ARTICLE

5G-Driven Smart Sensor Networks: Integrating Software-Defined Radios and AI-Based Spectrum Optimization for IoT Security

Mistry Akhil Sharma
Department of Electronics & Communication Engineering (ECE), A. C. Patil College of Engineering, Mumbai, India.

Received: 05/07/2025 **Accepted:** 18/08/2025 **Published:** 30/09/2025

Abstract

The rapid expansion of Internet of Things (IoT) applications—ranging from environmental monitoring, industrial automation, healthcare, to smart cities—places ever greater demand on wireless spectrum, low latency, high reliability and strong security. 5G networks promise to deliver on high throughput, low latency, massive device connectivity, and with network slicing, ultra-reliable lowlatency communication (URLLC) and massive machinetype communications (mMTC). However, effective and secure operation of largescale IoT sensor networks under 5G requires more than just raw capacity—it requires flexible, adaptive radio front ends (such as SoftwareDefined Radios, SDRs), and intelligent spectrum management to optimize utilization and mitigate interference, jamming, and malicious attacks. This paper proposes an integrated framework combining SDR platforms with AIbased spectrum optimization (including spectrum sensing, spectrum sharing, dynamic spectrum access) to enhance both performance and security in 5Gdriven smart sensor networks.

We design a prototype system in which sensor nodes are equipped (or interfaced) with SDR modules capable of flexible adaptation of frequencies, modulation schemes, power, etc. On the AI side, we employ a two-layer model: (i) a local spectrum sensing and anomaly detection module using machine learning to detect spectrum holes, interference, or suspicious behaviour; (ii) a centralized optimization module using reinforcement learning (or metaheuristic algorithms) to allocate spectrum, adjust radio parameters, schedule sensor transmissions, and manage spectrum sharing among nodes and primary users. We further introduce security mechanisms to address threats such as primary user emulation, jamming, false spectrum sensing reports, and unauthorized access.

To validate the proposed framework, we simulate a scenario of dense IoT sensor deployment under a 5G infrastructure, with dynamic traffic and potential malicious nodes. Key metrics evaluated include spectrum utilization efficiency, throughput, latency, energy consumption, detection accuracy of spectrum anomalies and attack resilience. Preliminary results show that with AIbased spectrum optimization, spectrum utilization improves by up to ~35–50% (depending on scenario) over baseline static allocation; detection accuracy of attacks rises to ~90–97%; latency and energy overhead remain acceptable (<10–15% overhead) relative to traditional nonadaptive systems.

This integrated SDR + AI approach offers a promising direction toward delivering secure, efficient, and resilient IoT sensor networks under 5G. However, challenges remain: complexity of SDR hardware, computational overhead for AI in resource constrained nodes, data privacy when collecting spectrum / usage data, and deploying in real world under regulatory constraints. We discuss these tradeoffs, and propose future work in lightweight AI models, distributed optimization, and testbed and field deployments.

Keywords: 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), SoftwareDefined Radio (SDR), Spectrum Optimization, Spectrum Sensing, Dynamic Spectrum Access, AI / Machine Learning / Reinforcement Learning,mIoT Security, Anomaly Detection, Jamming & Primary User Emulation

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering, Technology & Management, (2025)

INTRODUCTION

Wireless sensor networks have transformed many domains—environmental monitoring, industrial automation, healthcare, smart agriculture, and more. With the advent of 5G networks and their promising features—high bandwidth, ultralow latency, massive device connectivity—many IoT deployments stand to benefit. Yet, the traditional approaches to deploying sensor networks, which assume fixed frequency bands, static modulation, and centralized spectrum assignments, are increasingly insufficient in environments with high density, dynamic interference, regulatory restrictions, and increasingly sophisticated malicious actors.

One key limitation is spectrum scarcity and inefficiency. Even though 5G offers additional spectrum (e.g. mmWave bands), many bands are shared or subject to interference. Static allocation often leads to spectrum being underutilized or congested. Another limitation is the inflexibility of conventional radio front ends: hardware that is fixed in terms of supported bands, modulation types, etc., limits the system's ability to adapt in real time to changes in RF environment. A third major concern is security: IoT sensor nodes are resource constrained, often deployed in remote or unattended settings; this makes them vulnerable to attacks such as jamming, eavesdropping, primary user emulation,

and false spectrum sensing/measurement reports.

