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The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Drug Discovery and Development : Novel Approach

Mr. Ankit Ujjwal
email ID : ujjwalankit28@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

The drug discovery and development process is complex, time-consuming, and costly. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative technology to improve efficiency, accuracy, and innovation in pharmaceutical research. This study explores the applications, benefits, and challenges of integrating AI in drug discovery and development. the role of AI in drug discovery, its transformative impact on pharmaceutical research, and the potential benefits and challenges. Briefly mention the major AI techniques used in different phases of drug discovery and development. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into drug discovery and development is transforming the pharmaceutical industry by speeding up processes, reducing costs, and enhancing precision. This paper discusses the involvement of AI in drug discovery and development. AI has brought a revolution to drug invention and development, significantly reducing costs and accelerating the process. By integrating AI into these stages, drug development has become more efficient, allowing for faster and more cost-effective innovations in the pharmaceutical field.

Keywords : Artificial Intelligence, Drug Discovery, Machine Learning, Virtual Screening, Predictive Analytics, Pharmacology, Lead Optimization.

I. INTRODUCTION

The drug discovery and development process is a complex, time-consuming, and costly endeavor that involves identifying and developing new therapeutic agents to treat various diseases and conditions. The process typically spans 10-15 years, involves numerous stakeholders, and requires significant investment.

Target Identification and Validation

The first step in drug discovery is identifying a potential therapeutic target, typically a protein or gene, associated with a specific disease. Researchers use various techniques, such as genomics, proteomics, and bioinformatics, to validate the target's role in disease pathology.

Lead Compound Identification

Once a target is identified, researchers search for lead compounds that can modulate its activity. This involves screening large libraries of compounds using high-throughput screening (HTS) assays, computational modeling, and structure-based design.

Hit-to-Lead Optimization

Promising lead compounds are optimized through iterative chemical modifications to improve potency, selectivity, and pharmacokinetic properties. This stage involves extensive medicinal chemistry, molecular modeling, and biological testing.

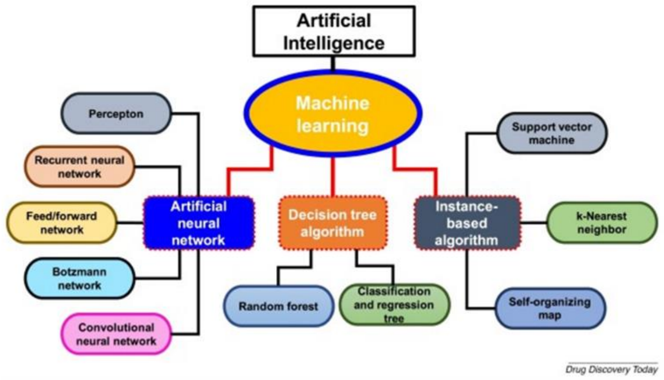
The drug discovery and development process is a complex, multi-stage journey that transforms scientific findings into safe and effective medicines for patients. It begins with the *discovery phase*, where researchers identify a disease target and screen thousands of compounds to find potential candidates that may interact effectively with that target. Once promising compounds are identified, they enter the *preclinical phase*, which involves laboratory and animal studies to evaluate safety, efficacy, and pharmacokinetics. If a compound shows positive results, it progresses to *clinical trials*, conducted in three phases to test safety, dosage, and effectiveness in human participants. Phase I trials focus on safety and dosage in small groups, Phase II assesses effectiveness and side effects in a larger group, and Phase III expands the testing to diverse populations to confirm effectiveness and monitor adverse reactions. Following successful trials, the drug undergoes a *regulatory review* process, where data from all phases are evaluated by regulatory agencies, like the FDA, to determine if the drug is safe and effective for public use. Once approved, the drug enters the *post-marketing phase* (Phase IV), where its long-term effects and benefits continue to be monitored. This extensive process, often spanning a decade or more, is essential to ensure that new drugs are both effective and safe for patients.

