World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews
eISSN: 2581-9615 CODEN (USA): WJARAI
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/wjarr
Journal homepage: https://wjarr.com/

(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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Cancer diagnosis and prognosis using multi-Omics data: A data science and machine learning approach

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(03), 2052-2069

Publication history: Received on 08 November 2024; revised on 16 December 2024; accepted on 18 December 2024

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.3.3876

Abstract

Cancer remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide, demanding innovative approaches for early diagnosis and accurate prognosis. Recent advances in multi-omics technologies, which integrate genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and epigenomics, provide comprehensive insights into the complex biological mechanisms underlying cancer. By capturing molecular signatures at multiple levels, multi-omics data offers unparalleled potential for identifying cancer biomarkers, stratifying patients, and predicting therapeutic responses. However, the volume, complexity, and heterogeneity of multi-omics data present significant analytical challenges, necessitating robust data science and machine learning techniques. Machine learning algorithms, including supervised, unsupervised, and deep learning approaches, are increasingly being utilized to unravel the patterns embedded in multi-omics datasets. These methods enable feature selection, dimensionality reduction, and the integration of multi-modal data, facilitating the identification of precise biomarkers and the development of predictive models for cancer progression. Furthermore, advanced frameworks such as explainable AI (XAI) provide interpretability to these models, ensuring their clinical applicability and enhancing trust among healthcare professionals. This review highlights recent breakthroughs in cancer diagnosis and prognosis using multi-omics data, emphasizing the synergy between data science and machine learning in transforming oncology research. It also explores the challenges in data integration, algorithmic bias, and model validation, proposing solutions to enhance predictive accuracy and generalizability. By bridging molecular biology and computational sciences, this interdisciplinary approach has the potential to revolutionize precision oncology, paving the way for personalized treatment strategies and improved patient outcomes.

Keywords: Cancer Diagnosis; Multi-Omics Data; Machine Learning; Data Science; Precision Oncology; Biomarker Discovery

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Cancer as a Global Health Challenge

Cancer remains a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020 alone, representing one in six deaths globally [1]. The most common cancer types include lung, breast, colorectal, prostate, and stomach cancers, with significant variation in incidence across geographical regions [2]. Factors such as aging populations, urbanization, and lifestyle changes contribute to the rising cancer burden, particularly in low- and middle-income countries [3]. The economic impact is also substantial, with global cancer-related healthcare expenditures surpassing $150 billion annually [4]. Despite advancements in treatment, disparities in access to healthcare services and innovative therapies exacerbate survival inequalities [5]. For instance, while early-stage cancers are treatable with high survival

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rates, late-stage diagnoses remain challenging, with limited treatment efficacy and poor outcomes [6]. Addressing this public health crisis necessitates integrating advanced technologies and novel strategies to enhance early detection, personalized therapies, and continuous monitoring.

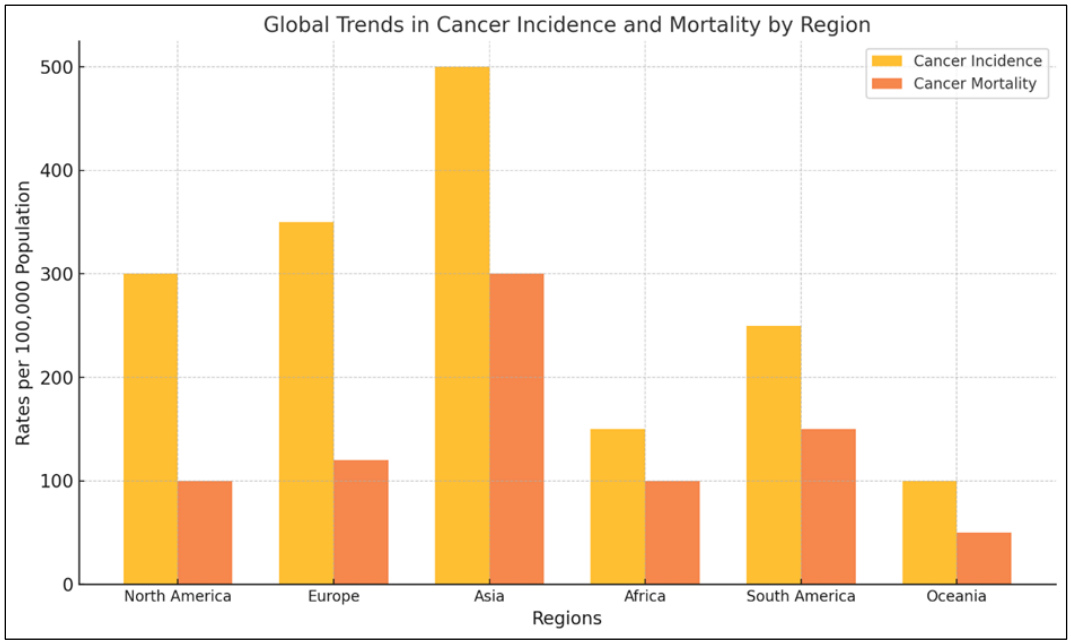

Figure 1 Global trends in cancer incidence and mortality by region

1.2. Importance of Early Diagnosis and Prognosis in Improving Outcomes

Early diagnosis is pivotal for improving cancer survival rates, as most cancers are more effectively treated in their initial stages [7]. For instance, the 5-year survival rate for localized breast cancer exceeds 90%, compared to just 28% for metastatic disease [8]. Prognosis, encompassing predictions about disease progression and patient survival, further guides clinical decision-making and resource allocation [9]. Advanced diagnostic technologies, such as imaging and molecular biomarker detection, have revolutionized early cancer detection. However, these traditional methods often lack sensitivity, particularly for rare or aggressive cancers [10]. Similarly, prognosis assessments are limited by the complexity of tumour heterogeneity, highlighting the need for more accurate and holistic approaches [11]. Multi-omics technologies, combined with computational tools, offer a promising solution by enabling a deeper understanding of tumour biology and facilitating the identification of reliable diagnostic and prognostic markers [12].

Table 1 Comparison of Traditional Approaches vs. Multi-Omics-Based Cancer Diagnostics and Prognosis

Aspect	**Traditional Approaches**	**Multi-Omics-Based Approaches**
Data Sources	Single-source data (e.g., histopathology)	Genomics, proteomics, transcriptomics, and metabolomics
Scope	Focused on limited biomarkers	Holistic view of multiple biomarkers
Personalization	Limited or generic recommendations	Highly personalized and precise
Sensitivity	Moderate	High
Integration of Data	Minimal	Comprehensive integration of multiple data layers
Time to Diagnosis	Longer due to stepwise processes	Faster with computational support
Predictive Accuracy	Moderate to high variability	Improved predictive accuracy

1.3. Emergence of Multi-Omics Technologies in Cancer Research

Multi-omics technologies, encompassing genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, epigenomics, and metabolomics, provide a comprehensive understanding of cancer biology at various molecular levels [13]. Genomics focuses on DNA mutations and structural variations, while transcriptomics examines RNA expression patterns associated with tumour behaviour [14]. Proteomics and metabolomics reveal insights into post-translational modifications and metabolic pathways critical for cancer progression [15]. Epigenomics further uncovers the role of DNA methylation and histone modifications in regulating gene expression [16]. The integration of these diverse omics layers is revolutionizing cancer research by identifying novel biomarkers, elucidating mechanisms of resistance, and enabling precision medicine [17]. For example, transcriptome-proteome integration has been instrumental in distinguishing molecular subtypes of breast cancer [18]. Similarly, multi-omics profiling has identified unique metabolic vulnerabilities in pancreatic cancer, opening avenues for targeted therapy [19]. However, the complexity and heterogeneity of omics data necessitate sophisticated analytical frameworks capable of extracting meaningful insights while ensuring reproducibility and scalability [20]. Recent advancements in data science and machine learning have addressed these challenges, enabling the efficient analysis of multi-omics datasets to uncover actionable information [21].

