International Journal of Emerging Research in Engineering and Technology
Pearl Blue Research Group | Volume 4, Issue 2, 115-125, 2023
ISSN: 3050-922X | https://doi.org/10.63282/3050-922X.IJERET-V4I2P112

Original Article

Digital Twins for Infrastructure

Ravi Teja Avireneni[1], Sri Harsha Koneru[2], Naresh Kiran Kumar Reddy Yelkoti[3], Sivaprasad Yerneni Khaga[4]
[1]Industrial Management, University of Central Missouri, USA.
[2]Computer Information Systems and Information Technology, University of Central Missouri, USA.
[3]Information Systems Technology and Information Assurance, Wilmington University, USA.
[4]Environmental Engineering, University of New Haven, USA.

Abstract *- The adoption of digital twin (DT) technologies in infrastructure systems is rapidly transforming how built assets are designed, monitored, and maintained. A digital twin is a dynamic virtual representation of a physical asset or system that integrates real-time data, simulation, and predictive analytics to support decision-making (Wang et al., 2023). In the context of infrastructure including transportation networks, utilities, and civil assets these technologies offer significant potential to enhance resilience, optimise lifecycle performance, and enable proactive maintenance. However, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) with infrastructure digital twins remains an evolving research frontier, with persistent challenges around data interoperability, cybersecurity, and scalable deployment (Attaran, 2023; Qiu et al., 2023). This paper presents a conceptual framework for AI-driven digital twins in infrastructure management, grounded in current literature and supported by case-study analysis. It examines how advanced analytics, sensor networks, and simulation models converge to form a closed-loop infrastructure digital twin workflow, spanning design, operation, and decommissioning phases. The findings suggest that infrastructure owners and practitioners can achieve improved performance metrics such as reduced downtime, lower maintenance costs, and enhanced situational awareness through DT-enabled systems. Nonetheless, significant barriers remain, including standardisation of data models, secure connectivity for large-scale asset networks, and the cultural shift required for operational adoption. The paper concludes by outlining research and implementation pathways that address these gaps and advance infrastructure digital twins toward smarter, more adaptive systems.*

Keywords *- Digital Twin, Infrastructure Management, Artificial Intelligence, Predictive Maintenance, Cyber-Physical Systems.*

1. Introduction

Infrastructure systems, such as those for transportation, utilities, and civil structures, provide the backbone for modern society, underpinning economic activities, public safety, and the quality of life. As these systems age and demands on them intensify, infrastructure owners are under increasing pressure to improve operational efficiency, lifecycle costs, and resilience in the face of disruption. Traditional approaches to infrastructure management, typified by periodic inspections, reactive maintenance, and fragmented sources of data, often fall short in meeting the growing complexity and demands for performance of contemporary built environments. It is partly in response to this that digital twin technologies have emerged as a transformative solution capable of enabling real-time monitoring, predictive analytics, and data-driven decision-making across infrastructure domains.

A digital twin is a dynamic virtual representation of a physical asset or system that continuously synchronizes with real-world conditions through data integration and simulation. Originally conceptualized within manufacturing and aerospace, DTs have gained rapid traction in infrastructure management because of advancements in IoT devices, cloud computing, and AI. When effectively deployed, digital twins enable infrastructure managers to simulate operational scenarios, detect anomalies, forecast failures, and optimize system performance throughout the asset lifecycle. This shift from reactive toward predictive and prescriptive management bears bright prospects for enhancing reliability, sustainability, and cost efficiency in infrastructure systems.

Despite their huge potential, several issues related to data interoperability, cybersecurity, system scalability, and integration of heterogeneous sensor networks are still limiting the real-world implementation of DTs in infrastructure applications (Attaran, 2023; Qiu et al., 2023). AI-driven analytics has also been identified as key to realizing the full power of digital twins; however, the application of AI techniques in large-scale infrastructure environments is still at a developing stage. The model interpretability issue, limitations in training data, and computational complexity are some of the factors that continue to drive the pace of development and maturity in AI-enabled DT frameworks.