The drug discovery and development process is known for being time-intensive, costly, and highly intricate. Due to the significant expenses and prolonged timelines associated with traditional methods, there is an urgent need to explore innovative strategies to enhance efficiency. Artificial intelligence (AI) is now playing a transformative role in drug discovery, attracting interest from investors and scientists in both industry and academia. AI has the potential to streamline drug development by optimizing crucial factors such as pharmacodynamics, pharmacokinetics, and overall clinical effectiveness. This paper delves into the drug discovery process, the integration of AI tools, and the future challenges and prospects for AI in drug development. By combining AI with drug discovery, the pharmaceutical industry may be better equipped to address its inherent complexities. Evaluating new research tools could also help uncover novel drug targets. The journey from initial discovery to an approved drug is challenging, typically taking 12 to 15 years and costing around $1 billion. Out of approximately one million compounds screened, only one usually progresses to late-stage clinical trials and, eventually, to patients.

1.1 AI: networks and tools

AI encompasses several key domains, including reasoning, knowledge representation, solution searching, and particularly, the foundational approach of machine learning (ML). ML utilizes algorithms that identify patterns within categorized data. Within ML, *deep learning* (DL) emerges as a specialized branch that operates through artificial neural networks (ANNs). ANNs are sophisticated networks of interconnected processing units, known as "perceptrons," which simulate the functionality of human neurons by mimicking the transmission of electrical impulses in the brain. These ANNs consist of nodes that process individual inputs and convert them into outputs, either independently or in multilayered configurations, using various algorithms to address specific problems.

ANNs include diverse architectures such as multilayer perceptron (MLP) networks, recurrent neural networks (RNNs), and convolutional neural networks (CNNs), all of which employ either supervised or unsupervised learning methods. MLP networks are effective for applications like pattern recognition, optimization, process identification, and control; they use one-way, supervised training to function as universal classifiers. RNNs, characterized by their feedback loops, have memory capabilities and can store information, such as in Boltzmann machines and Hopfield networks. CNNs, with their locally connected, dynamic structures, are widely applied in image and video processing, biological modeling, brain function simulations, pattern recognition, and advanced signal processing. Advanced types of neural networks include Kohonen networks, radial basis function (RBF) networks, learning vector quantization (LVQ) networks, counter-propagation networks, and ADALINE networks. Each of these network types brings unique capabilities to the expanding field of AI.



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1.2 AI in the lifecycle of pharmaceutical products

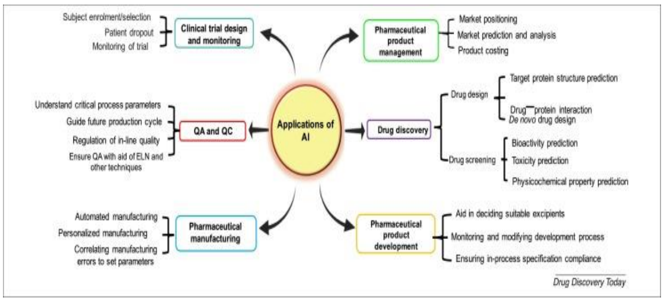
AI has become an essential tool across the entire lifecycle of pharmaceutical products, transforming every stage from initial discovery to post-market surveillance. In the *discovery phase*, AI-powered algorithms streamline the identification of potential drug targets and compound screening, significantly shortening the timeline required to identify viable drug candidates. Machine learning models can process vast datasets to uncover patterns and relationships that traditional methods might miss, facilitating faster and more efficient drug design.

During the *preclinical phase*, AI assists in predicting pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, enabling researchers to evaluate drug safety and efficacy with higher accuracy. AI-driven simulations and predictive models help reduce the reliance on animal testing by forecasting how a drug might interact with the human body. This results in safer candidate selection and a reduction in early-phase failures.

