Lightweight Spatiotemporal Feature Compression for Edge-Based Video Intelligence

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Abstract

The proliferation of video-capable edge devices has created an urgent demand for intelligent video analytics that operate within severe constraints of bandwidth, energy, and computational capacity. While deep neural networks have achieved remarkable accuracy in tasks such as object detection and activity recognition, their deployment on resource-limited edge platforms remains challenged by the high dimensionality of video data. This paper introduces a framework for lightweight spatiotemporal feature compression specifically designed to enable efficient edge-based video intelligence. We argue that compression must be understood not merely as a data reduction technique but as a structural intervention that shapes the entire inference pipeline, from sensor sampling to model architecture and communication protocol. The proposed approach decouples spatial and temporal redundancy through a dual-stream encoding strategy that preserves salient motion patterns while aggressively compressing static background information. We examine the architectural trade-offs between compression ratio, latency, and inference fidelity, and discuss how such compression influences system-level properties including energy sustainability, operational robustness under network variability, and fairness across diverse deployment contexts. A governance perspective is introduced to address the policy implications of automated video analysis at the edge, particularly concerning privacy preservation and algorithmic accountability. Through a comparative analysis with existing compression methods, we demonstrate that lightweight spatiotemporal compression can reduce data transmission requirements by over an order of magnitude while maintaining competitive accuracy on standard surveillance and activity recognition benchmarks. The paper concludes by outlining future research directions for adaptive compression policies that respond to real-time context, workload heterogeneity, and evolving ethical standards in edge video intelligence.

Keywords

edge computing, video analytics, feature compression, spatiotemporal encoding, lightweight neural networks, sustainable AI, privacy-preserving video.

1. Introduction

The convergence of ubiquitous camera sensors, affordable edge hardware, and advanced computer vision models has propelled video intelligence into domains ranging from autonomous navigation and industrial inspection to public safety and healthcare monitoring. Unlike cloud-centric architectures where raw video streams are transmitted to centralized servers for processing, edge-based video intelligence performs inference locally or at the network periphery, thereby reducing latency, preserving bandwidth, and enhancing data locality [1]. However, the high dimensionality of video data—characterized by both spatial resolution and temporal depth—imposes severe stress on edge devices that typically possess limited memory, modest processing power, and constrained energy budgets [2]. Traditional video compression codecs such as H.264 and H.265 are designed for human visual consumption and do not prioritize the preservation of features that are most informative for machine perception tasks [3]. Consequently, a growing body of research has investigated feature-level compression methods that discard information irrelevant to downstream tasks while retaining semantically meaningful representations [4].

This paper proposes a lightweight spatiotemporal feature compression framework that operates at the intersection of video encoding and neural network design. Rather than compressing raw pixel data, our approach compresses intermediate feature maps extracted by a lightweight backbone network, thereby reducing the volume of data that must be transmitted between edge nodes or stored for later analysis [5]. The framework employs a dual-stream architecture that separately processes spatial and temporal information, enabling aggressive compression of static background features while preserving motion cues that are critical for activity recognition and anomaly detection [6]. We argue that such an approach offers a principled balance between compression efficiency and task accuracy, and that its deployment must be evaluated not only on technical metrics but also on broader system-level considerations including energy sustainability, fairness across diverse operational conditions, and governance of automated decision-making [7].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related work in video compression for machine vision, edge inference architectures, and spatiotemporal feature learning. Section 3 presents the architectural design of our lightweight compression framework, detailing the dual-stream encoding strategy and the mechanisms for adaptive compression rate control. Section 4 provides a system-level analysis of trade-offs involving latency, energy consumption, robustness to network variability, and fairness implications. Section 5 discusses deployment considerations, including infrastructure requirements, sustainability metrics, and governance frameworks for responsible edge video intelligence. Section 6 presents comparative experimental results on standard benchmarks, and Section 7 concludes with a summary of contributions and directions for future research.

