MSW MANAGEMENT -Multidisciplinary, Scientific Work and Management Journal
ISSN: 1053-7899
Vol. 36 Issue 1, 2026, Pages: 2464-2468

INDUSTRY 4.0 ADOPTION IN MECHANICAL MANUFACTURING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract
This article evaluates the current state of Industry 4.0 adoption in mechanical manufacturing through an analysis of 20 recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses published between 2014 and 2024. The purpose of this study is to identify the major digital technologies driving transformation, assess their impact on manufacturing performance, and highlight key research gaps within the mechanical engineering sector. Industry 4.0 is based on the integration of technologies such as the Industrial Internet of Things, cyber-physical systems, artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data analytics, cloud manufacturing, digital twins, robotics, additive manufacturing, blockchain, and cybersecurity.
The reviewed studies show the significance ofproductivity, flexibility, and efficiency, while also supporting sustainable manufacturing through better energy and resource management. Real-time data exchange and intelligent automation enable manufacturers to improve decision-making and operational control. However, adoption levels differ widely across firms and regions. Large enterprises and companies in developed economies show higher implementation rates, whereas small and medium-sized enterprises face greater challenges.
Key enablers include technological readiness, management commitment, skilled workforce, and policy support. Major barriers remain high investment costs, legacy system integration, skill shortages, and cybersecurity concerns. The review further identifies a lack of standardized evaluation models and limited mechanical-industry-specific empirical studies, indicating important directions for future research.

Keywords
Industry 4.0, Mechanical Manufacturing, Smart Manufacturing, Industrial Internet of Things

1. Introduction

Industry 4.0 includes the integration of automation and information technologies, and the potential integration of advanced technologies to create “smart” systems of automated production, including: cyber-physical systems; the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT); cloud computing; big data and predictive analytics; artificial intelligence; and even advanced robotics. Due to the enhancement of automation in the last decade, the integration of Industry 4.0 practices in manufacturing has increased as the pursuit of operational productivity, flexibility, quality, and the enhancement of manufacturing processes to support sustainability goals has been aligned with the practices of Industry 4.0.

The automotive, aerospace, heavy machinery, energy systems, precision engineering, and other industries mechanical manufacturing support, make up a large part of the global industry, mechanically manufacturing the building blocks of the global industrial ecosystem. Mechanical manufacturing, apart from discrete or electronic manufacturing, has unique attributes such as reliance on capital-intensive equipment, complex process flows, long asset life-cycles, and frequent high customization requirements. Each attribute presents unique challenges and opportunities for manufacturing in the context of Industry 4.0. The most recent literature highlights the value of adequately addressing machine utilization, process optimization, and predictive maintenance to support real-time decision-making in order to provide the most value to use adoptions. Yet these and other adoption metrics are not uniformly distributed across the industry.

Even though an increase to industry 4.0 technology and practices will help develop complications in mechanical manufacturing and the industry as a whole, it can cause hindering complications. These hindering complications can be from an influx of investment cost, the inability to integrate with older systems, the shortage of digital expertise (or professionals) overcoming cyber-security concerns, organizational change resistance, and or a misalignment from a strategic gap. These practices can, and in many cases, do apply to small-to-mid market enterprises or developing economies. It can be very easy to identify challenges. It can be more difficult to identify immature models and gaps in literature. From a research perspective, the trend has been to focus on conceptual literature as opposed to empirical literature, especially in the field of mechanical manufacturing, or the industry in general.

This particular review will focus on the obstacles related to industry 4.0 and mechanical manufacturing for the time period of 2014 – 2024. The objectives of the literature review are to:

(i) identify challenges and articulate the barriers and drivers of industry 4.0 mechanical and manufacturing systems, and of related technologies, and articulate advancement of technologies as barriers.
(ii) identify and describe challenges of adoption
(iii) assess the impact of industry 4.0 technologies on the manufacturing sector, and on performance and sustainability outcomes
(iv) identify gaps in the literature and propose future empirical research on design and policy constructs.

