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Revamping structural health monitoring of advanced rail transit systems: A paradigmatic shift from digital shadows to digital twins

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ABSTRACT

Advanced rail transit systems (ARTS), including high-speed rail and maglev trains, provide enhanced transportation options to meet the growing demand for efficient transportation systems. However, they present unique challenges in maintaining the safety and performance of their infrastructures. Structural health monitoring (SHM) has emerged as an essential practice to forestall the potential consequences of structural defects in ARTS. Recently, digital twins and digital shadows have been successfully employed in various industries to monitor the state of physical systems. However, their application for structural health monitoring in ARTS remains largely unexplored. Hence, this article explores the potential of digital twins and digital shadows, in improving structural health monitoring in ARTS. Due to the digital twins' ability to bi-directional communication between a real system and its virtual replica, this article presents a comprehensive literature survey on their enablers and capabilities. Meanwhile, a framework for digital twins-based monitoring in ARTS is also proposed. The key distinctions and benefits of digital twins over other Industry 4.0 digital representation concepts, such as real-time monitoring, optimization, prediction, simulation, and decision-making, are identified. The paper highlights the significant opportunities that digital twins, especially, can offer to improve health monitoring. Similarly, limitations and bottlenecks that must be tackled in future research for implementations are also acknowledged. Finally, harnessing the power of digital twins can catalyze a transformative shift in ARTS, leading to more effective monitoring, enhanced safety, and improved performance.

1. Introduction

Transportation networks, including roads and railways, play a crucial role in societal development and the economy [\[1\].](#page-11-0) With the increasing demand for efficient transportation, rail transit has emerged as a reliable, efficient, and sustainable option. However, the pursuit of higher speeds, increased loads, and growing passenger volumes pose challenges to rail infrastructure, particularly in advanced rail transit systems (ARTS). These systems, such as high-speed rail, maglev, automated metros, and hyperloop, have been developed to address these challenges and improve the overall performance of the railway industry [2–[4\]](#page-11-0). The rail transit system in China has grown exponentially in the last few decades, boasting the most extensive public transport network in the world [\[5\].](#page-11-0) Other regions, such as Eastern Asia and Europe, have also witnessed significant progress in implementing ARTS, led by countries like Germany, Japan, and South Korea [\[6\]](#page-11-0). Despite these advancements, rail infrastructure faces challenges from loadings,

environmental factors, and human-induced effects, impacting its condition [\[7\].](#page-11-0) Regular monitoring is essential to assess operational characteristics, detect anomalies, and prevent discomfort, risks, and failures [\[8\].](#page-11-0) Structural health monitoring (SHM) is crucial for extending the life of rail assets through proactive maintenance [\[8\]](#page-11-0).

SHM systems rely on sensor networks to continuously measure structural and environmental data in order to detect anomalous conditions [\[9\]](#page-11-0). Various sensing technologies, including strain sensors, accelerometers, and displacement transducers, enable integrated and distributed measurements inside and outside the structure [\[10\]](#page-11-0). Despite extensive research, the industry still relies on visual inspections, which could be inefficient [\[11\].](#page-11-0) Autonomous real-time systems are crucial for providing engineers with timely information about structural conditions [\[12\]](#page-11-0). Early detection of structural malfunctions in critical components like train bogies [\[13\],](#page-11-0) railway signal systems [\[14\]](#page-11-0), maglev suspension systems [\[15\],](#page-11-0) track systems, etc. [\[16\]](#page-11-0) increases service life and reduces maintenance costs.

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While conventional SHM techniques that rely on direct sensor data analysis or model updating are gaining recognition, their reliability in detecting structural issues accurately and promptly depends on their correct deployment [\[17\]](#page-11-0). However, traditional SHM techniques face several challenges, resulting in a low acceptance rate in related industries. These challenges include data sufficiency and management, disruption of service or normal use of structures, interference risks, lack of real-time measurement and inference automation, uncertainties, deployment costs, sensor configuration issues, and a lack of uniform methodology in implementation [\[18\].](#page-11-0) Digitalized SHM involving digital shadows (DS), or digital twins (DT) can address some of these limitations.

The advent of Industry 4.0 [\[19\]](#page-11-0) and the emerging Industry 5.0 [\[20\]](#page-11-0) hold tremendous potential for advancing sustainability and resilience in various sectors, particularly in transportation systems. The combination of technologies introduced allows for intelligent decision-making, predictive maintenance, and sustainable practices, leading us toward a future that balances economic growth, environmental responsibility, and enhanced resiliency [\[21\]](#page-11-0).

Industry 4.0 concepts such as building information modeling (BIM), cyber-physical systems (CPS), DT, DS, big data, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), cloud computing, internet of things (IoT), and sensor networks have gained popularity in the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industry. These advancements reflect the increasing digitization and convergence of the AEC industry with other sectors. However, the AEC industry has been slow to adapt to the digital trend, posing challenges for infrastructural digitalization, smart infrastructures (SI), and SHM $[8]$. While the AEC industry has been relatively less digitized, full-scale digitalization is anticipated to result in substantial cost savings during different construction phases. Fig. 1 **(a)** shows the increasing worldwide relative search volume for the search term "digital twin" over a five-year period, between June 2018 and May 2023. The search volume is presented on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 representing the highest search volume observed. On the other hand, Fig. 1 **(b)** shows the relative distribution of 8815 research documents related to "digital twin", "digital twins", "digital shadow" or "digital shadows" available on the Web of Science database between 2014 and 2023. The exponentially growing bar chart also highlights the growing scientific interest in the concept of digital twins.

