

Optimizing Drug Delivery Vehicle with Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) - Based Excipient Selection

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ABSTRACT

Excipients are used in drug delivery systems as a means of effectively delivering drugs to their target site. Multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) methods are tools for decision-making that consider multidimensional factors. Such methods are a comparative technology used in medicine that combines individual criteria into the total assessment of selected alternatives. This study aims to enhance the solubility and bioavailability of drugs through the application of MCDM-based excipient selection. By incorporating the Preference Ranking Organization Method for Enrichment Evaluations (PROMETHEE), various excipients can be evaluated and ranked based on their suitability for specific applications, considering parameters related to drug solubility and bioavailability. The results highlight the potential of cyclodextrins (net flow: 0.0023) and Eudragit polymers (net flow: 0.0016) as preferred options for drug carriers, while Poloxamer 188 (P188) (net flow: -0.0030) is identified as the least preferred option. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of the PROMETHEE method in improving the performance of poorly soluble and bioavailable drugs, ultimately contributing to the development of new drug delivery systems. The findings have significant implications for therapeutic outcomes in the treatment of diseases.

Keywords: Multi-criteria decision making (MCDM), Drug Carrier excipient, Solubility, Bioavailability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The selection of suitable drug carrier excipients in drug delivery systems plays a crucial role in enhancing the solubility and bioavailability of drugs (1). BCS (as seen in Fig 1) is a scientific classification system used for grouping drug products according to their water solution solubility and intestinal permeability. Excipients play a significant role in improving the solubility and permeability of desired drugs. Using several enhancing techniques, drug carrier polymers such as Eudragit, HPMC, Soluplus, HPC, PVP, and many others have proven to improve the apparent solubility and bioavailability of class II and IV drug compounds. Multi-criteria Decision-Making

(MCDM) methods provide a robust framework for decision-making processes, considering multiple factors and criteria in the evaluation of selected alternatives. Several authors, such as Alaa Aziz and Fraj Abudayah, have explored the opportunity of drug delivery for treating diseases (2). In the pharmaceutical field, MCDM-based approaches have shown promise in streamlining the excipient selection process, reducing screening time, and optimizing drug delivery vehicles for improved therapeutic outcomes. The motivation behind this study is to leverage the potential advantages of MCDM in pharmaceuticals and drug delivery technologies. By employing the Preference Ranking Organization Method for Enrichment Evaluations (PROMETHEE), this research aims to identify and rank various excipients based on their suitability for enhancing drug solubility and bioavailability. The application of fuzzy logic in PROMETHEE facilitates handling complex and uncertain decision-making scenarios, making it well-suited for

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pharmaceutical applications where several criteria need to be considered (2). While excipient selection is a critical aspect of drug development, limited research has focused on the potential advantages of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) methods in this domain. Traditional approaches to excipient selection often involve time-consuming and resource-intensive experimental screenings. This research novelly employs the MCDM-based fuzzy Preference Ranking Organization Method for Enrichment Evaluation (PROMETHEE) for excipient selection, providing a systematic and efficient means of identifying optimal drug carriers.

The proposed methodology integrates the fuzzy sets approach, which allows the inclusion of expert knowledge and linguistic variables in the decision-making process. This enables a more realistic representation of human judgment, making decision outcomes more relevant and applicable to real-world scenarios. This study uniquely combines the benefits of both MCDM and fuzzy sets to optimize the selection of drug delivery vehicles using fuzzy PROMETHEE.

The primary contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the effectiveness of the fuzzy

PROMETHEE method for selecting drug carrier excipients to enhance drug solubility and bioavailability. This research provides a comprehensive evaluation of various excipients based on multiple criteria. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to innovatively use the fuzzy PROMETHEE method to evaluate drug carrier excipients. No other study in existing literature has compared drug carrier excipients using this methodology.

