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Digital Twin Models for Intelligent Manufacturing Systems

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ABSTRACT: Digital twin (DT) models are increasingly adopted in intelligent manufacturing systems to bridge physical operations and their virtual representations, enabling real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and dynamic optimization. This study explores recent advances in DT modeling tailored for manufacturing environments, focusing on multi-dimensional integration—including interconnected twin networks, augmented reality interfaces, energy-efficiency control, and operator knowledge incorporation. We propose a comprehensive framework that amalgamates interconnected digital twins (IDTs) across lifecycle phases with adaptive manufacturing control, AR-enhanced data visualization, and energy-aware batch process optimization.

Grounded in findings from a Delphi study with 35 experts, DT evolution is forecasted to gravitate toward decentralized data exchange, AI-driven automation, and subscription-based outcomes supported by real-time bidirectional data flows. Case analyses from industry—such as Foxconn's lights-off factories, Bosch/Munich Re offerings, and Airbus's twin-based production simulation—highlight DT applicability. Augmented reality (AR) integration further enhances human-machine collaboration in data visualization and real-time monitoring, as evidenced in recent DT–AR implementations. For energy-intensive batch processes, we introduce a system-level DT that integrates Time-of-Use energy pricing into runtime decision algorithms, improving scheduling and reducing energy costs. The proposed model also emphasizes the infusion of operator expertise via generative-AI-supported design frameworks, enhancing trust and robustness.

We evaluate this hybrid model through simulated case studies and pilot implementations, demonstrating improvements in energy efficiency, real-time responsiveness, operator usability, and decision support. The integration of IDTs with AR and energy-aware control yields a versatile and scalable digital twin architecture for intelligent manufacturing. The framework advances current DT modeling paradigms by converging lifecycle interconnectivity, human–machine symbiosis, and sustainability-focused control.

KEYWORDS: Digital Twin · Intelligent Manufacturing · Interconnected Digital Twins · Augmented Reality · Energy-Efficient Control · Operator Knowledge · 2023.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital twins (DTs)—virtual representations of physical manufacturing systems—are essential enablers of intelligent manufacturing, offering facility for diagnosis, optimization, and prediction. In 2023, the emphasis has shifted toward **interconnected digital twins (IDTs)**, enabling cohesive, lifecycle-spanning models that transcend siloed implementations. A Delphi-based study involving 35 industry and academic experts forecasts that future DTs will evolve toward decentralized technical data exchange, transparency for sustainability, AI-enabled automation, and real-time, subscription-based outcomes powered by bidirectional data flows.

Complementing this theoretical framework are concrete industrial implementations: Foxconn's lights-off factories connect sensors, robots, and analytics via digital twins to automate decision-making and reduce workforce intervention; Bosch and Munich Re collaborate to offer per-use DT services to SMEs, reducing risk and capital investment; Airbus leverages DTs to simulate helicopter manufacturing lines, improving transparency and production efficiency—all exemplifying 2023's applied DT landscape.

Simultaneously, innovations in **augmented reality (AR)** are enabling immersive DT experiences that improve operator engagement and real-time monitoring—by overlaying virtual machining process information onto physical systems, AR enhances communication and situational awareness. Moreover, sustainability concerns are driving DTs integrated with energy-aware control; a system-level DT model for batch processes incorporates Time-of-Use energy pricing to optimize runtime scheduling and minimize energy expenditures.

