NVQuery: Efficient Query Processing in Non-Volatile Memory

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Abstract-Today's computing systems use huge amount of energy and time to process basic queries in database. A large part of it is spent in data movement between the memory and processing cores, owing to the limited cache capacity and memory bandwidth of traditional computers. In this paper, we propose a non-volatile memory-based query accelerator, called NVQuery, which performs several basic query functions in memory including aggregation, prediction, bit-wise operations, join operations, as well as exact and nearest distance search queries. NVOuerv is implemented on a content addressable memory (CAM) and exploits the analog characteristic of nonvolatile memory in order to enable in-memory processing. To implement nearest distance search in memory, we introduce a novel bitline driving scheme to give weights to the indices of the bits during the search operation. To further improve the energy efficiency, our design supports configurable approximation by adaptively putting memory blocks under voltage overscaling. Our experimental evaluation shows that, NVQuery can provide 49.3× performance speedup and $32.9 \times$ energy savings as compared to running the same query on traditional processor. Approximation improves the energy-delay product of NVQuery by $7.3 \times$, while providing acceptable accuracy. In addition, NVQuery can achieve 30.1× energy-delay product improvement as compared to the state-of-the-art query accelerators.

Index Terms—Query processing, Non-volatile memory, Inmemory computing, Content addressable memory

I. INTRODUCTION

Data management systems (DMS) are the standard tools for collecting and serving large amounts of information for web applications and end users. Over the past decade, data generation has grown exponentially due the diversity of collection sources [1]–[3]. In addition, organizations collect large amounts of information for decision making and business analytics [4]–[6]. In the majority of scenarios, the execution time of DMS queries tends to increase linearly and sometimes exponentially as more records are stored in a single server instance. This has been one of the main challenges of DMS and its caused by the the hardware and software co-design limitations [7].

Several efforts have been made to accelerate computation by paralleling operations on a co-processor or GPUs [8]– [14]. However, in most cases data movement has been a bottleneck due to the fact that large amounts of information tend to reside in memory. In most Structured Query Language

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(SQL) accelerator studies, this data overhead is not taken into account and as a consequence their results do not show a valuable improvement over general designs [15]. On the other hand, software have been developed to adapt to the nature of particular tasks. In the case of interactive data analysis, the focus is often less on exactness of the result and more on timeliness or responsiveness, which gives us the opportunity to approximate the result within a margin of error [7]. Data movement is the main bottleneck of current computing systems wherein the size of data increases over the cache capacity of the processing core [16]. Limited memory bandwidth makes the condition worse as data is delayed each time the main memory is accessed.

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Near data computing and processing in-memory (PIM) are two efficient techniques which reduce the cost of data movement [17]–[23]. Near-data computing puts the computing units close to the main memory, in order to avoid data movement cost in computation [24], [25]. Although this technique improves the computation efficiency, it has some challenges including: (i) cost of large CMOS-based computing unit and (ii) cost of integrating the memory and logic in a single chip. The introduction of non-volatile memories has made it possible to process data in the memory itself [26]-[32], resulting in the concept of PIM [17], [19], [33]. Resistive RAM (ReRAM) is one such memory, which enjoys the benefit of low energy, high switching speeds, high density, and scalability. PIM processes data within memory, eliminating the need for integration between large processing cores and the memory. However, the existing PIM techniques support only simple functions like bit-wise or search operations [34], [35]. Not only it is too cumbersome to break down a simple query function like search into a series of bit-wise computations but it also minimizes the benefits of using PIM.

This paper implements an efficient PIM-based query processor which supports a wide range of query functions. We propose a novel non-volatile, memory-based query processing accelerator, called NVQuery. NVQuery supports wide range of query functionalities including aggregation functions, prediction functions, bit-wise operations, addition, joins, exact and nearest distance search operation. The configurable crossbar memory structure of our design supports these functionalities inside the memory. It exploits the analog characteristic of non-volatile memory to also enable the nearest distance search capability. The exact search mode enables NVQuery to realize join operations. Our experimental evaluation shows that, NVQuery can provide $49.3 \times$ performance speedup and $32.9 \times$ energy savings as compared to running the same query on traditional processor. Approximation improves the energy-delay product of NVQuery by $7.3\times$, while providing acceptable accuracy. In addition, NVQuery can achieve $30.1\times$ energy-delay product improvement as compared to the state-of-the-art query accelerators.

II. RELATED WORK

A. Query Processing

Several efforts have been made in order to accelerate DMS querying by using specialized hardware [8], [36]–[38]. GPUs in particular have been used to parallelize the 'SELECT' SQL queries with results that range from 20x to 70x speed up [8]. However, they do not take into consideration the data movement overhead of these tasks and assume only the computation cost. It has been demonstrated that the bandwidth and cache capacity of GPU devices are the main bottlenecks of database computations. For instance, work in [36] examines multiple GPU systems and acknowledges that unless the full working set of data can fit into the memory on a GPU, PCI Express bus will be a bottleneck.