This research offers pharmaceutical scientists and decision-makers a valuable tool for informed decision-making in drug delivery system design. The potential advantages of MCDM-based excipient selection include reduced screening time and efforts, cost-effectiveness, and improved therapeutic outcomes. Additionally, the application of fuzzy logic in PROMETHEE allows for handling uncertainties and ambiguities often encountered in pharmaceutical decision-making processes. The findings of this study hold significant implications for drug development and therapeutic advancements in the treatment of diseases, including oncology and rare genetic conditions.

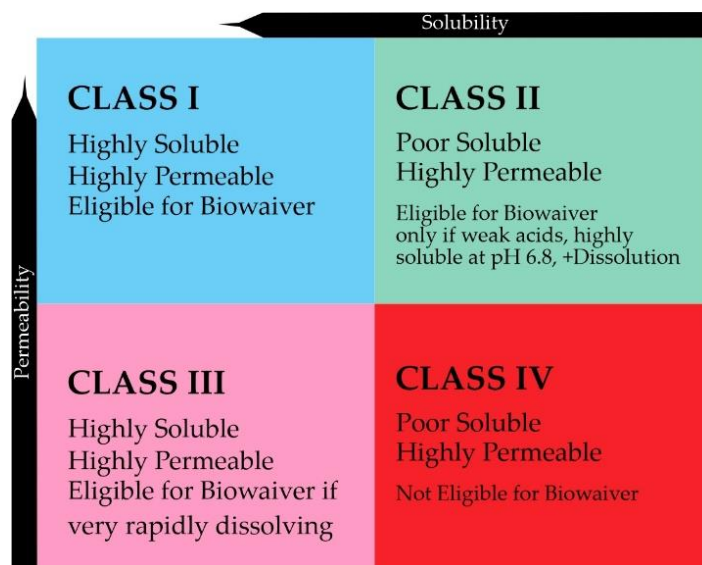


Figure 1: BCS Classification of drug (Author, 2023)

This current study focuses on frequently used drug carrier excipients over the past 10 years. The selected excipients have varied properties, disparate chemical compositions, and diverse means of drug delivery.

1.1 Cyclodextrins

Cyclodextrins are ring-shaped oligosaccharides naturally produced when bacteria act upon cellulose. They are composed of larger glucose molecules joined together

by α -1,4 glycosidic bonds. While some types may possess as many as 6 units of glucose, others bear 7 to 8 units (β -, and γ - cyclodextrins, respectively) (Fig 2a). Cyclodextrins can encapsulate drugs and release them at the site of absorption (Fig 2b), thereby enhancing the solubility and bioavailability of the drug. Their applications include the crosslinking of water-soluble cyclodextrin with hyaluronic acid for targeted drug delivery for wound treatment (3).

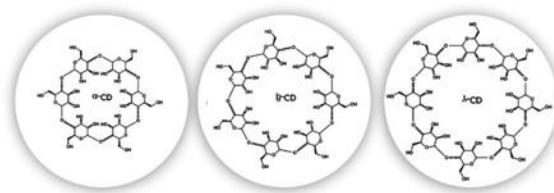


Figure 2a: Chemical structure of alpha, beta, and gamma cyclodextrins (Nikitenko et al, 2013)

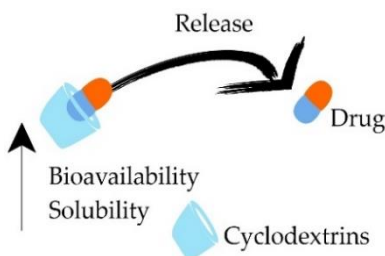


Figure 2b: Cyclodextrins as a drug carrier (Author, 2023)

1.2 Soluplus

The application of these polymers in enhancing technologies such as amorphous solid dispersions aim to maintain the supersaturation of the drug molecules by forming micelles around the poorly soluble drugs thereby

inhibiting recrystallization of the drug. The stability of enhanced drugs by amorphous solid dispersions by micelles continues to be a concern as the micelle's formations do not stay around the drugs indefinitely.

