

E-LifeSeeker: An Interactive Lifelog Search Engine for LSC'23

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ABSTRACT

Lifelogging is referred to as the process of automatically capturing the everyday activities of an individual to ultimately create a digital diary for further sharing, which can be challenging to manage and retrieve due to its multimodal nature. Lifelog retrieval systems not only have the potential to transform the way people interact and understand their lives, but also provide insights into their behaviour, habits, and preferences. The Lifelog Search Challenge (LSC) is a live benchmarking challenge to evaluate the performance of lifelog search tools in a real-time. This paper describes the modifications made to the E-LifeSeeker retrieval system, which participates in the 6th LSC challenge. This year, we enhance not only the underlying core engine with the latest pre-trained embedding models but also the user interface to be more intuitive for novice users. Moreover, Differential Networks are implemented to address the new question-answering task this year. These new modalities are designed to provide users with a more intuitive and efficient search experience, easing the process of locating information needed from the huge collection of egocentric lifelog images.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Information systems** → **Multimedia databases; Users and interactive retrieval; Search interfaces**; • **Human-centered computing** → **Interactive systems and tools**.

KEYWORDS

lifelog, interactive retrieval, information system

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1 INTRODUCTION

With the widespread use of digital devices in everyday life, it is getting easier and easier to capture data generated by the daily activities of an individual, leading to a potentially huge collection of data. Lifelog retrieval systems have emerged as a result of the difficulty in organising and accessing those data which aims to provide users a convenient way to interact and retrieve specific moments from the collection. To benchmark for different search engines in indexing and retrieving multimodal lifelog data, there have been a number of interactive lifelog retrieval challenges such as NTCIR Lifelog [7, 8], ImageCLEF Lifelog [4, 5, 20], and Lifelog Search Challenge (LSC) [9, 10]. Inspired by an annual popular video search challenge named Video Browser Showdown (VBS), the LSC challenge has been organised since 2018, with the intention of benchmarking different search methods on lifelog dataset specifically. This challenge has attracted participants from all over the world to compete in interactive tasks designed to simulate real-world lifelog retrieval. Each team is tasked with developing an interactive retrieval tool capable of answering specific questions from the provided data collection within a time constraint. Particularly, the organisers introduce three different types of tasks for this year's challenge including Known-item Search (KIS), Ad-hoc Search (ADS), and Question Answering Search (QAS). Sharing the same objective of finding images from a given query, the KIS task seeks specific keyframes as fast as possible, while the ADS task seeks as many relevant items as possible for a given query. Meanwhile, the QAS tasks, newly introduced this year, require users to give textual responses answering the information needs which will be manually judged in real-time. All tasks will be measured by the score combining between correctness and solving time of the team's submissions.

Our retrieval system, LifeSeeker [15], was originally developed as a concept-based searching tool that matches the input queries with the pre-defined indices. After participating in the LSC through three research iterations [15, 16, 19], we have continued improving both the underlying engine and interface in response to the user feedback. Besides, we also identified the lack of context of the search queries when matching keywords standalone leading to a major change to the semantic-based system in LifeSeeker 4.0[18].

In this paper, we introduce E-LifeSeeker, an enhanced version of our latest system [18], which maintains the semantic-driven approach to participate in the LSC'23 [11]. We integrate different state-of-the-art models for vision-language relations that were pre-trained on a huge dataset to further leverage the contextual meanings from visual scenes. Moreover, we will employ Differential Networks [28] to resolve the new coming task (QAS). Additionally,