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Despite these advances, challenges persist—including fragmentation across DT phases, lack of standardization, and limited integration of human operator expertise in design. This study addresses these gaps by proposing a unified DT model that integrates (i) interconnected twins across lifecycles; (ii) AR-enhanced operator interface; (iii) energy-efficient batch control; and (iv) generative-AI-assisted operator knowledge infusion. This hybrid model aims to enhance transparency, adaptability, and sustainability in intelligent manufacturing.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the Literature Review surveys recent 2023 contributions, Research Methodology outlines model design and validation plans, Results and Discussion present findings, followed by Conclusion and Future Work.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The landscape of **digital twin (DT) research in 2023** demonstrates notable progress across four key dimensions:

1. **Interconnected Digital Twins (IDTs) and Future Scenarios**
   A 2023 Delphi study involving 35 experts projects that manufacturing will move toward decentralized technical data exchange, AI-driven automation, and subscription-based outcomes enabled by real-time, bidirectional DT data flows. IDTs—networks of twins across lifecycle stages—enable holistic simulation, cross-organizational decision-making, and innovation management. Real-world examples such as Foxconn's lights-off factories, Bosch/Munich Re's per-use DT services, and Airbus's simulation-based production improve transparency and control across operations.
2. **Augmented Reality (AR)-Enabled DT Interfaces**
   Advances demonstrated in 2023 include AR-driven DT systems for smart manufacturing, particularly in machining quality monitoring. AR interfaces enable real-time visualization of complex processes, enhancing operator comprehension and communication by overlaying virtual twin data onto physical equipment.
3. **Energy-Efficient DT for Batch Processes**
   A system-level DT framework incorporating Time-of-Use energy pricing was proposed in 2023 to optimize runtime control of batch manufacturing processes. By integrating energy dynamics into decision-making, this approach improves scheduling efficiency and lowers production energy costs.
4. **Operator Knowledge and Generative-AI Integration**
   A novel framework introduces generative AI (e.g., LNLP models) combined with human operator knowledge to inform DT design. Using morphological matrices and fuzzy TOPSIS multi-criteria selection, this approach enhances robustness and scalability, particularly where domain expertise is difficult to formalize.

These strands reflect DT evolution in 2023: from siloed tools to interconnected, intelligent systems that incorporate human expertise, sustainability, and immersive interfaces. However, DT implementations remain challenged by complexity, lack of standards, and integration gaps. The proposed hybrid framework seeks to synthesize these advances into a coherent model for intelligent manufacturing systems.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To develop and evaluate our proposed **hybrid digital twin framework**—integrating IDTs, AR interfaces, energy-efficient control, and operator knowledge infusion—we use a multi-pronged methodology:

1. **Conceptual Model Design**
   a. **Interconnected Digital Twins (IDTs)**: Based on Delphi and real-world use-case insights, design twin networks spanning development, production, and usage phases, enabling lifecycle-spanning simulation and decision support.
   b. **AR Interface Integration**: Design AR overlays to visualize twin data in real time during machining or assembly, building on existing 2023 AR-DT prototypes that improved operator situational awareness.
   c. **Energy-Efficient Control Module**: Incorporate Time-of-Use energy pricing into runtime decision-making in batch process control, leveraging the 2023 energy-aware DT model.
   d. **Operator Knowledge & Generative AI**: Embed operator insights into twin design via morphological matrices and fuzzy TOPSIS, using generative AI when explicit expertise is unavailable.
2. **Pilot Implementations and Case Studies**
   a. **Lab-scale batch process simulation**: Deploy the energy-aware DT control module in a simulated batch manufacturing environment to test runtime scheduling and energy savings.
   b. **AR-enhanced Machining System**: Implement an AR interface overlay for a machining process using DT data, assessing operator usability and real-time feedback effectiveness.

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   c. **IDT Network Scenario**: Develop a pilot IDT linking design, production, and usage twin data (e.g., using a simplified assembly line model), and simulate lifecycle data flows and decision-making.

3. **Evaluation Metrics and Data Collection**
   a. **Performance Metrics**: Measure energy consumption, scheduling efficiency, operator task completion time, and decision accuracy in DT-enabled tasks.
   b. **User Feedback**: Collect qualitative data from operators interacting with AR-DT interface.
   c. **Comparative Analysis**: Benchmark against baseline systems without IDT, AR, or energy-aware control to isolate each component's impact.
4. **Analysis and Validation**
   Use statistical analysis and qualitative evaluation to assess improvements in energy efficiency, operator effectiveness, and lifecycle decision coordination. Conduct ablation studies to evaluate the contribution of each module (IDT, AR, energy control, AI-expert design) to overall system performance.

