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The Next Era of Solid-State Innovation: Beyond Silicon

V. Basil Hans*

Abstract

The semiconductor industry is getting close to the physical and economic boundaries of silicon-based technology. A new era of solid-state innovation is beginning. Beyond silicon, the next era of solid-state innovation looks at the materials, device layouts, and manufacturing methods that are about to change the way electronics and energy work. The article talks about improvements in wide- and ultra-wide-bandgap semiconductors, two-dimensional materials, and quantum and neuromorphic systems that promise better performance, energy efficiency, and features that go beyond what is possible with regular Complementary Metal–Oxide–Semiconductor (CMOS) scaling. It also talks about problems with integration, manufacturability, dependability, and sustainability, and stresses the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches that bring together materials science, physics, and engineering. This article looks at current breakthroughs and future approaches to show how post-silicon technologies could lead to big changes in computing, power electronics, sensing, and communication. These technologies could be the basis for the next generation of solid-state systems. The next phase of solid-state innovation transcends silicon, employing materials such as gallium nitride (GaN) and silicon carbide (SiC) for enhanced power efficiency, alongside 2D materials like graphene for increased speed. This phase incorporates novel devices (ferroelectrics) for Edge AI, targeting advancements in autonomous systems, accelerated communications (5G/6G), and personalized medicine, transitioning from mere miniaturization to sophisticated integration and emerging computing paradigms like molecular electronics. In the constantly changing world of semiconductor technology, the quest for smaller and more efficient devices has pushed the limits of materials science and technology. Silicon has been at the center of the semiconductor industry since the first silicon-based transistor was made in 1947. This is what Moore's law predicted would happen: computing power would expand at an exponential rate. But as we get closer to the physical and technical boundaries of silicon, the industry faces new problems in keeping up this level of innovation. Silicon's inherent material qualities, which previously helped it rise to the top, now make it hard to move forward in terms of speed, power use, and heat dissipation. So, it has become very important to look for new materials and technologies that can get around these problems while still fulfilling the growing need for more computing power and energy efficiency.

Keywords: Power consumption, heat dissipation, wide-bandgap semiconductors, two-dimensional (2D) materials, and organic semiconductors

***Author for Correspondence**
V. Basil Hans
E-mail: vhans2011@gmail.com

Research Professor, Department of Management & Commerce, Srinivas University, Mangaluru, Karnataka, India

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INTRODUCTION

Solid-state technology allows electronics to extend beyond silicon [1]. Solid-state electronics do not require moving parts or liquids. They are small, use little power, work at incredible speeds, can be integrated into a single chip, and can be made smaller [2]. The three main solid-state components are semiconductors, dielectric materials, and luminescent materials. When there are electric impulses or energy supplies, semiconductors change the flow of electrons. Dielectric materials

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hold energy without leaking through insulation and have a breakdown voltage for dielectrics. Display methods use luminescent materials that emit light after absorbing other forms of energy. Silicon (Si), gallium arsenide (GaAs), silicon carbide (SiC), aluminum gallium nitride (AlGaN), indium phosphide (InP), and wide-bandgap oxides (ZrO_2, TiO_2, ZnO, TiO, Al_2O_3, SiO). Polymers, hydrogenated amorphous silicon (a-Si:H), and perovskites are all dielectric materials. There has been considerable progress in solid-state luminescent devices such as thin-film light-emitting diodes (LEDs), lasers, and micro-displays. Display technologies, laser technologies, biomedicines, and nanomedicine solid-state luminescent materials and devices are major areas that are pushing the need for solid-state technologies.

WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY THAT IS SOLID-STATE?

Solid-state technology, which involves thin films of functional materials being deposited on substrates and a system that does not have any moving components or fluids, has received much attention in the past several years. The main goal of many solid-state systems is to achieve better performance, durability, safety, and flexibility, as well as to add new features that silicon-based systems cannot achieve. Solid-state systems can have many useful and desirable qualities, such as mechanical flexibility, which allows them to wrap around diverse surfaces [3]; structural transparency [4]; and ultra-light weight, which makes wearable electronics less heavy [1]. Many materials can be used in solid-state systems, such as ceramics, polymers, perovskites, wide-bandgap and two-dimensional semiconductors, and new processes for additive printing and solution-based coating. This gives us a chance to rethink designs from the ground, which will lead to a revolution in materials and heterogeneous integration. Solid-state technology could help Moore's law keep going and open up a big and exciting field for new business and technical ideas to take electronics to the next level.

