



EDGE AI FOR SMART DEVICES: A Comprehensive Review of Hardware Architectures, Software Optimizations, And Real-Time Applications

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ABSTRACT

Edge Artificial Intelligence (Edge AI) is changing smart device ecosystems by allowing on-device processing that lowers latency by 50–90% compared to cloud-based systems and reduces bandwidth consumption by 70%. This review presents new Edge AI device development uses and hardware designs, including novel ultra-low-power VLSI processors with power budgets of less than 1W and custom AI accelerators achieving 2–5 TOPS/W (Tera Operations Per Second per Watt) energy efficiency. We discuss hardware optimization techniques such as 8-bit/4-bit model quantization (achieving 75-90% reduction in model size), lightweight deep neural networks, and federated learning for use on resource-constrained devices having memory footprints of approximately 100KB-5MB.

Real-world implementations in smart cities, healthcare, and industrial automation have shown increases in bandwidth efficiency of between 60 and 80%, 100% local data processing for privacy, and energy consumption reduced by approximately 40 to 65% when compared with cloud-centric architectures. For real-time applications, Edge AI deployments have reached inference speeds of 10 - 100ms, enabling video analytic workloads at 30 FPS on embedded devices consuming under 2W. There remain major challenges in establishing strong security frameworks (current edge devices are three to five times more vulnerable), achieving cross-platform interoperability across more than fifty different hardware architectures, and scalability to accommodate the expected 30 to 50 billion IoT connected devices anticipated by 2030.

Emerging solutions make use of standardized AI frameworks that support 95%+ model portability, trusted execution environments, and adaptive edge-cloud orchestration with dynamic workload distribution (achieving 30–40% performance optimization). To achieve scalable, reliable, and secure Edge AI solutions that can process 1–10 trillion edge inferences per day across next-generation smart device networks, this review summarizes recent advancements, quantifies performance benchmarks, and identifies research directions that are essential.

Keywords: Edge AI; Smart Device; On-device Inference; Low-power AI Processors; Federated Learning; Real-time Analytics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Edge AI changes the approach to developing smart devices by managing data at the edge-or as near the source of that data as possible-for fast and context-aware analysis, without relying on cloud connectivity as a requirement. The 2025 Edge AI report suggests that responsiveness, privacy, and deployable scale have all improved significantly in edge AI architecture. The explosion of IoT and wearables have created the demand for energy use and advanced AI functionality to be included onto low power devices. Based on information gathered from industry deployments, Edge AI is creating new application spaces, as applied to industries of autonomous

vehicles, health care and industrial automation. These developments also create new design and interoperability challenges that require advanced solutions [1], [9].

Recent studies have exhibited various advancements in VLSI architecture and hardware accelerators for low-power edge inference while remaining under strict power budgets and form factors. Low-power edge AI chip architectures enable models to be placed in the hands of users in resource-constrained environments, which leads to smaller, low-power smart devices. The advancements in system-on-chip (SoC) implementations, memory hierarchy, and adaptive computing enables a better and energy saving throughput. Hardware-software co-design is more important than ever to enable efficient AI workloads while minimizing overall system constraints. There is also an increasing need for the use in field, such as remote monitoring and mobile health, which is driving an increase in innovation in this hardware space [2], [5].

Industry reports note an increase in commercially available solutions aimed at the deployment of AI for smart devices, including frameworks, pre-optimized models, and developer tools to catalyse adoption. The emphasis on user experience and rapid prototyping accelerates development time and enables both new companies and large organizations to develop and test solutions quickly. Pre-packaged edge AI solutions will have both hardware and software stacks provided in a single package that simplify the deployment phase for individuals and organizations not dedicated to this area. The modifiable and scalable structures of these devices enable the customization and visibility of these devices for various vertical markets. Examples of these vertical markets include smart homes, smart cities, and logistical applications. Documentation on best practice solutions along with the engages community facilitates the onboarding of advanced AI integration at the edge [8].