The concept of DT can be ambiguous due to varying interpretations [\[22\]](#page-11-0). The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) defines DT as a simulation that incorporates multiple scales, physics, and stochastic elements, using the best available models and updated

information to mirror the life cycle of its physical twin $[23]$. On the other hand, a DS enables one-way information exchange between the physical structure/object and the digital representation, with limited manual communication between the digital entity and the physical entity [\[24\].](#page-12-0)

DTs have gained traction in manufacturing, automotive production, aerospace, and healthcare sectors [\[25,26\].](#page-12-0) Despite these advancements, the full implementation of DTs in complex systems like railways for enhancing reliability, competitiveness, and efficiency, delivering highquality services remains unexplored [\[27\]](#page-12-0). While extensive research has been conducted on DT in the AEC industry and related fields ([Table 1](#page-2-0)**)**, there is often discrepancies in its usage and definition across these studies. Finding clear guidelines and technical reports on developing DT platforms for complex systems like rail transit is challenging. Additionally, there is a limited number of DT-related papers in the AEC industry, particularly in the context of railways. However, there is significant potential for DTs in areas like SHM. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies combining ARTS, DTs, and SHM. Meanwhile, integration of these aspects through DTs and establishing formalized frameworks are crucial.

The main contribution of this paper is to provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on DTs and related concepts, clarify digitalization concepts, bridge the gap between SHM and DT, and propose a framework for SHM-DT in ARTS. The paper aims to establish a generally applicable technical framework for developing SHM-DTs in the advanced rail transit industry.

The paper is organized as follows: **Section 2** critically reviews the concept of SHM, including the need for SHM, types of maintenance, and enablers. **[Section 3](#page-3-0)** discusses the concept of digitalization, highlighting the various levels of virtualization and their applications. **[Section 4](#page-4-0)** discusses the enablers of DT and its requirements. **[Section 5](#page-6-0)** focuses on applying DT technology in SHM for the railway industry and other sectors. **[Section 6](#page-7-0)** proposes a conceptual framework for designing SHM-DTs for ARTS. **[Section 7](#page-8-0)** explores other aspects of the rail transit industry where DT adoption would be beneficial. **Section 8** discusses barriers to fully realizing DT's potential and proposes future works to address them. Finally, in **[Section 9](#page-10-0)**, concluding remarks are provided.

2. Overview and evolution of structural health monitoring (SHM)

This section provides an overview of SHM from a general perspective. It discusses the necessity for SHM, the classification of SHM

Fig. 1. (a) The increasing interest in worldwide search for "digital twins" on Google search engine (2018 – 2023); (b) The exponential growth of the total publications regarding "digital twins" on the Web of Science (2014 – 2023).

Table 1

Some literature review papers on DT in relation to general practice and the AEC industry.

*A number of the literature included in this review are of integration level lower than DTs and would at most be classified as digital shadows.

practices, and the enabling technologies that drive advancements in SHM.

2.1. The necessity for SHM

SHM is primarily concerned with monitoring and detecting degradations and defects that impact a structure's ability to perform its intended purpose, as well as the material and geometric properties [\[52\]](#page-12-0). Based on the information obtained from the structure, SHM can be categorized into four phases [\[53\]](#page-12-0), i.e. damage localization, life prediction, identification, and damage assessment, as shown in Table 2.

In general, for all types of rail transit systems, whether conventional or advanced, monitoring is particularly crucial for track/guideway components such as curvatures, slopes, irregularities, and turnouts [\[54\]](#page-12-0). Abnormal loads can impact the bogie (in high-speed rails) or the levitation bogies (in maglev trains) and can also lead to fatigue issues [\[55\]](#page-12-0). In maglev trains, the dynamic contact between the electromagnet and the guideway [\[56\]](#page-12-0) and irregularities in the guideway [\[15\]](#page-11-0) can cause resonance and vehicle instability [\[57\].](#page-12-0) Resorting to traditional maintenance practices in railway would lead to under- or over-maintenance [\[58\]](#page-12-0). Therefore, there is a need for improved, digitized, continuous, and real-time-based maintenance.

2.2. Classification of SHM

2.2.1. Based on variation of measured system properties

SHM methods often require measuring the responses of a structure to infer the structure's condition [\[59\]](#page-12-0). There are two main groups in this regard: static SHM involving slowly varying system responses; and dynamic SHM involving dynamically varying properties [\[53\].](#page-12-0)

2.2.2. Based on measured system properties

SHM can be classified into vibration-based and non-vibration-based methods based on the measured system properties. They are vibrationbased SHM which could involve free, forced, or ambient responses [\[60\]](#page-12-0); and non-vibration-based SHM [\[61\].](#page-12-0)

2.2.3. Based on modeling

SHM practices can also be classified based on the analytics methodology, specifically, the approach used for system condition identification [\[53\].](#page-12-0) The main categories are physics model-based SHM which involves updating system models based on measured system responses; and data-driven SHM involving statistical methods and/or ML algorithms.

2.3. Advanced SHM enablers

The advent of some modern devices and the gradual convergence of civil engineering with various other fields [\[62\]](#page-12-0) have recently led to advancement in SHM. In the realm of sensing and measurements, modern devices have overcome many limitations of conventional sensors, offering improved precision and coverage. These enable the

Table 2

Phases of structural health diagnosis.

measurement of new structural characteristics, including electrical impedance and guided wave responses, offering integrated, quasidistributed, and distributed measurements [\[10\]](#page-11-0). Examples of these new sensor technologies include optical fiber sensors (OFS), global positioning systems (GPS), micro-mechanical systems (MEMS), radarbased systems (e.g., LiDAR), vision-based systems, smart wireless sensors, etc. [\[17\].](#page-11-0)

Other aspects, such as automation and data management speed, have also been enhanced through wireless sensors, high-speed computers, new ML techniques, cloud computing, and high-speed connectivity [\[63\]](#page-12-0). Issues with traditional SHM such as data inundation, cable length constraints, and interference caused by long cables [\[64\]](#page-12-0) can also be prevented with new technologies.

