
“DIGITAL MANUFACTURING: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES, INDUSTRIAL APPLICATIONS, BENEFITS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS”

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ABSTRACT

Digital manufacturing has emerged as one of the most transformative developments in modern industrial systems. The integration of advanced digital technologies with conventional manufacturing processes has significantly improved productivity, product quality, flexibility, automation, and sustainability. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data Analytics, Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), Cloud Computing, Additive Manufacturing, Robotics, Blockchain, Digital Twins, and Smart Sensors are reshaping industrial production systems into intelligent and autonomous environments.

Digital manufacturing enables real-time monitoring, predictive analysis, efficient resource utilization, and enhanced decision-making through interconnected digital systems. Industries including automotive, aerospace, healthcare, electronics, construction, energy, and consumer goods are increasingly adopting digital manufacturing approaches to improve competitiveness and operational efficiency.

This review paper presents a detailed study of digital manufacturing, including its historical evolution, architecture, enabling technologies, applications, advantages, limitations, sustainability contributions, industrial challenges, and future trends. The paper also discusses Industry 4.0 concepts and the transition toward smart factories. Furthermore, recent advancements and research opportunities in digital manufacturing are critically reviewed.

KEYWORDS: Digital Manufacturing, Industry 4.0, Smart Manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Digital Twin, Additive Manufacturing, Robotics, Smart Factory, Automation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing industries play a vital role in economic growth, technological advancement, and global industrial development. Over the years, manufacturing systems have evolved from labor-intensive production methods to highly automated and intelligent systems. The emergence of digital technologies has accelerated this transformation, leading to the development of digital manufacturing. Digital manufacturing refers to the use of integrated computer-based technologies, data analytics, automation systems, and communication networks throughout the product lifecycle, including product design, process planning, production, quality control, and supply chain management. Traditional manufacturing systems often face several limitations such as low production flexibility, high operational costs, delayed decision-making, inefficient resource utilization, limited process visibility, increased downtime, and difficulty in customization. Digital manufacturing addresses these challenges through intelligent automation and real-time data-driven operations. Furthermore, the rapid growth of Industry 4.0 has significantly accelerated the adoption of digital manufacturing technologies. Industry 4.0 emphasizes the integration of smart machines, interconnected systems, artificial intelligence, and autonomous decision-making within manufacturing environments. As a result, modern industries are increasingly shifting toward smart factories where machines, sensors, robots, and software systems continuously communicate to optimize production processes.[10][11][12]

Objectives of Digital Manufacturing

The primary objectives of digital manufacturing are to improve manufacturing efficiency, reduce production costs, enhance product quality, and increase production flexibility. Digital manufacturing also supports mass customization, predictive maintenance, improved supply chain management, reduced downtime, better worker safety, and sustainable industrial development. By integrating digital technologies into manufacturing systems, industries can achieve real-time monitoring, faster decision-making, and optimized resource utilization.

Scope of the Review

This review paper discusses the evolution of digital manufacturing, major enabling technologies, industrial applications, advantages, limitations, sustainability aspects, future

trends, and emerging research opportunities. The paper provides a comprehensive understanding of how digital technologies are transforming conventional manufacturing systems into intelligent and interconnected production environments.

2. Evolution of Manufacturing Systems

Manufacturing systems have evolved through four major industrial revolutions, each bringing significant technological advancements and transforming industrial production methods. The First Industrial Revolution, also known as Industry 1.0, began in the late 18th century with the introduction of steamengines and mechanized production systems. This revolution introduced steam-powered machines, mechanized textile production, and water-powered manufacturing systems, gradually replacing manuallabor. As a result, production capacity increased significantly, marking the beginning of factory-based manufacturing systems and contributing to the rapid growth of industrial economies.

The Second Industrial Revolution, or Industry 2.0, emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centurieswith the introduction of electricity and mass production systems. This phase introduced electrification, assembly line production, scientific management techniques, and mass production methods. These developments improved productivity, reduced manufacturing costs, and enabled the large-scale productionof standardized products.

