

BERT-Flow-VAE: A Weakly-supervised Model for Multi-Label Text Classification

Ziwen Liu

University College London
z.liu.19@ucl.ac.uk

Scott Allan Orr

University College London
scott.orr@ucl.ac.uk

Josep Grau-Bové

University College London
josep.grau.bove@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract

Multi-label Text Classification (MLTC) is the task of categorizing documents into one or more topics. Considering the large volumes of data and varying domains of such tasks, fully-supervised learning requires manually fully annotated datasets which is costly and time-consuming. In this paper, we propose BERT-Flow-VAE (BFV), a Weakly-Supervised Multi-Label Text Classification (WSMLTC) model that reduces the need for full supervision. This new model: (1) produces BERT sentence embeddings and calibrates them using a flow model, (2) generates an initial topic-document matrix by averaging results of a seeded sparse topic model and a textual entailment model that only require surface name of topics and 4-6 seed words per topic, and (3) adopts a VAE framework to reconstruct the embeddings under the guidance of the topic-document matrix. Finally, (4) it uses the means produced by the encoder model in the VAE architecture as predictions for MLTC. Experimental results on 6 multi-label datasets show that BFV can substantially outperform other baseline WSMLTC models in key metrics and achieve approximately 84% performance of a fully-supervised model.

1 Introduction

As vast numbers of written comments are posted daily on social media and e-commerce platforms, there is an increasing demand for methods that efficiently and effectively extract useful information from this unstructured text data. One of the methods to analyze this unstructured text data is to classify them into organized categories. This can be considered as a Multi-label Text Classification (MLTC) task since a single data may contain multiple non-mutually-exclusive topics (aspects). There are a range of relevant applications of this task such as categorizing movies by genres (Hoang, 2018), multi-label sentiment analysis (Almeida

et al., 2018) and multi-label toxicity identification (Gunasekara and Nejadgholi, 2018).

Fully-supervised learning methods are undesirable for this task, because of the diversity of domains of application and cost of manual labelling (Brody and Elhadad, 2010). Seeded topic models, such as SeededLDA and CorEx (Jagarlamudi et al., 2012; Gallagher et al., 2017), where users can designate seed words as a prior to guide the models to find topics of interest, can be seen as a Weakly-Supervised Multi-Label Text Classification (WSMLTC) method. Nevertheless, as these models are mainly statistical models based on bag-of-words representation, they fail to fully exploit key sentence elements such as context and word positions. In contrast, large pre-trained language models such as BERT and GPT-3 (Devlin et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020) produce contextualized embeddings for each word in a sentence, which has afforded them great success in the NLP field (Minaee et al., 2021; Ethayarajh, 2019).

Recently, prompt-based Few-Shot Learning (FSL) and Zero-Shot Learning (ZSL) methods (Yin et al., 2019, 2020; Gao et al., 2020) that take advantage of the general knowledge of large pre-trained language models can also approach MLTC tasks using only a few examples or topic surface names as a means of supervision. Specifically, these models convert text classification to a textual entailment task by preparing a template such as 'This example is about _' as input, and then estimating the probability of the model filling the blank with certain topic names. However, this method does not work well for abstract topics and there is no agreed way to use multiple words for the entailment task.

In this paper, we propose BERT-Flow-VAE (BFV), a WSMLTC model. It is based on the Variational AutoEncoder (VAE) (Kingma and Welling, 2013) framework to reconstruct the sentence embeddings obtained from distil-BERT (Sanh et al., 2019). Inspired by the work of (Li et al., 2020), we

use a shallow Glow (Kingma and Dhariwal, 2018) model to map the sentence embeddings to a standard Gaussian space before feeding them into the VAE model. Finally, we use the averaged results of a seeded sparse topic model and a ZSL model to guide our model to build latent variables towards pre-specified topics as predictions for MLTC.

Our contributions can be listed as follows: (1) We propose BFV, a WSMLTC model based on VAE framework, that can achieve comparable performance to a fully-supervised method on 6 multi-label datasets with only limited inputs (4 to 6 seed words per topic and surface name of topics). (2) We show that using a normalizing-flow model to calibrate sentence embeddings before feeding them into a VAE model can improve the model’s MLTC performance, suggesting that pre-processing inputs is needed as it can better fit the overall objective of the VAE framework. (3) We present that the topic classification performance of ZSL method can be further improved by properly integrating predictions from a sparse seeded topic model, which complements the results from ZSL method by naturally incorporating multiple words to define a topic and could play a role of regularization.

2 Related Work

Seeded Topic Model Guided (seeded) topic models are built to find more desirable topics by incorporating users’ prior domain knowledge. These seeded topic models can be seen as Weakly-Supervised (WS) methods to find specific topics in a corpus. Andrzejewski and Zhu (2009) proposed a model by using ‘z-labels’ to control which words appear or not appear in certain topics. Andrzejewski et al. (2009) presented DFLDA to construct Must-Link and Cannot-Link conditions between words to indirectly force the emergence of topics. Jagarlamudi et al. (2012) proposed SeededLDA to incorporate seed words for each topics to guide the results found by LDA. This is achieved by biasing (1) topics to produce seed words and (2) documents containing seed words to select corresponding topics. Gallagher et al. (2017) presented Correlation Explanation (CorEx), a model searching for topics that are ‘maximally informative’ about a set of documents. Seed words can be flexibly incorporated into the model during fitting. Meng et al. (2020a) proposed CatE that jointly embeds words, documents and seeded categories (topics) into a shared space. The category distinctive information

is encoded during the process.

Weakly-supervised Text Classification Recently, Weakly-Supervised Text Classification (WSTC) has been rapidly developed (Meng et al., 2020b; Wang et al., 2020). Most of the works used pseudo labels/documents generation and self-training. Particularly, Meng et al. (2018) proposed WeSTClass which uses seed information such as label surface name and keywords to generate pseudo documents and refines itself via self-training. Mekala and Shang (2020) proposed ConWea that uses contextualized embeddings to disambiguate user input seed words and generates pseudo labels for unlabeled documents based on these words to train a text classifier. COSINE from (Yu et al., 2020) receives weak supervision and generates pseudo labels to perform contrastive learning (with confidence reweighting) to train a classifier. Some studies integrated simple rules as weak supervision signals: Ren et al. (2020) used rule-annotated weak labels to denoise labels, which then supervise a classifier to predict unseen samples; Karamanolakis et al. (2021) developed ASTRA that utilizes task-specific unlabeled data, few labeled data, and domain-specific rules through a student model, a teacher model and self-training. However, these WSTC methods were specifically designed for multi-class tasks and are not optimized for WSMLTC tasks in which documents could belong to multiple classes simultaneously.

Prompt-based Zero-Shot Learning MLTC tasks can also be approached with very limited supervision by Prompt-based Few-Shot Learning (FSL) or Zero-Shot Learning (ZSL). For example, Yin et al. (2019) proposed a ZSL method for text classification tasks by treating text classification as a textual entailment problem. This model treats an input text as a premise and prepares a corresponding hypothesis (template) such as ‘This example is about _’ for the entailment model. Finally, it uses the probability of the model filling the blank with topic names as the topic predictions. However, the choice of template and word for the entailment task requires domain knowledge and is often sub-optimal (Gao et al., 2020). Also, it is not straightforward to find multiple words as entailment for a topic. This may limit model’s ability to understand abstract topics (e.g., ‘evacuation’ and ‘infrastructure’) where providing

a single surface name is insufficient (Yin et al., 2019). Although some automatic search strategies (Gao et al., 2020; Schick and Schütze, 2020; Schick et al., 2020) have been suggested, relevant research and applications are still under-explored.

3 Proposed Model: BERT-Flow-VAE

3.1 Problem Formulation and Motivation

Problem Formulation Multi-label text classification task is a broad concept, which includes many sub-fields such as eXtreme Multi-label Text Classification (XMTC), Hierarchical Multi-label Text Classification (HMTC) and multi-label topic modeling. In our model, instead of following these approaches, we follow a simpler assumption that the labels do not have a hierarchical structure and distribution of examples per label is not extremely skewed.

More precisely, given an input corpus consisting of N documents $\mathcal{D} = \{D_1, \dots, D_N\}$, the model assigns zero, single, or multiple labels to each document $D_i \in \mathcal{D}$ based on weak supervision signal from a dictionary of {topic surface name:keywords} \mathcal{W} provided by user.

This is a more challenging task than multi-class text classification as samples are assumed to have non-mutually exclusive labels. This is a more practical assumption for text classification task because documents usually belong to more than one conceptual class (Tsoumakas and Katakis, 2007).

Motivation Inspired by relevant work of VAE and β -VAE (see Appendix A), we assume that the semantic information within sentence embeddings are composed of multiple disentangled factors in the latent space. Each latent factor can be seen as a label (topic) that may appear independently. Hence, we adopted VAE as our framework to approach this task.

3.2 Preparing the Inputs

Language Model and Sentence Embedding Strategy

As we will model the latent factors from the semantic information of sentences encoded in the word embeddings, we need to firstly convert sentences into embeddings. Specifically, given the input corpus \mathcal{D} , we firstly process them into a collection of sentence embeddings $E_s \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times V}$, where V is the embedding dimension of the language model. Taking BERT as an example, there are two main ways to produce such sentence

embeddings: (1) using the special token ($[CLS]$ in BERT) and (2) using a mean-pooling strategy to aggregate all word embeddings into a single sentence embedding. We tested and showed the performance of the two versions in section 5. Lastly, for computational efficiency, we used distil-BERT (Sanh et al., 2019) as our language model, which is a lighter version of BERT with comparable performance.

Moreover, instead of simply averaging the embeddings of words in a sentence with equal weights, we also tested a TF-IDF averaging strategy. Specifically, we firstly calculated the weights of words in a sentence using the TF-IDF algorithm with L_2 normalization, and then averaged the words according to the TF-IDF weights. To avoid weights of some common words to be nearly zero, we combined 10% mean pooling weights and 90% TF-IDF pooling weights as the final embeddings.

