

# Effect of traffic dataset on various machine-learning algorithms when forecasting air quality

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## Abstract

### Purpose

Road traffic emissions are generally believed to contribute immensely to air pollution, but the effect of road traffic datasets on air quality predictions has not been fully investigated. This research investigates the effects traffic dataset have on the performance of Machine Learning (ML) predictive models in air quality prediction.

### Design/methodology/approach

To achieve this, we have set up an experiment with the control dataset having only the Air Quality (AQ) dataset and Meteorological (Met) dataset. While the experimental dataset is made up of the AQ dataset, Met dataset, and Traffic dataset. Several ML models (such as Extra Trees Regressor, eXtreme Gradient Boosting Regressor, Random Forest Regressor, K-Neighbors Regressor, and two others) were trained, tested, and compared on these individual combinations of datasets to predict the volume of PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, and O<sub>3</sub> in the atmosphere at various time of the day.

### Findings

The result obtained showed that various ML algorithms react differently to the traffic dataset despite generally contributing to the performance improvement of all the ML algorithms considered in this study by at least 20% and an error reduction of at least 18.97%.

### Research limitations/implications

This research is limited in terms of the study area and the result cannot be generalized outside of the UK as some of the inherent conditions may not be similar elsewhere. Additionally, only the ML algorithms

commonly used in literature are considered in this research. Therefore, leaving out a few other ML algorithms.

### **Practical implications**

This study reinforces the belief that the traffic dataset has a significant effect on improving the performance of air pollution ML prediction models. Hence, there is an indication that ML algorithms behave differently when trained with a form of traffic dataset in the development of an air quality prediction model. This implies that developers and researchers in air quality prediction need to identify the ML algorithms that behave in their best interest before implementation.

### **Originality/value**

This will enable researchers to focus more on algorithms of benefit when using traffic datasets in air quality prediction.

**Keywords:** Air-Quality Prediction, Traffic Dataset, Big-Data, Machine Learning

## **1 Introduction**

The urban population in the year 2050 is expected to have become 68% of the world population (UN DESA, 2018). The air quality of major cities around the world would be affected negatively if the forecast comes to pass and nothing is done to mitigate its impact on the environment. The World Health Organization (WHO) on their part have highlighted the effect of air pollution on various aspect of our lives as it is linked to about seven million annual deaths around the world. Additionally, 80% of the urban areas have air quality measures that are worse than the WHO guideline (WHO, 2014). The vulnerable group which includes children, the elderly, and people with respiratory and cardiovascular problems are the worse hit by the degrading air quality situation. Records have shown that in recent years, air pollution accounts for 1 out of 8 deaths globally (WHO, 2014). This situation emphasises the urgent need for a highly accurate air pollution Machine Learning (ML) prediction model.

The increase in the proportion of pollutants in the form of particles and inhabitable gasses in the atmosphere of an area leads to air pollution. Human activities as observed through transportation, industry, or domestic activities and sometimes biological or environmental activities such as the case of pollutants like ozone ( $O_3$ ), pollen, dust contributes to the composition of the atmosphere that leads to air pollution. Even in developing countries, (Owusu-Manu et al., 2020) established air quality as one of the eight indicators for measuring green city development. Various air pollutants have been linked to critical health challenges such as cardiovascular diseases, pulmonary disease, acute respiratory infection and increased risk of lung cancer. The yield of crops has also been affected by the increasing concentration of  $O_3$  in the atmosphere (Gul & Khan, 2020). Air pollutants such as Nitrogen Dioxide ( $NO_2$ ), Sulphur Dioxide ( $SO_2$ ), Ozone are medically proven to irritate the airways of the lungs, increasing the symptoms of those suffering from lung diseases. Fine particles ( $PM_{2.5}$  and  $PM_{10}$ ) always find their way into the lungs to cause inflammation and a worse condition of heart and lung diseases. Carbon Monoxide (CO) is believed to inhibit the absorption of oxygen by the blood (DEFRA, 2021). These conditions can lead to a shortage of oxygen supply to the heart and most likely death.

(Rybarczyk & Zalakeviciute, 2018) reported research (such Lin et al., 2018; Martinez-Espana et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2019; Zhang & Ding, 2017; Zhao et al., 2016) that have reported significant performance gain in predicting many of the air pollutants.  $PM_{2.5}$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $O_3$  have been among the major pollutants of concern globally as they are linked to various health hazards. The particulate matters (PM) are worsening the situation recently and are getting into the limelight. An increase in exposure to air

pollutants, (Bowatte et al., 2015; Power Melinda C. et al., 2011) have been able to link the air pollutant  $PM_{2.5}$  to the risk of asthma across childhood up to twelve years of age and a decreased cognitive function in older men. The magnitude increases with age and the pattern is more prominent with  $PM_{2.5}$ . Many of these health hazards have been the driving force for governments around the world to redesign policies to reduce air pollution and its impact on the environment. Despite government efforts, pollution is yet to reduce to a significant low. Hence, the need to be aware of where and when pollution is high. So, individuals and organizations can be well equipped to make an informed decision about pollution in their respective environments.

As deterministic models struggle to capture the relationships between variables that affect air pollution, several implementations of ML algorithms ranging from the classical ML algorithms such as Support Vector Machine (SVM), Linear Regression (LR) and the sophisticated ML algorithms like Deep-Neural Network (DNN), and Extreme Machine Learning have been the trend (Iskandaryan et al., 2020; Rybarczyk & Zalakeviciute, 2018). In the course of finding an optimally performing air quality ML prediction model, researchers have trained ML algorithms on varying combinations of datasets (Masih, 2019). Yet the selection of appropriate ML algorithms has been a challenge when using traffic datasets in developing air pollution ML prediction models.

This study aims to investigate the effect of traffic datasets on the performance of various ML algorithms used in the development of air pollution ML prediction models. To achieve this, we have selected air pollutants  $PM_{2.5}$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $O_3$ ; these have been reported to have some of the worse impacts on the human way of life globally. In the next section, recent literature in ML-based air quality prediction is reviewed. This is followed by the methodology section, where we explain the research methodology used in this study. The result analysis and discussion section present the outcome of the study. A conclusion of the findings of this research is recorded in the conclusion section.

## 2 Literature Review

Several recent research using ML (Alaka et al., 2018; Martinez-Espana et al., 2018; Tao et al., 2019; Zhang & Ding, 2017; Hellas et al., 2019; Jiang, 2019; Tu et al., 2020; Mane et al., 2020; Madeiros et al., 2019) have shown that deterministic models proved less efficient in the prediction problems in general and specifically in air pollution prediction, while ML algorithms are more promising in this domain as reported in the literature (Iskandaryan et al., 2020; Rybarczyk & Zalakeviciute, 2018). As seen in our recent study (Sulaimon et al., 2021), improved data accessibility in recent years has enhanced the contribution of research in the domain of air pollution prediction. Hence, several research efforts with diverse approaches have been contributed. The state-of-the-art research in air pollution prediction using ML is summarized in Table 1. This explains a lot about the trend in the domain as there are several datasets used in the prediction of air pollution, researchers find Air Quality data and Meteorological data more useful. This has to some extent limit the performance of air pollution ML prediction models.

### 2.1 Systematic Literature Review Process

As with literature review studies (such as Alaka et al., 2018; Rybarczyk & Zalakeviciute, 2018; Egwim et al., 2021), we conducted a systematic review of the state-of-the-art research in this domain. The literature review is conducted to reveal the trends and assumptions in using traffic datasets in the development of air quality prediction models.

We searched the SCOPUS database using the search keyword- (*“air pollution” OR “air quality” OR “atmospheric pollution” OR “air pollutant”*) AND (*prediction OR forecast OR forecasting OR predict OR predicting*) AND (*“machine learning” OR ml OR “predictive model” OR modelling OR algorithm OR “big data” OR bigdata OR “artificial intelligence” OR ai*). The keyword was developed through similar studies

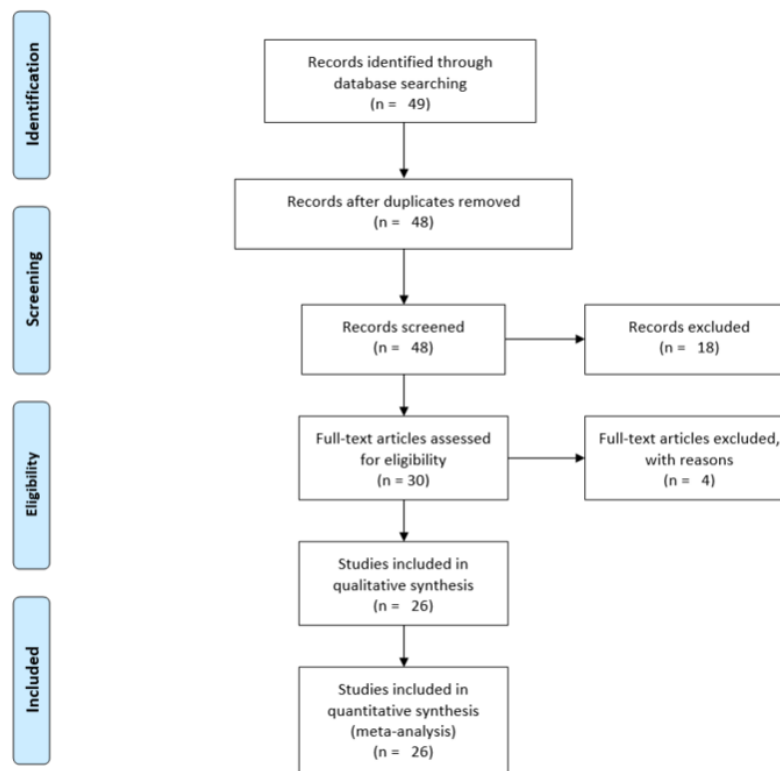
and common keywords in the domain, while the choice of the SCOPUS database is based on the benefits it offered by the unification of research globally and providing a comprehensive and wide range of scholarly information.