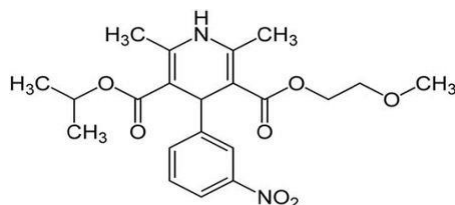


Figure 3a: Chemical Structure of Soluplus (PCL-PVAc-PEG) (Alsheyyab et al, 2019)

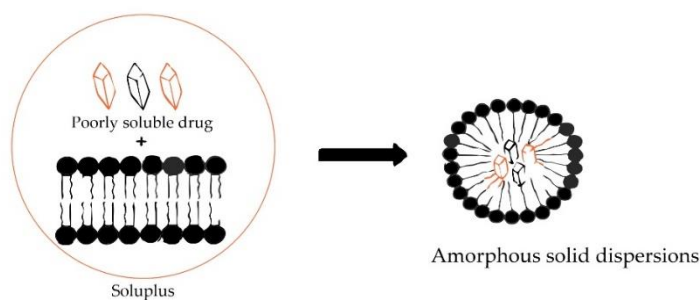


Figure 3b: Soluplus Polymeric Micells (Author, 2023)

1.3 Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC)

HPMC, or Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose, is a hydrophilic polymer used in the production of orally based drug delivery systems. It possesses significant properties such as high swelling capability and delayed release

characteristics. Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose is a semi-synthetic, inert, viscoelastic polymer. Several formulations based on HPMC have been synthesized and evaluated for use as gastro retentive drug delivery systems, including tablets, capsules, pellets, and microparticles.

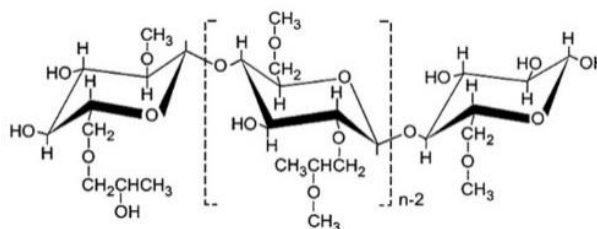


Figure 4: Chemical structure of Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (Azad et al, 2019)

1.4 Poly (vinyl pyrrolidone) PVP

Polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), also known as Povidone, is a water-soluble material obtained through the polymerization of the monomer N-vinyl-pyrrolidone (Fig 5). PVP can encapsulate both hydrophilic and lipophilic

drugs. Its inert and non-toxic properties, temperature resistance, and stability across various pH ranges contribute to its selection as a choice ingredient in drug delivery systems.

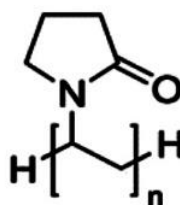


Figure 5: Chemical structure of Polyvinylpyrrolidone (Sigma Aldrich, 2023)

1.5 Poloxamers

Poloxamers are used as carriers to improve the solubilization and stability of compounds. They can form micelles and act as nanocarriers of drugs to the site of

action. The surfactant property of poloxamer allows it to be inserted into lipid monolayers, thereby promoting the solubility and bioavailability of drugs.

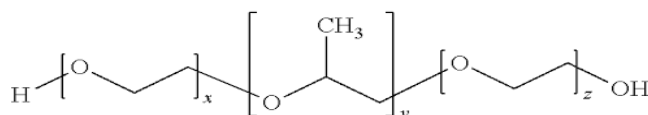


Figure 6: Chemical structure of Poloxamer (Specialized RX, 2023)

1.6 Eudragit Polymers

Eudragit polymers offer a wide range of polymers with enhancing characteristics to optimize the bioavailability,

stability, and drug load of the final product. Eudragit is prepared by the polymerization of acrylic and methacrylic acids, or their esters, as seen in Figure 7.