Flow-calibration Sentence embeddings obtained from BERT without extra fine-tuning have been found to poorly capture the semantic meaning of sentences. This is reflected by the performance of BERT on sentence-level tasks such as predicting Semantic Textual Similarity (STS) (Reimers and Gurevych, 2019). This may be caused by anisotropy (embeddings occupy a narrow cone in the vector space), a common problem of embeddings produced by language models (Ethayarajh, 2019; Li et al., 2020). To address this problem, following the work of (Li et al., 2020), we adopted BERT-Flow to calibrate the sentence embeddings. More exactly, we used a shallow Glow (Kingma and Dhariwal, 2018) with $K = 16$ and $L = 1$, a normalizing-flow based model, with random permutation and affine coupling to post-process the sentence embeddings from all 7 layers of distil-BERT (including the word embedding layer). We tested different combinations of the 7 post-processed embeddings and took the average of embeddings from the first, second and sixth layer based on the metrics evaluated on the STS benchmark dataset.

Since normalizing-flow based models can create an invertible mapping from the BERT embedding space to a standard Gaussian latent space (Li et al., 2020), the advantages of using flow calibration are: (1) it improves the anisotropy to make the sentence embeddings more semantically distinguishable, and (2) it converts the distribution of BERT embeddings to be standard Gaussian, which fits the

objective of minimizing mean-squared reconstruction error and Kullback–Leibler Divergence (KLD) with a standard Gaussian prior distribution in the following VAE model.

Backend Model To guide our model towards some pre-specified topics, we used Zero-Shot Text Classification method (0SHOT-TC) proposed by (Yin et al., 2019) as the backend model. Specifically, we used RoBERTa-large (Liu et al., 2019) as the language model for 0SHOT-TC. Following the example mentioned previously, we prepared a template (hypothesis) with the shape 'This example is about _' for each sentence (premise) and filled the blank with the surface name of topics. Finally, we took the probability of *entailment* as that of the topic appearing in the sentence for each class and collected this as $\mathcal{T}_{0SHOT-TC} \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times M}$, where M is the number of topics.

However, because current zero-shot learning methods lack an agreed way to find multiple words as entailment for a topic, we further used a seeded topic model as a complement. More exactly, we selected Anchored Correlation Explanation (CorEx) (Gallagher et al., 2017) as another backend model. By following the approach used by (Jagarlamudi et al., 2012; Gallagher et al., 2017), we randomly chose 4 to 6 seed words from the top 20 most discriminating words of each topic as seed words to better simulate real-world applications. Finally, we estimated unnormalized document-topic matrix $\mathcal{T}_{CorEx} \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times M}$ and took the combination:

$$\mathcal{T} = \omega \times \mathcal{T}_{0SHOT-TC} + (1 - \omega) \times \mathcal{T}_{CorEx}$$

where ω is the combination weight. We set $\omega = 0.5$ herein (details will be discussed in section 5.2).

3.3 Model Description

Model Architecture and Objective Function

An overview of the model architecture can be seen in Fig 1. Specifically, we used fully connected layers combined with layer normalization (Ba et al., 2016) and Parametric ReLU (PReLU) (He et al., 2015). The encoder model q_ϕ receives flow-calibrated sentence embeddings E_s and outputs mean ($\mu \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times M}$) and variance ($\sigma \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times M}$) which will be the inputs to the decoder model p_θ to produce reconstructed sentence embeddings $\hat{E}_s \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times V}$.

As in the vanilla VAE model in Appendix A, the objective function of our model contains a reconstruction loss and KLD loss. We used the mean-

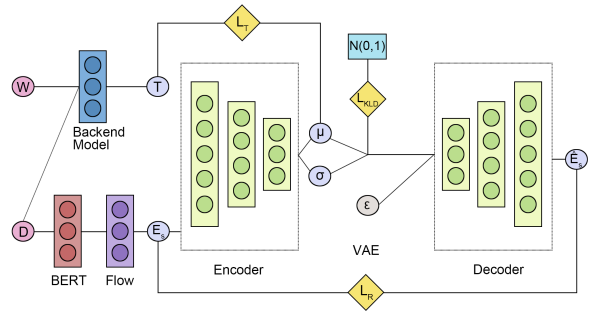


Figure 1: Architecture of the proposed model.

squared error between E_s and \hat{E}_s as the reconstruction loss because input embeddings have been calibrated to have a standard Gaussian distribution, and used the KL divergence between the output (μ and σ) of the encoder and the prior $\mathcal{N}(0, I)$ as the KLD loss. In addition, in order to guide the model's direction towards the pre-specified topics, we added another loss term dubbed topic loss:

$$L_{\mathcal{T}} = -\frac{1}{NM} \sum_i^N \sum_j^M \mathcal{T}_{ij} \cdot \log(\text{sigmoid}(\mu_{ij}))$$

where $\text{sigmoid}(\cdot)$ is the element-wise sigmoid function. $L_{\mathcal{T}}$ is the binary cross-entropy between μ and \mathcal{T} to encourage μ to be closer to \mathcal{T} .

Notice that the value of $\text{sigmoid}(\mu) \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times M}$ produced by the encoder can be viewed as a document-topic matrix. Thus, we used it as the model's prediction for MLTC. $\text{sigmoid}(\mu_{ij}) > 0.5$ is predicted as positive (i.e., topic j appears in i th document). σ is left as free values to reconstruct \hat{E}_s .

As shown by (Higgins et al., 2016; Burgess et al., 2018), the weight of different components in the objective function of the VAE model is important to find disentangled representations. In particular, based on our observations, the ratio between L_{KLD} and $L_{\mathcal{T}}$ is crucial. Hence, we set a hyperparameter γ in the objective function controlling the ratio of L_{KLD} and $L_{\mathcal{T}}$. Finally, the objective function of our VAE model is:

$$\mathcal{L}(\theta, \phi; E_s, \mathcal{T}, \alpha, \eta) = -(L_R + \alpha L_{KLD} + \eta L_{\mathcal{T}})$$

where $\alpha = 0.1 \times \sqrt{\gamma}$ and $\eta = 0.1 \times \gamma M$. It can be seen that a higher value of γ will lead to a heavier penalty on $L_{\mathcal{T}}$, and therefore μ will become more similar to \mathcal{T} ; while, conversely, a lower value of γ will make μ diverge from \mathcal{T} . As L_{KLD} pushes

$\text{sigmoid}(\mu)$ towards 0.5, a lower value of γ would encourage model to make aggressive predictions.

Hyper-Parameter Scheduling (HPS) We adopted the strategy to gradually change the hyper-parameters of the model. We used the first epoch of training as a warm-up stage (Sønderby et al., 2016) by setting the value of α to one-tenth of its original value. Similarly, we also halved the value of η in the last epoch of training, aiming to reduce the dependency of μ on \mathcal{T} .

4 Experiments Setup

4.1 Datasets

We chose *Restaurant* and *Laptop* datasets from SemEval 2014 Task 4 (Pontiki et al., 2014) as well as *CitySearch* (Ganu et al., 2009), which are very popular in aspect-based sentiment analysis studies. We also added *SentiHood* (Saeidi et al., 2016), a similar dataset to the SemEval datasets. Additionally, *Reuters* (ApteMod version) (Apt’e et al., 1994), a well-known text classification dataset containing Reuters financial newswire service in 1987 was also selected. Finally, given that the Restaurants, CitySearch and SentiHood are all largely related to food-related aspects, we added a self-made dataset called *Heritage*, which is composed of 3,760 online reviews for 77 heritage sites. There are 9 categories in this dataset: *heritage*, *exhibition*, *price*, *family*, *service*, *transport*, *facilities*, *environment* and *miscellaneous* (see Appendix D).

4.2 Data Pre-processing

Pre-processing For all datasets, we only kept categories which have at least 30 corresponding samples or account for at least 1% in the whole dataset. Also, we removed categories with no specific meaning (e.g., ‘miscellaneous’). Finally, for datasets which do not have a pre-specified train-test split, we used 20% of the examples as the test set (splits were carefully conducted to account for class balance). Table 1 shows detailed information on the datasets after pre-processing.

Model Fine-tuning and Training We finetuned distil-BERT before using it to produce embeddings. Specifically, we used a learning rate of 1×10^{-5} for the word embedding layer and top 3 layers of distil-BERT, and 1×10^{-3} for last 3 layers. The weight decay was set to 0 for the bias and layer normalization weights. We used a warm-up strategy to gradually unfreeze the parameters of distil-BERT.

We ran the fine-tuning process for 5 epochs on each dataset separately. Additionally, we trained the Glow model with a learning rate of 1×10^{-3} for 5 epochs. Lastly, we trained the BFV model with a learning rate of 1×10^{-3} for 10 epochs, with weight decay set using the same values as the distil-BERT fine-tuning. AdamW (Loshchilov and Hutter, 2017) is the optimizer used for training all three models.

4.3 Evaluation Procedure

Evaluation Metrics One of the limitations of this model is that, as we only reconstruct the pooled representation of the sentences rather than words, there is no explicit modelling of word-topic relationship. Therefore, metrics for topic models such as perplexity and topic coherence cannot be directly measured. Thus, they will not be reported. We calculated the macro-average of each class for the metrics defined only for binary predictions such as F1-score. More detailed definition of metrics can be found in Appendix E. We report the average and standard deviation over 10 runs for our model and its ablated versions.

Baseline Models In this paper, we only compare our model with methods that can perform multi-label prediction with weak supervision (only surface names and keywords are provided). To the best of the authors’ knowledge, there are few methods built specifically for the WSMLTC tasks. Therefore, we consider guided topic models and prompting based zero-shot learning language models as the work most closely related to our model as baselines. For weakly-supervised methods that were specifically designed for multi-class tasks, we compare our model with them in Appendix B since we converted them to perform MLTC tasks which may cause them to perform differently from their original multi-class design.