Solid-state batteries, biosensing analyzers, wide-bandgap semiconductors, non-volatile and neuromorphic memory, solid-state cooling, solid-state lighting, and solid-state lasers are all examples of solid-state technology. These efforts are still in their early phase; however, there has been a boom in solid-state technology in all areas of electronics. Solid-state devices have several advantages over traditional silicon-based systems. These include improved performance, more features, greater safety, a wider range of temperatures in which they may function, and better compatibility with new substrates and/or active materials. Solid-state systems could start a new era of solid-state technology that lasts owing to novel materials, combinations, cross-cutting technologies, ecosystems, and business models. To comprehensively examine solid-state technology, advances that are exclusively or mostly aimed at solid-state devices have been presented.

WHY GO BEYOND SILICON?

Silicon has long been used in electronics because it works well when devices are small and close together, and lithographic processes continue to decrease. Microelectronics that use advanced methods to create larger systems-on-chip or higher integration levels are still limited by lithography. This leads to the construction of chiplets, longer interconnecting pathways, and less efficient high-performance computing [2]. The slowing of scaling is less affected when technology allows for performance expansion while maintaining size and increasing performance in a manner that works with devices made from older technology. Solid-state technology provides material systems and access to design space with more freedom, giving them another way to overcome silicon's limits. Solid-state technology is already being used to create products.

IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENTS IN SOLID-STATE DEVICES

To make it easier to quickly move towards systems with solid-state capabilities, developers have conducted significant work on important solid-state devices such as capacitors, resistors, diodes, transistors, and photodetectors. Many electronic gadgets use these parts, and they are also extensively used in older silicon technology. Researchers are especially interested in devices that use new solid-state materials such as ceramics, polymers, perovskites, wide-bandgap semiconductors, and ultrathin films. Many developments have been achieved in three-terminal transistors and non-volatile resistance and capacitance switching devices that do not use standard semiconductor-based methods. These types

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of devices are expected to make operations more flexible, allow logic and memory parts to be combined into the same architecture, and make new ideas for neuromorphic computing easier to implement (Lin, 2007) [1, 2].

Solid-state energy-storage systems are necessary to achieve high levels of integration. People are paying attention to solid-state batteries that include only solid materials, solid electrodes with liquid electrolytes, and solid electrolytes that work with current lithium-ion materials. All-solid-state frameworks enhance safety by entirely removing organic solvents and flammability risks, while systems employing solid electrolytes facilitate the utilization of lithium metal anodes that markedly elevate the energy density relative to traditional methods (Lin, 2007) [1].

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN BATTERIES AND ENERGY STORAGE

Solid-state technology is a way to make gadgets and systems work better, while also solving problems with resources and the environment. Advanced studies have examined different materials and processing methods to improve energy storage [5]. Some important advances in solid-state batteries are new batteries, electrodes, and electrolytes that boost energy density seven times, make them safer, and last longer [6].

NEW IDEAS IN MEMORY AND COMPUTING

Recent improvements in computing and memory have led to the use of a wide range of solid-state materials and structures as alternatives to traditional silicon-based computer systems. Modern computers have thousands of non-volatile memory cells that store data by changing the resistance of a solid-state film in each cell. Ferromagnets, ferroelectric ceramics, transition metal oxides, and other artificial solid-state structures that may change shape are emerging options for non-volatile memory storage [1]. Progress in Solid-State Electronics is a thriving multidimensional field covering accelerators, atomistic modelling, advanced membranes, additives, amorphous films, bandgap, ceramics, circuits, confinement, contacts, degradation, diffusion, filters, foams, frames, intercalation, interactions, local plasma, memristor, modelling, noise, polymer membranes, printing, safety, shielding, substrates, supercapacitors, templates, and thermoelectric [7].

PROBLEMS WITH MATERIALS AND MANUFACTURING

Silicon-based electronics have been used in industry for many years. However, switching to solid-state technologies can make electronic devices much smaller and more useful. Advanced solid-state materials could also make devices work better and simplify their designs, which would lead to more environmentally friendly electronics.

