

A Multi-Method AI Framework for the Sustainable Optimization of Concrete Mix Designs Using Industrial and Agricultural Waste: A Comprehensive Review

¹Er. Manpreet Singh, ²Dr. Vijay Dhir, ³Er. Simran

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, Sant Baba Bhag Singh University, Jalandhar, Punjab, India

²Professor, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, Sant Baba Bhag Singh University, Jalandhar, Punjab, India

³Research Scholar, Department of Computer Science & Engineering, GNA University, Phagwara, Punjab, India

Abstract - The global construction industry faces a dual challenge: meeting the massive demand for concrete while mitigating its significant environmental footprint, primarily from cement production. Concurrently, the disposal of industrial and agricultural waste poses severe ecological threats. The integration of these waste streams such as Sugarcane Bagasse Ash (SCBA), Waste Paper Sludge Ash (WPSA), Rice Husk Ash (RHA), Fly Ash, and Waste Glass Powder (WGP) as partial cement replacements presents a promising pathway toward sustainable concrete. However, the non-linear and complex behavior of concrete incorporating these supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) makes traditional empirical mix design methods inadequate. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the state-of-the-art in leveraging advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) models to optimize sustainable concrete mix designs. We synthesize empirical findings from numerous studies on the mechanical and durability properties of concrete containing SCBA, WPSA, RHA, Fly Ash, and WGP. Building upon this foundation, the core of this review proposes a novel multi-method AI framework. This integrated framework synergistically combines Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for spatial waste inventory and logistics, Remote Sensing for monitoring raw material availability and environmental impact, and a suite of advanced ML algorithms including Frequency Ratio (FR), Information Value (IV), Logistic Regression (LR), Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), and Weight of Evidence (WoE) to create a robust predictive and optimization model. The proposed system is designed to predict key concrete properties (e.g., compressive and tensile strength) and identify the optimal mix proportion for a given set of performance, cost, and sustainability criteria. This review underscores the transformative potential of a data-driven, AI-powered approach in transitioning the concrete industry towards a circular economy, enabling the effective Valorization of waste streams into high-value construction materials.

Keywords: Sustainable Concrete, Machine Learning, Artificial Neural Networks, Waste Valorization, Supplementary

Cementitious Materials, Mix Design Optimization, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Remote Sensing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Concrete is the most consumed man-made material on earth, second only to water [1]. Its primary binder, Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC), is responsible for approximately 8% of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions [2]. This environmental burden, coupled with the exponential generation of industrial and agricultural waste, has catalyzed research into sustainable alternatives. The partial replacement of cement with waste-derived materials like Fly Ash, RHA, SCBA, WPSA, and WGP has been extensively demonstrated to not only reduce the carbon footprint but also, in many cases, enhance the long-term strength and durability of concrete through pozzolanic reactions [3] [6].

Research by Chagger et al. [6] and Suri et al. [4], [7] has systematically investigated the use of SCBA, WPSA, and RHA, revealing that optimal replacement levels can yield compressive and tensile strengths comparable to or even exceeding those of conventional concrete. Similarly, studies on WGP [2], [14] and Fly Ash [8] confirm their efficacy as viable SCMs. However, the chemical and physical heterogeneity of these waste materials introduces significant complexity into the mix design process. The performance of the resulting concrete is influenced by a multitude of interlinked factors: the specific chemical composition of the waste, its particle size distribution, the replacement percentage, water-to-binder ratio, and the use of chemical admixtures [4], [7], [19].

Traditional methods for concrete mix design, often based on regression analysis and limited experimental datasets, struggle to capture these complex, non-linear relationships. This often leads to sub-optimal mixes, requiring extensive and costly laboratory trials. To address this limitation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have emerged as powerful tools for modeling the intricate behavior of concrete [5]. ML algorithms can learn from existing experimental data to build high-fidelity predictive models, thereby accelerating the mix design process and unlocking new possibilities for multi-objective optimization.

While previous reviews have touched upon the use of ML in civil engineering [5], [9] or the individual properties of specific SCMs [2], [6], [10], a significant research gap exists in the integration of a *comprehensive AI framework* that encompasses the entire lifecycle—from waste sourcing to final mix optimization. This paper aims to fill this gap by presenting a holistic review and proposing a novel multi-method AI framework. This framework uniquely integrates spatial analysis (GIS/Remote Sensing) with an ensemble of advanced ML techniques (FR, IV, LR, ANN, WoE) to create a decision-support system for the sustainable optimization of concrete mixes using diverse waste streams.