In addition, the rapid advancement of information and communication technology has resulted in the incorporation of computer-aided technologies into SHM practices. Concepts such as computer-aided engineering, BIM (building information modeling), etc., have become ubiquitous in the SHM field. Indeed, newer concepts such as ML, the internet of things (IoT), big data, cloud computing, DT, and sensor networks are also gaining traction.

3. Digitalization for SHM: Between digital model (DM), digital shadow (DS), and digital twin (DT)

This section explores digitalization and aims to clarify the various concepts associated with it. The distinction between these concepts is crucial to avoid the confusion often encountered in literature. Additionally, the application and impact of digitalization in the AEC industry and other sectors will be discussed.

3.1. The concept of digitalization and modeling

The integration of computer-aided technologies and information technologies into the AEC industry is grounded in the virtualization of physical systems or objects, collectively known as "digitalization". In essence, digitalization involves creating a digital representation or model of a physical system [\[65\]](#page-12-0). DT represents the pinnacle of the digitalization process [\[8\]](#page-11-0) in engineering and management, as it provides a framework to automate and optimize the "cradle-to-grave" processes associated with operating a civil engineering asset. Therefore, the question arises: where, when, and how does a model evolve into a DT?

3.2. The simplification of digital modeling levels and their key attributes

Within the realm of digitalization, several concepts closely related to DTs, such as simulation, emulation, DS, CPS, digital thread, and BIM exist [\[47\]](#page-12-0). In the AEC industry especially, finding clear guidelines, and semantics that differentiate various aspects of digitalization is quite challenging. In their literature review, Liu et al. [\[66\]](#page-12-0) observed that over half of the studies described digital models or DSs, despite claiming to focus on DTs. The definitions of concepts also vary so much that they are sometimes incorrect [\[67](#page-12-0)–69], resulting in their misuse [\[70\].](#page-12-0) Hence, it is essential to differentiate these concepts.

3.2.1. Simplification of the terms: DM, DS, DT, and digital thread

A DM is the foundational level of virtualization and refers to the virtual representation of a simulated or real object that does not involve any information interchange between the real and virtual counterparts [\[71\]](#page-12-0). On the other hand, a DS represents a virtual object that allows for automatic unidirectional information exchange between the real and virtual objects. Changes in the state of the real object are reflected in the virtual object, but there is no automatic reverse information exchange [\[47\]](#page-12-0). A DT surpasses the capabilities of a DS by enabling mutual bidirectional information exchange between a real object and its virtual counterpart throughout the entity's lifecycle. Finally, a digital thread is the continuous connection of all digital representations throughout the

different phases of a product's lifecycle, enabling traceability from re-quirements to retirement [\[72,73\]](#page-12-0).

3.2.2. Clarifying misconceptions among similar concepts

This sub-section seeks to clarify distinctions between DTs, BIM, CPS, and smart infrastructures (SI).

a) Between DT and BIM

While BIM can manage digital information and be considered a digital model of a physical asset [\[74\],](#page-12-0) it does not fulfill the requirements to be fully considered a DT. Although, high level BIMs with sensors exist [\[75,76\],](#page-12-0) a DT goes beyond by enabling bidirectional information interchange with the real object throughout its life cycle, including realtime visualization, data analysis, and feedback [\[77,78\].](#page-13-0)

b) Between DT and CPS

While CPS emphasizes the computing and communication capabilities of the cyber world to the physical [79–[82\],](#page-13-0) a DT provides a detailed representation of the physical process and can thus incorporate CPS technologies as part of its communication module [\[83\]](#page-13-0).

c) Between DT and SI

SI combines sensory networks with physical infrastructure for monitoring and better-informed decision-making [\[84\]](#page-13-0). While SI focuses on the physical asset itself using real-time data, DTs focus on virtual replication of the physical asset and its behaviours based on real and historical data.

Based on the characteristics of the digitalization concepts discussed above and the cited references**,** [Table 3](#page-4-0) provides a summary of the attributes for clearer understanding. Meanwhile, the increasing complexities of digitalization concepts, and their interactions are presented in [Fig. 2.](#page-4-0)

3.3. Aspects and definition of DT

A comprehensive collection of DT's definitions can be found in [\[85\]](#page-13-0). According to the Industrial Internet Consortium (IIC) [\[86\],](#page-13-0) DT is defined as "a formal digital representation of some asset, process, or system that captures attributes and behaviors of that entity suitable for communication, storage, interpretation, or processing within a certain context.".

According to Grieves [\[87\]](#page-13-0), a digital twin consists of three main components: (i) physical objects in the real world, (ii) digital objects in the virtual world, and (iii) connections linking the digital and physical world. Based on these, the key characteristics of DTs are:

- 1. Virtual representation: DTs are virtual replicas of real-world physical assets (the physical or real twin).
- 2. Communication: DTs incorporate information from real-world data measurements, enriching their geometric and graphical data.
- 3. Self-evolution: DTs can automatically update themselves with new real-time data, evolving alongside the physical twin.

3.3.1. Applications case studies of DT in the AEC and railway industry

DTs have found applications in various areas of the AEC industry. For railways, frameworks such as In2Smart [\[88\],](#page-13-0) have been developed to facilitate the digitalization of railway intelligent asset management and monitoring practices. Other implementations of DTs in smart construction have also been reported [\[89\]](#page-13-0). For power and energy management, DTs have been developed to control electric railway power systems [\[90\]](#page-13-0), track a power transformer's voltage distribution [\[91\]](#page-13-0), and provide online analysis for energy management [\[92,93\]](#page-13-0). DTs have also found application in smart city development in Singapore [\[94\]](#page-13-0), Herrenberg

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Comparison of attributes of the digitalization concepts.

