Digital Twin Architecture for Scope 3 Emission Transparency in Sustainable Supply Networks

Viraj P. Tathavadekar[1], Dr. Nitin R. Mahankale[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India

[2]Associate Professor, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Symbiosis International University, Pune, India

Abstract

The escalating urgency of climate change mitigation has intensified corporate focus on comprehensive supply chain emission monitoring, particularly Scope 3 emissions which represent 70-90% of organizational carbon footprints. Traditional emission tracking methods prove inadequate for managing complex, multi-tiered supply networks, creating an urgent need for innovative technological solutions. This research investigates how digital twin architecture transforms Scope 3 emission transparency through dynamic virtual representations of physical supply networks. The study employs a comprehensive literature review and case analysis methodology, examining implementations across automotive, consumer goods, and technology sectors. Our four-stage framework encompasses data acquisition and integration, virtual modeling and simulation, real-time monitoring and analytics, and predictive optimization capabilities. Findings demonstrate that digital twin technology enables unprecedented supply chain visibility, facilitating proactive environmental management rather than reactive reporting. Organizations implementing digital twins report enhanced decision-making through granular emission data, improved regulatory compliance, optimized transportation routes, and dynamic supplier selection based on environmental performance. Strategic benefits encompass strengthening relationships with stakeholders, competitive market advantages, and support for setting science-based targets. However, implementation challenges relate to the complexity surrounding data integration across the almost impossibly varied supplier networks, huge infrastructure investments at the start, resistance from within regarding the transformation by technology, and privacy concerns on that information that is considered sensitive in the supply chain bureaucracy. The overall picture of adoption includes partnering collaborations, phased implementation approaches, standardized data protocols, and sharply vertical governance frameworks. This research offers new insights on technology-enabled solutions for sustainability while offering actionable advice for practitioners. Future lines of inquiry should consider an industry-oriented framework, standardization protocols, and longitudinal environmental impact assessments to empower digital twin applications for sustainable supply chain transformation.

Keywords

Digital Twin Architecture, Scope 3 Emissions, Supply Chain Transparency, Sustainability, Carbon Footprint, Environmental Monitoring

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In the new dawn of business, the organizations increasingly face immense pressure to exhibit environmental accountability through the whole chain of value. With the growing urgency of climate change-leashing, the corporate sustainability focus has been fundamentally moved away from direct emissions from their operations to complete supply-chain transparency. This essentially implies concerns have evolved to a realization that beyond the immediate adverse environmental impact that an organization might be inflicting through its direct operations. Unwittingly (or knowingly), this entity might be in the mix of environmental degradation through the acts of its suppliers, distributors, and partners, which encompass the entire modern business ecosystem.

Scope 3 emissions refer to the indirect emissions of GHGs occurring throughout an organization's value chain, thereby often forming the highest share of a corporate carbon footprint, with percentages ranging between 70 and 90 per cent among different organizations [1]. Scope 3 emissions come from upstream activities like purchased fuel- and energy-related activities; goods and services; capital goods; transportation and distribution, both upstream and downstream; business travel; waste generated in operations; and employee commuting. The downstream activities encompass transportation and distribution; processing of sold products; use of sold products; end-of-life treatment; leased assets; and franchises. The enormous size and complexity of the emission categories pose great challenges to organizations aiming for holistic environmental accountability.

This question has become a primary concern for sustainability professionals across the globe. How can organizations, striving toward full visibility and control, view or exercise control over emissions that is embedded deep down in complex multi-tiered supply networks, which usually span multiple continents, have thousands of suppliers, and cut across different industry segments with varying environmental standards and reporting capability? And what is coming up as an answer increasingly is the digital twin architecture.

1.2 Evolution of Supply Chain Emission Tracking

Traditional supply chain emission tracking has evolved over the past ten years, changing from manual data collection and calculations by spreadsheets to complex digital modeling programs [1]. Early methods would have used industry-average emission factors, supplier surveys on an annual basis, and extrapolations from data points too thin on the ground to be fully representative. While they provided estimates at a baseline level, these methods were often too coarse, untimely, and inaccurate to serve proper environmental management.