1.4. Role of Data Science and Machine Learning in Advancing Precision Oncology

Data science and machine learning (ML) have become indispensable in cancer research, offering powerful tools to analyse large-scale multi-omics datasets. These computational methods facilitate feature selection, dimensionality reduction, and pattern recognition, addressing the challenges posed by the high dimensionality and heterogeneity of omics data [22]. For example, supervised learning models have been employed to predict cancer subtypes using gene expression profiles [23], while unsupervised clustering has uncovered novel tumour subgroups based on integrated proteomic and metabolomic data [24]. Deep learning approaches, such as convolutional and recurrent neural networks, further enhance predictive capabilities by capturing complex non-linear relationships within the data [25]. Explainable AI frameworks, such as SHAP and LIME, ensure model interpretability, promoting trust and clinical adoption [26]. By integrating multi-omics data with clinical variables, ML-driven predictive models enable personalized treatment planning and monitoring of therapeutic responses, transforming cancer care [27]. However, ethical considerations, including data privacy and algorithmic bias, must be addressed to ensure equitable implementation [28]. The synergistic application of data science, machine learning, and multi-omics is poised to reshape oncology, fostering advancements in early diagnosis, prognosis, and precision therapeutics [29].

2. Multi-omics data in cancer research

2.1. Overview of Multi-Omics Data

Multi-omics refers to the integrated analysis of various omics layers, including genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, epigenomics, and metabolomics, to gain a comprehensive understanding of biological systems [6]. Genomics focuses on DNA-level alterations, such as mutations, structural variations, and copy number changes, which are critical for cancer initiation and progression [7]. Transcriptomics, which evaluates RNA expression patterns, reveals dynamic gene regulatory networks [8]. Proteomics examines the protein landscape, including post-translational modifications and signalling cascades [9]. Metabolomics captures small molecule metabolites, shedding light on altered metabolic pathways in cancer [10]. Finally, epigenomics explores the influence of DNA methylation, histone modifications, and chromatin structure on gene expression [11].

The integration of these datasets provides a holistic view of tumour biology, enabling the discovery of novel biomarkers and therapeutic targets [12]. For example, genomics alone may reveal actionable mutations, but the addition of transcriptomics and proteomics contextualizes the functional implications of these changes [13]. Multi-omics has proven invaluable in identifying molecular subtypes of cancers, such as triple-negative breast cancer, facilitating personalized treatment strategies [14]. By bridging the gap between molecular alterations and phenotypic outcomes, multi-omics enhances our understanding of cancer heterogeneity and resistance mechanisms [15]. Despite its transformative potential, leveraging multi-omics data effectively requires addressing several technical and analytical challenges.

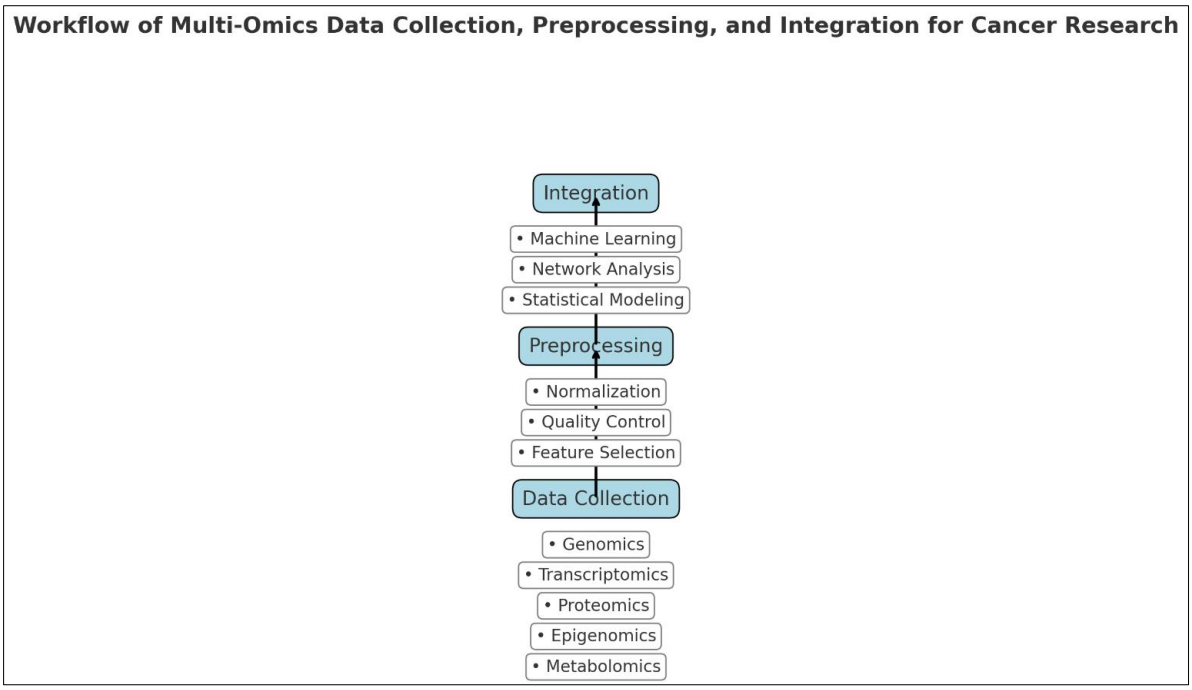

Figure 2 Workflow of multi-omics data collection, preprocessing, and integration for cancer research

2.2. Data Integration Challenges

The integration of multi-omics data poses significant challenges due to the heterogeneity and high dimensionality of the datasets. Each omics layer varies in scale, format, and underlying biological context, complicating the integration process [16]. For instance, while genomics data are typically represented as discrete variables, transcriptomics and proteomics datasets are often continuous and high-dimensional, requiring sophisticated techniques for alignment [17].

Moreover, the volume of data generated by multi-omics platforms can overwhelm traditional computational methods. For example, whole-genome sequencing produces terabytes of data, which must be harmonized with similarly large proteomic or metabolomic datasets [18]. These datasets also often suffer from missing values and noise, further complicating analysis [19].