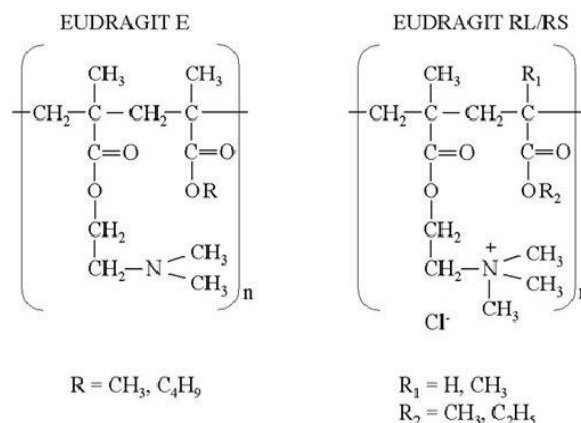


Figure 7: Chemical Structure of Eudragit (Nguyen et al, 2006)

2.0 Multi Criteria Decision Making (MCDM)

The diversity of Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) methods ensures that decision-makers have a wide range of tools at their disposal to handle various decision-making challenges effectively. In this study, the fuzzy Preference Ranking Organization Method for Enrichment Evaluations (PROMETHEE) method has been deployed to evaluate the available alternatives based on selected and weighted parameters. The use of MCDM has gradually gained traction with agencies for healthcare

technological advancement, and its incorporation is progressively occurring across Europe. It's vital to carefully select the MCDM method that aligns with the complexity of the problem, data availability, and the level of ambiguity present. It's important to note that no single MCDM method is innately more valuable than the others, as their significance depends on the specific problem context and the decision-maker's preferences and priorities.

2.1 Fuzzy PROMETHEE

The PROMETHEE method is one of the most recent Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) methods. It was developed by Brans (1982) and later expanded by Vincke and Brans (1985). PROMETHEE is a tool used for sorting a number of closely related alternatives from which selections are ranked and chosen based on clearly stated criteria. Fuzzy PROMETHEE is an extension of the traditional PROMETHEE method that incorporates fuzzy logic to handle uncertainties and linguistic variables. It allows for more flexible and realistic decision-making, making it suitable for situations with imprecise or ambiguous data (4).

Several studies have utilized the fuzzy PROMETHEE technique in the field of medicine. For example, a study by Ozsahin (2022) (5) used the fuzzy PROMETHEE technique for the selection of radiopharmaceutical tau PET tracers to significantly improve the diagnosis and treatment accuracy of neurodegenerative diseases for targeted and personalized imaging based on precision. Another study by Uzun (2023) (6) used fuzzy PROMETHEE to evaluate machine learning models used for the real-time detection of brain tumors, facilitating early diagnosis and effective management of brain cancer. Similarly, Onakpojeruo (2022) (7) compared the treatment alternatives for spinal cord tumors using the same MCDM technique, contributing to the existing body of knowledge that prioritizes the treatment approaches for spinal cord

tumors. These studies and many others demonstrate the effectiveness of MCDM methods in decision-making, particularly in the healthcare field.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Before proceeding with the implementation of fuzzy PROMETHEE, we simplified the process by assigning relative weights to each of the criteria, as shown in Table 1. The weighted average scores of all the criteria used to rank the various options are displayed in Table 2. Additionally, we used the Yager index to remove any ambiguity that may have resulted from the data used. The Yager index is a promising candidate for defuzzification, as it comprehensively covers all potential set points, making it an ideal choice for this process. During the analysis process, we utilized a Gaussian preference function to make decisions regarding the PROMETHEE strategy.

Putting a numerical value on each criterion is a common approach to prioritize different criteria and draw attention to their relative importance. When using the fuzzy PROMETHEE method, the order in which various options are ranked depends on distinct factors. These factors include the criteria used, the considered alternatives, the weights assigned to different criteria, and the preset preferences. To correctly assign criteria, it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the relevant literature and consult field experts.