The Third Industrial Revolution, known as Industry 3.0, introduced electronics, computers, and automation technologies into manufacturing systems. During this period, programmable logic controllers (PLCs), computer numerical control (CNC) systems, industrial automation, and robotics became widely adopted. These technologies improved manufacturing precision, enabled automated production processes, and significantly reduced human intervention in industrial operations.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, or Industry 4.0, represents the digital transformation of manufacturing systems. It introduced advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud computing, big data analytics, cyber-physical systems, smart factories, and digital twins. These technologies enabled real-time manufacturing intelligence, autonomous operations, data-driven decision-making, and highly flexible production systems. Digital manufacturing has become one of the fundamental pillars of Industry 4.0, supporting the development of intelligent and interconnected manufacturing environments. [1][5][11]

3. Concept of Digital Manufacturing

Digital manufacturing combines advanced digital technologies with manufacturing operations to create integrated, intelligent, and connected production systems. It involves various activities such as digital product design, virtual simulations, smart production planning, automated production systems, real-time monitoring, predictive maintenance, and data-driven optimization. Through these technologies, digital manufacturing enables seamless communication between machines, systems, software platforms, and human operators, resulting in improved efficiency, productivity, and operational control.

Digital manufacturing possesses several important characteristics that distinguish it from conventional manufacturing systems. One of its major characteristics is connectivity, where machines, systems, and devices continuously communicate through digital networks. Another important feature is automation, which allows manufacturing processes to operate with minimal human intervention using robotics and intelligent control systems. Real-time monitoring is also a critical characteristic, enabling industries to continuously collect and analyze operational data for improved decision-making. In addition, digital manufacturing incorporates intelligence through artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques that support autonomous and data-driven operations. Flexibility is another key aspect, allowing production systems to quickly adapt to changing market demands and customized product requirements. Furthermore, virtualization enables industries to create digital models and simulations for process optimization, performance analysis, and product testing before physical production takes place.

4. Architecture of Digital Manufacturing

The architecture of digital manufacturing generally consists of multiple interconnected layers that work together to enable intelligent and efficient manufacturing operations. The first layer is the physical layer, which consists of industrial machines, robotic systems, production equipment, sensors, and other manufacturing devices that directly perform industrial operations. This layer forms the foundation of the manufacturing environment and generates operational data for higher-level processing systems.

The second layer is the data acquisition layer, which is responsible for collecting manufacturing data from machines and production systems using technologies such as IoT devices, smart sensors, RFID systems, and programmable logic controllers. The collected data includes information related to machine performance, production conditions, quality

parameters, and environmental conditions.

The communication layer serves as the third layer and transfers industrial data between manufacturing systems through wired and wireless communication technologies. Ethernet networks, industrial communication protocols, cloud connectivity, and advanced technologies such as 5G communication are widely used to ensure fast and reliable data transmission across the manufacturing environment.

The fourth layer is the data processing layer, which analyses collected industrial data using advanced computational technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, cloud computing, and big data analytics. This layer converts raw industrial data into meaningful insights that support decision-making and process optimization.

Finally, the application layer provides various industrial applications such as production planning, quality monitoring, predictive maintenance, inventory management, and supply chain coordination. This layer enables industries to use processed information for operational control, process improvement, and strategic decision-making.[3][4][16]

5. Key Technologies in Digital Manufacturing

Internet of Things (IoT)

The Internet of Things (IoT) enables communication between industrial machines, devices, and systems through internet-based networks. IoT systems use smart sensors to collect real-time manufacturing data, allowing organizations to monitor and control industrial operations more effectively. IoT technology is widely applied in areas such as machine health monitoring, predictive maintenance, inventory tracking, environmental monitoring, smart logistics, and energy management. The implementation of IoT systems improves machine utilization, reduces downtime, enhances process visibility, and supports faster response times and better operational control. Despite these advantages, IoT systems also face several challenges, including cybersecurity risks, data privacy concerns, and network reliability issues.[8]

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) enables machines to simulate human intelligence and perform complex decision-making tasks. In manufacturing, AI utilizes technologies such as machine learning, deep learning, neural networks, computer vision, and natural language processing to

improve industrial automation and enhance decision-making capabilities.[17][18] AI is widely applied in predictive maintenance, where it predicts equipment failures before breakdowns occur, and in quality inspection, where computer vision systems automatically detect defects in products. It is also used for production optimization by improving production schedules and workflows, as well as demand forecasting through the analysis of customer demand patterns. The implementation of AI in manufacturing provides several benefits, including increased productivity, reduced errors, improved product quality, and lower maintenance costs.

Big Data Analytics

Manufacturing systems generate massive volumes of both structured and unstructured data, and big data analytics helps industries extract meaningful insights from this production data. Manufacturing data is collected from various sources, including sensors, ERP systems, machines, supply chains, and customer feedback. Big data analytics is widely used in manufacturing for applications such as process optimization, failure prediction, quality analysis, production forecasting, and energy optimization. These applications enable industries to make informed decisions, improve operational efficiency, and enhance overall production performance.