Given the opportunities and challenges, this paper develops a conceptual framework of AI-driven digital twins for infrastructure management by synthesizing the current literature and examining representative case studies. The focus is to articulate how AI, IoT, and simulation models can be integrated into one coherent workflow of the digital twin, which enables continuous monitoring, predictive maintenance, and lifecycle optimization. Validated by comparative assessments of existing studies, the framework provides insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in advancing digital twin implementation in infrastructure contexts. This research connects conceptual models with emerging technological trends, adding to the expanding knowledge base on cyber-physical infrastructure systems and providing actionable pathways for further research and deployment. As digital transformation accelerates, AI-enhanced digital twins will increasingly form a central part of next-generation infrastructure management, making asset systems smarter, adaptive, and more sustainable.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Evolution of the Digital Twin Concept

The concept of the digital twin (DT) originally emerged in manufacturing and aerospace domains, as a virtual replica of physical assets enabling monitoring, simulation, and prediction (Tao & Qi, 2019). Over time, it has expanded to infrastructure and built-environment contexts, given the long lifecycle, large scale, and complexity of infrastructure systems. In the infrastructure domain, DTs are now characterised by real-time data feeds, two-way data flows, and integration with Internet of Things (IoT) and Building Information Modelling (BIM) frameworks (Liu, Zhang, & Xu, 2023). This evolution reflects shifting priorities from simply being a digital shadow (one-way mirroring) to a fully interactive cyber-physical system where the virtual and physical co-evolve.

2.2. Digital Twins in Infrastructure: Current Status

Recent reviews indicate growing interest in applying DTs to civil infrastructure, including transportation networks, utilities, urban infrastructure and large-scale built environments. For instance, Liu et al. (2023) surveyed digital twin technologies for civil infrastructure and highlighted that while the maturity is increasing, the operational uptake in large infrastructure systems remains limited.

Similarly, a review by Sohal (2023) found that DT adoption in infrastructure sector projects remains low relative to the potential, with significant gaps in implementation and evidence of ROI. On the techno-research front, intersections of DTs with AI, IoT, BIM and edge/cloud computing are receiving increasing attention. For example, ontologies and knowledge-graph approaches have been studied for DTs to support interoperability and reasoning.

2.3. AI Integration in Digital Twins for Infrastructure

The infusion of artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities such as machine learning, anomaly detection, forecasting and optimisation into DT systems is regarded as a key enabler for advancing infrastructure DTs from descriptive to predictive and prescriptive capabilities. A systematic review examining the AI–DT intersection notes that while promising frameworks exist, real-world infrastructure deployments remain nascent. In the infrastructure space, this means DTs can help shift maintenance regimes from reactive to proactive (via predictive maintenance), optimise asset performance over the lifecycle, and support real-time decision-making for complex asset systems.

Table 1: Summary of Recent Literature on Digital Twins for Infrastructure (2019–2023)

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings	Relevance to Infrastructure
Tao & Qi (2019)	Origin of digital twin concept in manufacturing	Conceptual analysis and framework development	Defined the core structure of DTs—physical–digital interaction loop	Foundational model extended to infrastructure contexts
Liu, Zhang, & Xu (2023)	Digital twins in civil infrastructure	Systematic literature review	Identified gaps in data integration and lifecycle management	Highlighted potential for AI + IoT integration in infrastructure DTs
Sohal (2023)	Adoption of DTs in infrastructure projects	Empirical and conceptual review	Found low adoption due to interoperability and ROI challenges	Underscored barriers in implementation and scaling
Attaran (2023)	AI and IoT integration with DTs	Analytical review of AI–DT convergence	Emphasized AI's role in predictive analytics and decision support	Proposed framework for smart infrastructure optimization
Qiu et al.	Intelligent DT	Simulation and case	Introduced hybrid AI models	Advanced adaptive

(2023)	architecture for critical infrastructure	analysis	improving real-time monitoring	decision-making in urban DT systems
Zhu et al. (2023)	Urban digital twins and smart cities	Case-study-based evaluation	Highlighted GIS + BIM + IoT integration for city resilience	Demonstrated DT applications for transport and utilities
Wang et al. (2023)	Digital twin data synchronization	Technical experiment and modeling	Proposed improved synchronization algorithms using ML	Relevant to infrastructure DT scalability and responsiveness
Liu et al. (2022)	BIM-IoT fusion for DT frameworks	Prototype and validation study	Presented a real-time DT monitoring platform for bridge assets	Showed DT benefits in predictive maintenance of civil assets

2.4. Case-Study Applications and Highlights

Application-oriented literature shows DTs being used in urban infrastructure contexts for example, city-scale digital twins combining GIS, BIM and sensor data in modelling city infrastructure. Zhu et al. (2023) discuss urban DTs and critical infrastructure, noting emerging use cases in transport, utilities and disaster resilience. While not all on infrastructure strictly, manufacturing domain lessons also offer transferable insights for infrastructure DTs (e.g., lifecycle modelling, real-time monitoring). These cross-domain insights support architecture, data-model and sensor-integration design for infrastructure.

