)
	Qwen2.5-VL-7B + SDXL-Turbo	15818 + 6725	1.69 (± 0.05)	3.49 (± 0.33)	7.18 (± 0.41)

6 Model Deployment

Our proposed framework leverages MLLMs and diffusion models, making efficient real-time deployment critical for practical application. To ensure low-latency retrieval, we preprocess the entire candidate image pool by indexing their visual representations in a vector database using the `FAISS` (Johnson et al., 2019) library. MLLMs or diffusion models can be used offline to generate new data based on multimodal queries, and then store the query representation using the same strategy. This way, decoupling the generative process from the retrieval step can balance performance and efficiency, enabling scalable real-time operation.

7 Limitations

While our method demonstrates promising performance via multiple conversion strategies of CIR tasks, and is highly compatible with comparable techniques like LDRE and ImageScope, it is subject to several challenges inherent to its design, which at the same time present exciting opportunities for future research. First, the integration of diffusion models and MLLMs for the pseudo-fusion of modalities can lead to concept drift issues, which often lead to propagation of errors through the pipeline. Consequently, chaining multiple models can be error-prone and presents a significant challenge for optimizing CIR performance via the entire pipeline. Second, our framework considers non-preprocessed user-provided text modifiers as inputs to MLLMs. We posit that performance could be enhanced through advanced text paraphrasing, structured formatting, or more sophisticated prompt engineering strategies. However, such techniques must be carefully designed to mitigate the inherent risk of LLM hallucinations. Third, diffusion models and MLLMs are highly sensitive to their hyperparameters; nevertheless, tuning these hyperparameters is a labor-intensive process that may lack generalization across diverse datasets.

Based on these limitations, we identify several promising directions for future work. Efforts could focus on developing robust integration techniques to minimize error propagation in multi-model pipelines. Furthermore, considering more complex scenarios remains a compelling long-term goal. For example, compositions involving multiple input images, longer text narratives, or additional modalities like video, can be worthy of investigation. Another promising avenue is to explore iterative, multi-round fusion of images and text to generate progressively more refined and more accurate descriptions. Finally, we realize such conversion paradigms inherently introduce some latency, therefore, to massively deploy interpretable CIR systems as such, more sophisticated and light-weighted models should be developed.

8 Conclusion

This work represents the first systematic investigation and benchmarking of training-free pseudo-fusion for both uni-directional and bi-directional conversion within ZS-CIR. We empirically quantified the relationship between CIR performance and key hyperparameters of modern generative models, and conducted compute analysis when using various MLLMs and diffusion models. Our results demonstrate that CIR tasks can be

effectively reframed by converting heterogeneous modalities into a single, unified modality. This approach enables the use of standard single-query retrieval systems, either intra-modal or cross-modal, leveraging existing high-performance pre-trained models in a plug-and-play manner, without having to train new modules. Furthermore, our analysis establishes that reformulating the CIR task as a text-to-image retrieval task is a more effective strategy compared to other conversion modes, emphasizing the importance of choosing proper MLLMs and diffusion models when converting multimodal queries. The competitive performance of generative models in this pseudo-fusion role underscores their potential as a powerful tool for modality unification and points to a promising future for generative, model-based fusion methods in multimodal machine learning.

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A Datasets

Table 7 shows the details of each dataset we used in our experiments. Due to broken links in the Fashion-IQ dataset, we are missing some images comparing to the original dataset: shirt missing 98, dress 158, and toptee 97. CIRR, CIRCO, and GeneCIS datasets have all images available.

Table 7: Public benchmarks used in our experiments. We use the validation split for FashionIQ and test splits for CIRCO, CIRR, and GeneCIS.

Dataset	**# of Queries**	**# of Candidates**
Fashion-IQ (Shirt)	1940	6181
Fashion-IQ (Dress)	1859	3648
Fashion-IQ (Toptee)	1867	5261
CIRCO	800	123403
CIRR	4148	2315
GeneCIS (Focus Attr)	2000	20000
GeneCIS (Change Attr)	2112	31680
GeneCIS (Focus Obj)	1960	29400
GeneCIS (Change Obj)	1960	29400

B Training-based Methods

To gain further insights, we provide the baseline performance of training-based methods on all datasets in Table 8, Table 10, Table 9, and Table 11, respectively. Nonetheless, we mainly focus on training-free methods in this paper.

