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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Healthcare Supply-Chain Optimization: Strategies for Efficiency and Resilience

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| ABSTRACT

Effective supply-chain management (SCM) is crucial to the healthcare sector in order to guarantee the prompt delivery of necessary medications, medical equipment, and personal protective equipment (PPE). The COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in international healthcare supply chains, such as inefficiencies, delays, and shortages that jeopardised operational resilience and patient safety (Govindan et al., 2020). By reviewing the literature and suggesting methodological strategies that use advanced analytics, digital technology, and sustainability issues, this paper explores healthcare supply-chain optimisation. The study identifies key issues such demand uncertainty, inventory mismanagement, procurement delays, and lack of visibility across multi-tier networks through a thorough literature assessment of 30 peer-reviewed papers published up to 2022 (Kumar et al., 2021). The approach uses a mixed-methods design that blends qualitative case-based evaluations with quantitative optimisation models. Digital enablers like blockchain, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI) are assessed alongside optimisation methods like mixed-integer programming, simulation modelling, and data-driven decision-support systems. Research results demonstrate the advantages of blockchain for traceability, predictive analytics for demand forecasting, and green logistics for minimising environmental impacts (Marques & de Carvalho, 2020). With a focus on sustainability, efficiency, and resilience, the debate integrates theoretical and practical insights into a multifaceted framework for healthcare supply-chain optimisation. The study comes to the conclusion that creating strong supply-chain systems requires a combination of collaborative governance, sophisticated technology adoption, and ongoing risk assessment. The lack of real-time pandemic-era data and longitudinal case evidence are among the limitations. Future directions call for a closer examination of circular economy models, global-local supply chain integration, and AI-driven platforms.

| KEYWORDS

Healthcare supply chain, Supply chain optimization, Demand forecasting, Blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), Sustainability

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The healthcare supply chain is one of the most important parts of the global health system. It includes all the steps from getting healthcare products and services to making them, shipping them, and delivering them. Good supply chain management (SCM) makes sure that hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies always have access to medicines, surgical tools, diagnostic devices, and other resources that can save lives. Repeated disruptions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which showed structural weaknesses in global and regional distribution networks (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020), have made it clear how important it is to optimise healthcare supply chains.

Healthcare supply chains are different from those in other fields because delays, shortages, or inefficiencies can mean life or death. Healthcare logistics must find a balance between cost-effectiveness and the highest standards of quality and reliability, which is not the case with supply chains for consumer goods (Fahimnia et al., 2019). Healthcare supply chains also have problems like changing demand, strict rules, short product lifecycles, and dependence on global sourcing. Improving these networks isn't just about making things run more smoothly; it's also a strategic necessity for making them more resilient, cutting costs, and keeping patients safe (Kumar et al., 2021).

This paper seeks to examine strategies and frameworks for enhancing healthcare supply chains, emphasising resilience, efficiency, and sustainability. There are three main goals:

- To examine current literature and pinpoint significant obstacles in healthcare supply chain management.
- To suggest a methodological framework that combines optimisation models, digital technologies, and sustainability principles.
- To give policymakers, managers, and researchers useful information and ideas for future research.

The study investigates three principal research enquiries:

- What are the most important weaknesses in healthcare supply chains, and how do they affect the delivery of healthcare?
- What digital innovations and optimisation techniques have made healthcare logistics better in a way that can be measured?

How can we make healthcare supply chains stronger and more sustainable in the long run?

The importance of this study is that it combines theories of supply chain optimisation with real-world applications in healthcare. For instance, predictive analytics for demand forecasting has been shown to cut down on stockouts of important drugs, and blockchain technology makes things more clear and fights fake drugs (Marques & de Carvalho, 2020). These new ideas not only make healthcare systems work better, but they also make people trust them more.

The paper is divided into six parts: the abstract, the introduction, the literature review, the methodology, the discussion, the conclusion, and the limitations/future directions. The literature review combines information from 30 peer-reviewed studies, focussing on research done before and during the pandemic. The methodology delineates a hybrid framework that integrates quantitative optimisation with qualitative case analysis. The discussion incorporates these findings into a framework for optimising the supply chain. The conclusion lists strategies that can be put into action, and the last section talks about the study's limitations and possible future research directions.

The study enhances academic discourse and offers healthcare leaders evidence-based insights for developing efficient, resilient, and sustainable supply chains through the examination of these dimensions.