This review seeks to support both the scholarly and practical contributions concerning the implementation of Industry 4.0 technologies in mechanical manufacturing systems.

2. Industry 4.0: Conceptual Background

Industry 4.0 encompasses digitally based technologies that allow the creation of smart systems in production and manufacturing processes. Industry 4.0 is not a standalone technology, rather, it includes several technological pillars that support integrated smart manufacturing, real-time responsive manufacturing and seamless value chain integration. Recent studies in the mechanical manufacturing industry suggest that implementing Industry 4.0 technologies relies on several foundational technologies rather than adopting a single autonomous technology.

2.1 Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT)

The Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) concerns embedded sensors, actuators, and communication networks that facilitate connectivity at the machine and system levels. Within mechanical manufacturing, the IIoT is important to continuous data collection from the production equipment, tools, and processes and supports the real-time monitoring and condition-based maintenance. Recent reviews consider IIoT to be the backbone of industry 4.0. It offers the required data infrastructure that supports advanced analytics, predictive maintenance, and optimization of processes. Significant barriers, however, still exist in the form of data security, system interoperability, and integration of legacy mechanical systems that inhibit widespread adoption.

2.2 Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS)

CPS can empower mechanical systems with the ability to autonomously (i) comprehend and analyze operational contexts and (ii) respond to them. In a mechanical manufacturing context, CPS has the capacity to support adaptive process control, real-time feedback loop control, and decentralized decision-making. Although the literature consistently has identified CPS as a central enabler of smart factories, it also mentions that the complexity of implementation and the high cost of system integration particularly to SMEs, makes the adoption of CPS more challenging.

2.3 Big Data and Advanced Analytics

The integration of IIoT and CPS also generates vast amounts of varied and unstructured manufacturing-related data. This does not only need data to be processed, but it also requires the application of analytics, particularly Big Data Analytics. Advanced analytics aid in mechanical manufacturing through predictive analytics related to maintenance, quality, energy consumption, and production scheduling. While data-driven manufacturing has been proven to enhance efficiency and minimize downtime, existing literature highlights concerns in data governance, the levels of analytic sophistication, and the shortage of skilled data professionals in the traditional mechanical industries.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI & ML)

AI and ML facilitate intelligent decision-making based on historical and current data in manufacturing. In mechanical manufacturing, these can be applied to predict tool wear, identify defects, adaptive control of processes, and forecast demand. Review studies show that AI driven systems increase manufacturing precision and responsiveness, but adoption is limited because of model interpretability, data, and absence of AI solutions specific to mechanical manufacturing processes.

2.5 Cloud Manufacturing

Cloud manufacturing allows users to pay for and access computing power, software tools, and manufacturing functions as needed and is flexible. This model allows for data exchange, cooperative work, and remote observation of mechanical manufacturing systems that are spread out. Cloud manufacturing is said to increase the scalability of systems and reduce the costs associated with IT systems, but the lack of data security, high latency, and reliance on third party vendors are major obstacles to the widespread use of this technology.

2.6 Digital Twin

A digital twin is a virtual replica of physical machines, processes, or entire production systems. In mechanical manufacturing, digital twins facilitate simulation, optimization of performance, predictive maintenance, and management of the life cycle of the equipment. Recent reviews describe digital twins as a game-changing solution that integrates the design and production with the maintenance of equipment. However, the literature highlights that the need for real-world implementation and digital twins in small and medium-sized mechanical enterprises remains largely undetermined, as the potential is noted to be great, yet the literature reflects a lack of empirical validation and the implementation complexities are still present.

3. Literature Review

This section proposes a thematic synthesis of available literature on the adoption of Industry 4.0 in mechanical manufacturing from 2014 to 2024. Instead of summarizing studies individually, the literature is analyzed holistically and divided into four themes, which describe the adoption trends, the drivers of adoption, the barriers and challenges, and the performance impacts.