II. CHARACTERIZATION OF WASTE STREAMS FOR CONCRETE PRODUCTION

A critical first step in the Valorization process is the thorough characterization of the potential waste materials. Their suitability as SCMs is governed by their pozzolanic activity, which is a function of their amorphous silica content and fineness.

A. Agricultural Residue Ashes

- **Sugarcane Bagasse Ash (SCBA):** SCBA is produced by burning sugarcane bagasse, a by-product of the sugar industry. Chagger et al. [10], [11] highlight that its high silica content, when processed to a fine particle size, makes it an excellent pozzolan. It reacts with calcium hydroxide in cement to form additional calcium silicate hydrate (C-S-H) gel, the primary strength-giving compound in concrete.
- **Rice Husk Ash (RHA):** RHA is renowned for its very high reactivity due to its porous structure and elevated amorphous silica content (often over 85-90%). Singh et al. [18] and J. Singh et al. [19] demonstrated that RHA significantly improves compressive strength and refines the pore structure, leading to enhanced durability. The review by Chagger et al. [6] consolidates findings that RHA can effectively replace cement up to 10-15% by weight.

B. Industrial Waste Materials

- **Waste Paper Sludge Ash (WPSA):** WPSA is an inert ash obtained from the incineration of paper mill waste. Studies by Suri et al. [4], [7] and J. Singh et al. [19], [21] investigated its use in conjunction with other ashes. While its pozzolanicity can be variable, it acts as an effective filler, densifying the concrete matrix and improving mechanical properties at optimal replacement levels.
- **Fly Ash:** A well-established SCM, Fly Ash is a by-product of coal combustion in thermal power plants. Chagger et al. [8] investigated its use in M30 grade concrete, confirming its role in enhancing long-term strength and workability. It is classified as Class F (low lime) or Class C (high lime), with Class F being more common and prized for its pozzolanic properties.

- **Waste Glass Powder (WGP):** The review by Chagger et al. [2] and the examination by Anmol et al. [14] posit that when waste glass is ground to a fine powder (typically below 75 μ m), the alkali-silica reaction (ASR) risk can be mitigated. The amorphous nature of WGP grants it pozzolanic properties, making it a suitable cement replacement, which also addresses the global issue of glass waste.

The synergistic use of these materials, as explored in [4], [7], [11], [19], can lead to further improvements by leveraging the complementary properties of different SCMs.

III. THE PROPOSED MULTI-METHOD AI FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework is designed to be a holistic, end-to-end system for sustainable concrete mix design. It consists of three integrated modules, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** A GIS database can be constructed to map the locations of waste sources (sugar mills, paper mills, power plants, rice mills, glass recycling facilities) relative to concrete batching plants. As explored in the context of road construction and material logistics [3], [15], GIS can perform network analysis to calculate optimal transportation routes, minimizing fuel consumption and cost. Furthermore, GIS can integrate data on local waste generation rates, as studied in the context of plastic waste for soil enhancement [24], to assess the long-term availability and feasibility of specific SCMs in a region.
- **Remote Sensing:** Satellite imagery and aerial photography can be used to monitor and quantify agricultural residues. For instance, satellite data can estimate sugarcane and rice cultivation areas, providing predictive insights into the seasonal availability of bagasse and rice husk. Remote sensing can also monitor the environmental impact of waste disposal sites, providing a baseline against which the sustainability benefits of using these wastes in concrete can be measured.
- **Dataset Curation:** A comprehensive database is assembled from the literature [4], [7], [8], [14], [19], [23], including features such as: cement content, water content, fine and coarse aggregate content, replacement type (SCBA, WPSA, etc.), replacement percentage, chemical admixture dosage, curing age, and the resulting compressive strength, tensile strength, slump, etc.
- **Information Value (IV) and Weight of Evidence (WoE):** These techniques, widely used in geospatial and risk analysis [22], are adapted to evaluate the predictive power of each input variable. Continuous variables (e.g., replacement percentage) are binned. WoE measures the strength of the relationship between a binned feature and the target (e.g., achieving a strength > 40 MPa). IV is the sum of WoE across bins, providing a single measure of a variable's importance. This helps in feature selection,

prioritizing factors like replacement percentage and curing age which have high IV.