The search returned 49 relevant research articles between January 2007 and June 2021. The research articles were further screened using the following selection criterion:

- Publication must be published between the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2000 and the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2021.
- Publication must report on the use of ML models or algorithms in the prediction of air pollution.
- Publication must involve an empirical study to analyze the performance of the approach used and the result obtained.
- If some publications reported the same empirical studies, the most recent will be selected.

Research articles are excluded if:

- They do not meet the selection criterion, if
- They performed only a Systematic Literature Review, Systematic Mapping Study or General Literature Review.
- They do not conduct an empirical study.
- The full text is not available.
- They are written in languages other than English and without a translation to English.
- They are grey literature (such as technical papers, government reports, policy statements and issues papers, conference proceedings, pre-prints and post-prints of articles, theses and dissertations, research reports, geological and geophysical surveys, maps, newsletters and bulletins, fact sheets).



The 49 research articles discovered through our search were put to further scrutiny to ensure only quality research are included in the study. Our literature search flow diagram in Figure 3 shows that the literature

identification stage ended up with 48 research articles as one of the articles is a duplicate. Hence, a copy of the article from the most reliable source is included for the study. At the screening stage, 18 articles are excluded after screening the abstract and ensuring that the selected articles were published within the defined period between 2017 and 2021. Despite the titles of some of the articles being related to our study, the abstract reflects that their objectives are very different from that of our study. While some other articles have no full text available for further study. Therefore, 30 research articles are remaining for the full-text analysis (eligibility) stage. The full-text analysis reveals that four of the articles deviate from the objective of our research, as one does not report the pollutants of focus, the other involved only a simulation study and the last two does not involve air pollution prediction.

Finally, only 26 of the research articles are selected for review, as they fulfil the selection criteria, and are the most recent in the domain as they were published between 2017 and 2021. The unselected articles either are out of scope, duplicates or have inaccessible full text. These primary study articles are further reviewed for data extraction, data synthesis and data analysis. A full report of the systematic review and result is found in (Sulaimon et al., 2021).

## 2.2 State-of-the-art in Air Quality Prediction

There are many pollutants of focus in air quality prediction using ML, but only six of them are the most common pollutants ( $PM_{2.5}$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $O_3$ ,  $NO_2$ ,  $SO_2$ ,  $CO$ ) among many research studies (Table 1, in appendix). This is partly due to the presence of these pollutants in almost everywhere there are human activities, while the rarely focused pollutants are found in the atmosphere of specific areas such as the insides of mines, tunnels and factories. Additionally, there are diverse combinations of datasets for the prediction of these air pollutants. The commonly used datasets are the Air Quality dataset and the Meteorological dataset. Most of the literature has a form of Air Quality dataset in their dataset collection used for air pollutant prediction. Despite the diversity observed in the choices for ML algorithms, Random Forest appears to be the most common choice of many researchers.

Not until recently have researchers started to use different forms of traffic datasets in air quality forecasts. This has been due to the recent availability of traffic datasets and the inherent belief induced through traffic emission modelling that simulate how traffic emission contributes to air pollution. Many studies like (Comert et al., 2020; Hatzopoulou et al., 2013; Pinto et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020) have supported the theory that traffic emission contributes to air pollution. This has caused several studies such as (Ashayeri et al., 2021; Rossi et al., 2019a; Rossi et al., 2020) in the domain of air quality forecast to use various forms of traffic datasets for prediction model development. Whereas, there is no significant research that proves the impact of traffic datasets on the performance of air quality ML prediction models. It is obvious in Table 1 (see appendix) that the performance measure reported in research that uses traffic datasets are not significantly better than the others, and it has not been verified if the traffic datasets are the contributors to the performance recorded. In addition, research reported does not use the same datasets, combination of datasets, methodologies nor ML algorithms. Hence, the results are not comparable to prove the assumption on how traffic datasets influence the predictive performance of air quality ML prediction models.

As traffic-related air pollution is a major contributor to air pollution as evident in traffic emission dispersion modelling, traffic data is believed to enable a dataset with high granularity and an ML predictive model with better performance. Hence, we verify through an experimental approach how traffic dataset influences the performance of ML algorithms in the development of air quality ML prediction models.

### 3 Methodology

Deterministic models have proved less efficient in the prediction of air pollutants (Iskandaryan et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2021), this research applies ML in the development of an air pollution ML prediction model. Hence, we implemented the full length of the ML pipeline, starting from Data preprocessing, Algorithm selection, Model training/validation/testing, Model evaluation.

As presented in Figure-1, the research begins with a systematic review of the state-of-the-art in air quality prediction. Simultaneously, data collection is ongoing to gather a sufficient amount of Air Quality dataset, Meteorological (Weather) dataset and Traffic dataset as needed. This is followed by the ML pipeline to develop the air quality prediction model. At the end of the air quality model development, the models are evaluated, results of the evaluations are analysed for comparison between models. The developed models are then prepared ready for use while a conclusion and recommendation are recorded.

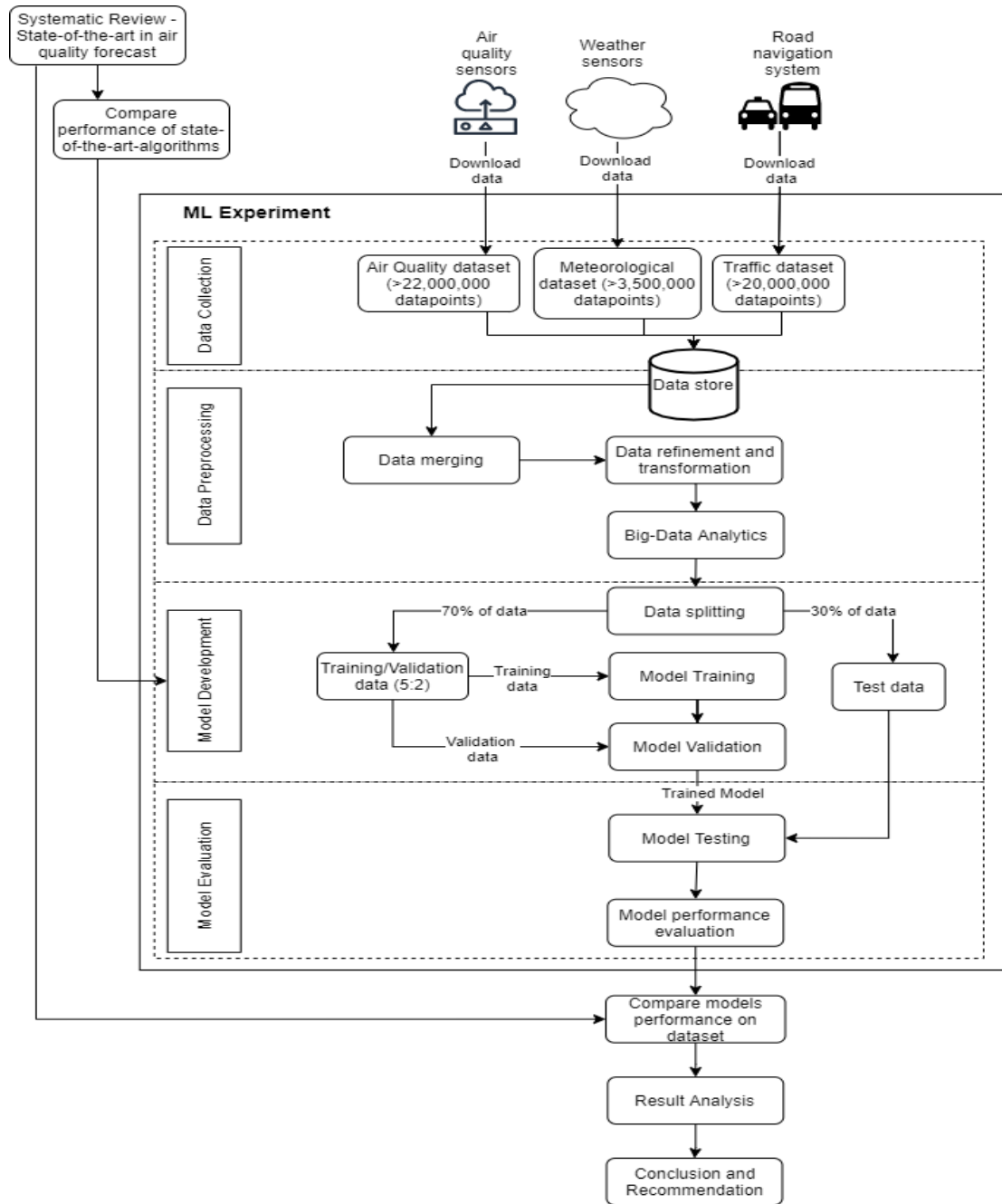


Figure 1: Research Methodology Block-Diagram

### 3.1 Study area

The study area for this research is the United Kingdom (UK), which is comprised of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The UK is the 21st most populated country in the world with a population of 68.2 million and a population density of 259 people per square kilometre. The predominantly urban and suburban England's southeast region houses about a third of the population of the UK (KS3 Geography Revision, 2021). This explains the higher density of dataset collection sites in the southeastern part of England as seen in Figure-2.