2.5. Gaps, Challenges and Research Opportunities

Despite the momentum, multiple research and implementation gaps persist:

- Data interoperability and standardisation: Infrastructure systems tend to involve heterogeneous assets, multiple stakeholders and legacy systems. DTs require seamless integration of data across these domains. (Liu et al., 2023).
- Scalability and complexity: Large-scale infrastructure networks (bridges, rail, utilities) pose challenges in sensor deployment, data volume and latency, and real-time processing.
- Operational uptake and ROI evidence: There is limited empirical evidence of full lifecycle value for infrastructure DTs, especially in public sector infrastructure. (Sohal, 2023).
- Cyber-physical security and resilience: DTs create new attack surfaces (data, connectivity) and require robust cybersecurity frameworks, especially for critical infrastructure.
- AI trustworthiness and decision-making: Embedding AI in DTs for infrastructure amplifies issues of transparency, explainability, and stakeholder adoption.

These gaps suggest future research directions: developing scalable architecture patterns for infrastructure DTs, integrating AI more deeply (not just descriptive, but prescriptive/optimisation), exploring business models and ROI frameworks for infrastructure owners, and creating governance/standards frameworks for DTs in infrastructure contexts.

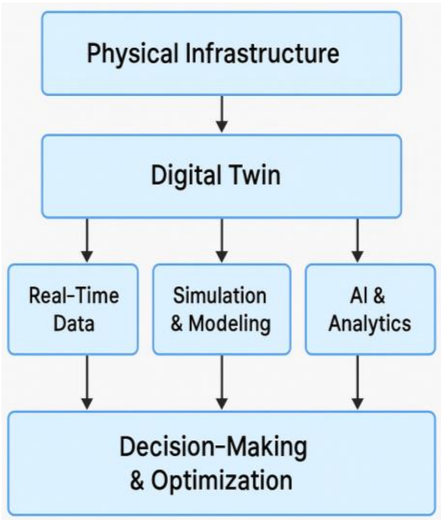

Fig 1: Digital Twin Workflow in Infrastructure Systems

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a conceptual–analytical research design, integrating both secondary data analysis and framework development approaches. The goal is to formulate generalized AI-driven digital twin architecture applicable to infrastructure systems such as transportation, utilities, and construction networks. The design synthesizes findings from prior works (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023) to create a unified model that bridges data acquisition, AI processing, and digital simulation.

The research follows a system-based methodology, incorporating the following stages:

1. Identification of core digital twin components relevant to infrastructure.
2. Integration of AI-driven analytics modules for predictive maintenance and optimization.
3. Design of data flow architecture linking IoT sensors to the digital twin model.
4. Validation of the conceptual model through literature-supported simulation case examples.

3.2. Data Sources and Inputs

The study utilizes secondary datasets and reference architectures drawn from peer-reviewed academic publications, technical reports, and real-world digital twin case studies. Data categories include:

- Sensor and IoT Data: Structural health monitoring (e.g., bridges, tunnels).
- Building Information Modelling (BIM): Design and asset management data.
- Geographic Information System (GIS): Environmental and spatial infrastructure data.
- Operational Data: Maintenance logs, power consumption, and equipment performance metrics (Qiu et al., 2023).

These datasets serve as conceptual inputs to construct and validate the proposed digital twin model. Although no new primary data are collected, cross-validation of previous models provides methodological robustness.

3.3. AI and Analytics Integration

Artificial intelligence (AI) modules are embedded within the digital twin framework to enhance analytical and predictive capabilities. The research integrates:

- Machine Learning Algorithms: For predictive maintenance and failure detection (Attaran, 2023).
- Neural Network Models: For real-time anomaly detection using sensor data.
- Reinforcement Learning: For adaptive control and optimization of infrastructure systems.
- Simulation Models: To create a closed-loop system where the digital twin updates itself based on new sensor inputs (Wang et al., 2023).