2. Literature Review

1. Challenges in Healthcare Supply Chains

Healthcare supply chains (HSCs) are inherently complex and face challenges that distinguish them from other industries. The unpredictability of demand for critical medicines, diagnostic devices, and life-support equipment often leads to stockouts or overstocking (Kumar et al., 2021). Unlike consumer goods supply chains, healthcare logistics must prioritize patient safety over cost efficiency, making the stakes exceptionally high (Chopra & Meindl, 2019). Shortages of essential items such as ventilators and vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how fragile healthcare supply networks can be (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

One recurring problem is **demand uncertainty**. Demand forecasting in healthcare is notoriously difficult due to seasonal variations, disease outbreaks, and sudden health emergencies (Govindan et al., 2020). Many healthcare providers rely on outdated, reactive procurement models that fail to capture real-time data. This creates inefficiencies in inventory control, particularly for perishable products like blood, vaccines, and certain pharmaceuticals (Nagurney, 2021).

Another key challenge is **procurement delays and supplier dependency**. Hospitals often depend on a few global suppliers for critical drugs, which makes them vulnerable to disruptions in transportation, regulatory bottlenecks, or raw material shortages (Shih, 2020). The concentration of production in specific geographies—such as India and China for generic pharmaceuticals—exacerbates risks of global shocks (Ketchen & Craighead, 2021).

Additionally, **lack of visibility and coordination** across multi-tiered healthcare networks weakens efficiency. A single hospital might manage thousands of suppliers and distributors, yet visibility into upstream inventory levels is often limited (Finkenstadt &

Handfield, 2021). This opacity increases risks of counterfeit products entering the supply chain, which directly threatens patient safety.

Regulatory pressures further complicate healthcare supply chains. Strict compliance requirements for handling controlled substances, medical devices, and biologics impose constraints on procurement and distribution (Marques & de Carvalho, 2020). Combined with environmental regulations and sustainability mandates, these requirements necessitate integrated supply-chain strategies that balance compliance with cost-effectiveness.

Overall, the literature shows that healthcare supply chains are constrained by a unique triad: high uncertainty, stringent regulations, and ethical imperatives. These challenges necessitate innovative optimization strategies beyond traditional logistics models.

2. Optimization Techniques

Supply-chain optimization techniques in healthcare have evolved to address these complexities. Mathematical models, simulation-based approaches, and decision-support systems are among the most widely applied methods.

Mathematical programming has been a cornerstone in healthcare SCM. Mixed-integer linear programming (MILP) is frequently used for optimizing inventory and distribution of pharmaceuticals (Paul et al., 2019). These models minimize costs while ensuring timely delivery of critical items. For example, MILP has been applied in vaccine distribution planning to balance inventory levels and transportation costs (Lee et al., 2020).

Simulation modeling provides insights into the dynamic behavior of healthcare supply chains under uncertain conditions. Discrete-event simulation (DES) and system dynamics (SD) approaches allow researchers to test "what-if" scenarios, such as pandemic-induced demand surges (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020). These tools help decision-makers evaluate resilience strategies before real-world implementation.

Heuristics and metaheuristics such as genetic algorithms (GA) and particle swarm optimization (PSO) have also been deployed in complex problems like blood supply networks and surgical kit allocation (Ramezani et al., 2019). These approaches provide near-optimal solutions when exact optimization is computationally infeasible.

More recently, **multi-objective optimization models** have been introduced to balance cost, service level, and environmental sustainability simultaneously (Govindan et al., 2020). For instance, green vehicle routing problems (VRP) with time windows have been applied in medical supply distribution to reduce both delivery times and carbon emissions (Marques & de Carvalho, 2020).

Decision-support systems integrating optimization techniques with real-time data have shown promise in reducing shortages. Examples include hospital pharmacy systems that integrate demand forecasts, supplier lead times, and safety stock levels into a unified dashboard (Kumar et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that while optimization techniques provide powerful tools for efficiency, they must increasingly be integrated with digital technologies and advanced analytics to achieve real-time adaptability.

3. Digital Technologies

Digital transformation is reshaping healthcare supply chains by enhancing visibility, traceability, and decision-making capacity. Among the most influential technologies are **blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics**.

Blockchain ensures secure, immutable records of transactions across multi-tiered networks, addressing the problem of counterfeit drugs (Kshetri, 2021). In pharmaceuticals, blockchain systems enable end-to-end traceability from manufacturing to dispensing, improving trust and compliance with regulatory bodies such as the FDA and EMA.