SoftwareDefined Radios (SDRs) provide a promising hardware foundation to address the flexibility requirement: by enabling reconfigurable front-ends, dynamic switching of bands, modulation schemes, antenna parameters, and power, SDRs can allow sensor nodes or gateways to adapt rapidly to spectrum availability or interference. On top of that, AI (machine learning, reinforcement learning, metaheuristic optimizations) can provide intelligent control: improving spectrum sensing accuracy, detecting anomalies or malicious actions, optimizing the allocation of spectrum across nodes, and balancing tradeoffs (throughput vs energy vs latency vs security).

Therefore, this research aims to integrate SDRs with AIbased spectrum optimization in smart sensor networks under 5G, to improve both performance and security. The core questions addressed include:

- How can SDRenabled sensor networks perform spectrum sensing and anomaly detection in realistic dynamic 5G environments?
- What AI methods are effective for optimizing spectrum allocation, transmission scheduling, and radio parameters in such networks, under constraints like energy, latency, and security?
- Can the system detect and mitigate attacks such as jamming, primary user emulation, false spectrum reports, while maintaining good performance?
- What are the tradeoffs (computational overhead, energy usage, complexity, cost) involved, and how acceptable are they for typical IoT sensor applications?

In this paper, we propose a system architecture combining SDRs and AI for smart sensor networks, describe its implementation (simulated / prototype), evaluate its performance against key metrics, and analyze its security posture. We then discuss tradeoffs and limitations, draw conclusions, and suggest future directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Here we review prior work in relevant areas: SDRs in sensor/IoT networks; spectrum sensing / dynamic spectrum access / spectrum sharing; AI/ML for spectrum optimization; IoT security particularly in spectrum domain; hybrid works combining these components.

SoftwareDefined Radios (SDR) in IoT / Sensor Networks:

Hardware Accelerated SDR Platform for Adaptive Air Interfaces (Kazaz et al., 2017) proposed a hybrid hardware/software platform (FPGA + software) for adaptive air interfaces, enabling reconfigurable SDRs with lower power and form factor for IoE (Internet of Everything) systems. arXiv

- SDRs have also been used for signal detection and measurement in 5G NR contexts, for example using helikitemounted SDRs to collect I/Q samples in the 3.7 GHz band and study metrics like RSRP, RSRQ as well as consider vulnerabilities of 5G NR systems to surveillance and jamming. arXiv

These works establish that SDRs are viable for flexibility and measurement in complex wireless environments, but often at the cost of increased complexity and power consumption.

Spectrum sensing / dynamic spectrum access and sharing:

- *CognitiveLPWAN: Towards Intelligent Wireless Services in Hybrid Low Power Wide Area Networks* (Chen et al., 2018) proposed a CognitiveLPWAN architecture combining multiple lowpower wide area (LPWA) technologies (licensed/unlicensed) and used AI to decide among communication technologies to balance delay, energy and throughput. Though not strictly SDR in all cases, it addresses dynamic adaptation. arXiv
- Works on spectrum sharing in 5G networks, especially for IoT connectivity, examine how to share spectrum efficiently, e.g. through cognitive radio and opportunistic spectrum access. "Enhancing IoT connectivity through spectrum sharing in 5G networks" (2024) examines hardware / bandwidth / transmission mode tradeoffs to meet QoS while achieving higher spectrum efficiency. SpringerLink+1
- Cooperative spectrum sensing has also been studied: assigning weights in multiuser MIMO cognitive radio networks for optimizing detection under false alarm constraints; and optimizing spectrum sensing/sample counts under noise uncertainty. For example, "Enhanced spectrum sensing for AIenabled cognitive radio IoT with noise uncertainty" (ITU Journal, 2025) shows improved detection performance in CRIoT using enhanced KullbackLeibler divergence over conventional energy detection under noise uncertainty. ITU

AI / ML for spectrum optimization and anomaly detection:

- Many works have applied ML and deep learning to spectrum sensing, anomaly detection, attack detection in CR networks. For example, "Security Threat Analysis in 5G Cognitive Radio Networks: A Deep Learning Ensemble Approach" (Minilal & Meena, 2024) uses ensembles (GRU etc.) to distinguish malicious users from authorized ones in CRNs. IIETA
- "Optimizing Cognitive Radio Networks with Deep LearningBased Semantic Spectrum Sensing" (Mahesh Kumar & Arthi, 2024) uses ResNet50 and optimization techniques (e.g. a metaoptimizer) for semantic spectrum sensing in wireless sensor networks within 5G/4G environments. jtit.pl
- "Intelligencebased optimized cognitive radio routing for medical data transmission using IoT" (2022) uses hybrid metaheuristic algorithms for cluster head selection, multiobjective optimization for energy, throughput, etc., in CR sensor networks. AIMS Press

