International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

The Role of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Healthcare

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) can potentially revolutionise healthcare systems by improving diagnostic and treatment procedures, thereby enhancing patients' health. Based on big data, these technologies can find correlations that human eyes cannot see. Doing so may lead to earlier diagnoses, better treatments, and more effective drug development. However, the use of AI and ML in the healthcare sector cannot succeed without addressing issues of ethics and professionalism, such as data privacy and inductive bias. To protect patients, it is important that these technologies are designed and used ethically, ensuring that patients have control over their deployment. With the continual development of AI and ML technologies, it is necessary to invest more in research and development to tackle their potential issues.

1. Introduction

There has been a lot of attention on a global scale regarding the use of AI and ML in healthcare. Surgery, rehabilitation, nursing, and the monitoring of vital signs are just a few areas where these innovations have found varied applications in recent years. With the ability to create more algorithms and information, than can be identified by the human brain, diseases that were impossible to identify through other means is possible. These concepts of AI and ML are the best examples of 'personalised medicine' which strives to make treatment more efficient and specific to the patient. In the midst of these breakthroughs, there are however, several impediments in actualising the full potential of these technologies in the healthcare domain (Rane, J., et al., 2024).

Data privacy, data accuracy and the integration of AI-powered solutions are some of the challenges that will need to be addressed while offering a patient-centred care along the pathway. The main objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of AI and ML and the modernisation thereof in the healthcare industry. The paper begins by outlining the current state of healthcare, followed by an in-depth discussion of the challenges and potential issues related to integrating AI and ML into healthcare systems. The advantages of these technologies are then presented, culminating in a conclusion that highlights expectations for the future of healthcare (Santosh, K. C., et al., 2022).

2. Foundations of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a multi-disciplinary field of computer science that explores the creation of machines that can simulate the cognitive functions of humans, such as thinking, learning, problem-solving, voice recognition, and language translation. Machine Learning (ML) is an essential application of AI that allows machines to learn automatically from experience using data examples rather than being explicitly programmed to perform a specific task. This indicates a substantial difference from traditional programming, where input data is provided with the intended output, and a proper algorithm that processes the input directly to produce the specified output is designed. In contrast, ML models, with their unique ability to learn by identifying patterns within the input data and assigning them to the corresponding output data provided, offer a level of adaptability that traditional programming algorithms cannot match. This adaptability is a key factor in the potential of ML to revolutionise various industries. It includes various learning paradigms, e.g., supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning (Janiesch, C., et al., 2021). A machine learning model is constructed using two essential elements: data representations and learning algorithms. These elements are not just components of a model, but the very foundation on which the model's capabilities are built. The data representations interface the machine learning model and the data type needed to make specific predictions, classifications, and recommendations. Data representations and learning algorithms are deeply rooted in data processing and algorithm optimisation techniques, playing an important role in realistic and practical application development. AI was birthed in 1956 by John McCarthy in alignment with the invention of the digital computer. Subsequently, several early discoveries and advanced explorations in AI have been made by well-known scientists. Many advancements in hardware technology have occurred alongside these AI developments, with various companies playing a key role in fostering rapid evolution (Sarker, I. H., 2021).

3. Current Applications in Healthcare

The potential of AI and ML to transform healthcare is immense. This transformative power is particularly evident in the complex, data-rich domain of healthcare. AI and ML help clinicians and researchers to better and faster identify concealed patterns in data and hence impact patient care by improving health outcomes given to patients by healthcare practitioners (Schwalbe, N., et al., 2020). Medical imaging and diagnostics is one of the areas where AI has proved successful in health care. It has the potential of assisting radiologists to analyse images at far much faster and more accurate ways. The established use case of AI in healthcare is in the field of diagnostics, where its success is attributed to the vast amount of data on disease signs and symptoms collected across various settings. This wealth of labelled data, distinguishing normal from abnormal in a range of medical conditions, is instrumental in developing ML algorithms to predict the presence of numerous diseases (Najjar, R. (2023).

Drug Discovery and Development: AI and ML are also being executed in the drug discovery and development processes. Drug discovery and development are traditionally prescribed and conducted in four stages, taking at least a decade from initial discovery to approval by a jurisdictional body. The stages involve:

- The identification and synthesis of targets.
- Rigorous testing in laboratory solutions and animal-based models.
- Moving to clinical trials in human subjects.
- Regulatory assessment leading to approval.

Accelerating the identification of molecules that are highly likely to bind strongly to therapeutic targets

and have the expected biological effects—is where AI and ML can help through different types of techniques such as reinforcement learning; a branch of machine learning in which an agent learns to make decisions by taking actions in an environment to maximise the expected cumulative reward. Also, within the fast-growing life sciences data, researchers are unearthing potential drug targets and underlying mechanisms of disease using large-scale data analysis (Gupta, R., et al., 2021).