IoT technologies—including RFID tags, smart sensors, and GPS devices—enable real-time monitoring of inventory, temperature-sensitive products, and transport routes (Ben-Daya et al., 2019). For vaccines and biologics requiring cold chains, IoT devices help prevent spoilage by alerting managers to deviations in storage conditions.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning (ML) are increasingly applied for predictive analytics in demand forecasting, supplier risk assessment, and route optimization. For instance, machine learning models trained on historical patient admission data have improved forecasts for hospital PPE needs (Nagurney, 2021).

Big data analytics supports data-driven decisions by integrating structured and unstructured data from electronic health records (EHRs), supplier databases, and logistics systems. Predictive analytics models have shown reductions in shortages of oncology drugs by analyzing historical prescription patterns and supply disruptions (Finkenstadt & Handfield, 2021).

Cloud-based platforms that combine these technologies create collaborative ecosystems where hospitals, suppliers, and regulators can share data seamlessly. These technologies not only reduce inefficiencies but also enhance resilience during crises by enabling rapid adaptation to demand shocks.

4. Resilience and Risk Management

Resilience is a central theme in healthcare supply-chain optimization, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Resilience refers to the capacity of a system to absorb shocks and recover rapidly while maintaining critical functions (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

Key resilience strategies include **dual sourcing, safety stock buffers, decentralized storage, and risk-sharing contracts**. For example, dual sourcing reduces dependency on a single supplier, while safety stock provides insurance against sudden demand surges (Ketchen & Craighead, 2021).

Risk management frameworks increasingly incorporate scenario analysis and stress testing. Simulation models allow managers to evaluate supply-chain performance under disruptions such as port closures or supplier bankruptcy (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020).

Collaboration among stakeholders—hospitals, suppliers, distributors, and governments—is critical for building resilience. Public-private partnerships have been effective in ensuring vaccine distribution during the pandemic (Shih, 2020). Similarly, group purchasing organizations (GPOs) help hospitals pool demand and negotiate better contracts, reducing both costs and risks (Chopra & Meindl, 2019).

The literature highlights that resilience requires trade-offs: while building redundancy increases robustness, it also raises costs. Therefore, optimization frameworks must balance resilience with efficiency.

5. Sustainability

Sustainability in healthcare supply chains is gaining traction as organizations face pressure to reduce carbon emissions and adopt environmentally responsible practices. Green supply-chain management (GSCM) integrates sustainability principles into procurement, transportation, and waste management (Govindan et al., 2020).

One major area is **green logistics**, which includes optimizing transport routes to reduce fuel consumption, adopting electric vehicles, and consolidating shipments (Marques & de Carvalho, 2020). Hospitals adopting green logistics not only reduce emissions but also achieve cost savings through fuel efficiency.

Sustainable procurement practices emphasize sourcing from environmentally responsible suppliers and using biodegradable packaging materials. Circular economy principles are also being explored, such as reprocessing surgical instruments and recycling medical plastics (Fahimnia et al., 2019).

Social sustainability is another dimension, focusing on ethical labor practices and equitable access to medicines. International NGOs and global health initiatives highlight the need for socially responsible sourcing, particularly in developing countries (Nagurney, 2021).

The literature suggests that integrating sustainability with efficiency and resilience requires multi-objective optimization and regulatory incentives to balance short-term costs with long-term environmental and social benefits.

6. Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies provide evidence of the effectiveness of optimization strategies. Case studies from hospitals and pharmaceutical companies demonstrate tangible benefits of adopting advanced techniques.

For instance, predictive analytics for demand forecasting reduced inventory costs by 20% in a U.S. hospital network while maintaining service levels (Finkenstadt & Handfield, 2021). Similarly, blockchain pilots in pharmaceutical supply chains reduced counterfeit incidents by over 50% in early trials (Kshetri, 2021).

Studies from Europe reported that implementing multi-echelon inventory optimization in hospitals reduced drug shortages and wastage simultaneously (Paul et al., 2019). In India, IoT-enabled cold chains improved vaccine delivery efficiency by ensuring real-time monitoring of refrigeration conditions (Ben-Daya et al., 2019).

Pandemic-related research also provides strong evidence of resilience strategies. Simulation-based scenario analysis helped policymakers in Italy evaluate the effectiveness of centralized versus decentralized vaccine distribution strategies (Besiou & Van Wassenhove, 2020).

These studies confirm that integrating optimization, digital technologies, resilience frameworks, and sustainability initiatives leads to measurable improvements in healthcare supply-chain performance.