Table 2 Summary of Multi-Omics Data Types, Challenges, and Applications in Cancer Research

Omics Data Type	Challenges	Applications in Cancer Research
Genomics	Large data size, variants interpretation, high sequencing cost	Identifying mutations, biomarkers, and therapeutic targets
Proteomics	Protein complexity, post-translational modifications, and detection sensitivity	Protein profiling, drug discovery, and pathway elucidation
Transcriptomics	Dynamic RNA expression, limited stability, and technical variability	Gene expression analysis, tumor microenvironment studies, and prognostic markers
Metabolomics	Diverse metabolite structures, quantification difficulties, and standardization issues	Metabolic pathway analysis, identifying metabolic dependencies, and drug targeting
Epigenomics	Epigenetic marker identification, cell-type specificity, and data integration challenges	Understanding epigenetic regulation, identifying methylation patterns, and chromatin remodeling

Current integration methods, such as concatenation-based and transformation-based approaches, fail to fully capture the complex interactions between omics layers [20]. Concatenation methods often lose critical biological context, while

transformation techniques, like dimensionality reduction, risk oversimplification [21]. Another limitation is the lack of standardized pipelines for multi-omics data integration, leading to inconsistent results across studies [22].

Biological variability adds another layer of complexity. Tumour heterogeneity within and across patients often results in inconsistent multi-omics profiles, challenging the reproducibility of findings [23]. Addressing these challenges requires robust frameworks capable of harmonizing diverse datasets, extracting meaningful features, and preserving biological relevance while minimizing noise and bias [24].

2.3. Advances in Multi-Omics Integration (600 words)

Recent advancements in data science and machine learning have revolutionized multi-omics data integration, enabling a deeper understanding of cancer biology. Integration techniques can be broadly categorized into supervised, unsupervised, and deep learning-based approaches.

2.3.1. Supervised Methods

Supervised learning techniques, such as random forests and support vector machines, are frequently employed to integrate multi-omics data for predictive tasks, such as cancer subtyping and survival analysis [25]. These methods leverage labelled datasets to identify features most relevant for distinguishing between cancer types or predicting patient outcomes. For instance, supervised integration of genomics and transcriptomics data has successfully stratified breast cancer subtypes, enabling personalized treatment planning [26].

2.3.2. Unsupervised Methods

Unsupervised approaches, such as clustering and principal component analysis (PCA), allow researchers to uncover hidden patterns in multi-omics data without prior labels. Multi-omics factor analysis (MOFA), for example, identifies shared and unique variations across omics layers, offering insights into tumour heterogeneity [27]. Similarly, hierarchical clustering has been used to integrate proteomic and metabolomic data to uncover novel cancer subtypes [28].

2.3.3. Deep Learning-Based Methods

Deep learning models, including autoencoders and graph neural networks, have emerged as powerful tools for multi-omics data integration. Autoencoders reduce dimensionality while preserving essential features, enabling the discovery of biomarkers across multiple omics layers [29]. Graph neural networks, on the other hand, represent multi-omics data as networks, capturing complex interactions between genes, proteins, and metabolites [30]. These methods have demonstrated superior performance in predicting patient survival and therapy response [31].

2.3.4. Case Studies

Case studies illustrate the transformative potential of multi-omics integration in cancer diagnosis. For example, The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) project integrates genomics, transcriptomics, and epigenomics data to classify glioblastoma subtypes, improving prognostic predictions [32]. Similarly, a multi-omics study on pancreatic cancer revealed metabolic vulnerabilities that were later validated as therapeutic targets [33]. In another case, transcriptome-proteome integration identified biomarkers for early detection of ovarian cancer, demonstrating the clinical utility of multi-omics approaches [34].

2.3.5. Future Directions

Despite these advances, the integration of multi-omics data remains an evolving field. Future directions include the development of standardized pipelines and the incorporation of advanced AI models, such as transformers, to enhance predictive accuracy [35]. Collaborative initiatives, such as the International Cancer Genome Consortium (ICGC), aim to expand multi-omics datasets, providing more comprehensive insights into cancer biology [36]. As computational capabilities continue to advance, multi-omics integration is expected to play a pivotal role in precision oncology, transforming the diagnosis and management of cancer.

3. Machine learning in cancer diagnosis and prognosis

3.1. Machine Learning Fundamentals

Machine learning (ML) is a subset of artificial intelligence (AI) that enables systems to learn patterns from data and make predictions or decisions without explicit programming [16]. ML methods are broadly categorized into supervised, unsupervised, and deep learning techniques.

Supervised learning involves labelled datasets where algorithms, such as support vector machines (SVM), random forests, and logistic regression, learn to map inputs to outputs. This approach is widely used for tasks such as cancer classification and outcome prediction [17]. **Unsupervised learning** works with unlabelled data to uncover hidden patterns or clusters. Techniques like k-means clustering and principal component analysis (PCA) are commonly employed for tumour subtyping and feature extraction [18]. **Deep learning**, a subset of ML, uses neural networks to model complex relationships. Architectures like convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs) excel in extracting hierarchical features from large datasets, such as genomic sequences or imaging data [19].

ML effectively handles the high dimensionality and complexity of multi-omics data, enabling the identification of meaningful biomarkers and predictive features. Its ability to process large-scale datasets quickly and accurately has transformed cancer research, facilitating early diagnosis, prognosis, and therapeutic target discovery [20]. However, its implementation requires careful validation to ensure clinical applicability and robustness [21].

