Applications in Industrial Automation: Current Status and Future Directions

Linchen Zhang

College of Electronic and Information Engineering, Beibu Gulf University, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

LincolnZ2004@163.com

Abstract. With the increasing application of new-generation information technologies in the production and manufacturing sectors, the era of Industry 4.0 has arrived. As a branch discipline of computer science, artificial intelligence plays a crucial role in promoting the automation of industrial production. This article mainly studies the AI algorithms in industrial automation. Through literature analysis and a case study of JD, it summarizes the application scenarios of artificial intelligence algorithms and how they affect industrial automation, demonstrating the successful practice of this technology in industrial and other fields. The review highlights that production optimization, quality control, and intelligent robots are among the current applications of AI, which have substantially improved efficiency and flexibility. While, insufficient data quality, inadequate algorithm interpretability, security risks, ethical controversies, and the absence of standardization are among the obstacles encountered.

Keywords: Industrial automation, Artificial intelligence, Algorithm, Production.

1. Introduction

Industrial automation has played a significant role in the development of modern industry since the four industrial revolutions. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, the application of AI algorithms in industrial automation has become increasingly widespread.

By reviewing the existing literature, it can be observed that the research on artificial intelligence in the field of industrial automation mainly focuses on the following topics: intelligent manufacturing and process optimization, quality inspection and control, robots and automation systems, predictive maintenance, human-machine collaboration, etc.

These technologies have brought numerous benefits to industrial automation, such as enhancing production efficiency, improving product quality, reducing costs, increasing flexibility, and improving response speed, etc.

However, the drawbacks are also quite obvious; deploying AI systems is extremely costly, the performance of the algorithms has high requirements for the quality and quantity of data, the algorithms are highly complex, many enterprises lack relevant professional talents, and there are issues such as poor interpretability and potential security risks.

Furthermore, the application of artificial intelligence in industrial automation also faces numerous challenges, such as insufficient data quality and availability, lack of robustness and generalization capabilities of algorithms, difficulties in ensuring security and privacy protection, considerations regarding ethics and social impacts, as well as the absence of standardization and interoperability.

The issue explored in this article is to discuss how AI algorithms influence industrial automation, and to analyze current applications, challenges and future trends. The aim is to comprehensively assess the current application status and challenges of AI algorithms in industrial automation, and to look forward to future development directions, providing references for researchers and practitioners.

2. The Review of Relevant Theories

The theory of automated control is a research direction that combines robot process automation (RPA), artificial intelligence (AI), and soft computing. Its aim is to achieve robust and adaptive decision-making to cope with complex environments and customer demands. By improving operational efficiency and decision quality, it enhances the reliability and functionality of the system[1]. Production system theory focuses on the study of planning and managing production processes more effectively to achieve higher efficiency and cost savings. [2].

The lean production theory aims to enhance production efficiency and product quality by reducing waste and optimizing processes. It was initially developed by Toyota. [3]. Machine learning is a technique that trains algorithms through data to identify patterns or make predictions. It plays a significant role in data mining and faces challenges in handling imbalanced data. [4]. When the data volume is small or of medium scale, machine learning algorithms are usually employed because they perform better than deep learning. For instance, random forests are superior in scenarios with small data volumes, low dimensions, the need for interpretability, or resource constraints. In contrast, deep learning is more suitable for handling complex, high-dimensional, and large-scale unstructured data[5]. Deep learning is a machine learning method based on multi-layer neural networks, which can automatically learn features and patterns from a large amount of data. This approach is suitable for handling complex tasks.[5].

Here are several common deep learning models: Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs); they are good at handling high-dimensional data and can automatically learn to extract spatial features. Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs); they are suitable for processing time-series data, such as network traffic data, and can capture the temporal dependencies in the data. Autoencoders (AEs): Mainly used for anomaly detection, they identify anomalies by learning normal behavior[5].

3. The Application of Artificial Intelligence Algorithms in Industrial Automation

3.1 Production Process Optimization

Utilizing AI algorithms to predict equipment failures and reducing downtime. By utilizing AI algorithms, the system is capable of predicting in advance the likelihood of device malfunctions, thereby facilitating timely maintenance interventions. This predictive functionality substantially reduces unplanned equipment downtime and contributes to smoother operation of production lines. Through the comprehensive application of AI technologies, including machine learning and deep learning, predictive maintenance effectively minimizes disruptions in the production process while extending the service life of equipment[6].