Table 1. Linguistic variables and assigned fuzzy numbers with their corresponding priority weight.

| Linguistic scale | Fuzzy Number/criteria weight | Rating of criteria |
|------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Very high (VH) | (0.75, 1.00, 1.00) | Solubility, Bioavailability |
| High (H) | (0.50, 0.75, 1.00) | side effect |
| Moderate (M) | (0.25, 0.50, 0.75) | Food effect, Stability of Drug Product, Drug Load, Dosage Form, Manufacturing Cost. |
| Low (L) | (0, 0.25, 0.50) | Ease of Manufacturing, Formulation Technology Selection |
| Very low (VL) | (0, 0, 0.25) | Sustained or Delayed Release Modification of Drug |

Table 2. Drug carrier parameters evaluated with visual PROMETHEE values

| criteria/alternatives | Aim | Weight | Cyclodextrins | Soluplus (PCL-PVAc-PEG) | Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) | Poly (vinyl pyrrolidone) (PVP) | Poloxamer | Eudragit Polymers |
|---|-----|-----------|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Solubility | Max | VH (0.92) | H | VH | M | H | H | VH |
| Bioavailability | Max | VH (0.92) | M | H | M | H | H | VH |
| Food effect | Min | M (0.50) | L | M | L | M | M | M |
| Stability of Drug Product | Max | M (0.50) | L | L | H | M | L | M |
| Sustained or Delayed Release Modification of Drug | Max | VL (0.08) | H | L | VH | L | L | VH |
| Drug Load | Max | M (0.50) | H | M | M | M | M | M |
| Dosage Form | Max | M (0.50) | VH | H | L | M | L | M |
| Side Effect | Min | H (0.75) | L | M | M | M | M | M |
| Manufacturing Cost | Min | M (0.50) | L | M | H | L | M | M |
| Ease of Manufacturing | Max | L (0.25) | H | VH | H | H | L | VH |
| Formulation Technology Selection | Max | L (0.25) | VH | VH | L | H | L | H |

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In this study, drug carrier excipients, including cyclodextrins, soluplus (PCL-PVAc-PEG), hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC), poly(vinyl pyrrolidone) (PVP), poloxamer, and Eudragit polymers, were evaluated using a combination of fuzzy and PROMETHEE methods. The evaluation utilized criteria such as enhancements in solubility, bioavailability, the food effect, drug stability, drug load, manufacturing cost, side effects, manufacturing ease, ability to sustain or delay drug release, swallowability, and taste masking. Relative weights were assigned to each criterion, and their weighted average scores were used to rank the various options. The Yager index was employed to clarify any potential confusion caused by the data.

The drug carriers and their excipients were ranked according to their net flow scores, which took into account both the positive and negative flows between various criteria. The PROMETHEE method used in the study generates an important output known as the NetFlow score. This score represents the difference between the positive "outranking" flow and the negative "outranking" flow for each evaluated option—essentially, it measures the degree to which an option outperforms the other options.

Within this investigation's context, the NetFlow score provides a quantitative indication of the overall ranking of various drug carriers and excipients. Alternatives with higher positive NetFlow scores are considered the best choices as they exhibit a higher degree of preference compared to other options within the set. Conversely, options with negative NetFlow scores are viewed as less desirable alternatives due to their lower ranking. Therefore, NetFlow scores' significance lies in their ability to establish a distinct ranking of drug carriers and excipients, based on each option's overall preference concerning the evaluation criteria.

The findings from the investigation, as shown in Table 3, indicate that cyclodextrins ranked first with a net flow score of 0.0023, followed by Eudragit polymers with a net flow score of 0.0016. Soluplus (PCL-PVAc-PEG) came in third with a net flow score of 0.0011, and Polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) was fourth with a net flow score of 0.0005. The Hydroxypropyl Methylcellulose (HPMC) drug carrier excipient ranked fifth, with a negative net flow score of -0.0025, indicating it held a lower rank than the other excipients used in drug carriers. Poloxamer, with a net flow score of -0.0030, came in sixth and was considered the least desirable drug carrier excipient according to the criteria used in the analysis.