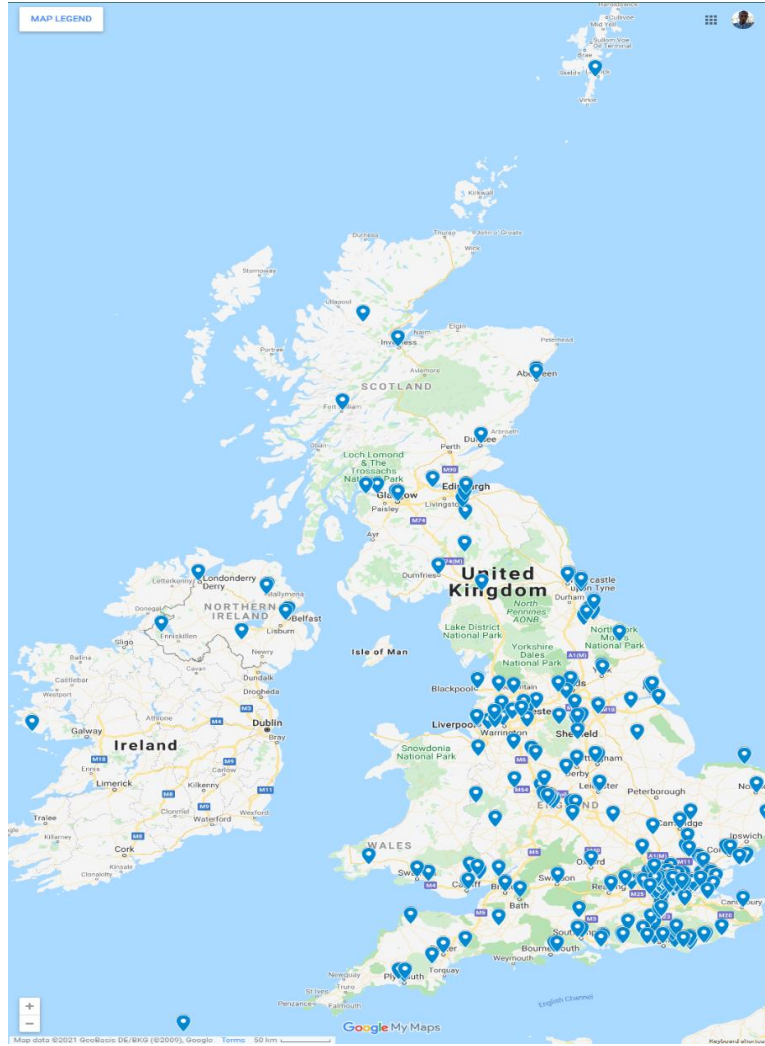


Figure 2: 338 Data Collection site across the United Kingdom

Data was collected from 338 different locations across the UK as shown in the identified location on the map in Figure-2. The data collected is made up of 11,322,240 data points of the Air Quality dataset, Meteorological dataset and Traffic dataset.

## 3.2 Data

In the process of applying ML to solving a problem, the availability of data, the volume and quality of the available data are important metrics to be considered. To ensure an optimal combination of high-quality dataset and selection of features, we documented and review all the stages of Data collection, Data merging, Data preprocessing, Data visualization and analysis, Feature selection.

### 3.2.1 Data collection

The Internet-of-Things (IoT) has simplified the process of data collection and monitoring in many fields (Arowoia et al., 2020; Gamil et al., 2020). The data collection process for this research was conducted using IoT-based sensors within the 338 data collection sites selected within the UK. This was done with a focus on ensuring high granularity and accuracy of our model prediction. Therefore, the datasets collected include the meteorological (weather) dataset, air quality dataset and traffic dataset for 338 postcodes spread around the UK. For this research, we used a dataset for the 6 months starting from 01:00 am, 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2020, till 00:00 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2021. The period was selected as it falls within the period when

the covid-19 lockdown was eased in the UK. Additionally, it enables capturing datasets for multiple seasons with variable weather conditions.

**Air Quality Data:** The advent of IoT-based technology has made the recording of Air Quality (AQ) data easier. The air quality data used in this research is sourced via the 338 IoT sensors stationed across the UK. The sensors record hourly data for several pollutants (such as NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, FINE, O<sub>3</sub>, PM<sub>1</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, TSP, CO, NO). Each of the sensors does not record readings for all the pollutants. Hence, the recordings for various pollutants were collated from several sensors. The Air Quality Data is recorded hourly by each of the 338 sensors and stored using the AWS Document DB that supports MongoDB. A description of the air quality dataset is seen in Table 2 (see appendix)

**Meteorological Data:** The recording of the meteorological (Met) data was conducted for each of the data collection sites selected in the UK. This data was sourced via the Open Weather Map API (OpenWeatherMap, 2021). A JSON format object is used for the API response, while the data is extracted and stored on the Amazon Web Service (AWS) S3 bucket to ease accessibility. Table 3 (in appendix) contains a brief description of the meteorological (weather) dataset.

**Traffic Data:** The process of getting the traffic data has been challenging, as several traffic data sources do not have it readily available while many of the sources do not have the data recorded hourly nor at the level of granularity needed. Hence, for this research, we sourced traffic data from TomTom traffic flow API (Tom Tom, 2021). The traffic data is collected at 15 minutes intervals, but it is further analysed and processed to derive an hourly average of every day of the week. This process involves the elimination of the data recorded for the period immediately after the COVID-19 lockdown was eased in the UK (between the 8th of March 2021 and the 22nd of March 2021). The purpose of the data elimination was due to the irregular spike in the traffic situation across the UK roads during the stated period. The distortion introduced into the data is eliminated through the observed procedure. A summary of the traffic dataset is presented in Table 4 (in appendix).

### 3.2.2 Data preprocessing

The data preprocessing phase of the ML pipeline is a need-based process. Hence, we performed the preprocessing needed for the datasets available for the research. Due to the large size of the dataset used in this research, the dataset is stored and processed as big data. The dataset is stored using the Amazon Web Service (AWS) S3 bucket and the AWS DocumentDB. This allows for flexibility in processing the data via the AWS cloud.

**Data merging:** Using multiple datasets require the process of data merging to ensure that the required data can be sourced from a unified repository. The three datasets used for this research were processed and merged using the Pandas package in the Python programming language. The data were merged using their common feature of Location (Latitude, Longitude), Date and Time.

**Data Refinement:** The refinement applied to the data includes the process of cleaning the data of outliers and treating the missing data. The records with missing pollutants values are eliminated to avoid ambiguity in the data modelling phase and the model training and testing phase.

**Data Transformation:** All the features of the dataset are transformed into numerical and float data types. This is to enable easy computation.

### 3.2.3 Feature selection

In selecting the features to be used for training the model, we ensured that only the important features of the dataset are selected. The Air Quality, Meteorological and Traffic datasets consists of numerous features that are not related to the study. Hence, these features are removed from the dataset for the training process. Table 5 describes the selected features of the dataset after it has been merged. The

Location (Latitude, Longitude), Date and Time features of the dataset are used only to merge the dataset. These features were removed before the dataset is used in the ML pipeline. The correlation analysis that guides the feature selection process of the dataset is presented in Figure-3.

*Table 1: Selected variables for model development*

| Data           | Features                                                     | Unit              | Type        |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Location       | Latitude                                                     |                   |             |
|                | Longitude                                                    |                   |             |
| Date           | Date                                                         |                   |             |
| Time           | Time                                                         | Hour              |             |
| Meteorological | Absolute Temperature                                         | °c                | Independent |
|                | Feels-Like                                                   | °c                |             |
|                | Pressure                                                     | Hg                |             |
|                | Humidity                                                     | %                 |             |
|                | Minimum Temperature                                          | °F                |             |
|                | Maximum Temperature                                          | °F                |             |
|                | Wind Speed                                                   | km/h              |             |
|                | Wind Degree                                                  | degree            |             |
|                | Cloud                                                        | okta              |             |
|                | Rainfall                                                     | mm                |             |
| Traffic        | Current Travel Speed                                         | km/h              |             |
|                | Free Flow Travel Speed                                       | km/h              |             |
|                | The ratio of Current Travel Speed and Free Flow Travel Speed |                   |             |
|                | Current Travel Time                                          | Seconds           |             |
|                | Free Flow Travel Time                                        | Seconds           |             |
|                | The ratio of Current Travel Time and Free Flow Travel Time   |                   |             |
|                | Data Confidence                                              |                   |             |
|                | Road Closure                                                 | 0,1,2,3,4         |             |
| Air Quality    | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                            | µg/m <sup>3</sup> | Dependent   |
|                | PM <sub>10</sub>                                             | µg/m <sup>3</sup> |             |
|                | NO <sub>2</sub>                                              | µg/m <sup>3</sup> |             |
|                | O <sub>3</sub>                                               | µg/m <sup>3</sup> |             |

