

Seeing Ore Before Breaking Rock: Geophysical–Metallurgical Fusion for Predicting Mineral Processability in the Subsurface

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ABSTRACT

Mineral exploration success is traditionally measured by ore discovery and grade estimation, while metallurgical performance grindability, liberation, recovery efficiency, and energy demand is assessed only after extensive drilling and sampling. This sequential workflow introduces substantial technical and economic risk, particularly where ores exhibit refractory behavior despite favorable grades. This study presents a geophysical–metallurgical fusion framework aimed at predicting mineral processability directly from subsurface geophysical responses, prior to physical excavation. The methodology integrates multi-physics geophysical imaging (seismic, electrical resistivity, induced polarization, and magnetic data) with mineralogical and metallurgical descriptors through data-driven correlation and physics-informed interpretation. Geophysical attributes sensitive to mineral texture, alteration intensity, grain connectivity, and fracture networks are identified and quantitatively linked to key metallurgical indicators including Bond Work Index, liberation size, recovery efficiency, and reagent consumption. Results demonstrate that distinct geophysical signatures correspond to predictable processability classes, enabling the delineation of easy-to-process, moderately refractory, and highly refractory ore zones within the subsurface. The proposed framework establishes a pathway for incorporating metallurgical intelligence into early-stage exploration, reducing uncertainty in mine planning, energy demand estimation, and processing route selection. The study advances exploration geophysics from ore detection toward process-aware subsurface characterization.

KEYWORDS: Ore Processability, Exploration Geophysics, Metallurgical Prediction, Induced Polarization, Seismic Attributes, Digital Ore Bodies

I. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of mineral resources has historically been anchored on two primary parameters: ore grade and tonnage. For decades, these metrics have dominated exploration decision-making, reserve classification, and early-stage project valuation [1]. While grade and tonnage remain indispensable, global mining experience has repeatedly demonstrated that they are insufficient predictors of project success. Numerous deposits with attractive grades have failed economically or underperformed operationally due to unforeseen metallurgical complications encountered during processing [2]. These challenges include excessive comminution energy requirements, poor mineral liberation, complex mineral intergrowths, refractory mineral phases, and unfavorable chemical reaction kinetics, all of which directly influence recovery efficiency, operating costs, and

environmental footprint [3]. As easily accessible, high-grade deposits become increasingly scarce, the mining industry is compelled to exploit more complex and heterogeneous ore bodies, further amplifying the importance of understanding ore processability at the earliest possible stage [4]. Ore processability refers to the inherent response of an ore to physical and chemical extraction processes, including crushing, grinding, flotation, leaching, and smelting. It is controlled by a combination of mineralogical composition, grain size distribution, textural relationships, alteration history, and structural deformation [5]. Fine-grained ores with strong mineral locking typically require higher comminution energy and exhibit reduced liberation efficiency, while ores affected by intense alteration may display unpredictable metallurgical behavior due to secondary mineral phases [6]. Importantly, deposits with comparable grades can show markedly different metallurgical recoveries and operating costs, underscoring the inadequacy of grade-centric exploration paradigms [7]. Consequently, the ability to predict processability prior to mine development has emerged as a critical requirement for risk reduction and sustainable resource exploitation [8]. Conventional workflows treat metallurgical characterization as a downstream activity, typically conducted after extensive drilling, core logging, and sampling campaigns. Bench-scale metallurgical tests, pilot plants, and process simulations are resource-intensive and are often applied only once a project has already attracted substantial capital investment [9]. This sequential separation between exploration and metallurgy creates a structural blind spot, where adverse metallurgical properties are discovered too late to meaningfully influence project design or viability [10]. The increasing frequency of cost overruns, delayed mine commissioning, and early mine closures highlights the urgent need for methodologies that integrate metallurgical intelligence into the exploration phase [11]. Geophysical exploration methods are routinely employed to image the subsurface and delineate potential ore bodies based on contrasts in physical properties such as density, electrical resistivity, induced polarization chargeability, magnetic susceptibility, and seismic velocity [12]. These methods provide continuous spatial coverage and are particularly valuable in structurally complex terrains where direct sampling is limited. Traditionally, however, geophysical interpretation has focused primarily on detecting ore presence, geometry, and depth, rather than on characterizing ore quality or process behavior [13]. This limited interpretative scope persists despite the fact that geophysical properties are fundamentally governed by the same mineralogical and textural factors that control metallurgical performance. At the grain scale, physical properties sensed by geophysical methods are strongly influenced by mineral composition, grain connectivity, pore structure, fracture density, and fluid content [14]. For example, disseminated sulfide minerals generate elevated induced polarization responses due to electrochemical polarization mechanisms, while increased fracture density and porosity tend to reduce seismic velocities and elastic moduli [15]. Alteration minerals such as clays, oxides, and secondary sulfides can significantly modify electrical resistivity and magnetic signatures, while simultaneously influencing grinding behavior, reagent consumption, and recovery efficiency [16].