We used backend models (**CorEx**, **0SHOT-TC** and **CorEx+0SHOT-TC**) and **Guided LDA (GLDA)**, a standard LDA with initial word-topic priors biased towards seeded topics, as baseline models to compare the performance of our models. Following the work in (Brody and Elhadad, 2010), we used a POS-tagging model¹ to only keep nouns and adjectives for GLDA and CorEx. We also included ablated versions of BFV:

BERT-Whitening-VAE (BWV): The Flow in

¹huggingface.co/vblagoje/bert-english-uncased-finetuned-pos

Dataset	Number of samples	Number of classes	Max number of data per class	Min number of data per class	Multilabel ratio	Average text length
Reuters	10788	42	3964	31	0.14	128
CitySearch	3315	4	1227	298	0.11	14
Sentihood	5215	9	714	143	0.10	15
Restaurant	3844	4	1651	402	0.16	13
Laptop	3308	5	639	175	0.12	13
Heritage	3760	8	623	156	0.11	18

Table 1: Metadata for 6 selected datasets after pre-processing. "Multilabel ratio" is the percentage of samples having more than one label.

BFV is replaced by a simple whitening operation introduced by (Huang et al., 2021).

BERT-VAE (BV): No calibration is performed to the BERT-embeddings.

BERT-Flow-VAE-CLS (BFVCLS): Instead of using pooling average strategy, $[CLS]$ token is used as the representation of a sentence.

BERT-Flow-Encoder (BFE): Only the encoder part of the VAE is kept, and two loss components (L_R and L_{KLD}) are disabled.

BERT-Flow (BF): The VAE part in BFV is replaced by a textual entailment classification header² with the same template. The classification header has been finetuned on the MNLI dataset to adjust for the flow-calibrated model.

OSHOT-TC-Flow: Flow calibration is applied to the original OSHOT-TC model. The classification header has been finetuned on the MNLI dataset to adjust for the flow-calibrated model.

Lastly, to show the performance gap between our model and fully-supervised methods, the performance of the **BFE** trained in a fully-supervised way using groundtruth labels (**BFE-Sup**) is included.

5 Results

5.1 Quantitative Evaluation

Table 2 presents the quantitative evaluation of the models measured using classification metrics (clustering performance and qualitative evaluation can be found in Appendix C.). We make the following observations based on these results:

(1) BFV outperforms other WSMLTC models in most datasets with relatively large margin except for *Reuters*, in terms of F1-score and APS.

(2) In terms of the F1-score, BFV with only seed words and surface name of topics as supervision can, on average, achieve approximately 84% performance of the fully-supervised model as reflected in

²huggingface.co/huggingface/distilbert-base-uncased-finetuned-mnli

	% of BFE-Sup's F1
BFE-Sup	100.0 (100.0)
BFV	84.38 (83.40)
BWV	78.67 (77.49)
BV	73.47 (71.28)
BFVCLS	58.93 (56.10)
BFE	69.15 (67.46)
BF	26.57 (25.50)
OSHOT-TC+CorEx	57.84 (53.97)
OSHOT-TC-Flow	33.42 (33.56)
OSHOT-TC	69.57 (71.53)
CorEX	53.86 (50.25)
GLDA	27.84 (27.37)

Table 3: Models performance in percentage of the fully-supervised model measured by F1-score averaged across all datasets. Numbers in the brackets are F1-score averaged across 5 datasets excluding *Heritage*.

Table 3. In addition, the performance gap between weakly-supervised and fully-supervised model is narrow in datasets of social media reviews. This suggests that the weakly-supervised models are able to find topics with limited guidance in the context of short text, informal and polysemous words that characterise reviews.

(3) After replacing Flow with a simple whitening operation, there is no significant drop of performance of the model in terms of key metrics such as F1, demonstrating the robustness of the model.

Table 4 shows examples of prediction results in the format of document-topic matrix, where each value shows the probability of the topic (column) appearing in the document (row).

5.2 Ablation Study and Sensitivity Analysis

In order to investigate further the effectiveness of each component and the sensitivity with respect to backend models, we sequentially added each component of the model and calculated its perfor-

		ACC	HS	P@3	F1	Recall	Precision	APS	AUC
Reuters	BFE-Sup (20)	75.52	80.82	82.86	63.29	54.12	83.00	70.18	97.91
	BFV (20)	44.65 (1.33)	55.74 (1.35)	66.03 (1.5)	44.99 (0.51)	55.38 (0.6)	51.58 (0.84)	56.18 (0.34)	95.86 (0.14)
	BWV (20)	39.83 (1.23)	51.33 (1.23)	61.98 (1.2)	44.59 (0.41)	54.96 (0.5)	50.27 (0.76)	55.96 (0.36)	95.85 (0.1)
	BV (20)	48.84 (2.5)	57.72 (2.61)	65.40 (2.88)	40.91 (0.73)	45.63 (1.65)	50.56 (1.71)	51.12 (0.7)	95.58 (0.11)
	BFVCLS (20)	49.60 (4.92)	56.85 (5.15)	62.53 (5.51)	33.97 (1.84)	37.08 (3.32)	44.19 (1.57)	46.23 (0.54)	94.37 (0.11)
	BFE (20)	45.09 (0.74)	53.54 (0.78)	60.37 (0.75)	37.56 (0.36)	39.81 (0.35)	50.13 (1.1)	44.21 (0.39)	94.07 (0.09)
	BF	1.82	3.35	7.96	3.92	33.51	2.72	3.12	43.86
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	12.62	25.61	49.30	25.28	60.56	21.43	50.28	93.91
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	0.43	4.76	11.39	5.22	58.01	3.31	3.81	54.94
	OSHOT-TC	19.68	43.19	75.26	44.55	70.65	38.21	56.22	91.64
	CorEx	10.53	22.84	31.56	24.27	57.53	20.71	17.90	86.71
	GLDA	7.92	8.28	8.28	6.88	4.15	34.33	26.33	75.18
CitySearch	BFE-Sup (1)	71.79	75.72	76.66	72.66	64.81	83.13	82.30	94.37
	BFV (1)	61.07 (1.25)	68.95 (0.93)	72.79 (0.75)	69.48 (0.96)	76.50 (1.33)	64.92 (1.35)	77.25 (0.42)	92.37 (0.22)
	BWV (1)	54.60 (1.38)	61.07 (1.39)	62.87 (1.51)	62.63 (1.53)	60.99 (2.92)	66.13 (1.92)	69.98 (0.69)	89.19 (0.26)
	BV (1)	53.74 (0.99)	58.51 (1.12)	59.34 (1.25)	59.64 (2.2)	52.24 (5.07)	75.06 (3.06)	72.41 (0.47)	89.09 (0.25)
	BFVCLS (1)	54.39 (1.34)	58.86 (1.37)	59.08 (1.38)	48.82 (1.61)	39.67 (2.3)	79.56 (2.76)	67.09 (0.4)	87.97 (0.2)
	BFE (1)	53.26 (0.68)	57.90 (0.79)	58.33 (0.79)	54.28 (1.25)	43.84 (1.09)	78.08 (1.62)	69.89 (0.84)	88.63 (0.46)
	BF	29.41	33.74	33.81	18.80	21.09	19.04	19.39	48.41
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	47.36	51.43	51.92	39.98	30.83	58.42	63.75	87.80
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	37.86	46.10	50.35	41.68	51.13	40.97	45.08	77.08
	OSHOT-TC	41.78	53.12	61.29	60.43	86.90	48.30	71.04	88.12
	CorEx	45.70	49.57	50.04	35.66	26.44	55.57	43.89	69.97
	GLDA	33.18	35.97	35.97	27.42	23.55	35.92	30.63	65.73
Sentihood	BFE-Sup (1)	74.04	77.41	78.14	68.88	61.32	79.05	76.60	96.81
	BFV (1)	42.94 (1.57)	51.23 (1.37)	56.35 (1.25)	53.54 (0.88)	75.58 (1.13)	47.21 (0.96)	59.10 (0.68)	92.12 (0.14)
	BWV (1)	50.29 (1.73)	55.61 (1.51)	57.80 (1.36)	51.40 (1.36)	60.18 (2.32)	53.49 (0.71)	59.80 (0.33)	91.96 (0.13)
	BV (1)	51.41 (3.61)	56.66 (3.14)	59.00 (2.67)	51.02 (1.66)	53.77 (2.94)	59.25 (1.04)	60.78 (0.48)	91.93 (0.22)
	BFVCLS (1)	53.62 (2.56)	56.13 (2.42)	56.75 (2.17)	32.92 (1.28)	31.04 (2.14)	55.77 (2.0)	48.80 (0.58)	89.20 (0.14)
	BFE (1)	52.60 (0.45)	56.88 (0.4)	58.63 (0.44)	46.55 (0.87)	46.83 (0.79)	56.58 (1.09)	56.12 (0.44)	90.46 (0.21)
	BF	20.66	24.32	25.57	10.81	46.58	6.42	6.76	51.86
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	53.05	55.90	56.42	39.17	39.50	45.05	53.26	91.29
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	0.60	6.82	10.02	11.37	64.15	6.42	9.03	48.18
	OSHOT-TC	4.16	18.33	36.82	39.13	89.11	28.16	55.30	91.12
	CorEx	52.52	54.98	55.34	34.71	33.82	40.76	33.00	75.87
	GLDA	39.17	40.39	40.40	16.41	15.43	20.58	16.70	71.18
Restaurant	BFE-Sup (1)	75.38	80.93	81.72	81.59	75.57	89.11	90.02	95.87
	BFV (1)	68.85 (1.95)	74.42 (2.02)	76.34 (2.16)	80.49 (0.77)	80.58 (1.72)	80.88 (2.24)	89.73 (0.4)	95.21 (0.27)
	BWV (1)	58.09 (1.91)	65.65 (1.76)	68.13 (1.97)	73.44 (1.35)	80.02 (3.47)	69.62 (3.21)	85.55 (0.35)	93.34 (0.17)
	BV (1)	53.66 (2.18)	59.43 (2.36)	60.27 (2.63)	69.52 (1.97)	60.85 (4.55)	84.74 (3.94)	84.97 (0.45)	91.78 (0.33)
	BFVCLS (1)	57.84 (2.94)	64.95 (2.83)	66.02 (2.61)	60.14 (2.89)	53.00 (2.45)	83.62 (8.77)	78.28 (1.11)	90.09 (0.34)
	BFE (1)	57.36 (1.01)	63.38 (0.9)	64.11 (0.86)	69.05 (1.45)	60.35 (1.42)	83.59 (1.18)	81.57 (0.59)	91.21 (0.24)
	BF	8.38	21.33	24.74	30.21	51.64	25.00	25.62	49.18
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	46.00	51.12	51.54	57.02	45.92	78.68	83.06	93.40
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	4.88	28.45	47.24	38.44	88.02	26.49	30.58	60.69
	OSHOT-TC	37.25	56.46	72.90	63.04	95.00	48.61	83.65	92.43
	CorEx	45.25	50.19	50.31	54.42	43.00	77.55	61.20	74.97
	GLDA	26.12	31.08	31.08	34.46	30.93	46.52	42.51	72.39
Laptop	BFE-Sup (2)	60.15	63.48	63.90	49.24	39.87	65.76	57.66	87.21
	BFV (2)	45.72 (1.18)	49.37 (1.18)	50.53 (1.2)	36.40 (1.2)	38.59 (1.54)	42.75 (1.67)	39.25 (0.54)	73.38 (0.49)
	BWV (2)	45.04 (0.57)	47.96 (0.37)	48.76 (0.42)	32.58 (1.15)	32.34 (1.46)	44.62 (0.84)	37.56 (0.31)	72.72 (0.18)
	BV (2)	51.18 (2.11)	52.82 (1.86)	53.16 (1.7)	24.82 (1.71)	21.52 (2.59)	52.31 (2.46)	37.21 (0.49)	73.28 (0.33)
	BFVCLS (2)	52.46 (0.97)	53.59 (0.86)	53.79 (0.86)	18.78 (1.56)	14.36 (1.04)	54.01 (3.23)	35.23 (0.65)	72.30 (0.36)
	BFE (2)	49.15 (0.63)	50.96 (0.6)	51.30 (0.55)	25.14 (0.5)	22.35 (0.74)	52.14 (3.68)	35.96 (0.69)	71.90 (0.36)
	BF	9.90	18.32	21.60	21.03	68.05	12.85	14.60	54.14
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	48.76	50.51	50.56	23.71	22.39	35.82	33.91	71.89
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	13.00	20.07	23.24	18.99	44.92	12.97	13.59	53.47
	OSHOT-TC	14.98	25.13	31.76	34.49	64.18	27.10	34.78	70.96
	CorEx	48.39	50.09	50.12	23.00	21.89	34.69	23.64	60.20
	GLDA	43.19	43.79	43.79	10.91	9.73	17.03	16.56	60.99
Heritage	BFE-Sup (5)	53.44	56.59	56.81	49.52	39.42	67.95	58.86	89.85
	BFV (5)	40.10 (1.41)	47.23 (1.36)	51.42 (1.5)	44.20 (1.22)	50.34 (2.11)	41.75 (0.85)	46.68 (0.56)	81.55 (0.32)
	BWV (5)	33.75 (0.98)	42.22 (0.77)	47.29 (0.85)	41.89 (0.64)	51.99 (2.07)	37.30 (0.95)	45.08 (0.49)	79.90 (0.21)
	BV (5)	42.37 (1.01)	47.77 (1.11)	50.26 (1.4)	41.81 (1.49)	41.18 (2.85)	46.84 (1.39)	45.33 (0.25)	81.28 (0.25)
	BFVCLS (5)	41.58 (1.61)	46.34 (1.26)	48.61 (1.17)	36.18 (1.25)	33.39 (1.94)	47.93 (3.81)	40.75 (0.46)	80.81 (0.15)
	BFE (5)	40.05 (1.04)	45.65 (0.73)	48.60 (0.59)	38.41 (0.72)	37.44 (0.88)	42.86 (0.74)	40.15 (0.46)	80.86 (0.34)
	BF	4.41	11.06	13.44	15.81	67.63	9.22	9.65	49.20
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	41.50	44.95	46.10	38.21	36.36	44.89	40.32	78.10
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	0.39	9.17	12.86	16.21	76.19	9.29	9.46	49.09
	OSHOT-TC	9.34	24.08	40.43	29.59	73.51	19.37	33.76	75.55
	CorEx	41.25	44.27	44.87	35.61	32.67	43.58	31.60	71.87
	GLDA	24.64	25.14	25.14	14.95	13.43	19.30	18.58	66.81

