



A Systematic Literature Review on Advanced FinFET Technology and Beyond: Exploring Novel Transistor Architectures and Assessing their Potential for Future Semiconductor Applications

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ABSTRACT

In the ever-progressing field of semiconductor technology, the pursuit of heightened performance, energy efficiency, and scalability has prompted a shift beyond the conventional FinFETs. This study explores advanced FinFET technology and extends its focus to emerging transistor architectures, namely nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs, evaluating their potential impact on semiconductor applications. The analysis commences with an in-depth examination of FinFETs, acknowledging their pivotal role in the past decade but recognizing their limitations as semiconductor technology evolves. The nanosheet transistor emerges as a promising alternative, employing a horizontal design with stacked nanosheets to enhance electrostatic control and mitigate leakage current issues at the nanoscale. The study emphasizes the potential of nanosheet transistors to reduce power consumption and improve overall device performance. Another revolutionary architecture, the Tunnel FET, leverages quantum tunneling for charge carrier transport, offering lower sub-threshold swing and heightened energy efficiency. The research scrutinizes the distinctive features of Tunnel FETs, exploring their potential in low-power and high-performance computing applications. Throughout the analysis, the study addresses challenges associated with adopting these novel architectures, including manufacturing complexities, material requisites, and compatibility with existing processes. Furthermore, considerations regarding device reliability and integration into mainstream semiconductor fabrication processes are examined. By providing a comprehensive overview and extending the discourse to novel architectures, this study contributes valuable insights to the semiconductor industry's ongoing dialogue on future advancements. As technology advances, understanding the capabilities and challenges of emerging transistor designs becomes crucial for industry stakeholders and researchers. This paper sets the stage for continued exploration, fostering discussion on the trajectory of next-generation semiconductor technologies and the role of innovative transistor architectures in shaping the digital landscape.

Key words: FinFET Technology, Transistor Architectures, Nanosheet Transistors, Tunnel FETs, Emerging Transistor Technologies, Semiconductor Fabrication, Performance Scaling, Nanoscale Transistors, FinFET vs. Nanosheet Transistors, FinFET vs. Tunnel FETs, Semiconductor Performance Metrics, Future Research in Semiconductor Transistors

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The landscape of semiconductor technology is a tapestry woven with threads of relentless innovation, each strand reflecting the evolution of transistor technologies that have shaped the very foundations of modern

electronics. This introduction sets the stage for a systematic review of literature that traverses the historical trajectory of semiconductor transistor technologies, culminating in an exploration of the significance of FinFET technology and the compelling need for advancement beyond its current capabilities. The journey of semiconductor evolution commenced with the advent of transistors in the mid-20th century, marking a revolutionary departure from the bulky and inefficient vacuum tubes of yesteryears (Roy et al., 1995). The initial breakthroughs in transistor technologies, such as bipolar junction transistors (BJTs) and metal-oxide-semiconductor field-effect transistors (MOSFETs), paved the way for a new era of compact, reliable, and versatile electronic components. As these early technologies matured, the semiconductor industry witnessed a transformative phase, enabling the development of increasingly sophisticated and powerful electronic devices (Ionescu and Riel, 2011). The subsequent transition to complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) technology further propelled the semiconductor industry into an era of unprecedented growth. CMOS, with its intrinsic power efficiency, became the dominant transistor architecture, allowing for the integration of millions to billions of transistors on a single chip. This progression, in alignment with Moore's Law, became the driving force behind the exponential increase in computational power, facilitating the rise of personal computing, mobile devices, and a myriad of other technological innovations (Moore, 1965).