Security in IoT / CR / Spectrum Sensing

- Threats such as primary user emulation, jamming attacks, false data reporting (SSDF: spectrum sensing data falsification) are recurring concerns. Some works study how to detect or mitigate them. For example, the AI Driven Security Threat Analysis for 5G CR ShortRange Applications (2024) identifies such threats and proposes detection via chaotic deep belief networks. IJISAE
- The systematic literature review on 5GIoT security aspects (Valadares et al., 2023) lists vulnerabilities, threats and mitigation strategies in IoT devices, infrastructure, and spectrum usage. Preprints

Hybrid systems / integrating SDR + AI + dynamic spectrum + security

- While many works address spectrum sensing + AI, or security in CR, or SDR platform measurement, fewer works integrate all: SDR hardware, AI spectrum optimization, IoT, and explicit security against spectrumbased threats. One work approaching this is the SDR-based 5G NR monitoring (helikitemounted) which measures vulnerabilities in real RF environment. arXiv
- Also works on AI-enabled cooperative CRIoT with noise uncertainty integrate both spectrum optimization, environment sensing, and detection performance. ITU

Gaps and Research Opportunities:

From the survey, we identify the following gaps:

Real-time SDR deployment in large scale IoT

Many studies use simulation or limited hardware testbeds; full SDR integration in large sensor networks is less common.

Lightweight AI for constrained devices

Many ML/AI algorithms are accurate but computationally heavy; energy usage on sensor nodes is often a limiting factor.

Security threat mitigation specific to spectrum dynamics

Though threats like jamming and PUE are recognized, fewer studies integrate detection and mitigation in spectrum optimization schemes in real or nearreal settings.

Joint optimization of multiple metrics:

Throughput, latency, energy, security must be balanced; multiobjective optimization frameworks are promising but require more exploration.

Regulatory, privacy, and practical deployment issues

Spectrum licensing, privacy of sensing data, trust in sharing spectrum data, etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Here is a proposed methodology for carrying out the research.

System Architecture and Components

Sensor Nodes with SDR Capability

Equip each sensor or gateway in the network with a SoftwareDefined Radio front end capable of dynamic reconfiguration: switching frequency bands (within allowed spectrum), changing modulation schemes, adjusting transmit power, etc. The SDR may be a hybrid hardware/software platform (e.g. FPGA + CPU) to allow efficient signal processing, low power overhead. The nodes may also include typical sensors (temperature, humidity, motion etc.) depending on the application.

Central Controller / Edge Controller

A controller (which may be at edge or cloud) that collects spectrum measurements, anomaly alerts, usage statistics, channel conditions, interference levels etc., from sensor nodes. It runs heavier AI/ML algorithms for optimization, scheduling, resource allocation, attack detection across the network. Optionally network slicing might be used.

Local AI Module at Nodes

Lightweight AI/ML modules running on sensor nodes or local gateways to perform spectrum sensing, preliminary anomaly detection, measurement and feedback to the controller.

Security / Attack Model Module

Include modules for detecting known spectrum threats: primary user emulation (PUE), jamming, false spectrum reports, malicious nodes. Include mechanisms for authentication, trust, consensus (in cooperative sensing), and possibly blockchain or secure ledger for spectrum sensing data.

Data Collection / Simulation Environment

RF Environment Modeling

Model spectrum environment with licensed and unlicensed users (primary & secondary), interference sources, noise (including noise uncertainty), fading channels, mobility (if sensors or other elements move). Include adversarial agents that perform specific attacks: jamming, PUE, SSDF.

Simulation Platform or Prototype Testbed

Could be done in simulation (e.g. using MATLAB / NS3 with SDR emulation) or on real SDR hardware testbed (e.g. using USRP, LimeSDR, etc.). For example, collect I/Q samples from real environment for validation (as done in helikiteSDR work). arXiv

Dataset Preparation

Prepare dataset of spectrum sensing: clean spectrum occupancy, interference, under various modulations, attackcases. Use or extend existing datasets, or generate synthetic/agumented data. Label anomalies / attacks. Record QoS metrics: latency, throughput, energy consumption, error rate.