|                            | dt | time     | latitude | longitude | temp     | feels_like | pressure | humidity | temp_min | temp_max | speed    | deg      | all      | id       | NO2      | PM10     | SO2       | FINE     | O3       | PM1      | PM25     | TSP      | CO       | NO       | AQI      | lat      | long     | currentSpeed | freeFlowSpeed | currentTravelTime | freeFlowTravelTime | freeFlow_currentTravelTime | confidence | roadClosure |          |  |  |
|----------------------------|----|----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------|-------------|----------|--|--|
| dt                         | 1  | -0.00478 | 0.079973 | -0.10805  | 0.452662 | 0.415282   | 0.231938 | -0.42899 | 0.432534 | 0.46607  | 0.074717 | -0.02747 | -0.17988 | 0.084114 | -0.05719 | 0.061808 | -0.04535  | -0.06456 | 0.11451  | -0.04682 | 0.033517 | -0.08343 | -0.06301 | -0.02366 | 0.66057  | 0.079973 | -0.10805 | -0.01388     | -0.01787      | 0.003143          | -0.00664           | -0.00591                   | 0.003161   | -0.00248    | -0.00188 |  |  |
| time                       |    | 1        | -0.00278 | -0.10048  | 0.050471 | -0.0362    | 0.939485 | -0.0386  | 0.051573 | 0.05116  | 0.082239 | 0.026951 | -0.03165 | -0.00217 | 0.141471 | 0.044709 | -0.001331 | -0.00108 | 0.014584 | -0.00966 | 0.002396 | -0.00286 | 0.005144 | 0.015546 | 0.014591 | -0.00278 | -0.10048 | -0.00447     | -0.003288     | -0.26277          | 0.142388           | -0.00281                   | -0.26311   | 0.304772    | 0.001021 |  |  |
| latitude                   |    |          | 1        |           | 0.007032 | -0.0362    | 1        | 1        | -0.03494 | -0.03752 | 0.025655 | -0.01315 | 0.032547 | -0.00246 | 0.11888  | 0.010449 | 0.026016  | 0.067836 | -0.04539 | 0.03155  | 0.094213 | -0.00286 | 0.028409 | -0.13169 | 0.062983 | -0.10048 | -0.00447 | -0.003288    | -0.19358      | -0.11843          | 0.065007           | 0.000851                   | -0.11887   | 0.061899    | 0.001021 |  |  |
| longitude                  |    |          |          | 1         |          | 0.939485   | 1        | 1        | 0.993793 | 0.993916 | 0.261903 | 0.076247 | 0.042967 | 0.028881 | 0.11888  | 0.010449 | 0.026016  | 0.067836 | -0.04539 | 0.03155  | 0.094213 | -0.00286 | 0.028409 | -0.13169 | 0.062983 | -0.10048 | -0.00447 | -0.003288    | -0.19358      | -0.11843          | 0.065007           | 0.000851                   | -0.11887   | 0.061899    | 0.001021 |  |  |
| temp                       |    |          |          |           | 1        |            |          | 1        | 0.993793 | 0.993916 | 0.261903 | 0.076247 | 0.042967 | 0.028881 | 0.11888  | 0.010449 | 0.026016  | 0.067836 | -0.04539 | 0.03155  | 0.094213 | -0.00286 | 0.028409 | -0.13169 | 0.062983 | -0.10048 | -0.00447 | -0.003288    | -0.19358      | -0.11843          | 0.065007           | 0.000851                   | -0.11887   | 0.061899    | 0.001021 |  |  |
| feels_like                 |    |          |          |           |          | 1          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| pressure                   |    |          |          |           |          |            | 1        |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| humidity                   |    |          |          |           |          |            |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| temp_min                   |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| temp_max                   |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| speed                      |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| deg                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| all                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| id                         |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| NO2                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| PM10                       |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| SO2                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1         |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| FINE                       |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| O3                         |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| PM1                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| PM25                       |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| TSP                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| CO                         |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| NO                         |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| AQI                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| lat                        |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| long                       |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1        |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| currentSpeed               |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          | 1            |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| freeFlowSpeed              |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              | 1             |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| current_freeFlowSpeed      |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               | 1                 |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| currentTravelTime          |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   | 1                  |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| freeFlowTravelTime         |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    | 1                          |            |             |          |  |  |
| freeFlow_currentTravelTime |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            | 1          |             |          |  |  |
| confidence                 |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |
| roadClosure                |    |          |          |           |          |            |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |              |               |                   |                    |                            |            |             |          |  |  |

Figure 3: Correlation analysis of all features

This has informed the selection of features of the dataset that have the least correlations and are of most concern to this research as seen in Table 5 (of the appendix).

### 3.3 Algorithm selection

The approach to this study is to use ML regressor algorithms for the development of the ML prediction model. Hence, we trained 40 ML regressor algorithms and report the top six models based on their performance recorded using the performance metrics stated. The reported algorithms are Extra Trees Regressor, Histogram-Based Gradient Boosting Regressor, Light Gradient Boosted Machine (LGBM) Regressor, eXtreme Gradient Boosting (XGB) Regressor, Random Forest Regressor, Bagging Regressor, Gradient Boosting Regressor, K-Neighbors Regressor (KNN), Multi-Layer Perceptron (MLP) Regressor. These ML algorithms are trained on the merged datasets using their default hyper-parameters to ensure a fair comparison of the performance of the algorithms.

### 3.4 Performance metrics

The choice of performance metrics in evaluating the predictive models is based on the commonly used performance metrics found in related literature. This will enable easy comparison of our results with the state-of-the-art benchmarks. Many of the literature reported in reviews (such as Iskandaryan et al., 2020; Rybarczyk & Zalakeviciute, 2018) evaluate their predictive models using R-Squared ( $R^2$ ), Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Error (MAE). Hence, these two measures of performance are selected as the performance metrics for this study.

#### 3.4.1 R-Squared ( $R^2$ ) score

The performance score  $R^2$  shows the degree to which the data fit the model. It is used to determine the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable(s) that is justifiable by the independent variables. The best  $R^2$  score is 1.0, but the value of  $R^2$  can range from negative values. When the value of  $R^2$  is negative, it explains that the fit of the variance is worse than just fitting a horizontal line. The  $R^2$  is defined in equation 1:

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_{pred,i} - y_{data,i})^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_{data,i} - \bar{y}_{data})^2} \quad (1)$$

Where

$$\begin{aligned} y_{pred,i} &= \text{Predicted Value} \\ y_{data,i} &= \text{Actual Value} \\ \bar{y}_{data} &= \text{Mean Actual Value} \\ n &= \text{Number of data objects} \end{aligned}$$

#### 3.4.2 Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE)

The RMSE is the root of the Mean Squared Error (MSE). Hence, it is the root of the variances between the predicted value and the actual value. As a measure of error, the value of RMSE ranges between 0 and 1. While the lower the value, the better the performance of the model. The RMSE is formulated as seen in equation 2.

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (AE_i - PE_i)^2} \quad (2)$$

Where

$$\begin{aligned} AE_i &= \text{Actual Value} \\ PE_i &= \text{Predicted Value} \\ n &= \text{Number of data objects} \end{aligned}$$

### 3.4.3 Mean Absolute Error (MAE)

Mean Absolute Error (MAE) computes the variation between the predicted values and true or actual values. MAE scores close to zero indicates better performance while a score greater than zero signifies a bad performance. Unlike RMSE, MAE is not sensitive to outliers (Hyndman & Koehler, 2006).

$$MAE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n |AE_i - PE_i| \quad (3)$$

Where

$AE_i$  = Actual Value  
 $PE_i$  = Predicted Value  
 $n$  = Number of data objects

### 3.5 Design of Experiments

We designed the experiment to have the control and the experiment. The control group ML models of the experiment are designed to be trained on the merged Air Quality dataset and Meteorological dataset. While the Experimental group of the ML models are developed using the merged dataset consisting of the Air Quality dataset, Meteorological dataset and Traffic dataset (Table 6, in appendix).

Table 2: Experiment design

| Study      | Dataset                  |
|------------|--------------------------|
| Control    | AQ, Met dataset          |
| Experiment | AQ, Met, Traffic dataset |

The design of the experiment as summarized in Figure-4 is made up of four phases- Data collection, Data preparation, Model development and Model evaluation. Aside from the first phase of Data collection, every other phase is similar for each of the control and the experiment.

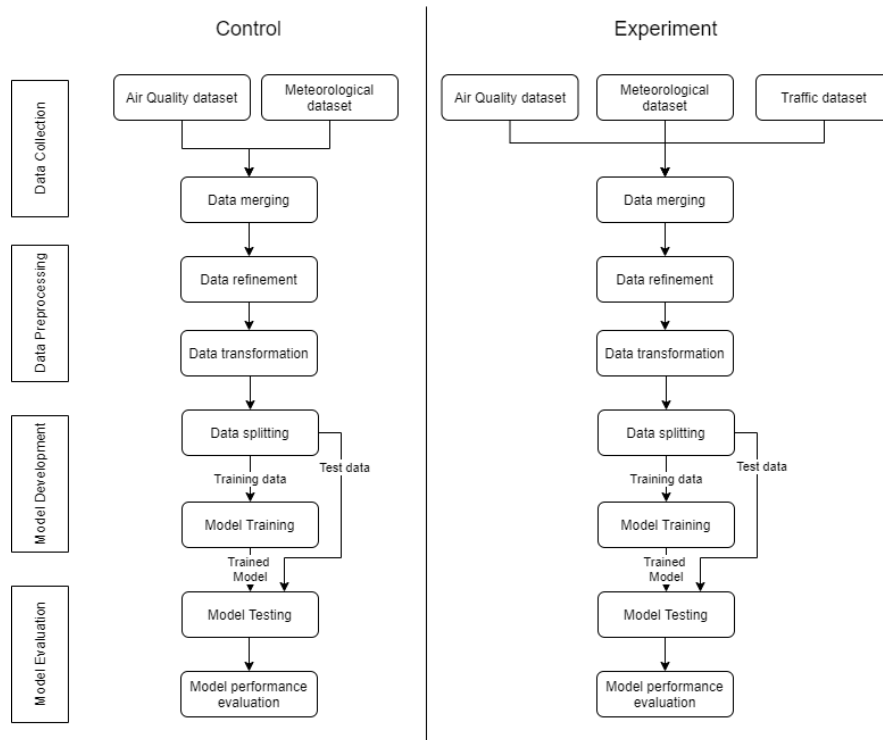


Figure 4: Design of the Experiment

### 3.5.1 Experimental setup

The experiment was conducted using Python programming language 3.6.8 (van Rossum & Drake, 1995) with the support of the Scikit-Learn Python Package (Pedregosa et al., 2012). The computation was performed using Apple MacBook Air with BigSur OS version 11.3 and an M1 processor with 16GB RAM. This configuration is in no way believed to impact the performance of the predictive models developed.