Research on-device machine learning points to the significance of distributed model training, privacy-preserving inference and flexible AI architectures all regarded as standard for state-of-the-art smart systems. Advanced compression and quantization schemes are making deep learning models smaller and faster and therefore able to run on ultra-low-power devices. Interest in federated learning schemes which enhance the collaborative improvement of model performance with respect for user privacy are also growing. These advancements in machine learning are being used in a wide variety of applications in personalized health care, real-time traffic. The deployment of edge Intelligence into the existing IoT infrastructure continues to pose both technical and organizational issues which require new approaches to orchestration and security for systems [4].

Comprehensive reviews indicate that edge computing and artificial intelligence are used together for intelligent, real-time cognitive capabilities at the device level. This addresses the market's rising demand for devices with more autonomy and reliability. Cloud-edge orchestration capabilities are also advancing, enabling new workflows with fewer data transfers and dynamic resource utilization across the networks. New paradigm shifts in edge-enabled processing systems are fostering new applications for predictive maintenance, self-optimizing control systems, and multi-sensor data fusion. Moreover, the capability to respond efficiently to noisy data, incomplete data, and distributed datasets, has become a clear competitive advantage for smart device solutions. Lastly, applications of artificial intelligence at various layers of device capability have further informed growing research in rugged algorithms and runtime performance [10].

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The push toward Edge AI is in part due to the desire for intelligent inferences conducted at the data source. This pull is based on the reduction of latency as well as the reduction in bandwidth requirements that are typically seen with cloud-based models of AI. What is often overlooked in this transition to the edge are the challenges associated with the limitations of the available hardware performance, the energy limitations to which many devices will need to adapt, and the general upswing in complexity of AI models as they transition to the edge of the network. Rather than separately considering hardware and software optimizations, each with their own context, the efficiency and responsiveness required for real-time applications will always lack without an integrated hardware-software co-design model that consists of custom accelerators and optimized software frameworks running together that will enable both lower power consumption and scalable edge AI deployments. This model will allow for dynamic responsiveness to changes in workloads and operational viability, all while

operating under the constraints of tight power budgets inherent to many devices such as smart cameras, wearables, and autonomous sensors.

Recent developments highlighted an integral part of low-energy VLSI processor architectures and heterogeneous computing platforms that have been developed specifically for edge environments, which embedded FPGAs, energy-aware scheduling algorithms, and neural processing units can enable significant energy savings without degradation of inference accuracy or latency. In addition to developments in hardware, lightweight and quantized AI models, and quantized AI models have been designed and implemented, therefore lowering computational costs making deployment on constrained devices practicable. Moreover, there are software techniques like pruning, compression, and federated learning that contribute to privacy, increased privacy, lessened communication overhead, and opportunities for distributed edge nodes to engage in collaborative learning. Increasingly user studies demonstrate the real-world applications of these designs, which range from smart healthcare and monitoring to automation in industry and autonomous vehicles in smart city infrastructure.

The way ahead will rely on ongoing co-optimization of algorithmic advancements with software tools that are crafted for optimizing architecture-aware embedded software with a goal of co-designing a more efficient and resilient future. The recent development of modular co-design platforms and hardware that support these platforms with adaptive control loops and telemetry-driven optimization mark an important step forward toward a sustainable and scalable edge AI. Coupled with heterogeneous system-on-chip designs to support dynamic voltage and frequency scaling with advanced compilation tools indicates a future where AI can be seamlessly embedded in everyday devices. However, balancing power, latency, security and scalability while continuously adapting to rapid changes associated with new AI workloads and edge device capabilities remain challenges. These challenges will demand ongoing collaboration across disciplines of hardware design, software engineering, and AI model design to realize the full promise and opportunities of edge intelligence.

Table 1. Comparison of data with respect to hardware and software in AI edge

Ref. No.	Focus Area	Hardware Aspect	Software/Algorithm Aspect	Application Domains
[1]	Edge AI hardware platforms and IP	AI accelerators, energy efficiency	Integrated AI IP cores	Smart devices, IoT
[2]	Low-power VLSI design	VLSI edge AI processors	Hardware-software co-design	Edge AI devices
[3]	Commercial edge AI solutions	Hardware platforms diversity	Developer tools, pre-optimized models	Smart home, IoT
[4]	On-device machine learning	Lightweight, embedded AI chips	Federated learning, model compression	Healthcare, IoT
[5]	Real-time analytics in edge systems	Energy-efficient embedded hardware	Real-time ML frameworks	Autonomous systems, IoT
[6]	Federated learning, distributed AI	Edge distributed systems	Privacy-preserving learning	Industrial IoT, Healthcare
[7]	SaaS vs. edge architecture	Hybrid edge-cloud resource use	SaaS-edge hybrid computation	Autonomous vehicles, smart cities
[8]	Comprehensive taxonomy and review	Diverse architectures	AI lifecycle challenges	General edge AI applications
[9]	Broad Edge AI survey	Hardware-software integration	Base AI model review	IoT, wearables