As a consequence, researchers have worked on optimizing the data movement through memory. In the areas of distributed computation, Al-Kiswany et al. describe StoreGPU, a distributed storage system that uses pinned, non-pageable memory on the host system to reduce the impact of data transfer [39]. Gelado et al. in [40] introduce an asymmetric distributed shared memory that defines two types of memory updates which determine when to move data on and off the GPU. These optimization efforts only focus on conventional memory technologies. The computation still occurs on computing units. A query service by Google called, BigQuery is capable of searching through petabytes of data [41]. The latency is minimized by paralleling queries over multiple servers and columnar storage of data over multiple memories or memory banks. However, this distribution of queries and data results in huge energy requirements. Also, it does not support data manipulation queries and has large latency overhead for updating data.

On the other hand, the work in [42] uses analog characteristic of non-volatile memory and analog to digital converter (ADC) to enable query processing in-memory. However, prior work showed that ADC are taking large portion of memory energy and area [19]. Also, it utilizes multi-level memristors which are highly unreliable and restrict the size of numbers that can be stored in each memory cell. Each attribute in the paper is a 32-bit integer, which is practically not feasible with the type of RRAM device used.

Our paper adds support for a wide range of functions to extend the capabilities of NVQuery. We further introduce approximation techniques to improve the performance and energy efficiency of NVQuery.

B. SQL Optimization

Approximating the results of SQL query can be used to reduce the required waiting time by producing results within acceptable error bounds. The most famous querying framework based on approximation is sampling-based approximate querying (SAQ) [43], [44], where the computation is performed over a small random subset of the data. The error in the estimate is specified using a confidence interval or error bars. However, SAQ ignores the tails of the data that cannot help with complex queries. Poti *et al.* [7] proposes deterministic approximate querying (DAQ) schemes that formalize a deterministic approach to approximate the results by taking advantage of the bit value representations. Their approach reads the table records, starting from the most significant bit, one by one and adjust deterministic error bounds with respect to the bits not seen yet. DAQ evaluations estimates less than 1% error with a speedup of 6x for SQL predicate queries and 2-4x for aggregation.

SQL supports many operations to make the processing of queries easier. Out of these, join is considered to be one of the most important operation. Join splits data into tables, saving memory space by removing the redundancy associated with one monolithic table. Thus, it is one of the most basic operation, with considerable cost because of the sheer amount of data being read from storage. The efficiency of join operation is one of the most fundamental concepts of relational databases. Recent years have seen many papers that deal with the worst case scenario speedup for joins [45], [46]. Innovative techniques for different distributed systems [4], [47] show the need to improve the efficiency of join operation in databases.

Software based optimization for joins using dynamic and greedy algorithms have looked into SMP based multi-joins [48]. While this tackles the problem by building an analytical model, it does not optimize the core join operation for the general use case. Join optimizations for MapReduce environment give promising results for some cases of big data joins [49], [50]. It tries to reduce the communication, but still suffers from the lack of core join optimization. NVQuery can potentially be used to optimize and accelerate all such methods as it works directly in memory.

III. NVQUERY ACCELERATOR

Fig. 1 shows the general architecture of the proposed NVQuery. The proposed NVQuery integrates with DRAM and enables the main processor to accelerate query processing. NVQuery can also be used as a secondary storage to improve the effective DRAM capacity. NVQuery consists of N banks, where each has k memory blocks. Each memory block can be configured as memory or query accelerator.

Our design is a heterogeneous architecture, where the NV-Query co-operates with main processor in order to find the query result. In NVQuery, each memory block returns a result of the query, independent from other blocks. Therefore, to find the result of a query from the whole data set, the main processor receives output response of each memory block (a total of $N \times k$ values instead of the entire data). Finally, it processes data to find the result of query over the entire data set. In this way, the load on memory bandwidth due to query processing and its related costs are significantly reduced. Table I lists different configurations that NVQuery can take including: nearest search, search, and memory. For each of This article has been accepted for publication in a future issue of this journal, but has not been fully edited. Content may change prior to final publication. Citation information: DOI 10.1109/TCAD.2018.2819080, IEEE Transactions on Computer-Aided Design of Integrated Circuits and Systems

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Fig. 1. Proposed NVQuery architecture with N banks and $k \times N$ blocks. The right part details the crossbar implementation of memory banks along with the supporting control logic.

Configuration	Example Functions	CAM Input	CAM SA	Memory SA	Comment
	MIN	Least	Nearest	NA	L: Least possible value
Nearest Search	MAX Greatest Nearest NA G: C		G: Greatest possible value		
	ТОР К	IQ (FIFO)	Nearest	NA	Requires k iterations
Search	Exact Search	IQ (FIFO)	Exact	NA	IQ: Input query
	Bitwise	NA	NA	AND/OR	CAM input: Bitline driver
Memory	Memory	NA	NA	MEM	CAM input: Bitline driver
	Addition	NA	NA	MAJ	CAM input: Bitline driver

