IoT Based Real-Time Fault Detection and Protection in Power Transformers

Pardhavi Sai Sree.T

Assistant Professor (Academic Consultant), Department of EEE, SoET, SPMVV, Tirupati, A.P, India

Abstract
Power transformers serve as essential elements in electrical distribution networks, and unexpected failures can lead to substantial operational and economic impacts. This paper introduces a real-time monitoring solution built on Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to identify and manage transformer faults proactively. The system integrates multiple sensors to continuously track key operational parameters, including temperature, oil level, current, and voltage. A microcontroller processes this sensor data and facilitates transmission to a cloud-based platform via Wi-Fi. To ensure uninterrupted fault notifications in areas with limited internet access, the system employs GSM technology to dispatch SMS alerts. This dual-communication framework enhances data reliability and guarantees timely awareness of fault conditions. An interactive user interface enables real-time data visualization and decision-making. The system's modular structure supports easy scalability and deployment across diverse environments. Validation through testing confirms its effectiveness in boosting transformer performance and promoting preventive maintenance practices.

Keywords: IoT, power transformer, fault detection, real-time monitoring, GSM, Wi-Fi, cloud-based system, preventive maintenance.

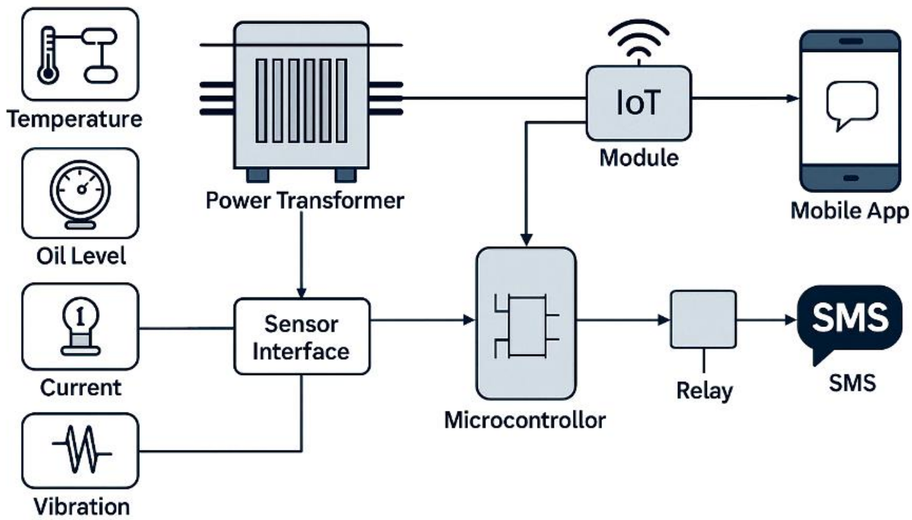
1. Introduction

Power transformers are integral components in electrical transmission and distribution systems, acting as the backbone of power delivery across vast networks. Their operational health directly influences the reliability and efficiency of the entire power grid. Unexpected transformer failures not only disrupt electricity supply but also incur heavy financial penalties and maintenance costs. Traditional monitoring methods often rely on periodic manual inspection, which can miss early warning signs of internal faults.
With advancements in digital technology, the Internet of Things (IoT) has emerged as a powerful tool for real-time condition monitoring. By integrating sensors and connectivity modules, IoT-based systems can continuously track key transformer parameters such as temperature, oil level, voltage, and current. These systems provide timely insights that facilitate predictive maintenance, reducing the risk of catastrophic failure.
This paper presents a dual-mode IoT solution that utilizes both Wi-Fi and GSM communication to ensure uninterrupted data transmission and fault alerting. The Wi-Fi module enables real-time cloud visualization, while the GSM module ensures SMS-based alerts even in remote or offline conditions. This hybrid approach increases system reliability and adaptability, making it suitable for both urban substations and isolated locations. The aim is to improve operational safety, reduce downtime, and extend transformer lifespan through smart, automated monitoring.