Solid-state technology involves a wide range of materials with unique properties that make it possible to build devices and add features that silicon cannot. Numerous methodologies that utilize ceramics, polymers, perovskites, wide-bandgap semiconductors, and thin-film materials have advanced, potentially facilitating a shift from silicon-based electronics [8]. Solid-state energy-storage devices, such as batteries and supercapacitors, are safer, cheaper, smaller, and longer-lasting than silicon-based devices. Solid-state versions of tantalum niobate and memristor devices offer significant increases in speed and energy efficiency over the best devices on the market. A wide range of new developments is being made to improve the performance, safety, lifespan, and environmental friendliness of battery materials and accumulator technologies, as well as speed up their use on a large scale. Solid-state materials are used in many different devices, such as neuromorphic computers, next-generation amplifiers and oscillators, and small high-frequency microwave devices [2].

EFFECTS ON THE INDUSTRY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The semiconductor industry is going through a big change right now, thanks to strong companies that have used disruptions such as the COVID-19 epidemic, geopolitical tensions, and the advent of generative AI to change the way they conduct business. Moreover, the way forward depends on new

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materials and devices instead of old silicon technology. This has led many companies to invest more in studying and selling solid-state components and systems.

Silicon is still very important for the current delivery of solid-state technologies, but the semiconductor environment is starting to change. New requirements are coming up that are leading to new semiconductor-based solutions that are very different from the silicon-based structures that most industries use. Strategic solid-state techniques have met these standards.

The next generation of technology wants to achieve target specifications such as sensitive performance made possible by a new family of materials that can handle high temperatures and extreme electromagnetic field orientations, new capabilities based on nature that can process a wide range of information using things like oscillations and temporal correlations, and major breakthroughs in dimensionality reduction and structural versatility that lead to compact solid-state multilayer-partitioned forms. There are still some needs that certain areas are working towards, such as zero power use while not in use, length scales of materials and active devices at the nanoscale, and multiscale designs and materials that range from the atomic to the millimeter.

CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY, ETHICS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Solid-state ideas have a significant effect on safety, ethics, and the environment. There is a difference between the relatively easy toxicological difficulties that many silicon substrates have and the far more complicated safety and lifespan problems of solid-state devices. Listening to what people in the community are worried about and helping with clean-up efforts. Contamination from selectively detachable or toggleable surface adsorbates and from a small-diameter plasma jet and mask can be successfully reduced using measures that safeguard device performance. Conductive channels pertinent to high-rate cycling of composite anodes may persist without enduring side reactions at the electrode-electrolyte interface or irreversible structural changes, thereby maintaining the power capability. Hybrid organic-inorganic halide perovskite semiconductors, potentially devoid of heavy metals, are currently attracting significant research interest for optoelectronic applications extending beyond photovoltaics, and multilayer array architectures are being explored to achieve device scalability in the multi-terabyte per second range. There is now a lot of research on the environmental impact of nanofabrication circuits and the simple process skills that accompany them. Computation-based and experimental-plus-theoretical approaches now provide extensive arrays of qualified nanoscale synthesis pathways for the large-scale production of graphene, carbon nanospheres, and one-dimensional nanostructured materials derived from combinations of molecules readily sourced from nature, the built environment, and chemical libraries, including common commodities like cooking oil [9–11].

CONCLUSION

Silicon technology is tremendously useful in the semiconductor industry. The success of information and communication technology has been the foundation of society and people's daily lives, making them much more modern, and making solutions more complicated and useful in more situations. However, Moore's law has been broken, and the end of the silicon age is becoming increasingly likely. New technologies, materials, and structures that meet solid-state requirements have come out that can, at least in theory, address these needs. Therefore, research into solid-state devices for the next generation of technologies is important and needs to be done immediately. Solid-state technology, which includes new gadgets, materials, and structures, makes it possible to reach community and business goals. Solid-state research encompasses fundamental scientific discoveries, the creation of emergent technologies, and the advancement of new materials. This type of study will become increasingly important to businesses and markets in the years to come.

A group of general high-level needs and critical criteria has been found that may be used to judge roadmaps, device ideas, and technology advancement strategies for all solid-state devices. Good performance in these areas, such as high operational speed, ultra-low-power operation, non-volatility, bio-inspiration, multi-functionality, and others, is very difficult, and meeting a few of them is often

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problematic. The higher exhibits persistent performance gaps throughout their specifications and needs, where existing technologies—including silicon—fall short and where the possibility and need for solid-state advances remain the greatest. Solid-state technology can help to reduce these disparities in performance. These gaps encompass a diverse array of technologies for sensing, actuating, processing, and interfacing, collectively representing a substantial portion of the anticipated billions of connected devices.

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