Table 2: Results for classification performance. Definition of metrics can be found at Appendix E. Highest values are marked with bold font. Numbers in the brackets are γ values (for model name) or standard deviation (for metrics). All numbers are percentages. γ values are chosen based on the observation of the aggressiveness of the model.

	ambience	service	price	food
The wait staff is friendly, and the food has gotten better and better! ('food', 'service')	0.43	0.69	0.37	0.73
The staff is unbelievably friendly, and I dream about their Saag gosht...so good. ('service', 'food')	0.43	0.71	0.36	0.51
The crust is thin, the ingredients are fresh and the staff is friendly. ('food', 'service')	0.47	0.69	0.30	0.68
The food is outstanding and the service is quick, friendly and very professional. ('food', 'service')	0.47	0.88	0.30	0.74
Get the soup and a nosh (pastrami sandwich) for \$8 and you're golden. ('food', 'price')	0.36	0.42	0.52	0.53
Wonderful menu, warm inviting ambiance, great service the FOOD keeps me coming back! ('food', 'ambience', 'service')	0.61	0.69	0.32	0.68
The food was good, the service prompt, and the price very reasonable. ('food', 'service', 'price')	0.42	0.80	0.76	0.81
Great food at REASONABLE prices, makes for an evening that can't be beat! ('food', 'price')	0.47	0.35	0.78	0.72
While the food was excellent, it wasn't cheap (though not extremely expensive either). ('food', 'price')	0.34	0.32	0.69	0.75
I found the food, service and value exceptional everytime I have been there. ('food', 'service', 'price')	0.33	0.68	0.43	0.65

Table 4: An exemplar of document-topic matrix using sentences selected from *Restaurant* dataset, where rows represent documents and columns represent topics. Words in brackets after the document show the corresponding groundtruth label.

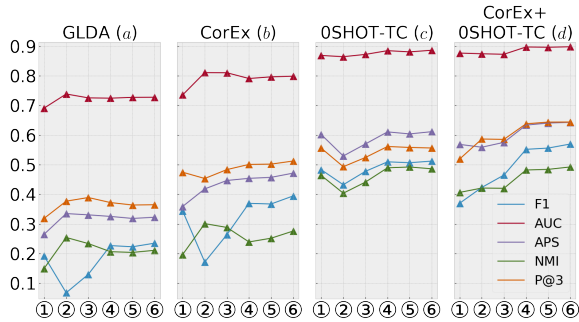


Figure 2: Ablation study with respect to various backend models and components, averaged across 5 multi-label datasets excluding *Heritage* dataset. Title: different backend models. X-axis: ①: Backend model only; ②: ①+BERT+encoder; ③: ②+Flow; ④: ③+VAE; ⑤: ④+TF-IDF; ⑥: ⑤+HPS. NMI: Normalized Mutual Information

mance by averaging several key metrics across 5 multi-label (excluding *Heritage*) datasets in Fig 2.

The results shown in Fig 2 suggest that there is a consistent improvement of BFV models (at stage ⑥) with respect to various backends (at stage ①) in terms of F1, manifesting the generalizability of the benefits brought by BFV. Furthermore, after adopting the flow model and VAE in step ③ and step ④, most metrics outperform that of the base models. This indicates the effectiveness of Flow-calibrated embeddings and extra two losses (L_R and L_{KLD}) brought by VAE. On the other hand, the TF-IDF averaging strategy (⑤) does not result in significant effects on model performance. Also, the HPS strategy (⑥) does yield performance gains when GLDA and CorEx as backend models, but has limited effects on OSHOT-TC and CorEx+OSHOT-TC backend models.

We also conducted a sensitivity analysis with respect to γ and ω in Fig 3. It could be observed that the model performs best when γ is between 0.5 and 5 and ω is between 0.5 and 0.6 for nearly

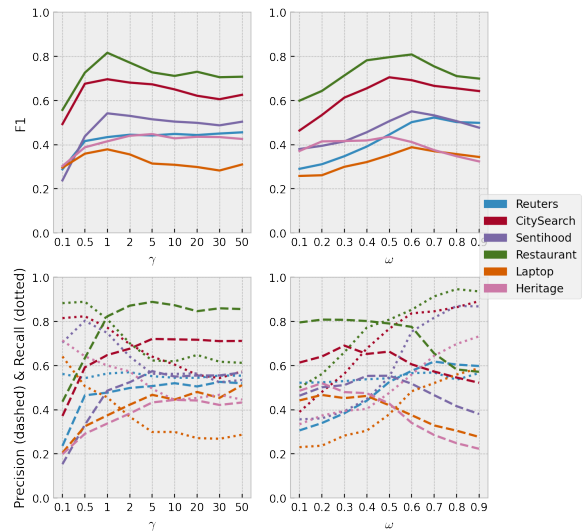


Figure 3: Sensitivity with respect to γ and ω in terms of F1 (solid line), Precision (dashed line) and Recall (dotted line) on 6 datasets

all datasets. From the bottom two plots in Fig 3 we can see that, γ has a positive (negative) relationship with Precision (Recall). This relationship is reversed when it comes to ω . This makes sense because γ controls the relative weight of L_{KLD} and $L_{\mathcal{T}}$ in the loss function, and ω controls the weight of the combination of two backend models. Therefore, they could influence the aggressiveness of the model. This can be used to control specificity and sensitivity of the model (with default value of $\gamma = 1$ and $\omega = 0.5$).