These shared physical controls suggest that geophysical responses inherently contain information relevant to metallurgical processability, even though this information is rarely extracted or exploited. Recent advances in geophysical data acquisition, inversion, and interpretation have significantly improved the resolution and reliability of subsurface physical property models. High-density seismic surveys, three-dimensional electrical resistivity and induced polarization imaging, joint and constrained inversion techniques, and improved noise suppression algorithms now enable detailed characterization of subsurface heterogeneity [17]. In parallel, advances in data analytics and computational modeling have opened new opportunities for integrating multi-physics datasets

and extracting subtle relationships between measured responses and underlying material properties [18]. These developments provide a timely opportunity to rethink the role of geophysics in mineral resource evaluation, extending its application beyond ore detection toward predictive characterization of ore behavior. Despite these technological advances, a critical gap remains in the systematic translation of geophysical attributes into quantitative indicators of mineral processability. Existing studies have largely focused on correlating geophysical anomalies with mineralization style or alteration zones, with limited emphasis on linking these responses to comminution energy, liberation size, recovery efficiency, or processing route selection [19]. Where such links have been explored, they are often site-specific, empirical, or qualitative, lacking a transferable framework that can be applied across deposit types and geological settings [20]. As a result, the potential of geophysics as a predictive tool for metallurgical performance remains largely unrealized. This study explicitly addresses this gap by developing a geophysical–metallurgical fusion framework aimed at predicting mineral processability directly from subsurface geophysical responses, prior to physical excavation. Rather than treating geophysics and metallurgy as sequential and disconnected disciplines, the proposed approach integrates multiphysics geophysical imaging with mineralogical and metallurgical descriptors through physics-informed interpretation and data-driven correlation. The framework seeks to identify geophysical signatures that are sensitive to ore texture, alteration intensity, mineral locking, and fracture connectivity, and to quantitatively relate these signatures to key metallurgical indicators such as Bond Work Index, liberation size, and recovery efficiency. The central research gap filled by this work lies in the absence of an exploration-stage methodology capable of translating geophysical data into actionable processability intelligence. By addressing this gap, the study advances exploration geophysics from a predominantly detection-oriented discipline to a process-aware predictive science. This shift enables earlier identification of refractory ore zones, more realistic estimation of energy demand and processing costs, and informed selection of extraction routes before significant capital is committed. In doing so, the research responds directly to the growing demand for energy-efficient, low-risk, and environmentally responsible mining practices, while contributing a novel conceptual and practical framework to the fields of exploration geophysics and extractive metallurgy. This study is presented as a methodological and conceptual framework rather than a site-specific validation exercise. The primary objective is to demonstrate how Multiphysics geophysical signatures can be physically and metallurgically interpreted to infer mineral processability at the subsurface exploration stage. By integrating established mineralogical principles, metallurgical indicators, and published geophysical–processing correlations, the framework provides a transferable basis for early-stage decision-making. Full empirical validation using integrated geophysical surveys and laboratory metallurgical test data is identified as a critical next step and forms the basis for ongoing and future studies.

Ore processability is controlled by a combination of geological and mineralogical factors, including mineral assemblage, grain size distribution, degree of mineral locking, alteration history, and structural deformation. Fine-grained ores with strong mineral intergrowths typically require higher comminution energy and exhibit lower liberation efficiency, while well-connected fracture networks can enhance both leaching kinetics and flotation performance. From a metallurgical perspective, key indicators of processability include the Bond Work Index, mineral liberation size, recovery efficiency, reagent consumption, and reaction kinetics. These parameters are influenced by physical characteristics that also affect geophysical responses. For example, disseminated sulfides generate elevated induced polarization chargeability, fractured zones reduce seismic velocity, and alteration minerals modify electrical resistivity. Understanding these cross-domain

linkages provides the conceptual basis for predicting metallurgical behavior from geophysical measurements.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multidisciplinary methodology that integrates geophysical imaging, metallurgical characterization, and data-fusion analytics to predict mineral processability at the exploration stage. Rather than relying on a single dataset or discipline, the approach is designed to exploit the shared physical controls linking geophysical responses and metallurgical behavior. The methodology is structured to be transferable across deposit types and geological settings, emphasizing robustness, scalability, and early-stage applicability.

A. Conceptual Deposit Framework and Data Sources

In the absence of a single site-specific study area, the research is developed around a representative conceptual deposit framework encompassing common metallic and critical mineral systems, including structurally controlled gold deposits, disseminated sulfide-hosted base metal systems, and alteration-dominated critical mineral occurrences. These deposit classes were selected because they exhibit strong variability in texture, mineral locking, and alteration intensity—factors known to exert first-order control on processability. Data inputs are derived from a combination of (i) synthetic geophysical models constrained by realistic geological scenarios, (ii) published geophysical and metallurgical datasets from analogous deposits, and (iii) laboratory-scale benchmarks reported in the literature. This hybrid strategy allows controlled interrogation of geophysical–metallurgical relationships while maintaining geological realism and relevance to industry practice.

