

Selective Offloading in Mobile Edge Computing for the Green Internet of Things

Xinchen Lyu, Hui Tian, Li Jiang, Alexey Vinel, Sabita Maharjan, Stein Gjessing, and Yan Zhang

ABSTRACT

Mobile edge computing provides the radio access networks with cloud computing capabilities to fulfill the requirements of the Internet of Things services such as high reliability and low latency. Offloading services to edge servers can alleviate the storage and computing limitations and prolong the lifetimes of the IoT devices. However, offloading in MEC faces scalability problems due to the massive number of IoT devices. In this article, we present a new integration architecture of the cloud, MEC, and IoT, and propose a lightweight request and admission framework to resolve the scalability problem. Without coordination among devices, the proposed framework can be operated at the IoT devices and computing servers separately, by encapsulating latency requirements in offloading requests. Then a selective offloading scheme is designed to minimize the energy consumption of devices, where the signaling overhead can be further reduced by enabling the devices to be self-nominated or self-denied for offloading. Simulation results show that our proposed selective offloading scheme can satisfy the latency requirements of different services and reduce the energy consumption of IoT devices.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet of Things (IoT) is proposed to equip everyday objects with electronics, software, sensors, and network connectivity, and bring the vision of a connected world into reality [1, 2]. However, computation-intensive services, such as e-health, automatic driving, and industrial automation, are fast developing and outgrowing the computing and storage capabilities of IoT devices. Cloud computing offers enormous storage, computing facilities, and data sharing opportunities. By offloading the computation and storage from the IoT devices to the cloud through mobile networks, mobile cloud computing can alleviate the computation and storage limitations and prolong the lifetimes of IoT devices [3].

As the computing units in the core network use shared backhaul resources, mobile cloud computing may not be able to meet the reliability and latency requirements of IoT services. For instance, emergency IoT services, such as mobile vehicular connectivity, e-health, and industrial automation, require ultra low latency and extremely high reliability. In addition, the services from smart sensors generate high volumes of data. Uploading the

sensed data to the cloud may waste energy and cause traffic congestion in the core network.

Mobile edge computing (MEC) is introduced to provide radio access networks with cloud computing capabilities [4]. For instance, macro/pico/femto base stations (BSs) may be connected to co-located edge servers to reduce latency, ease the traffic on backhaul links, and deliver reliable services. Typical characteristics of MEC include proximity, high energy efficiency, low latency, high throughput, mobility support, and location awareness [4]. These features align well with the requirements of IoT services.

Offloading incurs extra energy consumption and latency due to the communication between devices and servers. Earlier works on task offloading focus on single-device decision making, where the devices make offloading decisions independently to minimize either latency [5] or energy consumption [6]. Due to the resource bottlenecks of edge servers, scalability becomes a key problem in MEC [7–10]; that is, there is a trade-off between the scale of offloading and the quality of service (QoS). Especially in the era of IoT, the offloaded services from millions of devices will exhaust the computational resources at the edge servers, which leads to increased processing latency that violates the requirements of the emergency IoT services.

The existing studies resolve the scalability problem by either executing the load balancing among edge servers to aggregate and sustain the workloads [7, 8] or implementing the coordination among mobile devices to select services for offloading [9, 10]. On the other hand, cross-platform IoT services have been enabled via transparent computing in [11], and offloading decisions and resource allocations have been jointly optimized in [12, 13]. However, the tremendous scale of IoT devices necessitates efficient service discovery and lightweight resource management for heterogeneous IoT services.

In this article, we present a novel three-layer integration architecture including the cloud, MEC, and IoT, and propose a lightweight request and admission framework to resolve the scalability problem. Following the proposed framework, a selective offloading scheme is developed to minimize the energy consumption of the IoT devices and further reduce the signaling overhead of MEC. Our main contributions are summarized as follows.

Integration architecture of the cloud, MEC, and IoT: The cloud and the geo-distributed edge

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Xinchen Lyu and Hui Tian (corresponding author) are with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications; Li Jiang is with Guangdong University of Technology; Alexey Vinel is with Halmstad University; Sabita Maharjan and Stein Gjessing are with Simula Research Laboratory and the University of Oslo; Yan Zhang is with the University of Oslo.

servers can be complemented by each other to fulfill the various requirements of the IoT services. In the integration, by exploiting the location awareness of edge servers and low-latency interconnects between them, IoT devices from a wide range can be grouped into virtual clusters for efficient service discovery, and the edge servers are organized in a hierarchical structure to sustain the peak workloads by aggregating services across different tiers of servers.

Lightweight request and admission framework: We encapsulate the latency requirements determined at each device in their offloading requests to decouple the dependency of task partitioning of different devices. The proposed request and admission framework resolves the intrinsic scalability problem of MEC, and can be operated at the devices and edge servers separately, without the need for coordination among devices.

Selective offloading scheme: We propose a selective offloading scheme under the request and admission framework to minimize the energy consumption of the IoT devices while satisfying the latency requirements of different services. The signaling overhead of MEC can be further reduced by enabling the devices to be self-nominated or self-denied for offloading.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. We present the three-layer integration architecture, and propose the request and admission framework. We then illustrate our selective offloading scheme and evaluate its efficiency through numerical results. Finally, we conclude the article.