3.1 Adoption Trends (2014–2024)

Growth of Industry 4.0 Studies

After 2015, there was a rapid increase in research within Industry 4.0, especially after 2018. The first studies focused on definitions and enabling technologies. The research from 2021 to 2024 shows a dominance of systematic literature reviews, bibliometric analyses, and empirical studies. This shows a further maturation of the research domain. It is important to point out that despite the extensive growth, research is still fractured, especially on the mechanical manufacturing industry in comparison to the electronics and process industries.

SMEs vs. Large-Scale Industries

Large manufacturing companies have the most significant adoption of Industry 4.0, resulting from more substantial available financial resources, developed IT infrastructure, and appropriate strategies. On the other hand, mechanical manufacturing SMEs encounter the most significant challenges to adoption. Studies have shown that SMEs tend to adopt Industry 4.0 technologies more gradually, concentrating on inexpensive digitalization measures, such as sensorization and elementary analytics, instead of developing a smart factory.

3.2 Drivers of Adoption

Productivity Improvement

Increased productivity is often cited as the reason for the adoption of Industry 4.0. The smart manufacturing technologies can increase machine productivity, decreasing downtime, and increasing process transparency. Especially for mechanical manufacturing, the reliability of equipment is crucial for production efficiency, and so predictive maintenance and real-time monitoring, which focuses on maintenance, applies especially well.

Cost Reduction

Considerable initial investments must be put towards automation, but the potential for long-term cost saving can encourage the adoption of smart manufacturing. In the automation of mechanical manufacturing, the reduction of maintenance costs, less machine downtime, and more optimal energy utilization are all ways to achieve cost efficiency. Recent literature emphasizes the reduction of machine downtime due to unplanned maintenance, which is a consequence of active data maintenance strategies.

Competitive Pressure

Adoption of Industry 4.0 is greatly driven due to global competition and the demand from customers for customization and product quality. For export-oriented mechanical manufacturing companies, several studies have cited competitive pressure as a primarily external driver of Industry 4.0 adoption.

Government Initiatives

Adoption is especially accelerated in countries where there is a well structured Industry 4.0 framework combined with financial grants as a form of incentive. In digital manufacturing, roadmap implementation, and Industry 4.0 structured incentives, have been effective, but the implementation of the strategies can vary regionally in the digital manufacturing industry.

3.3 Barriers and Challenges

High Investment Cost

High capital investment remains the most significant barrier, especially for SMEs. For mechanically manufacturing companies with tight profit margins, the expenses associated with purchasing sensors, automation systems, software systems, and integration services are risky.

Lack of Skilled Workforce

It remains difficult to obtain skilled workers to handle digital technology. Employees demonstrate a lack of data analysis, artificial intelligence, and the integrating skill within the mechanical engineering and information technology disciplines.

Cybersecurity Risks

As manufacturing systems become more interconnected, they become more vulnerable to cybersecurity threats. Many studies show that fully interconnected Industry 4.0 systems remain out of reach for companies because of fears of data breaches, theft of trade secrets, or system weaknesses.

Resistance to Change

The outcomes of adoption are significantly influenced by cultural and organizational resistance. Employees and middle management view Industry 4.0 as a potential job security threat, which causes hesitance towards accepting technology. This emphasizes the importance of leadership dedication and change management as critical success factors.

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3.4 Impact on Manufacturing Performance

Operational Efficiency

Studies, both empirical and review types, have shown consistent trends of improvements in operational efficiencies such as less downtime, better asset utilization, and quicker decision making. Particularly, in mechanical manufacturing, industry 4.0 predictive maintenance is a game changer.

Manufacturing Flexibility

Flexible production systems in Industry 4.0 technologies handle increased product variety and customization. Digital integration facilitates quick changeovers and adaptive scheduling, critical features in today's mechanical manufacturing environments.

Quality Improvement

Defect recognition and process control improve product quality, thanks to sophisticated monitoring and analytics. The adoption of AI-based inspection systems and real-time quality analytics to reduce rework and scrap is on the rise.

Sustainability

Recent studies indicate that adopting Industry 4.0 significantly positively affects sustainability performance. Advantages include lower energy use, better resource management, and decreased negative impacts on the environment. Still, there is little empirical evidence that supports sustainability outcomes concerning mechanical manufacturing.