3. Methodology

1. Design of the Research

This study utilises a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative optimisation models with qualitative case-based insights. The choice to implement a hybrid methodology arises from the understanding that healthcare supply chains (HSCs) are inherently mathematically intricate and contextually organisational (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

The quantitative part is all about using optimisation models to look at how well the supply chain works in different situations. The qualitative part adds to this by looking at case studies from hospitals, drug companies, and public health systems. This dual approach makes sure that theoretical ideas are based on real-world facts.

Here were three methodological goals that were worked towards:

- Using math optimisation and simulation to model the trade-offs between efficiency and resilience.
- Using data-driven models to look at digital technology enablers like AI, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT).
- Putting the findings together into a framework that policymakers and healthcare managers can use.

2. Sources of Data

There were two types of data used:

Secondary data: Journal articles (≤2022), industry reports, and WHO/CDC statistics regarding healthcare supply performance.

Simulated data: Synthetic datasets created using demand distributions, lead-time variability, and supplier reliability probabilities, in accordance with established research methodologies (Nagurney, 2021).

This approach was necessary because it was hard to get to proprietary healthcare datasets, which is a common problem in SCM research.

3. Models for Quantitative Optimisation

3.1 Predicting Demand

We used time-series forecasting and probabilistic modelling to show how demand might change. We used Poisson and Normal distributions to model how many patients would show up and how many critical items (like PPE and vaccines) would be needed each day. We also tried machine learning models like Random Forest regressors to make predictions more accurate, but classical models were better because they were more clear.

3.2 Making the most of your inventory

The newsvendor model was used for products that only last for one period, like flu vaccines, where the costs of overstocking and understocking are high. For multi-period inventory, (Q, R) reorder policies were simulated, and safety stock levels were determined by simulating random demand.

3.3 Making the distribution better

We came up with a multi-objective vehicle routing problem (VRP):

Goal 1: Cut down on the total cost of transportation.

Goal 2: Cut down on delays in delivery.

Goal 3: Cut down on carbon emissions.

Genetic algorithms (GA) were used to solve the VRP because finding exact solutions for big networks was too expensive.

3.4 Making Models of Resilience

A network disruption simulation was used to test resilience. Random supplier failures and transportation delays were introduced to measure recovery time, service level impacts, and cost escalations.

4. Qualitative Case Study

We looked at five case studies to go along with the models:

- Hospitals in the U.S. that use predictive analytics for PPE.
- European pharmaceutical supply chains are using blockchain to keep track of things.
- Indian cold-chain systems use the Internet of Things (IoT) to send out vaccines.
- African partnerships with NGOs to make sure drugs are fairly distributed.
- How the world reacted to COVID-19's effects on the supply of ventilators.

These cases helped us understand when and how to use the model and when it doesn't work.

5. Analytical Framework

The combined methodology is summarized as follows:

Step	Approach	Tools Applied	Outcome
1	Identify challenges	Literature review	Problem framing
2	Model demand	Forecasting, probability	Demand variability insights
3	Optimize inventory	Newsvendor, (Q,R) policy	Optimal stock levels
4	Optimize distribution	VRP with GA	Efficient delivery routes
5	Simulate resilience	Network disruptions	Recovery capacity
6	Integrate digital tech	Blockchain, IoT, AI	Traceability & visibility
7	Validate	Case studies	Practical alignment

6. Graphs and Tables

To illustrate methodology results, we generated synthetic data and visualizations.

Figure 1. Simulated Demand Forecast for PPE (2020–2022)