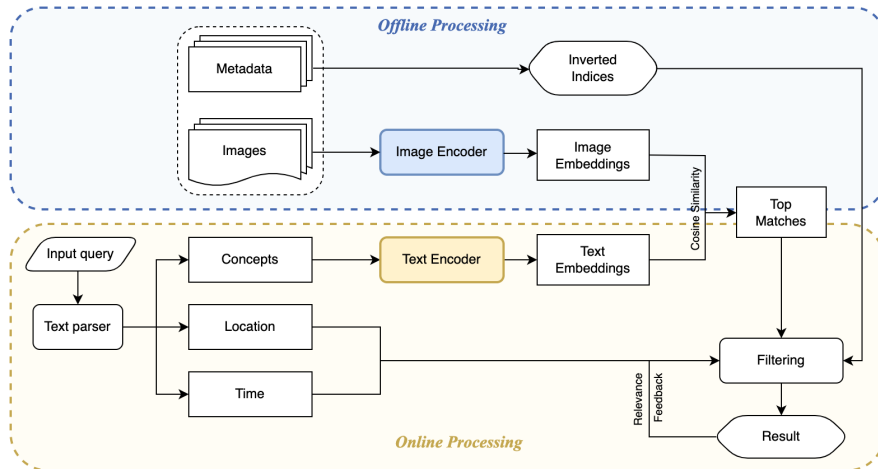


Figure 1: The System Architecture of E-LifeSeeker

the user interface (UI) was also redesigned to support easier user interaction, especially for novices.

2 RELATED RESEARCH

Participants have implemented different ranking models and search methods to solve the tasks posed in the live challenge. The most common mechanism that has been used during the first three years of the competition is concept-based search tool [3, 12, 19, 24, 27]. The key idea of this approach is to convert lifelogging images into a collection of visual annotations (including objects, text visible in the images or additional data) prior to matching them with the input keywords. While Vitriivr [13] provided multiple search modalities, including keywords, sketches, and audio, to facilitate the browsing process, Myscéal [27] incorporated users with the implementation of query expansion and expansion of location-based information in addition to text. Sharing the same core engine with Vitriivr [13], Vitriivr-VR [24] offered a unique user interaction experience by providing a virtual reality (VR) space for interactive retrieval. Meanwhile, LifeConcept [3] proposed a concept recommendation method by using ConceptNet alongside with a daily timeline view to aid the temporal navigation. Additionally, Lifegraph [22] leveraged a knowledge graph to match between text and vision, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between data for more accurate results. Another technique has been popular in constructing retrieval system is the vision-language-joint embedding approach. The popular pre-trained embedding model, CLIP [21] released in 2021 by open AI, has been adopted by many teams [1, 2, 18, 26]. Particularly, Memento [1] use ensemble models from two pre-trained Vision Transformers [6](ViT-L/14 and ResNet-50x64) as their backbone to search resulting in the better performance as compared to their previous version. Similarly, Voxento [2] provided a voice command experience while leveraging the same underlying model. Nevertheless, LifeSeeker [18] and Myscéal [26] also switched into semantic-driven systems as they made an effort to gain more insights into not only the visual content but the semantic context.

As we continue to employ semantic-based models on our new system E-LifeSeeker, we aim to investigate different models on encoding the visual content. Additionally, we facilitate the search process by enhancing the UI with additional functionalities including ranked list clustering, temporal search, and relevance feedback.

3 OVERVIEW OF E-LIFESEEKER

The E-LifeSeeker system has been developed specifically to provide fast and effective retrieval facilities over the LSC dataset from the challenge in 2023.

3.1 LSC dataset

The dataset used for this year’s competition is almost identical to the Lifelog dataset¹ in LSC’22, which includes the personal data of one active lifelogger for the period of 18 months (527 days). The multimodal dataset comprises the following three components:

- **Egocentric images:** 725,226 images captured by the Narrative Clip device² with a resolution of 1024 x 768. To protect the privacy of both the lifelogger and people’s surroundings, these images are fully anonymised with blurred faces and censored text;
- **Metadata:** descriptive, spatial, and temporal information corresponding with the images;
- **Visual Concepts:** visual objects, scenes, captions, and text are extracted from the non-redacted version of the visual dataset.

In 2023, some additional location annotations have been provided by the Myscéal team.

3.2 E-LifeSeeker System Architecture

Similar to other retrieval systems [25], the system architecture of E-LifeSeeker consists of both offline and online stages, as illustrated in Figure 1. In general, the offline (indexing) stage is responsible for creating a searchable database of features from the dataset. Initially,

¹http://lifelogsearch.org/lsc/lsc_data/

²<http://getnarrative.com/>

while provided metadata (including spatial, temporal, and other information) was indexed into inverted files, the egocentric images were transferred to high-dimensional representations for further matching in the next stage. In the online (searching) stage, the system processes user queries and performs similarity matching on the pre-processed database in real-time, returning the most relevant results measured by the cosine similarity score. The higher the score, the more similar the content is likely to be. Furthermore, users have options for filters adding more information related to time, location, objects, or text visible in the images (like part of the day, at work, etc.) to the current query.