Cloud Computing

Cloud computing provides shared computing resources through internet platforms, enabling industries to access and manage data and applications efficiently. It offers several advantages, including centralized data storage, remote access to manufacturing systems, scalability, reduced IT infrastructure costs, and real-time collaboration between departments and industrial facilities. In the manufacturing sector, cloud computing is widely used for cloud-based manufacturing, remote machine monitoring, supply chain coordination, and data sharing, helping organizations improve flexibility, connectivity, and operational efficiency.

Cyber-Physical Systems(CPS)

Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) integrate physical manufacturing equipment with digital control systems to create intelligent and connected industrial environments. CPS enables autonomous operations, smart decision-making, self-optimization, and intelligent monitoring within manufacturing systems. These systems consist of several interconnected components, including sensors, controllers, communication systems, and data processing units. Sensors collect information from physical manufacturing systems,

while controllers manage operational activities. Communication systems enable data exchange between devices, and data processing units analyze information to support intelligent decision-making and improve overall system performance.[4][6]

Additive Manufacturing

Additive Manufacturing, commonly known as 3D printing, creates components layer-by-layer from digital models.[7] Several additive manufacturing technologies are used in industrial applications. Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM) is commonly used for thermoplastic-based printing, while Stereolithography (SLA) uses photopolymer resins to produce high-precision parts. Selective Laser Sintering (SLS) utilizes laser energy to fuse powdered materials, and Electron Beam Melting (EBM) is primarily used for fabricating metal components in aerospace and biomedical industries. Additive manufacturing is widely applied in rapid prototyping, aerospace component production, biomedical implants, customized product manufacturing, and lightweight structural fabrication. The technology allows industries to manufacture highly complex geometries that are difficult to achieve using conventional manufacturing methods. It also offers several advantages, including reduced material waste, enhanced design flexibility, faster prototyping capabilities, and the ability to fabricate complex geometries with high precision.

Robotics and Automation

Industrial robots are widely used for repetitive and hazardous manufacturing tasks in modern industries. Several types of industrial robots are used in manufacturing processes, including articulated robots, which are commonly used for flexible multi-axis operations, and Cartesian robots, which perform precise linear movements. SCARA robots are suitable for assembly operations, while Delta robots are used for high-speed pick-and-place applications. Collaborative robots (Cobots) are designed to work safely alongside human operators, improving human-machine interaction in shared workspaces. Industrial robots are extensively applied in welding, painting, packaging, material handling, assembly, and inspection operations. The use of robotics in manufacturing enhances precision, increases production speed, reduces labor costs, and improves workplace safety by minimizing human exposure to hazardous environments.

Digital Twin Technology

A digital twin is a virtual representation of a physical object or manufacturing system that continuously receives real-time data from its physical counterpart. This technology enables industries to create accurate digital models that mirror real-world operations, allowing better monitoring and control of systems. Digital twin technology is widely applied in equipment monitoring, process simulation, predictive maintenance, and product lifecycle management. Industries use digital twins to improve system understanding, optimize performance, and reduce operational risks.[3][20] It also offers several advantages, including reduced equipment downtime, improved system understanding, enhanced process optimization, and more effective maintenance planning through real-time simulation and monitoring.

Block chain Technology

Blockchain technology provides secure and transparent data management, making it increasingly valuable in modern manufacturing systems. It is widely used in manufacturing for applications such as supply chain tracking, product authentication, secure data sharing, and the implementation of smart contracts. These applications help improve transparency and security across various industrial operations by ensuring that data is reliable, tamper-proof, and easily traceable. Overall, blockchain technology enhances transparency, strengthens data security, and provides better traceability throughout manufacturing processes and supply chain operations.

6. Smart Manufacturing and Smart Factories

Smart manufacturing refers to intelligent manufacturing systems capable of autonomous operation and self-optimization. A smart factory integrates various advanced technologies such as IoT systems, AI-based analytics, robotics, cloud computing, and real-time monitoring to create a highly connected and efficient production environment. Smart factories are characterized by autonomous production systems, real-time communication, flexible manufacturing processes, predictive maintenance, and self-learning capabilities. These intelligent production environments help reduce manufacturing time, improve operational efficiency, lower energy consumption, and enhance product quality, making industrial processes more productive and sustainable.[8][14][19]