TABLE I NVQUERY SUPPORTED CONFIGURATIONS

TABLE II NVQUERY SUPPORTED FUNCTIONALITY

Notation		Functions		
Aggregation	$F(S_I) \rightarrow S_O$	MIN, MAX, Average, Count		
Bit-wise Operations	$F(S_I) \rightarrow S_O$	AND, OR, XOR (Combination of AND, OR)		
Addition $F(S_I) \rightarrow S_O$		In-memory addition		
Comparison	$= \leq \geq$	Bit-wise and value-wise comparison		
Predict	р	Exist, Search condition, Top, Like, Group, Between		
Join	$\bowtie, \bowtie, \bowtie, \bowtie, \bowtie \ldots$	Inner, Left, Right, Outer, Semi joins		

the configurations, we show the status of different memory peripherals for some example functions. In this section, we describe the functions supported by our proposed non-volatile query processor, NVQuery. Table II lists the NVQuery support functionalities. NVQuery supports a large number of essential functions including aggregation (MIN, MAX, Average, SUM, and Count), boolean functions (such as AND, OR), addition, comparison (equality or non-equality), and different types of Join. In addition, NVQuery can also process prediction functions such as Exist, Search Condition, Like, Group, Between, and Top in memory.

We map all query functionalities explained in Table I to NVQuery which can work in three main configurations: (i) look-up table (LUT) with capability of exact search, (ii) nearest distance search, and (iii) memory. We propose a new memory architecture which can process data locally without reading it. In each of these configurations, our design shown in Fig. 1 processes query operations without approximating the result. In the following subsections, we explain how each query operation can be supported in memory.

A. Exact Search

The most common operation in many query processors is looking up for a set of data which matches with input query. A typical search query involves a brute-force search through a LUT till the data is located. This is usually implemented in one of the two ways, (i) word-by-word search and (ii) bit-bybit search. A word-by-word search looks through every stored word in the LUT sequentially and finds a match. In the worst case, it involves processing each and every element present in the LUT. The bit-by-bit search scans through one bit (but same index) for multiple words at a time. The first iteration analyses a particular bit index of every word in the LUT, looking for a match with the corresponding entry in the input query. The following iterations are performed only on the words filtered by previous iterations. This approach does not analyze all the elements since the size of candidate pool decreases after each iteration. The exact search operation supports the following functions in NVOuerv:

Exist: It is used to test the existence of some specific data in the LUT. The exact search can be directly used to implement this function.

Count: It is used to get the number of rows that match a certain criteria. The Count output can be obtained by

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counting the number of hits for an exact search query. Our design adds a counter block to NVQuery in order to support this query.

Like: It is used to find the existence of a specific data or pattern of data in the rows. It involves searching for occurrence at (i) a particular position and (ii) any position. The first case can be easily implemented using the exact search mode in the same way as the Exist function. The second case requires repeated use of exact search mode for all the occurrence patterns possible. This comes with an inherent latency overhead due to multiple serial exact searches.

Group by: It is used to group the rows on the basis of one or more columns. The grouping is usually based on the output of some operation applied to the data in the column. Multiple serial exact searches are used to find the rows belonging to different groups.

B. Nearest Distance Search

NVQuery can be configured to perform the closest distance search operation inside the memory. The bit-by-bit search described above can be used to implement this functionality. Here, the nearest data is the one which remains selected for the maximum number of iterations. Our design exploits this functionality to support aggregation functions like MIN and MAX and prediction functions like Top k. Running these queries on traditional core has a time complexity of $O(\log n)$. However, our hardware can find MIN, MAX queries in a single cycle and Top k in k cycles.

MIN: This query runs on a set of stored data to find the minimum value. To perform this query in LUT, NVQuery block adopts the nearest distance search configuration and searches for the data which has the closest distance to the minimum possible value. In case of unsigned numbers, our design searches for an entry which has the closest distance to zero. In the case of signed values, this number is the largest possible negative number (single one followed by a chain of zeros, i.e., 1000...0).

MAX: To find the data with the maximum value, we search for the entry which has the least distance from the largest positive number. For unsigned values, the largest value is a chain of ones (1111...1), while in the case of signed numbers, this value is represented by a zero followed by a chain of ones (0111...1).

Top k: To search for k values closest to the input data, we perform the nearest distance search for k iterations. After each iteration, our design deactivates the selected word and repeats the nearest distance search on the remaining words. This approach gives a set of k nearest values arranged in the order of their proximity to the input. Our design also supports bit-wise/value-wise comparison by searching for the exact and nearest values.

Between: This operator takes in two inputs, the lower and upper limits, and outputs those values from the stored data which are equal to or between these limits. Traditional implementations of this function involve a lot of computational overhead, comparing each value with the limits. The nearest distance search proposed above enables efficient implementation of this operator. Instead of finding the values nearest to the upper and lower limits, we find the values nearest to the midpoint of the total range. Then the values are sorted as explained in Section IV-B. NVQuery compares the values with the input limits and selects the entries which lie between them. Instead of naively searching through the data, NVQuery uses binary search to find the corner cases and reduce the computational overhead.

