

DEVELOPMENT OF ICMP-BASED TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORK DIAGNOSTICS AND TROUBLESHOOTING

A CAPSTONE PROJECT REPORT

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Submitted by

Lathika Chowdry S (192512286)

Shalini K (192512270)

Srenidhi M S (192511214)

Under the Supervision of

Dr. K. Senthil

Dr. P. Rajaram



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Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences

Chennai-602105

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Chennai-602105



DECLARATION

We, S. Lathika Chowdry, K. Shalini and M.S. Srenidhi of the ECE and CSE, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Saveetha University, Chennai. Hereby declare that the Capstone Project Work entitled '**Development of ICMP-Based Tools for Effective Network Diagnostics and Troubleshooting**' is the result of our own Bonafide efforts. To the best of our knowledge, the work presented herein is original, accurate, and has been carried out in accordance with principles of engineering ethics.

Place: SIMATS Engineering, Chennai

Date: 26 December 2025

Signature of the Students with Names

Lathika Chowdry S (192512286)

Shalini K (192512270)

Srenidhi M S (192511214)



SIMATS ENGINEERING

Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences

Chennai-602105



BONAFIDE CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Capstone Project entitled "**Development of ICMP-Based Tools for Effective Network Diagnostics and Troubleshooting**" has been carried out by **S. Lathika Chowdry, K. Shalini and M S Sreenidhi** under the supervision of **Dr. K. Senthil and Dr. P. Rajaram** and is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the current semester of the CSE-AI, IT program at Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai.

SIGNATURE

Dr. S. Magesh Kumar,

Program Director,

Department of CSE-Bio Science,

Saveetha school of Engineering,
SIMATS

SIGNATURE

Dr. K. Senthil,

Dr .P. Rajaram,

Professors,

Department of computer science,

Saveetha school of Engineering, SIMATS

Submitted for the Project work Viva-Voce held on 26.12.2025

INTERNAL EXAMINER

EXTERNAL EXAMINER

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Signature With Student Name

Lathika Chowdry S (192512286)

Shalini K (192512270)

Srenidhi M S (192511214)

ABSTRACT

The growth of computer networks and the increasing dependence on reliable digital communication have highlighted the importance of efficient diagnostic mechanisms and fault-tolerant network design. As organizations scale, even minor disruptions in connectivity can significantly impact applications, services, and service-level agreements (SLAs). To address such challenges, this project focuses on the implementation, analysis, and evaluation of the Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP) as a fundamental tool for network diagnostics and troubleshooting. ICMP, defined under RFC 792, operates at the network layer and provides critical feedback related to packet delivery, routing behavior, and error notifications.

This capstone project investigates the technical architecture of ICMP, explores message types and structures, implements core ICMP functionalities such as Echo Request/Reply and Time Exceeded messages, and demonstrates how these mechanisms support diagnostics tools like Ping and Traceroute. The project is divided into two major modules: ICMP Protocol Implementation, which explains the construction of ICMP packets, header fields, checksum computation, and the internal processing of ICMP messages by network devices; and ICMP Diagnostics Implementation, which simulates real-time diagnostic operations including latency measurement, packet-loss detection, routing path identification, and failure analysis.

Analytical results from controlled testing environments show how ICMP accurately identifies problems such as unreachable hosts, routing loops, transmission delays, and gateway misconfigurations. The project concludes that ICMP remains an indispensable tool for network engineers, offering transparency into network behavior and forming the basis for advanced monitoring systems. Recommendations are provided for improving ICMP-based diagnostics and extending this work into areas such as security analysis and QoS-aware monitoring.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

Modern networking infrastructures support billions of devices that rely on seamless, secure, and efficient communication. Whether in enterprise environments, cloud-based architectures, educational networks, or public internet systems, the ability to rapidly diagnose and resolve network-related issues is essential for maintaining performance and reliability. Network disruptions—ranging from broken links, routing misconfigurations, overloaded devices, to misbehaving protocols—can affect service availability, impact business operations, and degrade application performance.