Utilizing AI algorithms to optimize energy consumption and material utilization. The strategies for optimizing energy consumption and material utilization through AI algorithms include: Internet of Things monitoring (using IoT technology to monitor supply chain operations in real time, promptly identifying issues and optimizing resource utilization), circular production model (adopting a circular production and packaging model to increase material utilization and reduce waste), digital replication (establishing a digital model of the supply chain, predicting changes to optimize decisions, thereby improving energy efficiency). These strategies achieve more efficient energy and material management through big data analysis and prediction, promoting the sustainable development of the supply chain[7].

Utilizing AI algorithms to achieve precise control and optimization of the production process. The application of industrial artificial intelligence in process control automation mainly includes: predictive analysis (using AI to process large amounts of data to assist in decision-making and enhance the predictive ability of the process), coping with complex environments (optimizing complex, nonlinear, and multi-stage control environments), improving dynamic response capabilities (adapt to the dynamic environment of Industry 4.0, and enhancing system connectivity and response speed), and promoting technology adoption (establishing a framework to facilitate the application of AI from the experimental stage to actual industrial control). These applications help enhance the efficiency and flexibility of automation[8].

3.2 Quality Inspection and Control

Utilize AI algorithms to predict product quality and adjust production parameters in advance. AI technologies, such as machine learning and deep learning, can monitor the production process in real time, enabling rapid identification and detection of defects in the products. Through these AI-driven algorithms, the system can identify problems more accurately and improve overall quality control. These technologies analyze data and images during the production process to automatically detect possible defects, allowing factories to quickly address issues, reduce the production of non-conforming products, and ultimately increase production efficiency and product quality[6].

Utilize AI algorithms to predict product quality and adjust production parameters in advance. The application of AI in quality prediction for industrial automation mainly relies on machine learning and deep learning technologies, which analyze the data collected during the production process to predict product quality. This approach enables factories to identify potential quality issues in advance and make adjustments, thereby ensuring the consistency and high quality of the products. AI not only improves the detection accuracy but also optimizes the entire production process, helping enterprises better meet quality standards[6].

3.3 Intelligent Robot

The robot autonomously completes material handling and assembly tasks. In future factories, the roles that robots and artificial intelligence might play include: leveraging high-performance computing and advanced intelligent technologies to support efficient large-scale production activities. Such factories can explore ways to enhance the efficiency and innovation potential of AI and robot applications in the automation process[9].

Robots and workers work together to complete complex tasks, thereby enhancing production efficiency. The significant role of AI technology in human-machine collaboration is mainly reflected in the following aspects: privacy protection (through AI technology, data privacy, model privacy, and service privacy can be protected to ensure that personal information is not compromised during the processing of large amounts of data); efficiency optimization (AI can optimize the human-machine collaboration process, making production and task execution more efficient. For example, by predicting and adjusting in real time to enhance the production performance in the manufacturing industry); decision support (AI provides rapid data analysis and intelligent decision support, helping humans make more informed judgments in complex tasks). Overall, AI plays a crucial role in enhancing the security and efficiency of human-machine collaboration, promoting the development of Industry 5.0[10].

3.4 Other Applications

Utilizing AI algorithms to optimize supply chain management, enhancing efficiency and reducing costs. Optimizing supply chain management through artificial intelligence algorithms can enhance efficiency and reduce costs. Utilizing Internet of Things technology for real-time monitoring enables timely identification of issues and improves resource management; adopting a circular production model can increase material utilization and reduce waste, thereby effectively lowering costs; establishing a digital model of the supply chain helps predict changes and optimize decisions, thereby improving operational efficiency[7].

AI Enhances the Cybersecurity of Industrial Control Systems. Artificial intelligence plays a crucial role in the cybersecurity of industrial control systems, mainly in real-time decision-making and anomaly detection, helping to identify and address complex network threats, thereby reducing security risks. At the same time, AI technology also has the potential to further enhance the cybersecurity protection capabilities in industrial environments[11].

4. Case Study

Here is an example of a Chinese enterprise - JD.com, which is a leading e-commerce logistics company in China. The AI application of JD Logistics has provided a successful digital transformation model for the industry. The following are the key cases of this enterprise's AI application:

Firstly, JD's intelligent supply chain planning. The company independently developed the YiBu engineering platform, which integrates machine learning and deep learning algorithms, and also builds a bio-inspired algorithm and reinforcement learning framework. In the project with Volvo Cars, in order to solve the problems of inefficient logistics for Volvo's pre-production of components and lagging after-sales service for the entire vehicle transportation, by dynamically adjusting the layout of the warehouse network, the number of national component warehouses was expanded from 4 to 8, resulting in a coverage rate of next-day delivery for dealers exceeding 80% and a 30% improvement in after-sales supply chain fulfillment efficiency. JD's manufacturing industry also carried out cost reduction reforms, creating a unified supply network with multiple warehouses, shortening the procurement process, increasing the online rate of industrial products from less than 5% to 12%, and reducing procurement costs by 18%. Thanks to the intelligent supply chain planning, the accuracy rate of demand forecasting increased by 23%, the inventory turnover rate was optimized by 40%, and the supply chain technology revenue in the 2025 Q1 financial report showed a year-on-year growth of 34%..