Table 8: Performance (%) of training-based methods on **Fashion-IQ** validation split. **Best** and second best highlighted. *: reproduced results; †: results from original papers.

Method	Retrieval Model	Shirt		Dress		Toptee		Average	
		R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50
Pic2Word†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	26.20	43.60	20.00	40.20	27.90	47.40	24.70	43.70
SEARLE-OTI*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	24.43	41.39	19.85	40.72	24.85	45.47	23.05	42.53
SEARLE*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	24.85	41.60	19.37	39.21	25.12	46.22	23.11	42.34
CoLLM†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	24.90	45.10	22.90	43.80	26.40	46.80	24.80	45.20
LinCIR*	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	29.69	48.14	22.32	45.13	30.85	52.01	27.62	48.43
SEARLE+CIG-XL turbo†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	24.73	41.46	18.94	39.66	25.50	46.66	23.06	42.59
HyCIR†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	27.62	44.94	19.98	40.80	28.14	47.67	25.25	44.47

Table 9: Performance (%) of training-based methods on **CIRR** test split.

Method	Retrieval Model	Recall					$\text{Recall}_{\text{subset}}$		
		@1	@2	@5	@10	@50	@1	@2	@3
Pic2Word†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	23.90	—	51.70	65.30	87.80	53.76	74.46	87.08
SEARLE-OTI*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	23.18	34.72	52.31	66.00	89.21	52.02	74.43	86.75
SEARLE*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	23.33	34.89	52.89	66.99	89.81	53.90	76.19	87.76
CoLLM†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	28.60	—	—	71.80	92.70	—	—	—
LinCIR*	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	25.04	36.22	53.78	67.18	88.75	56.53	76.82	88.70
SEARLE+CIG-XL turbo†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	25.54	—	55.01	68.24	90.72	57.52	78.36	89.35
HyCIR†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	25.08	—	53.49	67.03	89.85	53.83	75.06	87.18

Table 10: Performance (%) of training-based methods on **CIRCO** test split.

Method	Retrieval Model	mAP@5	mAP@10	mAP@25	mAP@50
Pic2Word‡	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	8.72	9.51	10.64	11.29
SEARLE-OTI*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	7.29	7.99	9.21	9.85
SEARLE*	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	9.38	9.95	11.13	11.85
CoLLM†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	12.90	13.20	—	15.00
LinCIR*	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	12.33	13.13	14.56	15.46
SEARLE+CIG-XL turbo†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	10.45	11.02	12.34	13.00
HyCIR†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	14.12	15.02	16.72	17.56

Table 11: Performance (%) of training-based methods on **GeneCIS** test split.

Method	Retrival Model	Focus Attribute			Change Attribute			Focus Object			Change Object			Average
		R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1
Pic2Word†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	15.65	28.16	38.65	13.87	24.67	33.05	8.42	18.01	25.77	6.68	15.05	24.03	11.16
SEARLE†	CLIP (ViT-B/32)	18.90	30.60	41.20	13.00	23.80	33.70	12.20	23.00	33.30	13.60	23.80	33.30	14.40
LinCIR†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	16.90	29.95	41.45	16.19	27.98	36.84	8.27	17.40	26.22	7.40	15.71	25.00	12.19
LinCIR+CIG-XL turbo†	CLIP (ViT-L/14)	16.80	29.70	40.90	15.91	28.88	37.45	8.37	17.35	25.10	7.86	15.46	24.29	12.24

Table 12: Scaling law on each category of **Fashion-IQ** and **CIRR** subsets using OpenCLIP for text-to-image task.