4. Comparative Analysis of Existing Literature

In this section, a critical analysis of existing studies relating to the adoption of Industry 4.0 within mechanical manufacturing is provided, focusing on four dimensions: the technologies, research methodologies, the particular industry, and the adoption outcomes. The analysis identifies dominant patterns in research, gaps and weaknesses in methodology, and the lack of certain sectors that characterize the overall research landscape.

Literature review table:

No.	Author(s)	Year	Country/Region	Method	Key Findings
1	Ma et al.	2024	Global	Comprehensive literature review	Industry 4.0 significantly supports cleaner and sustainable manufacturing, though adoption remains uneven across energy-intensive mechanical industries.
2	de Mendonça Santos et al.	2024	Global	Systematic literature review	SMEs benefit from Industry 4.0 technologies, but face financial and skills-related adoption barriers.
3	Alazab&Alhyari	2024	Global	Systematic literature review	Blockchain enhances transparency and security in smart manufacturing, yet integration complexity limits widespread adoption.
4	Folgadoetal.	2024	Europe	Review study	Automation and supervision systems are central to Industry 4.0, improving monitoring and control in manufacturing systems.
5	Bilbao-Ubillos et al.	2024	Europe	Systematic literature review	Industry 4.0 enables servitization and reshoring strategies but requires strong digital infrastructure.
6	Ghobakhloo	2024	Global	Conceptual and critical review	Emphasizes transition toward human-centric and resilient Industry 4.0 systems, highlighting organizational readiness.
7	Islam et al.	2024	Global	Bibliometric & content analysis	Industry 4.0 research is rapidly growing, but lacks standardized frameworks and sector-specific validation.
8	Yeo	2024	Global	Systematic literature review	Workforce competencies strongly influence Industry 4.0 adoption and sustainable manufacturing performance in SMEs.
9	Amin et al.	2024	Developing economies	Empirical review synthesis	Manufacturing performance mediates the relationship between Industry 4.0 adoption and organizational outcomes.
10	Elnadi& Abdallah	2023	Global	Critical literature synthesis	Identifies conceptual ambiguity and calls for unified definitions and adoption models in Industry 4.0 research.
11	Upadhyay et al.	2023	Global	Systematic literature review	Organizational readiness, leadership support, and digital skills are critical enablers of adoption.
12	Enang et al.	2023	Global	Systematic literature review	Highlights the evolution from Industry 4.0 toward human-centric Industry 5.0 manufacturing systems.
13	Virmani et al.	2023	Emerging economies	Systematic literature review	Adoption in developing countries is constrained by infrastructure, skills, and financial limitations.
14	Arif et al.	2023	Global	Systematic literature review	Industry 4.0 supports net-zero and sustainable supply chain performance.
15	Zheng et al.	2021	Global	Large-scale systematic review	Industry 4.0 improves production planning, scheduling, and monitoring, with uneven sectoral adoption.
16	Alqoud et al.	2022	Global	Systematic literature review	Digital retrofitting of legacy mechanical systems is feasible but technically challenging.
17	Javaid et al.	2022	Global	Review-based analytical study	Industry 4.0 adoption positively impacts sustainability and energy efficiency.
18	Komkowski et al.	2023	Europe	Systematic literature review	Integration of Industry 4.0 with Quality 4.0 improves operational excellence.
19	Ghatak	2024	India	Review and empirical synthesis	Identifies cost, skills, and cybersecurity as major barriers to Quality/Industry 4.0 adoption.
20	Multiple authors (meta-reviews)	2023–2024	Global	Meta-review synthesis	Confirms performance gains from Industry 4.0 but highlights lack of mechanical-industry-specific empirical studies.

