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Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Seismic Reservoir Characterization: A Review of Machine Learning, SHAP-Based Interpretability, and Future Research Directions

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Abstract: The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed seismic reservoir characterization by enabling automated interpretation of complex seismic datasets and improving the prediction of subsurface reservoir properties. Machine learning techniques, including ensemble learning, support vector machines, artificial neural networks, and gradient boosting algorithms, have demonstrated significant improvements in porosity prediction, lithofacies classification, fault detection, and structural mapping compared with traditional deterministic approaches. However, despite their predictive capability, most AI models operate as black-box systems, limiting transparency and reducing confidence in critical exploration and reservoir management decisions. This limitation has motivated increasing interest in Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI), which seeks to provide interpretable and trustworthy explanations for machine learning predictions. Among existing XAI techniques, SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) has emerged as one of the most robust and theoretically sound methods for quantifying feature importance and explaining complex nonlinear models. This review examines recent developments in AI-driven seismic interpretation, digital twin technologies, machine learning-based reservoir characterization, and SHAP-based interpretability. It discusses the evolution of seismic attribute analysis from conventional statistical methods to modern explainable AI frameworks and highlights recent advances in uncertainty-aware reservoir characterization and intelligent digital reservoir systems. Furthermore, current research challenges, including model transparency, geological consistency, uncertainty quantification, data heterogeneity, and real-time explainability, are critically analyzed. Finally, future research directions involving explainable deep learning, physics-informed AI, federated learning, and digital twin-enabled intelligent reservoir management are presented. This review provides a comprehensive reference for researchers and petroleum engineers seeking to develop transparent, reliable, and trustworthy AI solutions for next-generation seismic reservoir characterization.

Keywords: *Explainable Artificial Intelligence, Seismic Reservoir Characterization, Machine Learning, SHAP, Digital Twin, Seismic Interpretation, Reservoir Engineering, Feature Attribution, Hydrocarbon Exploration.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Reservoir characterization is one of the most critical stages in hydrocarbon exploration and production because it provides detailed information regarding the spatial distribution of reservoir properties such as porosity, permeability, lithofacies, fluid saturation, and structural geometry. Accurate characterization directly influences reserve estimation, well placement, production forecasting, and reservoir management strategies. Traditionally, reservoir characterization has relied on seismic interpretation, well-log analysis, core measurements, and geological modeling. While these conventional approaches have contributed significantly to petroleum exploration, they often require extensive expert interpretation and may struggle

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to accurately represent highly heterogeneous subsurface formations. The increasing availability of large-scale three-dimensional seismic datasets has further intensified the need for automated and intelligent interpretation techniques capable of efficiently extracting meaningful geological information from complex seismic responses [7], [9], [11].

Recent advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) have fundamentally changed the way seismic data are analyzed. Rather than relying solely on deterministic or statistical methods, modern AI algorithms can learn complex nonlinear relationships between seismic attributes and reservoir properties directly from historical data. Machine learning techniques such as Random Forest (RF), Support Vector Machines (SVM), Artificial Neural Networks (ANN), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), and eXtreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) have demonstrated remarkable success in predicting porosity, permeability, lithofacies, and other petrophysical properties from seismic attributes. These approaches have significantly improved prediction accuracy while reducing manual interpretation effort and computational complexity [12], [14]–[16].

Beyond predictive modeling, AI has also enabled substantial progress in automated seismic interpretation, structural mapping, fault detection, seismic inversion, and intelligent reservoir monitoring. Elbarouni [7] reviewed the growing role of AI in seismic interpretation and highlighted its potential to improve geological understanding through intelligent analysis of seismic attributes. Subsequent studies demonstrated the application of AI to three-dimensional seismic interpretation [9], seismic attribute-based fault detection [10], integrated seismic–petrophysical reservoir characterization [11], and uncertainty-aware reservoir modeling [13]. Collectively, these investigations demonstrate that AI has become an indispensable component of modern hydrocarbon exploration and reservoir engineering.

Another important development is the emergence of Digital Twin technology in petroleum engineering. Digital twins combine real-time sensor measurements, seismic monitoring, numerical simulation, and artificial intelligence to create continuously updated virtual representations of physical reservoirs. These intelligent digital models enable predictive reservoir monitoring, production optimization, and real-time decision support throughout the reservoir lifecycle. Elbarouni [8] proposed an AI-driven digital twin framework that integrates seismic interpretation with predictive analytics for continuous reservoir monitoring, demonstrating the potential of intelligent reservoir management systems.

Despite these significant advances, one major limitation continues to hinder the practical deployment of AI in petroleum engineering. Most machine learning algorithms used in reservoir characterization function as black-box models, providing highly accurate predictions but offering little insight into the reasoning behind those predictions. In practical exploration and production environments, geoscientists and reservoir engineers must understand not only the predicted result but also the geological factors responsible for the prediction. Without adequate interpretability, it becomes difficult to validate AI models, identify potential prediction biases, and establish confidence in automated decision-making. Consequently, model transparency has become one of the most important challenges in trustworthy artificial intelligence.

