International Journal of Engineering and Techniques - Volume 12 Issue 3, May-June - 2026

Design of Low-Power IoT Communication Architectures for Smart Cities

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of urban populations has intensified the demand for efficient, sustainable, and intelligent infrastructure, leading to the widespread adoption of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies in smart cities. A critical challenge in large-scale IoT deployments is the design of low-power communication architectures that ensure long-term device operation, scalability, and reliability. This paper presents a comprehensive review of low-power IoT communication architectures for smart city applications. It critically examines layered architectures, communication technologies such as Low-Power Wide-Area Networks (LPWAN), and enabling paradigms including edge and fog computing, as well as energy harvesting techniques. Performance metrics such as energy efficiency, latency, scalability, and reliability are analyzed. The study highlights that hybrid architectures integrating LPWAN with edge/fog intelligence offer optimal performance. Furthermore, key challenges such as interoperability, security, and energy constraints are discussed, along with future research directions focusing on artificial intelligence integration and next-generation communication technologies.

Keywords: *Low-power IoT, Smart cities, LPWAN, Energy-efficient communication, Edge computing, Fog computing, Sustainable infrastructure*

1. Introduction

The concept of smart cities has emerged as a response to rapid urbanization and the need for sustainable resource management. Smart cities leverage IoT, cloud computing, and advanced communication technologies to improve urban services such as transportation, healthcare, and environmental monitoring (Zanella et al., 2014).

IoT enables interconnected devices to collect and exchange data in real time. However, one of the major challenges in IoT-based smart city systems is energy consumption, as most devices operate on limited battery power (Al-Fuqaha et al., 2015). Efficient communication architectures are therefore essential to ensure long-term sustainability.

Low-power communication technologies such as LPWAN, along with edge and fog computing paradigms, have been proposed to address these challenges (Raza et al., 2016; Chiang & Zhang, 2016). These technologies reduce energy consumption, enhance scalability, and improve system reliability.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a Systematic Analytical Review Methodology (SARM) specifically designed for evaluating low-power IoT communication architectures for smart cities**.** The methodology integrates systematic literature review, analytical modeling, and performance evaluation using mathematical formulations**,** ensuring scientific rigor and reproducibility.

2.1 Adopted Methodology

The research follows a five-stage structured methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis:

1. Problem Formulation
2. Systematic Literature Acquisition
3. Architecture Classification and Modeling
4. Analytical Evaluation using Mathematical Models
5. Comparative Assessment and Synthesis

This methodology is particularly suitable for review-based engineering research where both conceptual and analytical insights are required.

2.2 Step-by-Step Methodology

Step 1: Problem Formulation

The research problem is defined as:

How to design energy-efficient IoT communication architectures for scalable and sustainable smart city applications

The key parameters identified are:

- Energy consumption
- Latency

- Scalability
- Reliability

Step 2: Architecture Classification and Modeling

The collected literature was categorized into three major architectural models:

- Layered IoT Architecture
- LPWAN-based Communication Architecture
- Edge/Fog-enabled Hybrid Architecture

A generalized system model was developed:

IoT System Model:

$$S = \{N, C, E, D\}$$

Where:

- N = Sensor nodes
- C = Communication protocols
- E = Energy consumption
- D = Data transmission

Step 3: Analytical Evaluation Using Mathematical Models

To evaluate performance, the following mathematical formulations were used:

(a) Energy Consumption Model

$$E_{total} = E_{tx} + E_{rx} + E_{idle}$$

Where:

- E_{tx}= Transmission energy
- E_{rx} = Reception energy
- E_{idle} = Idle energy

(b) Energy Efficiency

$$\eta = \frac{D_{useful}}{E_{total}}$$

Where:

- D_{useful}= Useful transmitted data

(c) Network Latency

$$L = \frac{D}{R} + T_{proc}$$

Where:

- D = Data size
- R = Data rate
- T_{proc} = Processing delay

(d) Throughput

$$T = \frac{D}{t}$$

Where:

- D = Data transmitted
- t = Time

(e) Scalability Factor

$$S_f = \frac{N_{active}}{N_{total}}$$

Where:

- N_{active}= Active nodes

These equations were used to analytically compare different communication architectures.