It's important to underscore the significance of a drug's property in its carrier selection. We used the graphical PROMETHEE rainbow to assess how well each potential drug carrier aligned with the criteria, showcasing the positive and negative attributes. Based on the considered criteria and their respective weights, Figure 8 shows that cyclodextrins are the most advantageous and preferred drug carrier excipient, while poloxamer ranked last.

3.1. Further Discussions

This study used a unique methodology that integrated fuzzy logic and the PROMETHEE method to evaluate and rank drug carrier excipients based on their ability to improve medication solubility and bioavailability. The careful selection of suitable drug carriers is a crucial component in the development of effective drug delivery systems. Various factors, including solubility, bioavailability, food effect, medication stability, and production cost, significantly impact drug carrier effectiveness. However, offering a qualitative assessment of the optimal excipient selection lacks methodological rigor. The current study seeks to overcome this limitation by providing a quantitative and systematic evaluation of diverse drug delivery systems.

To ensure clarity, we assigned relative weights to each criterion according to their respective importance. The weights were derived using linguistic variables and fuzzy numbers, which served as a medium to convert expert opinions from qualitative to quantitative forms. The selected criteria were pivotal in assessing the excipients.

The PROMETHEE approach was used for a thorough evaluation of the drug carriers, in line with the determined criteria. As explained earlier, the net flow scores acquired from the PROMETHEE analysis represent the collective preference of each drug carrier, considering both positive and negative flows. Positive NetFlow scores indicate a greater level of preference compared to other options within the group, while negative NetFlow scores suggest lesser desirability.

When examining the results, it was observed that cyclodextrins demonstrated the most advantageous characteristics, as evidenced by achieving the highest NetFlow score (0.0023). In contrast, Poloxamer obtained the lowest NetFlow score (-0.0030), indicating its status as the least preferred excipient. The obtained results establish a definitive hierarchy among the drug carriers, as determined by their overall preference concerning the defined parameters.

This research's novelty lies in its innovative application of Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) methodologies, namely fuzzy logic and PROMETHEE, within the field of medicine, specifically for excipient selection. Traditional approaches often depend on subjective assessments, lacking a rigorous scientific foundation. Our approach addresses this constraint by quantifying qualitative factors and providing a structured, scientifically determined evaluation of drug carriers, utilizing a comprehensive set of criteria.

Table 3: PROMETHEE results for drug carriers excipients

| Rank | Drug carriers | Outranking NetFlow | Phi+ NetFlow | Phi- NetFlow |
|------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Cyclodextrins | 0,0023 | 0,0035 | 0,0012 |
| 2 | Eudragit Polymers | 0,0016 | 0,0023 | 0,0007 |
| 3 | Soluplus (PCL-PVAc-PEG) | 0,0011 | 0,0021 | 0,0010 |
| 4 | Poly(vinyl pyrrolidone) (PVP) | 0,0005 | 0,0014 | 0,0010 |
| 5 | Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) | -0,0025 | 0,0014 | 0,0040 |
| 6 | Poloxamer | -0,0030 | 0,0004 | 0,0034 |

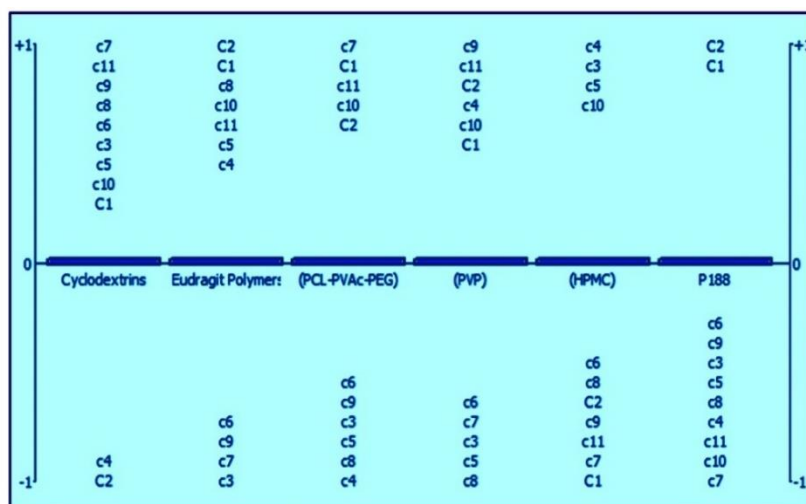


Figure 8: PROMETHEE rainbow of positive and negative aspects of the drug carriers