Nowadays, the shift to digital implies the growing importance of real-time, data-driven environmental impact assessment approaches. Corporations have realized the fact that an annual reporting cycle is inadequate for describing dynamic supply chain emissions, which change with operational decision making, seasonal variations, supplier performance, and market conditions. This realization has given rise to a steady flow of investments towards technological solutions that allow continuous monitoring and instantaneous feedback on the environmental performance. The traditional versus digital twin emission monitoring capability comparison is illustrated in Figure 1, demonstrating the significant advancement in technological approaches. Digital twin technology allows dynamic virtual representation of physical systems and provides new possibilities for the transparency and optimization of supply chain emissions. Winter et al. [2] propose that through the convergence of the Internet of Things sensors, blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence, organizations can create management digital twins of supply networks that track, analyze, and precisely predict environmentally detrimental effects perpetually. This technological merge gives the supply chain visibility that could never be attained via traditional means of monitoring.

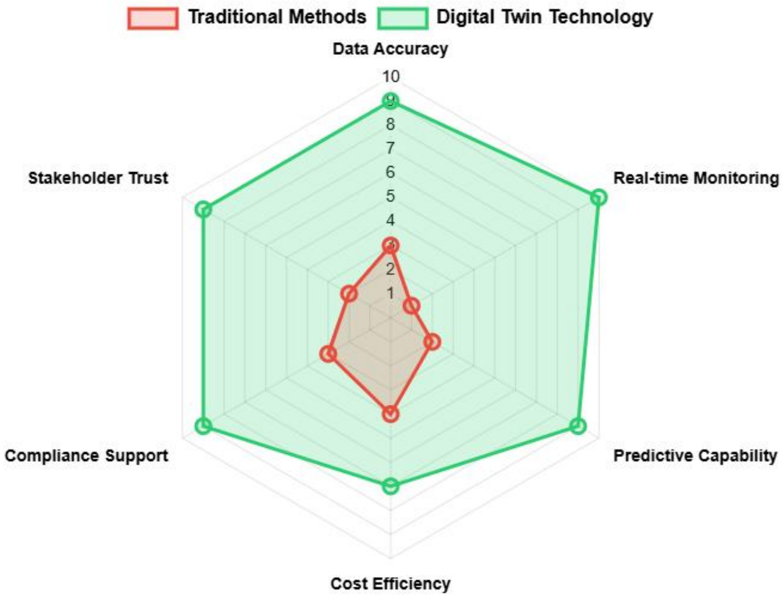

Figure 1. Traditional vs Digital Twin Emission Monitoring Capability Comparison

1.3 Implementation Challenges and Barriers

The transformative potential usually brings experience and, at the yes-or-no moment, in digital twin architectural implementations concerning Scope 3 emission management, some major challenges arise that organizations must deal with carefully. Ströher et al. [3] highlight that the main concern in data integration lies in the complexity brought about by contemporary supply chains that may contain hundreds or thousands of suppliers working across multiple geographic regions, each possibly idiosyncratic in its technological capability, its standard for reporting, or even its data management system. This diversity greatly aggravates the technical and logistical challenge of creating unified monitoring systems.

At any rate, a high initial set-up for digital infrastructure and resistance to technological transformation would act as adverse factors aiming at its widespread adoption [4]. The implementation of digital twins is almost a tough decision for many organizations because the upfront cost may not be apparent to immediate quantifiable benefits or may get realized over a long period. Change management is very much an issue in large, distributed organizations.

Privacy and intellectual property concern further complicate data sharing between supply chain partners. Often, this may limit the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives in emission monitoring. Suppliers, however, may not wish to share certain operational data because of possible competitive disadvantages, regulatory restrictions, or infrastructural impediments. These concerns must be taken into consideration and comprehensively addressed through governance frameworks that strike a balance between transparency requirements and that which is legitimately required in terms of privacy and security.

1.4 Research Objectives and Contribution

This paper discusses the ways digital twin architecture aids in providing Scope 3 emission transparency through extensive supply network modeling and by coupling it with capabilities of real-time monitoring and prediction analytics. By studying implementations within top organizations across a wide variety of industries, this paper integrates working evidence from industry reports and peer-reviewed research to demonstrate the technology's transformative potential for sustainable supply chain management.

Along with all these objectives, this research is aimed to develop: (I) a framework that is described in detail to implement a digital twin concept in supply chain emission management; (II) an examination of what benefits and challenges the digital twin adoption associates; (III) a study into real-world case studies and implementations; (IV) a set of best practices to address and subsequently overcome common barriers faced; and finally, (V) a formulation of recommendations for further research activities and development.