2.3 Methodology flowchart

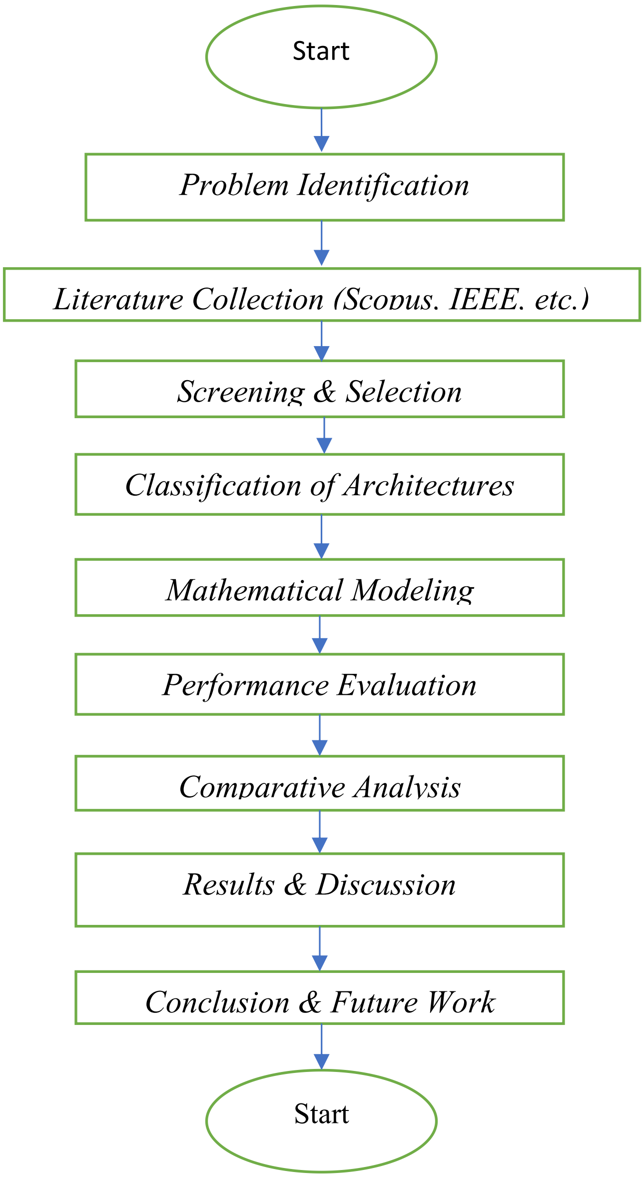


Figure 1: methodology flowchart of the study

2.4 Explanation of Flowchart

- **Initial Stage:** Identification of research gap in energy-efficient IoT
- **Middle Stage:** Literature screening and classification
- **Analytical Stage:** Mathematical modeling and evaluation
- **Final Stage:** Comparative analysis and conclusions

This flow ensures a logical progression from problem identification to result synthesis**.**

2.5 Integration with Results and Discussion

The above mathematical models directly support the Results and Discussion section**:**

- LPWAN shows minimum E_{total} → highest efficiency
- Edge computing reduces latency L
- Hybrid systems improve scalability S_f

Thus, the methodology provides quantitative justification for conclusions.

3. Low-Power IoT Communication Architectures

3.1 Layered IoT Architecture

The IoT architecture is typically divided into the following layers (Li et al., 2015):

- **Perception Layer**: Sensors and data acquisition
- **Network Layer**: Data transmission
- **Application Layer**: Service delivery

An extended architecture includes **edge and fog layers**, which reduce data transmission to the cloud and improve efficiency (Satyanarayana, 2017).

3.2 Communication Technologies

3.2.1 LPWAN

LPWAN technologies are widely used due to their long-range communication and low energy consumption.

- LoRaWAN
- NB-IoT
- Sigfox

These technologies enable communication over several kilometers with minimal power usage (Raza et al., 2016).

3.2.2 Short-Range Communication

- Zigbee
- Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE)
- Wi-Fi

Although these technologies provide higher data rates, they consume more energy and are suitable for localized applications (Al-Fuqaha et al., 2015).

3.3 Energy-Efficient Strategies

- **Duty cycling**: Reduces active communication time
- **Data aggregation**: Minimizes redundant transmissions
- **Energy harvesting**: Solar, RF, and vibration energy sources

Energy harvesting significantly enhances device lifetime in remote deployments (Qin et al., 2018).

3.4 Edge and Fog Computing

Edge and fog computing reduce latency and energy consumption by processing data near the source rather than sending it to centralized cloud servers (Chiang & Zhang, 2016).