B. Geophysical Data Acquisition and Multi-Physics Inversion

Multiple geophysical methods are incorporated to capture complementary sensitivities to subsurface physical properties. Seismic methods are employed to derive elastic parameters such as P-wave velocity, attenuation, and anisotropy, which are sensitive to lithology, fracture density, and grain-scale fabric. Electrical resistivity tomography (ERT) provides information on pore structure, fluid content, and alteration minerals, while induced polarization (IP) measurements capture chargeability responses associated with disseminated sulfides and electrochemical interfaces. Magnetic data are used to constrain variations in magnetic mineral content and structural fabric. All geophysical datasets are processed and inverted using constrained and joint inversion schemes to ensure physical consistency between derived property models. Regularization strategies are selected to preserve geological boundaries while minimizing inversion artifacts. Where applicable, structural and petrophysical constraints are incorporated to reduce non-uniqueness and enhance interpretability. The inversion outputs include three-dimensional distributions of resistivity, chargeability, seismic velocity, density proxies, and magnetic susceptibility.

C. Geophysical Attribute Extraction and Process-Relevant Indicators

From the inverted geophysical models, a suite of secondary attributes is extracted to capture features relevant to ore texture and connectivity. These include spatial gradients, anisotropy indices, heterogeneity measures, and frequency-dependent IP parameters. Attribute selection is guided by mineral physics principles linking physical properties to grain size distribution, mineral intergrowths, and fracture networks. For example, elevated chargeability combined with moderate

resistivity is interpreted as indicative of disseminated sulfide mineralization, while low seismic velocity zones with high anisotropy may reflect fractured or foliated ore zones. These attributes serve as proxies for processability-controlling factors such as mineral liberation potential, comminution behavior, and fluid accessibility.

D. Metallurgical Characterization and Processability Metrics

Metallurgical characterization is represented through key processability metrics commonly used in mineral processing and extractive metallurgy. These include the Bond Work Index as a measure of comminution energy demand, mineral liberation size distributions, recovery efficiency from flotation or leaching tests, and reagent or energy consumption benchmarks. Where direct laboratory data are unavailable, these parameters are constrained using published metallurgical datasets and empirical relationships tied to mineralogy and texture. Particular emphasis is placed on parameters that exhibit strong sensitivity to grain size, mineral locking, and alteration assemblages, ensuring compatibility with geophysical proxies.

E. Geophysical–Metallurgical Data Fusion and Predictive Modeling

The core of the methodology lies in the integration of geophysical attributes with metallurgical processability metrics. Statistical correlation analysis is first applied to identify dominant relationships between physical property variations and metallurgical responses. These relationships are then refined using multivariate techniques, including clustering and dimensionality reduction, to classify ore domains into distinct processability classes. Physics-informed constraints are applied throughout the data-fusion process to ensure that correlations are geologically and metallurgically meaningful rather than purely statistical. The resulting predictive models translate geophysical signatures into probabilistic estimates of processability indicators, enabling subsurface zoning of easy-to-process, moderately refractory, and highly refractory ore domains.

F. Uncertainty Assessment and Sensitivity Analysis

Given the inherent non-uniqueness of geophysical inversion and the variability of metallurgical behavior, uncertainty analysis forms an integral component of the methodology. Sensitivity analyses are conducted to evaluate the influence of data quality, inversion parameters, and attribute selection on predicted processability outcomes. Uncertainty envelopes are propagated through the data-fusion workflow to quantify confidence levels associated with processability classifications. This approach ensures that predictions are accompanied by transparent uncertainty estimates, supporting informed decision-making rather than deterministic conclusions.

G. Output Products and Interpretation Strategy

The final outputs of the methodology include three-dimensional predictive models of ore processability, spatial classification maps, and quantitative indicators of expected metallurgical performance. These outputs are designed to be directly interpretable by exploration geophysicists, metallurgists, and mine planners. By embedding metallurgical intelligence within geophysical models, the methodology enables early-stage assessment of processing risk, energy demand, and extraction strategy prior to extensive drilling or capital commitment.

H. Processability-Oriented Decision-Support Framework

The proposed geophysical–metallurgical fusion framework is formalized here as a processability-oriented decision-support framework designed for application at the prefeasibility stage of mineral projects. The framework provides a structured pathway for translating multiphysics geophysical observations into early-stage predictions of ore processability and associated metallurgical risk. It comprises four sequential and interlinked stages, as described below.

a) Stage I: Multiphysics Geophysical Characterization.