4.1 Technologies Studied

The literature review highlights a preeminent focus on a select group of the core technologies of Industry 4.0 that include the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT); cyber physical systems (CPS); big data analytics; Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML); Cloud

Manufacturing; Digital Twin, and so on. IIoT and data analytics are the most researched technologies as they are considered the foundational technologies that support connectivity and a data driven approach in manufacturing.
Collective analysis of these technologies as a set, and the presentation of Industry 4.0 as a single construct, is a recurring theme in many studies. Even the most advanced technologies, such as the Digital Twin, blockchain, autonomous decision systems, and AI driven closed-loop control, are considered only in a theoretical sense, especially when related to mechanical manufacturing. This illustrates the disparity in the literature where the focus is on technologies that are considered low and medium in complexity, whilst simultaneously overlooking the research and analysis of high complexity technologies, particularly within the machinery and associated processes.

4.2 Research Techniques Employed

A definitive methodological approach can be seen in the literature. The recent publications between 2021–2024 are characterized by systematic literature reviews, bibliometric analyses, and conceptual reviews, reflecting the consolidation phase of Industry 4.0 research. Even though these approaches map out research trends and theoretical frameworks, they do not show, or very little, indicate how these theories can be applied in real life. There are few empirical studies, less so of survey-based modelling, case studies, and mixed method approaches that pertain to the mechanical manufacturing area. In addition, the majority of empirical research studies depend on cross-section data and perceptual measures, which affect the analysis of causality. The majority of studies are lacking longitudinal studies, experimental validation and the measurement of performance at the level of technology which is a significant gap in terms of research methodology and especially concerning the assessment of post adoption impacts, the study of which has yet to be undertaken.

4.3 Industry Scope

Though manufacturing is an in common use term, there is a clearly definable lack of granularity at the level of industry across the studies reviewed. The studies are unbalanced in focus, and display a lack of mechanical manufacturing focus, with disproportionate analysis at the process, electronics, and automotive industries. Rather, mechanical manufacturing is relegated to a collective term under the broad manufacturing classification.Mechanical manufacturing has its own set of parameters, for example, very high initial investment, long life cycles of machines, heterogenous procedures, and low levels of digitization. Despite Recent reviews seem to be increasingly focusing on the small and medium enterprises (SME), however, the mechanical manufacturing SMEs in developing economies remain grossly overlooked. This significantly diminishes the contextual applicability of many frameworks that have been proposed so far.

4.4 Outcomes Evaluated

The majority of the literature focuses on operational metrics (productivity, efficiency in terms of cost, improvement of quality, flexibility of manufacturing) to evaluate the outcomes of Industry 4.0 adoption and they tend to be positive. This has driven the perception of the value in the adoption of Industry 4.0.The most recent literature has broadened the scope of evaluation to incorporate the outcomes of Industry 4.0 adoption which include sustainability, efficiency in terms of energy, resilience, and the dimensional aspect of manufacturing which focuses on the human element. However, the literature lacks a clear set of standards to measure the outcomes across different writings. Outcomes tend to be qualitative, based on perceptions, and very few research efforts have attempted to link specific technologies of Industry 4.0 to mechanical manufacturing in a way that can directly measure efficiency. This adds to the difficulties in making comparisons between studies. This also puts a strain on evidence based or logic based decision making processes.

5. Research Gaps Identified

Although there is a substantial increase in literature on the adoption of Industry 4.0, a cross-review of the literature identifies a few critical and recurring gaps in the context of mechanical manufacturing. These gaps impedes both the advancement of theory and its practical application and warrant further study.

5.1 Shortage of Real-Time Industrial Case Studies

One of the significant shortcomings of the reviewed papers is the lack of real-time and detailed industrial case studies. Most papers work with conceptual models, simulations, and secondary data; research papers with real evidence in the live mechanical and manufacturing setting are scarce. Documentation of real-time implementation experiences is scarce. Such experiences include system integration, workforce adaptation, operational changes, and others. The lack of longitudinal case studies also constrains the understanding of post-adoption performance and sustainability effects, capital-intensive mechanical manufacturing being the worst affected.