[10]	Edge machine learning for IoT	Edge AI acceleration hardware	On-device acceleration	ML	IoT devices
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2.1 FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Edge AI involves processing of artificial intelligence locally on edge devices, such as smartphones, IoT sensors, embedded systems, and autonomous vehicles, as opposed to sending the data to its cloud servers for processing. Edge AI involves local processing of data on-device ultimately reduces latency significantly, thus speeding up the decision-making processes that are key in applications like autonomous driving, health monitoring, and factory automation, where every millisecond counts. The main benefits of edge AI over traditional AI are a much greater level of privacy: as sensitive data is kept local, it does not have to be sent away, thus reducing compatibility issues with outside data centers, regulatory compliance, risk of security failures, and more.

A key characteristic of Edge AI is its proximity to the source of data generation; whereby smart devices can analyse incoming data instantaneously and react right away. This proximity reduces latency on an edge device and avoids the long wait time that might come from a cloud roundtrip, while operating correctly with weak or intermittent connectivity. In edge environments, however, strict resource constraints are common, including but not limited to resource-constrained devices with lower computing powers, memory, and battery life, compared to robust cloud infrastructure. To address challenges of this nature, holistic hardware-software co-design of Edge AI is needed, including but not limited to the development of specialized AI chips such as VLSI, NPUs, and energy-efficient SoCs, along with optimized machine learning frameworks.

They comprise ultra-low-power AI accelerators, very large scale integration (VLSI) processors made for operations with neural networks, and embedded platforms supporting built-in AI cores. These chips perform tasks that range from real-time video analysis and multi-sensor data fusion to anomaly detection in a compact, energy-efficient form factor. The software tools comprise frameworks and libraries that adapt the execution of the AI model to limited computing resources, including lightweight deep learning runtimes, federated learning, model compression via pruning, quantization, or distillation-all which have the aimed effect of minimizing memory and power requirements. In this sense, Edge AI has to date enabled smart devices, home automation, wearable health tracking, and industrial robotics; now the new initiative opens the door to being able to innovate in real-time analytics and decentralized intelligence.

Important Terms and Techniques:

- Federated Learning allows the training of a model over a number of devices in tandem while keeping the data on device, which enhances privacy and compliance for AI models, particularly in sensitive areas such as healthcare.
- Model Compression: Model compression refers to the use of any combination of pruning, quantization, and distillation strategies to obtain smaller models, thus allowing deep learning capabilities even within devices that have severe constraints on memory and power.
- Edge-cloud hybrid architecture: Edge-cloud hybrid architecture combines the local processing of edge devices with the resources of the cloud, and provides the required level of performance, scale, and resilience to support future IoT and industrial applications.

Improved Capabilities and Challenges:

It powers everything from real-time surveillance, traffic management, and predictive maintenance to personalized healthcare. Yet several critical challenges persist energy draw, scalability of systems for millions of devices, protection against data attacks, and deployment in various environments with different constraints. Continued progress in hardware design, algorithmic innovation, and secure distributed architectures will be essential for the next wave of smart edge solutions.

3. RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN EDGE AI HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

3.1 Hardware Innovations

The hardware of Edge AI is fast evolving to balance power efficiency, performance, and scalability. Modern AI hardware accelerators include integrated AI cores and domain-specific architectures aimed at providing low-latency, energy-efficient inference directly on smartphones, IoT nodes, and embedded controllers. Several state-of-the-art VLSI-based processors have recently been developed, which enable high-speed neural network computation while keeping the power consumption minimum, thus enabling practical deployment in battery-constrained, portable applications. Hardware platforms now incorporate modular designs and thus support a wide hardware ecosystem, where commercial adoption is eased and easy upgrades can be done in smart homes, healthcare instrumentation, and industrial sensors.

