Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the *'Committee on Publication Ethics'*

Online ISSN:2584-184X

Research Article

A Comparative Review of Machine Learning Approaches for Manufacturing Applications in Industry 4.0

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18766338

Abstract

Industry 4.0 has redefined modern manufacturing by integrating cyber–physical systems, Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), cloud–edge computing, and data-driven intelligence. Among these enablers, machine learning (ML) has emerged as a foundational technology for extracting actionable insights from heterogeneous manufacturing data. This paper presents an extended and comparative review of ML and deep learning (DL) techniques—including supervised, unsupervised, semi-supervised, reinforcement learning, and hybrid models—applied across core manufacturing domains such as predictive maintenance, quality inspection and defect detection, process optimization, production planning, and supply chain management. Based on a systematic analysis of literature published between 2015 and 2025, the review compares algorithmic performance, computational complexity, interpretability, and deployment feasibility. Mathematical formulations of commonly used models, including regression, support vector machines, convolutional neural networks (CNNs), and long short-term memory (LSTM) networks, are presented to enhance methodological clarity. Emerging trends such as transfer learning, federated learning, edge AI, and explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) are discussed in the context of industrial scalability and reliability. The study concludes that context-aware model selection, combined with hybrid and explainable frameworks, is critical for bridging the gap between laboratory-scale ML models and real-world smart manufacturing systems.

Manuscript Information

- **ISSN No:** 2584-184X
- **Received:** 26-12-2025
- **Accepted:** 23-02-2026
- **Published:** 25-02-2026
- **MRR:**4(2); 2026: 386-389
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- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

How to Cite this Article

Paswan V, Gupta S, Gurleen. A Comparative Review of Machine Learning Approaches for Manufacturing Applications in Industry 4.0. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(2):386-389.

Access this Article Online

www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Machine Learning, Deep Learning, Industry 4.0, Predictive Maintenance, Quality Inspection, Smart Manufacturing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fourth industrial revolution, commonly referred to as Industry 4.0, represents a paradigm shift in manufacturing through the convergence of digital technologies, automation, and intelligent decision-making systems. Advanced sensing, IIoT devices, and cyber–physical systems continuously generate high-volume, high-velocity, and high-variety data from production environments [1]. Effectively exploiting this data has become a strategic necessity for achieving operational efficiency, product quality, and sustainability.

Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly machine learning (ML), plays a central role in transforming raw manufacturing data into predictive and prescriptive intelligence [2]. ML algorithms enable systems to learn complex patterns directly from data, eliminating the need for explicit rule-based programming. Deep learning (DL), a specialized subset of ML, further enhances this capability by automatically extracting hierarchical features from images, signals, and time-series data using multi-layer neural networks [3].

In manufacturing, ML-driven solutions have demonstrated significant benefits, including reduced downtime through predictive maintenance, improved defect detection accuracy, optimized process parameters, and resilient supply chain operations. However, challenges such as data imbalance, model interpretability, computational constraints, and integration with legacy systems continue to hinder large-scale deployment.

The major contributions of this review are:

- A structured and comparative analysis of ML and DL techniques for diverse manufacturing applications.
- Inclusion of mathematical formulations to support algorithmic understanding.
- Identification of performance trade-offs between traditional ML and DL approaches.
- Discussion of emerging research directions aligned with sustainable and intelligent manufacturing.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section II describes the review methodology. Section III presents ML paradigms with mathematical foundations. Section IV discusses CNNs and sequence models. Section V provides application-wise comparative analysis. Section VI concludes the paper with future research directions.

2. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This study follows a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to ensure transparency and reproducibility. Major academic databases, including IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar, were queried using keywords such as machine learning in manufacturing, deep learning defect detection, and predictive maintenance Industry 4.0.

Publications from 2015 to 2025 were considered to capture both foundational and recent advancements. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles and reputed conference proceedings presenting empirical ML applications in manufacturing. After initial screening of more than 150 papers, approximately 90 high-impact studies were selected based on relevance, citation frequency, and methodological rigor.

The selected literature was categorized according to application domain, ML paradigm, data type, and evaluation metrics. A temporal analysis reveals a sharp increase in publications after 2020, reflecting accelerated Industry 4.0 adoption and advancements in DL frameworks [4].