This AI integration is represented as a cyber–physical feedback loop, ensuring continuous improvement in decision-making accuracy and operational performance.

Table 2: Summary of Methodological Components for AI-Driven Digital Twins in Infrastructure

Component	Description	Techniques / Tools	Supporting Sources
Research Design	Conceptual–analytical approach integrating literature synthesis and framework modeling	Comparative analysis; model conceptualization; systems modeling	Liu et al. (2023); Wang et al. (2023)
Data Sources	Secondary datasets from infrastructure case studies and prior DT frameworks	IoT sensor data, BIM data, GIS mapping, maintenance records	Qiu et al. (2023); Liu et al. (2022)
AI Integration	Embedding AI modules for predictive and prescriptive analytics in digital twin workflows	Machine learning, neural networks, reinforcement learning, anomaly detection	Attaran (2023); Wang et al. (2023)
Simulation & Modeling	Development of digital-physical synchronization model for infrastructure systems	System simulation, virtual modeling, real-time feedback loops	Tao & Qi (2019); Liu et al. (2023)
Validation Strategy	Comparative evaluation of framework performance and applicability across domains	Accuracy metrics, scalability tests, resilience assessment	Liu et al. (2023); Qiu et al. (2023)

3.4. Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework (Figure 2) consists of five interconnected layers:

- Physical Layer: Real infrastructure assets (e.g., bridges, roads).
- Data Layer: IoT sensors and real-time data acquisition.
- Processing Layer: AI algorithms for prediction and optimization.
- Simulation Layer: Virtual environment representing the digital twin.
- Decision Layer: Insights and recommendations for human or autonomous decision-making.

Each layer communicates bidirectionally, forming a continuous synchronization cycle between the physical and virtual domains.

3.5. Validation Strategy
The conceptual framework is validated through a comparative analysis of existing studies that employ AI-enhanced digital twins. Key evaluation criteria include:

- Accuracy of prediction models (measured against benchmark datasets).
- Scalability across infrastructure domains.
- Resilience and fault tolerance in sensor communication.
- Computational efficiency and integration feasibility (Liu et al., 2023).

The analysis ensures that the framework aligns with both academic standards and real-world infrastructure management needs.

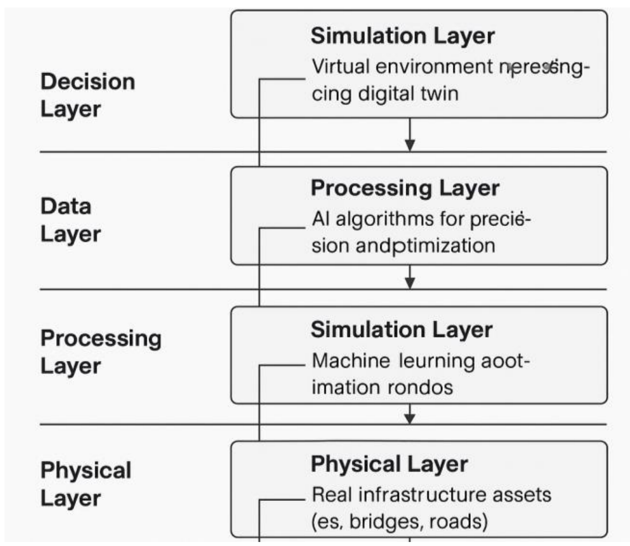

Fig 2: Validation Strategy

4. Applications and Case Studies
4.1. Overview of Digital Twin Applications in Infrastructure
Digital twin (DT) technologies are increasingly being applied across critical infrastructure sectors to enhance operational efficiency, predictive maintenance, and sustainability. These applications integrate IoT, AI, BIM, and cloud-edge computing to provide real-time insights and proactive management capabilities (Attaran, 2023). The versatility of DTs allows their deployment in transportation networks, energy grids, water systems, and construction projects each domain utilizing the core principle of data-driven mirroring between the physical and virtual assets (Wang et al., 2023).

