Revisiting Multi-Modal LLM Evaluation

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Abstract

With the advent of multi-modal large language models (MLLMs), datasets used for visual question answering (VQA) and referring expression comprehension have seen a resurgence. However, the most popular datasets used to evaluate MLLMs are some of the earliest ones created (VQAv2, GQA, TextVQA et al.) and they have many known problems, including extreme bias, spurious correlations, and an inability to permit fine-grained analysis. In this paper, we pioneer evaluating recent MLLMs (LLaVA-OneVision, MiniGemini, CogVLM, GPT-4V et al.) on datasets designed to address weaknesses in earlier ones. We assess three VQA datasets: 1) TDIUC, which permits fine-grained analysis on 12 question types; 2) TallyQA, which has simple and complex counting questions; and 3) DVQA, which requires optical character recognition for chart understanding. We also study VQDv1, a dataset that crucially requires identifying all image regions that satisfy a given query. Our experiments reveal the weaknesses of many MLLMs that have not previously been reported. Project webpage: https://shikhar-srivastava.github.io/MLLM_Evaluations/

1. Introduction

In recent years, multi-modal large language models (MLLMs) have emerged as powerful tools for tackling vision-language tasks [8, 18, 20, 24, 38]. Open source MLLMs leverage the extensive world knowledge of large language models (LLMs) and combine them with pre-trained vision encoders to process both linguistic and visual information [23, 24, 38]. These models are trained on various vision-language tasks such as visual question answering (VQA) [11, 37], image captioning [30], and visual conversations [1]. Their effectiveness is typically evaluated on VQA datasets [11, 28], which test the ability to produce answers to questions about images, as well as referring expression comprehension tasks [17], which require localizing the single object specified in the referring expression.

From 2017-2019, a series of datasets were designed to overcome the widely acknowledged weaknesses of earlier VQA and visual understanding datasets (COCO, VQAv2, RefCOCO et al.) [11, 27, 28], and intended to enable fine-grained analysis of visually grounded language understanding systems:

1. **VQDv1** [3], which requires the model to produce multiple bounding boxes instead of localizing only one object, thereby testing for general query detection skills;
2. **TallyQA** [2], which tests visual grounding through counting skills, asking questions that require intricate reasoning;
3. **TDIUC** [14], which tests versatility across 12 tasks, including object, attribute, and activity recognition, as well as overall scene understanding; and
4. **DVQA** [15], which requires interpreting and analyzing visual data in chart form, testing for the ability to do OCR, and properly handling unusual words found in charts.

Despite this, these early datasets are now widely used to evaluate MLLMs. The most commonly used datasets, e.g. VQAv2 [11], fail to adequately gauge visual grounding, allowing models to inflate performance by exploiting language bias without using visual information [13]. Additionally, they do not categorize questions into types, preventing fine-grained analysis of abilities like attribute detection, object recognition, reasoning, and scene understanding. In contrast, TDIUC provides comprehensive evaluation across 12 diverse tasks, enabling fine-grained analysis, while TallyQA focuses on counting, demanding intricate spatial reasoning for its complex questions. DVQA challenges models with chart interpretation, requiring OCR and handling unusual words. Referring expression datasets like RefCOCO [27] often only require localizing a single object, allowing models to exploit biases [3, 9] and often can answer queries without even considering the sentence structures [5]. In contrast, VQDv1 requires identifying multiple objects or none based on the query, making it a more rigorous test for visual grounding and reducing the ability to exploit biases.

This paper makes the following contributions:

1. We provide a robust evaluation of MLLMs on the TallyQA, TDIUC, and DVQA datasets, revealing previously unreported weaknesses via fine-grained analysis across

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various question types and tasks.
2. Using VQDv1, we challenge MLLMs' visual grounding capabilities by requiring them to engage in complex visual reasoning to identify multiple objects beyond the limitations of single-object referring expression datasets.
3. We leverage insights from our analyses to characterize the strengths and limitations of current MLLMs, offering guidance for future model development.

2. Multi-modal Large Language Models

Open-source MLLMs comprise a pre-trained LLM, a pre-trained vision encoder, and a learned adapter that aligns the visual and linguistic representations [26, 38]. They are usually trained in multiple stages. Initially, the adapter is trained to align the visual embeddings generated by the vision encoder with the textual embedding space of the LLM. Subsequently, the MLLM undergoes fine-tuning by adapting both the adapter and the LLM on various vision-language and instruction-tuning datasets. In our study, we consider both widely available state-of-the-art open-weight MLLMs and closed-source MLLMs.

