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Original Contribution

CHALLENGES FACING MODERN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING APPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRY 4.0

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ABSTRACT: *The article explores the challenges and opportunities facing modern mechanical engineering applications in the era of Industry 4.0. It analyzes the integration of cyber-physical systems, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and additive manufacturing into the traditional production environment. Emphasis is placed on digital transformation, automation, and smart factory concepts, which redefine design, production, and maintenance processes. The paper also addresses human and organizational challenges, such as workforce upskilling, digital culture, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The discussion concludes with an outlook on Industry 5.0, focusing on human-centered innovation and sustainable manufacturing.*

KEY WORDS: *Industry 4.0, Mechanical engineering, Automation, Cyber-physical systems, Artificial intelligence, Smart manufacturing.*

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, global industry has witnessed a massive technological transformation known as Industry 4.0 - the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by the digitalization, interconnection, and autonomy of production processes.

Mechanical engineering, as the backbone of industrial production, is among the sectors that are most strongly feeling the impact of this change. The integration of cyber-physical systems (CPS), the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and automated robotic systems are transforming the way machines and products are designed, manufactured, and maintained.

This article aims to analyze the main challenges that accompany the implementation of modern engineering applications in the context of Industry 4.0, and to outline possible solutions and trends for the future.

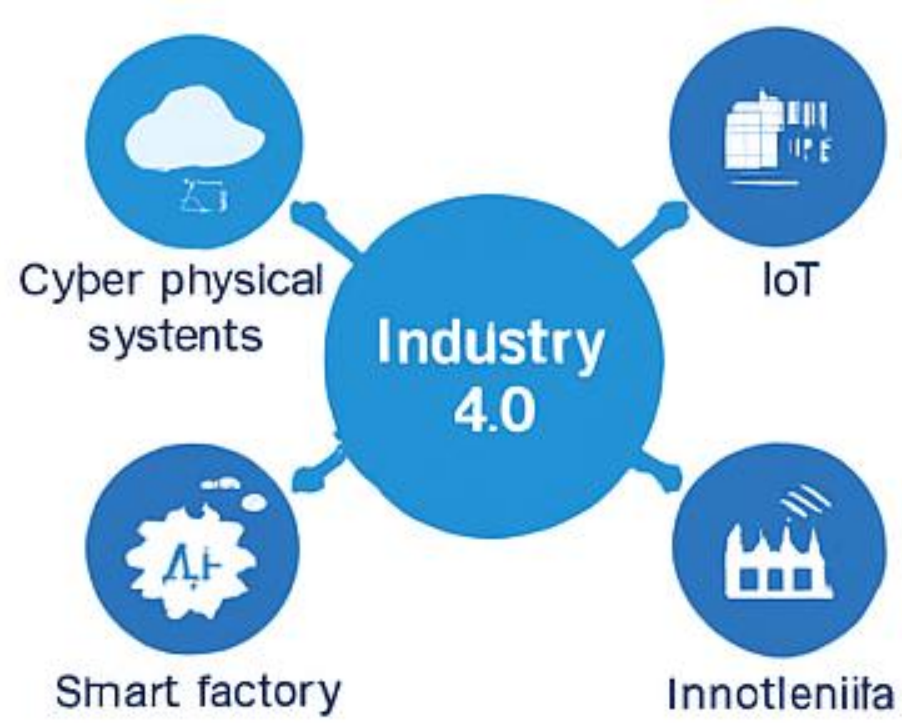

Fig. 1. Industry 4.0 ecosystem

2. Industry 4.0 and the transformation of mechanical engineering

The concept of Industry 4.0 emerged in Germany in 2011 as part of the national strategy for smart manufacturing. Its essence lies in the integration of information technology with production systems, which allows the creation of smart factories.

In mechanical engineering, this transformation leads to:

• integration of digital twins, which allow virtual modeling and optimization of processes;

• implementation of IoT sensors for monitoring the condition of machines in real time;

• use of machine learning and big data for predictive maintenance;

• additive manufacturing (3D printing) for rapid prototyping and personalized components.

This digital ecosystem creates a new model of engineering activity, in which traditional mechanical processes are combined with intelligent algorithms and communication technologies.

3. Key technological challenges

3.1. Digitalization and automation

One of the main challenges is the complete digitalization of production chains. Many mechanical engineering companies still use outdated management systems that do not allow full integration with new technologies. The need for

investments in ERP, SCADA, MES and PLM systems is key to effective automation.

3.1.1. Cyber-physical systems and IoT

CPS and IoT provide two-way communication between machines, sensors and software. This raises questions about cybersecurity, as any interconnection can become a potential vulnerability. Therefore, the development of reliable protocols and standards for protecting industrial networks is necessary.

3.1.2. Artificial intelligence and simulations

Artificial intelligence is used in the optimization of the design, control and maintenance of machines. AI-based simulations allow rapid testing of multiple design and process variants, but require high-quality data and expert models, which remains a challenge for small and medium-sized enterprises.

3.2. Human and organizational challenges

Industry 4.0 is not only a technological but also a social revolution. Mechanical engineers must acquire new digital competencies — programming, data analysis, systems thinking and working with artificial intelligence.

The lack of sufficiently prepared personnel is one of the most serious obstacles to the implementation of new technologies. A reform of engineering education is needed to promote interdisciplinary approaches and cooperation between universities and industry.

In addition, the organizational culture must change — from hierarchical to flexible, oriented towards innovation and experimentation.

3.3. Economic and sustainable aspects

Digital transformation requires significant investments, which often exceed the capabilities of small manufacturing enterprises. There is a risk of technological inequality between large corporations and SMEs.

At the same time, Industry 4.0 offers opportunities for increasing energy efficiency, reducing waste and optimizing resources, which creates conditions for sustainable production.

According to a report by the World Economic Forum (2023), the implementation of intelligent systems in mechanical engineering can reduce energy costs by up to 20% and carbon emissions by up to 15% within a decade.

4. Perspectives and future trends (Industry 5.0)

While Industry 4.0 focuses on automation and efficiency, Industry 5.0 focuses on the human factor. The main idea is human-robot collaboration (HRC) where the engineer is not replaced but supported by intelligent systems.

Future applications in mechanical engineering are expected to focus on:

- adaptive manufacturing systems;
- sustainable materials and circular economy;
- use of artificial intelligence for personalized manufacturing;
- integration of biomechanical and nanotechnologies.

5. Conclusion

The challenges facing modern mechanical engineering are multifaceted — technological, organizational, and social. The success of the industry depends on its ability to integrate new technologies with human potential and an innovation culture.

Industry 4.0 is not an end goal, but a process of continuous adaptation that will lead to smarter, more sustainable, and more humane production.

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