International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

A Comparative Study of Edge Computing vs Cloud Computing for IoT Applications

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Abstract

The rapid growth of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies has resulted in an unprecedented increase in data generation from connected devices, creating significant challenges for traditional cloud-based computing architectures. Cloud computing provides powerful computational resources, centralized management, and large-scale storage capabilities; however, limitations related to latency, bandwidth consumption, privacy, and real-time responsiveness have encouraged the emergence of edge computing. Edge computing enables data processing closer to IoT devices, reducing communication delays and improving system efficiency.

This research article presents a comparative study of edge computing and cloud computing architectures for IoT applications. The study analyzes both approaches based on key performance parameters including latency, computational capability, scalability, energy efficiency, security, reliability, and application suitability. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, the research identifies the strengths and limitations of each computing paradigm and evaluates their effectiveness in different IoT environments such as smart cities, healthcare monitoring, autonomous systems, and industrial automation.

The findings indicate that while cloud computing remains essential for large-scale data processing and long-term analytics, edge computing provides significant advantages for latency-sensitive and real-time IoT applications. The study concludes that future IoT ecosystems will increasingly adopt hybrid edge-cloud architectures that combine the real-time processing capabilities of edge computing with the scalability and intelligence of cloud platforms.

Keywords: Edge Computing, Cloud Computing, Internet of Things, IoT Applications, Distributed Computing, Artificial Intelligence, Smart Systems, Hybrid Computing Architecture

1. Introduction

The Internet of Things (IoT) has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies in modern computing, enabling billions of interconnected devices to collect, exchange, and process data. Applications such as smart homes, autonomous vehicles, healthcare monitoring, industrial automation, and smart cities rely heavily on IoT infrastructure.

Traditional IoT architectures depend primarily on cloud computing, where data generated by devices is transmitted to centralized cloud servers for processing and storage. Cloud computing provides significant advantages, including high computational power, scalability, and accessibility. However, the increasing volume of IoT-generated data has created challenges related to network congestion, processing delays, and privacy concerns.

Edge computing has emerged as an alternative paradigm by moving computation and data processing closer to IoT devices. Instead of sending all information to distant cloud servers, edge systems analyze data near its source, enabling faster responses and reducing network dependency. Research has identified edge computing as an important approach for improving IoT performance, particularly in applications requiring real-time decision-making.

This paper compares edge computing and cloud computing for IoT applications and evaluates their suitability across different performance dimensions.

2. Background Study

2.1 Cloud Computing in IoT

Cloud computing provides centralized computing resources through remote data centers. IoT devices transmit collected information to cloud platforms where advanced analytics, machine learning, and storage operations are performed.

Advantages of Cloud Computing:

- High computational capacity
- Large-scale storage
- Easy resource management
- Advanced AI analytics
- Global accessibility

Limitations:

- Higher latency
- Increased bandwidth requirements
- Dependency on internet connectivity
- Privacy concerns

2.2 Edge Computing in IoT

Edge computing distributes computational resources closer to IoT devices. Processing occurs through edge servers, gateways, or embedded devices located near data sources.

Advantages:

- Reduced latency
- Faster decision-making
- Lower bandwidth consumption
- Improved privacy
- Better support for real-time applications

Limitations:

- Limited computations
- Higher deployment complexity
- Security challenges
- Difficult resource management

Edge computing is generally considered complementary to cloud computing rather than a complete replacement. Modern IoT systems increasingly combine both approaches through edge-cloud collaboration.

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Compare edge computing and cloud computing architectures for IoT applications.

2. Analyze performance differences based on latency, scalability, security, and energy efficiency.
3. Identify suitable applications for edge and cloud computing.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a **systematic literature review approach**.

Data Sources:

Research articles from:

- IEEE Xplore
- ACM Digital Library
- SpringerLink
- ScienceDirect

Evaluation Parameters:

Parameter	Description
Latency	Time required for processing and response
Bandwidth	Network usage requirements
Scalability	Ability to handle increasing IoT devices
Security	Data protection
Energy Efficiency	Power consumption
Computational Capability	Processing capacity

5. Comparative Analysis

5.1 Latency Performance

Latency is one of the most important factors in IoT applications.