3.1. Medical Imaging and Diagnostics

Since the beginning of modern radiology, innovators have sought methods to enhance what is visible and computable within an image to understand the human body better. As such, traditional image processing of computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging has been considered a natural fit for AI, enhancing image analysis and feature detection to see better—and in some cases quantify, such as in filling volumes of interest faster—already present information. The successful application of deep learning to big medical image data in recent years can potentially improve radiology. In inpatient populations, AI supports interpretation by accelerating image reconstruction, registration, segmentation, and quantification tasks that may otherwise be time-intensive or even impossible. Some tasks, such as identifying a pattern on a chest radiograph or recognizing a fracture, may be completed more accurately or, at a minimum, by an algorithm with less variability (Obuchowicz, R., et al., 2024).

This decrease in variability, when used in combination, for instance, with computer-aided detection for lung nodules or a manufacturer-provided CAD tool for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), often enhances the sensitivity of human practitioners to detect disease. Tools for subtracting out the decrease of reflectance confounders, such as skin folds from a baseline photo filmed prior to the scans being performed, combined with a 3D total body photography system, were just cleared after being demonstrated in clinical validation to decrease false positives and improve the non-specialist area under the receiver operating characteristic in melanoma diagnosis. Methods for deep learning have also been shown to correct errors made in data collection or reduce the amount of patient exposure required to reach a given diagnostic performance. The first AI tool provides radiologists support to improve breast cancer visualisation using an AI application that aims to diagnose medical images. In partnership with the Diagnostic Reference Level and Dose Index Management system and test results, it provides tomosynthesis thresholding for improved lesion visibility. This section outlines some AI and machine learning applications in medical imaging and diagnostics, emphasizing the ongoing research and the exciting future of AI applications, which promises to continually enhance the field of radiology (Ak, M. F. 2020, April).

3.2. Drug Discovery and Development

The best area of application of AI and ML is during the drug development process is one of the most likely to be realised. In biomedicine, the process of drug discovery is costly as well as a very drawn-out process that may take as much as 10 to 15 years, and more than $1 billion to develop one new drug. This makes the process very ineffective with very low success rates and the levels of complexity and costs involved, only a fraction of the therapeutic chemical space has been explored while hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of research remain unproductive. Traditionally, drug development efforts have focused on a combination of historical chemical, in vitro, and silico experimental data; however, pharmaceutical researchers are increasingly finding benefits in applying new AI/ML-based approaches to their drug discovery and repurposing programs. AI and ML have been used to identify high-probability drug targets, forecast potential therapeutic indications of a diverse group of preclinical drug candidates, and study how variables in biological systems influence one another (Prosperi, M., et al., 2020).

Neural networks and other AI technologies can sift through large data sets and simulate the effects of experimental drugs on neurons or other cell types. This results in test candidates that are more likely to translate to positive human trials. AI technologies such as bioinformatics, predictive modelling, and algorithms contribute significantly to the low-hanging fruit of existing research and development programs. They are helping reanimate drugs that have been shelved for various reasons. In the instance of a specific drug, AI-driven discovery tools uncovered a key link between genetic clusters and drug metabolism that was previously overlooked. As the drug was a part of the approval pathway, its development could move directly to phase 2 of development after securing a date. This was pivotal to the company completing the drug's development and eventually being approved and brought to market. Ethical considerations when conducting such analyses, including obtaining informed consent to access data and ensuring responsible data use, are crucial. Companies in the space must hold themselves to high standards concerning the ethical use of data. In technological applications, bias can also manifest by virtue of the data used to build and train models, so it is imperative to ensure that these tools are representative of the communities that will ultimately benefit from their use (Gehl Sampath, P., 2021).

3.3. Predictive Analytics and Personalised Medicine

Predictive analytics, a powerful tool in healthcare, is the modelling and extrapolation of possible events or assessments. It is usually based on historical data and uses real-time investigative analysis to determine the likelihood of various patient outcomes. This includes identifying and prioritizing patients at risk based on past diagnoses, treatments, and hospitalisations to forecast future admissions, chronic diseases, hospital readmissions, and emergency department visits after discharge from inpatient care. With large volumes of complex clinical data, care providers and organizations can more accurately monitor the degree of possible occurrences and resource use. This may become the main driver behind preventive and early detection-based strategies, placing the individual patient at the centre of clinical care, building personalized medicine, and preparing them with appropriate care and preventive strategies. This has a positive impact on the healthcare sector because it puts more decisions in the hands of the healthcare professional concerning the patients (Batko, K., et al., 2022).