Fig. 2. The increasing complexities of digitalization concepts, as well as their interaction.

[\[95\]](#page-13-0), Zurich [\[96\],](#page-13-0) etc.

3.3.2. Application case studies in other industries

DTs have made significant impacts in various industries for enhancing, planning and productivity. Beyond its usage by NASA, other studies (e.g., [\[97\]](#page-13-0)) have reported usage in the space and aeronautics field. In the production industry, DTs have been applied to product identification and position tracking [\[82\],](#page-13-0) predictive maintenance [\[98\]](#page-13-0), sustainable manufacturing [\[99\],](#page-13-0) and many other areas of smart manufacturing [\[100](#page-13-0)–103]. Sustainability-related DT applications have also emerged such as decarbonization in ship routing [\[104\]](#page-13-0), sustainable offshore exploration [\[105\]](#page-13-0), etc. In the health area, DTs have been applied to personal health monitoring [\[106\]](#page-13-0), and in many other applications [107–[110\].](#page-13-0)

4. Perspectives on the composition of a DT: Enablers and requirements

Based on the preceding discussions, it is evident that DT represents a convergence of multiple technologies, including data analytics and AI, haptics and IoT, cybersecurity, and communication networks [\[106\].](#page-13-0) In this section, we discuss the enablers and requirements necessary for the design of DTs.

4.1. Enablers

Advancements in AI, broadband connectivity, sensor technology, big data techniques, and computing technologies, have facilitated the

emergence of DTs in the past decade [\[29\]](#page-12-0). In this section, the major enablers for DTs emergence and implementations are discussed.

4.1.1. Sensors and sensing system

New wired and wireless networking protocols incorporate data encryption functionality [\[43\]](#page-12-0), to remove the barrier of installation costs [\[111\]](#page-13-0) and data security concerns. The rise of advanced sensing technology e.g., optical fibers [\[112](#page-13-0)–114] has enabled sensing networks capable of measuring various responses from target structures, in multiple directions and high frequencies. Others like laser scan sensors can carry out reverse engineering for faster modeling [\[76\]](#page-13-0).

4.1.2. Enhanced modeling and computation

Simulation methods such as discrete-event simulation, finite element method (FEM), computational fluid dynamics (CFD) etc., are common nowadays [\[22\]](#page-11-0). Rasheed et al. [\[115\]](#page-13-0) highlighted developments in computational hardware as major factors contributing to the advancement of DT, as they enabled extensive data processing, improved accuracy [\[49\]](#page-12-0), cost benefits and portability [\[116\]](#page-13-0).

4.1.3. AI/ML

AI techniques, particularly ML methods [\[117\]](#page-13-0), have found extensive use in extracting valuable information from available data, guiding decision-making, reducing human efforts, and achieving a high level of automation in processes [\[118\]](#page-13-0). More recently, deep learning (DL) methods have been developed, offering even greater efficiency in data analytics [\[119,120\]](#page-13-0).

4.1.4. Big data

Big data involves collecting and analyzing massive amounts of data from various sources, incorporating advanced data cleaning, mining, and analysis techniques to DTs [\[121\]](#page-13-0).

4.1.5. Cloud computing and storage

The emergence of cloud services makes the computation, storage, and retrieval of massive amounts of data easy. Since DTs are constantly being updated with a continuous, this technology has enhanced their implementation e.g., [\[110,122\].](#page-13-0)

4.1.6. Internet-of-things

IoT, and its industrial counterpart (IIoT)), which enable seamless communication among devices and sensors, can help in collecting massive amounts of data required by DTs [\[49\]](#page-12-0). Incorporating IoT and/or IIoT into DT architecture enhances data collection, sorting, visualization, control relays, self-diagnostics and even self-repairing [\[123,124\].](#page-13-0)

4.1.7. Networks and communications

Communication technologies for enhanced interoperability and proper data exchange [\[49\]](#page-12-0) such as 5G, 6G, and WiFi are major DT enablers, allowing communication between the physical and the virtual twins, as well as within the cyber world.

4.1.8. Immersive technologies

Technologies overlaying the physical and cyber world together, like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR) have enhanced the creation of DTs, especially in the domain of visualization, training [\[49\]](#page-12-0) and better understanding [\[125\].](#page-13-0)

4.2. Requirements for a DT

In the literature, specific requirements exist for a DT to be fully functional. Based on these requirements, researchers have classified DTs into various layers/kinds; including five layers [\[126\]](#page-13-0), three layers [\[121\],](#page-13-0) and seven layers [\[127\]](#page-14-0). Ghitta and Siham [\[121\]](#page-13-0) opined that the architectures of DT vary depending on the digital twins' field of applications, intended services and benefits, and related technologies and concepts.

In this section, the requirements for DTs are discussed. Fig. 3 presents a schematic highlighting the full intricacies and details of the DT for a complex system like ARTS.

4.2.1. Modeling

In DT architecture, the most important component is the modeling/ virtualizing aspect. Several kinds of modeling could be involved, including geometric virtual modeling using CAD software; mechanicsbased modeling for analysis, simulation and predictions [\[128\]](#page-14-0); multiphysics modeling; multiscale modeling for incorporating various spatial and temporal scales [\[129\];](#page-14-0) data-driven modeling [\[130\]](#page-14-0); statistical modeling [\[131\]](#page-14-0); hybrid modeling combining physics-based and datadriven approaches [132–[134\]](#page-14-0); surrogate modeling [\[135\];](#page-14-0) and reduced modeling to capture only the essential physics [\[136,137\]](#page-14-0).

4.2.2. Sensors and data collection

One of the three major characteristics of the DT is the information exchange between the physical and virtual twins via sensors and sensing systems. Sensor data comprises a range of information, including operational data, behavior descriptions, engineering data, inspection reports, and maintenance history [\[8\].](#page-11-0) For data collection, certain considerations including the kind of data to measure as well as optimization of locations are paramount [\[138,139\]](#page-14-0).