BLIP2 [20] is a generic and compute-efficient method for vision-language pre-training that leverages frozen pre-trained image encoders and language models (LLMs). It pre-trains a lightweight Querying Transformer (Q-Former), consisting of image and text transformer sub-modules, to bridge visual and textual modalities. BLIP2, therefore, only trains a relatively light - 188M parameter transformer and achieves strong performance on VQA and image captioning tasks. We evaluate the base BLIP2 model [20], with 'blip2-flan-t5-xl' as the pretrained encoder.

iBLIP [10] (i.e., InstructBLIP), like BLIP-2, keeps the LLM and visual encoders frozen while introducing a novel instruction-aware Query Transformer that allows the model to extract informative visual features based on the textual instructions in the prompt. iBLIP is additionally trained on a much larger corpus of visual instruction tuning datasets, including knowledge-grounded image-question answering, visual reasoning, and VQA [10]. This leads to improvements, including higher zero-shot performance on VQA tasks, compared to BLIP2 and larger MLLMs. We test the version that uses 'instructblip-flan-t5-xxl' as the pre-trained encoder.

LLaVA [24] uses a visual instruction tuning dataset to fine-tune the LLM and adapter. LLaVA 1.5 enhances its vision encoder to handle higher-resolution images and replaces the linear projector layer with a multi-layer perceptron adapter. This version is trained on the VQA datasets VQAv2 and GQA datasets and a broader range of instruction-tuning data from sources like ShareGPT. These enhancements significantly improve its performance on fine-grained visual tasks, including detailed image description and complex question answering [23]. It achieves strong performance on several VQA benchmarks.

CogVLM [33] introduces a novel approach to bridging the gap between frozen pretrained language models and image encoders. Unlike shallow alignment methods, CogVLM employs a trainable visual expert module integrated into the attention and FFN layers. This deep fusion of vision-language features enables improved performance on cross-modal tasks without compromising NLP capabilities

QwenVL [6] is built upon the Qwen language model series and employs a three-stage training pipeline. It utilizes a visual receptor with a higher input resolution of 448x448 pixels, enabling more detailed image analysis. QwenVL incorporates a novel input-output interface that supports bounding box inputs and outputs, facilitating visual grounding and text reading tasks. The model is trained on a multilingual multi-modal corpus, allowing it to handle both Chinese and English inputs effectively. QwenVL demonstrates strong performance in zero-shot captioning and Chinese-language visual tasks, outperforming some larger models despite its relatively compact size

LLaVA-NeXT [25] is an improved version of LLaVA 1.5, with a focus on enhanced visual reasoning, optical character recognition (OCR), and multi-modal document understanding. LLaVA-NeXT scales the input image resolution of input images by $4\times$, up to 1344×336 compared to 336×336 in LLaVA 1.5 to enhance its ability to grasp finer-grained visual cues. LLaVA-NeXT is also trained on a more diverse and realistic visual instruction-tuning dataset (ShareGPT-4V and LAION-GPT-V), as well as a range of OCR, document, and chart datasets. We evaluate the 7B parameter version of LLaVA-NeXT.

Mini-Gemini [21] introduces a novel framework to allow for refined image processing of the visual encoder without increasing the visual token count. It employs a dual-encoder architecture—separately handling low-resolution and high-resolution visual embeddings—along with a patch information mining technique that aligns high-resolution regions with low-resolution visual queries at the patch level. Mini-Gemini is trained on a data recipe curated to improve image comprehension and reasoning-based generation. Mini-Gemini-HD (MGM-HD) processes images at 672x672 resolution, compared to Mini-Gemini (MGM)'s 336x336 normal resolution processing. MGM-HD is claimed to enable improved performance on detail-oriented tasks like text-VQA while maintaining computational efficiency. We evaluate both the Mini-Gemini-HD (MGM-HD) and Mini-Gemini (MGM) versions at the 7B parameter scale.

LLaVA-OneVision [19] is a family of open large multi-modal models that learns a single model to transfer across various modalities - single-image, multi-image, and video scenarios simultaneously. It consolidates insights from the LLaVA-NeXT series, employing a Qwen-2 language model, SigLIP vision encoder, and a 2-layer MLP projection layer. LLaVA-OneVision achieves strong transfer learning across

modalities, demonstrating emerging capabilities in tasks like diagram interpretation, set-of-mark prompting, and video analysis. We evaluate the 7B parameter versions of the model.

GPT-4o/GPT-4V [4, 35] are closed-weight MLLMs created by OpenAI that enable users to leverage the capability of GPT-4 scale LLMs to analyze visual inputs. GPT-4V is a powerful generalist multi-modal model and can process arbitrarily interleaved image-text data. GPT-4V can perform many visual-language tasks well, including spatial understanding, object localization, and object counting [35]. GPT-4o is reportedly an end-to-end text, vision, and audio multi-modal model, where multi-modal tokens are processed within the same network. GPT-4o has also been reported to improve linguistic and multi-modal understanding. Given that these are closed-source MLLMs, we use the API provided by OpenAI for our evaluations.