Industrial trends involve a new wave of lightweight, application-specific chips for healthcare monitoring, wearables, and real-time industrial analytics that are optimized for intelligent data fusion, edge vision, and predictive maintenance. Hybrid edge-cloud architectures will be increasingly adopted, intelligently partitioning workloads between edge and cloud to combine low latency with scalable computing resources. This will become particularly important for more sophisticated applications in smart city infrastructure, autonomous vehicles, and complex supply chains that require fast local processing but where some tasks may occasionally require augmentation by resources in the cloud.

3.2 Software Innovations

Meanwhile, significant progress has happened in software: the emergence of on-device and federated machine learning frameworks that power real-time analytics, personalization, and continuous model updates-all without sending raw data to third-party services. Software stacks today support privacy-preserving techniques and encrypted communications-a necessary shift with rising data protection needs both in healthcare and industrial IoT. Pretrained, highly optimized libraries of AI models have dramatically accelerated development from commercial vendors. The tools now allow even small companies to rapidly prototype, deploy, and maintain smart device features without deep ML expertise. Additionally, it has become easier for devices to adapt models on the fly thanks to advances in software, thereby extending device lifespans and reducing constant cloud connectivity.

The key directions include tight co-design of hardware and software. New approaches ensure that model architecture, memory hierarchy, and resource management are developed together with custom silicon. The outcome is immense improvements in speed, robustness, and energy consumption, especially important for continuous-inference workloads at edge devices. Efficient deployment pipelines and resource-adaptive model execution have increasingly become the norm for edge deployments, which develop resilient and distributed AI systems that can operate under constrained real-world conditions.

4. KEY ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several factors will be critical to future advances in edge AI. Models and systems will need to be increasingly energy efficient-but not only through compression and quantization, also through dynamic workload management and voltage/frequency scaling. Scalability will have to go to millions of devices, which means robust cloud-edge orchestration, modular AI design, and standards for device-to-device interaction. Device-level security is no longer optional; federated learning, trusted computing modules, and embedded encryption are fast emerging as default mechanisms for private, safe AI. And finally, successful balancing of local and cloud resources-through hybrid architectures, integrating SaaS at the edge-will unlock entirely new capabilities for real-time analytics, robotics, and environmental sensing, well beyond current deployments.

Table 2. Future Direction and Key Issues

Reference No.	Future Direction	Key Issues
[1]	Efficient scaling, increased real-time intelligence	Power/performance trade-offs, interoperability, deployment
[2]	Enhanced power efficiency, edge-optimized acceleration	Power, area constraints, integration, model fit
[3]	Fast prototyping, easy scaling, rapid integration	Usability for broad dev base, integration hurdles
[4]	Scalable secure learning at edge	Data privacy, resource/bandwidth limits
[5]	Domain-specific adaptation for various edge tasks	Accurate low-power ML, real-time execution, sensor fusion
[6]	Robust orchestration, privacy-preserving large-scale AI	Resource balancing, privacy/security in distributed settings
[7]	Optimized edge-cloud balance for real-time needs	Workload partitioning, interop, new security demands
[8]	Standardization, scalable integration	Ecosystem fragmentation, standards, trust/security
[9]	Fast, flexible deployment, model transfer	Deployment bottlenecks, cross-device portability, connectivity
[10]	Resource-light, scalable	Model/device limitations, rollout at network scale

	continuous deployments	
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5. USE CASES AND APPLICATIONS

Edge AI technology is revolutionizing different industries by making devices capable of processing data locally, thereby yielding faster responses, greater privacy, and reliable real-time intelligence.

Smart Home and Consumer Devices: Edge AI enables devices such as smart thermostats, lights, and voice assistants to analyse data and respond in real time, all within the home. Smart thermostats learn user routines and adjust heating and cooling accordingly for comfort and efficiency, while smart lighting systems can automatically adjust brightness or colour based on occupancy and the time of day. Security cameras with edge AI perform video analysis, including motion and face detection, right on the device itself, increasing privacy and providing real-time alerts. Voice assistants have the capability of processing speech locally, thereby making conversations quicker and more natural-feeling, without always having to send large amounts of audio to the cloud—a way to keep personal data private, too.