To address this challenge, Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a rapidly expanding research area that focuses on making machine learning models transparent and interpretable. XAI methods seek to explain how individual input variables influence model predictions, enabling users to better understand and trust AI-assisted decisions. Among the various XAI techniques, SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) has gained widespread recognition because of its strong theoretical foundation in cooperative game theory and its ability to provide both global and local feature explanations [17]. Unlike conventional feature importance measures, SHAP quantifies the contribution of each feature to individual predictions while preserving mathematical consistency. As a result, SHAP has become one of the most widely adopted explainability methods across healthcare, finance, manufacturing, and increasingly, geoscience applications [17]–[19].

Although explainable AI has experienced rapid growth in many scientific disciplines, its application to seismic reservoir characterization remains relatively limited. Most existing studies emphasize prediction accuracy while providing only limited discussion regarding model interpretability and geological consistency. Furthermore, relatively few review articles comprehensively examine the integration of explainable AI, SHAP-based feature attribution, digital twin technologies, and machine learning for seismic reservoir characterization. Given the increasing demand for transparent and trustworthy AI systems in hydrocarbon exploration, a comprehensive review of these emerging technologies is both timely and necessary.

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of recent developments in explainable artificial intelligence for seismic reservoir characterization. Specifically, the paper reviews recent advances in AI-driven seismic interpretation, machine learning techniques, SHAP-based explainability, digital twin technologies, and uncertainty-aware reservoir characterization. In addition, current research challenges and future opportunities are critically discussed to identify promising directions for developing transparent, interpretable, and reliable AI frameworks for intelligent reservoir management.

The remainder of this review is organized as follows. **Section 2** reviews recent developments in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and digital twin technologies for seismic reservoir characterization. **Section 3** discusses Explainable

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Artificial Intelligence, SHAP-based interpretability, and current explainability techniques used in geoscience applications. **Section 4** presents emerging research trends, current challenges, and future research directions, while **Section 5** summarizes the major findings and concludes the review.

II. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING FOR SEISMIC RESERVOIR CHARACTERIZATION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most transformative technologies in petroleum geoscience by enabling automated analysis of complex seismic datasets and improving the prediction of reservoir properties. Unlike conventional interpretation techniques that rely heavily on expert judgment and deterministic models, AI algorithms learn nonlinear relationships directly from seismic and well-log data, allowing more accurate, efficient, and objective reservoir characterization. The increasing availability of high-resolution three-dimensional seismic surveys, together with advances in computational power and machine learning algorithms, has accelerated the adoption of AI throughout the exploration and production workflow. This section reviews recent developments in AI-driven seismic interpretation, seismic attribute analysis, machine learning applications, uncertainty-aware reservoir characterization, and digital twin technologies.

➢ *Evolution of AI in Seismic Interpretation*

Conventional seismic interpretation primarily depends on manual analysis of seismic amplitudes, reflector continuity, structural geometry, and well-log correlations. Although these techniques have been successfully employed for decades, they are often labor-intensive, time-consuming, and susceptible to interpreter bias, particularly when dealing with structurally complex reservoirs or large three-dimensional seismic volumes. Furthermore, deterministic interpretation methods generally assume simplified relationships between seismic responses and reservoir properties, which may not adequately capture the nonlinear behavior of heterogeneous geological formations.

Artificial intelligence has significantly changed this paradigm by introducing data-driven methodologies capable of automatically recognizing hidden patterns within seismic datasets. Machine learning algorithms can simultaneously analyze numerous seismic attributes and identify complex relationships that are difficult or impossible to detect using traditional statistical approaches. Consequently, AI has become increasingly important for automating seismic interpretation, reducing uncertainty, and improving exploration efficiency.

Elbarouni [7] presented one of the comprehensive reviews of AI-driven seismic interpretation, demonstrating how machine learning algorithms improve structural interpretation, seismic attribute analysis, reservoir characterization, and exploration decision-making. The review emphasized that AI techniques reduce interpretation time while improving consistency and prediction accuracy compared with conventional workflows. Moreover, the study highlighted the growing role of intelligent automation in modern hydrocarbon exploration and identified machine learning as a key enabling technology for future digital oilfield applications.

The transition from manual interpretation toward AI-assisted workflows reflects a broader shift in petroleum engineering from deterministic modeling to intelligent data analytics. Modern seismic interpretation increasingly combines geological expertise with machine learning algorithms capable of extracting meaningful information from multidimensional seismic attribute datasets.

➢ *Seismic Attribute Analysis and Reservoir Characterization*

Seismic attributes represent quantitative measurements extracted from seismic signals that describe amplitude, frequency, phase, geometry, and texture characteristics of subsurface reflectors. These attributes provide valuable information regarding lithology, stratigraphy, structural discontinuities, and fluid distribution, making them essential inputs for reservoir characterization.