5.3 Discussion

Effectiveness of Flow and VAE Based on the performance of VAE-ablated models (**BF**, **BF** and **OSHOT-TC-Flow**) and Flow-ablated models (**BV** and **BWV**) shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, we can observe that, neither Flow nor VAE alone can outperform their combination (**BFV**) in terms of

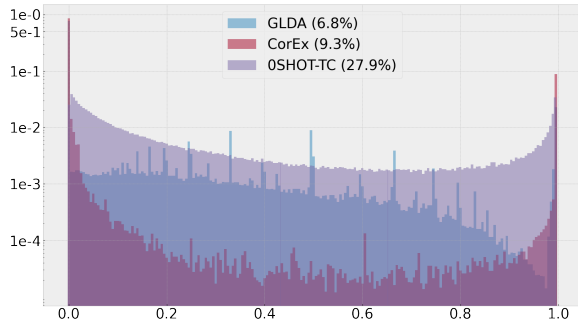


Figure 4: Normalized histogram of all predicted probabilities (x-axis) by backend models. The numbers in the bracket are the percentage of positive predictions.

F1-score and APS. This reflects the importance of combining Flow and VAE to model disentangled latent variables within calibrated BERT embeddings.

Mixture of Backend Except for the benefits brought by the pre-trained language model and embeddings calibration, we also suggest that BFV can learn from both a sparser and conservative model (CorEx) and a denser and aggressive model (OSHOT-TC) simultaneously:

(1) BFV can capture complementary information from seed words in the results of CorEx in addition to the topic surface name. Specifically, Fig 2 shows that the average of the results of CorEx and OSHOT-TC has a lower value of F1-score (① of d) compared to that of only OSHOT-TC (① of c). Note that this still holds even if we compare F1-score in ③ of d and ① of c . However, after being fully processed by BFV, the F1-score in ⑥ of d is significantly large compared to that of using only OSHOT-TC (⑥ of c) as backend.

(2) Results from CorEx may provide regularization. We observe in Fig 4 that, results from CorEx are sparser and conservative (most labels were predicted to be negative) than that of OSHOT-TC. We also observe from Table 2 that CorEx has a higher Precision than GLDA (and thus GLDA is not mixed) and OSHOT-TC in general.

Different Language Models When replacing the backend language model (distil-BERT) with BERT, RoBERTa and XLM-R, in terms of the F1-score over 10 runs averaged across the 6 datasets, we found: BERT-base (54.35%), BERT-large (54.54%), RoBERTa-base (55.47%), RoBERTa-large (55.96%) and XLM-R-base (54.50%) compared to distil-BERT of 54.85% (detailed dataset-specific results can be found in Appendix C). However, we simply tested these models using the same

hyper-parameters, which may cause impacts on the performance. We didn't test the effects of different combinations of language models and hyper-parameters because the potential amount of computation will be very large for grid search. Thus, it is difficult to draw conclusions at this stage and we propose to leave in-depth analysis as future work where different characteristics of the backend language model should be thoroughly considered.

6 Conclusion

We presented BFV, a WSMLTC model, that uses a VAE framework to reconstruct BERT-produced and flow-calibrated sentence embeddings under the guidance of the averaged results of CorEx and OSHOT-TC. It can significantly outperform other WSMLTC models in key metrics and achieve a approximately 84% performance of a fully-supervised model in terms of macro F1-score evaluated on 6 datasets. We found the improvements are mainly due to: (1) combining BERT and VAE framework, (2) mapping the sentence embeddings into a standard Gaussian space to better fit the overall objective of the VAE framework and (3) learning simultaneously from the results produced by a mixture of backends. As the input of surface name of topics and seed words are only used to produce \mathcal{T} , BFV can be viewed as a post-processing model to refine an already made document-topic matrix.

One limitation of the current BFV model is that it does not explicitly model the relationship between topics and words. Thus, relevant tasks such as calculating topic coherence and selecting keywords for each topic cannot be done directly. Another drawback of the BFV model is that it does not take into account the dependencies and hierarchies within topics. This may limit the model's performance for datasets in which labels are correlated.

In the future, BFV could be improved by reconstructing embeddings of each words in a sentence rather than an embedding of a sentence as a whole. This can also potentially expand this method into an applicable generative model for real sentence generation. Further work could also evaluate the performance of the model using embeddings made by language models other than distil-BERT.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback. We would also want to thank Dr Pontus Stenetorp for his helpful advice.

References

- Alex MG Almeida, Ricardo Cerri, Emerson Cabrera Paraiso, Rafael Gomes Mantovani, and Sylvio Barbon Junior. 2018. Applying multi-label techniques in emotion identification of short texts. *Neurocomputing*, 320:35–46.
- David Andrzejewski and Xiaojin Zhu. 2009. Latent dirichlet allocation with topic-in-set knowledge. In *Proceedings of the NAACL HLT 2009 Workshop on Semi-Supervised Learning for Natural Language Processing*, pages 43–48.
- David Andrzejewski, Xiaojin Zhu, and Mark Craven. 2009. Incorporating domain knowledge into topic modeling via dirichlet forest priors. In *Proceedings of the 26th annual international conference on machine learning*, pages 25–32.
- Chidanand Apt'e, Fred Damerau, and Sholom M. Weiss. 1994. Automated learning of decision rules for text categorization. *ACM Transactions on Information Systems*.
- Jimmy Lei Ba, Jamie Ryan Kiros, and Geoffrey E Hinton. 2016. Layer normalization. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1607.06450*.
- Samuel Brody and Noemie Elhadad. 2010. An unsupervised aspect-sentiment model for online reviews. In *Human language technologies: The 2010 annual conference of the North American chapter of the association for computational linguistics*, pages 804–812.
- Tom B Brown, Benjamin Mann, Nick Ryder, Melanie Subbiah, Jared Kaplan, Prafulla Dhariwal, Arvind Neelakantan, Pranav Shyam, Girish Sastry, Amanda Askell, et al. 2020. Language models are few-shot learners. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2005.14165*.
- Christopher P Burgess, Irina Higgins, Arka Pal, Loic Matthey, Nick Watters, Guillaume Desjardins, and Alexander Lerchner. 2018. Understanding disentangling in β -vae. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1804.03599*.
- Jacob Devlin, Ming-Wei Chang, Kenton Lee, and Kristina Toutanova. 2018. Bert: Pre-training of deep bidirectional transformers for language understanding. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1810.04805*.
- Kawin Ethayarajh. 2019. How contextual are contextualized word representations? comparing the geometry of bert, elmo, and gpt-2 embeddings. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1909.00512*.
- Ryan J Gallagher, Kyle Reing, David Kale, and Greg Ver Steeg. 2017. Anchored correlation explanation: Topic modeling with minimal domain knowledge. *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, 5:529–542.
- Gayatree Ganu, Noemie Elhadad, and Amélie Marian. 2009. Beyond the stars: improving rating predictions using review text content. In *WebDB*, volume 9, pages 1–6. Citeseer.
- Tianyu Gao, Adam Fisch, and Danqi Chen. 2020. Making pre-trained language models better few-shot learners. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2012.15723*.
- Isuru Gunasekara and Isar Nejadgholi. 2018. A review of standard text classification practices for multi-label toxicity identification of online content. In *Proceedings of the 2nd workshop on abusive language online (ALW2)*, pages 21–25.
- Kaiming He, Xiangyu Zhang, Shaoqing Ren, and Jian Sun. 2015. Delving deep into rectifiers: Surpassing human-level performance on imagenet classification. In *Proceedings of the IEEE international conference on computer vision*, pages 1026–1034.
- Irina Higgins, Loic Matthey, Arka Pal, Christopher Burgess, Xavier Glorot, Matthew Botvinick, Shakir Mohamed, and Alexander Lerchner. 2016. beta-vae: Learning basic visual concepts with a constrained variational framework. *ICLR 2017 conference*.
- Quan Hoang. 2018. Predicting movie genres based on plot summaries. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1801.04813*.
- Junjie Huang, Duyu Tang, Wanjun Zhong, Shuai Lu, Linjun Shou, Ming Gong, Daxin Jiang, and Nan Duan. 2021. [WhiteningBERT: An easy unsupervised sentence embedding approach](#). In *Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: EMNLP 2021*, pages 238–244, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Jagadeesh Jagarlamudi, Hal Daumé III, and Raghavendra Udupa. 2012. Incorporating lexical priors into topic models. In *Proceedings of the 13th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, pages 204–213.
- Giannis Karamanolakis, Subhabrata Mukherjee, Guoqing Zheng, and Ahmed Hassan Awadallah. 2021. Self-training with weak supervision. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2104.05514*.
- Diederik P Kingma and Prafulla Dhariwal. 2018. Glow: Generative flow with invertible 1x1 convolutions. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1807.03039*.
- Diederik P Kingma and Max Welling. 2013. Auto-encoding variational bayes. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1312.6114*.
- Bohan Li, Hao Zhou, Junxian He, Mingxuan Wang, Yiming Yang, and Lei Li. 2020. On the sentence embeddings from pre-trained language models. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2011.05864*.
- Yinhan Liu, Myle Ott, Naman Goyal, Jingfei Du, Mandar Joshi, Danqi Chen, Omer Levy, Mike Lewis, Luke Zettlemoyer, and Veselin Stoyanov. 2019. Roberta: A robustly optimized bert pretraining approach. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1907.11692*.
- Ilya Loshchilov and Frank Hutter. 2017. Decoupled weight decay regularization. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1711.05101*.