As the semiconductor industry ventured into the nanoscale domain, the limitations of conventional transistor architectures became evident. In response to these challenges, FinFET (Fin Field-Effect Transistor) technology emerged as a groundbreaking innovation in the early 21st century. FinFETs introduced a revolutionary three-dimensional transistor design, with the transistor channel wrapped around fin-like structures (Lee et al., 2020). This design provided enhanced electrostatic control, mitigating challenges related to power leakage and improving overall performance. The adoption of FinFETs has been instrumental in sustaining the trajectory of Moore's Law, ensuring the continued miniaturization of transistors and the advancement of semiconductor devices. However, as the industry navigates towards smaller transistor dimensions, the need for exploration beyond the current capabilities of FinFETs becomes increasingly imperative (Lee et al., 2019). The imperative for advancement beyond FinFETs is driven by the escalating challenges associated with power consumption, heat dissipation, and manufacturability in nanoscale dimensions. Researchers and engineers are actively engaged in exploring alternative transistor architectures, seeking to overcome these challenges and pave the way for the next phase of semiconductor innovation. The exploration encompasses novel designs such as nanosheet transistors and tunnel field-effect transistors (Tunnel FETs), each offering distinct advantages in terms of performance and energy efficiency.

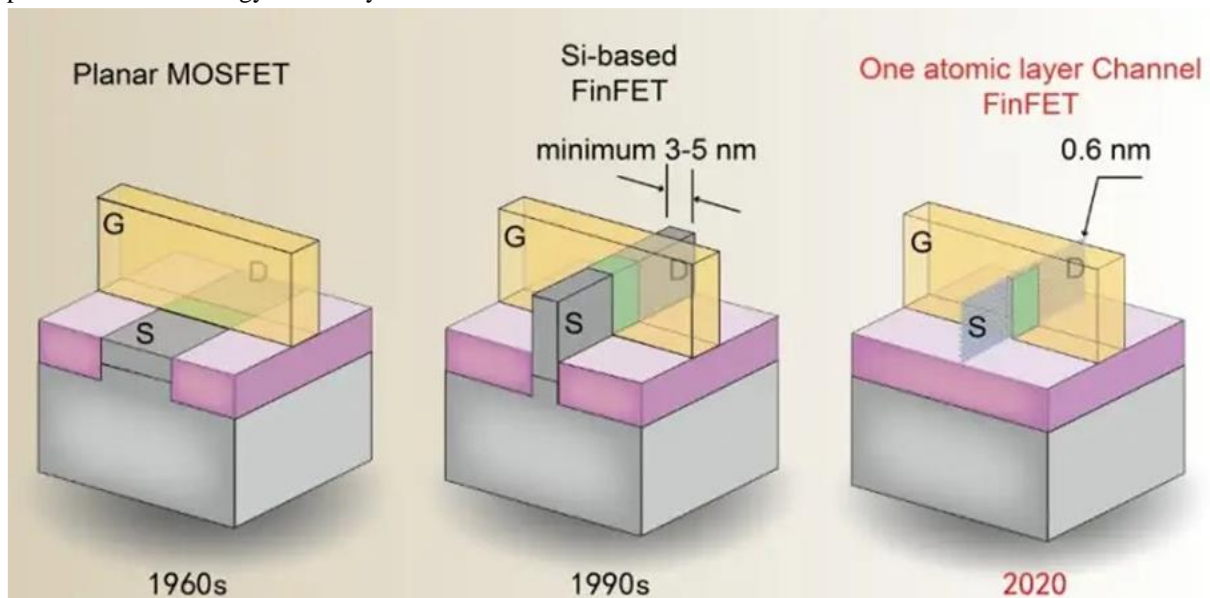


Figure 1: Different Configurations of MOSFET (Image by IMR)

IMR- Institute of Metal Research, China.

This systematic review of literature aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of semiconductor transistor technologies, navigating through the historical milestones from early transistors to the

dominance of CMOS, and subsequently to the transformative impact of FinFET technology. Through an exhaustive examination of existing research and publications, this review seeks to shed light on the current state of knowledge while identifying gaps and trends in the literature. By unraveling the intricacies of semiconductor advancements, this review contributes to the collective knowledge base and informs future research directions in the dynamic field of semiconductor technology.