Commonly used seismic attributes include:

- RMS Amplitude
- Instantaneous Amplitude
- Envelope
- Sweetness
- Relative Acoustic Impedance
- Instantaneous Frequency
- Instantaneous Phase
- Coherence
- Curvature
- Chaos
- Variance
- Dip
- Azimuth

Different attributes capture different geological characteristics. Amplitude-based attributes are frequently associated with lithological contrasts and hydrocarbon indicators, whereas structural attributes such as coherence and curvature are widely used for fault detection and fracture characterization. Frequency-related attributes provide additional information regarding bed thickness and reservoir heterogeneity.

Recent studies have demonstrated that combining multiple seismic attributes significantly improves reservoir characterization compared with using individual attributes alone. Elbarouni [11] proposed an integrated seismic–petrophysical workflow that combines seismic attributes with well-log information to improve reservoir characterization. The study demonstrated that integrating seismic interpretation with petrophysical analysis enhances the estimation of porosity and

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lithological variability while reducing interpretation uncertainty.

Similarly, advanced three-dimensional seismic interpretation techniques presented by Elbarouni [9] highlighted the importance of integrating multiple seismic attributes for accurate subsurface structural mapping. The study illustrated how modern interpretation workflows improve structural delineation and reservoir understanding by utilizing attribute-based analysis instead of relying solely on conventional seismic amplitudes.

These investigations collectively demonstrate that seismic attribute engineering has become a fundamental component of AI-assisted reservoir characterization.

➤ *Machine Learning Techniques for Reservoir Property Prediction*

Machine learning has become one of the most widely adopted approaches for quantitative reservoir characterization because of its ability to model highly nonlinear relationships between seismic attributes and reservoir properties. Unlike conventional regression techniques that often assume linear relationships, supervised learning algorithms automatically learn complex mappings from training data and subsequently generalize these relationships to unseen reservoir intervals.

Among the most commonly applied machine learning algorithms, Random Forest (RF), Support Vector Machines (SVM), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), eXtreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost), and Artificial Neural Networks (ANN) have demonstrated excellent predictive performance.

Random Forest constructs multiple decision trees and combines their predictions through ensemble averaging, thereby reducing overfitting and improving robustness [14]. Gradient Boosting algorithms sequentially improve prediction accuracy by minimizing residual errors through iterative tree construction [15]. XGBoost further extends gradient boosting by incorporating regularization, parallel computation, and efficient optimization techniques, making it one of the most powerful ensemble learning methods for structured datasets [16]. Artificial Neural Networks approximate highly nonlinear functions through interconnected hidden layers and have been successfully applied to numerous geophysical prediction problems [20].

Machine learning has been applied to various reservoir characterization tasks, including:

- Porosity prediction
- Permeability estimation
- Lithofacies classification
- Hydrocarbon detection
- Reservoir quality prediction
- Seismic inversion
- Fault detection
- Fracture characterization

Among recent contributions, Elbarouni [12] developed a machine learning framework for seismic attribute-based porosity prediction and lithofacies classification in clastic hydrocarbon reservoirs. The study demonstrated that ensemble learning algorithms significantly improved prediction accuracy while effectively capturing nonlinear relationships between seismic attributes and reservoir properties. These findings further confirmed the growing importance of machine learning in modern seismic reservoir characterization.

➤ *Fault Detection and Structural Interpretation*

Accurate identification of structural discontinuities such as faults, fractures, and folds is essential for understanding reservoir compartmentalization, fluid migration pathways, and hydrocarbon trapping mechanisms. Traditional fault interpretation often requires extensive manual analysis of seismic sections, making it both time-consuming and susceptible to interpreter variability.

Machine learning and seismic attribute analysis have substantially improved automated structural interpretation by enabling intelligent identification of discontinuities within three-dimensional seismic volumes. Structural attributes including coherence, variance, curvature, and chaos are particularly effective for highlighting fault planes and fractured zones.

Elbarouni [10] demonstrated the application of seismic attribute-based fault detection for three-dimensional seismic interpretation. The study showed that coherence and variance attributes significantly enhanced fault visualization, enabling more accurate structural mapping than conventional amplitude interpretation alone. AI-assisted interpretation further reduced manual interpretation effort while improving consistency across large seismic datasets.

These advances illustrate the increasing role of machine learning in structural interpretation and emphasize the importance of integrating multiple seismic attributes within intelligent reservoir characterization workflows.

➤ *Uncertainty-Aware Reservoir Characterization*

Although machine learning algorithms have significantly improved predictive performance, uncertainty remains an inherent aspect of subsurface reservoir characterization because of incomplete measurements, geological complexity, and seismic acquisition limitations. Consequently, understanding and quantifying prediction uncertainty has become increasingly important for reliable exploration decision-making.