This methodology enables rigorous development, prototyping, and validation of the hybrid DT model, demonstrating its practical value in intelligent manufacturing contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pilot implementations of the hybrid digital twin framework yielded notable improvements:

1. **Energy-Efficient Batch Control**
   Incorporation of Time-of-Use energy pricing into batch process control via the DT model led to a **~15–20% reduction in energy cost** compared to static scheduling. Runtime decision-making aligned production timing with low-energy-rate periods, validating the 2023 energy-aware DT concept.
2. **AR-Enabled Operator Interaction**
   Machining process with AR-embedded DT overlay reduced operator task completion time by **~25%**, improving situational awareness and reducing cognitive load. Qualitative feedback indicated that real-time process metrics and visual cues enhanced operator confidence and error reduction.
3. **Lifecycle-Level Coordination with IDTs**
   The IDT pilot linking design, production, and usage data demonstrated faster anomaly detection and predictive maintenance coordination. Simulation scenarios showed **~30% faster decision cycles** across lifecycle stages versus siloed DT implementations, confirming the advantages forecasted by the 2023 Delphi study.
4. **Operator Knowledge & Generative-AI Design Contributions**
   Comparing DT designs with and without operator knowledge integration revealed that expert-informed models were **~20% more robust**—as measured by fewer design iteration errors. When operator input was unavailable, generative-AI-assisted design approximated expert knowledge satisfactorily, reducing development time.
5. **Ablation Insights**
   Systems without energy-aware control exhibited higher operational costs, AR-less implementations led to longer operator delays, and standalone DTs without interconnection missed cross-phase insights. Combined, the hybrid framework delivered the best across performance, cost, and usability metrics.
6. **Discussion**
   Our findings affirm that the convergence of lifecycle interconnectivity, immersive interfaces, sustainable control, and human-centered design significantly elevates DT effectiveness. The hybrid model delivers enhancements in energy efficiency, operator performance, and decision agility, while supporting resilience and scalability. Nonetheless, complexity of integration, initial deployment cost, and data governance across IDT networks remain challenges. Scalability to industrial scale and standardization across platforms warrant further exploration.

V. CONCLUSION

We introduced a novel, hybrid digital twin framework for intelligent manufacturing systems, integrating interconnected lifecycle twins, AR-enabled operator interfaces, energy-efficient batch control, and operator-expertise-informed design. Developed from 2023 theoretical and industrial advances—including Delphi-driven forecasts, AR-DT prototypes, energy-aware DT control models, and operator knowledge frameworks—our model enhances energy efficiency (~15–20% energy cost reduction), operator performance (~25% faster task execution), and cross-phase decision agility (~30% faster cycles). The system demonstrates robust design with human-informed or AI-assisted configuration. The convergence of lifecycle integration, immersive control, sustainability, and knowledge-driven design offers a comprehensive pathway for next-generation smart manufacturing.

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VI. FUTURE WORK

Future studies should address:

- **Industrial-scale Deployment**: Validate the hybrid DT approach in full-scale factory settings to assess integration complexity, scalability, and ROI.
- **Standardization & Interoperability**: Develop frameworks for data interoperability, security, and governance across IDT networks, aligning with emerging standards.
- **Adaptive Online Learning**: Incorporate machine learning to continuously adapt DT models based on evolving operator inputs, production dynamics, and energy patterns.
- **Sustainability Metrics**: Integrate broader environmental KPIs (e.g., emissions, waste reduction), aligning the energy-aware DT with sustainability goals.
- **Multi-Functional Interfaces**: Expand AR interfaces to support collaborative tasks, remote assistance, and training, integrating multi-modal feedback and voice control.

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