2. Methodology

The IoT-based real-time fault detection and protection system in power transformers works by continuously monitoring key operational parameters such as temperature, oil level, current, and vibration using specialized sensors. These sensors are connected to a sensor interface unit that gathers and conditions the raw data. The conditioned signals are then sent to a microcontroller or embedded system (ESP32), which processes the data in real-time. This controller uses pre-programmed fault detection logic to identify anomalies or abnormal conditions by comparing the incoming values against safe operating thresholds. If a fault is detected, the microcontroller immediately activates a relay that disconnects the transformer from the power supply through a circuit breaker, preventing further damage. At the same time, the system utilizes an IoT communication module to transmit the fault data and sensor readings to a remote cloud server. This allows for real-time access to transformer health data via a web or mobile application. Alerts are also sent instantly to maintenance personnel through SMS, email, or app notifications, enabling fast response regardless of their physical location. Additionally, the system maintains historical data on the cloud, supporting predictive maintenance and reducing the likelihood of unexpected transformer failures. Overall, the integration of IoT technology enhances the reliability, safety, and efficiency of power transformer operation.

Figure 1: Block Diagram of IoT Based Real-Time Fault Detection and Protection in Power Transformers



Power Transformer

This is the central equipment being monitored in the system. Transformers are responsible for voltage regulation in power systems, and any internal fault such as overheating or oil leakage can lead to serious system failures. The health of this unit is crucial, which is why it's the focus of this monitoring solution.

Sensors (Temperature, Oil Level, Current, Vibration)

Various sensors are connected to the transformer to monitor vital parameters:

Temperature sensor tracks the heat generated in the windings or oil.

Oil level sensor detects drops in oil levels that may signal leaks or evaporation.

Current sensor monitors load conditions and short circuits.

Vibration sensor identifies mechanical faults like loosened components or external impact. These sensors provide real-time data to the controller system.

Microcontroller / Embedded System
A microcontroller (ESP32) processes the incoming sensor data. It acts as the system's processor, running programmed logic to compare sensor values against safety limits. It also communicates with the relay and IoT module. The microcontroller is the brain that coordinates detection, protection, and reporting actions.

Fault Detection Logic
This internal logic inside the microcontroller evaluates sensor data to detect abnormalities. It uses threshold values (like max safe temperature) or algorithms to determine if a condition indicates a fault. If a fault is detected, it proceeds to initiate the protection mechanism while simultaneously updating external interfaces.

Relay & Circuit Breaker Unit
When a fault is identified, the system activates a relay that sends a signal to a circuit breaker. This breaker then isolates the transformer from the power line, effectively preventing further damage. This protective mechanism is automatic, reducing the need for manual intervention.

IoT Module (Wi-Fi/GSM)
The IoT module provides wireless communication between the system and cloud servers or user devices. It could use:
Wi-Fi (via ESP32) for areas with internet coverage.
GSM (SIM800L) for SMS-based communication in areas without internet. This module ensures fault data and updates can be accessed remotely.

Cloud Storage / IoT Dashboard
Sensor data and fault logs are sent to a cloud platform where they are stored and visualized through an online dashboard or app. This allows remote monitoring of transformer health, historical data analysis, and system diagnostics from any location with internet access.

SMS Alert System
This module ensures fault notifications reach technicians or operators via SMS, even in places where app access is limited. It uses a GSM module to send messages when critical parameters are breached, alerting maintenance staff for quick action.

Mobile Application
A dedicated mobile app or web dashboard provides a user-friendly interface for operators. It displays real-time sensor data, alert history, system health status, and can also allow for manual override or reset if required. This enhances operational control and transparency.

3. Results

Table 1: Fault Detection and System Response

Test No.	Parameter Monitored	Normal Range	Observed Value	Fault Detected	Relay Triggered	SMS Alert Sent	Dashboard Updated
1	Temperature	30°C – 70°C	85°C	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Oil Level	Above 50%	35%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Current Load	Under 10A	8A	No	No	No	Yes
4	Vibration Level	Less than 2.0 m/s²	3.5 m/s²	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Temperature	30°C – 70°C	65°C	No	No	No	Yes

4. Conclusion

The development and implementation of an IoT-based real-time fault detection and protection system for power transformers has proven to be both effective and efficient. By integrating sensors with a microcontroller and wireless communication module, the system successfully monitors critical parameters such as temperature, oil level, current, and vibration in real time. Upon detecting any deviation beyond safe limits, the system promptly activates protection mechanisms to isolate the transformer and prevent potential damage.

Additionally, the use of IoT technology enables remote monitoring and instant alert notifications via mobile applications and SMS, enhancing the responsiveness of maintenance teams. Data logging and cloud storage provide valuable insights for predictive maintenance, reducing the chances of unexpected failures. This approach not only improves the reliability and safety of transformer operations but also supports the shift toward smarter, data-driven power systems. Overall, the system demonstrates a cost-effective and scalable solution for modernizing transformer protection in both urban and remote environments.

5. References

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