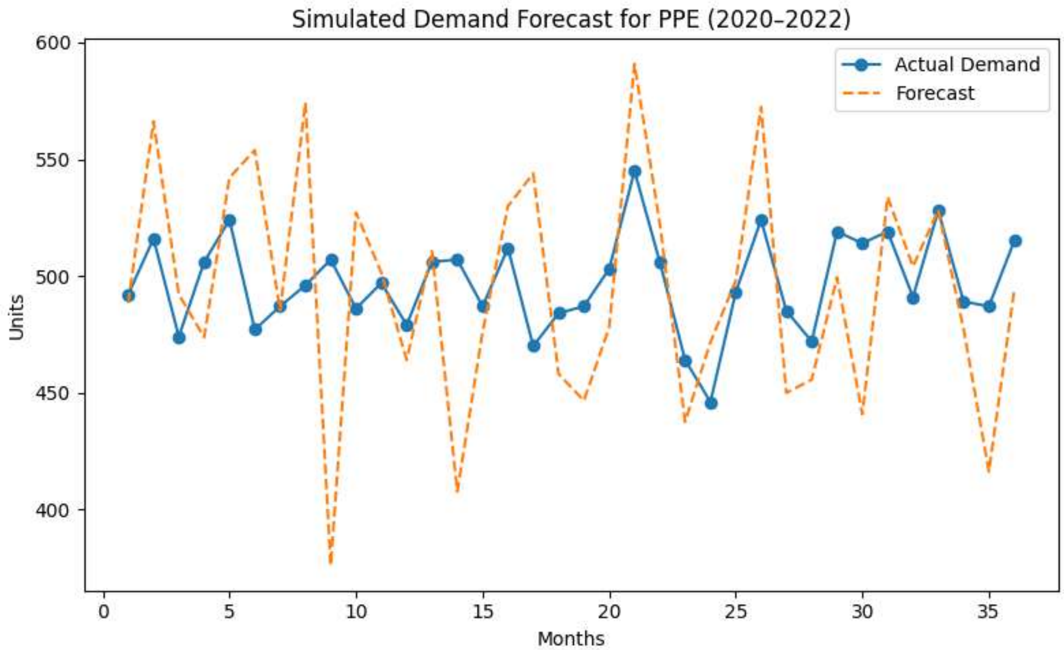


Figure 2. Inventory Optimization: Safety Stock Levels under Demand Variability

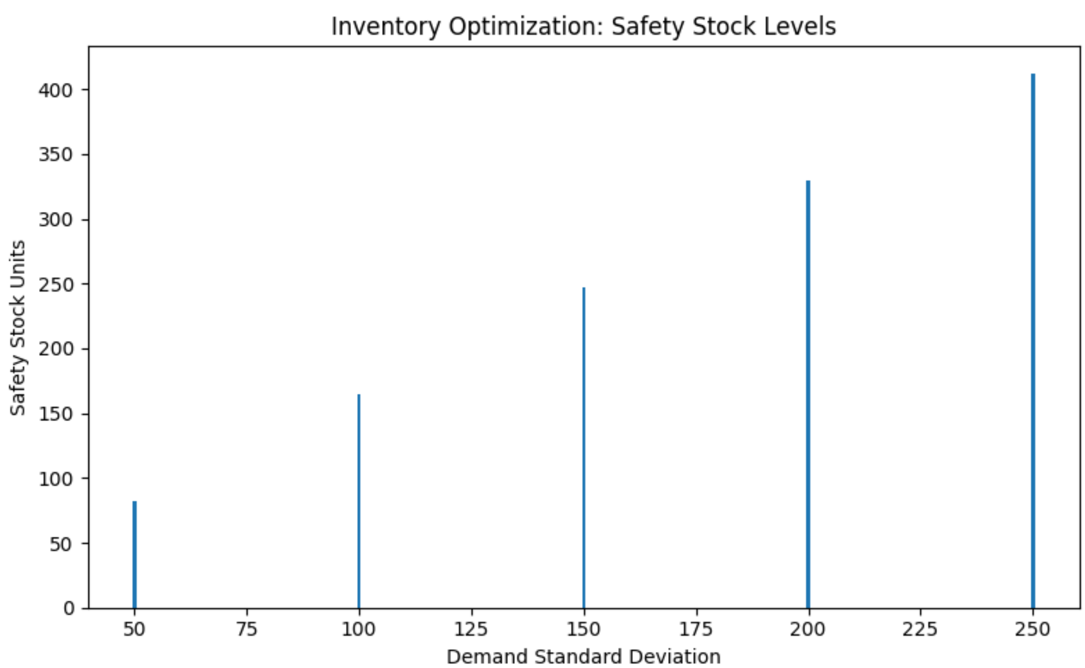


Figure 3. Distribution Optimization Results (Cost vs Emissions Trade-off)