Network administrators depend on diagnostic tools to identify connectivity problems, locate performance bottlenecks, and monitor end-to-end latency. A foundational technology that enables such diagnostics is the Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP). Unlike TCP or UDP, ICMP is not used to transport application data; instead, it communicates control information and error messages, assisting in the detection and reporting of faults within the network layer. ICMP forms the operational core behind popular network tools such as Ping, Traceroute, PathPing, and numerous monitoring systems.

ICMP's role in networking is unique because it operates alongside IPv4/IPv6, providing insight into packet forwarding, router behavior, TTL (Time-to-Live) expiration, congestion, and unreachable destinations. Without ICMP, diagnosing faults in IP-based networks would be significantly more challenging, as routers and hosts would lack a standardized mechanism for error reporting. This project explores the architecture, implementation, and practical applications of ICMP to create a strong conceptual and practical understanding of network diagnostics.

1.2 Project Objectives

The key objectives of this project include:

1. To study the architectural design of the Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP) and its role in IP networks.

2. To implement core ICMP functionalities including message generation, header structure, message types, and checksum computation.
3. To develop the ICMP Protocol Implementation Module demonstrating how ICMP messages are constructed, transmitted, and processed by network devices.
4. To develop the ICMP Diagnostics Implementation Module that simulates tools such as Ping and Traceroute for troubleshooting network performance.
5. To analyze how ICMP helps in identifying issues such as packet loss, network congestion, unreachable hosts, routing loops, TTL expiration, and misconfigured gateways.

1.3 Significance of the Project

This project holds academic, industrial, and practical significance due to the following reasons:

- **Network Reliability:** ICMP plays a central role in supporting infrastructure reliability by providing real-time feedback on connectivity issues.
- **Foundation for Troubleshooting:** Tools built on ICMP (Ping, Traceroute) are indispensable for network administrators and support engineers.
- **Educational Importance:** Understanding ICMP deepens one's knowledge of the TCP/IP suite, routing behavior, error detection, and network-layer operations.
- **Practical Industry Utility:** Almost every enterprise network relies on ICMP for fault analysis, making this project highly relevant to real-world networking roles.
- **Basis for Security Tools:** Many security scans and reconnaissance techniques also leverage ICMP, making its understanding important from a cybersecurity perspective.

1.4 Scope of the Project

Included in Scope:

- ICMP fundamental concepts, message types, and architecture
- Detailed protocol implementation (header structure, type/code values, checksum algorithm)

- Implementation of ICMP Echo Request/Reply
- Simulation of Ping and Traceroute functionalities
- Network diagnostics using ICMP
- Performance analysis and troubleshooting case studies

Excluded from Scope:

- Firewall bypass techniques using ICMP
- ICMP tunneling and covert channels
- Advanced IDS/IPS or security exploitation using ICMP
- IPv6 ICMPv6 (project focuses primarily on ICMP for IPv4)

1.5 Methodology Overview

The methodology followed in this project includes:

1. **Literature Review:** Studying RFC 792, academic papers, textbooks, and online research sources to understand ICMP behavior.
2. **System Design:** Designing two modules for protocol implementation and diagnostics.
3. **Protocol Implementation:** Constructing ICMP packets, generating Echo Requests, computing checksums, and analyzing replies.
4. **Diagnostics Module Development:** Simulating Ping, Traceroute, and error detection mechanisms.
5. **Testing:** Executing controlled experiments with reachable and unreachable hosts, varying TTL, and measuring delay.
6. **Analysis:** Documenting results, analyzing errors, and drawing conclusions.
7. **Recommendations:** Identifying improvements and proposing future enhancements.\

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Description of the Problem

In modern communication networks, disruptions can occur due to hardware failures, misconfigurations, routing anomalies, congestion, or ISP issues. Without effective diagnostic mechanisms, identifying the root cause of network failures becomes extremely difficult. The absence of structured error reporting leads to longer downtime, increased operational cost, and reduced network performance.

Although networks operate using IP routing, the IP protocol itself does not include mechanisms for error reporting or status feedback. Therefore, administrators must rely on ICMP as the primary method for retrieving diagnostic information. This project aims to address the lack of clear understanding and implementation of ICMP-based diagnostics among learners and practitioners.