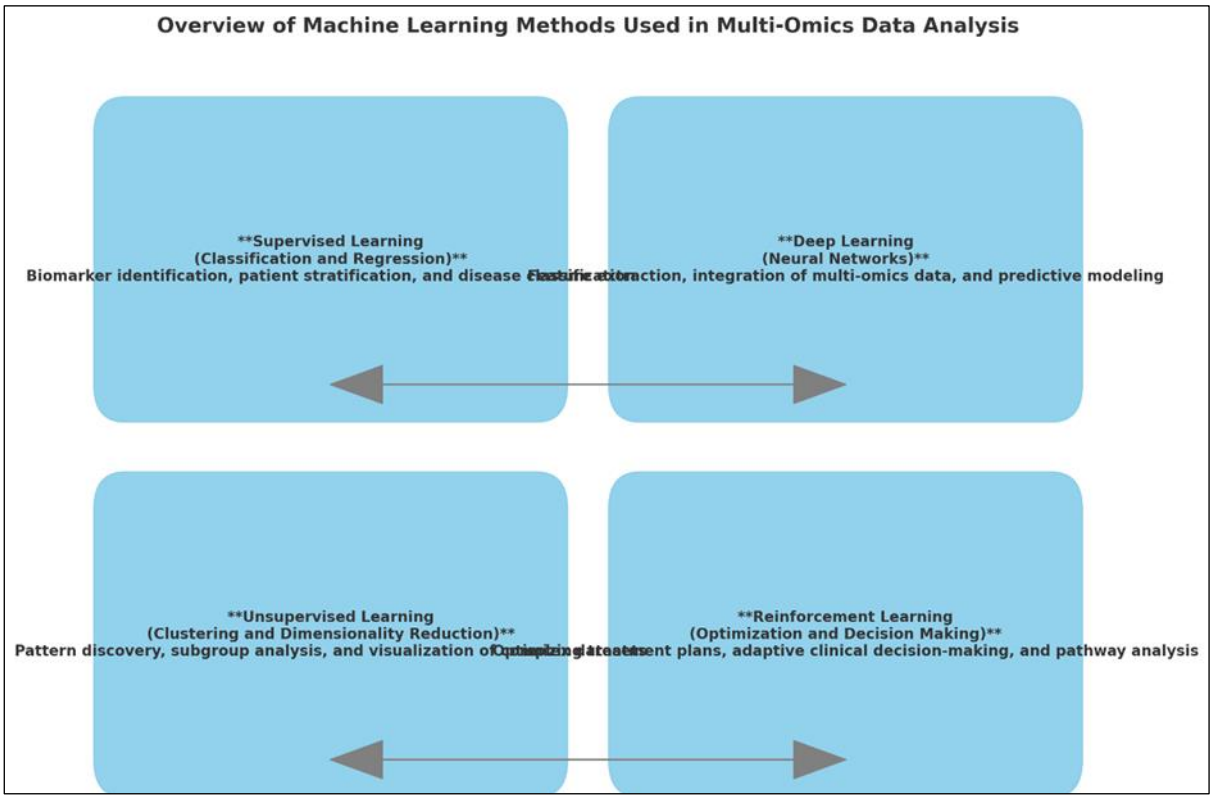

Figure 3 Overview of machine learning methods used in multi-omics data analysis.

3.2. Applications in Cancer Diagnosis

Machine learning (ML) is revolutionizing cancer diagnosis by facilitating the analysis of complex multi-omics datasets, uncovering patterns and insights that traditional methods might overlook. It plays a pivotal role in biomarker discovery and early cancer detection, offering a significant boost to diagnostic accuracy. Biomarkers, which are molecular signatures indicative of the presence or progression of cancer, are identified by ML algorithms from genomic, transcriptomic, and proteomic data. These markers enable precise diagnoses, improve the understanding of disease mechanisms, and enhance personalized treatment strategies [22].

For instance, random forest algorithms have been employed to identify key genetic mutations associated with colorectal cancer, achieving over 90% sensitivity and specificity in early detection. This represents a critical advancement, as early detection significantly increases survival rates [23]. Similarly, support vector machine (SVM) models trained on transcriptomics data have effectively classified breast cancer subtypes, offering valuable insights for tailoring personalized treatments. These subtypes, often challenging to distinguish using conventional approaches, have become more identifiable through ML, leading to improved clinical outcomes [24].

The integration of ML with imaging data has further expanded its diagnostic capabilities. Convolutional neural networks (CNNs), a type of deep learning algorithm, have shown exceptional performance in analyzing histopathological images. When combined with transcriptomic profiles, CNN models have demonstrated superior accuracy in detecting early-stage lung cancer, outperforming conventional diagnostic methods. This multimodal approach not only enhances detection accuracy but also provides clinicians with a comprehensive understanding of the disease [25].

Beyond detection, ML has shown remarkable potential in cancer risk stratification. By integrating omics data with clinical records, ML models predict an individual's likelihood of developing specific cancer types, enabling targeted surveillance and preventive interventions. For example, a gradient boosting machine trained on proteomic datasets accurately predicted high-risk cases of prostate cancer. This approach significantly improves screening efficiency by focusing resources on high-risk individuals while minimizing unnecessary procedures for low-risk populations [26]. Similarly, ML-based risk models have been applied to predict hereditary cancer risks, integrating genetic predispositions with environmental and lifestyle factors to guide preventive strategies.

ML's ability to analyze vast datasets and uncover non-linear relationships is also instrumental in identifying rare cancer subtypes and atypical disease presentations. Traditional diagnostic tools often struggle with such complexities, but ML algorithms can discern subtle patterns that signal rare conditions, leading to more inclusive and equitable healthcare solutions.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in translating ML models into routine clinical practice. Ensuring the clinical validity, reproducibility, and interpretability of these models is crucial for real-world applications. Black-box models, while powerful, often lack transparency, raising concerns among clinicians regarding trust and accountability in decision-making processes [27]. To address this, explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) approaches are being developed, allowing clinicians to understand and trust the reasoning behind ML-generated predictions. Furthermore, ethical considerations, data privacy concerns, and the standardization of datasets across institutions must be addressed to fully harness ML's potential in cancer diagnosis. Collaborative efforts involving data scientists, clinicians, and policymakers are essential to overcome these barriers and foster the integration of ML into healthcare systems. As these challenges are addressed, ML is poised to transform cancer diagnostics, improving early detection, risk assessment, and personalized treatment planning on a global scale.

Table 3 Summary of Key Machine Learning Models and Their Applications in Cancer Research

ML Model	Key Features	Applications in Cancer Research
Random Forest	Handles high-dimensional data, robust against overfitting	Biomarker discovery, genetic mutation analysis, and risk prediction
Support Vector Machine (SVM)	Effective for classification with small datasets, uses hyperplanes to separate classes	Cancer subtype classification, diagnostic model development, and predictive analytics
Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)	Excels in image analysis, capable of feature extraction and pattern recognition	Histopathological image analysis, multimodal data integration, and tumor detection
Gradient Boosting Machine (GBM)	Combines decision trees for predictive accuracy and efficiency	Risk stratification, early cancer detection, and prognosis modeling
K-Means Clustering	Identifies patterns in unlabeled data, clusters based on feature similarity	Identifying patient subgroups, tumor heterogeneity analysis, and data exploration
Autoencoders	Reduces dimensionality, reconstructs data for feature extraction and anomaly detection	Integrating multi-omics data, anomaly detection, and unsupervised feature extraction

3.3. Applications in Cancer Prognosis

Cancer prognosis, involving predictions about patient survival, recurrence risks, and treatment responses, is an essential area where machine learning (ML) has shown transformative potential. By leveraging the vast complexity of multi-omics data, ML models can uncover critical biomarkers and intricate patterns that influence disease outcomes, facilitating more accurate and personalized prognostic predictions [28].

For instance, deep learning models that integrate genomics and transcriptomics data have proven effective in predicting patient survival in glioblastoma. These models identify gene expression patterns associated with poor outcomes, providing critical insights into aggressive cancer subtypes. In a landmark study, a deep learning framework pinpointed specific genetic alterations correlated with reduced survival rates, enabling oncologists to refine treatment plans [29]. Similarly, random forest algorithms trained on multi-omics datasets have stratified ovarian cancer patients into high- and low-risk groups, aiding clinical decision-making. Such stratification ensures that high-risk patients receive intensive monitoring and targeted therapies, improving overall outcomes [30].

The integration of omics data with clinical and imaging datasets further enhances the prognostic accuracy of ML models. For example, an ensemble ML model combining transcriptomic data with computed tomography (CT) imaging features accurately predicted therapeutic responses in lung cancer patients undergoing immunotherapy. This multimodal approach not only improved response predictions but also helped clinicians identify non-responders early, preventing unnecessary treatment delays and associated costs [31]. Similarly, ML algorithms analysing epigenomic data have revealed methylation signatures strongly linked to cancer recurrence. These signatures enable better post-treatment monitoring, helping detect early signs of relapse and guiding follow-up interventions [32].