C. Join

NVQuery supports different types of joins namely, inner, left, and right joins. Our implementation is similar to in-memory hash joins, but more efficient due to NVM-based PIM. Ideal implementation of join would involve fetching the data from memory to the core and searching through the involved tables. Although, optimizations like hash join reduce the amount of data to be transferred yet the cost of data movement is a lot. NVQuery reduces this overhead by reducing searching for keys inside the memory itself. The exact search discussed earlier is used to implement joins.

Equi joins involve searching for exact match of the join key through the tables. Exact search mode can be easily extended to implement different kinds of *equi* joins, enabling the records that are needed for the final join computation. Memory read bus along the columns of a table is used to read the desired columns of the rows with matching data. The read data is copied to the memory location pertaining to the final join output. Limited 4K row capacity forces the implementation to break the table into multiple 4K slices or blocks, this does not affect the computational complexity of the implementation and the impact on execution time is also minimal. A choice between a block or slice is made based on the query and size of the input.

NVQuery is flexible enough to cater to any combination of columns to implement different types of joins like inner, left, and right joins. Multi joins are implemented by saving the temporary result of two table joins and iteratively applying joins to that.

Different SQL implementations use a combination of nested loop, merge and hash joins. Execution complexity of these methods vary based on availability of index on the join property. The worst case complexities are O(NM), O(MlogN + NlogM) and O(N + M) respectively, where N,M are the table sizes. NVQuery's worst case execution complexity is equivalent to hash joins, though it does not require explicit hashing of the join key like hash joins do.

D. Bit-wise Operations and Addition

A traditional processor implements bit-wise logic operations in the main core. The operands are fetched from the main memory and brought through the memory hierarchy all the way up to the core. The core then performs the required computations. On the other hand, our design implements these operations in the memory, avoiding the need to transfer data from memory. For executing these operations, NVQuery is set into memory configuration and the output is obtained from memory SA. This operation can support the following queries: AND, OR, XOR and Average. Our design supports

This article has been accepted for publication in a future issue of this journal, but has not been fully edited. Content may change prior to final publication. Citation information: DOI 10.1109/TCAD.2018.2819080, IEEE Transactions on Computer-Aided Design of Integrated Circuits and Systems

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Fig. 2. Circuit level implementation of CAM SA, Memory SA, and Row Driver.

average query by using a counter and sending the data to main processor.

IV. HARDWARE SUPPORT

This section describes the hardware implementation of NVQuery and the way in which it supports the functions described in Section III. NVQuery is designed using a crossbar non-volatile memory architecture. The crossbar is configured in such a way that a set of two storage elements in the crossbar corresponds to one bit data. Data 0 is stored as $\{R_{HIGH} \ R_{LOW}\}$, while 1 is stored as $\{R_{LOW} \ R_{HIGH}\}$. However, our architecture does not use any access transistors for these elements, hence it is called 0T-2R. Implementations like 2T-2R require access transistors. This makes the design unsuitable for a crossbar memory, reducing the area density benefit of non-volatile memories. Moreover, the presence of transistors introduces non-linearity to the system. On the other hand, 0T-2R doesn't need access transistors and can be implemented on a conventional crossbar memory, making it more area efficient.

As shown in Fig. 1, the crossbar memory in NVQuery is supported by peripheral components. The controller receives the input query and generates the appropriate control signals. It is also responsible for collecting the output of the block and forwarding it for further processing. The multiplexer managed by the controller, selects the input which drives the bitlines of the crossbar memory. This input can either be the input query (in case of search operations) or greatest positive value (corresponding to MAX) or least representable value (corresponding to MIN). The column driver drives the bitlines of the crossbar. It not only applies the execution voltages for different operations but also maps the input query to the required bitline voltage levels. Row driver is responsible for charging the wordlines (also called matchlines due to the nature of operations). It is also responsible for selecting/activating different words (rows) in the memory. It also provides a limited set of voltage options essential to the working of crossbar. The crossbar is equipped with sense amplifiers (SAs) on both the wordlines (CAM SA) and the

bitlines (memory SA). Fig. 2 shows these SAs. The CAM SAs are responsible for detecting charging and discharging behavior of wordlines. The nMOS-capacitor circuit acts as a latch. The inverter-diode-NOR circuit deactivates the wordlines as soon as the first edge is detected or the sampling signal for *Exact* is set. As a result, the latch is set only for the wordlines which discharge before this deactivation. The memory SAs are buffers with special resistors to support bit-wise and memory operations as described in Section IV-C. We next discuss how NVQuery enables different functions discussed in Section III.

A. Exact Search

To implement the LUTs discussed in Section III-A, NV-Query uses content addressable memory (CAM) configuration of crossbar. Fig. 2 shows the structure of non-volatile crossbar CAM, capable of searching for stored data which exactly matches the input query. During search operation, all the match-lines (MLs) pre-charge to V_{dd} . The input buffer (column driver) distributes the query point to all CAM rows using vertical bitline. Any cell with the same stored data as input query discharges the ML. The sense amplifier, connected to the horizontal ML, determines the equality of the input and stored data by sampling the ML voltage [51].