2.2 Evidence of the Problem

Typical network problems observed in real-world environments include:

- **Packet loss** due to congested links
- **Firewall blocking** preventing application communication
- **TTL expiry** indicating long or faulty paths

ICMP is capable of providing real-time feedback about these conditions through standardized messages.

2.3 Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholders affected by poor network diagnostics include:

- **Network Engineers:** Require troubleshooting tools to maintain infrastructure.
- **IT Support Teams:** Need accurate diagnostics to solve end-user connectivity issues.
- **High latency** caused by routing inefficiency
- **Unreachable hosts** due to downed servers or broken paths

- **Incorrect routing tables** leading to routing loops
- **Organizations & Enterprises:** Rely on stable networks for operation continuity.
- **Students and Researchers:** Gain practical understanding of protocol behavior.
- **Cloud and Data Center Providers:** Require monitoring systems built on ICMP.

2.4 Supporting Data and Research Findings

Research papers and RFC standards emphasize the importance of ICMP in operational networking:

- **RFC 792** specifies ICMP as essential for error messages and operational information.
- Studies by Cisco, Juniper, and IEEE highlight ICMP as the foundation for network health checks.
- ICMP is used in enterprise-grade monitoring tools such as SolarWinds, Nagios, Zabbix, and PRTG.
- Academically, ICMP is taught as a fundamental concept in computer networks, security, and routing.

These findings validate the need for ICMP-based diagnostic implementations

CHAPTER 3

SOLUTION DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Overview of the Methodology

The methodology for this project was designed to ensure a systematic, logical, and technically accurate approach to implementing ICMP-based network diagnostics. The entire process was divided into well-defined phases that covered planning, analysis, design, implementation, testing, and validation. This structured workflow enabled smooth progression from theory.

The project began with understanding ICMP protocol specifications from RFC 792 and IPv4 specifications from RFC 791. These documents served as the primary guidelines for constructing ICMP packets, implementing checksum logic, and ensuring proper packet formatting. After gaining theoretical clarity, the methodology moved into designing the system architecture for the ICMP Protocol Implementation Module and the ICMP Diagnostics

Finally, practical testing was conducted using tools such as Wireshark, Cisco Packet Tracer, and real network environments to verify the correctness of the implementation. This methodology ensured accuracy, reliability, and deep technical understanding of ICMP operations.

3.2 Data Collection and Technical Study

Data collection for this project primarily focused on gathering accurate protocol descriptions, packet formats, and operational rules from authoritative sources. RFC 792 and RFC 791 were the core technical references used to understand ICMP Type, Code fields, header structure,

In addition to RFCs, textbooks, research papers, and networking documentation were reviewed to understand real-world applications of ICMP diagnostics. This included studying how Ping and Traceroute work internally, how routers respond to TTL expiration, how Echo Replies are generated, and what conditions trigger Destination Unreachable messages.

The data collected also included practical observations from packet captures. By examining Wireshark traces of real ICMP traffic, I was able to verify checksum behavior, timestamp accuracy, and payload structure. These observations guided the implementation and provided This combined approach of theoretical data collection and empirical packet analysis ensured authentic and technically correct implementation.

3.3 System Design and Architecture

The architecture defined how raw sockets would be used to manually construct ICMP Echo Request packets, how fields such as Type, Code, Identifier, Sequence Number, and Checksum would be inserted, and how the packet would then be encapsulated inside an IPv4 datagram for transmission.

For diagnostics, the system design outlined how Ping would measure round-trip time by capturing timestamps before and after sending packets. Similarly, Traceroute was designed to use incrementing TTL values to retrieve Time Exceeded messages from each hop.

The system architecture also included the use of Wireshark for packet validation and Cisco Packet Tracer for controlled simulation of multi-router paths and routing loops. Overall, the system design ensured modularity, clarity, and compliance with networking standards.

3.4 Implementation Process

The implementation phase involved translating the system design into a working diagnostic tool based on ICMP. The first step was constructing an ICMP Echo Request packet manually. This required creating a raw byte array and inserting the correct header values such as Type 8 (Echo Request), Code 0, Identifier, Sequence Number, and checksum. The checksum was calculated using the standard Internet checksum algorithm, requiring careful handling of 16-bit values.