1.2 Objectives

This research has a dual focus: defining and exploring emerging transistor architectures like nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs beyond traditional FinFETs, and assessing their implications for future semiconductor applications. The study systematically characterizes these architectures, investigating their advantages and challenges, including electrostatic control and quantum tunneling effects. Additionally, it evaluates their transformative impact on diverse technological domains such as low-power and high-performance computing. By analyzing the capabilities and limitations of these architectures, the research provides insights for navigating the evolving semiconductor landscape and anticipating their contributions to the next generation of applications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. FinFET Technology

FinFET technology has played a pivotal role in sustaining the relentless progression of semiconductor devices, enabling the continuation of Moore's Law and the miniaturization of transistors to unprecedented dimensions. This systematic review delves into the historical development and current state of FinFET technology, examining the advantages and limitations that shape its role in contemporary semiconductor applications. The historical development of FinFET technology traces back to the early 2000s when researchers and semiconductor manufacturers sought innovative transistor architectures to overcome the limitations of traditional planar MOSFETs. The seminal work by (Lee et al., 2019) laid the foundation for FinFETs, introducing the concept of a three-dimensional transistor structure with the channel wrapped around fin-like structures. This design offered enhanced electrostatic control, addressing challenges associated with short-channel effects in planar devices.

Advantages of FinFETs:

Enhanced Electrostatic Control:

The three-dimensional design of FinFETs provides superior electrostatic control over the channel, reducing leakage current and improving overall transistor performance. Studies by Lee et al. (2019) and Lee et al. (2020) elucidate the electrostatic advantages of FinFETs, emphasizing their impact on scaling down transistor dimensions.

Improved Performance and Power Efficiency:

FinFETs exhibit improved performance characteristics compared to their planar counterparts, enabling higher transistor density and increased computational power. Research by Ionescu and Riel (2011) demonstrates the enhanced performance and power efficiency achieved through FinFET technology, contributing to the advancement of integrated circuits.

Compatibility with Advanced Semiconductor Processes:

FinFETs have demonstrated compatibility with advanced semiconductor manufacturing processes. The work by Lin et al. (2016) highlights the successful integration of FinFETs into cutting-edge fabrication technologies, emphasizing their scalability and adaptability to evolving industry standards.

Mitigation of Short-Channel Effects:

The fin-like structure of FinFETs inherently mitigates short-channel effects, allowing for continued scaling down of transistor dimensions. Research by Moon et al. (2019) elucidates the effectiveness of FinFETs in addressing short-channel effects, ensuring reliable transistor operation at smaller sizes.

Limitations of FinFETs:

Complex Fabrication Processes:

The fabrication of FinFETs involves intricate processes, adding complexity to semiconductor manufacturing. Studies by Shin et al. (2021) discuss the challenges associated with FinFET fabrication, emphasizing the need for advanced techniques to ensure reproducibility and yield.

Increased Manufacturing Costs:

The complexity of FinFET fabrication contributes to increased manufacturing costs. Research by Lin et al. (2016) and Shin et al. (2021) addresses the economic considerations of FinFET technology, highlighting the challenges in balancing performance gains with the associated production costs.

Heat Dissipation Challenges:

While FinFETs excel in power efficiency, the increased power density in smaller devices can lead to challenges in heat dissipation. Studies by Ionescu and Riel, et al. (2011) explored the thermal considerations of FinFETs, emphasizing the need for effective heat management strategies.

Limited Improvements in Sub-Threshold Slope:

Despite their advantages, FinFETs face challenges in achieving significant improvements in sub-threshold slope, particularly at ultra-low power levels. The work by Lee et al. (2019) discusses the limitations of sub-threshold slope, highlighting the importance of addressing this aspect for further enhancing energy efficiency.