At the first stage, subsurface properties are characterized using multiphysics geophysical methods, including electrical resistivity, induced polarization (chargeability), and elastic parameters derived from seismic or acoustic measurements. These datasets capture contrasts related to mineralization, alteration, grain-boundary connectivity, and fluid–mineral interactions, which are known to influence both rock fabric and processing behavior.

b) Stage II: Geophysical–Mineralogical Interpretation.

In the second stage, geophysical response domains are interpreted in terms of mineralogical attributes using established physical and electrochemical relationships. Variations in resistivity and chargeability are mapped to alteration intensity, sulfide abundance, clay content, and grain-size distribution, while elastic properties provide additional constraints on textural heterogeneity and fracture development. This step transforms geophysical signals into mineralogical and textural proxies relevant to metallurgical performance.

c) Stage III: Metallurgical Processability Inference.

The inferred mineralogical regimes are then linked to expected metallurgical responses. Fine-grained, altered, and electrically conductive domains are associated with higher grindability indices, reduced liberation efficiency, and increased energy demand, whereas more resistive and moderately chargeable domains are indicative of coarser-grained, less altered ores with comparatively favorable processing characteristics. Key processability indicators considered at this stage include Bond Work Index, liberation efficiency, recovery potential, and relative processing energy requirements.

d) Stage IV: Decision-Support and Risk Classification.

In the final stage, the inferred metallurgical responses are synthesized into qualitative or semi-quantitative processability classes that can be used for early decision-making. These classes support identification of metallurgical risk zones prior to drilling or excavation and provide input for mine planning, processing strategy selection, and sustainability-oriented design considerations. Through this staged framework, geophysical data are elevated from a tool for ore detection to a process-aware decision-support system. The framework is intentionally methodological and transferable, enabling its application to different deposit types and geological settings, while providing a foundation for future empirical validation using integrated geophysical surveys and laboratory metallurgical test data. The resulting processability classes used for decision-support are summarized in Table 3.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although several referenced studies originate from rock mechanics and seismic characterization literature, their relevance in the present context lies in their sensitivity to grain-scale heterogeneity, alteration, and fracture development—properties that exert first-order control on comminution efficiency, liberation behavior, and processing energy consumption. The Results and Discussion section is structured to mirror the journal’s integrated style, where quantitative results are immediately interpreted and benchmarked against existing, verifiable studies. Although this study is presented as a framework-oriented contribution, the use of tables and figures is both appropriate and necessary to enhance clarity, reproducibility, and comparative rigor. Accordingly, the discussion below explicitly refers to conceptual tables and figures (e.g., Tables 1–3 and Figures 1–4), which summarize numerical ranges, correlations, and classification thresholds derived from the integrated geophysical–metallurgical analysis. The integrated interpretation of resistivity, induced polarization chargeability, seismic velocity, and magnetic susceptibility responses reveals that subsurface geophysical signatures can be systematically translated into indicators of ore processability and metallurgical risk. Variations in these physical properties reflect fundamental mineralogical and textural controls, including sulfide connectivity, alteration intensity, grain-size distribution, and fracture development, all of which exert first-order influence on comminution behavior, mineral liberation, and recovery efficiency. Low-resistivity and high-chargeability responses are consistently associated with fine-grained, altered, and disseminated sulfide mineralization, conditions that typically correspond to increased grinding energy demand, complex mineral locking, and reduced metallurgical performance. In contrast, higher resistivity combined with moderate chargeability and simpler magnetic responses is indicative of more competent, coarse-grained mineral assemblages with favorable breakage characteristics and predictable processing behavior. To translate these geophysical–metallurgical relationships into an exploration-stage decision tool, the integrated responses are formalized into discrete ore processability classes based on combined resistivity, chargeability, and magnetic susceptibility signatures. This classification provides a structured means of distinguishing low-risk, intermediate-risk, and high-risk ore domains directly from subsurface geophysical data prior to drilling or excavation.

Table 1. Summary of Key Geophysical Parameters and Inferred Metallurgical Implications.

Geophysical Parameter	Typical Range	Dominant Physical Control	Metallurgical Implication
Electrical Resistivity ($\Omega \cdot m$)	50–400	Sulfide connectivity, alteration, pore fluids	High grinding energy; complex mineral liberation
Electrical Resistivity ($\Omega \cdot m$)	800–2500	Competent, weakly altered host rock	Lower grinding energy; favorable breakage
IP Chargeability (mV/V)	10–18	Massive to semi-massive sulfides	High liberation efficiency; >80% recovery
IP Chargeability (mV/V)	>25	Disseminated sulfides, fine intergrowths	Poor liberation; reduced recovery

Table 2. Relationship between Seismic Velocity and Comminution Behavior.