In terms of warehousing, JD has also integrated artificial intelligence technologies. Through the third-generation Tianlang System (integrating AGVs (4m/s), elevators (5m/s), and 3D SCADA monitoring) combined with a dedicated 5G network and RFID technology, centimeter-level positioning of equipment is achieved. In practical applications, after adopting this system in the Yiancang 3C electronics warehouse renovation project, pallet storage density increased to 3 times the original level, picking efficiency rose from 300 boxes/hour to 1,800 boxes/hour, while enabling mixed storage of bonded and duty-paid goods, annually reducing warehouse space by 10,000 square meters. The Kunshan Asia No.1 Warehouse deployed 80 automatic sorting lines and 10,000 intelligent robots, processing 4.5 million parcels daily on average. During the 2025 618 shopping festival, it achieved "second-level" sorting with a sorting error rate below 0.01%. Data shows that the intelligent warehousing system can quadruple storage efficiency, reduce labor costs by 65%, and lower the spoilage rate of fresh products from 5% to 0.8% through precise temperature and humidity control.

In terms of data processing, JD.com has developed dynamic decision optimization technology, achieving the capability to process hundreds of millions of orders per minute through a distributed simulation system, and has developed an intelligent decision-making module based on the DeepSeek large model and industry algorithms. In practical applications, the national transportation network optimization project dynamically adjusted route planning using ant colony algorithms, reducing transportation costs by 19% in 2024 and shortening the transportation time for the Shenzhen-to-Shanghai route from 38 hours to 22 hours. In response to emergencies, such as the 2025 Zhengzhou flood, the system replanned regional distribution plans within 4 hours and activated a drone emergency warehousing network, ensuring the delivery of 15 tons of relief supplies to the disaster area within 72 hours. This technology has improved route planning efficiency by 37%, reduced annual carbon emissions by 230,000 tons, and compressed the response time for handling abnormal incidents to 15 minutes, forming a decision optimization system that covers both regular operations and emergency scenarios.

Furthermore, some innovative scenarios demonstrate JD.com's application of artificial intelligence. .In Suzhou, drone logistics established low-altitude transportation channels, using 5kg-class drones for instant replenishment, achieving 6 times the efficiency of traditional methods. In the first quarter of 2025, it completed 800,000 delivery orders, with 72% powered by clean energy. The intelligent customer service system "Jingling," powered by large model technology, has handled 83% of user inquiries, achieving a 92% problem resolution rate and improving customer satisfaction by

19% through emotion recognition functionality. In terms of employee benefits, the "JD Jinli" platform uses AI algorithms to provide personalized recommendations, increasing employee retention by 11%, reducing workwear customization costs by 40%, and shortening production cycles from 21 days to 7 days[12]. From the above, it is not difficult to see that AI enables JD to achieve more precise, greener and more resilient logistics operations, while reducing costs and improving user and employee satisfaction.

5. Discussion

Overall, the application of AI algorithms in industrial automation has enhanced production efficiency and quality, reduced operational costs, and increased the flexibility and adaptability of the production process.

However, this still faces many challenges; the first is the data issue. High-quality data is a prerequisite for the effective application of AI algorithms. Nowadays, data formats are diverse, the quality and authenticity are hard to guarantee, the huge volume of data brings storage and processing pressure, data privacy and security protection are needed, and the integrity of data is difficult to maintain as it changes over time[13].

Then there are algorithm and model issues. Complex algorithms are hard to trust and understand. When choosing an algorithm, one needs to balance its accuracy, interpretability, computational efficiency, and suitability for real-time operations. Moreover, the training process is resource-intensive and prone to problems such as data imbalance and overfitting. In critical industrial fields, the "black box" nature of AI models, especially deep learning models, makes their decision-making processes difficult to understand and trust, and there is a trade-off between interpretability and accuracy[13].

In terms of technical integration and compatibility, AI solutions have difficulty integrating seamlessly with existing legacy systems (such as ERP, CRM, etc.), and industrial infrastructure may not be able to meet the high computational requirements of AI models. Moreover, the development and deployment of industrial AI applications are costly, and it is difficult to achieve large-scale application as quickly as consumer-level AI to spread the costs, which makes it hard to guarantee the return on investment[13].