3.3 Embedding Model Selection for Semantic Search

Semantic-based models have gained popularity across different research areas due to their efficiency and versatility. Their applications in information retrieval, in general, and lifelog search in particular, have shown a significant increase in recent years. From the last competition and our previous user study [18], we observed that semantic-based models, OpenAI CLIP models with a Vision Transformer [6] pre-trained at 336-pixel resolution (ViT-L/14@336p), outperformed the conventional concept-matching method in terms of both accuracy and searching time. Building on this success, we aim to enhance the underlying models used in LifeSeeker 4.0 by leveraging larger scale and more powerful pre-trained models such as CoCa [29], CLIP [21] pre-trained on LAION-5B dataset [23], BLIP [17], and ALIGN [14]. These state-of-the-art models, trained on massive amounts of data, can have the potential to capture more complex and abstract visual-textual relations, making them feasibly better suited for lifelog data. The E-LifeSeeker system is designed to integrate all these models, and it is possible to select any of them as the core embedding model for the search engine in the LSC'23 competition.

3.4 Question Answering task

The Question-Answering task is a notable new task in this year's LSC challenge. Unlike the known-item search tasks in previous years, where users are asked to locate target images for a provided description, the question-answering task in 2023 requires the submission of a textual answer to a set of previously unprecedented questions concerning the given personal collection, such as questions about quantities, activities, or durations. It is a real-world scenario, yet a challenging task to solve since the queries will be highly personalised and may require the searcher to quickly develop a deep understanding of the user's individual experiences and activities. E-LifeSeeker integrates latest embedding models for retrieval and utilises differential networks to support Q&A queries. Firstly, we input the initial query and get the ranked list by taking advantage of the above embedding models. Once the system retrieves a set of relevant images, users can use the Differential Networks based Fusion model [28], a plug-and-play module that enables differences between pairwise feature elements, or involves judging which image contains the information necessary to answer the question. For example, the task "What did I have for breakfast on Christmas Day 2019" cannot be answered by submitting a single

image, it requires users to navigate throughout that event and then specify the objects or information needed from those images.

3.5 User Interface Improvements

In our efforts to offer users a better search experience, we modify our UI to meet the demands of both expert and novice users, with the rearrangement depicted in Figure 2. The improved UI is composed of four main components: the free-text search and filter box (A), the automatic question generation display (B), the search progress bar (C), and vertically-scrollable panel displaying the retrieved result in groups (D). We recognise that the intuitive interface is critical for enhancing overall system performance as well as user experience. Those modifications include ranked list clustering, user relevance feedback, and temporal search.

Ranked List Clustering. Similarly to almost all conventional lifelog retrieval systems, our previous UI [18] displayed results as all keyframes individually ranked by their relevance score for the input query. However, this approach made it difficult for users to navigate to find the desired moments when a sequence of duplicated images happened in one event. For example, when querying for "the lifelogger was watching the TV", it would return hundreds of images of this activity, many of which are temporally sequential. To overcome this problem, we introduce a new way of displaying the results (D) by clustering them based on temporal features. They will be clustered together and displayed in the top-3 with the highest score, with the option to view all images in the group if desired. To be more precise, the re-ranking algorithm has the execution steps below:

- (1) Get the ranked list when entering a new query,
- (2) Convert the ranked list into sub-lists by grouping images in the same part of the day (each day will be divided into 3 parts: morning, afternoon, and evening),
- (3) Calculate the average confidence score of the top-3 highest ranked images in each sub-list,
- (4) Re-rank sub-lists based on their new average confidence score scores.

Temporal Search. This functionality provides users with the option to navigate through the selected moment and its temporally-related images by adjusting the temporal range between them. By allowing users to explore these data, they will get a better understanding of the activities and context surrounding that event or during a day.

Relevance Feedback. To better support users when interacting with the system, we incorporate relevance feedback (B), where users are enabled to provide more information to adjust the current result. In particular, after inputting a query, the system will automatically generate a question related to the visual content of their desired images, and users have the option to choose to include or eliminate those. By doing so, we are able to improve the ranking algorithm and ensure that more relevant and less irrelevant images will be displayed in future searches. In addition, a progress bar (C) can also be very helpful for users, especially when performing complex search queries that involve multiple steps. By showing the results of the current step and allowing users to go back to any previous step, they can easily correct the queries or modify their search criteria in case if necessary, further enhancing the usability of the system.