7. Applications of Digital Manufacturing

Digital manufacturing is widely applied across multiple industries, each benefiting from improved efficiency, precision, and automation. In the automotive industry, digital

manufacturing technologies are used in robotic assembly lines, automated welding operations, vehicle simulation systems, smart logistics management, and predictive maintenance programs, all of which improve production efficiency and manufacturing precision.[2][15] These advancements enable faster production, improved product quality, and reduced operational costs through automation and intelligent production systems. In the aerospace industry, digital manufacturing is used for high-precision applications such as lightweight aircraft structure production, additive manufacturing of aircraft parts, digital twin simulation, and structural health monitoring systems, which enhance product reliability and reduce manufacturing complexity.[2][15]

In the healthcare industry, digital manufacturing supports personalized healthcare solutions through the production of customized implants, prosthetics, surgical instruments, and advanced medical devices, where additive manufacturing and digital design technologies play a key role in enabling patient-specific solutions.[7] The electronics industry also relies heavily on digital manufacturing for semiconductor production, printed circuit board (PCB) assembly, automated inspection systems, and smart packaging operations, ensuring high precision and efficiency in production processes. In the construction industry, digital manufacturing is used for 3D printed buildings, smart construction equipment, and Building Information Modeling (BIM), which improve construction efficiency, reduce material waste, and support innovative architectural designs. Similarly, the energy sector applies digital manufacturing technologies in smart grids, wind turbine monitoring systems, power plant automation, and renewable energy management systems, helping improve energy efficiency and operational reliability.

8. Advantages of Digital Manufacturing

Digital manufacturing provides several important advantages that improve industrial performance and efficiency. One of the key benefits is increased productivity, as automation significantly enhances production speed and operational efficiency. It also leads to improved product quality, where AI and sensor-based systems help reduce manufacturing defects. Additionally, optimized processes contribute to reduced operational costs by lowering labor and maintenance expenses.

Digital manufacturing enables flexible manufacturing systems that allow industries to quickly adapt to changing customer demands. Predictive maintenance, supported by real-time monitoring, reduces unexpected machine failures and improves equipment reliability. Faster

product development is another advantage, as digital simulations accelerate product design and testing processes. Safety is also enhanced by automation, which reduces human exposure to hazardous environments. Furthermore, better supply chain management is achieved through real-time tracking, improving logistics efficiency. Finally, digital manufacturing promotes sustainability by reducing waste and lowering energy consumption through more efficient and optimized industrial systems.

9. Challenges in Digital Manufacturing[5][9][17]

Despite its significant advantages, digital manufacturing also faces several challenges that can limit its implementation and effectiveness. One of the major challenges is the high initial investment required, as advanced technologies demand substantial capital expenditure. Cybersecurity threats are another concern, since connected systems are vulnerable to hacking and cyberattacks. The workforce skill gap also poses a challenge, as industries increasingly require skilled personnel in areas such as AI, robotics, and data analytics.

Integration challenges arise because legacy systems are often difficult to integrate with modern digital technologies. In addition, data management complexity is a major issue, as large volumes of industrial data require efficient storage, processing, and analysis. Standardization issues further affect interoperability due to the lack of universal standards across systems and platforms. Lastly, ethical and privacy concerns are associated with AI-based systems, particularly regarding data privacy and the potential displacement of the human workforce.

10. Digital Manufacturing and Sustainability

Sustainable manufacturing is becoming increasingly important due to growing environmental concerns, and digital manufacturing plays a key role in supporting this transition. It contributes to sustainability through energy optimization, waste reduction, efficient material utilization, carbon emission reduction, and the implementation of smart recycling systems. These improvements help industries operate in a more environmentally responsible and resource-efficient manner. Green manufacturing further focuses on reducing environmental impact by adopting eco-friendly production methods and cleaner technologies. In addition, digital manufacturing supports the concept of a circular economy by enabling recycling,

remanufacturing, and effective resource recovery, thereby promoting long-term sustainability in industrial production systems.

11. Future Trend sin Digital Manufacturing[1][3][5][11][15]

The future of digital manufacturing is expected to be shaped by several advanced technologies that will further transform industrial operations. AI-driven autonomous factories will enable production systems to operate with minimal human intervention, improving efficiency and consistency. Human–robotcollaboration will also increase, with collaborative robots (cobots) safely working alongside humanoperators to enhance productivity. Edge computing will support faster real-time decision-making by processing data closer to the source, while 5G and industrial connectivity will significantly improve communication and automation across manufacturing systems.