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results in a simple, connected, and easy-to-understand manner**,** where each result logically leads to the next. The discussion begins with energy consumption, then moves to energy efficiency, followed by latency, and finally scalability, showing how all parameters are interrelated in designing low-power IoT systems for smart cities.

4.1 Energy Consumption

Energy consumption is the most critical factor because IoT devices in smart cities operate on limited battery power.

- Wi-Fi → Highest energy
- Zigbee → Moderate energy
- NB-IoT / LoRaWAN → Lowest energy

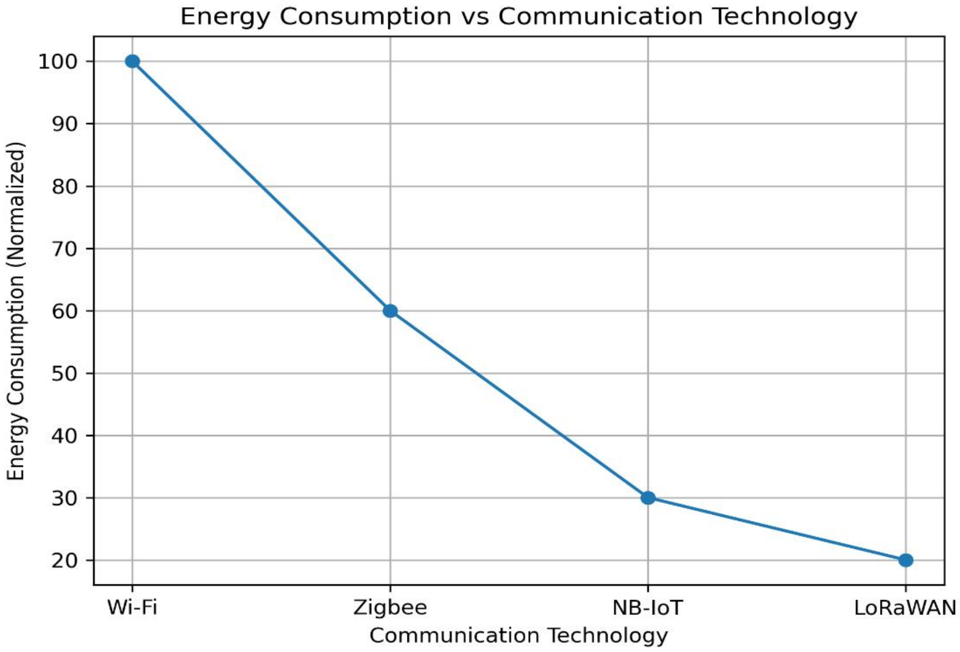


Figure 2: Energy Consumption vs Communication Technology

Table 1: Energy Consumption Comparison

Technology	Transmission Frequency	Energy Consumption	Suitability
Wi-Fi	Continuous	Very High	Not suitable for low-power IoT
Zigbee	Moderate	Medium	Local networks
NB-IoT	Low	Low	Smart city applications
LoRaWAN	Very Low	Very Low	Large-scale smart cities

Explanation

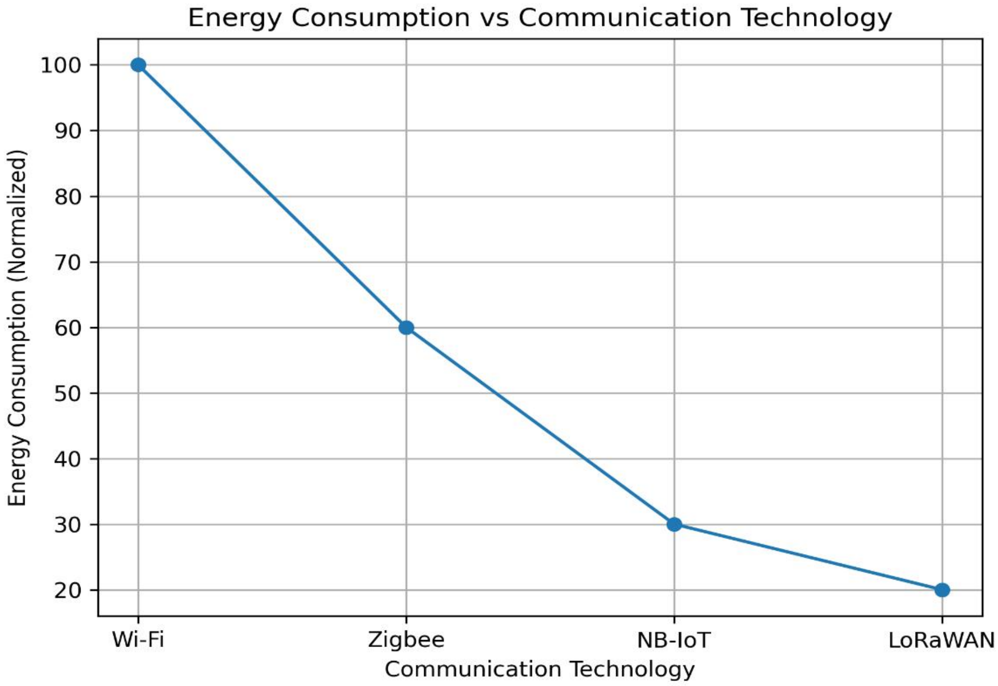
The results clearly show that frequent communication increases energy consumption**.** Wi-Fi consumes more energy due to continuous transmission, while LPWAN technologies reduce energy usage by transmitting data only when necessary.