In the *clinical trial phase*, AI supports patient recruitment, trial design, and data analysis. By analyzing historical and real-time patient data, AI can identify suitable candidates for trials more efficiently, ensuring that the trials are representative and statistically robust. Additionally, AI algorithms optimize trial protocols and help detect adverse effects early, improving trial outcomes and reducing costs.

Finally, in the *post-marketing phase*, AI enables continuous monitoring of drug performance and safety through real-world data analysis. Machine learning algorithms detect adverse events, usage patterns, and emerging risks in real-time by analyzing patient records, social media, and other data sources. This proactive surveillance contributes to ongoing product safety and effectiveness.

Overall, AI integration in the pharmaceutical product lifecycle accelerates the development process, enhances safety and efficacy evaluations, and supports compliance with regulatory requirements. The use of AI is rapidly making drug development more efficient, cost-effective, and capable of meeting complex healthcare demands.



1.3 AI in drug discovery

AI is revolutionizing drug discovery by enhancing the precision, speed, and efficiency of finding new therapeutic candidates. Traditionally, drug discovery involves a lengthy and costly process of identifying, testing, and refining potential compounds. AI optimizes this process by leveraging data-driven approaches that reduce reliance on trial-and-error methods, allowing researchers to focus on the most promising candidates early on.

In the *target identification* stage, AI algorithms analyze large datasets from genomics, proteomics, and metabolomics to identify biological targets associated with diseases. These insights help scientists understand disease mechanisms more clearly and identify molecular targets more precisely. AI can also reveal relationships between genes, proteins, and disease phenotypes that might otherwise go unnoticed, accelerating the identification of new drug targets.

Once potential targets are identified, AI aids in *compound screening*, where virtual libraries of millions of compounds are rapidly analyzed. Machine learning models predict the interaction between these compounds and target molecules, narrowing down candidates likely to have the desired therapeutic effects. This virtual screening drastically reduces the need for physical testing, saving time and resources.

In the *lead optimization* phase, AI is employed to fine-tune promising compounds by predicting properties like solubility, bioavailability, and potential toxicity. These properties are essential for determining a compound's success in later stages. AI models analyze structural variations to optimize these properties, helping researchers select compounds that are more likely to be safe and effective for clinical trials.

AI also facilitates the process of *drug repurposing*, where existing drugs are evaluated for effectiveness in new therapeutic areas. By analyzing vast amounts of data from clinical trials, patient records, and scientific literature, AI can suggest alternative uses for approved drugs, often accelerating development for unmet medical needs.

Overall, AI-driven drug discovery reduces the costs and timelines associated with traditional approaches while increasing the likelihood of discovering effective, safe, and innovative treatments. Through predictive modeling, pattern recognition, and data mining, AI is making drug discovery more precise, resource-efficient, and responsive to complex healthcare challenges.

1.4 Research Gap: Limitations of Traditional Methods

Traditional pharmaceutical research methods face notable challenges that impact their efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and success rates. The conventional approach to drug discovery often involves time-consuming trial-and-error processes, where potential compounds are manually screened and tested in extensive laboratory experiments. This process is resource-intensive, often taking over a decade and costing billions of dollars to bring a single drug to market. Furthermore, many promising drug candidates fail during late-stage clinical trials due to unexpected toxicities or inefficacies, as traditional methods struggle to predict these outcomes early in development. Another limitation is the difficulty of understanding complex biological systems, which restricts the ability to identify optimal drug targets and limits the scope of disease mechanisms that can be addressed. These inefficiencies contribute to a declining rate of new drug approvals and highlight the need for innovative approaches in pharmaceutical research.