4.2.3. Simulation

Simulation in DTs serves several purposes, including evaluation of unobservable responses [\[140\]](#page-14-0), response prediction to future events [\[29\]](#page-12-0), predictive maintenance [\[141\]](#page-14-0), decision-making and control strategies, visualization of the physical twin's state, as well as training of surrogate models for analysis purposes [\[142\],](#page-14-0) leading to improved decision-making, and proactive maintenance strategies [\[143\]](#page-14-0).

4.2.4. Visualization/ user interface

The visualization and user interface component of the DT is essential, as it facilitates human–machine interaction, and allows control actions and decisions to be relayed. The user interface must be user-friendly, semi- or fully automated for deriving insights, decision support, predictions and implementation processes [\[25\]](#page-12-0). Platforms include immersive technologies [\[83,125\]](#page-13-0), web applications [\[7\]](#page-11-0), live graphs [\[144\]](#page-14-0) etc.

Fig. 3. Schematic illustrating the full intricacies about the digital twin of an ARTS.

4.2.5. Decision and control

For DTs' decision support system of DTs, decision-making and selecting intervention actions could be formalized into stable architec-tures like decision trees [\[8\].](#page-11-0) Semantics and ontologies have also been proposed in the literature [\[145\]](#page-14-0), especially in cases where aggregation of several components of sub-systems DTs is necessary. Data-driven assisted cognition functions are also possible by incorporating ML/DL algorithms.

4.2.6. Full autonomy

An essential requirement of DTs is autonomy, reflected in selfadaptation and self-parametrization capabilities, allowing the virtual twin to automatically mimic the real twin throughout its whole lifecycle. One of the ways to implement full autonomy is by the development of highly modularized and parameterized DTs, allowing system decentralization [\[146\].](#page-14-0)

4.2.7. Data handling and management

Since a DT is expected to mirror the behavior of the real twin throughout its entire lifecycle, humongous amounts of data would be collected from the physical world. Data handling protocols include ontology [\[145\],](#page-14-0) extensible markup language [\[147\]](#page-14-0), and the standard for the exchange of product model data $[148]$. On the other hand, data management concepts ensure the quality [\[149\],](#page-14-0) fusion/integration of data [\[150\]](#page-14-0) as well as data security [\[151\]](#page-14-0).

4.2.8. Twin and data storage

While storing data and the entire DT in a cloud-based system may appear straightforward, it is not optimal [\[7\]](#page-11-0). According to Schnicke and Kuhn [\[152\],](#page-14-0) data that requires frequent refreshing should be stored on the edge, while infrequently updated data can be stored on the cloud.

4.2.9. Self-updating ability and adaptability

The DT of a physical entity is expected to exist as several representations of the physical system over time (almost like a video), with a refresh/changing rate equal to the updating frequency of the virtual model behavior [\[8\]](#page-11-0). It is important for the DT to update itself based on available data streams and also reconfigure in adaptation to the evolution of the physical system itself [\[153,154\]](#page-14-0). In traditional model updating, calibration of models involves a computationally exhaustive process, hence making it impracticable for DT [\[128\]](#page-14-0).

4.2.10. Communication and interactions

In DTs, especially for distributed systems involving networked twins [256], communication between components of each DT and several DTs is paramount. Four levels of communication are considered: (a) real twin to virtual twin, relying on sensor data transmission and maintenance report feeding [\[155\];](#page-14-0) (b) DT to other DTs, for modulated complex systems $[22]$; (c) virtual space intercommunication $[156]$; and (d) virtual twin to real twin, for relaying decisions, control actions, and feedbacks [\[157\].](#page-14-0)

4.2.11. Uncertainty considerations

Uncertainties can arise in prediction results and inferences from various sources, including modeling, response measurement, data storage, measurement noise, errors, timing, and analog-to-digital conversion [\[90\].](#page-13-0) Model updating approaches, such as Bayesian methods [\[158\]](#page-14-0), can also be utilized to calibrate the structural model's parameters, ensuring that the predicted response aligns with the measured response [159–[162\]](#page-14-0).

5. Digitally enhanced SHM

With the rapid development of digitalization, researchers are revolutionizing SHM systems with digitalization to benefit the industry [\[1,47\]](#page-11-0). Hence, in this section, the benefits, and roles of digitalization in emerging practices of SHM and maintenance, both in the AEC industry and other industries are explored.

5.1. The benefits of digitalized SHM

Digitalized SHMs can address some of these limitations suffered by traditional SHMs in the following aspects:

- a) Reduction in uncertainties: The comprehensive data integration by DTs reduces uncertainties in simulations and predictions, improving accuracy and precision [\[8\]](#page-11-0)
- b) Better coordination of assets and increased efficiency: DTs facilitate the convergence of infrastructure networks, which improves efficiency, cost reductions, and better maintenance practices [\[65\].](#page-12-0)
- c) Continuous replication of physical system characteristics: DTs' continuous collection and generation of operational data enable close to real-time simulation and decision-making for improved efficiency [\[143\].](#page-14-0)
- d) Enhanced damage detection efficiency: Continuous and automatic monitoring with DTs overcomes the limitation of traditional SHM, enabling timely intervention.
- e) Better prediction of "what if" scenarios: DTs allow testing and assessment of long- and short-term decisions and actions before implementation [\[8,27\]](#page-11-0).
- f) Enhancement of lifetime support for systems: DTs are able to automate and optimize the "cradle-to-grave" processes associated with operating civil engineering assets [\[8\].](#page-11-0)
- g) Decision-making support: A key aspect of DTs is feedback, empowering infrastructure managers and decision-makers with tools to effectively control, monitor, and optimize physical assets [\[27,163\].](#page-12-0)
- h) Maintenance approach selection: DTs facilitate establishing condition-based, preventive approaches [\[164\]](#page-14-0), as well as proactive maintenance [\[8\]](#page-11-0).
- i) Potential for infrastructure automation: DTs enable seamless bidirectional information exchange between the real and virtual twins, enabling automation.
- j) Sustainability and environmental impact: Optimizing interventions and scheduling with DTs extends the service life of infrastructures while reducing their environmental impacts.

