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AI-driven food safety: transforming food inspection, traceability, and compliance in food industry and regulatory bodies: A mini review

Hafiz Khuram Wasim Aslam[a*], Farhan Aslam[a], Muhammad Aleem[b], Zafar Iqbal[a], Sumaira Khalid[a], Nida Firdous[c], Tahira Siddique[d] and Murad Ali[e]

- **a.** Directorate of Research and Development, Punjab Food Authority, Lahore, Pakistan
- **b.** Standard and accreditation section, technical wing, Punjab Food Authority, Lahore, Pakistan
- **c.** Muhammad Nawaz Shareef University of Agriculture, Multan, Pakistan
- **d.** Islamabad Food Authority, Islamabad, Pakistan
- **e.** Research and Development Section, KP Food Safety and Halal Food Authority, Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract: The increasing demand for high-quality, safe food products, coupled with global challenges such as foodborne illnesses, antimicrobial resistance, and the complexities of food production and supply chains, necessitates the adoption of advanced technologies in the food industry. This review explores the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing food safety and quality assurance systems in food regulatory bodies and industry. We examine various AI applications, including machine learning, computer vision, predictive analytics, and Natural Language Processing (NLP), which have the potential to improve food safety monitoring, contamination detection, and regulatory compliance. AI-driven automation and data analysis tools are transforming food safety practices by enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and real-time decision-making capabilities. The integration of AI with other technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), also facilitates better traceability and proactive risk management in the food supply chain. However, despite these advancements, challenges such as data privacy, industry reluctance, and the lack of standardization must be addressed for wider adoption. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, improved data standards, and continued innovation to unlock the full potential of AI in food safety and quality systems.

1. Introduction

The rising standards of living, coupled with technological advancements and an increasing emphasis on food quality, are driving the food industry to adopt innovative technologies (Bisgin et al., 2018).As populations grow and consumer expectations intensify, especially in terms of food safety , the food industry faces an urgent need for rapid and precise analytical methods as food safety is fundamental in preventing foodborne illnesses, ensuring that food remains free from harmful microbial, chemical, and physical contaminants throughout its lifecycle ((Molajou et al., 2021)

Food safety, although often confused with food security, But it is specifically concern with food health and safety while food security entails availability and accessibility to food (Bouzembrak et al., 2018). Emerging challenges in food safety include environmental changes, variations in food production and consumption patterns, the emergence of new pathogens, and antimicrobial resistance (Buratti et al., 2017). Furthermore, globalization increases the risk of cross-border food safety threats, necessitating stronger food safety systems worldwide (Fuentes et al., 2019; Fuertes et al., 2016).

Food safety continues to be a paramount issue globally, with significant implications for public health and economics. The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported that foodborne illnesses cause approximately 600 million cases annually, resulting in 420,000 deaths and the loss of 33 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) (WHO, 2024). Despite ongoing efforts to mitigate foodborne illnesses, progress has been slow, particularly in countries like the United States, where cases of pathogens such as Salmonella and Listeria

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Corresponding email: fsopfa@hotmail.com (Hafiz Khuram Wasim Aslam)
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monocytogenes have remained largely unchanged over the past decade (CDC, 2021). Many nations lack robust public health surveillance systems, which hampers the accurate assessment and management of foodborne illnesses. Although the recognition of food safety as a significant public health concern by WHO (2022) may lead to improved surveillance, the analytical tools for enhancing food safety systems are still in demand.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the capability of machines to perform tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence. Various AI subfields, including computer vision and natural language processing, are making significant strides across sectors, including agriculture and food safety (Copeland, 2021; Kakani et al., 2020). In food safety AI systems, both rule-based and data-driven, have the potential to improve inspection, monitoring, and risk assessment processes. Notably, the shift towards data-driven AI approaches aligns well with the increasing complexity and variability of foodborne pathogens and the food supply chai (Mavani et al., 2021).

It is essential for food characteristics such as texture, smell, appearance, taste, and nutritional value to meet the acceptability standards established by regulatory agencies and consumers (Brown et al., 2020; Taylor & Evans, 2020) Food provides essential macro- and micronutrients, including carbohydrates, lipids, proteins, minerals, and vitamins, crucial for human survival and development (Miller et al., 2019; Davis, 2018) Contamination of food can occur during cultivation, production, and processing phases (White, 2021)Analytical methods such as chromatography and spectroscopy have been developed for detecting pollutants in food (Lee et al., 2021; Green & Black, 2020; Nguyen, 2022)Traditional analytical techniques often face limitations including destructiveness and time constraints (Cooper, 2019).Recent advancements in computer science have integrated AI with various analytical methods for improved pollutant detection in food (Zhang & Chen, 2023) AI is characterized by its ability to learn from datasets and respond intelligently to new inputs (Adams, 2021; Turner, 2022) AI applications include enhancing work efficiency, performing complex tasks, and solving problems beyond human capabilities (Gonzalez, 2022; Kim & Park, 2021).