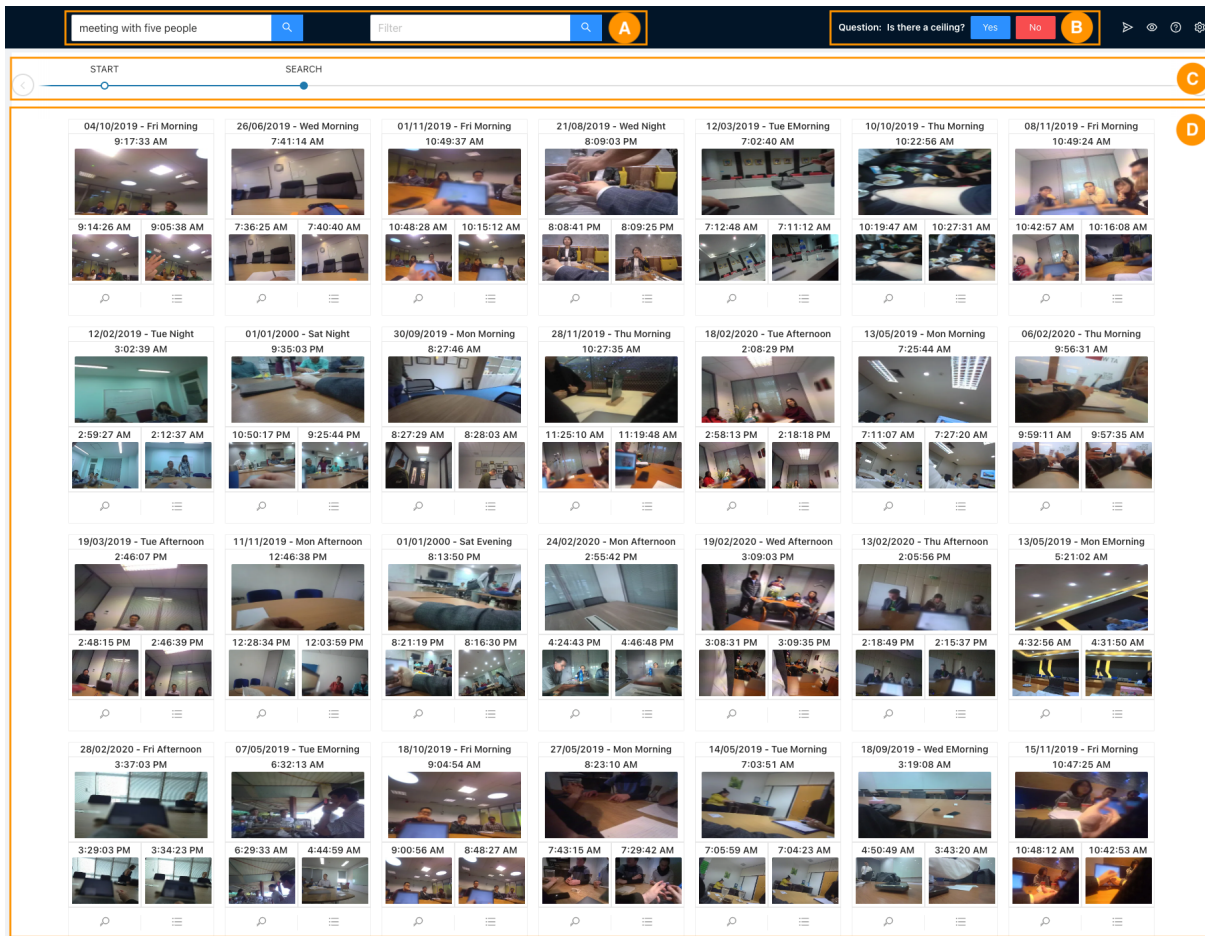


Figure 2: The User Interface of E-LifeSeeker. The screen displayed the result of an example query “meeting with five people”.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper presents the improvements made to our retrieval system, E-LifeSeeker, for the 6th Lifelog Search Challenge. The image representations were enhanced by incorporating state-of-the-art embedding models, while the newly released task (QAS) was resolved by the use of Differential Networks. We further made improvements in terms of the UI with better visualisation and additional functionalities in order to make the user experience more efficient. With these modifications, we hope that our system will achieve competitive results, as it did in previous challenges.

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