## 3.6 Model development

Following the experiment procedure, the model development stage is divided into two similar procedures for the control-dataset and the experimental-dataset respectively. The only difference between the two procedures is the dataset used in developing the predictive models (Figure 2). The models were developed to predict the independent variables ( $PM_{2.5}$ ,  $PM_{10}$ ,  $NO_2$  and  $O_3$ ) for each of the 338 locations at the various hour of the day.

For each of the experiment procedures, the dataset is randomly divided into a training dataset and a test dataset. 70% of the dataset is used for the training and validation, while the other 30% is used as the test dataset.

### 3.6.1 Training and validation

In the training phase of the ML pipeline, the selected ML algorithms are trained on the training dataset. Each of the algorithms is trained one after the other to ensure that the training process for each algorithm does not interfere in any way with the others.

The validation process is necessary while training the algorithm to ensure that the models improve in performance while undergoing training. Hence, the 10-fold cross-validation was done to ensure that the performance of the trained model is accurately recorded, and the model is well fitted.

### 3.6.2 Testing

For the performance evaluation purpose, testing the trained model is a vital step. The trained models are tested using the test dataset as provided from the main dataset. Here, the predictive models are used to predict the values of the dependent variable. These predictions are compared with the real value and the differences are recorded to be used for computing the evaluation metrics.

## 4 Result evaluation and discussion

Evaluating the model is based on the performance metrics used for the evaluation. The  $R^2$  and RMSE have been selected to be used in this research due to their popularity in the research domain.

### 4.1 Evaluation

The evaluation process was conducted by using the predictive models to predict the dependent variables of the test data. The prediction is compared with the true values and used to derive the values of the performance metrics. This procedure is applied on each of the air pollutants of focus and recorded as presented below respectively.

#### 4.1.1 $PM_{2.5}$

Table 7 presents the calculated  $R^2$  score, RMSE and MAE for the predictive models trained on the control dataset and experimental dataset of  $PM_{2.5}$ . With a 20.81% increase in the performance recorded for the Bagging regressor when trained with the experiment dataset, the trend noticed for the performance boost of  $PM_{2.5}$  prediction models appears interesting. The Bagging regressor is not the best performing algorithm in this category, but it displays the most performance boost (20.81%) when it is trained with

the dataset that contains the traffic dataset. While the Random Forest Regressor had the largest percentage error reduction (18.97%) when trained experiment dataset.

Table 3: Performance of  $PM_{2.5}$  Models

| Model                                 | Control        |               |               | Experiment     |               |               | % Difference   |              |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                       | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE         | MAE          |
| Extra Trees Regressor                 | <b>0.6221</b>  | <b>4.8191</b> | <b>3.0167</b> | 0.7356         | 4.0311        | <b>2.4445</b> | 18.24          | 16.35        | <b>18.97</b> |
| Random Forest Regressor               | 0.6214         | 4.8236        | 3.0580        | <b>0.7370</b>  | <b>4.0199</b> | 2.5098        | 18.61          | <b>16.66</b> | 17.93        |
| XGB Regressor                         | 0.6048         | 4.9281        | 3.2270        | 0.7218         | 4.1349        | 2.6752        | 19.34          | 16.10        | 17.10        |
| Histogram Gradient Boosting Regressor | 0.5906         | 5.0158        | 3.3309        | 0.7005         | 4.2897        | 2.8068        | 18.62          | 14.48        | 15.73        |
| LGBM Regressor                        | 0.5898         | 5.0205        | 3.3367        | 0.6979         | 4.3086        | 2.8112        | 18.32          | 14.18        | 15.75        |
| Bagging Regressor                     | 0.5892         | 5.0243        | 3.1718        | 0.7118         | 4.2083        | 2.6199        | <b>20.81</b>   | 16.24        | 17.40        |

#### 4.1.2 $PM_{10}$

The calculated R<sup>2</sup> score, RMSE and MAE as recorded in Table 8 shows the performance for the predictive models trained on the control dataset and experimental dataset of  $PM_{10}$ . In the prediction of  $PM_{10}$ , the Extra Trees regressor records the best performance boost of 70% when measured using the R<sup>2</sup>. Based on the MAE score, 27.77% is the largest error reduction recorded, and this is obtained by the Random Forest regressor. This is to reinforce the point that the best performing algorithm does not necessarily record the best improvement when the traffic dataset is added to the training dataset.

Table 4: Performance of  $PM_{10}$  Models

| Model                                 | Control        |               |               | Experiment     |               |               | % Difference   |              |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                       | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE         | MAE          |
| LGBM Regressor                        | <b>0.4140</b>  | <b>9.8203</b> | 6.2937        | 0.6788         | 7.2707        | 4.9348        | 63.95          | 25.96        | 18.97        |
| Histogram Gradient Boosting Regressor | 0.4134         | 9.8255        | 6.2923        | 0.6728         | 7.3387        | 4.9527        | 62.74          | 25.31        | 21.29        |
| XGB Regressor                         | 0.4110         | 9.8455        | <b>6.1002</b> | <b>0.6866</b>  | <b>7.1815</b> | 4.6899        | 67.06          | <b>27.06</b> | 23.12        |
| Random Forest Regressor               | 0.4021         | 9.9199        | 6.1163        | 0.6629         | 7.4487        | <b>4.4178</b> | 64.86          | 24.91        | <b>27.77</b> |
| Extra Trees Regressor                 | 0.3846         | 10.0639       | 6.1727        | 0.6538         | 7.5483        | 4.4822        | <b>70.00</b>   | 25.00        | 27.39        |
| Bagging Regressor                     | 0.3818         | 10.0863       | 6.2878        | 0.6336         | 7.7654        | 4.6895        | 20.81          | 16.24        | 17.40        |

#### 4.1.3 $NO_2$

Like other pollutants reported in this study, the performance metrics for the predictive models recorded for  $NO_2$  in the control and experimental dataset are slightly different. The calculated R<sup>2</sup> score and RMSE for the models trained on the control dataset and experimental dataset of  $NO_2$  are recorded in Table 9 below. In a similar trend with other prediction models, the Extra Trees regressor reported the best performance in both the control dataset and the experiment dataset. Whereas the Extra Trees regressor which is an ensemble of many decision trees shows the largest performance increase of 46.82% and error reduction of 31.13% as recorded by the R<sup>2</sup> and MAE respectively.

Table 5: Performance of NO<sub>2</sub> Models

| Model                                 | Control        |                |               | Experiment     |               |               | % Difference   |              |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                       | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE           | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE         | MAE          |
| XGB Regressor                         | <b>0.5266</b>  | <b>12.8396</b> | 9.4102        | <b>0.7407</b>  | <b>9.5023</b> | 6.6886        | 40.67          | 25.99        | 28.92        |
| Random Forest Regressor               | 0.5242         | 12.8715        | <b>9.3416</b> | 0.7191         | 9.8906        | 6.6648        | 37.17          | 23.16        | 28.66        |
| LGBM Regressor                        | 0.5007         | 13.1855        | 9.8240        | 0.7053         | 10.1301       | 7.2517        | 40.86          | 23.17        | 26.18        |
| Bagging Regressor                     | 0.5002         | 13.1914        | 9.5231        | 0.6866         | 10.4458       | 7.0351        | 37.26          | 20.81        | 26.13        |
| Histogram Gradient Boosting Regressor | 0.4967         | 13.2375        | 9.8343        | 0.6961         | 10.2868       | 7.3742        | 40.13          | 22.29        | 25.02        |
| Extra Trees Regressor                 | 0.4937         | 13.2773        | 9.5058        | 0.7249         | 9.7881        | <b>6.5467</b> | <b>46.82</b>   | <b>26.28</b> | <b>31.13</b> |

#### 4.1.4 O<sub>3</sub>

The performance metrics recorded for O<sub>3</sub> predictive models using R<sup>2</sup> score, RMSE and MAE are presented in Table 10. As with other predictive models in this study, the models are trained on the control dataset and experimental dataset of O<sub>3</sub>, and the performance metrics are measured and recorded. The Extra Tree regressor consistently records the best performance boost and the best error reduction in the experiment.