Consider a data set which contains the name, age, height, and income of people in different companies. The query SELECT F(income) FROM COMPANY1 is an example of SQL query. For this query, a query processor first selects all people in the list which are working for the COMPANY1. Then it applies another query function, F, on the income of all selected people. NVQuery eliminates the need for multiple sequential searches. It can perform a single step search by activating the bitlines corresponding to COMPANY1 and income simultaneously. The output of the query is given by the rows with fastest discharging MLs. This not only saves time by eliminating multiple searches but also the power involved in repeated charging and discharging of MLs. Each memory block/LUT returns an output to the controller. Finally,

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Fig. 3. NVQuery in nearest distance search configuration.



Fig. 4. Timing characteristic of CAM block in nearest distance search configurations.

the output data from each block is processed by the main processor which evaluates the final query result.

B. Nearest Distance Search

CAM has been extensively used to implement search operations. Different versions of CAM implementations (*e.g.* TCAM) on different types of hardware (crossbar, 2T-2R, 3T-1R, *etc.*) have been active topics of research recently. However, majority of the previous work revolves around exact and nearest hamming distance search operations. Hamming distance is a good criterion when considering hyper-dimensional vectors where the index of a bit does not matter. Only the face value of a bit and the total number of mismatches between the stored data and the input query are considered. Such a comparison is not practical for many real life applications where a query to the processor is dependent on the binary weighted values of the stored data.

To support such queries, some researchers have proposed the division of a memory block into stages [52]. In such an architecture, the first m most significant bits of data are stored in the first stage, the next m significant bits in the second stage and so on. Then, a search is performed sequentially, starting from the first stage. The output of a stage selects the rows to be activated in the following stage. This increases the weight of the initial stages with respect to the later stages. However, the m bits in a stage are treated as having the same binary weight. This leads to inaccurate results in many cases. In this work, we address this issue by introducing a new method to assign binary weights to the bits within a stage.

For a search in conventional CAM, the match-lines (MLs) are pre-charged to V_{dd} and then bitlines are driven with V_{dd}

or 0 depending upon the input query. The MLs of rows with more number of matches discharge earlier. The line to discharge first is the one with minimum mismatch with the input query. To give binary weight to the bits, we modify the bitline driving voltage. Suppose a stage contains *m* bits (m-1:0). The bitlines which were earlier driven with V_{dd} and now driven with a voltage $V_i = V_{dd}/2^{(m-1-i)}$ where *i* denotes the index of a bit in the stage. Fig. 3 shows CAM in nearest search configuration for a stage size of 4 bits. As shown in Fig. 4, a match in the most significant bit results in faster ML discharging current than lower indices. We exploit this difference and design a CAM which can find the binary value nearest to the input query.

The different discharging currents also allow us to sort the data, with the nearest data discharging first. This sorting is easy for a smaller number of records. However, as the number of records increase, it becomes difficult to differentiate data depending upon the discharging currents. In such a case, nearest search is implemented in groups with limited rows selected at a time.

Now, as the number of bits increases, the bitline voltage V_i becomes very small. We limit the minimum available voltage source output to 100mV. Moreover, the maximum voltage that can be applied is limited by the threshold voltage of the non-volatile elements. This ensures that the data in the memory is preserved. This upper bound is set to 1.8V. Hence, the allowable voltage levels include 0.1V, 0.2V, 0.4V, 0.8V and 1.6V, restricting the stage size to 5 bits. In this work, we split the CAM into multiple stages of 4-bits each for simplicity and then search for the nearest distance row in a serial manner, starting with the stage containing the most significant bits.

C. Bit-wise Operation and Addition

Although a search based CAM can accelerate several functionalities in NVQuery, it cannot support a major part of queries such as addition, average, and all bit-wise operations. In order to make NVQuery a general design for query processing accelerator, we modify the sense amplifiers in the vertical bitlines to support bit-wise operations. Fig. 2 shows the sense amplifier in a single NVQuery bitline to support bit-wise operations. In this mode, each block works as memory instead of CAM, where one of the vertical bitlines in each CAM cell is activated. The tail of the shared bit-line is connected to a sense amplifier. Since our design supports AND and OR functions, the sense amplifier has two main parts: one for AND operation and a simple sense amplifier to support OR. These circuits work on the basis of the leakage current through the vertical bitline. When several rows in memory are active, each row leaks current through vertical bitlines depending upon the resistance value. If the stored bit is 1 (low resistance), this current is large, while in the case of 0, leakage is significantly small. The goal of OR operation is to identify the presence of at least one high (1) bit in all activated rows. Therefore, we use a sense resistor, $R_>0$, such that in the case of at least single high bit, it turns the output signal to one. However, for AND operation the goal is to find a case such that at least one input is not 1. In that case, the AND circuitry uses an appropriate sense resistance.