3. Experiments

Across datasets we compute both micro performance, i.e., where every example is weighted equally, and macro performance, where we average across the mean score for different question/query types. We also generate a slim version of the datasets, by sub-sampling to maintain the long tailed distribution of the dataset while reducing the class imbalances (see Appendix Sec. C).

3.1. Visual Query Detection with VQDv1

Visual query detection (VQD) requires a model to provide bounding boxes for 0-N visual objects in response to a given query [3]. It is significantly more challenging than referring expression comprehension, which requires only localizing a single object in a scene. VQD aligns more closely with typical human referring behavior, where it is common to refer to multiple objects simultaneously. Unlike VQA, VQD requires the model to ground responses in visual inputs, providing direct evidence of task completion.

We evaluated all models on VQDv1 except for BLIP2 and iBLIP, which failed to produce bounding boxes under the zero-shot setting. All models were prompted to answer with a list of bounding boxes. We discuss details of prompt selection in Appendix D.

VQDv1 Metrics. In [3], average precision using an intersection over union (IoU) of 0.5 was used for evaluation; however, that requires scores for each box, which are unavailable for MLLMs. Therefore, we compute each model's micro and macro mean F_1 scores, recall, and precision. The predicted box with the highest IoU above 0.5 is considered a true positive for each ground-truth box, whereas any remaining predicted boxes are false positives. If a query has no ground truth bounding boxes, then the F_1 score is set to 1 when the model outputs no boxes. Otherwise, it is set to 0. Due to the limited number of questions with four or more bounding boxes, we grouped them.

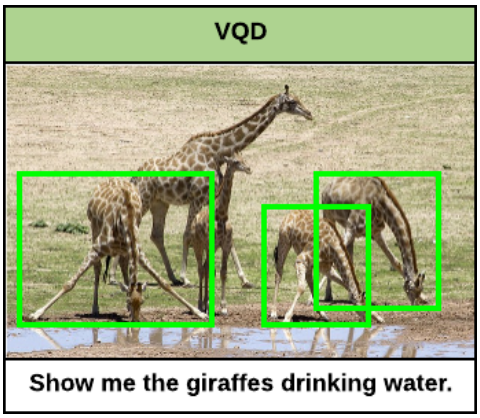


Figure 1. VQDv1 requires identifying all regions that satisfy a query.

Results for VQDv1. As presented in Table 1, all of the models struggle on VQDv1, with the best performing LLaVA-NeXT obtaining only 27.01 in terms of micro F_1 score. Fig. 2 shows the recall and precision scores across varying numbers of bounding boxes. Models struggle to ground multiple boxes, as evidenced by the recall score which decreases with an increase in the number of boxes.

3.2. Fine-Grained VQA Assessment with TDIUC

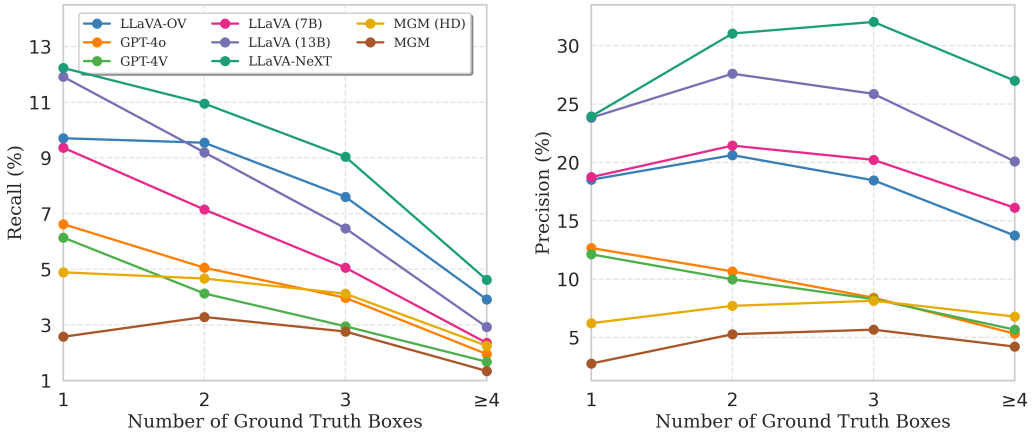
TDIUC [14] is a VQA dataset that organizes its questions into 12 distinct types. Performance is computed for each question type. TDIUC aims to address the shortcomings of previous VQA datasets by offering a broader spectrum of question types, and it enables a comprehensive analysis of VQA capabilities for each model.

TDIUC Metrics. For TDIUC, we use micro-accuracy and macro-accuracy, where micro accuracy corresponds to the average accuracy across the 12 question types. Macro-accuracy corresponds to the mean per type metric in the original paper.