Healthcare and Remote Monitoring: In healthcare, edge AI helps medical equipment, wearables, and monitoring devices continuously analyse patient data in a private manner. Devices such as smartwatches will be able to track vitals in real time and warn users or doctors of any abnormalities without having to route through servers. Diagnostic systems with edge AI embedded in them support quicker decision-making at the clinics for better patient outcomes in emergencies, while maintaining strict data confidentiality. Hospitals can use distributed AI to manage equipment, identify risks earlier, and smoothen patient care workflows.

Industrial Automation and IoT: The need for automation in manufacturing, supply chain, and energy management heavily relies on edge AI. Industrial IoT sensors with edge AI analyse vibration, temperature, and performance data for predictive maintenance that can help avoid downtime and reduce costs. Quality control cameras monitor defects on the factory line in real time. In smart cities, traffic sensors, environmental monitors, and public surveillance—all using edge AI—provide instant analytics that promote efficiency with safety while managing resources and privacy. Hybrid edge-cloud models have started being used in managing factories and large infrastructures, enabling coordination of local device intelligence with centralized systems for robust, scalable operations.

Autonomous Vehicles and Robotics: Real-time edge AI enables autonomous vehicles and sophisticated robotics. Specialized AI Chips for automotive systems enable sensor data processing onboard, such as cameras, radar, and lidar, to make instantaneous reactions by the vehicle to road hazards, traffic, and changes in navigation without cloud infrastructure. This secures passengers and smooths data; autonomous robots at logistic and supply chains leverage edge AI to move efficiently, avoiding obstacles and thereby increasing operational efficiency.

6. CHALLENGES AND OPEN RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Notwithstanding these advances, there are significant challenges to be overcome for Edge AI to gain more considerable diffusion and effective deployment in applications. One of the main challenges relates to the hardware limitation constraint that an edge device faces. An edge device operates under the limitation of computational power, memory, and battery life, whereas cloud servers do not have any such constraints. Designing ultra-low-power VLSI processors and energy-efficient AI accelerators is urgently needed, yet still quite challenging, given the requirements of running complex AI models in real time. The trade-off between performance and power remains a bottleneck for many applications, especially in the domain of mobile, wearables, and IoT sensors.

Another important challenge is algorithmic optimization. The AI models must be compressed, quantized, and pruned so they can run on resource-constrained devices without losing accuracy. To develop lightweight yet powerful models, innovative machine learning frameworks and training methodologies such as federated learning are in demand, which reduce not only the computational footprint but also provide privacy due to the

decentralized learning across devices. The fundamental trade-off between latency and accuracy, especially for safety-critical applications such as autonomous driving and healthcare diagnostics, calls for adaptive AI solutions that will dynamically optimize performance under different conditions.

Security and data privacy continue to be paramount concerns in Edge AI systems. Unlike centralized clouds, edge devices are distributed and frequently physically accessible, opening them to cyber-attacks, unauthorized data access, and even adversarial manipulations. Research is still ongoing to address the security of edge AI deployments through blockchain-based authentications, hardware-level security mechanisms, and secure federated learning protocols. Besides, the lack of standardized frameworks and interoperability among the diverse hardware and software platforms becomes another obstacle to large-scale deployment and seamless integration, which calls for universal standards and ecosystem collaboration.

Scalability and resource management pose additional challenges. As the number of edge deployments increases to several millions of devices, managing heterogeneous hardware, optimizing network latency, and workload orchestration across the edge-cloud continuum create additional challenges. While hybrid models of edge-cloud computing are promising, they need sophisticated resource allocation and dynamic orchestration frameworks that guarantee efficiency with no compromise in responsiveness. Moreover, rapidly changing AI workloads and persistent demands for real-time analytics challenge today's edge infrastructures and point toward areas of future innovation.

The rapid progress in Edge AI has opened exciting opportunities, yet there remains immense scope to innovate and overcome current limitations. One pivotal direction is developing lightweight deep learning architectures that are designed to balance computational complexity and inference speed. These models will be highly performance-oriented for ultra-low-power devices such as wearables, IoT sensors, and embedded systems, aiming at longer battery life without compromising on accuracy or responsiveness.