Furthermore, implementation strategies and real-world applications will be highlighted as a practical roadmap for organizations seeking to improve environmental accountability with the cutting-edge technological basis. The analysis relates to several sources to provide a comprehensive view of this emerging technological front of sustainable supply chain management, thereby contributing new insights into the growing literature on technology-enabled sustainability solutions.

2. Explaining Digital Twin Architecture in the Context of the Supply Chain

2.1 Conceptual Foundation and Framework

The digital twin architecture for supply chain emission management functions through four interlinked components that synergistically facilitate full-fledged environmental monitoring capabilities: data capture and integration, virtual modeling and simulation, real-time synchronization and monitoring, and predictive analytics and optimization [5]. From an integrated standpoint, the approach is fundamentally different from the traditional carbon accounting systems that work mostly on historical data, industry-average emission factors, and windowed reporting cycles.

The comprehensive digital twin architecture framework for supply chain emission management is presented in Figure 2, which illustrates the four-stage implementation process. All conventional approaches provide only retrospective insight into the environmental performances; however, digital twins enable continuous real-time monitoring and thus provide environments on proactive management strategies. This paradigm shift changes how organizations conceptualize, measure, and manage environmental impacts of their supply chains: from purely reactive acts of compliance-based reporting to an option of strategic-thinking based on real-time data, where environmental considerations are core-business considerations.

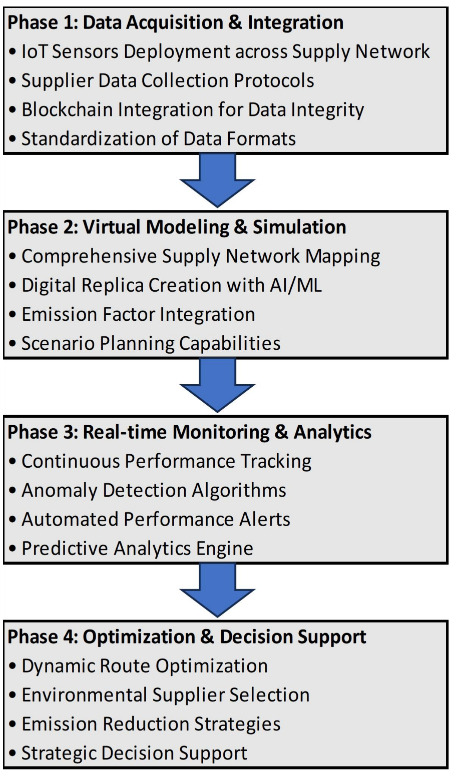

Figure 2. Digital Twin Architecture Framework for Supply Chain Emission Management

The digital twin framework, back and forth information flow between physical supply chain operations and their virtual representations, affords real-time optimization and continuous improvement. Hence, it fundamentally transforms organizational environmental management capabilities through the unprecedented visibility into complex supply network dynamics and their environmental consequences.

2.2 Technological Infrastructure and Components

The tech infrastructure supporting the digital twin architecture encompasses several critical components working in tandem to enable efficient supply chain emission monitoring. IoT sensors were planted across the supply network to collect real-time data on energy consumed, material flows, transport activities, and processes of production. Such sensors generate a continuous stream of environmental data, funneled into centralized platforms for analytic processing.

While data integrity and immutable records of environmental performance are maintained between supply chain partners, blockchain acts as a tool. This way, there is a record of the data generated and any need for its modification can be addressed, as well as providing an audit trail for compliance needs. Meanwhile, machine learning algorithms harness large volumes of supply chain data to identify patterns, make predictions, and generate recommendations for optimization.

Cloud computing provides platforms capable of affording scalable infrastructure for handling huge massive data volumes generated by detailed supply chain monitoring. They also allow such processing in real-time-cloud streaming by about thousands of sources-with secure interfaces accessible for stakeholder involvement and decision-making.

3. Data Acquisition and Integration

3.1 Comprehensive Data Collection Strategies

The core idea for giving a good digital twin architecture is to build data acquisition systems that, on that basis, acquires all data relevant to emissions from sources scattered across the supply chain. Therefore, organizations must insist upon the data collection mechanisms that pull in data from their suppliers, logistics partners, production plants, distribution centers, and the end-use locations. This is to ensure that all Scope 3 categories are covered and that the data collected are fine enough to be used for an environmental impact assessment.