5.2. Applications of digitally enhanced SHM

The railway industry has seen various studies and applications of digital-based SHM, primarily utilizing conventional model updating. These studies have focused on monitoring ballasted tracks [\[160,165\]](#page-14-0), rails [\[166\]](#page-14-0), slab tracks [\[167,168\],](#page-14-0) wheels [\[169\]](#page-14-0), high-speed rail [\[169,170\]](#page-14-0), railway bridges [\[171\]](#page-14-0), maglev train [\[172\],](#page-14-0) wave-based approach [\[173\]](#page-14-0), vision-based approach [\[174\]](#page-14-0), and advanced sensing techniques [\[166,175\].](#page-14-0) Meanwhile, new technologies, particularly DS and DT, have recently emerged to enhance conventional SHM practices, both within and outside the AEC industry. In the manufacturing sector, DTs have been used for predictive maintenance of robots [\[176\],](#page-14-0) machine reconditioning [\[156\]](#page-14-0) and fault diagnosis [\[177\]](#page-14-0). DTs have also found usage in SHM related to smart infrastructures, especially in bridges [178–[181\]](#page-14-0), vertical transportation [\[136\],](#page-14-0) smart and sustainable transportation [\[137,182\].](#page-14-0) This section explores the applications of digitalization in various forms to SHM in the railway and other industries.

5.2.1. Case studies of DTs in railway systems

An extensive amount of research on the application of DTs to SHM in railway systems focuses on civil infrastructure aspects, particularly railway bridges [\[141,183\],](#page-14-0) with less emphasis on other railway aspects. For railway vehicles, Efaanov [\[184\]](#page-15-0) proposed a conceptual model for the DT of infrastructure facilities and rolling stock of trains; Wu et al. [\[58\]](#page-12-0) developed a DT-based fault diagnosis framework for high-speed train bogies; while Ferdousi et al. [\[185\]](#page-15-0) designed the RailTwin framework to monitor heavy freight rail cars. For tracks, Yang et al. [\[122\]](#page-13-0) presented a DT-based methodology for predictive maintenance of railway switch machines, while Bernal et al. [\[142\]](#page-14-0) proposed a DT-based methodology for preventing train derailments. For rail power systems, Ahmadi et al. [\[90\]](#page-13-0) proposed a DT implementation in controlling and monitoring electric railway power systems, Ikeda [\[2\]](#page-11-0) developed DTs to maintain electric railway power supply systems, while Rodriguez et al. [\[186\]](#page-15-0) discussed DT implementation for state estimation of electric power train components. Other implementations of DTs in urban rail transit have also been explored [\[146,187\]](#page-14-0).

5.2.2. Case studies of DSs in railway systems

Many studies in the railway industry that claim to be based on DTs are DSs or at a lower level in the hierarchy of DMs discussed earlier. Some studies utilizing DS have focused on integrating data-driven models into decision-making frameworks for railway maintenance and examining various assets. Morant et al. [\[188\]](#page-15-0) and Yang et al. [\[189\]](#page-15-0) considered the maintenance of rail line signaling systems. Núñez et al. [\[190\],](#page-15-0) Jamshidi et al. [\[191\]](#page-15-0), and Consilvio et al. [\[192\]](#page-15-0) focused on rail track maintenance. Liu et al. [\[116\]](#page-13-0) proposed a cyber-twins framework for high-speed railway prognosis. Similarly, other studies involving smart high-speed railway platform monitoring [\[193\],](#page-15-0) urban railway evaluations [\[194\]](#page-15-0), and IoT-based railway maintenance [\[195\]](#page-15-0) have been reported.

5.2.3. Case studies of lower-level virtual representations in railway systems

This section encompasses all virtual representations of railway systems lower than DS. Most studies in the AEC industry fall into this category, with many erroneously labeled as DTs. In some studies, BIM was used to create models for railway buildings [\[196\],](#page-15-0) track turnout systems [\[197\]](#page-15-0), and railway tracks [\[198\]](#page-15-0). Also, Hamarat et al. [\[199\]](#page-15-0) devised a technique for evaluating fatigue damage in intricate railway turnout crossings. Avizzano et al. [\[200\]](#page-15-0) introduced a hybrid algorithm for reconstructing rolling stocks from a sequence of images.

Most studies focusing on online monitoring of railway data only analyze monitoring data without conducting comprehensive real-time equipment status analysis, resulting in one-sided communications [\[122\].](#page-13-0) Numerous online monitoring applications for high-speed rail can be found in the literature, including wheel defect identification [\[170,201\],](#page-14-0) turnout system [\[202\],](#page-15-0) bogie condition [\[203\],](#page-15-0) train vehicle condition $\lceil 204 \rceil$, and maglev suspension system $\lceil 16,172 \rceil$.

6. A conceptual framework for the SHM-focused advanced rail transit systems DT

Primarily, ARTS comprises five sectors: track (or guideway); civil structures (such as buildings, and bridges); electrical/power systems; telecommunications; and signaling/authorization systems [\[205\]](#page-15-0). Owing to its complexity, it is difficult to create a single DT for the entire system, even for a single purpose like SHM. A practicable idea is the creation of networked DTs replicating different systems and processes [\[25\]](#page-12-0). Each ARTS sector is interconnected at a global level. Hence, for SHM, all these sectors must be fully incorporated and catered to.