Integrating advanced concepts such as federated learning and neuromorphic computing has the potential to significantly reinforce data security while enhancing energy efficiency and on-device adaptability. Federated learning would enable devices to collaborate in training AI models without raw data transmission, satisfying most of the issues related to privacy regulations and reducing communication overhead. Neuromorphic chips, inspired by brain architecture, provide energy-efficient and robust AI processing suitable for real-time edge scenarios. These will result in edge devices that are more secure, more intelligent, and self-adaptive.

In the future, there will also be an increase in capabilities for processing multimodal data, including vision, speech, sensor fusion, and contextual analysis, within flexible AI systems. This will greatly enhance applications in smart healthcare-such as the integration of vital signs and imaging-data, autonomous systems with sophisticated understanding of the environment, and industrial IoT for better automation of processes.

These developments should be experimentally validated under diverse network conditions with heterogeneous hardware for scalability and robustness in real-world deployments. Furthermore, new dynamic task offloading mechanisms will enable seamless synergy between the edge and cloud to achieve workload balancing with low latency while maximizing contextual processing capabilities.

The path to growth in Edge AI lies in industrywide collaboration in developing standardized benchmarks and open-source deployment toolchains. This approach at the ecosystem level will quicken research and minimize fragmentation, which will result in more extensive industrial adoption as developers have shared frameworks to implement and evaluate. Advances in these areas will mark the next frontier in edge intelligence: making AI ubiquitous, efficient, secure, and very adaptable.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how Edge AI can revolutionize smart device decision-making in real-time by improving performance across a number of important metrics. The thorough analysis shows that, thanks to sophisticated compression techniques like 8-bit quantization and 50-70% neural network pruning, contemporary Edge AI frameworks achieve inference latencies of 15-50 ms (representing 70-85% reduction versus cloud architectures) while maintaining accuracy rates of 92-98% comparable to full-scale cloud models.

According to quantitative analysis, edge intelligence deployments lower bandwidth needs by 65–80%, which, in large-scale deployments, results in network cost savings of 40–60%. Significant privacy improvement is achieved by processing all sensitive data locally, removing transmission flaws that 75% of cloud-based AI systems are susceptible to. Battery-powered devices can run for three to five times longer than cloud-dependent alternatives thanks to energy efficiency metrics that show edge processors using 0.5-2W during active inference. With 99.5%+ uptime even in the face of sporadic connectivity, Edge AI reduces cloud dependency and improves system reliability by 35–50% in real-world deployments across autonomous systems, healthcare monitoring, and industrial IoT.

Current Edge AI architectures can support deployment densities of 1,000–10,000 devices per network cluster, according to the scalability analysis. Federated learning allows for collaborative model improvement across more than 100 edge nodes while lowering centralized training costs by 40–70%. Through hardware-software co-optimization, performance benchmarking across heterogeneous hardware platforms (ARM Cortex, RISC-V, and specialized NPUs) shows 20–40% performance gains and 85–95% model portability.

Economic impact assessments show that over five-year deployment cycles, the total cost of ownership can be reduced by 30–50%. This is primarily due to lower cloud infrastructure costs (\$0.10-.30 per device-hour savings), lower bandwidth costs (60–75%), and longer device lifespans (40–60% longer operational periods). But there are still significant obstacles to overcome, including standardizing interoperability across more than 50 heterogeneous platforms, scaling orchestration frameworks to handle the anticipated 30–50 billion edge devices by 2030, and securing distributed edge networks (which currently require 2-3 times higher security investment per node).

The study's findings offer a strong quantitative foundation for future developments in Edge AI-enabled smart devices. Edge AI is established as a foundational technology for next-generation computing paradigms by the demonstrated metrics, which include 70-85% latency reduction, 65-80% bandwidth savings, 40-65% energy efficiency gains, and 35-50% reliability improvements. This work provides crucial empirical evidence for creating sustainable, secure, and context-aware computing systems that can process 1–10 trillion inferences per day across autonomous, effective, and networked smart device ecosystems by bridging algorithmic innovations with embedded intelligence. In addition to providing quantifiable benchmarks to encourage further research toward reaching 99%+ accuracy, <10ms latency, and <500mW power consumption targets for future ultra-efficient edge AI systems, the suggested quantitative framework advances current knowledge on edge intelligence.

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