Data acquisition should follow standardized data protocols so that data is consistent and comparable among the supply chain partners. The said protocols need to allow different technological capabilities while applying the standards for the data quality and accuracy. The next step would be to create a secure communication link-respecting the law for protecting sensitive commercial information whilst providing the supposedly-required amount of transparency for environmental monitoring.

The supply chains-that-markets-verification map is inevitably modern and complicated, requiring data integration capabilities to merge information headlines from diverse sources with varying formats, standards, and frequency of reports. An advanced data integration platform will apply machine-learning algorithms to cleanse, validate, and standardize incoming data streams, which will need great accuracy so that the data may be used reliably in analytics and decision-making.

3.2 Real-World Implementation Examples

Leading automotive manufacturers follow best practices in supply chain data acquisition by establishing extensive IoT sensor networks within their supplier environments. These implementations observe the consumption of energy, transport emissions, production, and waste activities in real time. These sensors gather fine-grained data on electricity consumption, fuels, material fluxes, and operational efficiency parameters, thereby establishing an all-encompassing basis for precise emission calculations [2].

Use of blockchain technologies for these implementations assures data integrity and provides immutable records of environmental performance across complex supplier networks. This technology-based approach supports resistance to the tampering of data and serves as legitimate proof under audit for regulatory compliance and stakeholder reporting. IoT sensors combined with blockchain technology create a cozy data ecosystem that backs up joint activities in environmental management.

They have advanced data analytics platforms that use this continuous stream of information to draw real-time insights about the environmental performance of the supply chain. These platforms mark emission hotspots, observe trends in performance, and send out automated alerts whenever environmental thresholds have been crossed so immediate action can be taken or improvement measures can be started all along.

4. Virtual Modeling and Simulation

4.1 Digital Replica Development

World-class companies must build highly sophisticated virtual models that properly represent supplier relationships and their flows of materials within a physical supply network: transportation routes, manufacturing processes, and distribution networks. The environmental impact factors, emission coefficients, and sustainability metrics are integrated within the digital twins to provide complete carbon foot printing analysis for all the activities in the supply chain.

The corporate carbon footprint distribution by emission scope is clearly illustrated in Figure 3, demonstrating the predominance of Scope 3 emissions in organizational carbon footprints. Really world-class business is at the edge of having developed such sophisticated virtual models that well represented, with a truly detailed level of abstraction, supplier relationships and flows of materials into a physical supply network: material transportation routes, manufacturing processes, and the distribution network. All supply chain activities are carbon footprinted via a digital twin through the integration of environmental factor data, emission coefficients, and sustainability factors.

Scope 1 Emissions	Scope 2 Emissions	Scope 3 Emissions
5-10%	**5-15%**	**70-90%**
Direct emissions from owned or controlled sources (facilities, vehicles, equipment)	Indirect emissions from purchased electricity, steam, heating, and cooling	All other indirect emissions occurring in the organization's value chain

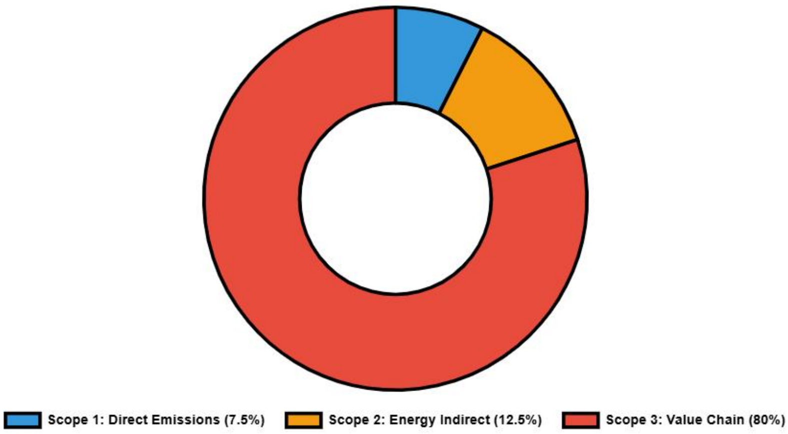

Figure 3. Corporate Carbon Footprint Distribution by Emission Scope

The system uses several advanced machine learning algorithms on huge supply chain data to draw insights about emission scenarios, environmental hotspots, and optimization opportunities. Such algorithms keep learning from real-time operational data to hone their prediction capabilities and pick up trending factors that may tilt environmental performance.