- **Frequency Ratio (FR):** FR is another bivariate statistical method where the frequency of a high-strength outcome in a specific class of a factor is compared to its overall frequency [26]. For example, the FR for a "SCBA replacement of 10-15%" bin would be high if a disproportionately large number of mixes in this bin achieve high strength. This provides an intuitive, preliminary understanding of optimal ranges for each SCM.
- **Artificial Neural Networks (ANN):** ANNs are exceptionally powerful for capturing complex, non-linear relationships, making them ideal for modeling concrete behavior [5], [23]. A multi-layer perceptron (MLP) network can be designed with input neurons for each mix parameter, hidden layers for processing, and output neurons for predicting properties like 7-day and 28-day compressive strength, tensile strength, etc. The network is trained on the curated dataset, learning the underlying patterns that govern performance.
- **Logistic Regression (LR):** While ANN is used for continuous value prediction, Logistic Regression can be employed for binary classification tasks, such as predicting the probability of a mix failing to meet a specific durability criterion (e.g., "ASR risk" for WGP mixes) or a minimum strength threshold. This provides a robust risk-assessment layer to the framework.
- **Multi-Objective Optimization:** The final step involves framing the mix design as an optimization problem. The objectives are typically to: (1) Maximize Compressive Strength, (2) Maximize Sustainability (i.e., maximize waste content), and (3) Minimize Cost. Using the trained ANN as a surrogate for laboratory experiments, a genetic algorithm or other optimization techniques can be used to explore the vast solution space of possible mixes. The output is a set of Pareto-optimal mixes, giving engineers a range of choices to balance strength, sustainability, and economy.

IV. SYNTHESIS OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FOR AI MODEL TRAINING

The proposed AI framework's accuracy is contingent on the quality and breadth of the empirical data used for training. A synthesis of key findings from the provided references provides a solid foundation:

- **SCBA and WPSA:** Suri et al. [4], [7] found that the combined use of SCBA and WPSA at a total replacement level of 10-15% can produce concrete with compressive and tensile strengths comparable to control mixes. This non-linear interaction is a prime candidate for ANN modeling.
- **RHA and WPSA:** J. Singh et al. [19] reported that a blend of RHA and WPSA could effectively replace cement up to 20%, with RHA contributing more

significantly to strength gain due to its higher pozzolanicity.

- **Fly Ash:** Chagger et al. [8] demonstrated that Fly Ash replacement (typically 20-30%) in M30 grade concrete results in satisfactory long-term strength development, a trend that an ANN can accurately capture over different curing ages.
- **WGP:** The review by Chagger et al. [2] and the experimental work of Anmol et al. [14] indicate that WGP shows optimal performance in the 10-20% replacement range, with fineness being a critical parameter—a key input feature for the ML model.
- **Synergistic Effects:** The research consistently shows that the effect of SCMs is not purely additive. The interaction between different particle sizes and chemical compositions creates synergistic effects [4], [11], [21], which are inherently non-linear and perfectly suited for discovery by advanced ML models like ANN.

V. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite its promise, the implementation of this framework faces several challenges:

1. **Data Scarcity and Quality:** The availability of large, high-quality, and standardized datasets covering a wide range of mixes and SCM combinations is limited. Future work must involve collaborative efforts to create open-access, curated databases.
2. **Model Interpretability:** ANNs are often considered "black boxes." Future research should integrate Explainable AI (XAI) techniques to elucidate the model's decision-making process, building trust among engineers.
3. **Dynamic and Real-Time Integration:** The framework can be evolved into a dynamic, cloud-based platform that continuously learns from new laboratory and field data, in line with the concepts of robotics and automation in construction [9].
4. **Expansion to Other Properties:** The current focus on mechanical properties should be expanded to include durability indices (chloride permeability, sulfate resistance, carbonation depth) and fresh properties (rheology), as begun in studies on adhesion [13] and fibers [17], [22].
5. **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) Integration:** The optimization function should explicitly incorporate real-time LCA calculations based on the spatial data from Module 1, ensuring the selected mix is not only strong and cheap but also has the lowest possible environmental impact.

VI. CONCLUSION

This review has articulated the urgent need for a paradigm shift in concrete mix design, moving from empirical, single-objective methods towards a data-driven, multi-objective optimization approach. The extensive body of work

on SCMs like SCBA, WPSA, RHA, Fly Ash, and WGP provides a compelling case for their use, but also highlights the complexity involved.

The proposed multi-method AI framework offers a novel and comprehensive solution. By integrating GIS and Remote Sensing for sustainable sourcing, IV/FR/WoE for intelligent feature analysis, and ANN/LR for powerful prediction and optimization, this framework can effectively navigate the complex design space of sustainable concrete. It promises to significantly reduce the time, cost, and environmental impact associated with developing high-performance, waste-incorporated concrete mixes. This holistic, intelligent system paves the way for a truly circular and sustainable concrete industry, transforming waste burdens into valuable construction resources through the power of artificial intelligence.

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