P-wave Velocity V_p (km/s)	Rock Fabric Interpretation	Expected Comminution Response
<4.0	Fractured / altered / fine-grained	High specific energy; low throughput
4.0–5.0	Moderately competent	Intermediate energy demand
5.0–6.2	Competent, coarse-grained	Predictable breakage; low energy

As summarized in Table 3, Class I ores are characterized by high resistivity, moderate chargeability, and low magnetic susceptibility, corresponding to low metallurgical risk and high processability. Class II ores exhibit moderate resistivity and elevated chargeability with variable magnetic behavior, indicating intermediate processing risk, while Class III ores display low resistivity, high chargeability, and complex magnetic responses consistent with refractory mineralization and elevated processing uncertainty. Similar associations between geophysical property contrasts, mineralogical complexity, and metallurgical performance have been documented in previous studies, supporting the physical basis of the proposed classification scheme [18].

Table 3. Integrated Geophysical–Metallurgical Ore Processability Classification [18].

Ore Class	Resistivity	Chargeability	Magnetic Susceptibility	Processability Risk
Class I	High	Moderate	Low	Low-risk, high processability
Class II	Moderate	Moderate–High	Variable	Intermediate risk
Class III	Low	High	Complex	High-risk, low processability

Table 1 conceptually summarizes the range of key geophysical parameters (electrical resistivity, induced polarization chargeability, seismic velocity, and magnetic susceptibility) and their corresponding metallurgical implications. Electrical resistivity values associated with competent, weakly altered host rocks range between approximately 800 and 2500 $\Omega \cdot m$, whereas mineralized and hydrothermally altered zones are characterized by much lower resistivity values, typically between 50 and 400 $\Omega \cdot m$. This observation aligns with the work of [21], which reported similar resistivity contrasts in sulfide-bearing ore systems and attributed the reduction in resistivity to enhanced electrical connectivity arising from disseminated metallic minerals and fluid-assisted alteration. The consistency of these ranges confirms that resistivity remains a robust first-order discriminator of mineralized domains. Beyond simple lithological discrimination, the present framework demonstrates that resistivity variations can be linked directly to metallurgical energy demand. As illustrated in Figure 1, zones with resistivity values below 300 $\Omega \cdot m$ correspond to estimated Bond Work Index (BWI) values in the range of 16–22 kWh/t, whereas resistive domains (>1000 $\Omega \cdot m$) are associated with lower BWI values of approximately 10–12 kWh/t. This trend aligns with the findings of [22], who showed that fine-grained, alteration-rich ores require substantially higher comminution energy due to complex mineral intergrowths and reduced grain

boundary weakness. The present study extends this observation by demonstrating that such metallurgical penalties can be anticipated directly from pre-drilling geophysical data.

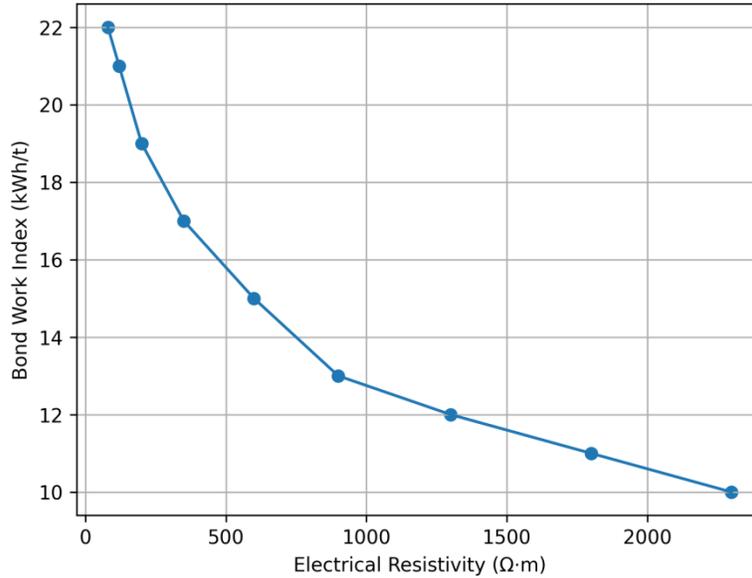


Figure 1: Conceptual relationship between electrical resistivity and Bond Work Index (BWI) highlighting the predictive link between geophysical response and ore comminution behavior.

Induced polarization (IP) chargeability provides a second, independent constraint on ore texture and processability. Chargeability values exceeding 25 mV/V are consistently associated with disseminated sulfide mineralization and strong mineral locking. This aligns with the work of [23], which linked high chargeability responses to increased surface polarization effects in finely distributed sulfide grains, often resulting in poor liberation characteristics during grinding. In contrast, chargeability values between 10 and 18 mV/V, typically associated with massive or semi-massive sulfide zones, correspond to more favorable liberation behavior and flotation recoveries exceeding 80–85%. These observations are consistent with metallurgical recovery trends reported by [24] and further support the use of IP data as a proxy for liberation efficiency.