4.2 Case Study Analysis

Multinational consumer goods companies provide an excellent case of complete automation at work. They created a digital model of their supply chain spanning over 10,000 suppliers and 50 manufacturing plants, thus earning great visibility into Scope 3 emissions [1]. These programmatic capabilities allow real-time ambient tracking of environmental impact clad into various product categories and multitudes of regions.

The digital twin model allows for advanced scenario planning, which enables the organization to assess environmental implications of different sourcing strategies, transportation routes, and even supplier selection decisions for their implementation consideration. This predictive ability facilitates preventable environmental management and strategic decision making with environmental considerations alongside standard business parameters of cost, quality, and delivery performance.

The implementation has generated a lot of business value, improved the supplier selection process, ensured smoother logistics operations, and fine-tuned the regulatory compliance aspect. The organization has witnessed significant reductions in overall supply-chain emissions, thereby also boosting the confidence of various stakeholders in its environmental commitments.

5. Real-time Monitoring and Analytics

5.1 Continuous Performance Tracking

To properly track and control Scope 3 emissions, digital twins ought to be constantly monitoring so that when a discrepancy in performance occurs, optimization opportunities are immediately recognized. Real-time analytics platforms will keep track of the streaming data generated throughout the supply chain and shall be the main source of information and alerts whenever emission thresholds are violated or any trends in performance appear which might lead to anomalies.

These advanced analyses can predict future environmental performance using information on current trends and planned activities. Anomaly detection procedures observe patterns that seem atypical, which could indicate a possible malfunction in the equipment, inefficiencies in the process, or human errors in reporting. Optimization algorithms continuously observe supply chain performance against environmental criteria and present suggestions towards fine-tuning for better sustainability outcomes.

Being agile, these cloud-based platforms connect to data sources from disparate IT environments and provide meeting scenarios for complex supply networks. Collaborative decision-making is encouraged by providing stakeholders with real-time access to data on environmental performance, tools for evaluating multiple scenarios, and optimization planning, among other things.

5.2 Technology Implementation Examples

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A real-time monitoring system provides immediate feedback on transportation decisions so that a logistics manager may consider the environmental impact of altering the route, choosing a different carrier, or consolidating the shipment. In this manner, logistics would cease to be a cost consideration and instead become an integrated optimization considering environmental, economic, and service quality factors.

Advanced predictive analytics capabilities allow organizations to anticipate and intervene in environmental performance issues before they occur. By basing their analyses on historical patterns and current trends, the systems can predict an emission spike and suggest that preventive action be taken to meet environmental targets and support business objectives.

6. Benefits and Outcomes of Digital Twin Implementation

6.1 Operational Implications for Supply Chain Management

Operational environmental management must go through another phase. When an organization sees the environmental impacts within its supply chain like never before, it can optimize operations through environmental considerations. This step of visibility leads toward an approach of decision-making that is data-driven, whereby environmental concerns are tied in with everyday operational decisions, thus instilling in the organization a culture of environmental awareness.

Expertise monitoring offers the ability to identify emissions hotspots and opportunities for optimization in real time and thus creates an approach for proactive environmental management instead of reporting. This shift towards proactive management allows an organization to tackle environmental-related issues before they become larger and more costly problems, thereby reducing the overall environmental impact and costs associated.

This comprehensive supply chain modeling lends itself to advanced strategic planning and scenario analysis capabilities, thus enabling an organization to analyze the varying environmental consequences which different business decisions may entail prior to actual implementation. The predictive nature of this capability supports the infusion of environmental considerations into strategic planning processes and facilitates more sustainable approaches to business growth.

6.2 Strategic Implications for Organizations

Access to granular supply chain emission data leads to organizations creating better sustainability strategies based on accurate real-time information instead of estimates and projections. This better quality of data supports science-based targets that are achievable and measurable, so no one in the environmental improvement exercise is left unclear about what they are doing.

The digital twin architecture supports regulatory compliance by producing accurate, auditable emission data that satisfies evolving reporting requirements along several jurisdictional lines. The compliance capability thereby mitigates regulatory risk and morphs into a reputational management issue in a business environment that increasingly favors environmentally conscious practices.

Activities involving transparent environmental performance data serve as a boost to the brand name and stakeholder trust and might provide competitive advantages in environmentally conscious markets, where growing consumer bases and business partners prioritize sustainability options in their buying choices [4]. Hence, tighter environmental transparency capabilities would steer these organizations in getting better prices or preferred partner status in competitive markets.