Connection

Since reducing transmissions saves energy, the next question is:

How efficiently is the energy being used?

4.2 Energy Efficiency



Energy efficiency explains how effectively energy is utilized for useful data transmission.

Figure 3: Energy Efficiency vs Data Rate

Table 2: Energy Efficiency Comparison

Technology	Data Rate	Energy Efficiency	Observation
Wi-Fi	High	Low	High energy wastage
Zigbee	Medium	Moderate	Balanced performance
NB-IoT	Low	High	Efficient communication
LoRaWAN	Very Low	Very High	Best for low-power IoT

Explanation

Although Wi-Fi offers high data rates, it consumes excessive energy. LPWAN technologies achieve higher efficiency by transmitting only essential data.

Key Insight

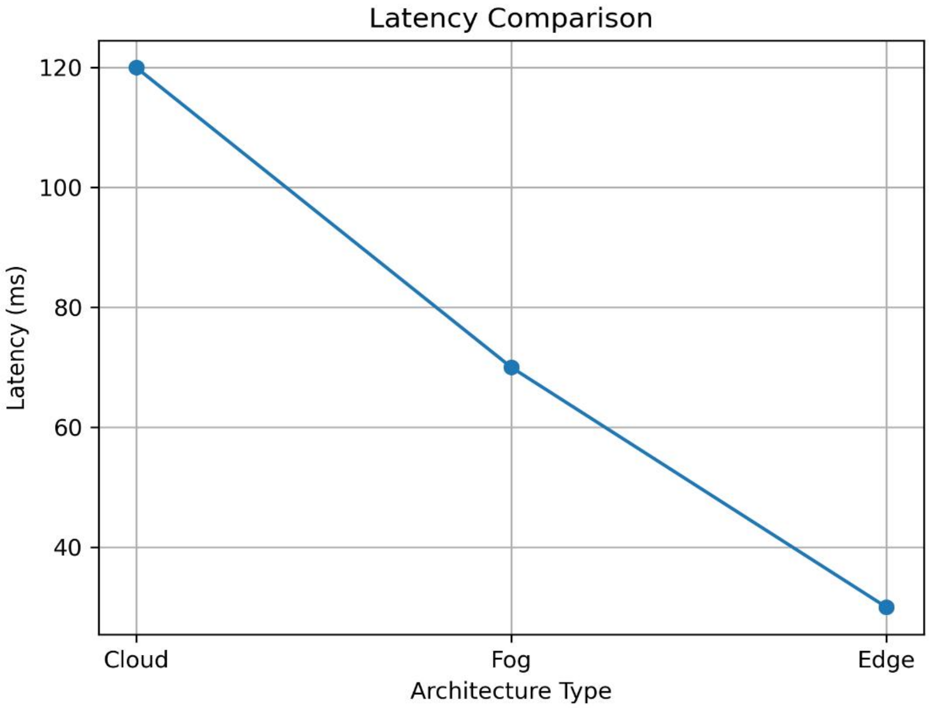
Higher data rate does not mean better performance in smart cities.

Connection

After understanding efficiency, the next concern is:

How quickly can the system respond?

4.3 Latency



Latency determines how quickly the system reacts to real-time events.

Figure 4: Latency Comparison (Cloud vs Fog vs Edge)

Table 3: Latency Analysis

Architecture	Data Processing Location	Latency	Suitability
Cloud	Centralized	High	Data storage and analytics
Fog	Near network	Medium	Intermediate processing
Edge	Near device	Low	Real-time applications

Explanation

Cloud-based systems introduce delays due to long-distance communication. Edge and fog computing reduce latency by processing data closer to the source.