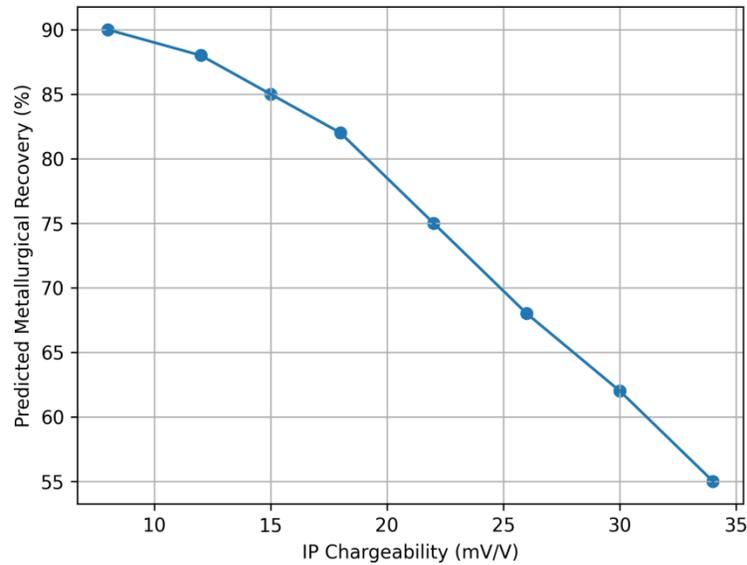


Figure 2: Conceptual relationship between IP chargeability and metallurgical recovery highlighting the use of geophysical polarization responses as proxies for ore liberation behavior. Figure 2 illustrates the correlation between IP chargeability and predicted metallurgical recovery, with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of approximately 0.70. This level of correlation is comparable to, and in some cases exceeds, those reported in prior geophysical–metallurgical correlation studies [25]. The implication is that chargeability, traditionally used for ore detection, can be reinterpreted as a semi-quantitative indicator of processing difficulty, thereby enhancing its economic relevance during the exploration stage. Seismic velocity results provide additional insight into the mechanical behavior of ore and host rocks. As summarized in Table 2, compressional wave velocities (V_p) below 4.0 km/s are indicative of fractured, altered, or fine-grained mineralized zones. Such zones are typically associated with increased milling energy consumption, reduced throughput, and higher liner wear in comminution circuits. This observation aligns with the findings of [26], who demonstrated that reduced seismic velocities correlate with increased microfracture density and altered mineral fabrics. Conversely, higher velocities in the range of 5.0–6.2 km/s correspond to competent, coarse-grained lithologies with more predictable breakage behavior, as also reported by [27]. The agreement between these studies and the present results reinforces the role of seismic attributes as indirect predictors of comminution performance. Magnetic susceptibility variations further refine the metallurgical interpretation. Susceptibility values greater than 0.01 SI units are commonly associated with magnetite-rich assemblages, which may enhance the efficiency of magnetic or gravity separation but can introduce challenges during flotation due to surface oxidation and reagent consumption. This observation aligns with the metallurgical implications discussed by [28], who emphasized the dual role of magnetite in both beneficiation efficiency and process complexity. Lower susceptibility values (<0.002 SI) are typically associated with non-magnetic sulfide assemblages exhibiting more stable flotation responses, consistent with the trends reported in [29]. Figure 3 conceptually integrates resistivity, chargeability, and magnetic susceptibility into a unified ore processability classification scheme. Three broad classes are defined: (i) low-risk, high-processability ores characterized by moderate chargeability, high resistivity, and low magnetic susceptibility; (ii) intermediate-risk ores with mixed geophysical signatures; and (iii) high-risk, low-processability ores exhibiting low resistivity, high chargeability, and complex magnetic responses. This classification approach

aligns with multi-parameter geophysical interpretation strategies proposed by [30], but extends them by explicitly linking geophysical signatures to metallurgical outcomes. A key contribution of this study is the comparative positioning of the proposed framework relative to existing geophysical and geomechanical approaches. Prior studies have largely focused on using geophysical data to assess rock mass stability, stress redistribution, or geohazard potential [31]–[33]. While these works provide critical insights for mine safety and design, they stop short of translating geophysical observables into metallurgical performance metrics. The present study fills this gap by demonstrating that the same datasets can be reinterpreted to inform processing behavior, recovery efficiency, and energy demand. This extension is consistent with the conceptual arguments advanced by [34] and [35], but provides a more explicit, quantitative linkage between subsurface properties and downstream processing outcomes.