In this section, a framework that caters to the implementation need is formulated for the interoperability of DTs towards obtaining a "fully twinned" ARTS.

6.1. Sensor and response collection

In this aspect, the following tasks are required:

- (a) Identification of possible systems conditions and responses sensitive to changes in these conditions.
- (b) Selection of proper sensors and sensing technologies for system responses.
- (c) Selection of sensors for environmental conditions to reduce epistemic uncertainties.
- (d) Identifying the required measurement accuracy level.
- (e) Optimization of sensor quantity, locations, and configurations.
- (f) Optimization of sampling rate for each considered quantity or sensor class.

6.2. Data pre-processing, storage and management

For the handling of data, we propose using a fusion of edge, fog and cloud technology [\[7,206\].](#page-11-0) The following steps are necessary:

- a. Data sources classification into static, semi-static and dynamic data.
- b. Determination of proper data storage using cloud, edge, and fog.
- c. Preprocessing and model training.
- d. Deployment of processed data and trained models.

6.3. Modulation and distributed system

In ARTS, modulation of DTs is essential. The networked DTs can collaborate to diagnose faults and solve system problems [\[146\]](#page-14-0). To achieve modulation, several actions are required:

- a) Definition of system's sub-systems and their respective components.
- b) Definition of sub-system's levels and components.
- c) Definition of each unit, component, level, and sub-level with necessary interaction nodes.
- d) Hierarchical evaluation of granulation.
- e) Sensors and sensor locations' virtualization.
- *6.4. Modeling*

The modeling of each component of ARTS must be able to describe the components in five essential aspects: geometry, physics, capability, behavior, and rule to give the DT an actual "mirroring" outlook. The following actions are proposed for modeling:

- a) Multiphysics modeling of the system from bottom to top.
- b) Establishment of data-driven model for each system level.
- c) Creation of hybridized models for each sub-system DTs.
- d) Surrogate *meta*-modeling based on the created hybrid high-fidelity models.
- e) Interaction of models at different system levels.

The interactions and functions of the various modeling levels and techniques for a DT are presented in [Fig. 4.](#page-8-0)

6.5. Model updating and uncertainty considerations

Thelen et al. [\[207\]](#page-15-0) have defined "real-time" as the minimum computational speed required to achieve seamless and uninterrupted optimization, prediction, and control of the system of interest. The necessary tasks for real-time optimum system refreshing are presented below.

- a) Identification of the system's changing and uncertain parameters.
- b) Definition of updating requirements for system components.
- c) Incorporation of surrogate models for model updating.
- d) Specification of updating algorithms.
- e) Optimization of dataset retrieval frequency and system refreshing rate.

6.6. Refreshing/updating rate of DTs

In the proposed framework, for each sequential data stream, an adaptive updating rate is recommended based on these tasks:

Fig. 4. The interaction between the various models, modeling levels and modeling techniques.

- a) Extraction of useful responses and information from the data.
- b) Assessment of model refreshing needs based on changes and level of changes in data streams.
- c) Adaptive updating of the data retrieval rate, and the system refreshing rate, based on a defined divergence criterion.
- d) Implementation of the analytics and control components for decision-making and control actions.

The processes and tasks involved in the proposed adaptive updating/ refreshing for DTs are detailed in [Fig. 5](#page-9-0).

6.7. Simulations

The various aspects of simulation required in DTs could include:

- a) Simulation for training data-driven models on unobserved system characteristics, unmeasurable data, and extreme events.
- b) Simulation for prediction.
- c) Simulation for inference and re-adaptation.
- d) Simulation for visualization.

6.8. Cognition, semantics, and ontology

To manage the complexity of the ARTS-DT, ontology and semantics are used to design knowledge graph models for coordinating the activities of the DT including:

- a) Interactions between DTs of different levels.
- b) General system decision making, and analytics.
- c) Interactions between different system DTs of complex systems.

6.9. Accessibility, user-interface, and feedback

DT outcomes should be user-friendly and easily understandable by non-experts, through clear visualizations, simplified summaries, and explicit feedback loops. This involves:

- a) Graphical simulation of the system's behavior in real-time.
- b) Visualization of dynamic charts and notifications.
- c) Incorporation of human-centered software for control actions.
- d) Incorporation of the online-based platform for easy access.

A flowchart detailing the proposed conceptual framework for ARTS-DT is presented in [Fig. 6](#page-10-0).

7. Other aspects of advanced rail transit with high potential for DT

As rail transport is becoming increasingly digitalized, the role of digital technology in all aspects of the rail sector is growing, along with the benefits.

7.1. Smart city and smart transportation

As an evolving strategy for city planning and integration, the market for smart city technologies is projected to worth around 165.8 billion USD by 2025 [\[208\].](#page-15-0) City-wide DTs also enhance effective planning, transportation, and comfortable urban living literature [\[209](#page-15-0)–211].

7.2. Train movement, journey scheduling, and other scheduling tasks

DT can also be applicable to train movements [\[212\]](#page-15-0) and automation

Fig. 5. The steps involved in the proposed adaptive refreshing algorithm.

of passenger movement and ticketing [\[146\].](#page-14-0) Negri et al. [\[213\]](#page-15-0) have demonstrated the strong prospect of DT in scheduling tasks, and enhancing efficiency.

7.3. Smart construction and lifetime control

Gu et al. [\[214\]](#page-15-0) demonstrated the ability of DT to facilitate ancient building protection, emergency rescue, and general construction practices including environmental quality monitoring, thermal comfort, and energy consumption.

7.4. Smart manufacturing of rail infrastructure

DTs can enhance decision-making during the design phase of a structure/infrastructure, construction, and its operational life [\[8,215\].](#page-11-0)

7.5. Infrastructure asset management

DTs will help seamlessly manage railway infrastructure assets throughout their entire service life, even for remote assets.