1.5 Significance: Potential of AI in Pharmaceutical Research

The integration of AI into pharmaceutical research presents a transformative opportunity to overcome the limitations of traditional methods. AI enhances the drug discovery process by automating data analysis, pattern recognition, and predictive modeling, thereby accelerating target identification and compound screening. Through machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL), AI can analyze vast datasets, uncovering complex relationships between genes, proteins, and diseases that might otherwise go undetected. This ability not only speeds up the discovery of viable drug candidates but also reduces the likelihood of late-stage failures by predicting drug toxicity and efficacy more accurately. Moreover, AI-driven approaches facilitate drug repurposing, identifying alternative therapeutic uses for existing drugs, which shortens development timelines and brings treatments to patients more quickly. Overall, AI holds the potential to make drug discovery faster, more cost-effective, and more precise, ultimately contributing to more rapid advancements in healthcare and improving patient outcomes.

1.6 Challenges

Despite advancements in AI and machine learning within the pharmaceutical industry, significant challenges persist in effectively implementing and integrating these technologies, particularly in drug discovery.

One major challenge is *inefficient data integration*. The diversity among datasets—ranging from raw to processed data, as well as metadata and candidate data—creates obstacles in the collection and consolidation necessary for effective analysis. Since no standardized method exists for integrating these varied datasets, the initial step of formatting data appropriately often falls short, which can lead to inaccurate machine learning outputs. Addressing this issue requires developing more efficient data integration methods to ensure that data is well-organized and ready for analysis before beginning the drug discovery process.

Another obstacle is *occupational and skillset immobility*. Many professionals in the pharmaceutical sector lack the cross-disciplinary expertise needed to operate AI systems. While some may be proficient in data science and others in molecular chemistry or biology, few possess the combined skills required to apply AI effectively in a pharmaceutical context. Both a solid understanding of chemistry to generate appropriate algorithms and data science expertise are essential, yet these skill sets are rarely found together.

Additionally, *skepticism towards AI and machine learning* poses a hurdle. The "black box" phenomenon, which refers to the opaque nature of AI algorithms, often leads to a lack of trust and understanding regarding the methodologies behind AI-driven results. This skepticism can result in reluctance to use AI-generated insights, potentially causing delays and inefficiencies that hinder progress within the industry.

This distrust also contributes to *limited financing for AI advancements* in the pharmaceutical sector. Skepticism surrounding AI’s role in drug development may deter investment, which in turn slows down the pace of research and development. This lack of funding limits the potential impact AI could have in streamlining drug discovery and improving efficiency.

These challenges—including data integration, skillset gaps, trust issues, and funding constraints—are critical barriers that must be addressed to fully integrate AI into the drug development process. Overcoming these obstacles is essential to unlock the full potential of AI within the pharmaceutical industry.

1.7 Conventional Methods vs. AI-Integrated Methods of Drug Discovery

The drug discovery and development process is intricate, involving multiple stages such as target identification, lead optimization, preclinical and clinical testing, regulatory navigation, and post-marketing safety monitoring. Traditional methods, though fundamental, face significant challenges, including time-consuming target identification, costly lead optimization, extensive trial-and-error testing, and complex regulatory compliance. These hurdles often slow down the development pipeline, increase costs, and reduce efficiency.

In contrast, AI-integrated methods offer a transformative approach by streamlining many of these stages. Through advanced data analytics, machine learning, and predictive modeling, AI can enhance target identification by rapidly analyzing complex biological data to find new targets that would be difficult to identify with conventional methods. In the lead optimization phase, AI enables scientists to screen and refine vast libraries of compounds more efficiently, reducing the reliance on labor-intensive experimental methods. Additionally, AI can predict drug behavior, toxicity, and efficacy with a high degree of accuracy before entering costly preclinical or clinical trials, thus improving the chances of success at each stage of the drug development process.

AI integration also facilitates faster regulatory compliance by automating data documentation and ensuring data integrity throughout the development cycle, helping companies meet regulatory requirements more efficiently. Post-marketing, AI systems can monitor real-world drug performance and safety through pharmacovigilance systems, identifying adverse effects more swiftly than conventional reporting methods.

Ultimately, AI-integrated methods hold the potential to revolutionize drug discovery by accelerating timelines, lowering development costs, and enabling the discovery of innovative treatments that can better address unmet medical needs. By reducing dependency on manual processes, AI-driven approaches empower scientists to focus on more complex challenges, paving the way for groundbreaking advancements in pharmaceutical research.