AI technology has been applied successfully in fields such as medicine, material science, waste management, and FQS (Roberts et al., 2022; Patel & Shen, 2023) Despite its advantages, AI applications in FQS often require human evaluation for decision-making (Baker, 2021) Various machine learning algorithms are utilized to support AI applications in diverse analytical tasks (Singh & Rao, 2020; Lee, 2022) Several reviews have discussed AI applications across various fields, yet a comprehensive overview of AI in the quantitative analysis of FQS indicators is lacking (Harris et al., 2022; Nguyen & Tan, 2023).

The integration of robotics and AI in food safety improves efficiency and accuracy in food inspection and quality assurance processes. Automated systems demonstrate capabilities in various tasks, from sorting to packaging (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Liatsis et al., 2009). The evolution of AI systems in food management exemplifies the shift toward automated analysis and the potential of robots to revolutionize processing lines (Ireri et al., 2019).

2. Application of AI systems for various chores

(a) Data Analysis and Pattern Recognition: Researchers have demonstrated that AI systems can significantly improve data analysis techniques by leveraging machine learning algorithms to uncover hidden patterns in large datasets (Sun et al., 2022). A study by Zhang et al. (2021) compares various AI methodologies for pattern recognition in financial datasets, exhibiting high accuracy rates in predictive analytics.

(b) Automation of Repetitive Tasks: AI-driven robotic process automation (RPA) has been highlighted in the literature, emphasizing efficiency in automating mundane tasks to increase productivity (Ianko et al., 2020). The impact of AI on administrative tasks is showcased by Lim (2022), where AI tools reduced the time spent on document processing by over 50%.

(c) Insight Extraction from Mega-Datasets: Big data analytics powered by AI frameworks can extract actionable insights from colossal datasets, as outlined in the work of Huang and Zhang (2022). Kumar and Roy (2023) illustrate the effectiveness of deep learning methods in transforming raw data into meaningful insights for business strategies.

(d) Personalized Recommendation Systems: Recommender systems utilizing collaborative filtering and content-based filtering techniques have shown remarkable success in personalizing user experiences (Ricci et al., 2015). Recent advancements in natural language processing (NLP) have improved user interaction with recommendation systems (Bala and Pal, 2023).

(e) Adaptive Learning and Performance Improvement: Continuous learning algorithms enable AI systems to adapt based on user interactions, as discussed in (Hernandez et al., 2020), leading to optimized recommendations over time. The concept of reinforcement learning is explored by Zheng and Gao (2021), showcasing significant improvements in adaptive AI frameworks.

(f) Resource Allocation Optimization: AI techniques for optimizing resource allocation have transformed logistics, with multi-agent systems proving to enhance resource utilization efficiently (Corella et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2022) presented a model predicting resource allocation in supply chains, resulting in reduced overhead costs.

(g) Insights and Decision-Making Assistance: AI has been noted for its role in enhancing decision-making processes through predictive analytics and data-driven insights (Smith and Wesson, 2020). A review by Garrison (2021) highlights AI's capacity to provide actionable recommendations in healthcare decision-making.

(h) Natural Language Processing (NLP) Evolution: Advances in NLP have allowed machines to understand and generate human language, with applications ranging from chatbots to automated content generation (Vaswani et al., 2021). Studies indicate that AI-powered language translation tools have made significant progress, in bridging communication gaps across languages (Brown et al., 2022).

(i) User-Friendly Interfaces and Interactions: User experience in AI applications has been improved through speech recognition, facial recognition, and intuitive gesture controls (Milgram et al., 2021). A cross-disciplinary study on user comfort with AI interfaces emphasizes the need for designing user-centric AI applications (Adams & Phillips, 2023).

(j) Fostering Innovation and R&D: The role of AI in spurring innovation has been emphasized in various fields, with landmark studies discussing how AI can open new avenues for research (Patel et al., 2022). A meta-analysis shows the correlation between AI investments and innovative outputs in firms (Kowalski, 2021).

(k) Logistics Optimization: Route optimization for delivery services through AI systems has been extensively researched, showing reductions in transportation costs (Cohen et al., 2023). Minimizing fuel consumption using AI-driven models is a critical area, with several case studies indicating substantial savings (Lee et al., 2022).

3. Major AI systems beneficial for Food Safety and Inspection in Food Industry and Regulator Bodies

3.1. Automated Inspection and Quality Control: Automated inspection systems utilize computer vision technologies to enhance the process of quality control in food production. These systems can detect defects, contamination, and inconsistencies, improving food safety inspections' efficiency and accuracy (Lee, 2021).

3.2. Predictive Analytics for Inspection Planning: Predictive analytics leverages historical data to forecast potential risks and streamline inspection schedules. By identifying high-risk facilities or products, USDA-FSIS can allocate resources more effectively (Smith and Jones, 2020).

3.3. Food Processing and Supply Chain Monitoring and Traceability: AI-driven monitoring tools enhance traceability throughout the food supply chain. This enables real-time tracking of food products, contributing to quicker responses during contamination events and ensuring compliance with food safety standards (Wang et al., 2022).