Table 6: Performance of O<sub>3</sub> Models

| Model                                 | Control        |                |               | Experiment     |               |               | % Difference   |              |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                       | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE           | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE          | MAE           | R <sup>2</sup> | RMSE         | MAE          |
| Random Forest Regressor               | <b>0.5305</b>  | <b>12.8737</b> | 9.4958        | 0.7415         | 9.5518        | 6.5092        | 39.78          | 25.80        | 31.45        |
| LGBM Regressor                        | 0.4981         | 13.3106        | 9.9812        | 0.6984         | 10.3189       | 7.4043        | 40.21          | 22.48        | 25.82        |
| Extra Trees Regressor                 | 0.4972         | 13.3225        | <b>9.6159</b> | <b>0.7718</b>  | <b>8.9760</b> | <b>5.8974</b> | <b>55.22</b>   | <b>32.63</b> | <b>38.67</b> |
| Histogram Gradient Boosting Regressor | 0.4942         | 13.3621        | 10.0266       | 0.6988         | 10.3111       | 7.4107        | 41.40          | 22.83        | 26.09        |
| XGB Regressor                         | 0.4942         | 13.3627        | 9.8844        | 0.7128         | 10.0690       | 7.0702        | 44.24          | 24.65        | 28.47        |
| Bagging Regressor                     | 0.4921         | 13.3906        | 9.8410        | 0.7034         | 10.2316       | 6.9975        | 42.96          | 23.59        | 28.90        |

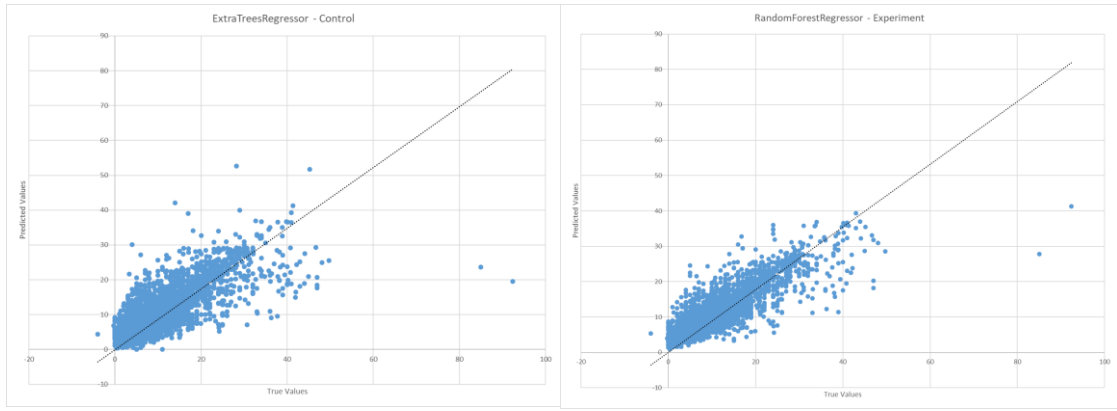
## 4.2 Discussion

Traffic data has been in use in vehicle emission modelling for a long time as proven in (Comert et al., 2020; Hatzopoulou et al., 2013; Pinto et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020) and similar studies. The impact of traffic data on air quality ML prediction models has been assumed in several studies such as (Ashayeri et al., 2021; Rossi et al., 2019a; Rossi et al., 2020), where it is undoubtedly believed that traffic pollution contributes immensely to air pollution. This alone is not enough to explain how the traffic dataset influences the performance of air quality ML prediction models.

Observing the R<sup>2</sup> and RMSE performance metrics recorded for each of the pollutants PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub> and O<sub>3</sub>, the performance measured for each of the predictive models consistently indicates that the models trained on the control dataset perform worse than the models trained on the experimental datasets. As

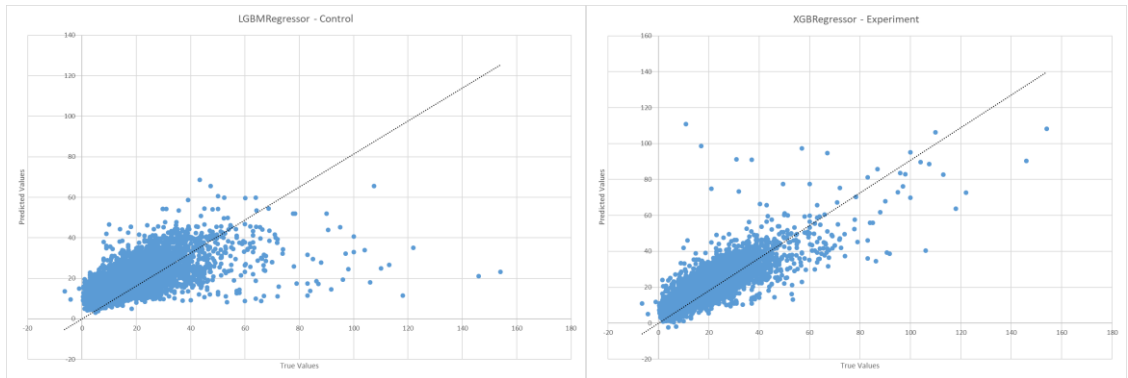
presented in Figure 5a, Extra Trees Regressor has the best performance recorded for  $PM_{2.5}$  prediction models trained with the control dataset. Whereas it does not seem to perform much better with the experiment dataset. The Random Forest Regressor display a relatively outstanding performance boost when trained with the experimental dataset (Figure 5b).  $PM_{10}$  prediction models have similar behaviour to that of  $PM_{2.5}$  prediction models, despite the variation in best-performing algorithms. The performance boost obtained in the  $PM_{10}$  experiment as presented in Figure 3d is significant when compared with the performance shown in Figure 3c which is obtained when the models are trained with the control dataset. Here, LGBM Regressor is best performing on the control dataset while the XGB Regressor obtained the best performance as measured for models trained with the experiment dataset. The prediction comparison presented in Figures 5e and 5f shows a consistent performance boost noticed for  $NO_2$ . XGB Regressor models obtained the best performance when trained with the control dataset, a relative boost in performance is also obtained when trained with the experiment dataset. As with  $PM_{2.5}$  and  $PM_{10}$ , a significant boost in performance is obtained for  $O_3$  models trained with the experiment dataset. Random forest Regressor obtained the best performance among models trained with the control dataset while the performance recorded for the experiment dataset is not significant enough to be the best performing model in this category (Figures 5g and 5h). The Random Forest Regressor is outperformed by the Extra Trees Regressor among the models trained with the experiment dataset.

Although the best-performing algorithms varies generally for each case, it is of immense benefit to have a performance gain in the air quality ML prediction models regardless of the algorithms used. This indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all situation to the best performing ML algorithms for building an air quality ML prediction model. There is limited research in the domain that compared the performance of ML algorithms developed with and without traffic datasets. Hence, there is no known research so far to compare the performance gain obtained in this work.



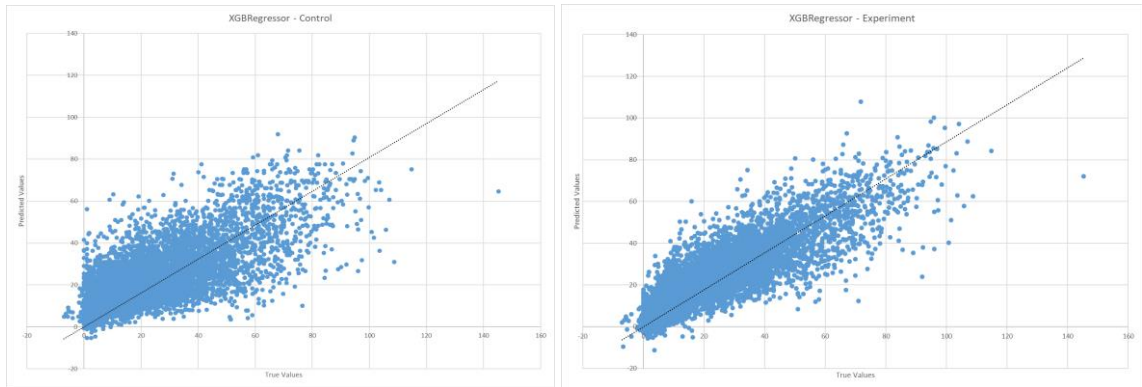
a).

b).



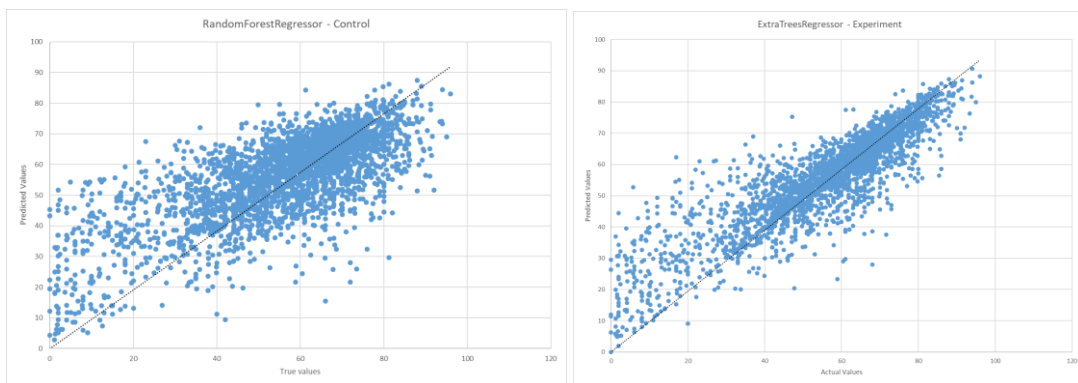
c).

d).



e).

f).



g).

h).

Figure 5. Model performance on Control and experimental datasets for various environmental parameters: a): PM2.5 - Control Dataset, b): PM2.5 - Experiment Dataset, c): PM10 - Control Dataset, d): PM10 - Experiment Dataset, e): NO2 - Control Dataset, f): NO2 - Experiment Dataset, g): O3 - Control Dataset, and h): O3 - Experiment Dataset

The patterns in the performance metrics recorded have reinforced the inherent belief that traffic datasets improve the performance of the Air Quality ML prediction model. This further validates the theory in (Comert et al., 2020; Hatzopoulou et al., 2013; Pinto et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2020) and related literature that traffic emission has a major effect on air pollution modelling. Additionally, various ML algorithms react differently in the presence of traffic datasets. Hence, researchers in air quality prediction need to be selective in the process of choosing ML algorithms when their dataset contains a form of traffic dataset. Although the performance varied from one pollutant to the other, the overall performance record shows that models trained with the experimental data consisting of traffic dataset reported better performance when compared with the models trained on the control dataset with no traffic dataset.