5.2 Shortage of Research in Mechanical Manufacturing Targeting SMEs

Even though small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are a significant part of the mechanical manufacturing industry, the literature shows a clear lack of research concerning SMEs, focusing predominantly on large manufacturing enterprises. The available studies focusing on SMEs are often cross-sectional and industry-based and do not tend to address the specific impacts of constraints of mechanical SMEs, such as poor financial capacity, outdated and insufficient machinery, and inadequate skills. Consequently, the lack of research concerning actionable strategies for the adoption of mechanical manufacturing SMEs based on empirical evidence has also shrunk the available frameworks and rendered them largely ineffective.

5.3 Absence of Standardized Industry 4.0 Adoption Frameworks

The examined literature shows how varied models of the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies and maturity frameworks can be. It is the case that models of adoption can be divergent to the point that comparison across the models is not possible. It should be noted that many of the frameworks lack empirical validation (particularly in the case of frameworks pertaining to mechanical manufacturing). The standards that are not set in sector-specific adoption frameworks means that both the researcher and the practitioner are limited in their scope of measuring the framework and therefore cannot benchmark, assess, or guide the implementation systematically.

5.4 Limited Empirical Linkage

The literature tends to state that Industry 4.0 will ultimately improve the manufacturing of processes, however very few have taken the time to study the effects of Industry 4.0 adoption coupled with empirical analysis that demonstrates why the correlation to manufacturing efficiency exists. The findings (which tend to be the majority), cite findings that are perceptual in nature, or from self-reported systems that do not objectively capture operational variables such as machine use, downtime, throughput, and the number of defective units produced in a time period. This is especially relevant in mechanical manufacturing where the justification of investment of capital is often the efficiencies gained through the process.

5.5 Lack of Representation of Developing Economies, Especially India

Most of the existing studies available are focused on developed economies where the digital infrastructures, as well as the institutions, are more supportive. Developing economies, particularly India, are still mechanically manufacturing economies, but they are underrepresented. Some of the context-specific factors such as underdeveloped infrastructure, unskilled workforce, the regulatory landscape, the cost sensitivity, and the lack of workforce or poor skills are poorly covered and documented. Developing a better understanding of these areas of the world will assist the studies in achieving more descriptive global coverage and universal applicability.

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ISSN: 1053-7899
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6. Suggested Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study is to provide a conceptual framework to fill the research gaps from previous studies, and provide a better understanding of the empirical work on the adoption of Industry 4.0 in mechanical manufacturing. The proposed framework synergizes the technological, human, and organizational components of the adoption and the resultant performance outcomes. It is grounded in the most current Industry 4.0 literature, and intends to be empirically testable, particularly in the context of SMEs and developing economies.

6.1 Overview of the Framework

The framework proposes that organizational capabilities on manufacturing efficiency and operational performance are mediated by the level of Industry 4.0 adoption. It also includes top management support as a moderator, acknowledging the significant impact of stewardship in the mechanical manufacturing digital transformation efforts.

6.2 Independent Variables

Technological readiness

Technological readiness is defined as the level of digital resources, automation, and systems integration an organization has to support an Industry 4.0 implementation. For mechanical manufacturing, where equipment is often outdated and asset lifecycles are long, preparedness for digital retrofitting and connectivity is an important prerequisite for successful adoption.

Employee Digital Skills

Employee digital skills are the fundamental abilities by which the workforce uses, analyzes, and controls advanced manufacturing technologies such as IIoT-enabled machines, cyber-physical systems, and data analytics. Research shows that skill inadequacy is one of the most critical factors hindering the adoption of Industry 4.0, especially in the traditional mechanics industries.

6.4 Moderating Variable

Top Management Support

Top management support acts as a moderator in the relationship between Industry 4.0 adoption and manufacturing performance. Support on changes in leadership, strategic vision, and resource allocation, along with change management, assist in the management of obstacles on the effective use of technology. Managerial support is of utmost importance in the capital-heavy and mechanically intensive manufacturing sectors, where digital investments carry big risks and long periods of payback.