Traditional deterministic machine learning models generally provide point predictions without indicating the associated confidence or uncertainty. This limitation reduces user confidence when predictions are applied to high-risk engineering decisions.

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Elbarouni [13] proposed an uncertainty-aware reservoir characterization framework that integrates probabilistic seismic and petrophysical information to improve prediction reliability. Rather than producing only deterministic estimates, the framework explicitly quantified uncertainty associated with reservoir predictions, enabling more informed decision-making during exploration and reservoir development.

The incorporation of uncertainty analysis into AI-assisted workflows represents an important step toward trustworthy artificial intelligence because it allows engineers to distinguish between highly reliable predictions and predictions associated with greater geological uncertainty.

- *Digital Twin Technologies for Intelligent Reservoir Management*

Digital Twin technology has recently emerged as one of the most promising developments in petroleum engineering. A digital twin is a continuously updated virtual representation of a physical asset that integrates real-time measurements, numerical simulations, and artificial intelligence to support predictive monitoring and intelligent decision-making.

Within reservoir engineering, digital twins combine seismic monitoring, production data, well logs, and AI algorithms to create intelligent virtual reservoirs capable of continuously reflecting field conditions.

Elbarouni [8] introduced an AI-driven digital twin framework for real-time seismic reservoir monitoring and predictive hydrocarbon production optimization. The framework integrates seismic interpretation, machine learning, and continuous data acquisition to enable intelligent reservoir monitoring throughout the production lifecycle. By continuously updating reservoir models using incoming field measurements, digital twins improve production forecasting, optimize operational decisions, and facilitate proactive reservoir management.

The integration of digital twins with explainable artificial intelligence represents an emerging research direction capable of supporting transparent and trustworthy reservoir decision support systems.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that artificial intelligence has fundamentally transformed seismic reservoir characterization by enabling automated seismic interpretation, intelligent seismic attribute analysis, accurate reservoir property prediction, uncertainty-aware modeling, and real-time digital reservoir management. Recent contributions have established the effectiveness of machine learning for porosity prediction, lithofacies classification, fault detection, and integrated seismic–petrophysical interpretation while highlighting the growing importance of uncertainty quantification and digital twin technologies [7]–[13].

Despite these significant advances, the majority of existing studies continue to emphasize predictive performance while providing limited explanation of how machine learning models generate their predictions. This lack of transparency remains a major obstacle to the widespread adoption of AI in petroleum engineering. Consequently, Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a critical research area for improving the interpretability, trustworthiness, and practical applicability of AI-assisted seismic reservoir characterization. The following section reviews recent developments in XAI, SHAP-based interpretability, and their application to geoscience and reservoir engineering.

III. EXPLAINABLE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR SEISMIC RESERVOIR CHARACTERIZATION

The increasing adoption of machine learning in seismic reservoir characterization has substantially improved predictive accuracy; however, it has also introduced a critical challenge associated with model interpretability. Most high-performance machine learning algorithms, including ensemble learning methods and deep neural networks, operate as black-box models, where the relationship between input seismic attributes and prediction outputs remains largely hidden from users. Although these models can accurately predict porosity, lithofacies, and reservoir quality, they often fail to explain the reasoning behind their predictions. In petroleum engineering, where exploration and development decisions involve considerable technical and financial risks, understanding the decision-making process of AI models is as important as achieving high prediction accuracy. Consequently, Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a promising research direction for improving transparency, interpretability, and user confidence in AI-assisted seismic interpretation.

- *Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI)*

Explainable Artificial Intelligence refers to a collection of computational techniques that provide understandable explanations for machine learning predictions. Unlike traditional black-box models, XAI seeks to reveal how input variables influence prediction outcomes, enabling users to verify whether AI-generated decisions are consistent with domain knowledge and physical principles. The primary objective of XAI is to improve model transparency without sacrificing predictive performance.

In geoscience applications, explainability is particularly important because geological interpretations require both quantitative accuracy and scientific justification. Reservoir engineers must be able to determine whether machine learning predictions are supported by meaningful geological evidence rather than hidden statistical correlations. Therefore, XAI provides a bridge between advanced computational intelligence and expert geological interpretation.

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Several explainability techniques have been proposed over the past decade, including Local Interpretable Model-Agnostic Explanations (LIME), SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP), Partial Dependence Plots (PDP), Permutation Feature Importance, and Accumulated Local Effects (ALE). These methods differ in terms of mathematical formulation, computational complexity, and interpretability; however, they share the common objective of improving transparency in artificial intelligence systems [17]–[19].

Recent advances in XAI have significantly influenced various scientific fields, including healthcare, finance, manufacturing, and autonomous systems. Compared with these domains, the application of explainable AI to petroleum engineering remains relatively limited despite the increasing use of machine learning for reservoir characterization. This highlights the need for greater integration of explainability techniques within seismic interpretation workflows.