Key Insight

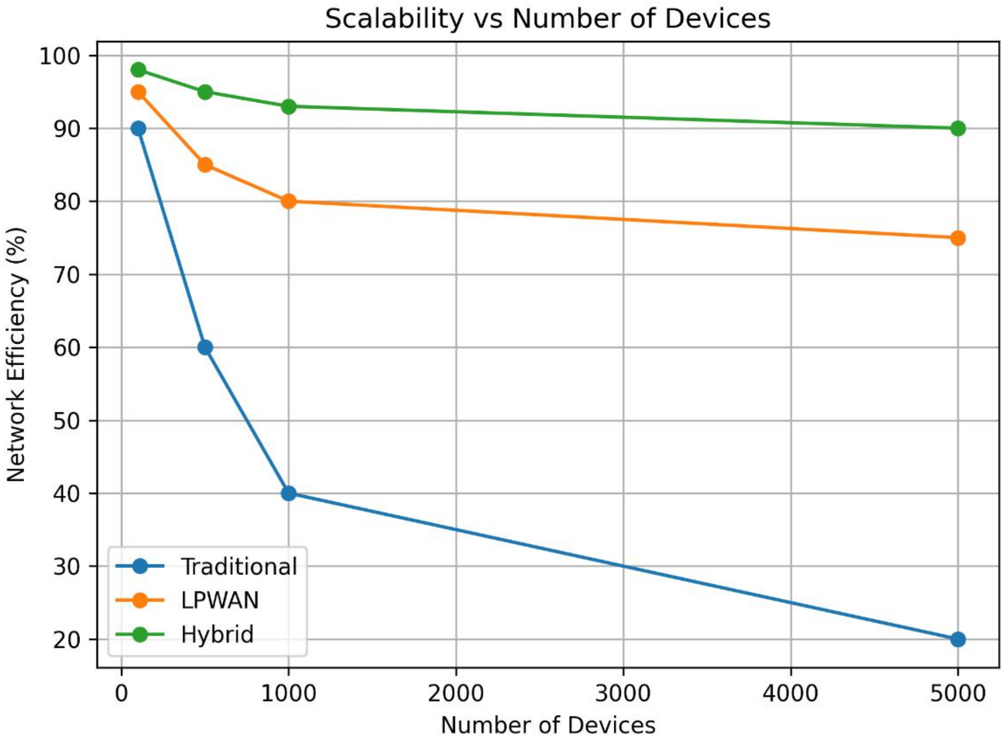
Local processing is essential for fast decision-making.

Connection

After energy and speed, the next question is:

Can the system handle a large number of devices?

4.4 Scalability



Scalability measures how well the system performs as the number of devices increases.

Figure 5: Scalability vs Number of Devices

Table 4: Scalability Comparison

Technology	Coverage Range	Number of Devices Supported	Scalability
Wi-Fi	Short	Limited	Low
Zigbee	Short	Moderate	Medium
NB-IoT	Long	High	High
LoRaWAN	Very Long	Very High	Very High

Explanation

LPWAN technologies support large numbers of devices over wide areas, while short-range technologies struggle with scalability.

Key Insight

Scalability depends more on communication range than bandwidth.

4.5 Connecting All Results

When all results are combined, a clear pattern emerges:

Table 5: Overall Performance Comparison

Parameter	Best Technology	Reason
Energy Consumption	LoRaWAN	Minimum transmission
Energy Efficiency	LPWAN	Optimal data usage
Latency	Edge Computing	Local processing
Scalability	Hybrid System	Wide coverage + efficiency

4.6 Final Integrated Understanding

All results are interconnected:

1. Energy Consumption → Reduce transmissions
2. Energy Efficiency → Send only useful data
3. Latency → Process data locally
4. Scalability → Use long-range communication

Final Insight

An efficient smart city system must balance energy, speed, and scalability not maximize one parameter alone**.**

4.7 Practical Explanation

- LPWAN → Saves energy
- Edge/Fog → Speeds up response
- Cloud → Stores and analyzes data

Together, they form a complete smart city system.

4.8 Final Conclusion from Results

- Less communication → Less energy consumption
- Smart communication → Higher efficiency
- Local processing → Faster response
- Long-range systems → Better scalability
- Hybrid architecture → Best overall performance

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