Results for TDIUC. Our main results on TDIUC are detailed in Table 2. LLaVA (13B) and LLaVA-NeXT achieve the highest micro accuracies under the asymptotic McNemar test ($p = 0.2355$). GPT-4o is the next best model, showing a statistically significant difference from LLaVA (13B) ($p = 0.0031$). BLIP2 obtains the poorest performance across question types, particularly in attribute/color recognition and counting. GPT-4V, GPT-4o, BLIP2, and iBLIP excel at absurd questions, whereas the LLaVA family performs worse, likely due to hallucinations. Compared to MuREl [7], the best system trained on TDIUC, MLLMs greatly improve for utility affordance questions, except for BLIP2. We note that introducing absurd questions poses an additional challenge to the model. In general, absurd questions are a test for the model's epistemic confidence in its responses.

Table 1. Performance comparison of various multi-modal large language models on VQDv1 dataset. 'L', 'MGM', 'OV' denote LLaVA, Mini-Gemini, and OneVision respectively.

Metrics/Model	L (7B)	L (13B)	QwenVL	CogVLM	GPT-4V	GPT-4o	MGM	MGM (HD)	L-NeXT	L-OV
Micro F_1	25.06	20.96	1.87	16.04	21.17	25.33	12.41	3.77	27.01	17.53
Macro F_1	19.87	16.81	2.43	20.76	16.54	21.01	15.66	4.30	21.84	21.75



(a) VQDv1 Recall

(b) VQDv1 Precision

Figure 2. Recall and precision curves for queries with varying box counts.

3.3. Assessing Counting Ability with TallyQA

TallyQA [2] tests model's ability to count visual objects accurately. Unlike earlier VQA datasets [11], where the majority of the counting questions are straightforward and doable with simple object detection (e.g., "How many giraffes are there?"), TallyQA adds additional challenges by incorporating more complex questions that necessitate detailed reasoning about the visual elements. For instance, a question such as "How many giraffes are sitting down?" requires the model to not only detect all the giraffes in the image but also to perform pose estimation to discern which giraffes are seated. This tests for enhanced capabilities including complex reasoning and specific visual analysis.

TallyQA Metrics. In addition to reporting micro accuracy, we group the questions based on their answers (0, 1, 2, 3, or 4+) and calculate the average to determine the macro accuracy.

Results for TallyQA. The results of the TallyQA analysis are displayed in Table 3. Compared to the simple counting questions, models exhibit large accuracy drops on complex counting questions, indicating deficiencies in reasoning capabilities [12]. This is evident even for the top-performing GPT-4o, which experiences declines of 9.8% and 17.6% in terms of micro and macro accuracies, respectively. Additionally, as shown in Fig. 6a and 6b, the accuracy of models tend to decrease as the number of objects to be counted increases, with the accuracy dropping below 30% when the ground truth count is four or more. As shown in Figs. 6a and 6b, the BLIP models struggled to output zero, and BLIP2 always emitted a value greater than zero.

3.4. Assessing Chart Comprehension with DVQA

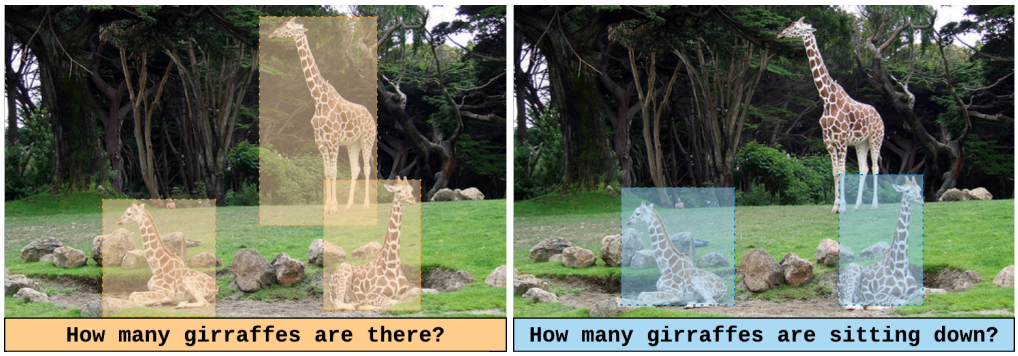
DVQA [15] is a VQA dataset evaluating chart understanding. DVQA requires the model to perform grounding extensively. With synthetic charts, the model is required to handle words or formulae that are specific for that instance. This contrasts with datasets using natural images, where questions such as "What color is the sky?" are based on universal concepts, and even models that simply exploit dataset biases can obtain high accuracy by guessing that the sky is either blue or gray. In contrast, the models cannot inflate accuracy by exploiting such correlations in DVQA since the concepts correspond to arbitrary values (e.g., the labels can correspond to arbitrary bar heights and colors) [15].