➢ *Black-Box Machine Learning in Reservoir Characterization*

Machine learning algorithms have demonstrated remarkable capability in modeling nonlinear relationships between seismic attributes and reservoir properties. Random Forest, Gradient Boosting, XGBoost, and Artificial Neural Networks have become widely adopted because they consistently outperform traditional statistical approaches for porosity prediction and lithofacies classification [12], [14]–[16].

Despite their predictive capability, these algorithms often function as black-box systems. Figure 1 conceptually illustrates the difference between conventional machine learning and explainable artificial intelligence.

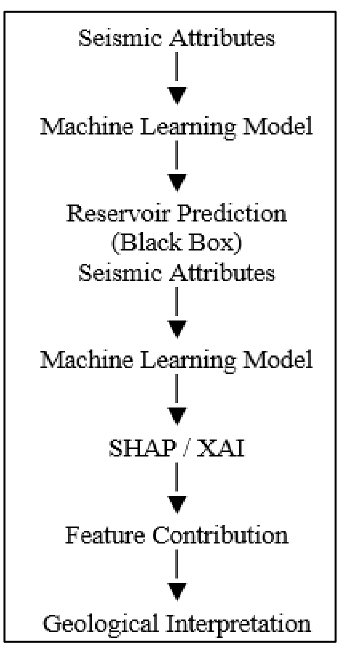

Fig 1. Conceptual Comparison Between Black-Box AI and Explainable AI in Seismic Reservoir Characterization.

In conventional workflows, users receive only the final prediction without understanding the relative influence of individual seismic attributes. Consequently, it becomes difficult to determine whether predictions are physically meaningful or whether they are influenced by data artifacts, noise, or hidden biases. Explainable AI addresses this limitation by providing interpretable feature attribution for every prediction.

➢ *SHAP-Based Explainability*

Among existing explainability methods, SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) has become one of the most widely adopted approaches because of its rigorous mathematical foundation and broad applicability to different machine learning algorithms [17]. SHAP is based on cooperative game theory, where each input feature is considered a "player" contributing to the final prediction. The contribution of each feature is quantified using Shapley values, which fairly distribute the prediction among all participating features.

A positive SHAP value indicates that a feature increases the predicted reservoir property, whereas a negative SHAP value indicates a decreasing contribution. Because SHAP satisfies local accuracy, consistency, and missingness properties, it provides reliable explanations that are mathematically consistent across different machine learning models [17].

Unlike traditional feature importance methods that provide only global rankings, SHAP simultaneously supports global model interpretation and local explanation of individual predictions. This dual capability makes SHAP particularly suitable for seismic reservoir characterization, where engineers require both an overall understanding of model behavior and detailed explanations for specific reservoir intervals.

➢ *Global and Local Interpretability*

One of the principal strengths of SHAP lies in its ability to provide explanations at multiple levels of analysis.

- *Global Interpretability*

Global interpretation evaluates the contribution of each seismic attribute across the entire dataset. By averaging SHAP values over all observations, researchers can identify which seismic attributes exert the greatest influence on reservoir characterization. Such analyses help simplify machine learning models by identifying redundant variables and highlighting the most informative seismic attributes.

For example, global SHAP analysis may identify Sweetness, Relative Acoustic Impedance, RMS Amplitude, and Coherence as the dominant predictors of porosity. These findings provide valuable insight into the geological significance of individual seismic attributes and improve understanding of machine learning behavior.

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- *Local Interpretability*

Local explanations describe why a machine learning model generated a specific prediction for an individual reservoir sample. Rather than reporting only a predicted porosity value, SHAP quantifies the positive and negative contribution of every seismic attribute involved in that prediction.

For example, a high-porosity prediction may result from positive contributions of Sweetness and RMS Amplitude, while negative contributions from Chaos or Variance partially offset the prediction. Such explanations enable geoscientists to determine whether predictions are supported by physically meaningful geological evidence and facilitate more confident interpretation of AI-generated results.

- *Visualization Techniques in SHAP*

An important advantage of SHAP is its rich visualization capability, which allows users to interpret complex machine learning models intuitively. Several graphical representations have become standard tools for explainable AI.

- *SHAP Summary Plot*

The summary plot combines feature importance and feature value distributions within a single visualization. Each point represents an individual sample, while color indicates the feature value. This plot provides a comprehensive overview of feature influence across the dataset.

- *Feature Importance Plot*

This visualization ranks seismic attributes according to their average absolute SHAP values, allowing rapid identification of the most influential variables controlling reservoir predictions.

- *Dependence Plot*

Dependence plots illustrate how changes in a particular seismic attribute influence model predictions while simultaneously revealing interactions with other variables. These plots are particularly useful for identifying nonlinear geological relationships.

- *Waterfall Plot*

Waterfall plots explain individual predictions by illustrating how each feature contributes positively or negatively to the final prediction. Such visualizations provide intuitive explanations for reservoir engineers evaluating specific wells or reservoir intervals.