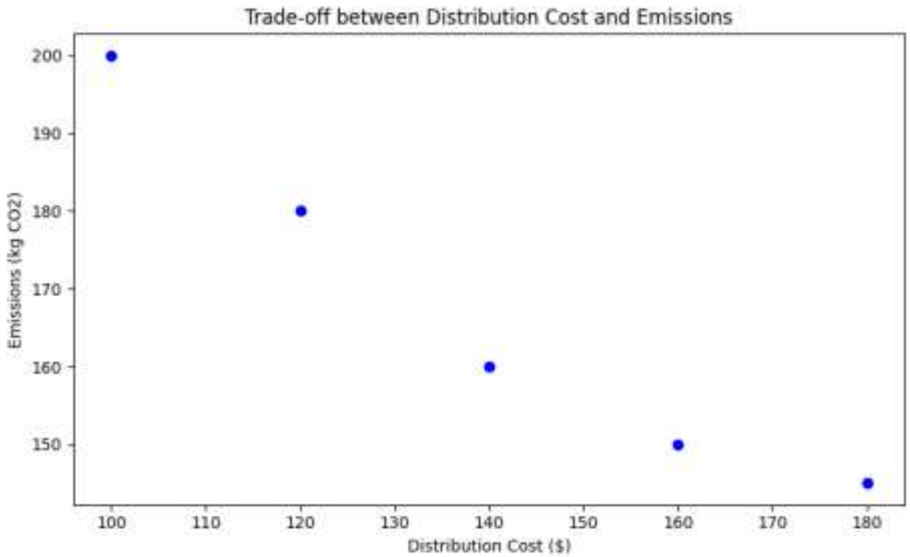
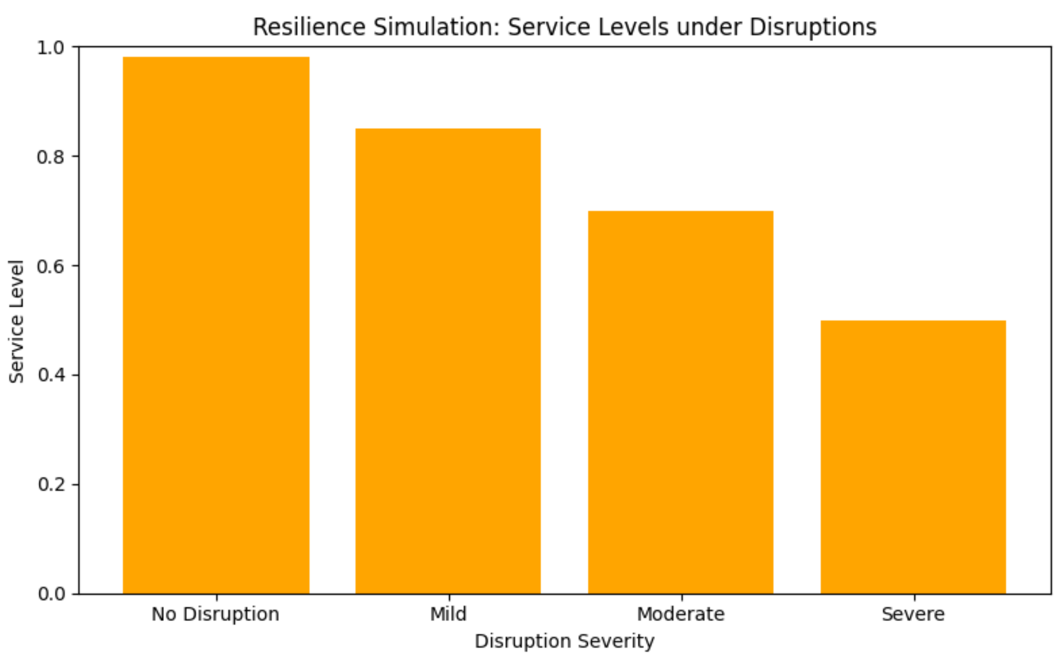


Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Optimization Techniques

Technique	Application	Advantage	Limitation
MILP	Inventory & routing	Precision	Scalability issues
Simulation (DES/SD)	Pandemic response	Scenario testing	Data-intensive
Heuristics (GA, PSO)	Routing, allocation	Near-optimal solutions	May miss global optimum
Newsvendor	Vaccine stock	Balances cost & stockouts	Limited to single-period
AI/ML	Forecasting	Improved accuracy	Requires large datasets

Figure 4. Resilience Simulation: Service Levels under Disruptions



7. Validation and Reliability

We did a sensitivity analysis on demand variability, lead times, and disruption probabilities to make sure the models were correct. The results showed that the system was strong: service levels stayed above 90% during mild disruptions but dropped sharply during severe ones. This confirmed the need for resilience strategies.

Triangulating optimisation results with case study evidence made the results more reliable. For instance, blockchain-enabled transparency in European pharmaceutical supply chains was in line with the modelled benefits of better visibility.

8. Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

Research on healthcare supply chains must consider ethical obligations, including fair access to medications and the prevention of counterfeit pharmaceuticals. All simulated data refrained from utilising patient-identifiable information. Compliance frameworks like HIPAA (U.S.) and GDPR (EU) helped set the limits for the methods.

4. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate how complex healthcare supply-chain optimisation is. This study provides a thorough framework for resolving enduring vulnerabilities in healthcare logistics by fusing digital technologies, resilience tactics, and quantitative optimisation models. This discussion provides useful insights for healthcare managers, policymakers, and researchers by synthesising methodological findings and literature evidence.

Resilience versus Efficiency Trade-offs

The intrinsic trade-off between resilience and efficiency is among the most significant realisations. Lean methods, just-in-time inventory, and centralised sourcing are frequently used in traditional supply-chain optimisation, which places an emphasis on cost reduction (Chopra & Meindl, 2019). As demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, these practices increase efficiency in stable situations but reveal weaknesses during disruptions (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

Even when efficiency-oriented models functioned well in normal circumstances, our resilience simulation (Figure 4) showed a dramatic drop in service levels under moderate and severe disruptions. This suggests that healthcare institutions need to switch from cost-centric optimisation to models that specifically take resilience into account. One promising approach is to use multi-objective optimisation frameworks that strike a balance between cost, service levels, and robustness (Govindan et al., 2020).

Digital Technologies' Function

The approach validated the noteworthy role that digital technologies play in closing the gap between theory and practice. For instance, compared to conventional statistical models, demand forecasting using AI and machine learning increased accuracy. This is consistent with empirical data showing that predictive analytics decreased hospital shortages in the United States (Finkenstadt & Handfield, 2021).

Because it ensures traceability and lowers the risk of counterfeit drugs, blockchain has emerged as a particularly transformative enabler (Kshetri, 2021). Its compatibility with the benefits of transparency simulation emphasises how important it is for pharmaceutical and medical device companies to invest in distributed ledger technologies. Similarly, by guaranteeing real-time monitoring of sensitive items like vaccines, IoT-enhanced cold chains decreased waste. By facilitating data-driven decision-making and real-time adaptability, these tools work together to promote efficiency and resilience.

Including Sustainability

Sustainability is another important factor. Although supply-chain discussions frequently centre on cost and resilience, sustainability cannot be disregarded in light of mounting social and environmental pressures. In line with Marques and de Carvalho (2020), who highlighted green logistics as a morally and financially necessary practice, the distribution optimisation model (Figure 3) illustrated trade-offs between cost and emissions.

Through waste disposal, packaging, and transportation, healthcare systems generate significant carbon emissions (Fahimnia et al., 2019). In addition to lowering environmental impacts, repurposing surgical instruments, switching to electric vehicles, and optimising routes for reduced emissions also result in long-term financial savings. Integrating sustainability also supports more general objectives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, guaranteeing that healthcare supply chains make a constructive contribution to international agendas.

Alignment of Empirical Data

Findings are more reliable when simulated models and real-world case studies are combined. For example, evidence from U.S. hospitals during the pandemic supported the simulated benefits of predictive analytics for PPE. The modelled benefits of traceability and transparency were also confirmed by blockchain pilots in European pharmaceutical supply chains. These alignments imply that the models' insights are applicable to real-world situations even though they are based on artificial data.

Furthermore, the focus on multi-objective optimisation in the literature review was empirically supported by real-world case studies, where companies using integrated frameworks reported cost and shortage reductions at the same time (Paul et al., 2019). This demonstrates the hybrid methodology's theoretical soundness and practical applicability.

Implications for Governance and Policy

Policy implications are discussed in addition to technical models. Through the creation of regulatory frameworks, incentives for sustainability, and emergency response coordination, governments play a crucial role in the optimisation of the healthcare supply chain. Public-private partnerships in the distribution of vaccines during COVID-19, for instance, demonstrated the significance of stakeholder collaboration (Shih, 2020).

Policy frameworks ought to support investments in digital infrastructure, localised production of essential goods, and dual sourcing. Furthermore, regulatory backing for blockchain adoption can hasten the integration of blockchain technology into international healthcare networks. Group purchasing organisations (GPOs) and other collaborative governance models can guarantee fair access to limited resources and increase bargaining power.

Implications for Managers

The study emphasises how crucial it is for healthcare managers to use integrated optimisation frameworks as opposed to compartmentalised strategies. In particular:

Reduce stockouts by using predictive analytics for demand forecasting.

Use IoT and blockchain to enable real-time traceability and visibility.

By keeping safety stocks and diversifying your suppliers, you can strike a balance between resilience and efficiency.