2. Related Work

The literature on video compression for machine vision can be broadly categorized into three streams: traditional codec-based compression, learned compression using deep neural networks, and feature-level compression for distributed inference. Traditional codecs such as H.264 and H.265 exploit spatial and temporal redundancies through block-based motion estimation and transform coding [8]. While these methods achieve high compression ratios for human viewing, they are suboptimal for machine vision tasks because they optimize for perceptual quality rather than semantic feature preservation [3]. Recent work in learned compression has employed autoencoder architectures to directly optimize rate-distortion trade-offs for specific tasks, achieving superior performance at the cost of increased

computational complexity [9]. However, these learned methods often require specialized hardware accelerators that may not be available on edge devices.

Feature-level compression addresses a different challenge: reducing the data volume between intermediate layers of a distributed neural network. In split computing architectures, a lightweight backbone runs on the edge device and compresses its feature maps before transmitting them to a more powerful server for deeper processing [10]. This paradigm has been explored for image classification, where feature compression using quantization and entropy coding can reduce transmission bandwidth by factors of ten to one hundred without significant accuracy loss [11]. Extending this approach to video introduces the additional dimension of temporal redundancy, which can be exploited through motion-compensated feature prediction or temporal filtering [12]. The HY-Himmel technical report proposes a hierarchical interleaved multi-stream motion encoding approach for long video understanding, demonstrating how multiple temporal scales can be interleaved to capture both short-term actions and long-term dependencies [18].

Spatiotemporal feature learning has been a central focus of video understanding research. Two-stream networks that process appearance and motion information separately have shown strong performance on action recognition benchmarks [13]. More recent architectures such as I3D and SlowFast networks integrate spatial and temporal pathways through carefully designed fusion mechanisms [14]. While these models achieve state-of-the-art accuracy, their computational demands are prohibitive for edge deployment. Lightweight alternatives such as MobileNet-based video models and temporal shift modules have emerged to address this gap, but they often sacrifice temporal resolution or fail to capture long-range dependencies [15]. Our work bridges these lines of research by proposing a feature compression framework that leverages a dual-stream architecture specifically optimized for edge constraints.

3. Lightweight Spatiotemporal Feature Compression Architecture

The proposed architecture is designed around the principle that video data contains substantial redundancy that can be eliminated without degrading task performance. This redundancy exists both spatially, where adjacent pixels are highly correlated, and temporally, where consecutive frames share large amounts of static content. Our framework exploits both forms of redundancy through a dual-stream encoding strategy that separates the video stream into a spatial context stream and a temporal motion stream. The spatial context stream captures background information at a reduced frame rate, while the temporal motion stream encodes changes between frames at the full frame rate but with aggressive compression applied to the motion residuals.

The spatial context stream is processed by a lightweight convolutional backbone that extracts feature maps at a resolution reduced by a factor of four in each spatial dimension. These feature maps are further compressed through channel-wise quantization and entropy coding, reducing the per-frame data volume by approximately ninety-five percent compared to raw pixel data [16]. Crucially, the spatial context stream is updated only when significant changes in the background are detected, which occurs infrequently in typical surveillance scenarios. This selective update mechanism dramatically reduces the average bitrate while maintaining a consistent representation of the scene.

The temporal motion stream operates on the difference between consecutive frames after alignment using a lightweight optical flow estimator. Rather than transmitting full-resolution motion vectors, our framework encodes only the regions where motion exceeds a learned

threshold, applying a higher compression ratio to static regions [17]. The motion features are then processed by a lightweight temporal convolutional network that captures short-term dynamics. For longer-term temporal dependencies, we draw inspiration from hierarchical interleaved multi-stream motion encoding, which interleaves multiple temporal scales to capture both fine-grained motion and coarse activity patterns [18]. This hierarchical structure allows the framework to adapt its temporal resolution based on the complexity of the observed activity, allocating more bits to rapid movements and fewer bits to slow-changing scenes.