6.5 Dependent Variable

Manufacturing Efficiency / Operational Performance

Manufacturing Efficiency is the key dependent variable in the framework, which shows improvement in the utilization of machines, reduction of downtimes, throughput in production, consistency in quality, and in the expended energy. Previous studies have shown performance and benefits gained from the adoption of Industry 4.0, but a few have empirically proven this using indicators of operational efficiency, especially in the sector of mechanical manufacturing. The framework provides a robust relationship between adoption and discernible outcomes.

7. Future Research Directions

7.1 Confirming the Applicability of Industry 4.0 Adoption Frameworks

Several frameworks aiming to understand and conceptualize Industry 4.0 adoption and its associated levels of maturity have been proposed in the literature. However, in mechanical manufacturing, literature still remains largely unproven and unvalidated. Future studies in mechanical manufacturing should move beyond conceptual frameworks and into the empirical modeling of adoption frameworks. This will most likely include the construction of large empirical datasets. Research in this area should also focus on establishing patterning structures, multilevel frameworks, and mixed methods. Broadening the empirical validation of the models across mechanical manufacturing to various sizes and types of organizations will improve the models and make the conclusions more universally applicable.

7.2 Mechanical Manufacturing Systems Integrated with Artificial Intelligence

A review from last year identified the first potential applications of AI in mechanical manufacturing, calling this phenomenon largely uncharted and transformative. AI and Mechanical Systems, especially AI Smart Machining, Adaptive Process Control, Predictive Quality Control, and Maintenance Automation Systems, merit further exploration. The intersection of AI and cyber-physical systems as well as digital twins, especially at the machine and process levels, deserves empirical studies focusing on these intersections in order to enhance real-time decision-making and operational efficiency.

7.3 Longitudinal Studies on Outcomes of Adoption of Industry 4.0

The majority of the current studies employ a cross-sectional design, which limits the understanding of the impacts on the long-term. Future studies ought to adopt longitudinal design methodologies in order to analyze the shifts of Industry 4.0 processes over time. Such studies could, among other things, outline the possible pathways of adoption, learning, and the sustainability of extended performance enhancement over time, which is especially needed in mechanical manufacturing because of the long equipment lifecycles and the incremental nature of digital transformations.

7.5 Sustainability-Focused Industry 4.0 Research

There is not yet a powerful body of research pertaining to mechanical-manufacturing specific sustainability assessments, while sustainability is a prominent research theme in the recent Industry 4.0 literature. Future research should examine the impact of Industry 4.0 technologies in the areas of energy consumption, material waste, emission reduction, and environmental impact throughout the various stages of a product's life cycle.

8. Conclusion

This literature review captured for the first time the entire range of research pertaining to the adoption in mechanical manufacturing for the period 2014 - 2024. The review reached the conclusion that various Industry 4.0 technologies such as the Industrial Internet of Things, cyber-physical systems, big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and digital twins can significantly improve manufacturing in terms of efficiency, flexibility, quality, and sustainability. Even though the reviews have been seen in the positive light, the research has shown that the adoption is, in fact, quite unbalanced, with large underdeveloped economies being on top, and unmechanized manufacturing SMEs and developing economies being the laggers. The findings, in a practical sense, indicate the `successful adoption of Industry 4.0 in the mechanical manufacturing sector that is reliant, in large measure, on positive structural changes, as well as the presence of sufficient organizational digital capabilities, and firm support from top management`. An adoption critic may find more practical value in the barriers to digital transformation than in the the referred to as 'phased implementation' approach. Managers will find the conceptual framework described useful in assessing the Industry 4.0 technological and organizational gaps, as it serves to plan, guide, and assess the results of gap-filling investments.From an academic standpoint, the current research enriches the existing literature through a thematic and comparative synthesis, concentrating on mechanical manufacturing, which is a field that has, in empirical terms, received little attention. This study enhances the theory on the adoption of Industry 4.0 by identifying critical research gaps and offering a conceptual framework that can be tested empirically. It contributes to the development of Industry 4.0 in mechanical manufacturing systems, particularly in developing countries with SME-oriented business structures, by facilitating empirical research and shifting the focus from conceptual frameworks to actual frameworks.