TABLE III Approximation in 16-Bit Addition

Approximated Bits	4	8	12	14	16
Error (%)	0.006	0.098	1.56	6.25	25
Energy (pJ)	3.52	2.41	1.3	0.75	0.197
Latency (ns)	182	133	84.7	60.5	36.3

Interestingly, prior work shows that crossbar memory can further support addition within the memory [53], [54]. This approach breaks down an operation into a series of NOR operations. The logic family used in the paper executes NOR in crossbar memory with a latency of just 1 cycle. This functionality is supported by NVQuery due to its regular structure (unlike CAMs with access transistors), enabling it to perform data computations within memory. In the case when approximate results are acceptable, the sense amplifier at the bitlines can be used to improve the performance of NVQuery. The truth table for 1-bit full adder shows that the sum bit (S) can be obtained by inversion of the carry bit (C) in 75% of the cases. The sense amplifier calculates C (majority) in one step by simply using an appropriate sense resistance. S is obtained by inverting C. This introduces a worst case error of 25%. However, this error is reduced significantly by approximating only some LSBs depending upon the level of accuracy desired. The MSBs are calculated accurately using the techniques described in [53]. Table III shows the error corresponding to different number of approximated bits for an 8-bit addition. By calculating the carry bit correctly, the proposed approximation approach limits the effect of an error to one bit and does not propagate it.

Addition is extended to implement average function. The output of successive additions is sent to the processor, where the average is obtained by bit-shifting or simple division.

V. APPROXIMATION IN NVQUERY

In most cases, a query does not require a unique or completely precise answer. Instead, it requires a fast result with good enough accuracy. Approximate computing is an effective way of improving the energy and performance by trading some accuracy. Much of the prior work seeks to exploit this fact in order to build faster and more energy efficient systems which are capable of responding to our needs with just good enough quality of response [52], [55], [56]. However, most of the existing techniques provide less energy or performance efficiency due to considerable data movement and lack of configurable accuracy.

NVQuery can work in both exact and approximate mode. Approximate mode provides the advantage of better metrics, both in terms of latency and power consumption. However, this comes at the cost of loss in accuracy. Here, we investigate two ways of approximation: (i) bit trimming and (ii) voltage scaling.

A. Bit Trimming

One common way to apply approximation in query search is trimming or neglecting bits. Our design neglects few least

TABLE IV NVQUERY APPROXIMATION AT DIFFERENT SUPPLY VOLTAGES

Voltage	1V	0.87V	0.8V	0.74V	0.7V	0.67V
Errors bits	0	1	2	3	4	5
Norm. Energy	1	0.68	0.39	0.22	0.17	0.11

significant bits of input data in order to accelerate the query functionality. For other bits, NVQuery performs the search serially on the blocks, starting from the most significant bits. The level of approximation is tuned by determining the number of neglected blocks. The upper and lower computation bounds are defined by the number of cut bits. For each input in query, the lower bound is defined by all trimmed bits being zero while the upper bound by all trimmed bits being one.

$$L_V < V < U_V$$
$$U_V - L_V = 2^K - 1$$

Where V is the exact value of V, and L_V and U_V are the lower and upper bounds respectively when the last k bits are trimmed. Therefore, our design guarantees that the NVQuery error rate on aggregation functions, (Minimum, Maximum, Average, Mean, etc.) is

$$Error_{Ouerv} < 2^{M-K} - 1$$

where M is the total number of bits.

For a 5-bit CAM stage with a nominal V_{dd} of 1.6V, $V_i = \{0.1V, 0.2V, 0.4V, 0.8V, 1.6V\}$ for $i = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$. This leads to an effective difference of $\{1.5V, 1.4V, 1.2V, 0.8V, 0V\}$ between ML and the bitline. If the lower bits in a block are approximated to have the same weight, then the required number of voltage levels can be reduced. However, the voltage levels for the non-approximated bits should be chosen such that

$$V_{i} = \begin{cases} (k+1) \times 0.1V, & i = k \\ 2 \times V_{i}, & i > k \end{cases}$$
(1)

where k is the number of approximated bits. This ensures that the effective weight of the approximated bits is at least 1 LSB (0.1V) less than the first accurate significant bit. For example, if the lower 2 bits are approximated to have the same weight, then the required voltages are $\{0.1V, 0.1V, 0.3V, 0.6V, 1.2V\}$. This further reduces the required V_{dd} for ML, reducing the total energy requirement of the computation.

B. Voltage Scaling

In NVQuery, approximation is done by applying voltage overscaling (VoS) on selective CAM blocks [14]. While CAM works without any error with nominal V_{dd} , lower supply voltages increase the possibility of error on CAM matching and memory functionality. Table IV lists the possible errors for each CAM block at different supply voltages. For instance, a 6-bit CAM block at 870mV supply voltage can match the input query with stored data with a single bit mismatch. Similarly, at 800mV and 740mV, the CAM block can search for data with 2-bit and 3-bit Hamming distance respectively from the input key.



Fig. 5. Energy consumption and performance of running join operations with different table sizes on traditional cores and the proposed NVQuery.