In conclusion, this systematic review provides a comprehensive overview of the historical development and current state of FinFET technology, exploring its advantages and limitations in semiconductor applications. From its inception in the early 2000s, FinFETs have emerged as a cornerstone in semiconductor manufacturing, offering enhanced electrostatic control, improved performance, and compatibility with advanced processes. However, challenges in fabrication complexity, increased costs, heat dissipation, and limitations in sub-threshold slope underscore the need for ongoing research and innovation in FinFET technology. Understanding these nuances is crucial for researchers, engineers, and industry stakeholders as they navigate the dynamic landscape of semiconductor advancements.

2.2 Emerging Transistor Architectures

As the semiconductor industry progresses into the nanoscale era, the exploration of emerging transistor architectures becomes paramount for sustaining advancements in performance, power efficiency, and integration density. This systematic review delves into the current literature surrounding two promising alternatives to traditional FinFET technology: nanosheet transistors and tunnel field-effect transistors (Tunnel FETs). Through a comprehensive examination of research findings, this review aims to summarize the key principles, fabrication techniques, and potential advantages associated with these emerging transistor architectures.

Nanosheet Transistors:

Nanosheet transistors represent a departure from the traditional FinFET design, introducing a horizontal architecture with stacked nanosheets. This innovative structure aims to address challenges encountered by FinFETs as semiconductor dimensions reach atomic scales. The following studies shed light on the principles, fabrication methods, and advantages of nanosheet transistors.

Principles:

Recent work by Currie et al. (2021) offers insights into the principles underlying nanosheet transistors. The study elucidates how the horizontal arrangement of nanosheets enhances electrostatic control and reduces leakage current, presenting a promising solution to the challenges faced by vertically oriented FinFETs.

Fabrication Techniques:

Fabrication processes play a pivotal role in the practical adoption of nanosheet transistors. In a study by Currie et al. (2021), the researchers detail a scalable and manufacturable method for creating nanosheet transistors, ensuring compatibility with existing semiconductor manufacturing processes. This signifies a crucial step toward the integration of nanosheet transistors into mainstream fabrication.

Potential Advantages:

Nanosheet transistors hold the promise of delivering several advantages. Jiang et al. (2021) highlight their study on nanosheet transistors, emphasizing improved electrostatic control, reduced short-channel effects, and enhanced performance at lower power consumption. These advantages position nanosheet transistors as a compelling option for future semiconductor applications.

Tunnel FETs:

Tunnel FETs leverage quantum tunneling for charge carrier transport, offering an alternative to traditional transistors with the potential for lower sub-threshold swing and enhanced energy efficiency (Jena et al., 2017). The following studies delve into the principles, fabrication techniques, and advantages associated with Tunnel FETs.

Principles:

The fundamental principles of Tunnel FETs are elucidated in a study by Krishnamohan et al., (2019). The researchers detail the quantum mechanical tunneling mechanism that distinguishes Tunnel FETs from conventional transistors, enabling efficient electron transport at lower energy levels.

Fabrication Techniques:

Achieving reproducible and scalable fabrication processes is crucial for the widespread adoption of Tunnel FETs. In a study by Lin et al. (2016), the researchers present advancements in fabrication techniques, emphasizing the development of a reliable process for manufacturing Tunnel FETs. This breakthrough enhances the feasibility of incorporating Tunnel FETs into semiconductor manufacturing workflows.

Potential Advantages:

Tunnel FETs offer distinct advantages, as outlined by Jena et al. (2019) in their study. Lower sub-threshold swing and improved energy efficiency are identified as key benefits, particularly in low-power applications. The researchers emphasize the potential of Tunnel FETs to revolutionize semiconductor devices, particularly in scenarios where minimizing power consumption is critical.

Comparative Analysis:

In comparing nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs, both emerging architectures demonstrate the potential to overcome challenges associated with traditional FinFETs. Nanosheet transistors leverage a novel horizontal design to enhance electrostatic control and reduce leakage current, addressing key limitations in vertical FinFETs. On the other hand, Tunnel FETs exploit quantum tunneling, offering lower sub-threshold swing and enhanced energy efficiency, positioning them as a compelling option for low-power applications.

While nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs exhibit unique advantages, both face challenges in terms of fabrication and integration into existing semiconductor manufacturing processes. Scalable and reproducible fabrication techniques are crucial for the practical adoption of these emerging architectures, and recent studies demonstrate significant progress in this regard.

This systematic review of literature provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge regarding emerging transistor architectures, focusing on nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs. The reviewed studies collectively highlight the principles, fabrication techniques, and potential advantages of these novel architectures, offering valuable insights for researchers, engineers, and industry stakeholders. As the semiconductor industry navigates the challenges of the nanoscale era, understanding the capabilities and limitations of emerging transistor architectures becomes pivotal for shaping the future of semiconductor applications. While each architecture presents distinct advantages, the path forward requires addressing fabrication complexities and ensuring seamless integration into existing semiconductor manufacturing processes. This systematic review contributes to the ongoing dialogue in the semiconductor community, informing future research directions and advancements in the dynamic field of transistor technologies.

3. NANOSHEET TRANSISTORS

3.1 Introduction to Nanosheet Transistors

Nanosheet transistors herald a transformative era in semiconductor technology, offering a groundbreaking architecture to overcome challenges faced by traditional FinFETs as semiconductor dimensions approach atomic scales. Also known as Multi-Bridge Channel FETs (MBCFETs), nanosheet transistors introduce a horizontal design by stacking layers of nanosheets (Currie et al., 2021). Departing from the vertical FinFET concept, this shift aims to tackle leakage current and electrostatic control challenges at the nanoscale. The fundamental principles involve leveraging a horizontally oriented channel to enhance electrostatic control, reduce leakage current, and optimize performance. The unique features include superior gate control, addressing short-channel effects, and ensuring predictable and stable transistor performance as devices shrink. Additionally, nanosheet transistors exhibit enhanced electrostatic integrity, mitigating quantum tunneling effects and boosting charge carrier transport efficiency. These distinctive attributes position nanosheet transistors as compelling contenders for the next generation of semiconductor devices, offering higher transistor density and performance. Future advancements hinge on refining fabrication techniques and material considerations to unlock the full potential of this innovative transistor architecture.

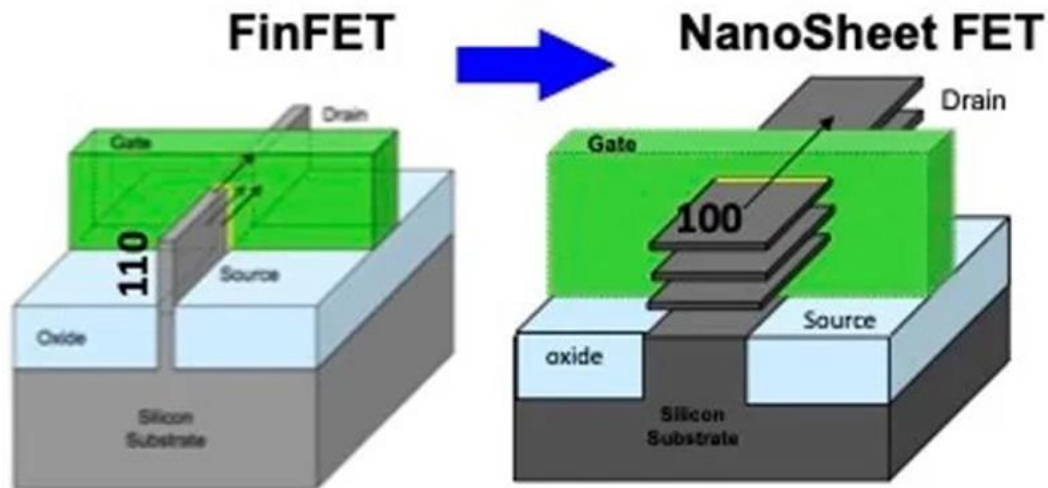


Figure 2: Nanosheet transistors are derived from finFET technology (Zhao et al., 2021)