The dual-stream features are fused at the decoder side through a lightweight attention mechanism that weights the contribution of spatial and temporal features based on the current scene context. This fusion is performed on the server or cloud side, where computational resources are abundant, while the edge device is responsible only for feature extraction and compression [19]. The overall architecture achieves a compression ratio of approximately thirty to one compared to raw video, while maintaining within three percent of the accuracy achieved by a full-resolution model on standard activity recognition benchmarks.

4. System-Level Trade-Offs and Analysis

Deploying spatiotemporal feature compression in real-world edge environments involves navigating a complex landscape of trade-offs that extend beyond simple rate-accuracy curves. Latency is perhaps the most critical constraint for real-time applications such as autonomous driving or industrial safety monitoring. The compression process introduces additional computational overhead on the edge device, which can increase per-frame processing time. However, our measurements indicate that the lightweight backbone and optimized motion estimator add only five to eight milliseconds of latency per frame on a typical edge GPU, which is acceptable for most real-time applications operating at thirty frames per second [20]. The reduction in data volume also decreases transmission latency, particularly over bandwidth-limited wireless links, resulting in a net reduction in end-to-end latency for most deployment scenarios.

Energy consumption is another critical consideration for battery-powered edge devices. The additional computation required for feature compression must be weighed against the energy saved by reduced wireless transmission. Wireless transmission is typically the most energy-intensive operation on an edge device, consuming orders of magnitude more energy per bit than local computation [21]. Our experiments show that the energy cost of compression is recouped by the reduction in transmission energy when the compression ratio exceeds approximately ten to one. For the typical compression ratios achieved by our framework, the net energy savings range from forty to sixty percent compared to transmitting raw video. This energy efficiency is particularly important for deployments in remote or inaccessible locations where battery replacement is impractical.

Robustness to network variability is a key advantage of edge-based compression architectures. When network bandwidth fluctuates due to congestion or interference, our framework can dynamically adjust the compression ratio by varying the quantization levels or the update frequency of the spatial context stream [22]. This adaptive capability ensures that inference quality degrades gracefully rather than catastrophically, maintaining acceptable performance even under severe bandwidth constraints. In contrast, systems that transmit raw video experience frame drops or severe quality degradation when bandwidth is insufficient, which can lead to missed detections or false alarms in safety-critical applications.

Fairness considerations arise when edge video intelligence systems are deployed across diverse environments with varying characteristics. A compression framework that performs well in well-lit, static indoor scenes may fail in dimly lit, highly dynamic outdoor environments [23]. Our analysis reveals that the dual-stream architecture exhibits differential performance across scene types, with higher compression ratios achievable in scenes with static backgrounds and uniform lighting. To address this disparity, we propose a fairness-aware compression policy that allocates more bits to scenes with higher motion complexity or lower lighting quality, ensuring that inference accuracy remains consistent across deployment contexts. This policy introduces a small overhead in terms of average compression ratio but significantly reduces performance variance across environments.

5. Deployment, Sustainability, and Governance

The successful deployment of lightweight spatiotemporal feature compression requires careful consideration of infrastructure requirements and operational practices. Edge devices must be provisioned with sufficient computational capacity to run the lightweight backbone and motion estimator, which typically requires a neural processing unit or a modest GPU. For devices that lack such hardware, our framework can be adapted to use even simpler feature extractors based on handcrafted features, albeit with some reduction in compression efficiency [24]. The server-side decoder must be capable of handling multiple concurrent video streams, which may require scalable cloud infrastructure for large-scale deployments.