The next part of implementation involved sending the packet through a raw socket and waiting for an Echo Reply. The received packet was then parsed to extract fields such as TTL, checksum, and round-trip timestamp. This enabled the core functionality of the Ping tool.

For Traceroute, the implementation involved sending multiple packets with increasing TTL values, starting from 1 up to a predefined maximum hop count. Each TTL value triggered a Time Exceeded message from intermediate routers, whose IP addresses were extracted and recorded.

The implementation phase also required debugging using Wireshark to confirm that packet structure and checksum values were correct. This step ensured strict compliance with the ICMP standard.

3.5 Testing, Verification, and Validation

Testing was conducted in multiple phases to ensure reliability and correctness of the implementation. First, functional testing was done using local networks to verify that ICMP Echo Requests generated Echo Replies correctly. Round-trip times were measured and compared with system-level Ping outputs to ensure the efficiency and the accuracy.

Next, traceroute testing was performed in simulated topologies created using Cisco Packet Tracer. These included simple three-router paths, mesh networks, and routing loop scenarios. Each hop responded with Time Exceeded messages as expected, confirming that TTL-based Validation was also performed using Wireshark packet captures. By analyzing packet fields such as Type, Code, Identifier, Sequence Number, and Checksum, the correctness of the generated ICMP packets was confirmed. Any packets with checksum mismatches were corrected. Finally, external network testing was conducted using public DNS servers and internet hosts to ensure the diagnostic tool works beyond local simulation. This multi-level testing process guaranteed accuracy, robustness, and standard compliance.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Evaluation of Results

This section presents the overall results obtained from implementing the ICMP Protocol Module and the ICMP Diagnostics Module. The evaluation focuses on correctness, accuracy, and performance of ICMP operations under various network environments.

The project successfully demonstrated that ICMP is a reliable mechanism for detecting network faults, measuring delay, identifying unreachable nodes, tracing routing paths, and analyzing hop-wise progression across routers.

Testing was conducted in multiple scenarios, including a local LAN, Wi-Fi network, simulated Packet Tracer networks, and public IP networks. The ICMP packets generated by the implementation followed the exact structure defined by RFC 792, and all packets captured in Wireshark matched expected header formats, checksum values, and identifier fields.

4.2 Challenges Encountered

During testing and implementation, several technical and environmental challenges were observed.

One major challenge was related to operating system restrictions. Platforms like Windows require elevated privileges to create raw ICMP sockets, which initially caused packet transmission failures. To overcome this, testing was shifted to Linux-based systems where raw-socket operations are more accessible.

Another challenge was firewall blocking, especially on networks where administrators restrict ICMP Echo Requests for security reasons. In such environments, Ping appeared to fail even though the host was active. This required careful interpretation of results to distinguish between genuine host unreachable conditions and ICMP suppression policies.

Additionally, routing loop simulations produced repetitive Time Exceeded messages, making it difficult to determine termination points in traceroute tests. To address this, a maximum hop limit was implemented. Wireless environments also introduced random latency spikes, affecting RTT stability and requiring statistical averaging to interpret results accurately.

4.3 Possible Improvements

Although the implemented ICMP system performed successfully, several enhancements can increase functionality, scalability, and analytical depth.

First, support for ICMPv6 can be added. Modern networks rely heavily on IPv6, and ICMPv6 provides additional functionalities such as Neighbor Discovery and Router Advertisements, which would extend the diagnostic capabilities of the project.

A second improvement would be to integrate visual output, such as graphical RTT plots, traceroute path diagrams, or detailed hop-wise analysis charts. This would support easier interpretation of results, especially for academic demonstrations or enterprise use.

Another improvement involves expanding diagnostics to include multi-protocol testing, such as TCP-based or UDP-based probing, enabling comparison across different transport mechanisms.

Furthermore, implementing an automated logging and reporting system could allow long-term monitoring, storing all diagnostic results for trend analysis and network performance evaluation.

4.4 Recommendations

The results demonstrate that ICMP remains essential for network troubleshooting, and several recommendations are provided for practical use and further development.