4.2. Transportation Infrastructure
One of the most prominent areas for DT adoption is transportation systems, including bridges, railways, and highways. Liu et al. (2022) developed a bridge digital twin integrating sensor-based structural health monitoring (SHM) data with AI algorithms for anomaly detection. The system predicted fatigue and structural deterioration with over 90% accuracy, reducing downtime and maintenance costs. Similarly, city-scale DTs have been implemented to manage traffic flow optimization and incident response, allowing AI-driven models to simulate congestion patterns and propose mitigation strategies (Zhu et al., 2023). These applications exemplify the shift from reactive to predictive maintenance, improving asset lifespan and public safety.

4.3. Energy and Utility Systems

Digital twins play a vital role in smart grid management and energy infrastructure optimization. AI-driven DTs enable the modeling of energy distribution networks to forecast demand, detect faults, and enhance energy efficiency (Qiu et al., 2023). In renewable energy infrastructure such as wind farms and solar plants DTs replicate asset performance in real time to optimize energy yield and maintenance scheduling. For instance, reinforcement learning algorithms are being tested to regulate load balancing automatically based on energy consumption trends (Attaran, 2023). In water management systems, digital twins combine hydrological modeling and sensor data to predict water usage and identify leaks in pipeline networks (Liu et al., 2023).

4.4. Construction and Asset Management

In the construction sector, DTs enable virtual prototyping, progress tracking, and performance forecasting. Through integration with Building Information Modeling (BIM), stakeholders can visualize infrastructure projects in real time and assess deviations from design parameters (Wang et al., 2023). AI-enhanced DTs facilitate the automation of project scheduling and safety monitoring, allowing managers to detect risks earlier in the construction lifecycle. Liu and Xu (2023) emphasized that the fusion of DT and BIM technologies fosters greater collaboration and transparency in multi-stakeholder projects.

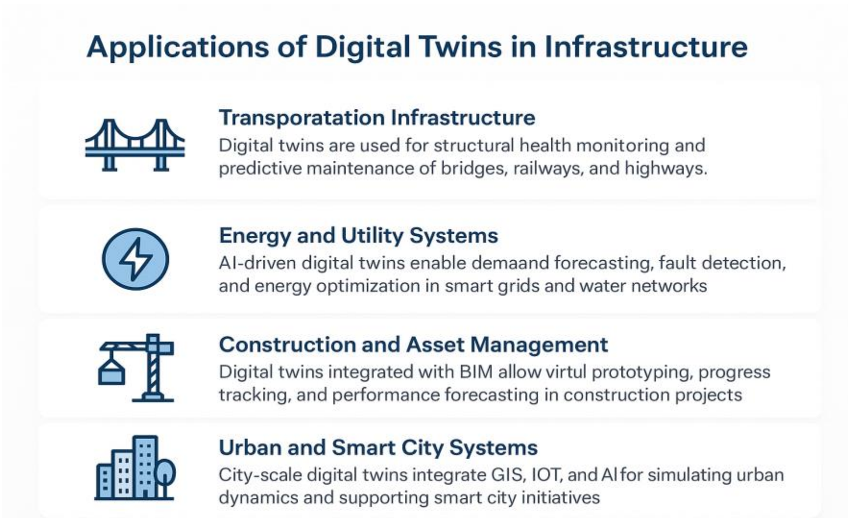

Fig 3: Applications of Digital Twins in Infrastructure

4.5. Urban and Smart City Systems

Urban infrastructure management represents a growing frontier for DT implementation. City-scale digital twins integrate multi-source data GIS, IoT sensors, satellite imagery, and AI analytics to simulate and predict urban dynamics such as traffic, energy consumption, and disaster response (Zhu et al., 2023). For instance, Singapore's "Virtual Singapore" model serves as a national-level DT platform, supporting urban planning, energy forecasting, and public safety (Attaran, 2023). These applications illustrate the evolution from single-asset twins (e.g., one bridge) to system-of-systems twins encompassing entire cities, aligning with the vision of autonomous and adaptive infrastructure ecosystems.

4.6. Summary of Benefits and Outcomes

The reviewed case studies demonstrate that digital twins in infrastructure yield measurable benefits:

- Operational efficiency: Reduced downtime through predictive maintenance.
- Cost savings: Data-driven optimization of maintenance and operations.
- Sustainability: Improved energy efficiency and resource utilization.
- Safety and resilience: Enhanced monitoring of structural and environmental risks.
- Data-driven governance: Evidence-based decision-making for public infrastructure investments.