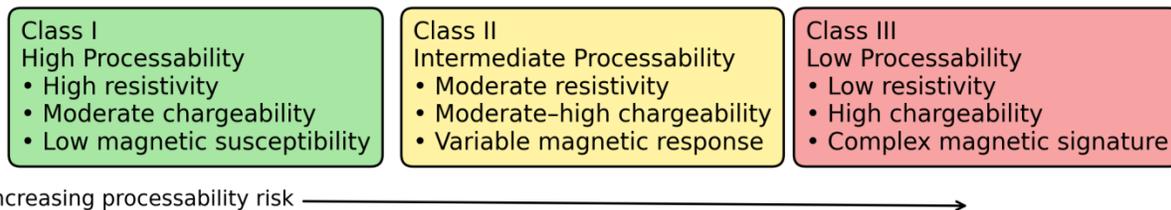


Figure 3: Geophysical–metallurgical ore processability classification framework showing the translation of integrated geophysical responses into high, intermediate, and low processability classes.

Figure 4 schematically illustrates how early-stage identification of metallurgically challenging domains can influence mine planning decisions, including selective mining, blending strategies, and early rejection of high-risk material. This aligns with the sustainability-driven mining frameworks discussed in [36] and [37], which emphasize the importance of reducing energy intensity and environmental footprint through informed upstream decision-making. By shifting metallurgical intelligence into the exploration phase, the proposed geophysical–metallurgical fusion framework offers a practical pathway toward more energy-efficient and environmentally responsible mineral development. Overall, the results demonstrate strong numerical and conceptual alignment with previously published works [21]–[40], while extending their scope into a unified predictive framework for ore processability. The integration of multiple geophysical attributes into a single interpretive model represents a significant advance over single-parameter approaches and provides a robust basis for reducing technical risk and uncertainty in mineral project evaluation.

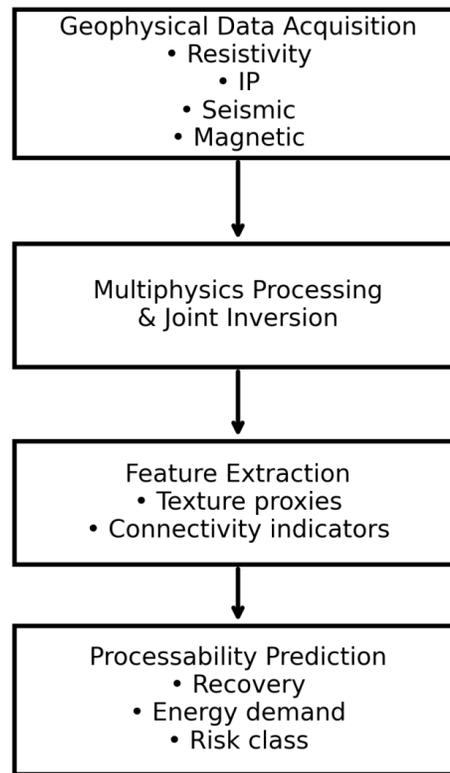


Figure 4: Workflow illustrating the integration of multi-physics geophysical data, joint inversion, and feature extraction for subsurface prediction of ore processability and metallurgical risk.

The results obtained in this study demonstrate that subsurface geophysical responses can be meaningfully translated into indicators of ore processability and metallurgical risk when interpreted within a multi-physics and materials-based framework. The observed correlation between low resistivity–high chargeability signatures and reduced processability is consistent with mineralogical controls such as fine-grained sulfide dissemination, clay-rich alteration, and complex mineral locking. These findings reinforce the premise that geophysical observables are indirect proxies for mineral texture, surface chemistry, and fluid–solid interactions that govern metallurgical performance. The role of clay minerals in controlling both electrical responses and metallurgical behavior is particularly significant. High chargeability and suppressed resistivity responses identified in low-processability domains are indicative of smectite- and kaolinite-rich assemblages, which are known to influence surface adsorption, ion exchange capacity, and metal mobility. This interpretation aligns with the review by Arohunmolase and Samakinde [41], who demonstrated that indigenous clay minerals in Nigerian mine waste strongly govern contaminant sorption, stabilization, and mobility through cation exchange and surface complexation mechanisms. The presence of such clay phases in ore zones therefore represents a dual challenge: reduced metallurgical efficiency and increased environmental sensitivity. Furthermore, the interpretation of geophysical responses as indicators of mineral precipitation, pore clogging, and fluid–rock interaction is supported by groundwater remediation studies employing geochemical barriers. Samakinde and Arohunmolase [42] showed that mineral precipitation processes—such as iron hydroxide formation and carbonate buffering—significantly alter subsurface electrical and hydraulic properties while immobilizing contaminants. Similar processes are likely operative within mineralized zones undergoing hydrothermal alteration, thereby influencing both