Sustainability is an increasingly important consideration for large-scale video intelligence deployments. The energy consumed by edge devices, network infrastructure, and cloud servers contributes to the carbon footprint of AI systems. Our compression framework reduces energy consumption at the edge by minimizing transmission, but it also reduces the computational load on cloud servers by requiring them to process compressed features rather than raw video [25]. A life-cycle assessment of a typical surveillance deployment shows that our framework reduces total energy consumption by approximately fifty percent compared to a cloud-centric architecture, with corresponding reductions in carbon emissions. However, the manufacturing and disposal of edge devices introduce their own environmental costs, which must be factored into sustainability assessments.

Governance frameworks for edge video intelligence must address a range of ethical and policy concerns, including privacy, accountability, and transparency. By compressing video at the feature level rather than transmitting raw images, our framework inherently provides a degree of privacy protection, as the compressed features do not contain sufficient information to reconstruct recognizable faces or license plates [26]. However, feature-level representations can still encode sensitive information, such as gender or ethnicity, which may be inferred by downstream models. Governance policies must therefore mandate regular auditing of feature representations for bias and require that compression parameters be documented and justified. Additionally, accountability for automated decisions made by edge video intelligence systems must be clearly assigned, particularly when those decisions affect individuals' rights or safety.

6. Comparative Experimental Evaluation

We evaluate our lightweight spatiotemporal feature compression framework on three standard video understanding benchmarks: UCF101 for action recognition, ActivityNet for temporal activity detection, and the MOT16 dataset for multi-object tracking. The baseline for comparison is a full-resolution I3D model processing raw video at thirty frames per second, which achieves state-of-the-art accuracy on these benchmarks. Our compressed variant uses

the dual-stream architecture with a MobileNetV3 backbone for spatial context and a lightweight temporal convolutional network for motion encoding.

On UCF101, our compressed model achieves a top-1 accuracy of 91.2 percent compared to 93.8 percent for the full-resolution baseline, representing a relative degradation of only 2.8 percent. The compression ratio achieved is 32:1, meaning that the total data transmitted from the edge device is reduced by over 96 percent. On ActivityNet, the mean average precision at an intersection-over-union threshold of 0.5 is 72.4 percent for our compressed model versus 75.1 percent for the baseline, a relative degradation of 3.6 percent. On MOT16, the multiple object tracking accuracy is 68.3 percent for our compressed model compared to 71.2 percent for the baseline, a relative degradation of 4.1 percent. These results demonstrate that lightweight spatiotemporal compression can achieve substantial data reduction with only modest accuracy loss across diverse video understanding tasks.

We compare our approach against two alternative compression strategies: traditional H.265 compression at the same bitrate and a learned compression model based on a variational autoencoder. H.265 compression at 32:1 ratio achieves a top-1 accuracy of only 78.5 percent on UCF101, significantly lower than our approach, because the codec optimizes for perceptual quality rather than semantic feature preservation. The learned compression model achieves 90.8 percent accuracy, comparable to our approach, but requires 4.2 times more computational resources on the edge device due to the complexity of the autoencoder. These comparisons highlight the advantages of our lightweight, task-aware compression framework for edge deployment.

7. Conclusion

This paper has presented a lightweight spatiotemporal feature compression framework designed to enable efficient edge-based video intelligence. The proposed dual-stream architecture separates spatial context and temporal motion information, allowing aggressive compression of static background features while preserving salient motion cues. Through a comprehensive system-level analysis, we have demonstrated that the framework achieves a favorable balance between compression ratio, latency, energy consumption, and inference accuracy. The adaptive compression policy ensures robustness to network variability and promotes fairness across diverse deployment contexts. Governance considerations have been addressed to ensure that the deployment of edge video intelligence respects privacy, accountability, and transparency principles.

Future research directions include the development of reinforcement learning-based policies for dynamic compression rate adaptation, the integration of privacy-preserving mechanisms directly into the feature compression process, and the extension of the framework to multimodal video intelligence that incorporates audio and sensor data. As edge devices become more capable and video analytics applications continue to proliferate, lightweight spatiotemporal compression will play an increasingly critical role in enabling sustainable, fair, and trustworthy video intelligence at the network edge.

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