The application of AI in drug development brings significant advantages, enhancing key stages such as hit discovery, lead optimization, and preclinical testing. AI algorithms facilitate accurate predictions of binding properties, improve virtual screening analysis, and aid in the selection of lead compounds, thus refining the early stages of drug discovery. Additionally, AI-driven approaches support predictions of bioactivity and toxicity, helping to identify potential issues before progressing to clinical trials.

In clinical trial phases, AI optimizes trial design by assisting in patient identification, recruitment, and real-time monitoring. AI can ensure efficient patient adherence and detect endpoints with greater accuracy, enhancing both the speed and quality of trials. Through real-time data monitoring, AI contributes to more responsive and dynamic trial management, potentially reducing costs and improving safety outcomes. These AI advancements are poised to transform the drug development process, making it more cost-effective, efficient, and safe, ultimately leading to faster delivery of new treatments to patients.

1.8 Research Objective

AI is an objective science. It means the AI-based drug development process is not a subject of prejudice, existing knowledge, personal interests or anything else that can directly impact the development outputs.

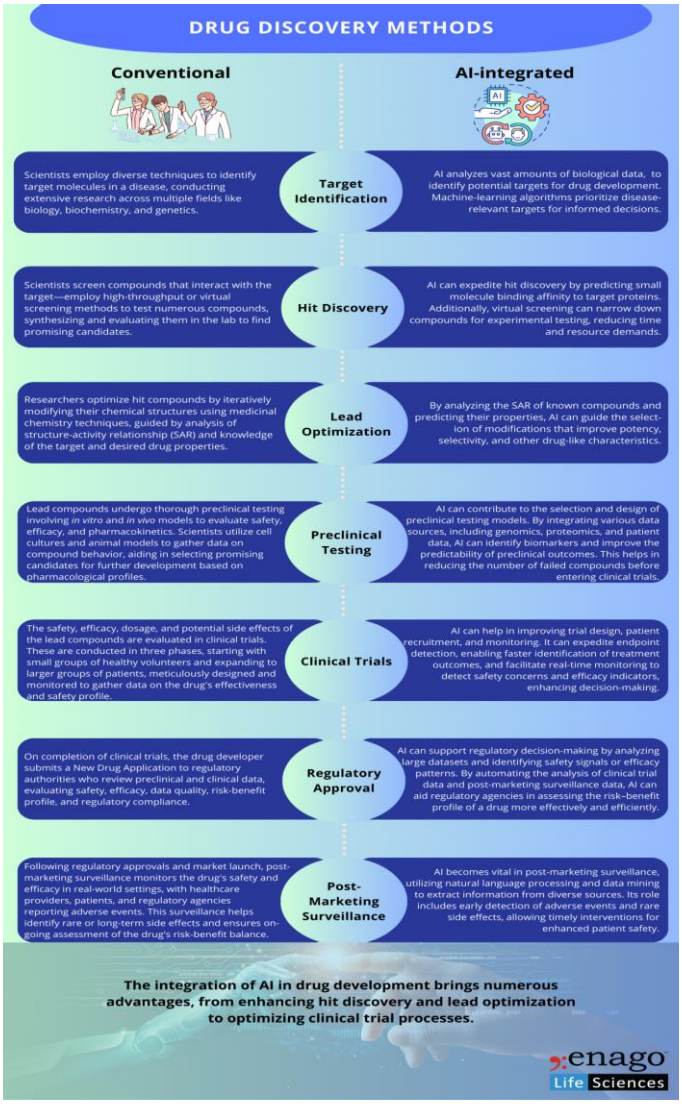
II. Methodology

1. **Review of Existing Research on AI in Drug Discovery and Development**: This study begins with a comprehensive review of current literature on the role of AI in drug discovery and development. Relevant research articles, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses are analyzed to gather insights into how AI has been applied across various stages of the drug development lifecycle. This review identifies the key AI techniques used, such as machine learning, deep learning, and natural language processing, and examines their impact on target identification, lead optimization, preclinical and clinical trial phases, and post-marketing surveillance. The review also highlights the advancements, challenges, and limitations that AI faces in the pharmaceutical sector.
2. **Case Studies: Analysis of Successful AI-Driven Pharmaceutical Projects**: To illustrate practical applications, several case studies of successful AI-driven drug development projects are selected and analyzed in depth. These case studies focus on real-world instances where AI technologies have been effectively integrated into the drug development process, leading to notable improvements in efficiency, accuracy, and cost savings. Each case study evaluates the specific AI methods applied, the outcomes achieved, and the challenges encountered, providing a detailed understanding of how AI contributes to innovation in pharmaceuticals.

1.10 Comparative analysis

Year Wise AI Usage in Drug Discovery (%) Development (Growth Rate %)

year	AI Usage in Drug Discovery (%)	Development (Growth Rate %)
2020	10%	07%
2021	20%	10%
2022	35%	15%
2023	50%	15%
2024	65%	18%



III. Benefits

- **Improved Accuracy and Efficiency**: AI-powered algorithms can process and analyze vast amounts of complex data faster and more accurately than traditional methods, leading to more precise predictions in drug discovery and development. This improvement not only increases the efficiency of identifying viable drug candidates but also minimizes errors in each phase of development, reducing costly setbacks.