Our design puts the blocks in different approximation levels based on their impact on approximation. For instance, if the i^{th} block is configured with *h*-bit error, the $i - 1^{th}$ block needs to have h/2-bit error. Generally, when the goal is to allow *K* bit error, we can estimate the error distance of each bit as follows:

$$h = K/(1 + 1/2 + 1/4 + \dots + 1/2^N)$$

Comparing these two ways of applying approximation shows that voltage overscaling can provide much higher advantage as compared to bit ignoring. In bit ignoring, the energy saving and speedup limits to a few bits which we neglected processing them. For example, in 6-bit CAM, trimming 2-bit, will give us 2/6 = 33% energy savings.

VI. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

A. Experimental setup

For detailed evaluation of the proposed NVOuery, we run circuit-level simulations in HSPICE with 45nm TSMC technology. We use VTEAM [57] model of memristors with I_{ON}/I_{OFF} ratio of 10³ for non-volatile memory crossbar design. We develop software-based cycle-accurate simulator (based on C++) which emulates the functionality of the designed NVQuery. This allows us to speed up the simulation time significantly and verify the proposed design with diverse practical data sets. The simulator has accurate models of the hardware, e.g., time and power extracted from the circuit-level simulation to evaluate the efficiency of the proposed design. We compare NVQuery performance and energy efficiency with state-of-the-art query processing approaches running on the same technology node. We evaluate two popular approaches, sampling-based approximate querying (SAQ) [44] and deterministic approximate querying (DAQ) [7] on Intel i7 7600 CPU with 8GB memory. For measurement of the processor

power, we use Hioki 3334 power meter. We use a dataset consisting a table of Census of 10 million tuples using 32bit unsigned integers to compare the efficiency of different techniques. This data is popularly used to model populations of various types ranging from cities and organizations to word frequencies in natural language corpora. The SQL server contains a single table with one 10GB column of randomly generated records. In the rest of the paper, power and performance results have been reported for 1000 queries from aggregation and prediction functions over five randomly generated datasets. Join operation uses a different dataset, as the previously described dataset is not ideal for join based operations (need more than one column for join). Dataset includes 6 columned tables, randomly populated. Size of the table ranges from 2^2 to 2^{17} . The upper limit on the size is a function of the maximum datasheet size in MS Excel (2^{20}) and realistic join compute times.

B. NVQuery Efficiency

Here we highlight the advantage that NVQuery can provide in computing each query function. Table V compares the energy savings and performance speedup of running different queries on proposed NVQuery as compared to a digital ASIC design. Each energy is reported when 10 queries run on 1k dataset. The selected dataset is small so that the reported values compare the computation energy without data movement cost. The digital system is designed using System Verilog in 45nm ASIC flow. The result shows that NVQuery improves the computation cost of all queries significantly. Specifically, queries such as MAX, MIN and/or TOP k can be processed in a single cycle, instead of processing in O(n) or O(logn)time. Our evaluation shows that our design can provide $11.8\times$ energy improvement and 26.85× performance speedup on average compared to digital approach for nearest distance searchbased queries. Similarly, our design can achieve on average



Fig. 6. Energy consumption and performance of query processing running on traditional core and the proposed NVQuery.

TABLE V ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND PERFORMANCE SPEEDUP OF QUERIES IN NVQUERY NORMALIZED TO DIGITAL DESIGN OVER 1K DATA

	Nearest search		Search	Men	mory	
Queries	MAX/ MIN	Top 1	Search/ Count	Addition/ Average	Bit-wise	
Energy Improv. Speedup	$9.5 \times 24.2 \times$	$\begin{array}{c} 14.1\times\\ 29.5\times\end{array}$	13× 92.1×	$5.8 \times 0.9 \times$	46.7× 122.6×	

 $13.7 \times$ and $92.1 \times (5.8 \times$ and $0.9 \times)$ energy savings and performance speedup over exact search (memory functionalities, e.g. addition). NVQuery is also efficient in executing different join operations. For a small table with 2^2 rows, NVQuery provides 2.3x speedup and 5.9x energy savings on average as compared to conventional systems. However, the performance and energy efficiency of NVQuery increases with table size. For example, for a table with 2^{15} rows, NVQuery provides speedup and energy efficiency improvement of 21x and 83x respectively. Although, the performance of in-memory addition is less than that of digital-based design, but considering the cost of data movement, it makes sense to process data locally in-memory. In large size query processing, the data movement dominates the computation cost, which motivates us to perform in-memory computations to avoid data movement issue.

C. NVQuery & Dataset Size

While running real dataset, the main advantage of NVQuery comes from addressing the data movement issue. Fig. 6 shows the average energy consumption and performance of running query processing on traditional core and NVQuery when the data set size changes from 1GB to 10GB. Our evaluation shows that the NVQuery has an advantage in processing the nearest distance search and related functions such as MIN, MAX or Top queries. However, to see the average NVQuery improvement, we generate the same number of queries running on the dataset. Our evaluation shows that increasing the data size significantly increases the energy and execution time of traditional cores. However, this increment is minor in NVQuery as it can locally process the data. As our result in Table V shows, NVQuery not only avoids the overhead of data movement, but also provides much cheaper computation than traditional cores. This difference is more prominent when the size of the dataset passes 8GB, which is the available main memory size in our tested platform. In such case, the traditional cores require to bring data up from the hard disk, which significantly slows down the computation. Comparing the energy and performance of NVQuery for 10G data shows that, our design can achieve $34.7 \times$ energy savings and $49.3 \times$ performance speedup as compared to traditional processor running the same query tasks.