Backbone	Shirt		Dress		Toptee		CIRR		
	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R@10	R@50	R_{subset}@1	R_{subset}@2	R_{subset}@3
ViT-L/14	29.54	47.01	25.23	43.73	33.69	54.37	73.49	88.82	95.08
ViT-H/14	30.41	47.22	26.90	47.71	33.90	55.33	74.41	89.23	95.33
ViT-g/14	30.52	48.87	25.12	46.05	34.82	55.44	74.15	89.57	95.45
ViT-bigG/14	31.39	47.32	25.12	45.56	34.82	55.60	75.90	89.37	95.59

C Scaling law on Categories of Fashion-IQ, CIRR subsets, and GeneCIS categories

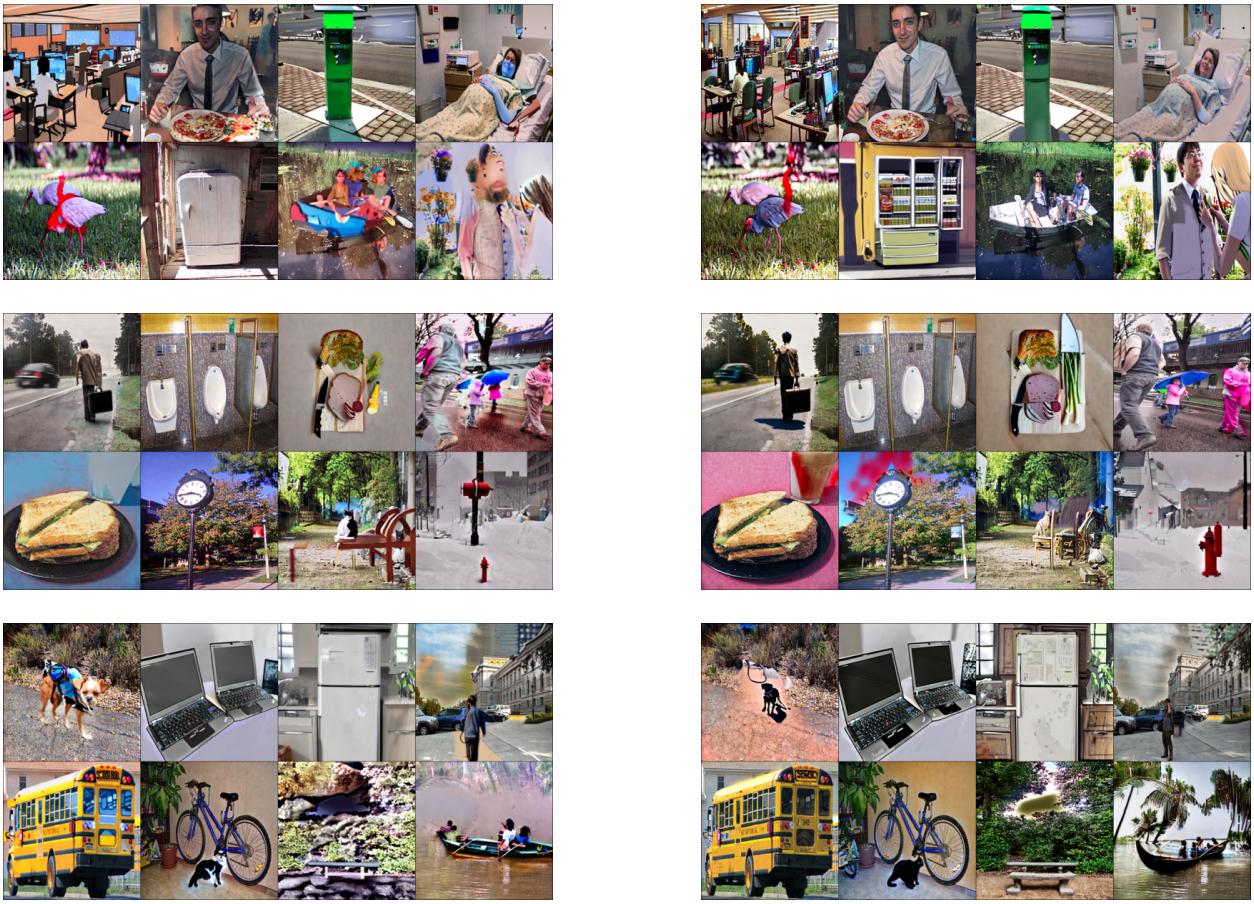
We report results of scaling law for each category of Fashion-IQ dataset and the subsets of CIRR in Table 12 and that of GeneCIS in Table 13.