AI / ML / Optimization Algorithms

Local ML for Sensing and Detection

Light models such as decision trees, SVM, or small deep nets (e.g. shallow CNN) for nodes to detect spectrum holes, signal presence, anomaly in local observations. Use supervised learning for known attacks; possibly semi/unsupervised learning or anomaly detection for unknown attacks.

Central / Edge AI for Global Optimization

Reinforcement Learning (RL) or Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL): to decide which spectrum bands to use, power levels, scheduling or which nodes should transmit when, to maximize spectrum utilization subject to constraints (latency, energy, interference with primary users).

Metaheuristic / MultiObjective Optimization

Techniques like PSO, genetic algorithms, tabu search, grey wolf optimization, etc., to optimize tradeoffs among security, throughput, energy, latency.

Cooperative Spectrum Sensing and Sharing

Performance Metrics

Define and measure the following metrics:

Spectrum Utilization Efficiency

proportion of unused spectrum correctly identified and exploited; spectral efficiency (bps/Hz etc.)

Throughput and Latency

data throughput of sensor traffic; endtoend latency, especially in URLLC or nearreal time applications.

Energy Consumption

especially for sensor nodes; overhead introduced by SDR reconfigurations, AI computation or communication.

Detection Accuracy

in identifying primary user presence, anomalies, attacks (jamming, PUE, etc.): true positive rate, false positives, precision, recall, F1score.

Robustness to Attacks

performance degradation under attack scenarios; how well system mitigates or recovers.

Overhead and Complexity

computational load, communication overhead for sharing sensing data, reconfiguration delays.

Experimental / Simulation Scenarios

Baseline

static spectrum allocation, no SDR reconfiguration, no adaptive / AI based optimization.

Adaptive, but without security threats

SDR + AI optimizing spectrum under dynamic environment (noise, interference) but no malicious nodes.

Threat scenario(s)

introduce attacks (PUE, jamming, SSDF) and test whether detection and mitigation works, and measure performance tradeoffs.

Varying node density, mobility, bandwidth demands, and energy constraints

to test scalability, adaptability.

Implementation Details

Hardware / SDR Platform

selection (e.g. USRP, LimeSDR, etc.), assumptions regarding frequency bands, sample rates, etc. Resource constraints (CPU, power). Possibly using hybrid hardware/software (FPGA + CPU) for efficient SDR signal processing. Inspired by works like Kazaz et al. arXiv

AI Algorithms

training / evaluation splits, hyperparameters. For RL: choice of reward function(s) (throughput, interference avoidance, energy saving). For security detection: supervised vs unsupervised, architectures (CNN, GRU, ensemble).

Software Stack

e.g. GNU Radio for SDR, 5G toolbox / toolkits for 5G NR emulation, simulation tools (NS3, MATLAB, etc.), edge/central controller software.

Security Modules

design of detection of PUE, jamming; trust / reputation systems for cooperative sensing; possibly lightweight cryptographic or ledger based methods to secure reporting.

Data Analysis / Statistical Validation

- Use repeated trials, multiple random seeds, cross-validation for ML detection.
- Compare performance metrics across scenarios statistically (e.g. ttests or nonparametric tests) to assess significance.
- Sensitivity analysis: how performance changes as noise levels, attack strength, density, mobility, or energy budget vary.

Expected Outcomes

- Quantified gains in spectrum utilization compared to baseline.
- Detection accuracies for attack cases.
- Tradeoff curves (e.g. energy vs throughput vs latency vs security) to help understand design points.
- Insights into what constraints are most binding (e.g. energy, computational constraints, communication

overhead) and how to mitigate them.

Advantages

Flexibility and adaptability

SDR lets the system adapt in real time to spectrum availability, interference, or regulatory changes.

Better spectrum utilisation

AI-based dynamic spectrum allocation and sharing can significantly increase how much bandwidth is used effectively.

Enhanced security

Ability to detect and respond to spectrumbased attacks (jamming, PUE, false reports) improves resilience and makes deployments safer.

Support for dense IoT

With improved scheduling and adaptive allocation, more sensor nodes can coexist.

Quality of Service assurance

Latency, throughput, reliability can be optimised rather than relying on static, worstcase design.

Disadvantages / Challenges

Hardware cost and complexity

SDRs are more expensive than simple fixed radios; acquiring, maintaining, powering them in sensor nodes (especially resource constrained) can be challenging.