6.3 Environmental and Societal Implications

The use of this technology enables more accurate carbon accounting and setting up of direct emission reduction programs throughout an entire industry, thus making it a general environmental goal. Through this cumulative impact, the entire setup would assist in furthest climate mitigation on earth by making corporate environmental management endeavors more efficient.

However, this technology has important implications that concern the use of data, privileged technology, and digital divide between large players with tech competencies and suppliers with special limitations. Organizations need to work jointly in overcoming these challenges; through collaborative approaches, the industry will be aided in building up supplier capabilities and ensuring that the benefits of digital twins are equally accessible to all entities within the whole supply chain ecosystem [5].

One of the main issues with implementing digital twin technology is that it entails heavy investments in technology infrastructure and human skills, thereby qualifying as barriers for smaller organizations that do not possess adequate resources to effect full-scale implementations. Hence, we must look at these equity issues and create inter-working models that make it possible for everyone to participate in such transformation exercises.

7. Implementation Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

7.1 Technical and Organizational Challenges

Successfully implementing a digital twin will be necessitated by challenges cutting across technical, organizational, and strategic spheres. Data integration complexity is undoubtedly one of the major technical challenges, given that organizations must harmonize information from various sources with diverse formats, standards, and frequency of reporting. Standardization protocols and phased implementations that gradually scale system coverage while building organizational capabilities piecemeal will mitigate this complexity.

The digital twin implementation challenges and severity assessment are comprehensively presented in Figure 4, which illustrates the primary barriers organizations face during implementation. However, a very high initial capital investment is required for many organizations, especially small units with scanty capital resources available to them for developing technological infrastructure. These concerns can find a solution through innovative partnership models, or more like cloud-based solutions that reduce such upfront costs, along with an implementation strategy that slowly builds value until such time as the investments required become significant.

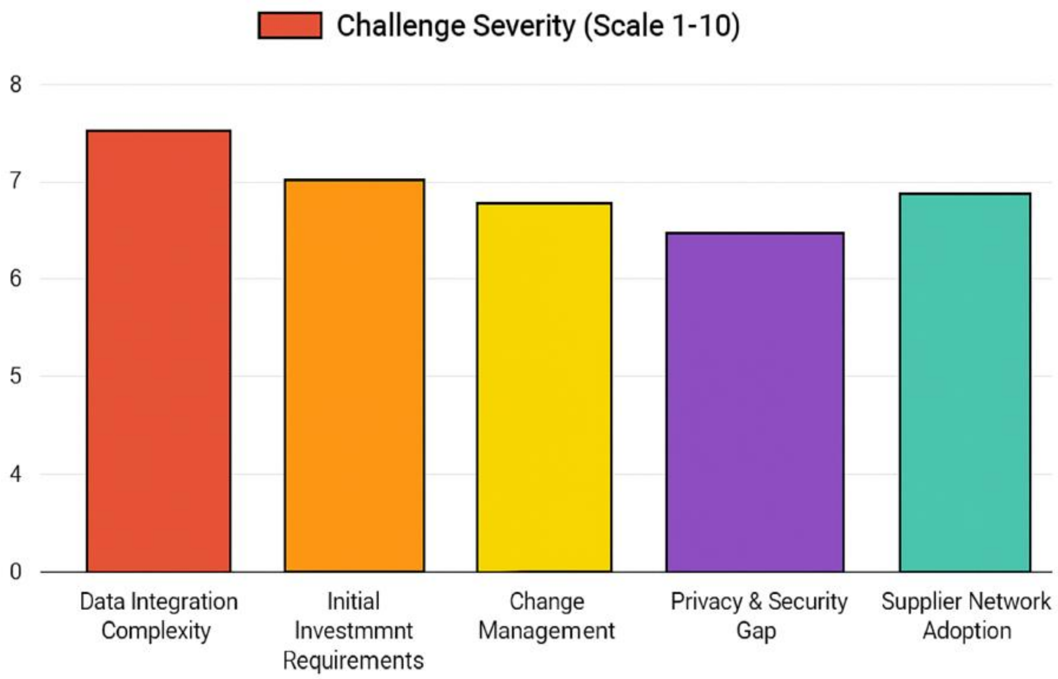

Figure 4. Digital Twin Implementation Challenges and Severity Assessment

Organizational resistance to technological transformation is a major challenge that necessitates a set of change management strategies. Such strategies must put forth strong value propositions for each stakeholder group, while also providing training and support to ensure successful adoption. To overcome resistance and create organizational support, leadership commitment must be clearly visible, along with good communication about the benefits and need for digital transformation.