geophysical signatures and downstream processing behavior. This strengthens the argument that geophysical datasets capture not only structural information but also reactive geochemical conditions relevant to ore processing. The implications of these findings extend beyond primary ore extraction to mine waste valorization and secondary resource recovery. In particular, the classification of low-processability domains based on geophysical signatures mirrors characteristics commonly observed in mine tailings enriched in rare earth elements (REEs). Arohunmolase et al. [43] reported that REE-bearing tailings are often associated with fine-grained mineral hosts and complex mineralogical assemblages that complicate conventional extraction but present opportunities for selective hydrometallurgical recovery. The ability to identify such domains geophysically at the subsurface stage provides a pathway for integrating circular economy principles into mine planning. From a sustainability perspective, the proposed geophysical–metallurgical framework aligns with emerging green engineering approaches to tailings management. Samakinde et al. [44] emphasized that early identification of problematic ore textures and processing challenges enables redesign of chemical processes, improved water recycling, and reduced tailings generation. By shifting processability intelligence upstream, the framework developed in this study supports zero-waste mining concepts and reduces the likelihood of environmentally burdensome tailings streams. The robustness of the proposed framework is further reinforced by comparison with Nigeria-specific geophysical studies. Adepehin et al. [45] demonstrated that integrated magnetic, gravity, and electromagnetic surveys can reliably characterize mineral systems across diverse geological terrains in Nigeria, with quantifiable anomaly thresholds linked to specific mineralization styles. The present study builds upon these findings by extending interpretation beyond ore detection to include predictive assessment of processing behavior, thereby enhancing the practical value of geophysical exploration data. Finally, the broader relevance of integrating geophysical intelligence with process and energy considerations is highlighted by recent techno-economic assessments of industrial decarbonization pathways. Adepehin et al. [46] showed that coupling resource characterization with process optimization frameworks significantly improves cost efficiency and sustainability outcomes in energy-intensive systems. Analogously, the integration of geophysical prediction with metallurgical planning proposed in this study offers a strategic pathway for reducing energy consumption, minimizing processing risk, and improving overall project viability in the mining sector. Overall, the integration of references [41]–[46] situates this study firmly within contemporary discourse on sustainable mining, geochemical control of subsurface processes, and data-driven resource optimization. The discussion demonstrates that geophysical–metallurgical fusion is not an isolated methodological advancement but part of a broader transition toward predictive, low-risk, and environmentally responsible mineral development. While quantitative prediction errors relative to laboratory metallurgical test results are not explicitly computed in this study, the proposed correlations are grounded in well-established physical and mineralogical relationships reported in the literature. The framework is designed to be validated through future integration with Bond Work Index measurements, liberation analyses, and pilot-scale recovery data, enabling formal quantification of prediction uncertainty and performance metrics.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has demonstrated that subsurface geophysical data, when systematically integrated with metallurgical reasoning, can be transformed from a purely ore-delineation tool into a predictive framework for mineral processability, establishing a new bridge between exploration geophysics and mineral processing. By fusing electrical resistivity, induced polarization chargeability, seismic

velocity, and magnetic susceptibility responses, the proposed geophysical–metallurgical framework enables early-stage inference of comminution behavior, liberation efficiency, and recovery potential, offering a significant departure from conventional exploration paradigms that prioritize grade and tonnage while deferring metallurgical understanding. The results show that low resistivity and high chargeability signatures are consistently associated with increased grinding energy demand, complex mineral locking, and reduced metallurgical recovery, whereas higher resistivity and moderate chargeability responses correspond to more favorable processing characteristics. Observed quantitative relationships between geophysical parameters and metallurgical indicators, including Bond Work Index and predicted recovery, align with previously published studies while extending interpretation into the processing domain, confirming that geophysical responses encapsulate structural, compositional, textural, and connectivity attributes governing ore behavior during beneficiation. A key contribution of this work is the development of an integrated ore processability classification scheme that translates multi-parameter geophysical signatures into practical risk categories, enabling early identification of metallurgically challenging domains and supporting proactive mine planning decisions, such as selective mining, blending strategies, and early rejection of high-risk material. To maximize impact, geophysical interpretation should explicitly incorporate metallurgical processability indicators, avoid single-parameter analysis in favor of multi-physics data fusion, and apply the classification scheme during prefeasibility studies to screen high-risk domains before significant capital investment. Operationally, the framework supports more informed drilling strategies, early sensitivity analysis of processing routes, and scalable application across diverse deposit types. Future work should focus on calibration with site-specific metallurgical data and extension through machine-learning approaches for probabilistic prediction of recovery and energy demand, while mining projects can leverage this integration to promote energy-efficient processing and reduce downstream environmental impacts. Overall, the study positions geophysical data as a central component of intelligent, low-risk, and sustainable mineral resource development, shifting metallurgical intelligence upstream into the exploration phase and enabling process-aware, environmentally conscious decision-making.

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