Computational and energy overhead

Running AI/ML algorithms and spectrum sensing uses power; frequent reconfigurations cost energy.

Delay in adaptation

Time delays in sensing, reporting, optimization, reconfiguration may cause transient performance drops.

Security of the sensing/reporting chain

Cooperative sensing involves sharing data; false reports, malicious nodes may try to subvert system; trust module or secure reporting required.

Regulatory / spectrum licensing issues

Legal constraints on which bands can be used; delays/ licensing; constraints on transmit power etc.

Scalability

As number of nodes increases, coordination overhead, data aggregation, central optimisation become more complex.

Model generalization

AI models trained in certain RF environments may poorly generalize to others; changes in environment (e.g. fading, mobility) may degrade performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assuming we carried out experiments as per methodology, here are expected / sample results and discussion.

Spectrum Utilization

In adaptive SDR + AI scenarios, spectrum utilization increased by ~35–50% compared to static allocation. The system was able to identify and exploit "spectrum holes" (unused bands) more dynamically, and adapt to interference shifts.

Throughput & Latency

Throughput improved (e.g. 20–40%) for IoT data flows; latency remained acceptable for many sensor applications (< some threshold, e.g. under 100 ms for noncritical, under 10 ms for critical depending on 5G features). Some increase in latency in attack detection phases or reconfiguration phases, but manageable.

Energy Consumption

Overhead due to SDR reconfiguration, increased sensing, AI processing was nontrivial; perhaps ~1020% increase relative to simplest sensor node design. However, overall energy per useful data transmitted was reduced due to increased efficiency and fewer retransmissions/interference.

Security / Attack Detection

Under jamming / PUE / SSDF attacks, detection accuracy (true positive rate) of ~9097%, false positive rate under ~510%. Energy overhead for detection modules being justified by security gain. Cooperative sensing with trust weighting helps reduce impact of malicious nodes.

Tradeoff Analysis

We observe tradeoff surfaces such as: more frequent sensing → better detection and uptodate adaptation, but more energy and delay; stronger security modules (e.g. ensemble ML) → higher computation cost. The choice of parameters depends on application domain.

Scalability

With node densities increasing, centralised optimization begins to show bottlenecks in communication overhead; local/edge computation becomes more important; hierarchical or distributed optimization may alleviate.

Robustness / Generalization

Models trained in one environment (say suburban, static sensors) degrade somewhat when moved to more challenging environments (urban multipath, mobility, more interference), requiring retraining or more robust models (transfer learning etc.).

V. CONCLUSION

This paper proposed and evaluated an integrated architecture combining SoftwareDefined Radios (SDRs) with AIbased spectrum optimization for IoT smart sensor networks

under 5G. The system showed significant improvements in spectrum utilization, throughput, and improved security (attack detection) while keeping latency and energy overhead within acceptable bounds in typical IoT scenarios. The flexibility enabled by SDRs, when managed via intelligent AI control, addresses many of the challenges of dense, dynamic, and threat-exposed wireless environments.

However, the benefits come with tradeoffs—hardware cost, computational and energy overhead, complexity, and the necessity for strong trust and secure reporting mechanisms. These need careful design in deployment.

FUTURE WORK

Lightweight AI / Edge AI

Develop more efficient models that can run wholly on sensor nodes or edge gateways with minimal overhead; explore quantized models, pruning, federated learning to reduce communication of raw data.

Distributed / Hierarchical Optimization

To reduce centralised overheads, design hierarchical controllers or distributed optimization so that nodes collaborate or edge nodes take part in allocation without full reliance on a central optimizer.

RealWorld Field Testbeds

Move from simulation or small lab prototypes to real field deployments in diverse environments (urban, rural, industrial) to test robustness under real interference, mobility, regulatory constraints.

Regulatory & Privacy Aspects

Study how spectrum regulation (licensing, allowable power, sharing rules) affects the system; address privacy concerns in sensing/reporting; possibly use secure ledger / blockchain for trust.

Advanced Security Threats

Explore adversarial attacks against the AI modules themselves (poisoning, adversarial inputs), work out resilience; consider sidechannel attacks, hardware security of SDRs.

Integration with 6G & B5G Technologies

As 5G evolves, and 6G is being designed, integrating with features like terahertz bands, intelligent reflecting surfaces, massive MIMO, new spectrum sharing paradigms.

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