NB: C1= Solubility, c2 = Bioavailability, c3 = Food effect, c4 = Stability of Drug Product, c5 = Sustained or Delayed Release Modification of Drug, c6 = Drug Load, c7 = Dosage Form, c8 = Side Effect, c9 = Manufacturing Cost, c10 = Ease of Manufacturing, c11 = Formulation Technology Selection

4. CONCLUSION

Solubility and bioavailability continue to present major challenges in drug delivery. To increase a drug's efficacy, a drug carrier excipient is often used. However, the selection of this carrier is based on a multitude of factors, which can make choosing the optimal carrier quite difficult. In this study, we evaluated the most frequently used excipients in the pharmaceutical industry and ranked them in order according to their PROMETHEE values. This straightforward yet efficient technique allows for swift screening of suitable excipients among a vast array of choices. This time-saving method can also be extended to a more extensive selection of excipients, yielding similar results.

While we acknowledge that every drug molecule is unique and may respond differently to drug carriers, the MCDM tool serves as a robust guide in screening and reducing the need for multiple experimental runs, thereby saving time, money, and resources. The results from the analysis show that cyclodextrins are the preferred drug

carrier excipients, followed by Eudragit polymers and then Soluplus, while Poloxamer is the least preferred alternative based on the evaluation criteria.

Future research should focus on validating the results through experimental trials, investigating how the chosen excipients perform concerning actual drug delivery and bioavailability enhancement. Additionally, integrating more complex criteria and refining the linguistic variables could further improve the accuracy and applicability of the method.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for drug development and therapeutic advancements in pharmaceutical research and development. Researchers, pharmaceutical scientists, and decision-makers can leverage these findings to make informed choices in drug delivery system design, thus positively impacting the field.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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تحسين وسيلة توصيل الدواء باستخدام اختيار المواد المساعدة المبني على قرارات متعددة المعايير (MCDM)

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ملخص

تستخدم المواد المساعدة في أنظمة توصيل الدواء كوسيلة لتوصيل الأدوية بفعالية إلى موقعها المستهدف. تُعد طرق اتخاذ القرار متعددة المعايير (MCDM) أدوات لاتخاذ القرارات التي يمكن أن تضع في الاعتبار العوامل متعددة الأبعاد بالإضافة إلى التكنولوجيا المقارنة المستخدمة في الطب مع مزيج من المعايير الفردية في التقييم الكلي للبدائل المختارة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحسين الذوبانية والتوافر الحيوي للأدوية من خلال تطبيق اختيار المواد المساعدة المستند إلى MCDM. من خلال دمج طريقة ترتيب التفضيلات لتقييمات التحسين (PROMETHEE الضبابي)، يمكن تقييم المواد المساعدة المختلفة وترتيبها بناءً على مدى ملاءمتها للتطبيق المحدد، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار المعايير المتعلقة بذوبانية الدواء وتوافره الحيوي. تسلط النتائج الضوء على إمكانات السيكلودكسترين (صافي التدفق: 0.0023) وبوليمرات البيودراجيت (صافي التدفق: 0.0016) كخيارات مفضلة لحاملات الدواء، بينما يتم تحديد بولوكسامر 188 (P188) (صافي التدفق: 0.0030) كأقل خيار مفضل. تُظهر هذه الدراسة فعالية طريقة PROMETHEE الضبابي في تحسين أداء الأدوية ذات الذوبانية والتوافر الحيوي المنخفض، مما يساهم في النهاية في تطوير أنظمة توصيل الدواء الجديدة. تتمتع النتائج بأهمية كبيرة للنتائج العلاجية في علاج الأمراض.

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