Finally, in terms of security, the primary safety concern of highly interconnected industrial automation lies in the fact that it will expose the originally isolated industrial control systems to a broader range of network attack surfaces. This exposure not only increases the risk of unauthorized access and data theft for the system, but also may lead to catastrophic consequences such as remote control of critical infrastructure, disruption of production processes, and even physical damage[14].

Furthermore, the application of AI in the field of industrial automation will also bring about ethical and social impacts. The first of these is that it will lead to changes in the labor structure, as automation may result in the loss of some jobs[15]; According to the World Economic Forum's "Future of Jobs Report 2023", the impacts are as follows: 50% of enterprises expect that AI will create new jobs (such as data scientists and AI experts, with a 40% increase in demand and the creation of approximately 1 million new positions), while 25% of enterprises believe that AI will lead to job losses (but the overall proportion of automated tasks has risen from 34% in 2023 to 42% in 2027, and the proportion of human tasks has dropped to 58%).

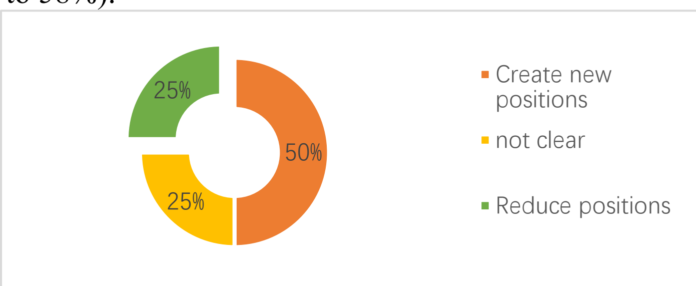

Figure 1: The company anticipates changes in job positions

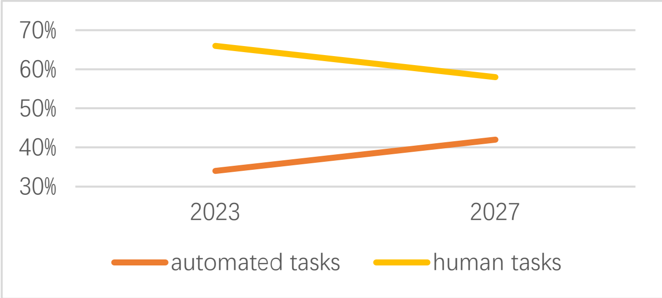

Figure 2: Expected changes in automated tasks and human tasks

Furthermore, this will lead to a more pronounced industry differentiation. Taking the technology type of industrial automation as an example, in the future, the number of positions in high-end manufacturing (such as robot maintenance) will increase, while the number of positions for assembly line workers and mechanical operators will further decrease. For instance, previously 10 workers produced 1,000 products per day. After introducing automation, 3 workers plus machines can produce 1,500 products per day. This will result in 7 job vacancies, but these 3 people need to master machine operation skills, and their wages may be higher.

6. Conclusion

Overall, AI algorithms are mainly applied in industrial automation for optimizing production processes, quality inspection and control, intelligent robots, and other applications such as supply chain optimization. It is speculated that in the future, the entire production process will become more intelligent, and more interpretable algorithms will be developed to enhance system performance and reliability. Moreover, in terms of interdisciplinary integration, AI will be integrated with technologies such as the Internet of Things and blockchain to promote the construction of cross-system interoperability standards. Additionally, attention will be paid to manual positions in labor-intensive industries (especially among low-educated groups), and some policies beneficial to employment will be proposed.

Regarding the issues mentioned in the introduction, better answers can be obtained through research; the current applications of AI include areas such as production optimization, quality control, and intelligent robots, significantly enhancing efficiency and flexibility. The challenges faced include insufficient data quality, poor algorithm interpretability, security risks, ethical controversies, and the lack of standardization. In the future, AI will drive industrial automation to develop towards deeper intelligence, becoming a key focus in terms of technological integration and ethical considerations.

In the research, there are also some shortcomings. For instance, I am limited by the data foundation. I intended to study the high dependence of AI algorithms on data quality, but I always felt that the research depth was insufficient. My understanding of this field is not profound enough. My research is technology-oriented, and the research on its economic feasibility and other dimensions may not be deep enough. I have visited some factories with poor digitalization foundations. The path dependence for traditional factories to transform into AI is quite serious. In such circumstances, my conclusions may not be fully applicable.

Looking to the future, I hope that efficient data processing technologies will emerge to alleviate the problem of data scarcity. Moreover, interpretable models can be designed to enhance generalization capabilities, and AI algorithms can be combined with technologies such as the Internet of Things and blockchain to promote the construction of an industrial automation ecosystem. Regarding issues such as employment impacts, a careful assessment should be conducted to evaluate their long-term effects on employment and society.

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