Deep learning, as one of the branches of machine learning, is vital in healthcare predictive analytics. It has furnished fundamental methodologies and instruments to get insight from a combination of information types including wearables, socio-economic data, biometrics, clinical data, mobile data, on-body data, the Internet of Things and pervasive and ubiquitous data. This enables the precise tailoring of strategies and care to the patient's behaviour, illness, comorbidities, roles, systems participation, environments, and conditions. AI can track the patterns that influence health and respond to situations that could pose risks to a person's health. The spectrum of tailored care could extend from preventive intervention and proactive situational awareness to reactive medical care. AI technology can better inform and guide healthcare assignments of the future by tapping into population behaviour and individual lifestyles to more accurately inform the selection of targeted regions, groups, or individual strategies. The value and success of predictive technologies will depend on accepting machine learning technology delineated by the data that generates it. The data feeding current machine learning algorithms is passive, and the newly modelled data is still new. There are also associated risks of data privacy and security and the very real fact that machine learning is only marginally better than clueless. Telling people that a tool needs help or solutions will push AI into realms not readily prepared. Ethicists question predictive responsibility based on the use or failure of population or practice-generated models or problems. It also points out another fact that is being ignored because of the event-driven frenzy behind artificial intelligence: managers, physicians, health

practitioners, or companies understand, learn, model, manage, and are driven by predictive models (Raschka, S., et al., 2020). In all cases, people are accountable for being wrong. In the era of AI, the question is, who is accountable?

4. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

AI & ML have demonstrated incredible capacity to disrupt the concentrated and highly marginalised service industry, known as healthcare. The health care sector has always been replete with data but unfortunately it has been an information scarce venture and this is already experiencing a revolutionary transformation. Being one of the primary consumer and generators of big data. The most crucial of these challenges is to meet ethical considerations, as the consequences of not doing so could be severe and far-reaching (Alowais, S. A., et al., 2023)

One of the most critical issues related to using AI and ML technologies in medicine is managing sensitive information since medical information belongs to the most intimate of all human rights. The rising concerns about privacy invasion, data breaches, and identity theft due to the ill-prepared AI and ML technologies have triggered protests from public and private institutions worldwide. Biases are encoded in AI systems in an insidious and sometimes invisible manner. They lurk behind the scenes of the most advanced and sophisticated models, reflecting, exacerbating, and immobilising already existing inequalities. In healthcare, bias inside a black-boxed decision-making process can be particularly dangerous as the cut-off thresholds for clinical decisions can result in differential standards of care and, therefore, affect patient safety and well-being (Schwartz, R., et al., 2022).

The use of AI approaches in medicine raises a critical question: the necessity for AI models, especially when used to create “black-boxed” decision-making systems, to articulate the factors and variables used to arrive at a particular diagnosis or treatment plan. This need for explanation is urgent, as it is a key factor in the ongoing debate regarding the use of advanced AI approaches in contemporary healthcare. Like other dilemmas related to the healthcare AI conundrum, the solution to minimising unwarranted impact and maximising the benefits of the clues of new AI technologies will similarly encompass the endorsement and following of the golden principles, such as ethics, by all stakeholders - at the very least that this technology is reassuring and accurate (Amann, J., et al., 2022).

5. Future Trends and Opportunities

Despite their current success, the field is still rapidly advancing. Researchers are actively working to develop supervised learning algorithms that can consistently handle smaller or more complex datasets, unsupervised learning algorithms, and, ultimately, reinforcement learning algorithms for more complicated problems. There is also significant interest in making AI algorithms more interpretable and linking them with structured theoretical models. Some sources of previously unused data, such as the vast medical records stored in free-text form, are only now beginning to be harnessed. In healthcare, the collection of real-time data is growing in prevalence. It may be especially useful for at-home acute medical care, remote patient monitoring, and telemedicine applications (Majeed, A., et al., 2021).

AI systems, particularly those for multi-modal data processing and real-time data analytics, will likely play a critical role in these new, data-driven healthcare paradigms. Other new systems that leverage rapidly advancing AI techniques are beginning to emerge that address challenging technical goals. These may include neural devices designed to restore structure or function after injury or surgery, devices designed to monitor and intervene in health state, or systems designed to provide deep phenotyping in the real-

world environment.

Combining ongoing hardware, software, and technique improvements with the rapid acceleration of cross-cutting machine learning techniques, continued research and careful implementation are necessary to ensure that AI's introduction into the EHR improves patient outcomes. The integration of AI into healthcare presents opportunities to truly revolutionize the system in a way that is needed to improve the health of individuals throughout society, but the task is complex. From regulatory frameworks to workforce training and clinician adoption to ethical considerations and beyond, countless hurdles must be overcome. The careful implementation of AI in healthcare is crucial, and each individual's role in this process is of utmost importance (Sahu, M., et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

There is the possibility that AI and ML can transform healthcare systems to enhance the diagnostic and treatment procedures and the overall health of patients. Through the use of large datasets, these technologies are able to pick out correlations that would not be visible to a human eye. This may result to early detection, better treatment plans and better drug development.

However, the implementation of the AI and ML in healthcare cannot be effective without addressing some ethical issues, data privacy and possible biases. It is therefore important that these technologies are created and used in a manner that will have positive impact on the patients.

In view of the fast evolution of the AI and ML, it is imperative to allocate resources to research and development. This will help overcome researchers' difficulties and enhance policymakers' potential to leverage such advancements. In this paper, we provide recommendations that can help define the future of healthcare and enhance the quality of life for millions of people globally.

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