7.2 Privacy and Governance Considerations

Privacy and intellectual property concerns call for strong data governance frameworks protecting sensitive data while leaving room for transparency essential for the successful monitoring of the environment. In summary, these frameworks are required for fair data sharing but, at the same time, should provide protection where competitive information and proprietary processes are concerned.

Secure data sharing protocols and blockchain technology can protect data while still ensuring collaboration-something which is essential for supply chain emission management [3]. This technology acts as a secured mechanism for sharing data that must remain secret to a few whiles enabling transparency necessary for environmental monitoring and its respective optimization.

Organizations must follow governance structures that comprehensively address that data ownership, access rights, usage restrictions, and compliance requirements under multiple jurisdictions. These structures must be flexible to allow variability across suppliers in their capabilities and maintain a discrete consistency in the standards of data quality and security.

8. Future Research Directions and Recommendations

8.1 Industry-Specific Implementation Frameworks

Industry-specific implementation frameworks should be developed in future research to cater to sector-specific challenges and requirements for adopting digital twins in supply chain emission management. Different industries have different environmental challenges, regulatory requirements, and technological constraints requiring a particular approach to digital twin realization.

Further research into standardization protocols would help to promote broader adoption of the technology and improve interoperability across different working digital twin systems. Standardization efforts need to also address these aspects: data formats, communication protocols, and performance metrics so that seamless integration may be another supply chain partner and technology platforms.

With the collaborative emission monitoring initiatives underway, having insights into the effectiveness of various data-sharing models or governance frameworks will be invaluable. This study must include a wide range of considerations in each framework: how to strike a balance on transparency versus privacy concerns and competitive considerations.

8.2 Long-term Impact Assessment

In the long-term environmental and business impacts of implementing digital twins need to be studied longitudinally for more concrete grasp of the transformative potentials of the said technology toward the sustainable supply chain management. Such longitudinal studies should follow the changes in the environmental end as well as the business performance indicators to have concrete composite assessments of value generation through digital twins.

The key performance indicators for digital twin implementation success are detailed in Figure 5, which demonstrates the critical metrics for measuring implementation effectiveness. Research into scaling digital twin implementations across various organizational sizes and industry settings would guide the community for further adoption of the technology. The research should focus on what factors help successful scaling and what barriers may hinder broad implementations.

Emission Reduction Achievement	**Data Accuracy Improvement**	**Response Time Enhancement**	**Return on Investment**
25-40%	**95%+**	**Real-time**	**18-36**
Average reduction in Scope 3 emissions within 18 months	Improvement in emission data quality and reliability	From days/weeks to minutes for issue detection	Months to achieve positive financial returns

Figure 5. Key Performance Indicators for Digital Twin Implementation Success

Research about the synergic integration of digital twin technology with other emerging technologies supporting sustainability, such as AI, machine learning, or blockchain, could highlight potential complementing factors to environmental management capacity.

9. Conclusion

This study illustrates the digital twin architecture driving Scope 3 emissions transparency through supply network modeling in full dimension and with real-time monitoring capabilities. It affords an unprecedented view of environmental impacts to organizations, thus promoting proactive management strategies and continuous improvement initiatives wherein environmental considerations are factored into the core business processes.

The deployment of digitized Twin Technology has almost fully optimized the benefits at different organizational levels--from excellent decision-making capabilities, observing very minute environmental operational data to improved regulatory compliance through accurate and auditable reporting systems, to stakeholder relationship development by communicating environmental performance transparently. The challenges of data integration complexity, all-important investment commitments, and organizational change management pose significant hurdles to implementation. These may be overcome through strategic planning, complementary partnerships, and phased implementation approaches that incrementally build capabilities while realizing value throughout the transformation exercise.

Offering new insight into technology-enabled sustainability solutions, this research provides workable guidelines for practitioners wishing to advance their environmental accountability through digital transformation. The arc-search framework developed is a practical roadmap for this endeavor on the enactment of digital twin technology in managing supply chain emissions.

Future research should continue dealing with industry-specific implementation issues, standardization protocols for better interoperability, and longitudinal studies to evaluate how adopting digital twin technology causes environmental and business impact on long terms. These research endeavors will be essential for bringing the digital twin architecture into a real transformative solution in sustainable supply chain management and global climate changes mitigation.

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