DVQA Metrics. For DVQA, we report micro and macro accuracy. DVQA has 3 question types: structural understanding, data retrieval, and reasoning. They are averaged to compute macro accuracy.

Results for DVQA. Results for DVQA are given in Table 4. LLaVA-NeXT achieved the highest micro accuracy, and under an asymptotic McNemar test all other models had a statistically significant difference in micro accuracy ($p < 0.0001$). Compared to other categories, all models performed best on structural questions. Structural questions include questions such as: 1) "How many bars are there?" 2) "Does the chart contain any negative values?" 3) "Are the bars horizontal?" and 4) "Is each bar a single solid color without patterns?" These questions do not require extract-

Table 2. Accuracy on TDIUC for each question type. 'L', 'MGM' and 'OV' denote LLaVA, MiniGemini and OneVision respectively. Best performers based on paired asymptotic McNemar tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) are in bold, except for Macro. Acc., where the max is bolded. For comparison, MuRel [7] is the previous best result from training on TDIUC. Models marked as ‡ cannot be confirmed to be evaluated in a zero-shot manner.

Ques. Type	BLIP2	iBLIP	L (7B)	L (13B)	GPT-4V‡	GPT-4o‡	L-NeXT	CogVLM	QwenVL	L-OV	MGM	MGM-HD	MuRel
Absurd	**99.87**	97.44	51.48	74.73	99.04	99.45	68.14	70.13	2.34	72.29	63.27	77.99	99.80
Activity	25.00	54.00	63.50	62.00	56.50	62.50	**68.00**	0.00	55.00	**68.00**	62.50	**70.50**	63.83
Attribute	1.31	48.15	71.46	73.20	60.78	73.20	**79.08**	12.42	72.11	**80.39**	71.90	77.34	58.19
Color	5.70	62.13	77.37	80.54	69.05	78.97	81.05	23.69	**82.39**	**82.55**	77.56	**81.95**	74.43
Counting	7.15	39.24	51.95	53.27	52.36	56.14	54.93	56.48	47.83	**62.68**	49.41	55.95	61.78
Object Pres.	43.22	74.87	91.31	90.57	67.28	77.81	**92.07**	52.71	90.93	61.94	91.02	**92.40**	95.75
Object Rec.	43.74	73.79	75.03	75.29	69.30	69.30	75.23	81.88	76.27	**90.74**	76.92	76.86	89.41
Position	3.42	20.20	36.81	39.41	31.11	37.46	41.69	21.34	38.76	**53.91**	36.32	44.30	41.19
Scene	30.15	78.47	82.38	76.57	62.94	67.67	**84.29**	76.93	82.11	79.93	81.20	82.11	96.11
Sentiment	16.50	73.00	**79.50**	**82.50**	62.50	28.00	**79.50**	48.00	**80.50**	63.00	57.50	77.00	60.65
Sport	28.29	**88.45**	88.25	**89.84**	77.89	81.27	**89.24**	81.87	**88.45**	**89.64**	87.45	**89.44**	96.20
Utility/Aff.	19.88	66.67	**76.02**	**74.85**	**77.19**	**73.68**	**76.02**	25.73	70.18	**73.68**	64.33	72.51	21.43
Micro Acc.	45.07	73.38	73.86	79.07	72.19	78.30	78.91	54.77	63.09	69.75	75.92	**81.43**	-
Macro Acc.	27.02	64.70	70.42	72.73	65.49	67.12	74.10	45.93	65.57	73.23	68.28	74.86	71.56



(a) Simple counting question (b) Complex counting question

Figure 3. Examples of simple and complex counting questions in TallyQA.

ing textual information from the image and only require the analysis of visual features. Models were worst at reasoning questions. Our results highlight the importance of training on synthetic data, as was done in LLaVA-NeXT, for achieving strong performance. No MLLM achieves the performance of a PReFIL for reasoning questions, which was trained on DVQA's training set, or of humans [16].

3.5. Analyzing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Today's MLLMs

We now discuss and analyse current MLLMs across a variety of criteria, based on our evaluations across DVQA, TDIUC, VQDv1 and TallyQA. We begin by evaluating the general capabilities of MLLMs across the datasets, then analyze how various MLLM development decisions, in particular - scale, architecture, model families, data recipes, and training paradigms affect the particular vision-language abilities of MLLMs we evaluate in this work.

3.5.1. Inferences on Capabilities of MLLMs

Our evaluation reveals that today's MLLMs exhibit a range of strengths and weaknesses across different vision-language tasks. Generally, MLLMs demonstrate strong performance in object recognition and scene understanding but struggle with tasks requiring complex reasoning, precise counting, and handling synthetic data representations."