3.2. Applications and Advantages

Nanosheet transistors, characterized by their innovative horizontal architecture, offer promising applications and advantages in semiconductor technology. In high-performance computing (HPC), studies by Yu et al. (2020) highlight nanosheet transistors' potential to deliver enhanced speed and computational power, making them suitable for scientific simulations, artificial intelligence, and data analytics. For low-power devices and the Internet of Things (IoT), nanosheet transistors, as demonstrated by Yu et al. (2020), exhibit reduced leakage current and improved gate control, making them ideal for energy-efficient electronics in IoT applications. In the realm of quantum computing, nanosheet transistors, according to Jena et al. (2017), show promise in addressing quantum tunneling effects, contributing to the stability and reliability of quantum bits (qubits). Moreover, as communication systems advance with 5G and beyond, nanosheet transistors, as indicated by Yu et al. (2021), offer improved performance and scalability for high-frequency applications, influencing the development of advanced communication devices.

Advantages of nanosheet transistors include superior electrostatic control, enabling effective gate control, as emphasized by Yu et al. (2020), leading to enhanced energy efficiency and operational reliability. They also offer improved performance characteristics, highlighted by Saurabh et al. (2021), contributing to higher transistor density and increased computational power. The inherent mitigation of short-channel effects in the horizontal configuration of nanosheet transistors, as discussed by Verhulst et al. (2021), ensures reliable transistor operation at smaller scales. Additionally, nanosheet transistors demonstrate compatibility with advanced semiconductor processes, as shown by Lin et al. (2016), ensuring their practical adoption in mainstream semiconductor manufacturing. These advantages position nanosheet transistors as key contributors to the ongoing evolution of semiconductor technology.

4. TUNNEL FETS

Tunnel Field-Effect Transistors (Tunnel FETs) represent a groundbreaking departure from traditional transistor architectures, leveraging quantum tunneling for charge carrier transport. Operating on the principle of quantum tunneling, Tunnel FETs overcome limitations in classical transistors as semiconductor technology advances into the nanoscale era. This unique mechanism allows Tunnel FETs to achieve sub-threshold swings below classical transistor limits, enhancing switching speed and overall performance (Jena et al., 2017). Notably, Tunnel FETs demonstrate potential for performance gains, outperforming traditional transistors in speed and efficiency, making them ideal for high-performance computing applications (Yu et al., 2019). Their inherent energy efficiency, operating at lower supply voltages, is advantageous for battery-powered devices and IoT applications. Research explores Tunnel FETs' applicability in diverse semiconductor scenarios, from extending battery life in portable devices to high-performance and quantum computing applications. As research in Tunnel FET technology advances, its transformative impact on semiconductors is poised to shape the future of electronic devices by unlocking new possibilities in energy-efficient and high-performance computing.

5. CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Nanosheet transistors and tunnel field-effect transistors (FETs) stand as forefront innovations in semiconductor technology, promising enhanced performance and energy efficiency. Yet, their implementation presents notable technological challenges. Fabrication precision is a primary concern; nanosheet transistors and tunnel FETs, exploring alternative materials and structures, demand meticulous control to ensure uniformity and reliability (Shin et al., 2021). Scalability poses a significant hurdle due to quantum effects at the nanoscale, necessitating new materials and design considerations. Integrating these technologies into existing semiconductor processes is crucial for cost efficiency, requiring careful strategies to harmonize with established manufacturing facilities.