- Dheeraj Mekala and Jingbo Shang. 2020. Contextualized weak supervision for text classification. In *Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, pages 323–333.
- Yu Meng, Jiaxin Huang, Guangyuan Wang, Zihan Wang, Chao Zhang, Yu Zhang, and Jiawei Han. 2020a. Discriminative topic mining via category-name guided text embedding. In *Proceedings of The Web Conference 2020*, pages 2121–2132.
- Yu Meng, Jiaming Shen, Chao Zhang, and Jiawei Han. 2018. Weakly-supervised neural text classification. In *Proceedings of the 27th ACM International Conference on Information and Knowledge Management*, pages 983–992.
- Yu Meng, Yunyi Zhang, Jiaxin Huang, Chenyan Xiong, Heng Ji, Chao Zhang, and Jiawei Han. 2020b. Text classification using label names only: A language model self-training approach. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.07245*.
- Shervin Minaee, Nal Kalchbrenner, Erik Cambria, Narjes Nikzad, Meysam Chenaghlu, and Jianfeng Gao. 2021. Deep learning-based text classification: A comprehensive review. *ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR)*, 54(3):1–40.
- Maria Pontiki, Dimitris Galanis, John Pavlopoulos, Harris Papageorgiou, Ion Androutsopoulos, and Suresh Manandhar. 2014. [SemEval-2014 task 4: Aspect based sentiment analysis](#). In *Proceedings of the 8th International Workshop on Semantic Evaluation (SemEval 2014)*, pages 27–35, Dublin, Ireland. Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Nils Reimers and Iryna Gurevych. 2019. Sentencebert: Sentence embeddings using siamese bert-networks. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1908.10084*.
- Wendi Ren, Yinghao Li, Hanting Su, David Kartchner, Cassie Mitchell, and Chao Zhang. 2020. Denoising multi-source weak supervision for neural text classification. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.04582*.
- Marzieh Saeidi, Guillaume Bouchard, Maria Liakata, and Sebastian Riedel. 2016. [SentiHood: Targeted aspect based sentiment analysis dataset for urban neighbourhoods](#). In *Proceedings of COLING 2016, the 26th International Conference on Computational Linguistics: Technical Papers*, pages 1546–1556, Osaka, Japan. The COLING 2016 Organizing Committee.
- Victor Sanh, Lysandre Debut, Julien Chaumond, and Thomas Wolf. 2019. Distilbert, a distilled version of bert: smaller, faster, cheaper and lighter. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1910.01108*.
- Timo Schick, Helmut Schmid, and Hinrich Schütze. 2020. Automatically identifying words that can serve as labels for few-shot text classification. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.13641*.
- Timo Schick and Hinrich Schütze. 2020. Exploiting cloze questions for few shot text classification and natural language inference. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2001.07676*.
- Casper Kaae Sønderby, Tapani Raiko, Lars Maaløe, Søren Kaae Sønderby, and Ole Winther. 2016. Ladder variational autoencoders. *Advances in neural information processing systems*, 29:3738–3746.
- Mukund Sundararajan, Ankur Taly, and Qiqi Yan. 2017. Axiomatic attribution for deep networks. In *International Conference on Machine Learning*, pages 3319–3328. PMLR.
- Grigorios Tsoumakas and Ioannis Katakis. 2007. Multi-label classification: An overview. *International Journal of Data Warehousing and Mining (IJDWM)*, 3(3):1–13.
- Zihan Wang, Dheeraj Mekala, and Jingbo Shang. 2020. X-class: Text classification with extremely weak supervision. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.12794*.
- Wenpeng Yin, Jamaal Hay, and Dan Roth. 2019. Benchmarking zero-shot text classification: Datasets, evaluation and entailment approach. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1909.00161*.
- Wenpeng Yin, Nazneen Fatema Rajani, Dragomir Radev, Richard Socher, and Caiming Xiong. 2020. Universal natural language processing with limited annotations: Try few-shot textual entailment as a start. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.02584*.
- Yue Yu, Simiao Zuo, Haoming Jiang, Wendi Ren, Tuo Zhao, and Chao Zhang. 2020. Fine-tuning pre-trained language model with weak supervision: A contrastive-regularized self-training approach. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.07835*.

Appendix

A Variational AutoEncoder (VAE)

Variational AutoEncoder (VAE) (Kingma and Welling, 2013) has been widely used as an unsupervised generative method, especially in computer vision field. It has been shown that β -VAE (Higgins et al., 2016) and its variants are capable of finding visual disentangled latent representations which remain invariant to some transformations (Burgess et al., 2018). This section provides a brief review of VAE and β -VAE.

VAE starts by solving the evidence (or marginal likelihood) $p_\theta(x)$ in Variational Inference (VI) problems involving latent variable Z . In particular, the evidence $p_\theta(x) = \int p(x, z) dz$ is often intractable to compute in practice due to computational cost. In VI, $p_\theta(x)$ can be approximated by introducing variational distributions and building a lower bound \mathcal{L} to reframe the problem as in Eq. 1 based on Jensen’s inequality.

$$\begin{aligned} \log p_\theta(x) &= \log(\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi(z|x)}[p_\theta(x|z) \frac{p(z)}{q_\phi(z|x)}]) \\ &\geq \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi}[\log p_\theta(x|z)] - KLD(q_\phi(z|x)||p(z)) \\ &= \mathcal{L}(\theta, \phi; x) \\ &= -(L_R + L_{KLD}) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

L_R and L_{KLD} refer to reconstruction loss and KLD loss respectively. By considering $q_\phi(z|x)$ as a Gaussian probabilistic encoder, $p(z)$ as a standard Gaussian prior $\mathcal{N}(0, I)$ and $p_\theta(x|z)$ as a probabilistic decoder, the objective can be defined as $\max_{\theta, \phi} \mathcal{L}(\theta, \phi; x)$. In particular, this objective function aims at finding optimal parameters θ and ϕ to maximize the lower bound \mathcal{L} which in turn approximates the log-probability of the data $\log p_\theta(x)$. In addition, in order to estimate the gradients of the lower bound with respect to ϕ more smoothly, a parameterization trick is applied: $z_i \sim q_\phi(z_i|x) = \mu_i + \sigma_i \epsilon_i$, where $\epsilon_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$.

In β -VAE, a hyper-parameter β is added into the objective function as shown in Eq. 2. Usually $\beta > 1$ will result in more disentangled representations and when $\beta = 1$, the β -VAE is equivalent to the vanilla VAE model (Burgess et al., 2018).

$$\mathcal{L}(\theta, \phi; x, \beta) = -(L_R + \beta L_{KLD}) \quad (2)$$

B Comparison with Weakly-supervised Multi-Class Methods

Here we compare our model with the following strong weakly-supervised multi-class models on MLTC datasets:

WeSTClass (Meng et al., 2018): a WSTC model that has been briefly introduced in the related-work section. It can receive inputs of topic surface name, keywords or limited amount of documents. We used the keywords as input to it. We replaced its last softmax layer with sigmoid layer and used the same threshold (0.5).

X-Class (Wang et al., 2020): this methods is based on aligning document representation and class representation. It uses class surface names as input and can generate pseudo labels to train a text classifier. We used its X-Class-Align version which uses a Gaussian Mixture Model (GMM) to make final predictions. We modified its final to output unnormalized probabilities and used the threshold of 0.5.

LOTClass (Meng et al., 2020b): it is based on Masked Category Prediction (MCP) task and a subsequent self-training to perform WSTC with only label surface names. We replaced its last softmax layer with sigmoid and used the same threshold of 0.5. We also tested transforming it into a binary relevance task by only using one label surface name each time, which results in similar performance and therefore is not reported.

We used default hyper-parameters for all three models. We slightly modified keywords and topic surface names if the model has a different specification, otherwise we used the same keywords and topic surface names as used in our model. The results of comparison is presented in Table 5. It can be shown that there is a large performance margin between our model and the weakly-supervised multi-class models on multi-label tasks in terms of key metrics such as F1-score.

C Further Evaluation

Qualitative Analysis To further check the validity of the BFV model, we used Integrated Gradients (IG) (Sundararajan et al., 2017) to calculate the attributions of each word with respect to predicted topics. In Fig 5, we applied this inspection on 3 sentences from different datasets as examples. From Fig 5, it can be seen that the gradients of words can largely align with human intuition.

Clustering Results We also tested our model’s performance in terms of clustering metrics. In calculating clustering metrics, we only used samples with single label in the whole dataset. Table 6 shows the models’ performance measured by clustering metrics.

Embeddings Visualization Embeddings produced at different stages of the model are visualized by T-SNE in Figure 6, where the shift of the embeddings during the process could be observed.

Other Language Models We tested the model’s performance with different backend language models. Table 7 shows the model’s performance on different datasets in terms of F1-score when using other language models. However, we simply tested these models using the same hyper-parameters, which may cause impacts on the performance.

D Supplementary Information of the Datasets

Fig 7 displays the distribution of the amount of topics in the samples in percentage for different datasets used in this paper.

In regard to the *Heritage* dataset, all annotators (authors of the paper) have checked the correctness of labelling and are fully aware of the risks to participant.