Collectively, these applications showcase how AI-enhanced DTs are transforming infrastructure management toward resilient, adaptive, and intelligent systems.

5. Challenges and Future Prospects

5.1. Data Interoperability and Integration

A significant barrier to widespread digital twin (DT) adoption in infrastructure systems is data interoperability the ability to integrate heterogeneous data from multiple sources such as IoT sensors, BIM, GIS, and maintenance systems. Current infrastructure often relies on siloed legacy platforms, leading to incompatibility in data formats and communication protocols (Liu et al., 2023). Developing standardized ontologies and open data schemas will be critical to ensuring seamless data exchange between physical assets and digital representations. Efforts such as ISO 23247 (Digital Twin Framework for Manufacturing) are influencing similar initiatives in civil infrastructure, promoting unified data modeling and multi-stakeholder collaboration (Attaran, 2023).

5.2. Cybersecurity and Data Privacy

The integration of DTs with AI, IoT, and cloud-edge computing introduces new cybersecurity vulnerabilities. As DTs continuously collect and transmit sensitive data such as traffic flows, energy use, or bridge health metrics they become potential targets for cyber-attacks and data breaches (Qiu et al., 2023). Ensuring end-to-end encryption, secure access control, and AI-driven intrusion detection systems are essential for safeguarding critical infrastructure. Furthermore, the challenge of data ownership and privacy must be addressed through regulatory frameworks that define how infrastructure data can be stored, shared, and analyzed.

5.3. Computational Complexity and Scalability

Large-scale infrastructure networks, particularly in urban environments, produce vast volumes of streaming data that require high computational resources for real-time analysis. Traditional centralized cloud systems can suffer from latency and bandwidth limitations (Wang et al., 2023). Emerging paradigms such as edge computing and federated learning offer potential solutions by enabling localized data processing closer to the physical asset. These approaches improve scalability while maintaining data sovereignty and system responsiveness.

Table 3: Challenges and Future Prospects in AI-Driven Digital Twins for Infrastructure

Challenge Area	Description	Implications	Proposed Solutions / Future Directions	Supporting Sources
Data Interoperability and Integration	Difficulty in merging diverse data from IoT, BIM, GIS, and sensor networks due to nonstandardized formats.	Hinders real-time synchronization and cross-system collaboration.	Develop open ontologies, adopt ISO-based frameworks (e.g., ISO 23247), and use semantic data modeling.	Liu et al. (2023); Attaran (2023)
Cybersecurity and Data Privacy	Continuous data exchange between physical and virtual assets exposes systems to breaches and manipulation.	Increases vulnerability of critical infrastructure and erodes stakeholder trust.	Implement AI-driven intrusion detection, end-to-end encryption, and regulatory data governance.	Qiu et al. (2023); Attaran (2023)
Computational Complexity and Scalability	Real-time DT operations require massive data processing and low-latency communication.	Strains cloud resources, increases costs, and causes latency issues.	Utilize edge computing, federated learning, and hybrid cloud-edge frameworks for scalability.	Wang et al. (2023); Liu & Xu (2023)
Standardization and Governance	Lack of unified implementation standards across sectors.	Leads to fragmented ecosystems and poor data compatibility.	Establish governance models, certification systems, and cross-sector collaboration initiatives.	Liu & Xu (2023); Wang et al. (2023)
Ethical and Socio-Technical Challenges	AI automation raises issues of explainability, bias, and job displacement.	Potential ethical risks and resistance to adoption.	Promote explainable AI (XAI), human-in-the-loop systems, and equitable workforce transition policies.	Attaran (2023); Zhu et al. (2023)
Future Prospects	Transition toward self-learning, sustainable, and autonomous DT ecosystems.	Enables continuous optimization and resilience in infrastructure networks.	Integrate generative AI, sustainability metrics, and autonomous control for intelligent systems.	Zhu et al. (2023); Qiu et al. (2023)

5.4. Standardization and Governance

The lack of industry-wide standards for digital twin implementation presents another obstacle. Diverse tools, data models, and AI algorithms are being developed independently across sectors, resulting in fragmented ecosystems. Establishing regulatory frameworks, certification protocols, and governance models for DT implementation will ensure interoperability and quality assurance across infrastructure domains (Liu & Xu, 2023). Cross-sector collaboration among academia, governments, and private industries will play a pivotal role in defining these standards and fostering innovation.