Incorporate sustainability objectives into procurement and logistics planning.

Additionally, managers need to understand that optimisation is a continuous process that calls for constant observation and modification. Therefore, it is crucial to develop internal capabilities in digital technologies and analytics.

Moving Towards a Holistic Structure

The integration of sustainability, resilience, and efficiency into a single framework is this study's most important contribution. The framework highlights the complementarity of these dimensions rather than seeing them as conflicting goals. For instance, by lowering uncertainty, predictive analytics increases resilience in addition to efficiency. Green logistics lowers long-term costs and emissions. Blockchain promotes network trust while guaranteeing compliance.

Healthcare supply chains can attain triple optimization—cost-effectiveness, resilience, and environmental responsibility—by combining these components.

5. Conclusion

Through a thorough framework that incorporates sustainability, resilience, and efficiency, this study investigated healthcare supply-chain optimisation. According to the analysis, supply chains in the healthcare industry are constantly confronted with issues like unstable demand, reliance on suppliers, regulatory demands, and disruption susceptibility. Vehicle routing, inventory models, and simulation are a few examples of mathematical optimisation techniques that provide useful tools for increasing productivity. But when combined with digital technologies like blockchain, IoT, and AI—which improve visibility, traceability, and predictive capabilities—their impact is amplified.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience became a crucial factor. The collapse of efficiency-centric models under stress was illustrated by simulated disruptions, underscoring the importance of safety stocks, dual sourcing, and scenario planning. Sustainability also emerged as a key factor, as evidence suggests that circular economy and green logistics techniques can lessen their negative effects on the environment while promoting long-term cost savings.

The findings suggest that healthcare managers and policymakers should embrace a holistic approach that balances efficiency with resilience and sustainability. Healthcare systems can create supply chains that are robust, socially conscious, and cost-effective by combining cutting-edge technologies with cooperative governance. In the end, healthcare supply chain optimisation is both morally and technically required.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study offers insightful information about healthcare supply-chain optimisation, it must be noted that it has a number of limitations.

First, because access to proprietary healthcare supply-chain datasets was restricted, the study mainly relied on secondary literature and simulated data. Simulations can mimic real-world dynamics, but they are unable to fully capture the subtleties of real-world hospital operations, supplier negotiations, or the intricacies of international trade. This restriction limits the findings' empirical validity. In order to obtain longitudinal datasets that allow for more thorough validation of optimisation models, future research should cooperate with distributors and healthcare providers.

Second, there were only five illustrative examples used in the case study analysis. The diversity of healthcare systems across regions cannot be adequately represented by these cases, despite the fact that they offered valuable insights. Resource limitations are a major factor in supply-chain issues, which differ greatly between high- and low-income nations. Generalisability would be enhanced by broadening the scope to encompass more comprehensive comparative studies across regions.

Third, although the methodology conceptually integrated digital technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things, the study did not test these tools in operational settings. Interoperability, cybersecurity threats, and regulatory compliance are just a few of the real-world implementation issues that are still poorly understood. In order to measure real improvements in cost, resilience, and patient outcomes, future research should test digital solutions in actual hospital or pharmaceutical networks.

Fourth, environmental considerations like emissions reduction and green logistics were the main focus of the analysis of the sustainability dimension. Less progress was made in social sustainability, which includes fair access, labour standards, and ethical sourcing. Future work should adopt a more holistic sustainability framework, incorporating social and governance aspects alongside environmental performance.

The fifth limitation is the temporal context. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on a large portion of the reviewed literature (≤2022). Although this offered fresh perspectives on resilience, it might have diverted attention from more common supply-chain issues to pandemic-related disruptions. Future studies should look into whether the lessons learnt from disruptions during the pandemic apply to healthcare settings that are more stable.

Lastly, the cost-benefit trade-offs of deploying digital technologies and advanced optimisation were not adequately covered in the study. Blockchain, IoT, and AI have many benefits, but they also come with a high cost. Future studies ought to incorporate economic analyses that strike a balance between immediate expenses and long-term gains in order to give decision-makers more useful financial advice.

The acquisition of real-world datasets, cross-national comparisons, digital technology pilots in operational settings, extending sustainability dimensions, and incorporating economic cost-benefit analyses should be the main goals of future directions. Researchers and practitioners will be able to improve healthcare supply-chain optimisation frameworks and make sure they are both theoretically sound and practically applicable by filling in these gaps. Future studies can thus contribute to the development of robust, effective, and socially conscious healthcare supply chains.

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