E Definition of Evaluation Metrics

In evaluating our model in Table 2, we have the following metrics. Assuming $y_i \in \mathbb{R}^C$ is the ground truth label and \hat{y}_i is the prediction for i th sample, where C is the number of classes:

ACC:

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n I(y_i = \hat{y}_i)$$

HS:

$$\text{Hamming Score} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{|y_i \cap \hat{y}_i|}{|y_i \cup \hat{y}_i|}$$

Precision:

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{|y_i \cap \hat{y}_i|}{|\hat{y}_i|}$$

Recall:

$$\text{Recall} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{|y_i \cap \hat{y}_i|}{|y_i|}$$

F1-score:

$$F_1 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{2|y_i \cap \hat{y}_i|}{|y_i| + |\hat{y}_i|}$$

APS:

Average Precision Score³

AUC:

ROC-AUC score⁴

P@3:

Mean Average Precision @ k = 3⁵

Homogeneity:

homogeneity score⁶

Completeness:

completeness score⁷

NMI:

$$v = \frac{2 \times \text{homogeneity} \times \text{completeness}}{\text{homogeneity} + \text{completeness}}$$

Adj MI:

Adjusted Mutual Info Score⁸

Adj Rand:

Adjusted Rand Score⁹

³https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.average_precision_score.html

⁴https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.roc_auc_score.html

⁵https://github.com/benhamner/Metrics/blob/master/Python/ml_metrics/average_precision.py

⁶https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.homogeneity_score.html#sklearn.metrics.homogeneity_score

⁷https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.completeness_score.html#sklearn.metrics.completeness_score

⁸https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.adjusted_mutual_info_score.html

⁹https://scikit-learn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.metrics.adjusted_rand_score.html

		ACC	F1	Recall	Precision	APS	AUC
Reuters	BFV (20)	44.65	44.99	55.38	51.58	56.18	95.86
	X-Class	27.63	33.83	38.05	40.64	30.44	67.84
	WeSTClass	6.16	1.12	2.60	1.84	2.99	48.18
	LOTClass	0.50	0.06	2.52	0.07	7.15	68.46
CitySearch	BFV (1)	61.07	69.48	76.50	64.92	77.25	92.37
	X-Class	49.77	16.62	25.00	12.44	18.78	50.00
	WeSTClass	25.49	22.26	23.31	24.21	18.99	47.50
	LOTClass	33.33	25.43	36.17	32.93	36.23	69.49
Sentihood	BFV (1)	42.94	53.54	75.58	47.21	59.10	92.12
	X-Class	55.94	17.29	16.29	46.58	12.48	54.32
	WeSTClass	8.92	6.50	12.30	10.61	7.34	51.28
	LOTClass	10.93	4.26	11.72	4.98	10.05	58.75
Restaurant	BFV (1)	68.85	80.49	80.58	80.88	89.73	95.21
	X-Class	38.75	13.96	24.92	9.70	24.75	50.03
	WeSTClass	26.38	23.64	24.94	25.91	25.90	49.72
	LOTClass	35.25	13.53	25.16	37.41	44.58	69.51
Laptop	BFV (2)	45.72	36.40	38.59	42.75	39.25	73.38
	X-Class	68.07	16.20	20.00	13.61	11.88	50.00
	WeSTClass	22.65	15.01	18.93	19.53	12.73	49.27
	LOTClass	9.03	10.41	28.27	18.04	15.83	55.45
Heritage	BFV (5)	40.10	44.20	50.34	41.75	46.68	81.55
	X-Class	41.25	7.31	12.50	5.16	10.01	50.22
	WeSTClass	10.12	8.47	9.59	12.07	9.80	48.71
	LOTClass	10.25	5.48	15.42	4.15	16.41	61.87

Table 5: Performance of BFV in comparison with weakly-supervised multi-class models on multi-label datasets. All numbers are percentages.

Sentence 1 (from Laptop)

Operation_performance (Probability = 0.857)

this (0.021) things (-0.007) run (0.259) smoothly (0.226) for (-0.002) its (0.158) price (0.049) , (0.035)
 and (0.024) the (0.142) battery (0.519) life (0.291) seems (-0.009) to (0.101) go (0.04) on (0.031)
 forever (0.12) . (0.048)

Price (Probability = 0.612)

this (0.117) things (0.117) run (0.018) smoothly (-0.157) for (0.265) its (0.18) price (0.906) , (0.074)
 and (-0.011) the (0.062) battery (-0.062) life (-0.01) seems (-0.005) to (0.041) go (0.108) on (0.103)
 forever (-0.017) . (0.054)

Sentence 2 (from CitySearch)

Food (Probability = 0.845)

the (0.112) food (0.707) was (0.105) well (0.157) prepared (0.276) and (0.103) the (0.044) service (-0.038)
 impeccable (0.042) . (-0.007)

Staff (Probability = 0.647)

the (0.088) food (-0.052) was (0.014) well (0.129) prepared (0.026) and (0.038) the (0.14) service (0.447)
 impeccable (-0.018) . (0.02)

Sentence 3 (from SentiHood)

Green-nature (Probability = 0.754)

in (-0.008) west (0.075) london (0.014) the (0.002) areas (0.082) of (0.012) location2 (0.112) and (-0.023)
 location1 (0.112) are (0.033) very (0.14) nicelots (0.128) of (0.028) green (0.485) space (0.227) , (0.044)
 nice (0.355) housing (-0.105) , (0.01) good (0.182) transportation (0.015) links (0.013) , (0.01) but (0.061)
 it (0.032) ' (0.008) s (0.039) expensive (-0.064)

Transit-location (Probability = 0.593)

in (0.089) west (0.055) london (0.008) the (-0.009) areas (0.015) of (-0.017) location2 (0.068) and (-0.006)
 location1 (0.059) are (-0.009) very (-0.0) nicelots (0.03) of (-0.008) green (0.038) space (-0.014) , (0.002)
 nice (0.011) housing (0.056) , (0.031) good (0.113) transportation (0.524) links (0.39) , (0.056) but (0.017)
 it (0.046) ' (-0.004) s (0.026) expensive (-0.069)

Price (Probability = 0.542)

in (0.023) west (0.047) london (-0.013) the (0.017) areas (-0.035) of (0.057) location2 (0.096) and (0.021)
 location1 (0.096) are (0.088) very (0.104) nicelots (0.071) of (0.048) green (0.02) space (0.014) , (0.101)
 nice (-0.046) housing (0.189) , (0.115) good (0.098) transportation (0.092) links (-0.158) , (0.113) but (0.014)
 it (0.032) ' (0.037) s (0.038) expensive (0.472)



0

1

Figure 5: Qualitative analysis of the correct predictions made by BFV model using Integrated Gradients (IG). Numbers with bracket attached to each words are gradients given by the IG

		Homogeneity	Completeness	NMI	Adj MI	Adj Rand
Reuters	BFV (20)	67.72 (0.39)	58.73 (0.74)	62.90 (0.56)	61.87 (0.58)	69.99 (1.86)
	BWV (20)	66.08 (0.38)	54.94 (0.62)	60.00 (0.52)	58.87 (0.53)	64.90 (1.45)
	BV (20)	67.87 (0.38)	61.73 (0.64)	64.66 (0.48)	63.71 (0.5)	73.34 (0.83)
	BFVCLS (20)	64.17 (1.1)	60.21 (1.98)	62.11 (1.41)	61.23 (1.43)	71.00 (3.85)
	BFE (20)	63.29 (0.26)	56.39 (0.33)	59.64 (0.28)	58.56 (0.29)	69.03 (0.6)
	BF	22.45	17.47	19.65	17.93	9.12
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	58.74	45.12	51.04	49.62	54.98
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	11.36	7.22	8.83	6.33	3.99
	OSHOT-TC	63.93	52.93	57.91	56.78	64.09
	CorEx	34.40	25.24	29.12	27.23	22.75
	GLDA	46.96	31.69	37.85	35.98	23.46
CitySearch	BFV (1)	51.71 (1.19)	48.99 (1.17)	50.31 (1.16)	50.21 (1.16)	60.21 (1.37)
	BWV (1)	44.91 (1.24)	42.36 (1.64)	43.60 (1.44)	43.48 (1.44)	51.63 (1.94)
	BV (1)	43.50 (1.7)	43.19 (2.29)	43.32 (1.7)	43.20 (1.7)	51.72 (2.89)
	BFVCLS (1)	40.11 (1.95)	44.07 (1.8)	41.98 (1.68)	41.85 (1.68)	50.32 (2.88)
	BFE (1)	41.06 (0.81)	42.58 (0.87)	41.81 (0.81)	41.67 (0.81)	50.94 (0.78)
	BF	0.69	2.77	1.11	0.73	2.59
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	35.86	33.45	34.61	34.47	40.80
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	14.94	13.61	14.25	14.06	13.96
	OSHOT-TC	43.24	46.24	44.69	44.56	54.24
	CorEx	15.92	14.07	14.94	14.76	8.28
	GLDA	7.36	6.24	6.75	6.56	6.75
Sentihood	BFV (1)	53.83 (1.48)	51.72 (1.48)	52.76 (1.46)	52.34 (1.47)	49.13 (2.69)
	BWV (1)	48.83 (1.39)	48.41 (1.15)	48.62 (1.25)	48.15 (1.26)	37.53 (3.33)
	BV (1)	45.42 (3.17)	48.56 (2.38)	46.92 (2.61)	46.41 (2.64)	28.08 (5.67)
	BFVCLS (1)	34.68 (2.8)	41.01 (2.71)	37.57 (2.69)	36.96 (2.73)	20.68 (5.11)
	BFE (1)	42.67 (0.75)	44.54 (0.76)	43.59 (0.75)	43.06 (0.76)	28.01 (0.8)
	BF	3.37	5.26	4.11	3.44	3.03
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	52.08	50.04	51.04	50.60	49.09
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	5.42	5.56	5.49	4.61	3.59
	OSHOT-TC	57.08	56.77	56.92	56.53	49.87
	CorEx	24.57	25.50	25.03	24.33	11.79
	GLDA	18.67	16.53	17.53	16.84	15.11
Restaurant	BFV (1)	59.23 (1.29)	57.23 (1.85)	58.21 (1.5)	58.13 (1.51)	68.13 (1.84)
	BWV (1)	50.04 (1.78)	44.93 (1.84)	47.34 (1.81)	47.25 (1.81)	53.10 (2.78)
	BV (1)	46.07 (1.34)	44.48 (1.85)	45.25 (1.5)	45.15 (1.5)	49.78 (4.81)
	BFVCLS (1)	41.03 (2.32)	44.44 (2.63)	42.63 (2.08)	42.51 (2.08)	50.98 (4.88)
	BFE (1)	45.86 (0.79)	44.64 (0.84)	45.24 (0.81)	45.14 (0.81)	52.47 (1.19)
	BF	1.41	27.83	2.69	2.45	1.50
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	49.44	45.98	47.65	47.55	56.46
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	1.79	1.59	1.68	1.50	3.32
	OSHOT-TC	54.94	56.52	55.72	55.63	67.55
	CorEx	19.13	18.50	18.81	18.66	5.37
	GLDA	9.93	8.21	8.99	8.83	7.97
Laptop	BFV (2)	22.28 (0.95)	21.90 (1.11)	22.09 (1.02)	21.78 (1.02)	14.27 (0.77)
	BWV (2)	20.38 (0.58)	21.46 (0.51)	20.90 (0.54)	20.58 (0.55)	12.78 (1.18)
	BV (2)	20.45 (0.99)	22.04 (0.98)	21.20 (0.84)	20.87 (0.84)	12.75 (1.75)
	BFVCLS (2)	12.52 (1.12)	17.58 (1.59)	14.60 (1.09)	14.25 (1.11)	6.13 (0.95)
	BFE (2)	18.67 (0.69)	21.48 (0.77)	19.98 (0.73)	19.63 (0.73)	10.42 (0.43)
	BF	2.75	44.62	5.18	4.85	1.46
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	18.45	19.57	19.00	18.66	11.48
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	0.58	0.62	0.60	0.18	-0.25
	OSHOT-TC	15.33	18.53	16.78	16.41	8.40
	CorEx	9.85	11.51	10.61	10.23	3.80
	GLDA	4.11	3.86	3.98	3.61	2.24
Heritage	BFV (5)	26.95 (0.7)	26.49 (0.77)	26.72 (0.73)	26.31 (0.74)	23.98 (1.29)
	BWV (5)	25.24 (0.38)	24.61 (0.35)	24.92 (0.36)	24.50 (0.37)	22.20 (0.5)
	BV (5)	28.99 (0.74)	28.82 (0.71)	28.90 (0.7)	28.50 (0.7)	25.30 (1.66)
	BFVCLS (5)	26.43 (0.89)	27.59 (0.96)	26.99 (0.84)	26.57 (0.84)	22.10 (2.16)
	BFE (5)	26.92 (0.58)	27.04 (0.6)	26.98 (0.59)	26.57 (0.59)	23.28 (0.61)
	BF	0.69	3.40	1.15	0.65	-0.17
	OSHOT-TC+CorEx	21.22	20.78	21.00	20.56	17.60
	OSHOT-TC-Flow	1.08	1.63	1.30	0.61	-0.18
	OSHOT-TC	20.70	20.69	20.70	20.25	16.25
	CorEx	15.07	15.97	15.50	15.01	8.00
	GLDA	6.62	6.41	6.51	5.99	4.52