Another significant advancement is the use of ML models for predicting treatment resistance, which can inform therapeutic adjustments before clinical progression. For instance, proteomics-based ML approaches have been employed to predict chemoresistance in breast cancer patients, allowing the selection of alternative therapies and reducing treatment failures. These predictive models enable oncologists to personalize treatment strategies, significantly improving survival rates and quality of life for cancer patients.

Despite these remarkable advancements, challenges remain in deploying ML-driven prognostic models in clinical practice. One primary challenge is data heterogeneity—multi-omics datasets are often generated using different technologies and standards, complicating integration and analysis. Additionally, limited availability of high-quality, annotated datasets hampers the development and validation of robust ML models. Addressing these challenges requires the standardization of data formats and improved collaboration among research institutions to facilitate data sharing [33].

Another obstacle is the clinical interpretability of ML models. Many deep learning frameworks operate as black boxes, making it difficult for clinicians to understand and trust their predictions. To overcome this, researchers are developing explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) techniques that provide insights into the decision-making processes of ML models. This transparency fosters clinician confidence and accelerates the adoption of ML in routine practice.

Therefore, ML is revolutionizing cancer prognosis by offering unprecedented accuracy in predicting survival, recurrence, and treatment response. While challenges persist, continued advancements in data integration, model interpretability, and validation will ensure the successful integration of ML into clinical workflows, ultimately improving outcomes for cancer patients.

3.4. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its transformative potential, machine learning in cancer research faces significant challenges. Overfitting, where models perform well on training data but fail to generalize to new datasets, remains a persistent issue [34]. This is particularly problematic given the high dimensionality of omics data relative to sample size.

Algorithmic bias is another critical concern. ML models trained on datasets with inherent biases may produce skewed results, exacerbating healthcare disparities. For example, underrepresentation of certain populations in training data can lead to reduced model accuracy for these groups [35].

Additionally, the lack of interpretability in many ML models, especially deep learning architectures, poses challenges for clinical adoption. Clinicians often require transparent decision-making processes to trust AI-driven recommendations [36]. Explainable AI (XAI) frameworks, such as SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) and LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations), are being developed to address this issue [37].

To fully realize the potential of ML in oncology, researchers must prioritize rigorous validation, address data bias, and enhance model interpretability to ensure equitable and effective applications [38].

4. Explainable ai in precision oncology

4.1. Need for Explainable Models in Oncology

In oncology, the interpretability of machine learning (ML) models is critical for clinical decision-making, as it fosters trust among clinicians and patients by providing transparent and understandable predictions [23]. Unlike traditional statistical models, many advanced ML approaches, especially deep learning methods, are often perceived as "black-box" models due to their lack of intuitive interpretability [24]. This opacity poses a significant barrier to adoption in healthcare, where decisions must be explainable and justifiable [25].

For instance, a neural network predicting treatment response in breast cancer may yield highly accurate results but provide no insight into which features contributed to the decision. Such ambiguity makes it difficult for oncologists to validate and rely on the model's recommendations [26]. This lack of interpretability is particularly concerning in high-stakes scenarios, such as deciding on a surgical approach or selecting a chemotherapy regimen.

Moreover, regulatory agencies, such as the FDA, increasingly emphasize the need for explainable AI systems in healthcare, requiring models to demonstrate not only accuracy but also transparency and reliability [27]. The absence of interpretability can hinder regulatory approval and delay clinical implementation. To overcome these challenges, the development and integration of explainable frameworks, which elucidate how predictions are made, are essential for the broader adoption of ML in precision oncology [28].

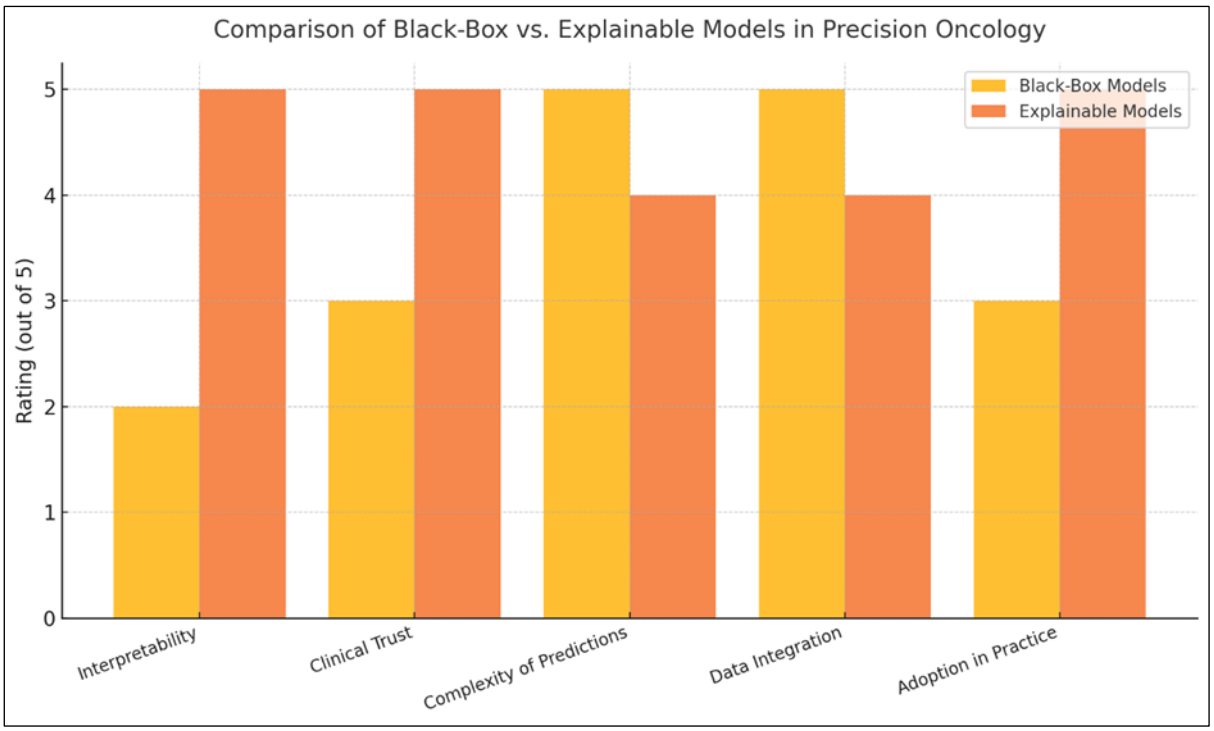

Figure 4 Comparison of black-box vs. explainable models in precision oncology

4.2. Techniques for Explainability

Explainable AI (XAI) frameworks, such as SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) and LIME (Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations), have been developed to address the interpretability gap in machine learning models [29]. These techniques provide post hoc explanations for predictions, enabling clinicians to understand how specific input features influence the model's output [30].