- **Enhanced Innovation and Creativity**: AI introduces new levels of innovation by uncovering complex patterns and relationships within biological data, sparking novel approaches and ideas that might not have emerged through traditional methods alone. By leveraging machine learning and predictive analytics, researchers can explore previously uncharted areas in drug discovery, potentially revealing breakthrough therapies.
- **Reduced Costs and Timelines**: AI helps streamline the drug development process by automating time-consuming tasks and reducing reliance on manual processes. By optimizing target identification, lead compound selection, and trial management, AI lowers both the cost and time involved in bringing a drug to market, making the entire process more sustainable and economically viable.
- **Personalized Medicine**: AI plays a pivotal role in advancing personalized medicine by analyzing genetic, molecular, and patient data to tailor treatments to individual needs. This ability to customize therapies for specific patient groups enhances the likelihood of treatment success and minimizes adverse effects, contributing to improved patient outcomes and more precise healthcare.

IV. Conclusion work

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into drug discovery and development presents a transformative opportunity in the pharmaceutical industry. The data in our analysis demonstrates a significant and consistent increase in AI adoption, with AI usage rising from 10% in 2020 to 65% in 2024, along with a steady growth rate. This progression highlights not only the growing reliance on AI technologies but also the industry's recognition of AI's potential to streamline and accelerate the traditionally lengthy, costly, and complex drug discovery and development process.

The consistent growth rate reflects how AI has contributed to advancements in various phases of drug discovery, including target identification, lead optimization, and clinical trial design. AI technologies, particularly machine learning and deep learning, enable better data analysis, improve the accuracy of predictive models, and reduce the time required to bring new drugs to market. This progress is evident from the increasing investment and focus on AI-driven projects within pharmaceutical research, addressing limitations of traditional methods and fostering innovations that were previously unachievable.

However, despite this promising trajectory, challenges persist. Efficient data integration, skill gaps, and skepticism surrounding AI models require attention to fully unlock AI’s transformative power. As AI continues to mature, overcoming these challenges will be crucial to enhancing drug discovery efficiency and making personalized medicine and innovative therapies more accessible.

In conclusion, the adoption and development of AI in drug discovery have laid the foundation for a novel, data-driven approach to pharmaceutical innovation. As the technology advances and becomes further integrated, the industry can expect AI to play an increasingly central role in addressing complex healthcare challenges, enabling faster, safer, and more cost-effective drug development.

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