This study implies that it reinforces the understanding that the traffic dataset has a significant effect on improving the performance of air pollution ML prediction models. Hence, there is an indication that ML algorithms behave differently when trained with a form of traffic dataset in the development of an air quality prediction model. This practically implies that developers and researchers in air quality prediction need to identify the ML algorithms that behave in their best interest before implementation. This research is limited in terms of the study area and the result cannot be generalized outside of the UK as many conditions may not be similar elsewhere. Additionally, only the ML algorithms commonly used in literature are considered in this research. Therefore, leaving out a few other ML algorithms.

## 5 Conclusion

In this research, we have investigated what impact traffic datasets have on the predictive performance of various air pollution ML prediction models. To achieve this, we have set up an experiment with the control dataset having only the AQ dataset and Met dataset. While the experimental dataset is made up of the AQ dataset, Met dataset and Traffic dataset. ML models were trained and tested on these individual combinations of datasets and the performance metrics were evaluated to show that the models trained on the experiment dataset consistently outperformed those trained on the controlled datasets. With a performance boost of at least 20% and an error reduction of at least 18.97% recorded for 98% of the ML algorithms when trained with a dataset containing a form of the traffic dataset, this study reinforces the belief that the traffic dataset has a significant effect on improving the performance of air pollution ML prediction models. Hence, it can be concluded that a performance boost is induced when ML algorithms are trained with a dataset containing a form of the traffic dataset for air quality prediction. Also, this study concludes that there is no single algorithm that has the best performance for all the pollutants and combinations of datasets. ML algorithms perform differently in various situations and with varying combinations of datasets. Future analysis of the result is envisaged with more ML algorithms and research datasets. Open research in this domain is to investigate the effect of the dataset granularity on the performance of the air pollution ML prediction model, and how the traffic dataset can contribute to the granularity of the dataset.

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## Appendix

Table 7: Summary of related studies in the literature

| SN | AUTHORS                        | POLLUTANTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | DATASETS | ML ALGORITHM          | COMPARED WITH                                                                                                                                                                                                      | BEST PERFORMANCE                    |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | (Zhang et al., 2021)           | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | AQ       | EMD-BiLSTM            | BiLSTM, LSTM                                                                                                                                                                                                       | R <sup>2</sup> =0.989, RMSE=6.86    |
| 2  | (Du et al., 2021)              | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO, O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ       | LCIELM                | LCIELM, ELM, WNN, Elman, TVFEMD-ELM(T-E), TVFEMD-WNN(T-W), TVFEMD-Elman (T-EI), VMD-LCIELM(V-L) and EMD-LCIELM(E-L)                                                                                                | RMSE=0.0482                         |
| 3  | (Sulaimon & Alaka, 2021)       | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , NO                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | AQ, M, T | XTR, HGBR             | LGBM, XGB, RF, BR, NuSVR, GBR, KNN, SVR                                                                                                                                                                            | R <sup>2</sup> =0.789, RMSE=0.099   |
| 4  | (Yarragunta et al., 2021)      | PM <sub>10</sub> , PM <sub>2.5</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO, NO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ       | DT                    | LR, SVM, RFT, NBT, KNN                                                                                                                                                                                             | Accuracy= 99.8%                     |
| 5  | (Cihan et al., 2021)           | PM <sub>10</sub> , PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | AQ, M    | ANFIS                 | SVR, CART, RF, KNN, ELM                                                                                                                                                                                            | R <sup>2</sup> =0.97, RMSE=3.05)    |
| 6  | (Ashayeri et al., 2021)        | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | T, BOP   | SVR                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | R <sup>2</sup> =0.842, RMSE=0.074   |
| 7  | (Yafouz et al., 2021)          | O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | AQ, M    | CNN, LSTM             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | R <sup>2</sup> =0.9348, RMSE=0.0041 |
| 8  | (Shah et al., 2020)            | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO                                                                                                                                                                                 | AQ       | SVM                   | RF, DT                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Accuracy= 95%                       |
| 9  | (Alpan & Sekeroglu, 2020)      | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , CO                                                                                                                                                                                 | M        | RF                    | DT, SVR                                                                                                                                                                                                            | R <sup>2</sup> =0.74 - 0.86         |
| 10 | (Kumari et al., 2020)          | SO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | AQ       | RF                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                     |
| 11 | (Dobrea et al., 2020)          | PM <sub>10</sub> , PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | AQ, M    | ARIMA                 | SVR, LSTM,                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Corr-Coeff=0.935                    |
| 12 | (Bozdağ et al., 2020)          | PM <sub>10</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | AQ, GIS  | ANN                   | ANN, LASSO, SVR, RF, KNN, XGB                                                                                                                                                                                      | R <sup>2</sup> =0.58, RMSE=20.8     |
| 13 | (Selvi & Chandrasekaran, 2020) | O <sub>3</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | AQ, M    | EINN                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | RMSE=0.0878                         |
| 14 | (Su et al., 2020)              | O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | AQ, M    | KELM-WT-PLS           | SVR, KELM, BPNN and SR                                                                                                                                                                                             | R <sup>2</sup> =0.78                |
| 15 | (Liu & Chen, 2020)             | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | AQ       | HI-EWT-NNA-WRELM-IEWT | EWT-WRELM, EWT-WRELM-IEWT, HI-EWT-WRELM, HI-EWT-WRELM-IEWT, EWT-NNA-WRELM, HI-EWT-NNA-WRELM, EWT-NNA-WRELM-IEWT. CEEMD-GWO-SVR, WD-ENN, WPD-PSO-BPNN-AdaBoost, WPD-CEEMD-PSR-PSOGSA-LSSVR, FEEMD-CS-ELM-VMD-CS-ELM | RMSE=5                              |
| 16 | (Wu & Lin, 2019)               | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO, NO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ       | LSSVM-BA              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | RMSE=4.4396                         |
| 17 | (Anurag et al., 2019)          | CO, C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>6</sub> , C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>5</sub> CH <sub>2</sub> CH <sub>3</sub> , NO, C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>4</sub> (CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> , NO <sub>x</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , PM <sub>2.5</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , C <sub>7</sub> H <sub>8</sub> | M        | XGB                   | ANN, DT, MLR                                                                                                                                                                                                       | RMSE=15.97                          |
| 18 | (Babu & Beulah, 2019)          | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO, NO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , NH <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                | AQ, M    | DT                    | LR, RF, KNN, SVM                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                     |
| 19 | (Srivastava et al., 2019)      | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , CO, NO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ, M    | SVR                   | ANN                                                                                                                                                                                                                | R <sup>2</sup> =0.02534             |
| 20 | (Rossi et al., 2019a)          | NO <sub>2</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | T, M     | BRNN                  | GLM, RF, SVM, ANN                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Accuracy=0.8                        |
| 21 | (Rossi et al., 2019b)          | NO <sub>2</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | T, M     | BRNN                  | GLM, RF, SVM, ANN                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Accuracy=0.8049                     |
| 22 | (Mo et al., 2019)              | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , NO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> , CO, O <sub>3</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ       | ICEEMDAN-WOA-ELM      | ARMA, GRNN, ELM, GA-ELM, WOA-ELM, EEMD-WOA-ELM.                                                                                                                                                                    | RMSE=0.0606                         |
| 23 | (Ray et al., 2019)             | C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>6</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | AQ       | DNN                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | RMSE=0.405181022925                 |
| 24 | (Gan et al., 2018)             | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | AQ       | SD-LSSVR-CPSOGSA      | CEEMD-PSOGSA, CEEMD-CPSOGSA, WPD-PSOGSA, WPD-CPSOGSA and SD-PSOGSA                                                                                                                                                 | RMSE= 3.7760                        |
| 25 | (Lin et al., 2018)             | NO <sub>2</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , O <sub>3</sub> , PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                                                                                                                                                                        | AQ       | CMG                   | SVR, NAR                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Accuracy=71.43%                     |

|    |                            |                                                                         |                 |                           |                                                 |                                              |
|----|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 26 | (Chen, Wang, et al., 2018) | PM <sub>10</sub>                                                        | M, LU, AOD      | RF                        | GAM, NLELRM                                     | R <sup>2</sup> =0.86, RMSE=34.2              |
| 27 | (Huang et al., 2018)       | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                       | AOD, M, LU      | RF                        |                                                 | R <sup>2</sup> =0.78                         |
| 28 | (Xu et al., 2018)          | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                       | AOD, LST        | Cubist                    | RF, XGB                                         | R <sup>2</sup> =0.48, RMSE=2.64              |
| 29 | (Chen, Li, et al., 2018)   | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                       | M, LU, AOD      | RF                        | GAM, NLELRM                                     | R <sup>2</sup> =0.86, RMSE=10.7 and 6.9      |
| 30 | (Zhang et al., 2018)       | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                       | AQ, M           | WNN                       | ELM, LSSVM, FNN                                 | R <sup>2</sup> =0.9975, RMSE=1.5124          |
| 31 | (Jo & Khan, 2018)          | CH <sub>4</sub> , CO, SO <sub>2</sub> , H <sub>2</sub> S                | AQ              | ANN                       | MLR, PCA-LR, ANN                                | R <sup>2</sup> =0.6654, RMSE=0.2104          |
| 32 | (Ni et al., 2017)          | PM <sub>2.5</sub>                                                       | M               | BPNN                      | ARIMA                                           | RMSE=6.76                                    |
| 33 | (Biancofiore et al., 2017) | PM <sub>2.5</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub>                                    | AQ, M           | RNN                       | ANN, MLR                                        | R <sup>2</sup> =0.8855                       |
| 34 | <b>This study</b>          | <b>PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>3</sub></b> | <b>AQ, M, T</b> | <b>XTR, RF, LGBM, XGB</b> | <b>HGBR, BR, NuSVR, GBR, KNN, MLPR, DT, SVR</b> | <b>R<sup>2</sup>=0.737023, RMSE=4.019938</b> |

