

# Introduction to Photonic Quantum Chips for Communication Engineers

Analog Realizations and Operations for 6G Signal Processing

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## Abstract

Photonic integrated circuits (PICs) are revolutionizing communication engineering: From low-latency RF filters for 6G networks to parallel AI operations in data centers. \*\*6G standardization begins in 2025, with photonic components being the key to unlocking the terahertz (THz) frequency range for extremely high data rates [7].\*\* This introduction is based on current literature (2024–2025) and highlights analog realization principles (e.g., interference via MZI), preferred operations (matrix multiplication, signal filtering), and relevance for real-time communication. Practical: Table of techniques, outlook on hybrid systems. Sources: Reviews from Nature, SPIE, and ScienceDirect. \*\*Current research (EPFL/Harvard) has introduced a revolutionary optoelectronic chip that processes THz and optical signals on a single processor [8].\*\*

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# 1 Basics: Photonic Chips in Communication Engineering

Photonic quantum chips use light waves for highly parallel, energy-efficient processing – essential for 6G (bandwidths  $> 100$  GHz, latency  $< 1$  ms). \*\*The European Commission has announced the start of 6G standardization for 2025, with a focus on sovereignty and a leading technology position [7]. Additionally, 2025 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology (IYQ), underscoring the strategic importance of photonics [6].\*\* In contrast to electronic CMOS chips (heat limits at high frequencies), PICs enable analog signal processing through optical interference and modulation, drawing on classical analog optics (e.g., from 1980s RF technology).

**Important Note:** Important Note: The technology is strongly analog: Continuous wave transformations (phase shifts, diffraction) dominate, as photons are intrinsically parallel (wavelength multiplexing) and low-latency. Hybrid systems (photonics + electronics) complement for control.

Current trends (2025): Scalable wafers (e.g., 6-inch TFLN) for industrial deployments in data centers, with  $1000\times$  speedup for AI workloads [3, ?].

## 2 Realization of Operations: Analog Principles

Operations are primarily realized through optical components that prioritize analog processing. Core components:

- **Mach-Zehnder Interferometer (MZI):** For phase modulation and linear transformations; analog addition/multiplication via interference.
- **Waveguides and Modulators:** Electro-optical (e.g., LiNbO<sub>3</sub>) or thermal control for continuous signals.
- **Monolithic Integration:** Co-packaging on Si or TFLN platforms minimizes losses ( $< 1$  dB), enables dynamic reconfiguration.

The technology draws on analog RF systems: Instead of discrete bits, continuous wave fields for real-time filtering (e.g., demodulation in 6G) [1].

**Key Formula:** Example: Linear transformation (matrix-vector multiplication) via MZI mesh:  $y = M \cdot x$ , where  $M$  is programmed by phases  $\phi_i$ :  $\phi_i = \arg(M_{ij})$ .

## 3 Preferred Operations for Photonic Components

Photonic chips are suited for linear, frequency-dependent, and parallel operations, as analog continuity saves energy (pJ/bit) and maximizes bandwidth. Based on 2025 reviews:

Not preferred: Non-linear logic (e.g., AND/OR), as photons are linear; hybrids required here.

| Operation                    | Realization (analog)   | Relevance for Communication Engineering                                 |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Matrix Multiplication (GEMM) | MZI arrays for interference-based addition/multiplication          | AI training in edge networks (e.g., Transformers for 6G routing) [3]    |
| RF Signal Filtering          | Optical diffraction/FFT via waveguides                             | Demodulation, BSS in 5G/6G (bandwidth > 100 GHz) [10]                   |
| Recurrent Processing         | Programmed photonic circuits (PPCs) for sequential transformations | Real-time monitoring in networks (e.g., RNNs for anomaly detection) [2] |
| Differential Operations      | Meta-optics for gradients (e.g., edge detection)                   | Image/signal enhancement in optical networks [4]                        |
| Parallel Optimization        | Correlation via coherent PICs                                      | Gradient descent for routing optimization [5]                           |

Table 1: Preferred Operations on Photonic Chips – Focus on Analog Techniques

## 4 Literature Review: Current Developments (2024–2025)

Based on the latest reviews (open access) and current projects:

- **Analog optical computing: principles, progress, and prospects (2025):** Overview of analog PICs; advances in reconfigurable designs for real-time signals [1].
- **Integrated Terahertz Communication:** A revolutionary optoelectronic processor (EPFL/Harvard, 2025) integrates the processing of **terahertz waves** and optical signals on a chip. This breakthrough is crucial for 6G, as it enables high performance without significant energy loss and is compatible with existing photonic technologies [8].
- **Integrated Photonics for 6G Research:** Projects like **6G-ADLANTIK** and **6G-RIC** (Fraunhofer HHI) develop photonic-electronic integration components to unlock the THz frequency range for 6G and improve network resilience (SUSTAINET) [9].
- **Integrated photonic recurrent processors (2025):** Recurrent operations via PPCs; applications in sequential processing (e.g., network monitoring) [2].
- **Photonics for sustainable AI (2025):** GEMM as core for AI; photonic advantages for energy-poor 6G inference [3].
- **All-optical analog differential operation... (2025):** Meta-optics for differential computing; ideal for signal enhancement [4].
- **Harnessing optical advantages in computing: a review (2024):** Parallel advantages; focus on FFT and correlation for RF [5].

These sources emphasize the shift to analog hybrids for 6G: From prototypes to scalable wafers.

## 5 Outlook: Photonics in 6G Networks

Photonic chips enable low-latency, scalable communication: E.g., optical BSS for multi-user MIMO in 6G. Challenges: Minimize losses (via InAs QDs). Future: Fully integrated PICs for edge computing in base stations. \*\*Fraunhofer HHI already offers application-specific PICs on the silicon nitride (SiN) platform, which are also used in biosciences and sensing [9].\*\*

## References

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