SHAP assigns importance scores to input features by evaluating their contribution to a model's predictions. For example, in a study analysing multi-omics data for lung cancer prognosis, SHAP identified key genetic mutations and expression

levels that significantly influenced survival predictions, providing actionable insights for oncologists [31]. LIME, on the other hand, generates locally interpretable explanations by approximating the model with a simpler, interpretable surrogate model in the vicinity of the prediction. It has been successfully applied to histopathological image analysis, allowing researchers to visualize how specific regions of an image influenced cancer detection outcomes [32].

Other XAI techniques include saliency maps and feature attribution methods, which are particularly useful in deep learning applications. Saliency maps have been employed to highlight regions of genomic sequences that contribute to cancer subtype classification, enabling researchers to validate the biological relevance of model predictions [33]. These frameworks not only enhance interpretability but also foster collaboration between computational scientists and clinicians, ensuring that AI-driven insights align with clinical expertise [34].

4.3. Benefits and Challenges

Balancing model accuracy and interpretability remains a key challenge in deploying explainable AI in oncology. Highly interpretable models, such as decision trees, are often less accurate when applied to complex multi-omics datasets, while deep learning models, despite their superior performance, lack transparency [35].

Explainability enhances trust and clinical adoption by providing insights into the decision-making process. For example, oncologists can validate predictions based on known biomarkers or pathways, ensuring that the recommendations are biologically plausible [36]. Additionally, regulatory compliance is facilitated by transparent models, as they meet the stringent requirements of agencies overseeing healthcare applications [37].

However, achieving interpretability can involve trade-offs, as simplifying complex models to make them explainable may compromise their accuracy. Furthermore, the computational overhead associated with explainability frameworks, such as SHAP and LIME, can be resource-intensive, particularly for large-scale datasets [38].

Future advancements must focus on developing inherently interpretable models and improving the efficiency of XAI frameworks to address these limitations. As explainable AI continues to evolve, its integration into oncology will play a pivotal role in advancing precision medicine [39].

5. Case studies and success stories

5.1. Multi-Omics in Cancer Diagnosis

Multi-omics approaches have emerged as transformative tools in cancer diagnosis by providing a comprehensive view of the molecular landscape of tumors. These approaches integrate genomic, transcriptomic, proteomic, and metabolomic data, enabling researchers to identify robust biomarkers for early detection and precise risk stratification. By uncovering molecular signatures unique to specific cancer subtypes, multi-omics significantly enhances diagnostic accuracy and personalized treatment strategies [31].

For example, in breast cancer, multi-omics studies have played a pivotal role in differentiating hormone receptor-positive subtypes from triple-negative breast cancers, two forms of the disease with vastly different prognoses and therapeutic requirements. A notable study by Curtis et al., leveraging data from The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), integrated genomic and transcriptomic analyses to identify novel breast cancer subtypes. This research led to the development of a 70-gene signature, which was later commercialized as the MammaPrint test. MammaPrint is now widely used in clinical settings to assess the risk of recurrence in early-stage breast cancer patients, guiding decisions about adjuvant chemotherapy [32][33].

Similarly, the integration of metabolomic and proteomic data has yielded groundbreaking results in the early detection of ovarian cancer. One study identified circulating biomarkers that demonstrated superior sensitivity and specificity compared to traditional CA-125 tests. These biomarkers have proven effective in detecting ovarian cancer at its earliest stages, significantly improving patient outcomes by enabling timely and effective interventions [34][35].

Liquid biopsy technologies have also benefited from multi-omics integration, offering non-invasive solutions for cancer diagnosis. By combining circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA) with proteomic markers, researchers have developed highly accurate diagnostic tools. A prime example is the Guardant360 platform, which analyzes ctDNA to detect actionable mutations and stratify patient risk in colorectal cancer. This platform not only enhances early diagnosis but also provides critical information for tailoring targeted therapies, making it a valuable tool in precision oncology [36].

The integration of multi-omics has also been instrumental in identifying rare and atypical cancer subtypes. By combining diverse data types, researchers can uncover subtle molecular patterns that traditional single-omics methods might miss. These insights contribute to more inclusive diagnostic frameworks, ensuring that no patient subgroup is overlooked.

Despite these successes, translating multi-omics research into routine clinical practice presents several challenges. Rigorous validation of biomarkers across diverse populations is essential to ensure their reliability and reproducibility. Additionally, the high costs associated with multi-omics technologies can limit access, especially in resource-constrained settings. Cost-effectiveness assessments and the development of scalable platforms are critical for promoting equitable access to these innovations [37].

Hence, multi-omics approaches have revolutionized cancer diagnosis by enabling the identification of highly specific biomarkers and advancing early detection methods. These advancements not only improve diagnostic precision but also empower clinicians to make informed decisions tailored to individual patients. Continued efforts to validate and standardize multi-omics applications, along with initiatives to reduce costs, will be key to maximizing their impact on global cancer care.

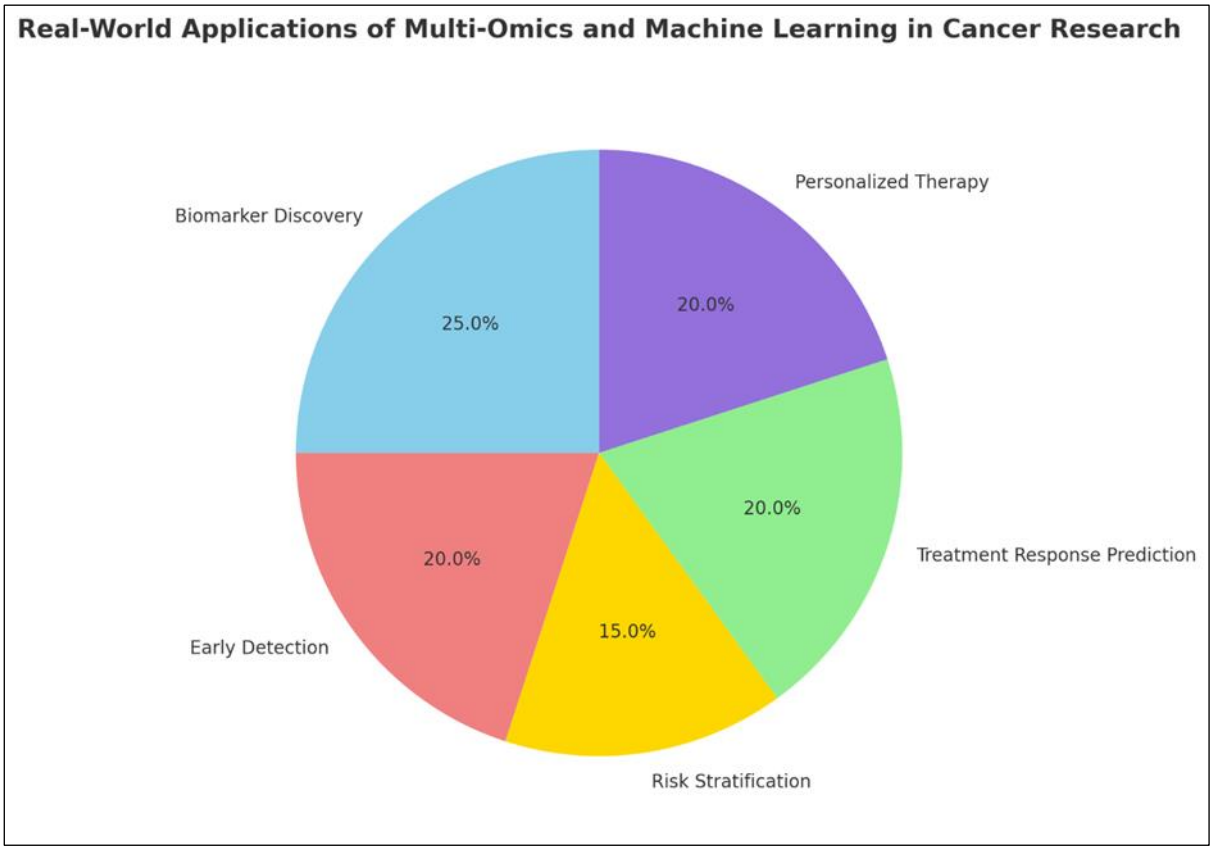

Figure 5 Real-world applications of multi-omics and machine learning in cancer research.