**Note:** ANFIS=Adaptive Neuro-fuzzy Inference System; ANN=Artificial Neural Network; AOD=Satellite-based Aerosol Optical Depth data; AQ=Air Quality data; ARIMA=Autoregressive Integrated Moving Average; BA= Bat Algorithm; BiLSTM=Bidirectional Long Short-Term Memory neural networks; BOP=Building Occupancy Pattern; BPNN=Back Propagation Neural Network; BR=Bagging Regressor; BRNN=Bayesian Regularization of Neural Networks; CART=Classification Regression Trees; CEEMD=Complementary Ensemble Empirical Mode Decomposition algorithm; CH<sub>4</sub>=Methane; CMG=Cloud Model Granulation; CO=Carbon Monoxide; CPSOGSA=Chaotic Particle Swarm Optimization Method combined with the Gravitation Search Algorithm (CPSOGSA); C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>4</sub>(CH<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>=meta-Xylene; C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>5</sub>CH<sub>2</sub>CH<sub>3</sub>=Ethylbenzene; C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>6</sub>= Benzene; C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>8</sub>=Toluene; DNN=Deep Neural Network; DT=Decision Tree; EEMD=Ensemble Empirical Mode Decomposition; ELM=Extreme Learning Machine; ELM=Extreme Learning Machine; EINN=Elman Neural Network; EMD=Empirical Mode Decomposition; EWT=Empirical Wavelet Transform; FNN=Fuzzy Neural Network; GAM=Generalized additive models; GBR=Gradient Boosting Regressor; GIS=Geographic Information System data; GLM=Generalized Linear Model; GRNN=Generalized Regression Neural Network; HGBR=Histogram-based Gradient Boosting Regressor; HI=Hampel Identifier; H<sub>2</sub>S=Hydrogen Sulfide Carbonyl Sulfide; ICEEMDAN=Improved Complete Ensemble Empirical Mode Decomposition with Adaptive Noise; IEWT=Inverse Empirical Wavelet Transform; IMF=Intrinsic Mode Function; KELM=Kernel Extreme Learning Machine; KNN=k-Nearest Neighbor; LCIELM=Length-Changeable Incremental Extreme Learning Machine; LGBM=Light Gradient Boosted Machine Regressor; LR=Logistic Regression; LSSVM=Least Squares Support Vector Machine; LST=Land Surface Temperature data; LU=Land Use data; M=Meteorological data; MLPR=Multi-Layer Perceptron Regressor; MLR=Multiple Linear Regressor; NAR=Non-linear Autoregressive neural network; NBT=Nave Bayes Theorem; NH<sub>3</sub>=Ammonia; NLELRM=Non-linear Exposure-lag-response Model; NNA=Neural Network Algorithm; NO<sub>2</sub>=Nitrogen Dioxide; NuSVR=Nu Support Vector Regression; O<sub>3</sub>=Ozone; PCA=Principal Component Analysis; PLS=Partial Least Squares; PM<sub>2.5</sub>=Particulate Matter(diameter=2.5μm); PM<sub>10</sub>=Particulate Matter(diameter=10μm); PSR=Phase Space Reconstruction; RF=Random Forest; RFT=Random Forest Tree; SD=Secondary Decomposition; SO<sub>2</sub>=Sulfur Dioxide; SVM=Support Vector Machine; SVR=Support Vector Regressor; T=Traffic data; WNN=Wavelet Neural Network; WOA=Whale Optimization Algorithm; WRELM=Weighted Regularized Extreme Learning Machine; WT=Wavelet Transformation; XGB=Feature-Based Weighted Xgboost; XTR= Extra Trees Regressor

Table 8: Description of Air Quality Dataset

|       | DATE_TIME  | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | NO2      | PM10     | SO2      | FINE     | O3       | PM1      | PM25     | TSP      | CO       | SO2      | NO2      | NO       | AQI      |
|-------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| COUNT | 1730587    | 1730587  | 1730587   | 1485522  | 992010   | 183928   | 48179    | 632308   | 20511    | 690523   | 18978    | 32854    | 52       | 51       | 609070   | 516492   |
| MEAN  | 1614298670 | 58.71559 | 4.915295  | 23.2387  | 16.47164 | 4.088476 | 9.357272 | 50.46037 | 8.97026  | 9.019211 | 17.75867 | 3.872447 | 6.365385 | 20.70588 | 10.83223 | 1.680098 |
| STD   | 4437418.76 | 305.251  | 306.3504  | 19.63155 | 12.51445 | 7.085552 | 7.879215 | 23.41542 | 9.690547 | 7.660558 | 15.14442 | 40.88974 | 0.65765  | 13.91732 | 24.97005 | 0.848755 |
| MIN   | 1606780800 | 49.76681 | -9.90392  | -32.3    | -14      | -12.3    | -6.4     | -5.4     | 0.1      | -13      | 0.5      | -0.5     | 5        | 2        | -0.68602 | 0        |
| 25%   | 1610449200 | 51.45797 | -2.29377  | 8.415    | 9        | 1.6      | 5        | 34       | 3        | 4.151    | 9.4      | 0.11642  | 6        | 6        | 0.62365  | 1        |
| 50%   | 1614304800 | 51.5579  | -0.78029  | 17.78625 | 13.8     | 3        | 7.2      | 53       | 5.3      | 7        | 14.6     | 0.34926  | 6        | 21       | 2.36987  | 2        |
| 75%   | 1617879600 | 53.40495 | -0.12019  | 33       | 20.9     | 5        | 10.9     | 68       | 11.5     | 11.132   | 21.2     | 0.69852  | 7        | 31       | 9.35475  | 2        |
| MAX   | 1622570400 | 15000    | 15000     | 282      | 1361.6   | 1210     | 141.9    | 201.7653 | 121.3    | 713      | 403.1    | 1100     | 7        | 54       | 766.3411 | 10       |

Table 9: Description of Weather Dataset

|       | DT          | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | TEMP     | FEELS LIKE | PRESSURE | HUMIDITY | TEMP_MIN | TEMP_MAX | SPEED    | DEG      | ALL      | ID       | 1H |
|-------|-------------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----|
| COUNT | 1373712     | 1373712  | 1373712   | 1373712  | 1373712    | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 1373712  | 0  |
| MEAN  | 1614343976  | 52.27683 | -1.09944  | 279.7678 | 275.7696   | 1011.972 | 79.94682 | 278.9453 | 280.5779 | 3.732348 | 184.7709 | 61.84165 | 761.3301 |    |
| STD   | 4567323.989 | 1.544163 | 1.682915  | 4.394833 | 4.904104   | 13.65112 | 15.01623 | 4.412379 | 4.436787 | 2.399483 | 102.2342 | 35.11993 | 101.2075 |    |
| MIN   | 1606780800  | 49.76681 | -9.90392  | 259.15   | 241.94     | 952      | 1        | 259.15   | 259.15   | 0.02     | 0        | 0        | 211      |    |
| 25%   | 1610420400  | 51.45636 | -1.8774   | 276.51   | 272.31     | 1003     | 71       | 275.93   | 277.15   | 2.06     | 90       | 30       | 800      |    |
| 50%   | 1614056400  | 51.53085 | -0.2775   | 279.88   | 275.74     | 1013     | 83       | 279.15   | 280.37   | 3.13     | 210      | 75       | 802      |    |
| 75%   | 1618005600  | 52.95473 | -0.05077  | 282.81   | 279.1      | 1023     | 93       | 282.04   | 283.71   | 5.14     | 260      | 90       | 804      |    |
| MAX   | 1622595600  | 60.13922 | 1.463497  | 298.23   | 298.81     | 1060     | 100      | 298.15   | 304.15   | 50.93    | 360      | 100      | 804      |    |

Table 10: Description of Traffic Dataset

|       | CURRENT SPEED | FREEFLOW SPEED | CURRENT_FREEFLOW SPEED | CURRENT TRAVELTIME | FREEFLOW TRAVELTIME | FREEFLOW_CURRENT TRAVELTIME | CONFIDENCE | ROADCLOSURE | DT          | LONGITUDE | LATITUDE |
|-------|---------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| COUNT | 485955        | 485955         | 482904                 | 485955             | 485955              | 482904                      | 485955     | 485955      | 485955      | 479818    | 479818   |
| MEAN  | 24.5923       | 26.78424       | 0.902648               | 73.63438           | 61.04907            | 0.902127                    | 0.925651   | 0.026194    | 1618276937  | -1.12234  | 52.33627 |
| STD   | 11.3973       | 10.23113       | 0.163828               | 47.50204           | 27.75625            | 0.164403                    | 0.142133   | 0.319594    | 1908591.839 | 1.484598  | 1.578814 |
| MIN   | 0             | 0              | 0.053587               | 0                  | 0                   | 0.053699                    | 0.5        | 0           | 1614909600  | -7.3311   | 50.37167 |
| 25%   | 16.75         | 20.5           | 0.863971               | 46.75              | 41                  | 0.863479                    | 0.95       | 0           | 1616619600  | -1.9808   | 51.4549  |
| 50%   | 23            | 25             | 1                      | 66                 | 60                  | 1                           | 0.9975     | 0           | 1618297200  | -0.3456   | 51.53085 |
| 75%   | 30            | 31             | 1                      | 89.5               | 78                  | 1                           | 1          | 0           | 1619892000  | -0.0967   | 53.22137 |
| MAX   | 71            | 71             | 1                      | 1734.25            | 181                 | 1                           | 1          | 4           | 1621710000  | 1.4634    | 60.13922 |