Table 6: Results for clustering performance. Highest values are marked with bold font. Numbers in the brackets are γ values (in column) or standard deviation (in matrix). All numbers are percentages.

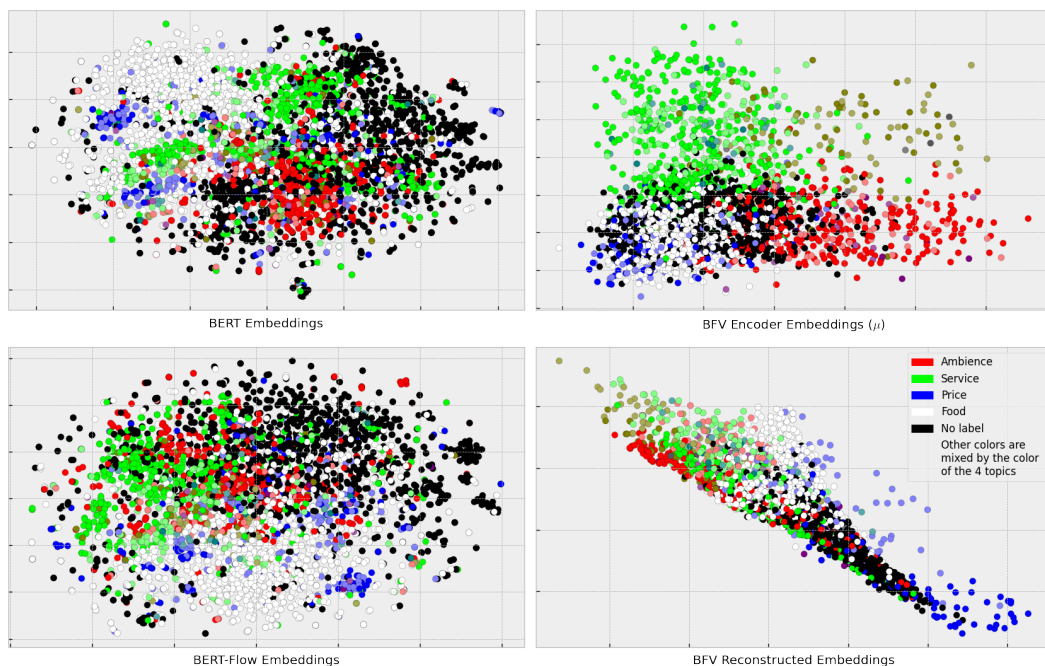


Figure 6: Visualization of embeddings produced at different stages of the model by T-SNE using the *Restaurant* dataset. Red, Green, Blue and White are used to represent topics 'ambience', 'service', 'price' and 'food' in the dataset. Colors other than Red, Blue, Green and White are mixed by the color of the corresponding topics when there are more than one topics assigned to the document.

	BERT-base	BERT-large	RoBERTa-base	RoBERTa-large	XLM-R-base
Reuters	42.12	43.53	40.22	44.16	42.16
CitySearch	69.52	69.05	70.96	71.73	70.42
Sentihood	54.49	52.14	55.34	54.48	53.54
Restaurant	79.02	80.72	81.14	83.53	79.29
Laptop	38.49	38.40	40.56	39.45	39.16
Heritage	42.45	43.41	44.57	42.41	42.43

Table 7: Models performance on 6 datasets with different backend language models in terms of F1-score. All numbers are percentages

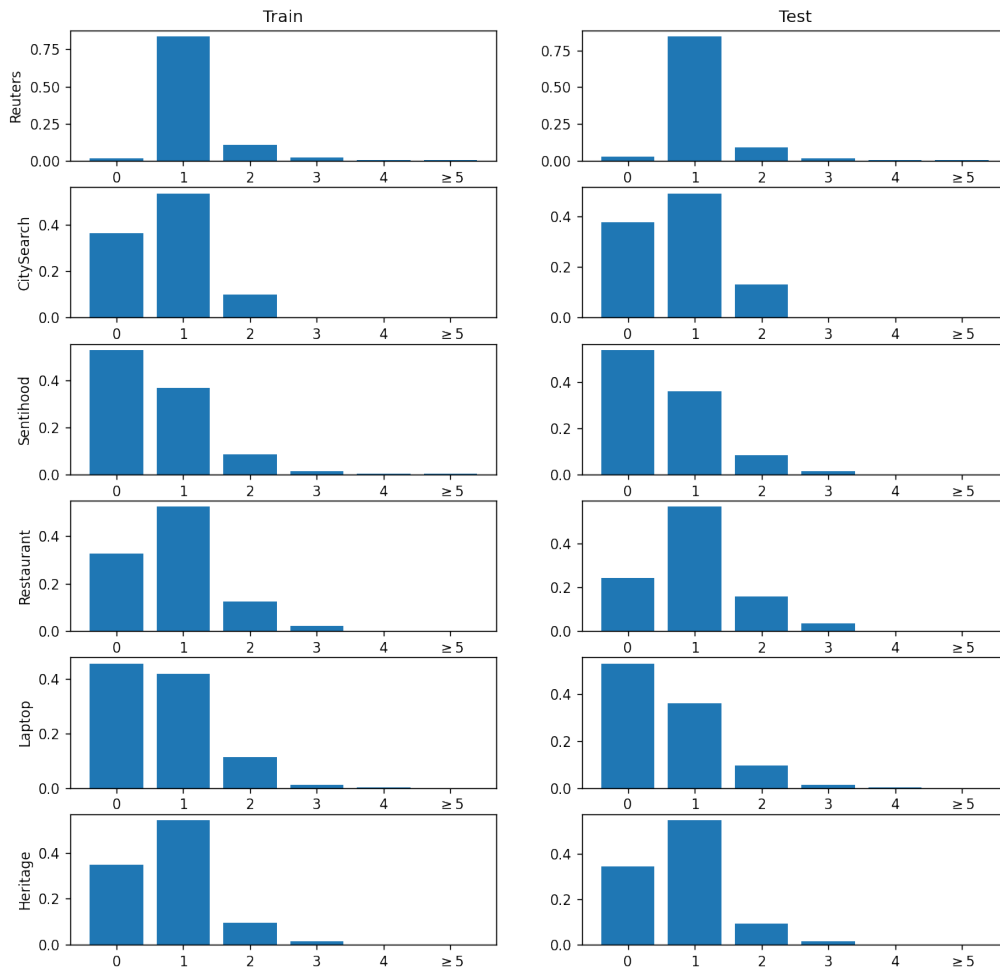


Figure 7: Distribution of the amount of topics in the samples in percentage.