3. Machine Learning Paradigms and Mathematical Foundations

ML techniques used in manufacturing can be broadly classified into supervised, unsupervised, semi-supervised, and reinforcement learning [5].

A. Supervised Learning: Supervised learning relies on labelled datasets and is widely used for regression and classification tasks.

A linear regression model can be expressed as:

$$\hat{y} = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^{n} \beta_i x_i$$

where (x_i) represents input features and β_i are model parameters.

Support Vector Machines (SVMs) aim to find an optimal hyperplane by solving:

$$\min_{w,b} \frac{1}{2}||w||^2 + C\sum_{i=1}^{N} \xi_i$$

subject to margin constraints, making them effective for small and medium-sized datasets.

B. Unsupervised Learning: Unsupervised learning techniques such as clustering and dimensionality reduction are applied when labeled data is unavailable. The K-means clustering objective is defined as:

$$J = \sum_{k=1} \sum_{x \in C_k} ||x - \mu_k||^2$$

where μ_k denotes the centroid of the cluster C_k.

C. Reinforcement Learning: Reinforcement learning (RL) models sequential decision-making problems using a reward-based framework. The optimal policy maximises the expected cumulative reward:

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$$R_t = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \gamma^k r_{t+k}$$

where $\gamma$is the discount factor. RL is increasingly applied in robotic assembly and adaptive process control.

D. Deep Learning: DL models extend ML paradigms using deep neural architectures capable of automated feature extraction [6].

4. Convolutional and Sequential Neural Networks

Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) are the dominant DL architecture for image-based manufacturing tasks such as surface defect detection [7]. A convolution operation is mathematically defined as:

$$(F * K)(i, j) = \sum_m \sum_n F(i + m, j + n) K(m, n)$$

where F is the input feature map and K is the convolution kernel.

Advanced CNN variants such as ResNet, YOLO, and Mask R-CNN have achieved detection accuracies exceeding 95% in real-time industrial inspection systems [8], [9].
For sequential sensor data, Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks model temporal dependencies using gated mechanisms.

The LSTM cell state update is given by:

$$C_t = f_t \odot C_{t-1} + i_t \odot \tilde{C}_t$$

where f_t and i_t represent forget and input gates, respectively [10].

5. Applications and Comparative Analysis

A. Predictive Maintenance: Predictive maintenance leverages ML models to estimate equipment health and remaining useful life (RUL). Studies report downtime reductions of 30–50% using ML-based maintenance strategies [11]. LSTM and CNN–LSTM hybrids outperform traditional methods on multivariate time-series data [12], while Random Forest (RF) and SVM remain competitive for engineered features [13].

B. Quality Inspection and Defect Detection: CNN-based visual inspection systems achieve state-of-the-art performance, with accuracies up to 99% on benchmark datasets such as steel surface defects [15], [16]. Compared to traditional ML, DL significantly reduces manual feature engineering overhead [17].

C. Process Optimisation and Supply Chain Management: Reinforcement learning and RF models are applied in additive manufacturing and process parameter optimization [18]. Unsupervised learning supports inventory classification and logistics optimisation [19].

Comparative Summary:

- DL models excel in high-dimensional and unstructured data scenarios.
- Traditional ML offers interpretability and lower computational cost.
- Hybrid and transfer learning models address data scarcity and domain adaptation challenges [20].

Key challenges include data imbalance, computational overhead, and legacy system integration. Emerging solutions include federated learning, explainable AI, and edge-based inference [21].

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This review demonstrates that ML and DL have become indispensable tools in Industry 4.0 manufacturing. CNNs dominate visual inspection, while LSTM-based architectures excel in predictive maintenance. However, industrial adoption requires balancing accuracy, interpretability, and scalability.
Future research directions include:

- Explainable and trustworthy ML for regulatory compliance.
- Integration with digital twins and next-generation (6G-enabled) IIoT.
- Energy-efficient and sustainable ML models for green manufacturing [22].

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Veeru Paswan is a dedicated student in the Department of Computer Applications at Guru Kashi University. Passionate about technology and software development, he is building strong foundations in programming, data management, and emerging digital tools. He is committed to academic excellence and aims to contribute meaningfully to the evolving field of computer science.

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