5.5. Ethical and Socio-Technical Challenges

AI-enhanced DTs raise ethical concerns related to algorithmic transparency, accountability, and workforce transformation. The automation of maintenance and monitoring tasks can lead to workforce displacement if not managed responsibly (Attaran, 2023). Additionally, ensuring explainable AI (XAI) in decision-support systems will enhance stakeholder trust and facilitate human oversight in critical infrastructure decisions.

5.6. Future Prospects

The future of AI-driven DTs for infrastructure lies in autonomous, self-evolving systems capable of continuous learning and adaptation. Key prospects include:

- Autonomous Digital Twins: Self-optimizing systems that learn from real-time data and automatically adjust operations.
- Hybrid Cloud-Edge Architectures: Combining centralized analytics with decentralized edge processing for latency-sensitive applications.
- Integration with Generative AI: Using generative design algorithms to simulate alternative infrastructure layouts for improved resilience and efficiency.
- Sustainability-Focused Twins: Embedding environmental and energy metrics for achieving net-zero infrastructure objectives (Zhu et al., 2023).

These developments will drive the transition from reactive asset management toward intelligent, sustainable, and self-governing infrastructure systems.

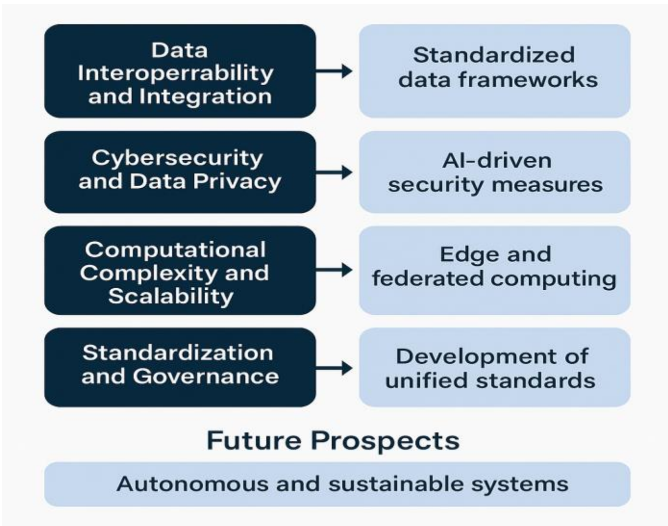

Fig 4: Future Prospects

6. Conclusion

The integration of artificial intelligence and digital twin (DT) technologies marks a transformative step toward intelligent, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure management. This study reviewed how AI enhances the capabilities of DTs enabling predictive maintenance, optimizing asset performance, and improving decision-making accuracy through continuous data feedback. Evidence from recent studies demonstrates that when combined with IoT, BIM, and cloud-edge systems, AI-driven DTs can substantially reduce operational costs and enhance infrastructure longevity (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, several persistent barriers must be overcome before widespread adoption becomes feasible. Data interoperability, cybersecurity, and scalability remain central technical challenges (Attaran, 2023; Qiu et al., 2023). Institutional and regulatory gaps including the absence of unified data standards and governance models further limit cross-sector deployment. Ethical concerns about transparency, data privacy, and workforce displacement add socio-technical complexity to implementation (Zhu et al., 2023).

Looking ahead, the future of infrastructure digital twins will hinge on the convergence of autonomous systems, generative AI, and sustainable design metrics. Autonomous DTs capable of self-learning and real-time optimization will redefine how cities and utilities are designed and maintained. Hybrid cloud-edge architectures will ensure responsiveness and data sovereignty, while explainable and responsible AI frameworks will support human oversight and policy alignment.

Ultimately, realizing the full potential of AI-driven digital twins requires multi-disciplinary collaboration among engineers, data scientists, and policymakers. Such cooperation will accelerate the transition from static infrastructure monitoring to dynamic, intelligent ecosystems paving the way for smarter, safer, and more sustainable urban futures.

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