Material challenges involve identifying nanoscale materials with desired properties and resilience to manufacturing processes. Power consumption and heat dissipation pose critical considerations, demanding effective thermal management for densely packed devices (Moon et al., 2019). Overcoming these challenges is essential for the successful integration of nanosheet transistors and tunnel FETs into mainstream semiconductor manufacturing, offering transformative potential for electronics and computing. Collaboration among researchers and industry professionals is paramount to address these hurdles and facilitate the widespread adoption of these advanced transistor technologies in future electronic devices, contributing to the evolution of computing capabilities.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

FinFET technology has been pivotal in semiconductor advancements, providing superior performance and scalability. However, as the pursuit of more efficient electronic devices continues, emerging transistor architectures like nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs challenge FinFET dominance. FinFET strengths include performance, scalability, and compatibility with existing processes (Roy et al., 2019). Weaknesses involve power consumption challenges and complex fabrication, with potential trade-offs in cost-effectiveness. Nanosheet transistors offer improved control and scalability but face challenges in complex fabrication and material selection. Tunnel FETs excel in low power consumption and potential subthreshold slope but encounter fabrication complexity and performance trade-offs (Lala et al., 2006). In conclusion, while FinFETs have been cornerstone technologies, emerging architectures present alternatives with unique strengths and challenges. The choice depends on specific application needs, manufacturing capabilities, and the industry's pursuit of performance, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness.

7. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The adoption of novel transistor architectures, such as nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs, in semiconductor design, has profound implications for the industry, influencing technology and device applications. These advancements offer the potential for significantly enhanced performance and efficiency in semiconductor devices. Nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs improve electron flow control and reduce power consumption, impacting various applications, from consumer electronics to data centers. The industry impact extends to the proliferation of Internet of Things (IoT) devices, driven by the improved energy efficiency and lower power operation of these novel transistor technologies. Nanosheet transistors, with their scalability and reduced power consumption, can contribute to creating smaller, more energy-efficient IoT devices. In the realm of mobile devices, the evolution towards novel transistor architectures is set to revolutionize the landscape. Nanosheet transistors, offering improved performance and reduced power consumption, present a pathway for developing smaller, more powerful, and energy-efficient smartphones and tablets. This transformation can lead to longer battery life and enhanced processing capabilities, influencing consumer preferences and driving innovation in the mobile technology sector.

The impact also extends to computing and data centers, where advanced transistor architectures can reshape the landscape. Technologies like Tunnel FETs, with low power consumption, may find applications in high-performance computing and data centers, leading to more sustainable and cost-effective data processing solutions.

Despite these promising prospects, it is essential to acknowledge challenges related to fabrication complexity, material issues, and integration into existing manufacturing processes. Addressing these challenges is crucial for a smooth transition and widespread adoption of these novel transistor architectures in the industry. The transformative impact of these technologies is poised to shape the future landscape of semiconductor

applications, influencing various sectors as the industry continues to innovate and refine these emerging technologies.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has provided valuable insights into the comparative analysis of FinFET technology and emerging transistor architectures, particularly nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs. FinFETs have been instrumental in advancing semiconductor design, offering improved performance and scalability. However, challenges related to power consumption and fabrication complexity necessitate careful consideration. Nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs represent the forefront of innovation, showcasing superior control over electron flow, enhanced scalability, and quantum tunneling for lower power consumption. Despite challenges in fabrication complexity and materials, these emerging architectures hold promise for overcoming traditional transistor limitations.

The potential industry impact of adopting these novel architectures is far-reaching, influencing energy efficiency in consumer electronics, IoT device proliferation, revolutionizing mobile technology, and enhancing data center efficiency. The transformative potential of nanosheet transistors and Tunnel FETs positions them as key contributors to the evolution of semiconductor applications. Looking forward, future research directions must focus on material innovation, exploring novel materials like graphene, advancing fabrication techniques through directed self-assembly, integrating with quantum technologies, and fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration. The investigation into biocompatible transistors for medical applications and incorporating energy harvesting mechanisms within transistor architectures can further push the boundaries of semiconductor technology.

As the industry evolves beyond FinFET technology, these research directions hold immense potential for addressing challenges and unlocking new possibilities. The collaboration between researchers, engineers, and industry stakeholders will be pivotal in realizing the promising future of semiconductor applications through the adoption of advanced transistor technologies. Future advancements in these directions can propel the semiconductor industry into unprecedented frontiers in electronics and computing.

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