On the **DVQA** dataset, which tests models on interpreting data visualizations like bar charts, we observe significant performance disparities. Open-source models like QwenVL and LLaVA-OneVision achieve high accuracies, with QwenVL attaining a Micro Accuracy of 89.26% and a Macro Accuracy of 92.30%, surpassing even the performance of models specifically trained on DVQA, such as PReFIL [16]. These models effectively interpret synthetic visual data and perform reasoning over it. In contrast, models like LLaVA (7B and 13B), BLIP2, and iBLIP show significantly lower performance, indicating challenges in handling synthetic datasets compared to natural images.

In the **TallyQA** dataset, designed to assess counting abilities, MLLMs generally perform well on simpler counting tasks but show a performance decline as the counting number increases. For instance, on the Test-Simple set, LLaVA-OneVision achieves the highest Micro Accuracy of 83.7%, but on the Test-Complex set, the accuracy drops to 73.0%.

Table 3. Results on TallyQA. For Micro Acc., best performers based on paired asymptotic McNemar tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) are in bold. For RMSE, the lowest value is bolded. For comparison, the result from SMoLA [34] is the current best on TallyQA. Models marked as † are reported to be trained with TallyQA, and thus not evaluated zero-shot. Models marked as ‡ cannot be confirmed to be zero-shot.

Model	TallyQA Test-Simple			TallyQA Test-Complex		
	Micro Acc.	Macro Acc.	RMSE	Micro Acc.	Macro Acc.	RMSE
BLIP2	64.3	43.0	3.74	27.5	24.8	1.57
iBLIP	73.1	61.7	1.22	49.3	35.6	2.15
LLaVA (7B)	75.5	66.5	1.20	64.1	45.5	2.21
LLaVA (13B)	76.6	67.3	1.01	65.6	47.8	1.93
QwenVL	62.2	65.9	1.44	41.5	40.6	5.22
CogVLM	82.9	75.7	0.62	71.6	53.9	1.42
Mini-Gemini	72.4	62.4	1.38	58.5	42.8	2.42
Mini-Gemini (HD)	78.5	69.0	0.87	66.5	48.7	1.71
LLaVA-NeXT	79.8	71.7	0.70	67.9	52.2	1.76
LLaVA-OneVision†	**83.7**	77.2	**0.56**	**73.0**	58.6	1.49
GPT-4V‡	73.6	69.0	0.86	62.6	50.4	1.58
GPT-4o‡	81.5	74.5	0.60	71.7	56.9	**1.21**
SMoLA [34]	83.3	-	-	70.7	-	-

Table 4. Percentage (%) accuracy results on DVQA. Best performers based on paired asymptotic McNemar tests ($\alpha = 0.05$) are in bold, except for Macro. Acc., where the max is bolded. For comparison, PReFIL and Human results correspond to performance on Test-Novel [16], where PReFIL uses Improved OCR (see [16]). PReFIL is a DVQA system trained on DVQA's training set. Models marked as † are reported to be trained with DVQA, and thus not evaluated zero-shot. Models marked as ‡ cannot be confirmed to be zero-shot.

Model	Reasoning	Retrieval	Structural	Micro Acc.	Macro Acc.
BLIP2	12.79	9.38	45.78	16.17	22.65
iBLIP	15.22	14.23	48.50	19.41	25.98
LLaVA (7B)	17.76	20.22	51.40	23.10	29.79
LLaVA (13B)	19.01	22.07	57.89	25.25	32.99
CogVLM	35.89	34.53	71.88	40.33	47.44
Mini-Gemini†	31.64	39.24	84.07	41.16	51.65
Mini-Gemini (HD)†	52.64	62.66	91.37	61.08	68.89
LLaVA-NeXT†	69.14	82.73	73.47	74.06	75.11
LLaVA-OneVision†	76.72	86.65	98.19	82.80	87.19
QwenVL†	**84.65**	**92.84**	**99.41**	**89.26**	**92.30**
GPT-4V‡	33.26	61.83	88.73	49.88	61.27
GPT-4o‡	52.06	73.64	95.60	64.84	73.77
PReFIL [16]	80.73	67.13	99.57	80.04	-
Human [16]	85.83	88.70	96.19	88.18	-

This decline suggests that while MLLMs can handle basic counting, they face difficulties in accurately detecting and enumerating multiple objects in complex scenes.

The **TDIUC** dataset provides a comprehensive evaluation across various question types. We observe that MLLMs perform differently depending on the question category. In 'Counting' questions, LLaVA-OneVision achieves the highest accuracy of 62.68%, outperforming models like GPT-4V (52.36%) and GPT-4o (56.14%). However, in categories like 'Object Recognition' and 'Sport', models such as QwenVL and LLaVA-OneVision excel, indicating proficiency in recognizing objects and scenes. Conversely, performance is lower in categories like 'Sentiment' and 'Position', highlighting limitations in understanding abstract concepts and spatial relationships.