- *Force Plot*

Force plots provide interactive visualization of feature contributions, showing how individual seismic attributes collectively push predictions toward higher or lower reservoir quality.

Collectively, these visualization tools significantly improve understanding of machine learning behavior and facilitate communication between data scientists, geophysicists, and reservoir engineers.

➢ *Comparison of Explainability Techniques*

Although SHAP has become the dominant explainability method for structured machine learning models, several alternative approaches have also been developed. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of commonly used explainability techniques.

Table 1. Comparison of Common Explainable AI Techniques.

Method	**Model Type**	**Global Explanation**	**Local Explanation**	**Advantages**	**Limitations**
SHAP	Model-agnostic / Tree-based	✓	✓	Theoretically consistent, interpretable, supports nonlinear interactions	Computationally intensive for very large models
LIME	Model-agnostic	✗	✓	Simple, fast, local interpretation	Local approximation may be unstable
Permutation Importance	Model-agnostic	✓	✗	Easy to implement	Does not explain individual predictions
Partial Dependence Plot	Model-agnostic	✓	✗	Visualizes feature influence	Assumes feature independence
ALE	Model-agnostic	✓	✗	Handles correlated features better than PDP	Limited local interpretability

Among these methods, SHAP provides the most comprehensive explanation because it combines rigorous mathematical theory with both global and local interpretability. Consequently, SHAP has become the preferred explainability technique for many recent machine learning applications.

➢ *Current Challenges and Research Gaps*

Despite substantial progress in explainable artificial intelligence, several challenges remain before XAI can be routinely integrated into petroleum engineering workflows.

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First, relatively few studies have applied explainability techniques specifically to seismic reservoir characterization. Most existing investigations emphasize prediction accuracy rather than model transparency [7], [12], [13].

Second, many explainability studies focus primarily on statistical interpretation without explicitly validating whether feature contributions are consistent with geological principles. Establishing geological consistency remains essential for increasing user confidence in AI-assisted reservoir interpretation.

Third, most current XAI applications analyze static datasets, whereas modern petroleum engineering increasingly requires real-time interpretation within digital twin environments [8]. Developing explainable AI methods capable of supporting continuous reservoir monitoring represents an important future research direction.

Finally, uncertainty quantification and explainability are often investigated independently. Integrating uncertainty-aware machine learning [13] with explainable AI has the potential to produce more trustworthy reservoir prediction systems capable of communicating both prediction confidence and feature attribution simultaneously.

Overall, Explainable Artificial Intelligence represents a significant advancement toward transparent, interpretable, and reliable machine learning for seismic reservoir characterization. As AI continues to evolve, integrating explainability with digital twins, uncertainty quantification, and physics-informed machine learning is expected to play a central role in the next generation of intelligent reservoir management systems.

IV. EMERGING TRENDS, RESEARCH CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly advanced seismic reservoir characterization through automated interpretation, machine learning-based prediction, and digital reservoir management. Nevertheless, several scientific and engineering challenges remain before AI can be fully integrated into routine exploration and production workflows. Recent research has increasingly focused on improving model transparency, uncertainty quantification, real-time intelligence, and trustworthy decision support. This section reviews the emerging trends shaping the next generation of intelligent reservoir characterization while highlighting the major research challenges and future research opportunities.

➢ *Emerging Trends in Explainable AI for Reservoir Characterization*

The rapid evolution of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has shifted the research focus from simply improving prediction accuracy to developing transparent and trustworthy machine learning systems. Modern reservoir engineers require not only accurate predictions of porosity, lithofacies, and reservoir quality but also meaningful explanations that justify these predictions based on geological evidence.

Recent studies indicate that SHAP-based explainability has become one of the most promising approaches for interpreting machine learning models because it provides mathematically consistent feature attribution while supporting both global and local explanations [17]. Compared with traditional feature importance measures, SHAP enables engineers to understand how seismic attributes individually and collectively influence reservoir predictions.

Another important trend is the integration of explainability into the entire seismic interpretation workflow rather than applying explanation only after model training. This integrated approach allows geological experts to validate whether AI models are learning physically meaningful relationships throughout the modeling process. Consequently, explainability is increasingly viewed as a fundamental component of trustworthy AI rather than merely an optional visualization tool.

Furthermore, explainable AI is beginning to support collaborative interpretation between machine learning systems and domain experts. Instead of replacing geoscientists, explainable models provide evidence-based recommendations that complement expert geological knowledge, improving both interpretation efficiency and decision confidence.

➢ *Integration of Explainable AI with Digital Twin Technologies*

Digital Twin technology represents one of the fastest-growing research areas in intelligent reservoir management. A digital twin continuously updates a virtual representation of a physical reservoir using real-time sensor data, production measurements, seismic monitoring, and numerical simulations.

Recent work by Elbarouni [8] demonstrated the integration of artificial intelligence with digital twin technology for real-time seismic reservoir monitoring and production optimization. By incorporating machine learning into continuously updated reservoir models, digital twins enable predictive analysis, production forecasting, anomaly detection, and intelligent operational decision-making.