From an operational perspective, organizations should enable ICMP selectively rather than blocking it entirely, as ICMP helps identify failures early and reduces diagnostic complexity. Minimal ICMP allowance—specifically Echo Reply and Time Exceeded messages—helps maintain security while still supporting diagnostics.

In academic and training environments, the developed modules can be used to teach students about packet-level networking, raw socket programming, and the layered architecture of IP networks.

For future research, it is recommended to explore machine learning-based anomaly detection using ICMP patterns, as modern networks generate large volumes of diagnostic data that can reveal performance degradation trends.

Overall, ICMP diagnostics should be integrated with broader monitoring systems such as SNMP or flow-based analysis tools for a more holistic network health evaluation.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTION ON LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Key Learning Outcomes

This project has provided extensive learning opportunities across academic concepts, technical implementation, and real-world networking behavior. Through the development of the ICMP Protocol Implementation and ICMP Diagnostics Implementation modules, I gained a deeper understanding of how network protocols function at a low level. Concepts such as packet structure, encapsulation, header formatting, TTL handling, and router behavior became more concrete as I worked directly with them during testing and implementation.

I also learned how essential ICMP is to maintaining network health. Tools like Ping and Traceroute, which were once simple utilities to me, became subjects of deeper analysis. I gained insights into how routers respond to TTL expiration, how hosts generate Echo Replies, and how diagnostic information travels through networks. Additionally, working with Wireshark strengthened my ability to analyze packets and interpret protocol fields, enhancing my confidence in examining network traffic.

Overall, the key learning outcome was a strong understanding of how theoretical networking concepts translate into practical operations on real systems.

5.2 Challenges Encountered and Overcome

Throughout this project, I encountered various challenges that tested my technical knowledge, patience, and analytical abilities. One of the major challenges was working with raw ICMP sockets, which require administrative privileges and strict compliance with protocol formats. Many operating systems impose restrictions on raw packet generation for security reasons, which caused initial tests to fail. Overcoming this required researching system permissions.

Another major challenge was correctly generating the ICMP checksum. Even a single incorrect bit causes routers to discard the packet, so I had to repeatedly compute the checksum, verify binary values, and compare results with packet captures. This process taught me the importance

Additionally, network environments with firewalls or ICMP blocking made it difficult to distinguish between genuine network failure and blocked diagnostic traffic. This taught me to analyze results more critically rather than assuming immediate conclusions. These challenges

collectively improved my troubleshooting skills and deepened my understanding of networking behavior.

5.3 Application of Engineering Standards

This project strengthened my appreciation for engineering standards and their importance in ensuring interoperability across networks. Implementing ICMP required strict adherence to RFC 792, while understanding IPv4 behavior required careful reading of RFC 791. These documents served as authoritative references that guided every aspect of the packet-building process.

By following these standards, the packets generated in the project were correctly recognized by routers and other devices, demonstrating the importance of maintaining compliance with established protocols. The experience also taught me how professionals in the networking industry rely on RFCs for designing, implementing, and validating network systems.

Additionally, testing the project in Ethernet and Wi-Fi environments exposed me to IEEE 802.3 and IEEE 802.11 standards, helping me understand how data moves through the lower layers before reaching the network layer. This comprehensive exposure improved my understanding of standardized communication, which is essential for building reliable and scalable systems.

5.4 Insights Gained into the Networking Industry

Working on this project gave me valuable insights into how the networking industry uses diagnostic tools and protocols in daily operations. I learned how network administrators rely on ICMP-based tools to ensure connectivity, measure performance, and identify problem areas. Tools such as Ping and Traceroute, though simple, form the backbone of real-world troubleshooting workflows.

I also gained insight into how enterprises manage their network security policies. Many organizations block or limit ICMP traffic to prevent scanning attacks, which affects diagnostic results. Understanding this helped me appreciate the balance between network visibility and security.

The project also showed me how ISPs manage routing and how multiple hops work together to deliver data across long distances. Observing the hop-by-hop journey of packets through traceroute tests gave me a real-world view of how internet routing functions. These insights helped me understand networking not just as a technical subject but as a critical infrastructure supporting global communication.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

6.1 Summary of the Project

This project, titled “Network Diagnostics and Troubleshooting Using the ICMP Protocol Implementation,” provided an in-depth exploration of how ICMP operates as an essential diagnostic protocol within IP networks. Throughout the development and testing phases, the focus remained on understanding the internal mechanics of ICMP, its error-reporting capabilities, and its diagnostic usefulness in troubleshooting network failures.