On the **VQDv1** dataset, involving open-ended questions about images, LLaVA-NeXT outperforms other models with a Micro F1 score of 27.01% and a Macro F1 score of 21.84%. This suggests that LLaVA-NeXT has a better general understanding of visual content and can generate more accurate responses to open-ended questions.

Overall, our analysis indicates that while current MLLMs have advanced capabilities in certain areas, they still face significant challenges in tasks requiring complex reasoning,

precise counting, and understanding synthetic visual representations.

3.5.2. Open vs Closed source models

We compare the performance of open-source models with that of closed-source models to understand how openness impacts model capabilities. Among the models evaluated, GPT-4V and GPT-4o are closed-source models developed by OpenAI, whereas models like LLaVA, CogVLM, and QwenVL are open-source. Strikingly, our results show that open-source models often achieve performance comparable to or even surpassing that of closed-source models.

For example, on the **VQDv1** dataset, which evaluates models on open-ended visual question answering without prior exposure, LLaVA-NeXT achieves the highest Micro F1 score of 27.01%, outperforming both GPT-4V (21.17%) and GPT-4o (25.33%). Similarly, on the **TDIUC** dataset, which provides a comprehensive evaluation across various question types, open-source models demonstrate competitive performance. For instance, consdering the 'Position' category — a task that assesses understanding of spatial relationships, LLaVA-OneVision achieves an accuracy of 53.91%, significantly outperforming GPT-4V (31.11%) and GPT-4o (37.46%). This indicates that open-source models are capable of handling spatial reasoning tasks at a level superior to closed-source models. This observation of equal or superior performance of open-source models holds across a number of abilities in TDIUC such as 'Utility/Affordance', 'Sport Recognition', 'Scene Recognition', among several others. These observations are especially striking considering the large gap in apparent model sizes between closed source and open-source models.

It's also noteworthy that on the **TallyQA** dataset, which focuses on counting objects in images, closed-source models show strong performance in certain metrics. For example, on the Test-Complex set, GPT-4o achieves the lowest Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of 1.21, outperforming open-source models like LLaVA-NeXT (1.76) and Mini-Gemini (HD) (1.71). A lower RMSE indicates more precise counting, suggesting that closed-source models may have advantages in tasks requiring fine-grained numerical understanding.

3.5.3. Model Scale & Image Resolution

Model Scale. To assess the impact of model scale, we compare the performance of LLaVA models with different parameter sizes. The LLaVA models are available in 7B and 13B parameter versions, enabling us to evaluate how scaling affects their capabilities. Across the datasets, the 13B model generally outperforms the 7B counterpart, albeit with modest gains. On the TallyQA Test-Simple set, LLaVA (13B) achieves a Micro Accuracy of 76.6%, slightly higher than the 7B model's 75.5%. On the TDIUC dataset, the 13B model shows improved performance in several question categories, such as 'Counting' (53.27% vs. 51.95%) and 'Attribute' (73.20% vs. 71.46%). However, the incremental improvements suggest that increasing model size from 7B to 13B does not lead to substantial performance boosts in vision-language tasks.

Image Resolution. We analyze the impact of input image resolution on MLLM performance on our evaluated datasets that enable fine-grained analysis. Models like LLaVA-NeXT and Mini-Gemini (HD) process images at higher resolutions, that are claimed to capture finer visual details. While previous studies have supported the benefit, it is interesting to note how this effect applies to visual understanding tasks that specifically de-bias language and visual biases and provide fine-grained visual analysis.

Comparing LLaVA-NeXT with LLaVA (13B) on the TallyQA Test-Complex set, LLaVA-NeXT achieves a Micro Accuracy of 67.9%, slightly higher than LLaVA (13B)'s 65.6%. Similarly, Mini-Gemini (HD) achieves a Micro Accuracy of 66.5%, outperforming significantly the standard Mini-Gemini's 58.5%. This suggests that higher resolution enables better counting performance in complex scenes. Additionally, on the DVQA dataset, Mini-Gemini (HD) achieves a significantly higher Micro Accuracy of 61.08%, than the standard model's 41.16%, with large improvements across 'Reasoning' (52.64% vs 31.64%), 'Retrieval' (62.66% vs 39.24%) and 'Structural' (91.37% vs 84.07%) capabilities. This suggests higher resolution processing improves detailed chart understanding across all reasoning, retrieval and structural analysis capabilities.

These findings suggest that incorporating higher-resolution images appears to benefit visual understanding across complex counting, visual reasoning and retrieval tasks. An important caveat to this observation is that in the multi-localization task of VQDv1, Mini-Gemini (HD) struggles significantly in comparison to the standard Mini-Gemini with 4.30 Macro F_1 compared to 15.66 Macro F_1 respectively. While LLaVA-NeXT also shows a mild improvement over LLaVA (7B). This indicates that on multiple object localization tasks such as VQDv1, higher resolution may not directly convey a universal benefit and can even hamper performance, suggesting that resolution gains do not straightforwardly translate to better localization accuracy.