Table 13: Scaling law on each category of **GeneCIS** using OpenCLIP for text-to-image task.

Backbone	Focus Attribute			Change Attribute			Focus Object			Change Object		
	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3	R@1	R@2	R@3
ViT-L/14	17.85	30.30	41.90	14.25	27.27	37.12	16.63	27.50	38.21	18.67	31.02	40.61
ViT-H/14	19.10	31.35	43.50	15.58	27.18	37.97	17.50	28.16	37.09	17.81	29.59	39.54
ViT-g/14	19.25	32.05	42.10	15.77	27.94	37.83	17.35	27.50	37.24	17.19	29.69	39.39
ViT-bigG/14	19.00	31.15	42.95	16.57	28.79	39.44	17.55	27.91	37.45	18.83	30.77	40.87

D Qualitative Results Using MLLM for Diffusion Models

We show the superiority of generated images based on MLLM-generated text over raw captions for CIRCO validation split in Figure 4 and Figure 5. It can be observed that using raw captions to generate images incurs more distinguishable artifacts for both diffusion models, and SDXL-Turbo-generated images has more artifacts than those of SDXL-InstructPix2Pix.



(a) With raw captions.

(b) With MLLM-generated descriptions.

Figure 4: Qualitative results of **SDXL-InstructPix2Pix**-generated images with Qwen2.5-VL-7B-generated descriptions and with raw captions from CIRCO validation split. We use 3.0 for image guidance scale, 7.5 for guidance scale, and 30 denoising steps.

(a) With raw captions.

(b) With MLLM-generated descriptions.

Figure 5: Qualitative results of **SDXL-Turbo**-generated images with Qwen2.5-VL-7B-generated descriptions and with raw captions from CIRCO validation split. We use 0.5 for strength, 0.0 for guidance scale, and 30 denoising steps.

E Prompts

We show the prompts used for MLLMs when generating composed descriptions based on reference images and text modifications. When using the prompts, images are converted to base64 format and then insert into the prompts. We point out that MLLMs can also be employed to generate multiple text from different aspects or views per query like in LDRE Yang et al. (2024), which further enhances CIR performance at the cost of extra computational overheads.

F Failure Cases

By way of example, we show the failure cases when using OpenCLIP to retrieve top-5 images from CIRCO 123K-candidate pool in Figure 6, when performing PeFuse (T→I).

Fashion-IQ

You are an expert at visual perception and imagination of fashion items. Given a reference image of fashion items and modification instructions, mentally apply the changes and produce an accurate and complete natural-language description of the resulting fashion items. The modifications may describe direct attributes (e.g., "solid white with buttons"), comparisons (e.g., "longer sleeves," "lighter in color"), combined attributes (e.g., "black with a red cherry pattern and deep V neckline"), or negations (e.g., "no lace design"). Image: `base64_image`. Here are the modification instructions: `caption`. Focus on the fashion item and its attributes such as type, color, pattern, material, shape, fit, and style details. Ignore people and background from the image. Avoid imaginary things. Be specific and objective so that I can find targeting images based on your description solely without knowing the reference image or modification instructions. Do not use vague comparative terms like 'same/different/smaller/larger/shorter/longer/unchanged', etc. Instead, you should specify these differences clearly, like: another color instead of red (if no specific targeting color is mentioned), and a clear sky (if mentioned) instead of unchanged sky, etc. Now, describe how the final fashion item looks after applying the modifications. Write in 1 to 3 coherent sentences.