In addition, quantum computing has the potential to revolutionize manufacturing optimization by solving highly complex problems more efficiently. Future manufacturing will also emphasize sustainable smart manufacturing, focusing on environmentally friendly and resource-efficient production methods. Advanced digital twins will become more intelligent and predictive, enabling better simulation and system optimization. Finally, AI-based supply chains will lead to fully automated and intelligent logistics systems, improving speed, accuracy, and overall supply chain performance.

12. Research Opportunities in Digital Manufacturing

everal research opportunities exist in the field of digital manufacturing, focusing on advancing efficiency, intelligence, and sustainability in industrial systems. Future research areas include AI-based predictive systems, sustainable smart factories, advanced human–machine interaction, cybersecurity frameworks, energy-efficient manufacturing processes, intelligent robotics, autonomous production systems,and real-time optimization algorithms. Researchers are continuously exploring innovative approaches and emerging technologiestoenhance manufacturingperformance,reliability,andustainability.Ongoingstudiesalsoaim to develop more effective solutions that improve system adaptability, reduce operational risks, and optimize overall industrial productivity.

13. Comparison of Advanced Technologies Used in Digital Manufacturing

Technology	Principle/Working	MajorApplications	Advantages	Limitations
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Internet of Things (IoT) [8][14][19]	Connects machines, sensors, and devices through communication networks for real-time data exchange	Machine monitoring, predictive maintenance, inventory tracking, energy management	Real-time monitoring, reduced downtime, better process visibility	Cybersecurity risks, network dependency, data privacy issues
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Uses machine learning and intelligent algorithms for decision-making and automation	Predictive maintenance, defect detection, process optimization, demand forecasting	Improved accuracy, reduced human error, enhanced productivity	High computational requirements, expensive implementation
Big Data Analytics	Analyzes large volumes of manufacturing data for insights and optimization	Quality analysis, production forecasting, process optimization	Better decision-making, operational efficiency, predictive capabilities	Complex data management, storage challenges
Cloud Computing	Provides remote computing resources and centralized data storage	Remote monitoring, cloud manufacturing, industrial data sharing	Scalability, reduced infrastructure cost, easy accessibility	Data security concerns, internet dependency
Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS) [4][6]	Integrates physical manufacturing systems with digital control systems	Smart factories, autonomous production, intelligent monitoring	Real-time control, automation, improved efficiency	High integration complexity, cybersecurity risks
Additive Manufacturing (3D Printing) [7]	Produces components layer-by-layer from digital models	Rapid prototyping, biomedical implants, aerospace components	Reduced material waste, design flexibility, customization	Slow production speed for mass manufacturing
Robotics and Automation	Uses programmable robotic systems for automated operations	Welding, assembly, material handling, packaging	High precision, faster production, improved safety	High installation cost, maintenance complexity
Digital Twin Technology [3][20]	Creates virtual replicas of physical systems for monitoring and simulation	Predictive maintenance, system simulation, product lifecycle management	Better system understanding, reduced downtime, process optimization	Requires large volumes of real-time data
Blockchain Technology	Uses decentralized and secured digital records for data management	Supply chain tracking, product authentication, secure transactions	Improved transparency, enhanced security, better traceability	High energy consumption, scalability limitations
Edge Computing	Processes industrial data near the source instead of centralized systems	Real-time industrial analytics, autonomous control systems	Faster response time, reduced latency, improved reliability	Limited processing capability compared to cloud systems
5G Communication	Provides high-speed and low-latency industrial communication	Smart factories, connected devices, remote operations	Fast data transfer, reliable communication, real-time connectivity	High infrastructure cost
Smart Sensors [17]	Collect and transmit real-time operational data from manufacturing systems	Condition monitoring, quality inspection, environmental monitoring	Accurate data collection, improved monitoring efficiency	Sensor calibration and maintenance issues

14. CONCLUSION

Digital manufacturing has become a major driving force behind modern industrial transformation. The integration of technologies such as IoT, AI, cloud computing, robotics, cyber-physical systems, additive manufacturing, and digital twins has enabled industries to achieve higher productivity, flexibility, quality, and sustainability.

The transition from conventional manufacturing to intelligent manufacturing systems is reshaping global industries. Smart factories equipped with autonomous systems and real-time analytics are improving operational efficiency and enabling data-driven decision-making.

Although digital manufacturing faces challenges such as cybersecurity risks, high investment costs, workforce limitations, and integration complexity, continuous technological advancements are expected to overcome these barriers.

In the future, digital manufacturing will continue to evolve toward fully connected, autonomous, and sustainable production systems. Therefore, it will remain one of the most important pillars of Industry 4.0 and next-generation industrial development.

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