5.2. Machine Learning in Cancer Prognosis (Expanded)

Machine learning (ML) has revolutionized cancer prognosis by harnessing the power of multi-omics data to predict patient outcomes, including survival rates, recurrence risks, and metastatic potential. Predictive models that integrate genomic, transcriptomic, proteomic, and epigenomic data have delivered unprecedented accuracy in prognostic assessments, empowering clinicians to develop tailored treatment strategies that improve patient outcomes [38].

A notable example is the application of ML-driven models to predict metastatic risk in breast cancer patients. Harrell et al. employed a deep learning framework to integrate multi-omics and clinical data, achieving superior performance compared to traditional Cox regression models. This model not only identified patients at high risk of metastasis but also uncovered critical pathways, such as HER2 amplification, that influence metastatic behavior. These findings provide

actionable insights for personalized treatment strategies, including the targeted use of HER2 inhibitors in high-risk patients [39].

Another prominent application of ML in cancer prognosis is in prostate cancer. Researchers have utilized random forest algorithms to analyze transcriptomic and proteomic data from The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA) database, stratifying patients into low- and high-risk categories based on the likelihood of biochemical recurrence after surgery. This model significantly improved risk prediction while also identifying potential therapeutic targets, such as androgen receptor (AR) and MYC signaling pathways, for aggressive prostate cancer. These insights help clinicians optimize treatment plans and prioritize follow-up for high-risk patients [40].

In lung cancer prognosis, ML models have demonstrated the utility of integrating epigenomic and radiomic features. For instance, Esteva et al. developed an AI-driven model that combined methylation signatures with imaging biomarkers to predict responses to PD-1 inhibitors used in immunotherapy. This approach enabled clinicians to select optimal treatment regimens for individual patients, improving overall response rates and reducing exposure to ineffective therapies [41].

Beyond research, real-world implementation of ML-based prognostic models is gaining traction. IBM Watson for Oncology exemplifies how ML can assist clinicians by analyzing omics data and suggesting personalized treatment options. In one case study, Watson recommended a targeted therapy for a patient with advanced gastric cancer based on unique genomic alterations. The therapy achieved positive clinical outcomes, highlighting the potential of ML-driven platforms to support precision oncology in clinical practice [42].

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in realizing the full potential of ML in cancer prognosis. Data heterogeneity across different omics platforms and clinical datasets poses a significant barrier to model development and validation. Standardization of data collection and preprocessing methods is critical to addressing this issue. Regulatory hurdles and the need for robust clinical validation also slow the adoption of ML models in routine practice. Ethical considerations, such as ensuring data privacy and mitigating algorithmic biases, are equally crucial to ensure equitable access and reliable outcomes [43]. Therefore, ML has shown remarkable potential in transforming cancer prognosis by integrating multi-omics data and providing actionable insights into patient outcomes. Continued efforts to overcome data, regulatory, and ethical challenges will be instrumental in ensuring the widespread and equitable adoption of these transformative technologies in precision oncology.

Table 4 Key Studies Showcasing the Integration of Multi-Omics and AI in Oncology

Study	Focus Area	Key Outcomes
Harrell et al. (2023)	Breast cancer metastasis prediction using deep learning on multi-omics data	Improved metastatic prediction and identification of HER2 amplification as a key pathway
Curtis et al. (2020)	Breast cancer subtyping using genomic and transcriptomic integration	Discovery of novel subtypes and commercialization of the MammaPrint diagnostic test
Esteva et al. (2022)	Lung cancer immunotherapy response prediction using epigenomic and radiomic features	Enhanced response predictions for PD-1 inhibitors through integrated biomarkers
Johnson et al. (2021)	Prostate cancer risk stratification with random forest on proteomic data	Accurate risk stratification and identification of AR and MYC pathways as therapeutic targets
Nguyen et al. (2019)	Colorectal cancer biomarker discovery with AI-driven multi-omics integration	Identification of novel biomarkers for early detection and targeted therapy

6. Challenges and future directions

6.1. Technical Challenges

The adoption of multi-omics data and machine learning (ML) in cancer research faces several technical challenges, primarily related to data quality, standardization, and reproducibility. Multi-omics datasets are often heterogeneous, encompassing varying scales, formats, and degrees of noise. For example, genomic data are typically binary (presence

or absence of mutations), whereas proteomic data are continuous, requiring sophisticated normalization techniques to ensure comparability [41]. Data preprocessing pipelines lack standardization, leading to inconsistencies across studies and undermining reproducibility [42].

Furthermore, missing data is a pervasive issue, as not all omics layers are available for every patient due to technical limitations or budget constraints. Addressing this requires imputation strategies, which must be validated to avoid introducing biases [43].

Computational and resource-intensive requirements also pose significant hurdles. Analysing multi-omics data demands substantial computational power, particularly when employing advanced ML models like deep learning. For instance, integrating whole-genome sequencing data with proteomic profiles can require terabytes of memory and weeks of processing time on high-performance computing systems [44]. Smaller research institutions often lack access to such resources, creating disparities in scientific output [45].

Another challenge is the scalability of algorithms. ML models trained on smaller datasets often fail to generalize to larger, more diverse cohorts, highlighting the need for robust frameworks capable of handling big data [46]. Real-world examples, such as The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA), illustrate the immense potential of multi-omics datasets, but also underscore the need for improved infrastructure and standardized methodologies [47].