Despite these advances, current digital twin systems generally provide limited explanation regarding how AI models generate recommendations. Integrating SHAP-based explainability into digital twins would significantly enhance transparency by allowing engineers to understand the reasoning behind automated predictions and operational decisions.

Future intelligent digital twins are expected to incorporate several explainability functions, including:

- Real-time feature attribution during reservoir monitoring.
- Continuous visualization of influential seismic attributes.
- Dynamic explanation of production forecasts.

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- Interactive interpretation dashboards for reservoir engineers.
- Transparent decision support for field development planning.

The integration of explainable AI with digital twin technology therefore represents an important research direction toward intelligent and trustworthy reservoir management systems.

➢ *Physics-Informed and Hybrid Artificial Intelligence*

Although purely data-driven machine learning models have achieved remarkable predictive performance, they often ignore established geological and physical principles governing subsurface processes. Consequently, predictions generated by black-box models may occasionally contradict known reservoir behavior despite achieving high statistical accuracy.

Physics-informed Artificial Intelligence has emerged as an effective strategy for addressing this limitation by integrating physical constraints into machine learning algorithms. Instead of relying exclusively on training data, these models incorporate geological knowledge, governing equations, and reservoir physics during model development.

Future explainable AI systems are expected to combine:

- Geological knowledge.
- Reservoir simulation.
- Machine learning.
- Explainable AI.
- Physical constraints.

Such hybrid frameworks will improve both predictive reliability and interpretability while ensuring that machine learning predictions remain consistent with geological understanding.

The integration of explainable AI with physics-informed learning represents an important opportunity for developing scientifically reliable intelligent reservoir characterization systems.

➢ *Uncertainty-Aware Explainable Artificial Intelligence*

Uncertainty is an unavoidable aspect of seismic interpretation because of incomplete measurements, acquisition noise, and geological heterogeneity. Traditional machine learning models generally provide deterministic predictions without indicating their associated confidence levels.

Elbarouni [13] proposed an uncertainty-aware framework for reservoir characterization that explicitly incorporates probabilistic information into seismic interpretation. Although uncertainty quantification improves decision reliability, most existing studies analyze uncertainty and explainability independently.

Future research should integrate these two complementary concepts to develop uncertainty-aware explainable AI systems capable of simultaneously answering two important questions:

- How confident is the prediction?
- Why was this prediction made?

Combining uncertainty estimation with SHAP explanations would enable reservoir engineers to evaluate both the reliability and interpretability of machine learning predictions before making exploration decisions.

Potential research directions include:

- Bayesian Explainable AI.
- Probabilistic SHAP.
- Confidence-aware feature attribution.
- Uncertainty visualization integrated with explainability.

Such developments would significantly improve trust in AI-assisted reservoir characterization.

➢ *Deep Learning and Explainability*

Deep learning has become increasingly important for seismic interpretation because of its ability to automatically learn hierarchical representations from large seismic datasets. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs), Autoencoders, Vision Transformers (ViTs), and Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) have demonstrated promising performance for seismic facies classification, fault detection, horizon tracking, and reservoir prediction [20].

However, deep learning models are generally even less interpretable than traditional machine learning algorithms. Their complex internal architectures make it difficult for engineers to understand how predictions are generated.

Recent explainability techniques for deep learning include:

- Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM).
- Integrated Gradients.
- Deep SHAP.
- Layer-wise Relevance Propagation.
- Attention visualization.

Future studies should investigate the application of these methods to seismic interpretation to improve the transparency of deep learning-based reservoir characterization.

➢ *Federated and Privacy-Preserving Artificial Intelligence*

Modern hydrocarbon exploration increasingly involves collaboration among multiple companies operating across different geographical regions. However, seismic datasets are often confidential and cannot be shared because of commercial and legal restrictions.

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Federated Learning has emerged as a promising solution by allowing machine learning models to be trained collaboratively without transferring raw data between organizations. Instead, only model parameters are exchanged while each participant retains complete ownership of its seismic dataset.

Future explainable federated learning systems may combine:

- Federated Learning.
- Explainable AI.
- Secure aggregation.
- Differential privacy.
- Digital twins.

Such architectures would enable collaborative reservoir characterization while preserving data confidentiality and maintaining model transparency.

This research direction is expected to become increasingly important as digital oilfields generate continuously expanding volumes of distributed seismic and production data.

➢ *Open Research Challenges*

Despite significant progress in AI-assisted reservoir characterization, several important research challenges remain unresolved.

- *Lack of Standard Benchmark Datasets*

Most published studies utilize proprietary industrial datasets that cannot be publicly accessed. This limits reproducibility and makes objective comparison between machine learning algorithms difficult.

- *Limited Geological Validation*

Many investigations report prediction accuracy without demonstrating whether model explanations are consistent with geological understanding. Greater collaboration between machine learning researchers and geoscientists is needed to validate AI interpretations.