By implementing core ICMP packet structures, constructing Echo Request and Echo Reply messages, and simulating TTL-based diagnostic operations, the project demonstrated that ICMP is fundamental for assessing connectivity, identifying routing issues, and measuring performance metrics such as delay and packet loss. The project also highlighted the importance of ICMP in enterprise environments, educational labs, and cybersecurity tasks.

Overall, the work successfully bridged theoretical networking concepts with practical implementation, proving that ICMP remains a vital protocol for maintaining stable, resilient, and transparent communication systems.

6.2 Major Findings from Analysis and Experiments

The experiments and simulations conducted throughout this project produced several important findings. One major finding was that ICMP-based tools such as Ping and Traceroute continue to be the most effective and widely used diagnostic mechanisms across networks of all sizes. Testing revealed that these tools accurately measure round-trip time, detect unreachable destinations, Another key finding was that ICMP behavior is heavily influenced by network environment and security configurations. Some routers and firewalls block ICMP responses, which can cause diagnostic results to appear inconsistent. This taught an important lesson: ICMP results should always be interpreted with awareness of network policies.

Additionally, the project revealed how checksum accuracy, TTL handling, and header formatting play critical roles in ensuring proper packet processing. Any deviation from RFC specifications resulted in packet rejection, reinforcing the importance of adhering strictly to standards. These findings highlight the technical precision required in network engineering and the reliability of ICMP when configured and interpreted correctly.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

Although the project was successful, it was conducted under certain limitations. One limitation was the testing environment itself. Some networks, especially institutional or public networks, block ICMP messages by default due to security policies. This created constraints during testing, as certain traceroute or ping results could not be fully captured or verified.

Another limitation was the scope of the implementation. The project primarily focused on ICMP for IPv4, leaving ICMPv6 outside the scope due to time constraints. ICMPv6 provides additional functionality such as Neighbour Discovery and Router Advertisements, which could enrich future diagnostics studies. Additionally, the project relied on simulation tools like Cisco Packet Tracer for certain routing scenarios. While Packet Tracer is reliable for learning, it does not always replicate real-world ISP-level routing conditions. This means the project simulated realistic scenarios but could not fully emulate large-scale network behaviors.

Despite these limitations, the project still achieved its objectives and provided valuable insights into ICMP operations.

6.4 Future Enhancements and Research Opportunities

There are several ways this project can be expanded in the future to enhance its usefulness and depth. One major enhancement is the inclusion of ICMPv6 diagnostics. Networks around the world are moving toward IPv6, and ICMPv6 has more advanced messaging capabilities that

Another future improvement is the integration of graphical output or real-time data visualization. For example, RTT graphs, hop-wise latency charts, or automated report generation would make the diagnostic tool more suitable for real-world network monitoring.

There is also potential to integrate machine learning or anomaly detection algorithms. ICMP data, when collected over time, can be analyzed to detect patterns of congestion, routing changes, or network attacks. Using predictive algorithms could transform ICMP diagnostics

Additionally, hybrid diagnostic approaches combining ICMP with TCP or UDP-based probing techniques could create a more comprehensive troubleshooting suite. These enhancements could significantly expand the capability and impact of the project.

6.5 Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, this project successfully demonstrated the functionality, importance, and reliability of ICMP as a network diagnostic protocol. It showed how ICMP contributes to detecting faults, measuring performance, and verifying connectivity between devices across

Through the construction and analysis of ICMP packets, I gained a detailed understanding of how networks operate internally and how diagnostic tools communicate with underlying protocols. The project reinforced the value of engineering standards, packet-level precision,

Ultimately, this project has strengthened my technical foundation, improved my analytical skills, and provided meaningful insights into real-world networking operations. The knowledge gained will serve as a strong base for future academic projects, research opportunities, and professional careers in networking and cybersecurity

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APPENDICES

A1: List of Hardware

1. Switch
2. PC
3. Laptop

A2: Sample Output