D. NVQuery Approximation

Fig. 7 shows the energy, performance and energy-delay product, when NVQuery has been approximated using bit trimming and voltage scaling. The x-axis in the graph shows the number of relaxed bits. In addition, the red line in EDP graph shows the average relative error of query processing at different levels of approximation. Although the latency remains constant in the case of approximation by voltage scaling, it can achieve much higher efficiency than bit trimming. Our evaluation shows that NVQuery approximation using bit trimming and voltage scaling can provide $490.7 \times$ and 507.9× EDP improvement as compared to NVQuery in exact mode while ensuring less than 0.2% average relative error. The efficiency of the voltage scaling approximation becomes more significant in deep approximation. For instance, while accepting 2% error, approximation by voltage scaling can achieve $45.0 \times$ and $17.6 \times$ energy savings and speedup ($807 \times$ EDP improvement).

We also compare the efficiency of the proposed NV-Query with the state-of-the-art approximate query accelerators SAQ [44] and DAQ [7] using 8G dataset size. The NVQuery and DAQ approximation is defined based on the number of blocks under voltage overscaling and the number of least significant bits neglected respectively. In SAQ the error rate is determined based on the requested error bound. Table VI shows the energy-delay product (EDP) improvement of the different query accelerators as compared to traditional CPU core when the level of approximation changes from 0% to 10%. For each error rate, we select those configurations of SAQ and DAQ which result in the best EDP improvement. As Table VI shows, increasing the number of relaxed bits improves the energy consumption of our design. Our experimental evaluation shows that, NVQuery can achieve $105.0 \times$ and $26.2 \times \text{EDP}$ improvement as compared to SAQ and DAQ designs in exact mode. The main advantage of NVQuery comes from addressing data movement issue. The NVQuery can provide higher efficiency when it works in approximate mode, since our memory-based design put a larger portion of memory under voltage overscaling in order to achieve the same error rate as DAQ design. In other words, when DAQ neglects *m*-bits for accelerating query processing, our memorybased design can get the same accuracy by putting larger

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Query Accelerators		0%	1%	2%	4%	6%	8%	10%
SAQ [44]	Error bound	0%	1.5%	3.1%	5.2%	7.4%	8.5%	10.9%
	EDP Improv.	4.1×	6.7 imes	8.3×	$11.8 \times$	$17.2 \times$	$24.4 \times$	39.8×
DAQ [7]	trimmed bits	0-bit	1-bit	2-bit	4-bit	6-bit	7-bit	9-bit
	EDP Improv.	16.4×	$24.2 \times$	36.9×	52.1×	69.2×	$85.5 \times$	$104.5 \times$
NVQuery	Relaxed bits	0-bit	2-bit	4-bit	6-bit	8-bit	11-bit	15-bit
	EDP Improv.	431×	$505 \times$	807×	1,515×	$2,288 \times$	$2,587 \times$	3,154×

TABLE VI Energy-Delay Product Improvement of SAQ, DAQ and Proposed NVQuery



Fig. 7. Energy consumption and performance of the NVQuery at different approximation levels.



Fig. 8. Area overhead as compared to conventional crossbar memory

portion of memory blocks under voltage overscaling (shown in Table V for 4-bit stage size). Our evaluation shows that in approximate mode, NVQuery can achieve $79.2 \times$ and $30.1 \times$ EDP improvement as compared to SAQ and DAQ respectively, while providing similar error rate.

E. Area Overhead

NVQuery has both memory and query processing functionalities. We added peripheral circuitry to crossbar memory to support nearest distance exact search operation, bitwise/addition operations, counter and controller. Fig. 8 shows that proposed NVQuery has up to 5.1% area overhead compared to the conventional crossbar. The search circuitry takes 2.1% extra area. Counter and bit-wise circuits add 0.3% and 1.5% area overhead to design. Finally, the controller and registers take the rest 1.2% area overhead.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper we propose a novel memory architecture which can accelerate query processing inside the memory. NVQuery supports a large range of query functionalities inside the memory. Our design exploits the analog characteristic of the non-volatile memory to design a configurable memory architecture which can look for exact or nearest distance values. Our result shows that NVQuery not only improves the cost of each query processing, but also completely addresses the data movement issue by locally processing the data in memory. To further improve the energy efficiency, our design NVQuery supports configurable approximation by adaptively putting memory under voltage overscaling. Our experimental evaluation shows that, in comparison with the state-of-theart query accelerators, NVQuery in exact (approximate) mode can achieve $26.2 \times (30.1 \times)$ energy-delay product improvement while providing similar accuracy.

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported in part by CRISP, one of six centers in JUMP, an SRC program sponsored by DARPA and NSF grants #1730158 and #1527034, and Jacobs School of Engineering UCSD Powell Fellowship.

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