CIRR

You are an expert at visual imagination of real-world scenes. Given a reference image and modification instructions, mentally apply the modifications to the reference image and describe the resulting image in clear, complete English. Apply the modifications exactly as described, and ensure the final description reflects the scene after the changes. The modifications may include: 1. Cardinality: adjusting the number of objects (e.g., "only one bird remains"). 2. Addition: adding new objects or attributes (e.g., "add a red chair in the corner"). 3. Negation: removing elements (e.g., "remove the table"). 4. Direct Addressing: ensuring specific mentioned objects are clearly included. 5. Compare & Change: replacing one attribute with another (e.g., "same sofa but in leather"). 6. Comparative Statement: relative size, quantity, or intensity changes (e.g., "a larger group of people"). 7. Conjunction Statements: multiple modifications combined (e.g., "remove the tree and add two benches"). 8. Spatial Relations & Background: modifying positions, layout, or setting (e.g., "change the background to a beach"). 9. Viewpoint: adjusting perspective or framing (e.g., "zoom out to show the whole scene"). Image: `base64_image`. Here are the modification instructions: `caption`. Focus on the elements (like objects, people, and animals), their attributes (like color, size, shape, and quantity), spatial relations, and background. Avoid imaginary details and unnecessary repetitions. Be specific and objective so that I can find the targeting image from an image gallery based on your description solely without knowing the reference image or modification instructions. Do not use vague comparative terms like 'same/different/smaller/larger/shorter/longer/unchanged', etc. Instead, you should specify these differences clearly, like: another color instead of red (if no specific targeting color is mentioned), and a clear sky (if mentioned) instead of unchanged sky, etc. Write in 1 to 3 coherent sentences in English. Now, describe how the final image looks after applying the modifications.

CIRCO

You are an expert at visual imagination of real-world scenes. Given a reference image and modification instructions, mentally apply the modifications and produce an accurate, detailed description of the resulting scene. Apply the modifications exactly as described, and describe the final scene after the changes. The modifications may involve: 1. Cardinality: adjusting the number of objects (e.g., "has two boxes"). 2. Addition: introducing new objects or attributes (e.g., "a child under the umbrella"). 3. Negation: removing elements (e.g., "shows no bike"). 4. Direct Addressing: ensuring a specific object is present (e.g., "next to a window"). 5. Compare & Change: altering attributes (e.g., "different color," "surrounded by flowers"). 6. Comparative Statements: relative size, number, or intensity (e.g., "more stickers," "larger crowd"). 7. Conjunction Statements: multiple edits at once (e.g., "surrounded by snow and trees are more bare"). 8. Spatial Relations & Background: positioning or environment changes (e.g., "skyscrapers in the background"). 9. Viewpoint: changes in perspective or framing (e.g., "shot from above"). Image: `base64_image`. Here are the modification instructions: `caption`. Focus on the objects, people, animals, attributes (color, size, shape, quantity), spatial relations, and background context. Be specific and objective. Avoid imaginary details not supported by the reference image or the modification. Do not use vague comparative terms like 'same/different/smaller/larger/shorter/longer/unchanged', etc. Instead, you should specify these differences clearly, like: another color instead of red (if no specific targeting color is mentioned), and a clear sky (if mentioned) instead of unchanged sky, etc. Write 1 to 3 complete and coherent sentences so that I can find targeting images based on your description solely without knowing the reference image or modification instructions. Now, describe how the final image looks after applying these modifications.

GeneCIS

You are an expert at visual imagination of real-world scenes. Given a reference image and modification instructions, you should distinguish the objects and their attributes from the reference image, abd then mentally apply the modifications to the reference image, and describe the objects and their attributes in the final image after the changes. Image: `base64_image`. Here are the modification instructions: `caption`. Avoid imaginary details not supported by the reference image or the modification. Write 1 to 3 complete and coherent sentences so that I can find targeting images based on your description solely without knowing the reference image or modification instructions. Now, describe the objects and their attributes after applying the modification.

Figure 6: Failure cases of PeFuse (T→I). None of the top-5 results matches the corresponding query.