3.4. Natural Language Processing for Compliance Analysis: Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools can analyze compliance documents, regulations, and inspection reports. This automates the extraction of relevant information, helping USDA-FSIS streamline compliance monitoring (Martinez, 2019).

3.5. Early Warning Systems for Food Safety Incidents: AI-powered early warning systems can analyze vast datasets to predict food safety incidents before they escalate. This proactive approach can minimize the impact of foodborne illnesses (Khan and Parvez, 2021).

3.6. AI-assisted Food Safety and Risk Assessment: AI tools can assist in evaluating food safety risks by analyzing factors such as historical data on contamination, environmental conditions, and food handling practices (Omar & Noor, 2020).

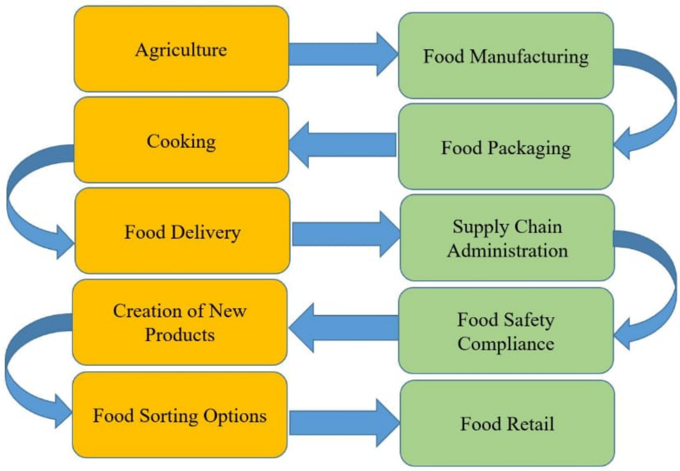
3.7. Dynamic Regulatory Compliance Updates: AI systems can provide real-time updates on regulatory changes, ensuring that food producers remain compliant with the latest food safety laws and guidelines (Johnson and Lee, 2023).

3.8. Smart Labeling and Product Information Extraction: Smart labeling technologies utilize AI to extract and process product information, enhancing consumer awareness of food safety practices and nutritional information (Fernandez et al., 2022).

3.9. AI-enhanced Training and Skill Development: AI can significantly improve the training of food safety inspectors and workers by offering personalized learning experiences and simulations that adapt to the learner's pace (Ali and Kumar, 2019).

3.10. IoT Integration for Real-Time Monitoring: Integrating IoT devices with AI allows for real-time monitoring of food products through various stages of processing and distribution. This technology is pivotal for maintaining food safety standards and preventing incidents (Thompson & Green, 2021).

Major AI uses in Food production and food quality system



4. Current Challenges and Way Forward

The integration of AI in food safety faces several challenges that need to be addressed for effective implementation. One primary issue is the availability and quality of data; AI models rely heavily on accurate, high-quality datasets, yet inconsistent data collection practices and limited access to comprehensive food safety data can hinder performance. Privacy and security concerns surrounding the collection and use of sensitive food supply chain data are also significant barriers, requiring robust safeguards to protect information. Moreover, the slow pace of adoption in some sectors of the food industry, coupled with resistance to change, presents a challenge in scaling AI-driven solutions. Another obstacle is the lack of standardized data protocols across regions, which complicates the development of universally applicable AI systems. Furthermore, regulatory bodies face difficulties in keeping pace with rapid technological advancements, which can delay the approval and implementation of AI-based solutions.

To overcome these challenges, collaboration between food industry stakeholders, researchers, and regulatory bodies is crucial. Standardized data protocols, along with clear guidelines for AI applications in food safety, would help streamline adoption. A stronger emphasis on data privacy and security frameworks, alongside the development of more accessible and affordable AI technologies, can alleviate concerns. Additionally, fostering a culture of innovation and providing adequate training programs will equip the workforce with the necessary skills to harness AI effectively. Finally, integrating AI with complementary technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) can enhance real-time monitoring and traceability, further strengthening food safety systems. With these efforts, AI can transform food safety practices, ensuring greater efficiency, compliance, and public health protection in the food industry.

5. Conclusion

The food industry is undergoing a significant transformation as it increasingly adopts technological advancements to tackle challenges related to food safety and quality, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) playing a pivotal role. AI enhances food safety systems through automated inspection, predictive analytics, real-time monitoring, and improved traceability within the food supply chain. It offers promising solutions for detecting contaminants, ensuring regulatory compliance, and proactively addressing risks to public health. However, the full potential of AI in the food sector is hindered by challenges such as data availability, privacy concerns, slow technological adoption, and the need for standardized data protocols. To maximize AI's impact, greater collaboration between researchers, industry stakeholders, and regulatory bodies is essential. Additionally, integrating AI with emerging technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) can further strengthen food safety surveillance, while efforts to enhance AI training and education will ensure a workforce equipped to leverage these innovations. Overcoming these barriers and embracing AI-driven solutions will be crucial in advancing food safety and safeguarding public health.

Author's contribution

Hafiz Khuram Wasim Aslam conceptualized and wrote the manuscript and other authors drafted, edited, and revised the manuscript.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Competing Interest

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