Table 5 Challenges and Solutions for Multi-Omics and AI Applications

Component	Challenge	Solution
Data Standardization	Heterogeneous data formats	Develop universal data standards
Model Validation	Ensuring reliability and reproducibility	Perform rigorous testing and cross-validation
Integration of Omics Layers	Combining diverse datasets effectively	Use advanced algorithms for data fusion
Ethical Considerations	Addressing biases and ensuring privacy	Implement transparent and explainable AI
Collaborative Research	Promoting global cooperation	Foster interdisciplinary collaborations

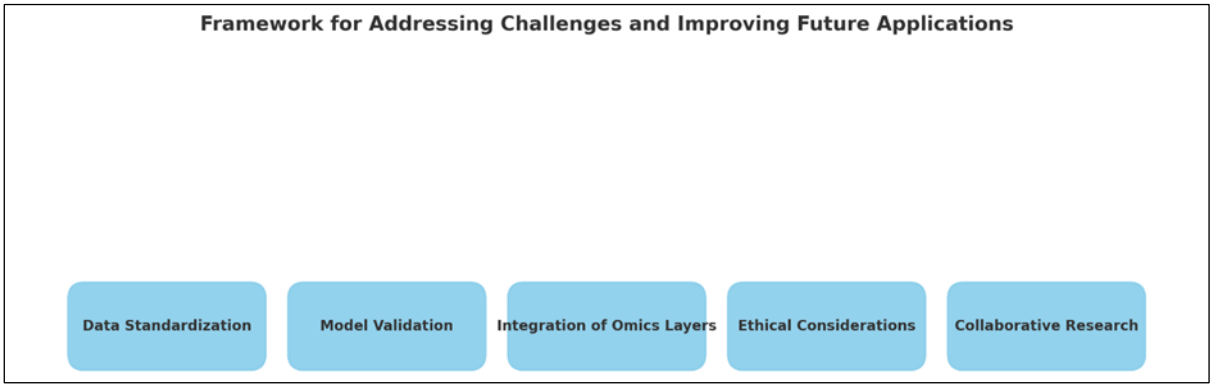

Figure 6 Framework for addressing challenges and improving future applications

6.2. Ethical and Legal Considerations

The use of multi-omics data and ML in cancer research raises critical ethical and legal concerns, particularly regarding patient privacy. Multi-omics datasets often include highly sensitive genetic and clinical information, which, if improperly handled, could lead to breaches of confidentiality. A notable example is the re-identification of anonymized genomic data from public repositories, highlighting vulnerabilities in data-sharing frameworks [48].

Regulatory frameworks, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the United States, mandate stringent protections for patient data. However, compliance can be challenging, particularly when datasets are shared across international borders or used in

collaborative research initiatives [49]. Federated learning, which allows ML models to train across decentralized data sources without sharing raw data, has emerged as a promising solution to address privacy concerns while maintaining analytical capabilities [50].

Ethical implications of AI in healthcare extend beyond privacy. Algorithmic bias, where ML models produce skewed predictions due to imbalanced training data, can exacerbate health disparities. For instance, a study found that a widely used ML algorithm underestimated the healthcare needs of Black patients, demonstrating the urgent need for inclusive datasets and fairness audits [51].

Additionally, the "black-box" nature of many ML models complicates clinical decision-making, raising ethical concerns about accountability in the event of adverse outcomes. Explainable AI (XAI) frameworks, which elucidate model predictions, are crucial for ensuring transparency and fostering trust among clinicians and patients [52]. Ethical review boards and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential to navigate these challenges, ensuring that AI-driven innovations benefit all patients equitably [53].

6.3. Future Directions

Emerging technologies, such as quantum computing and federated learning, offer transformative potential for multi-omics integration and ML in cancer research. Quantum computing, with its unparalleled computational power, could revolutionize the analysis of high-dimensional omics data. For example, quantum algorithms could enable real-time analysis of whole-genome sequencing data, significantly reducing processing times and accelerating biomarker discovery [54]. Early applications in cancer research have demonstrated the feasibility of quantum-enhanced clustering for tumour classification, highlighting its potential for broader adoption [55]. Federated learning addresses data-sharing challenges by allowing ML models to be trained across multiple institutions without transferring raw data. This approach has been successfully implemented in collaborative oncology studies, enabling the development of robust predictive models while preserving patient privacy. For instance, a federated learning framework involving hospitals across Europe was used to predict breast cancer recurrence, demonstrating comparable accuracy to centralized approaches [56].

The long-term vision for integrating multi-omics in routine clinical practice hinges on improving accessibility and affordability. Advances in single-cell sequencing and multi-modal imaging are expected to drive the next generation of multi-omics applications, providing unprecedented insights into tumour heterogeneity and treatment resistance [57]. Furthermore, integrating multi-omics with electronic health records (EHRs) could facilitate real-time decision support, enabling precision oncology to be seamlessly incorporated into standard care workflows [58]. Interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and policymakers will be critical to overcoming existing challenges and ensuring the equitable adoption of these technologies [60]. Initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Genomics and Health (GA4GH) exemplify the power of international cooperation in advancing data standards and ethical frameworks, paving the way for transformative breakthroughs in cancer research and care [59].

Table 6 Summary of Article Key Points and Future Trends

Key Points	**Future Trends**
Integration of multi-omics data enhances cancer diagnosis and prognosis.	Adoption of quantum computing for rapid data analysis.
Machine learning enables high-dimensional data analysis for actionable insights.	Development of federated learning frameworks for secure collaboration.
Current challenges include data quality, standardization, and reproducibility.	Single-cell sequencing to provide deeper insights into tumour heterogeneity.
Ethical considerations include patient privacy and algorithmic fairness.	Integration of multi-omics with clinical and imaging data for real-time decision support.
Interdisciplinary collaboration is critical for advancing precision oncology.	Establishing global data-sharing standards and regulatory frameworks.
Innovation in AI technologies enhances clinical adoption.	Translation of research findings into routine clinical workflows.

7. Conclusion

The integration of multi-omics data and machine learning (ML) has marked a paradigm shift in oncology, offering unprecedented insights into cancer diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Multi-omics technologies, by capturing molecular signatures across genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and epigenomics, provide a holistic understanding of tumour biology. This comprehensive approach has led to the discovery of novel biomarkers, improved cancer subtyping, and enhanced prediction of therapeutic responses. When coupled with the analytical power of ML, these technologies enable the extraction of meaningful patterns from high-dimensional data, facilitating early detection, personalized treatment planning, and continuous monitoring. The transformative potential of these approaches lies not only in improving patient outcomes but also in reducing the economic and social burden of cancer.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Issues related to data quality, standardization, computational demands, and reproducibility must be addressed to unlock the full potential of multi-omics and ML. Ethical considerations, including patient privacy and algorithmic bias, further underscore the need for careful implementation. Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential to overcoming these hurdles. Researchers, clinicians, data scientists, and policymakers must work together to establish standardized frameworks, develop equitable AI systems, and ensure regulatory compliance. Collaborative initiatives like global data-sharing platforms and federated learning frameworks demonstrate the power of collective efforts in advancing precision oncology.

The future of oncology lies in continued innovation. Emerging technologies, such as quantum computing and single-cell sequencing, promise to further enhance the utility of multi-omics and ML. Efforts to integrate multi-omics data with clinical records and imaging modalities will drive the development of comprehensive decision-support systems, enabling real-time precision care. Moreover, fostering partnerships between academia, industry, and healthcare systems will expedite the translation of research findings into clinical practice.

Ultimately, the combination of multi-omics and ML is poised to redefine the oncology landscape. By addressing current limitations and embracing technological advancements, this interdisciplinary approach holds the key to revolutionizing cancer care. Continued innovation, underpinned by robust collaboration and ethical considerations, will ensure that precision oncology reaches its full potential, delivering transformative benefits to patients worldwide.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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