7.6. Stations management and crowd control

DTs can facilitate interactions with customer behavior in stations, platforms, and trains in the railway industry [\[27\],](#page-12-0) helping passengers to passengers can make informed decisions.

7.7. Enhanced passengers experience

DTs can provide insights into passengers' behavior and can help improve customer experience and services [\[216\]](#page-15-0) by analyzing factors like ride comfort, such as temperature and noise levels [\[212\].](#page-15-0)

7.8. Safety

DT has enormous potential in the safety planning and coordination of railway industry activities, including evacuations during unusual events and construction [\[217,218\]](#page-15-0).

7.9. Sustainability and resilience and green ecosystem

DTs enable the use of decision support tools to improve asset management sustainability, optimize resource utilization and reduce the life cycle costs of assets [\[219\]](#page-15-0).

7.10. Others

Studies such as Parviainen et al. [\[220\]](#page-15-0) and Marcucci et al. [\[221\]](#page-15-0) identified that DTs enhance efficiency and the creation of new opportunities, thus impacting urban transport policymaking.

Fig. 6. Overall representation of the proposed framework.

8. Challenges and future works on SHM-DT for advanced rail transit

section include:

8.1. Current challenges

- a) Practical challenges, e.g., sensor installations, data volume, and advanced sensing networks may be required in areas with peculiarities.
- b) The necessity for organizational and perspective changes of key players poses a significant challenge for the railway industry.
- c) The skepticism of infrastructure managers towards SHM, and preference for experience-based decisions.
- d) Threats in security and policy also pose a significant barrier to the implementation of DT.
- e) Ownership, ethical and copyright concerns arise when dealing with the vast amount of data collected in DTs.
- f) The scale, complexity, and governance of data related to multi-modal rail journeys, which are influenced by various parties.
- g) The need for effective collaboration and teamwork among DTs practitioners/end users to address the variety, complexity, and scale.
- h) The complexity and need for aggregating several DTs from different systems, and key players poses a huge threat.
- i) Potential heterogeneity of architectures due to the lack of unified design, platforms, and tools.
- j) The challenge of disparate information systems resulting from data fragmentation.

8.2. Future works

Future works on solving some of the issues raised in the previous

- a) Modularization, decentralization, and integration of DTs.
- b) Full implementation of DTs for a modern rail transit system, rather than conceptual.
- c) Incorporation of enhanced cognitive, management, and security components to DTs.
- d) Development of standardized methodologies and frameworks.
- e) Efficient integration of more advanced cyber-physical immersions.
- f) Advancements in sensor technology.

9. Conclusion

The rapid advancement of rail transit systems has brought numerous benefits and challenges in terms of safety and maintenance. To address these challenges, the concept of DTs has emerged as a powerful tool, leveraging Industry 4.0 technologies and virtualization concepts. DTs and DSs have been increasingly applied in various processes, including maintenance and SHM, with promising outcomes. This paper has provided an explorative review of the literature on DTs' and SHM, as well as highlighted DTs' main features, enablers, and potentials in advanced railway SHM. The distinguishing characteristics of DTs have been clarified, highlighting the core requirements. However, it is noted that the literature still lacks comprehensive implementations of DTs in the rail industry, particularly for ARTS. Many studies mislabel concepts similar to DTs; or focus only on specific rail systems or infrastructure components.

To this effect, this paper aims to answer the question of how DTs can be applied to enhance the SHM of ARTS. It argued that DTs are a promising technology that can overcome the limitations of traditional SHM methods and provide more accurate, reliable, and timely information about the health and performance of rail systems. Hence, a framework for implementing digital twin based-SHM in ARTS is proposed.

The proposed framework provides a systematic approach to leverage Industry 4.0 and 5.0 technologies as well as virtualization concepts in several sectors of the railway industry. The contributions of the proposed framework can be quantified through several key metrics. Firstly, it offers a comprehensive integration of data collection, storage, integration, management, and analytics, enabling real-time monitoring and proactive maintenance based on both the system history and the prevailing system condition. This leads to a significant reduction in downtime and maintenance costs. The framework also facilitates proactive decision-making by providing accurate and timely information on the health and performance of rail transit systems, without the necessity of an expert for interpretation of results as in conventional SHM. Additionally, the framework acknowledges and addresses the challenges specific to ARTS by considering their unique characteristics and requirements. By leveraging DTs, it enables a paradigmatic shift from traditional methods based on digital models and digital shadows to dynamic, automated, and interactive representations of rail transit systems. This shift fosters a deeper understanding of system behavior and enables more effective maintenance strategies.

While the proposed framework contributes to the field of ARTS and SHM, it is essential to acknowledge the existing gaps and challenges that need further exploration, such as addressing data volume management, ensuring data security and privacy, and establishing industry standards for DT implementation in the rail sector. The paper also acknowledged the limitations of this study, such as the lack of empirical validation, and the need to consider the specific characteristics and requirements of different rail systems and components.

In summary, the developed framework for DT-based SHM in ARTS presents a significant step towards revolutionizing the monitoring, optimization, planning, and control of rail transit systems. By highlighting its contributions in terms of reduced downtime, cost savings, and improved decision-making, the framework provides a practical and valuable solution for the rail industry. There is however a need for future research focusing on the development, refinement, implementation, and performance evaluation of the DT framework in high-speed rails and maglev trains, while concurrently addressing the identified challenges. Through these efforts, the integration of DTs in ARTS will drive the digitalization and interconnectivity agenda to new heights, ultimately enhancing the safety, efficiency, and performance of rail transit systems.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Mujib Olamide Adeagbo: Writing – original draft. **Su-Mei Wang:** Writing – original draft. **Yi-Qing Ni:** Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

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Data availability

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