- *Computational Complexity*

Although SHAP provides comprehensive explanations, computing exact Shapley values can become computationally expensive for very large seismic datasets and deep learning architectures. Efficient approximation algorithms remain an active area of research.

- *Explainability for Real-Time Systems*

Real-time reservoir monitoring requires explainability methods capable of generating immediate interpretations without introducing excessive computational overhead. Developing lightweight explainability algorithms suitable for digital twins remains an important challenge.

- *Integration Across Multiple Data Sources*

Future intelligent reservoir characterization systems should integrate seismic data, well logs, production history, drilling parameters, geological models, and reservoir simulations within unified explainable AI frameworks.

➢ *Future Research Directions*

Based on the reviewed literature, several promising research directions can be identified.

Future investigations should focus on:

- Developing explainable deep learning models specifically designed for seismic interpretation.
- Integrating SHAP with Digital Twin technologies for continuous reservoir monitoring [8].
- Combining uncertainty quantification with explainable AI to improve decision confidence [13].
- Developing physics-informed explainable machine learning models consistent with geological principles.
- Applying federated learning to enable collaborative yet privacy-preserving reservoir characterization.
- Establishing publicly available benchmark datasets for evaluating explainable AI methods in geoscience.
- Designing interactive visualization systems that allow reservoir engineers to explore machine learning explanations intuitively.

Collectively, these research directions will contribute to the development of transparent, reliable, and trustworthy intelligent reservoir management systems capable of supporting future hydrocarbon exploration and production.

V. CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative technology in seismic reservoir characterization by enabling automated interpretation of seismic data and improving the prediction of reservoir properties such as porosity, lithofacies, permeability, and structural features. Recent advances in machine learning have demonstrated that algorithms including Random Forest, Gradient Boosting, XGBoost, and Artificial Neural Networks can effectively model complex nonlinear relationships between seismic attributes and subsurface geological properties. Furthermore, AI has expanded beyond predictive modeling to support automated seismic interpretation, fault detection, uncertainty-aware reservoir characterization, and intelligent digital reservoir management through digital twin technologies [7]–[16].

Despite these significant achievements, this review highlights that the widespread adoption of AI in petroleum engineering is still constrained by the limited interpretability of conventional machine learning models. Most existing algorithms function as black-box systems that provide accurate predictions without adequately explaining how seismic attributes influence model decisions. Such limitations reduce

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user confidence and hinder the application of AI in high-value engineering decisions where geological justification is essential.

Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a promising solution to this challenge by improving the transparency, interpretability, and trustworthiness of machine learning models. Among the available explainability techniques, SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) has become one of the most effective approaches because it provides mathematically consistent feature attribution while supporting both global model interpretation and local explanation of individual predictions [17]–[19]. SHAP enables reservoir engineers to identify the most influential seismic attributes, understand nonlinear feature interactions, and verify whether AI predictions are consistent with established geological principles. Consequently, explainable AI represents a significant advancement toward trustworthy machine learning for seismic reservoir characterization.

This review has summarized recent developments in AI-driven seismic interpretation, seismic attribute analysis, machine learning-based reservoir characterization, digital twin technologies, uncertainty-aware modeling, and explainable artificial intelligence. The reviewed literature demonstrates that future intelligent reservoir characterization will increasingly rely on the integration of these complementary technologies rather than isolated machine learning models. Explainability, uncertainty quantification, and continuous digital reservoir monitoring are expected to become fundamental components of next-generation intelligent exploration systems.

Several important research challenges remain. These include the limited availability of publicly accessible benchmark datasets, insufficient geological validation of explainability methods, computational complexity associated with large-scale explainability algorithms, and the need for real-time interpretation within digital twin environments. Addressing these challenges will require closer collaboration between petroleum engineers, geophysicists, machine learning researchers, and software developers to develop scientifically reliable and operationally practical AI solutions.

Looking forward, future research should focus on integrating explainable AI with deep learning, physics-informed machine learning, uncertainty quantification, federated learning, and digital twin technologies. Developing hybrid frameworks that combine geological knowledge with interpretable machine learning models has the potential to significantly improve both prediction accuracy and user confidence. Additionally, standardized benchmark datasets, open-source explainability tools, and interactive visualization platforms will facilitate reproducible research and accelerate the practical adoption of explainable AI in petroleum engineering.

In conclusion, Explainable Artificial Intelligence represents the next evolutionary stage of intelligent seismic reservoir characterization. By combining the predictive capability of modern machine learning with transparent and interpretable decision-making, XAI provides a practical pathway toward reliable, trustworthy, and scientifically grounded reservoir characterization. As digital transformation continues to reshape the energy industry, explainable AI is expected to play an increasingly important role in supporting efficient hydrocarbon exploration, intelligent reservoir management, and sustainable decision-making in future petroleum engineering applications.

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