Cloud computing requires data transmission between IoT devices and centralized servers, increasing response time.

Edge computing reduces latency by processing information locally.

Factor	Cloud Computing	Edge Computing
Processing Location	Remote data centers	Near IoT devices
Response Time	Higher	Lower
Real-Time Applications	Limited	Excellent

Edge computing is particularly beneficial for autonomous vehicles, industrial automation, and healthcare monitoring where immediate responses are required.

5.2 Computational Capability

Cloud platforms provide significantly greater computational resources due to large-scale infrastructure.

Cloud advantages:

- Deep learning training
- Big data analytics
- Complex simulations

Edge advantages:

- Local AI inference
- Real-time decision-making
- Reduced communication dependency

A combined edge-cloud architecture allows AI models to be trained in the cloud and deployed locally on edge devices.

5.3 Scalability

Cloud computing provides excellent scalability because resources can be dynamically allocated.
However, increasing IoT device numbers creates network congestion.
Edge computing improves scalability by distributing processing across multiple edge nodes.

5.4 Security and Privacy

Cloud computing centralizes data, creating potential security risks.
Edge computing improves privacy because sensitive data can be processed locally without being transferred.
However, distributed edge devices introduce additional security challenges due to their physical accessibility and limited protection mechanisms.

5.5 Energy Efficiency

Edge computing reduces energy consumption by minimizing data transmission.
However, edge devices often have limited battery capacity and computational resources.
Cloud computing requires substantial energy for large-scale data centers, though economies of scale and improving data-center efficiency partly offset this compared with distributed edge deployments.

6. Applications of Edge and Cloud Computing in IoT

Smart Healthcare

Edge computing enables:

- Real-time patient monitoring
- Emergency detection
- Wearable device intelligence

Cloud computing supports:

- Medical data storage
- Large-scale healthcare analytics

Smart Cities

Edge computing enables:

- Traffic management
- Smart surveillance
- Environmental monitoring

Cloud computing supports:

- City-wide data analysis
- Infrastructure planning

Industrial IoT

Edge computing supports:

- Predictive maintenance

- Robotics
- Real-time machine control

Cloud computing enables:

- Production analytics
- Long-term optimization

7. Future Trends

Future IoT systems are expected to move toward **hybrid edge-cloud architectures**.

Emerging technologies include:

Edge AI

AI models deployed directly on edge devices for faster decision-making.

Federated Learning

AI training without transferring sensitive data to centralized servers.

5G and 6G Networks

High-speed communication enabling advanced edge applications.

Digital Twins

Virtual models of physical systems combining IoT, AI, cloud, and edge computing.

8. Discussion

The comparison demonstrates that neither edge computing nor cloud computing alone can satisfy all IoT requirements.

Cloud computing remains essential for:

- Data storage
- Large-scale analytics
- AI model training

Edge computing is preferable for:

- Real-time applications
- Low latency requirements
- Applications requiring autonomy and immediate on-device control

Therefore, future IoT systems will likely adopt distributed architectures where edge devices handle immediate processing while cloud platforms provide advanced intelligence and storage.

9. Conclusion

The rapid expansion of IoT applications has created new challenges for traditional cloud-based computing architectures. While cloud computing provides unmatched scalability and computational power, limitations such as latency and bandwidth consumption restrict its effectiveness for real-time IoT applications.

Edge computing addresses these challenges by enabling localized processing, faster response times, and improved privacy. However, edge systems face limitations related to resource constraints, management complexity, and security.

This study concludes that the future of IoT computing will not involve replacing cloud computing with edge computing. Instead, hybrid edge-cloud architectures will provide the optimal solution by combining the strengths of both approaches. Such integration will support the development of intelligent, efficient, and scalable IoT ecosystems.

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