4. Related Work

Problems with Widely Used Datasets. With the advent of large foundation models, datasets for training, fine-tuning, and validation have become increasingly important [22]. These datasets are pivotal in reflecting a model's performance across different aspects. Notably, many recent MLLMs rely on some of the earliest established datasets [11, 17, 28], which, while foundational, are increasingly recognized for their constraints and biases. Existing VQA datasets have several well-known issues. Most fail to properly assess grounding capabilities—linking specific

parts of an image to corresponding textual elements in questions. For example, on some datasets, models can achieve approximately 50% accuracy even when blinded to the image, relying solely on the questions [13]. This indicates that many questions do not depend on grounding capabilities, allowing models to exploit learned biases rather than visual evidence. Moreover, popular VQA datasets focus narrowly on specific question types, limiting the assessment of models' generalization abilities. Most questions (69.84%) ask about objects in the image, hindering the model's ability to handle abstract reasoning, complex visual cues, or nuanced human interactions. Additionally, MLLMs often are not evaluated on synthetic datasets, missing opportunities to reveal limitations not observed with natural images. Mainstream referring expression recognition datasets like RefCOCO typically assume each referring expression refers to a single object, oversimplifying the task. In RefCOCOg [27], it was shown [9] that randomly permuting words in referring expressions only reduced performance by 5%. Models could achieve 71.2% precision in top-2 predictions using only the image. This suggests that models exploit dataset quirks and biases rather than utilizing linguistic cues for grounding. The imbalance in target object selection and the simplistic design of referring expressions, with only one associated bounding box, further exacerbate this issue. We discuss some other related efforts to improve MLLM evaluation in Appendix G.

5. Discussion

In this work, we performed a detailed examination of modern MLLMs on diverse tasks that expose biases, demand finer reasoning, and require more holistic visual grounding. Our evaluations revealed several notable insights.

Our TallyQA results highlight the necessity of incorporating more complex counting questions to reflect models' counting capabilities better. The LLaVA family demonstrates robustness to complex counting questions that demand sophisticated reasoning. In contrast, other models, like QwenVL and BLIP2, perform poorly on these complex questions despite performing adequately on easy counting questions compared to LLaVA. Relying solely on easy counting questions can lead to inflated scores, which can be misleading.

Results from VQDv1 show that traditional single-object referring expressions are more accessible for models to handle. However, introducing more targets in referring expressions presents a significant challenge, as performance drops when more objects are involved. Examining VQDv1 and TallyQA, they are complementary in evaluating models. In VQDv1, the model must generate one or more bounding boxes around objects described in the question, serving as an improved version of counting questions by requiring models to justify their answers. In TallyQA, models perform well when accounting for fewer objects, but performance drops significantly as the number of objects increases, indicating poor generalization abilities. This aligns with findings from VQDv1, where models struggle with multiple bounding boxes but perform well with a single bounding box. VQDv1 and TallyQA offer a comprehensive evaluation of a model's ability to justify its answers and handle varying numbers of objects, highlighting weaknesses in object detection and counting abilities.

Results from TDIUC provide insight into models' generalization across different question types. Most models perform poorly on positional reasoning, a critical skill for handling complex counting tasks and referring expressions. Similar to observations on TallyQA, models exhibit a substantial drop in macro accuracy on counting questions. However, these results also show that Utility/Affordance questions benefit greatly from MLLMs compared to models trained on TDIUC. All models perform poorly on DVQA, indicating that MLLMs struggle with parsing chart information, especially in reasoning and data retrieval questions. LLaVA-NeXT (and One-Vision family) improve significantly over other open-source MLLMs on DVQA, likely due to its training on documents and diagrams. The DVQA dataset highlights the challenges presented by synthetic images.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we conducted comprehensive, skill-specific evaluations of MLLMs released in 2023–2024. Our analysis revealed several weaknesses that are not apparent when using mainstream datasets alone. First, we found that while current MLLMs excel at simpler visual queries and common question patterns, they face substantial difficulties in tasks that deviate from typical MLLM training distributions—such as multi-object localization, intricate counting questions, or synthetic chart interpretation. Second, analyzing tasks like TDIUC highlighted that many models still struggle with aspects of positional reasoning and scene-centric questions, despite strong performances on more basic recognition tasks. Third, contrary to widespread belief that higher resolution invariably improves visual performance, our findings suggest this is task-dependent: certain tasks (e.g., complex counting or chart reasoning) benefit significantly, whereas multi-object localization might not.

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