PROPOSED INTEGRATION ARCHITECTURE OF THE CLOUD, MEC, AND IoT

MEC can complement the cloud to fulfill the various requirements of IoT services, such as low latency, high reliability, location awareness, and bandwidth demand. Offloading can save the energy of local execution and stretch the storage and computational capacities of IoT devices. However, the integration of the cloud, MEC, and IoT remains challenging in terms of service discovery, service supply, and load aggregation. In this section, we present our proposed three-layer integration architecture design and illustrate the scalability problem in MEC for IoT.

THREE-LAYER INTEGRATION ARCHITECTURE

Figure 1 shows the proposed three-layer integration architecture for the integration of the cloud, MEC, and IoT:

- The *user plane* is the bottom layer consisting of both mobile users (e.g., smartphones, tablets, and laptops) and IoT devices, such as industrial actuators, wearable devices, and smart sensors. These devices can be grouped into virtual clusters based on their ownership, and co-location and co-service relationships.
- The *edge computing plane* is in close proximity to the users. MEC enables cloud computing capabilities within the radio access networks to fulfill the requirements of the IoT services. The geo-distributed edge servers can be organized in a hierarchical structure to efficiently utilize the resources,

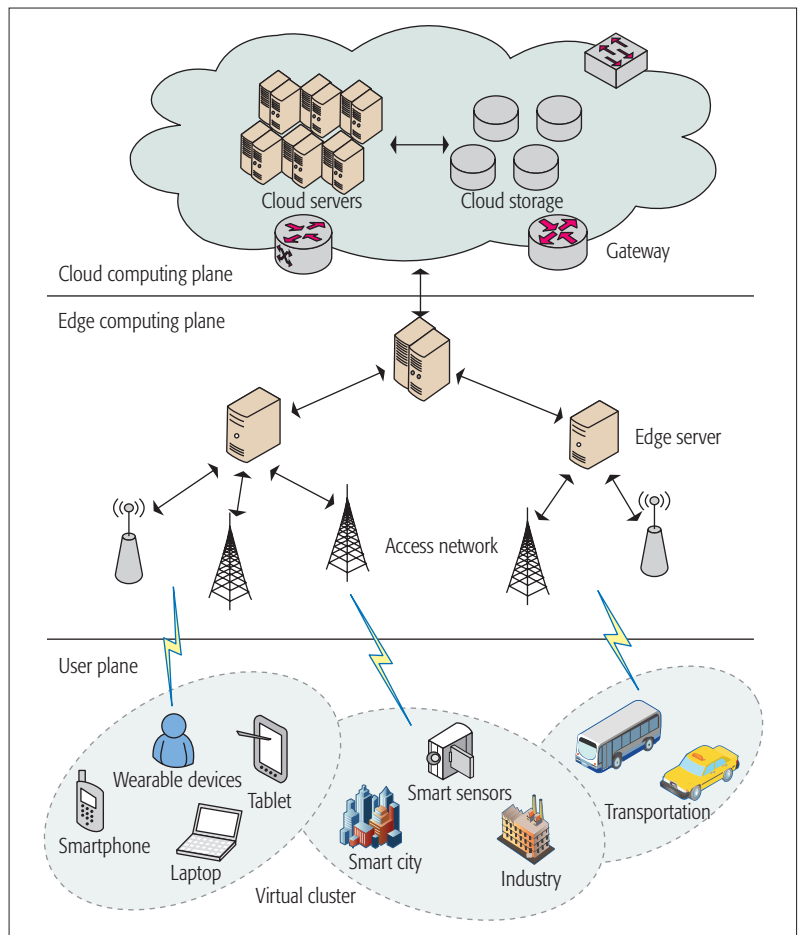


FIGURE 1. The three-layer integration architecture of the cloud, MEC, and IoT.

aggregate the services, and sustain the workloads during peak hours.

- The *cloud computing plane* is in the core network, and constitutes multiple cloud servers and data centers, which are capable of processing and storing enormous amounts of data.

In this three-layer architecture, the data centers in the cloud can perform complex computing and data analysis, and hence, is responsible for processing the delay-tolerant services that require a large number of storage and computational resources to augment the task processing of the edge computing plane. Specifically, the IoT devices sense a multitude of data and offload their services only to the edge servers, instead of offloading directly to the cloud to reduce the required signaling and corresponding energy consumption for decision making. The edge servers in proximity to the user plane collect the offloaded services, prioritize the processing of delay-sensitive services to ease traffic on the backhaul links, and offload delay-tolerant services to the cloud based on their workloads. The advantages of the integration architecture mainly include the following.

Efficient service discovery: In millions of IoT devices, the service discovery, that is, the search for the right device that can provide the desired data or service, is challenging due to its large scale. In the Social Internet of Things (SIoT) paradigm [14], devices can establish social relationships based on their ownerships, locations, and services to enhance the process of service discovery. The edge servers

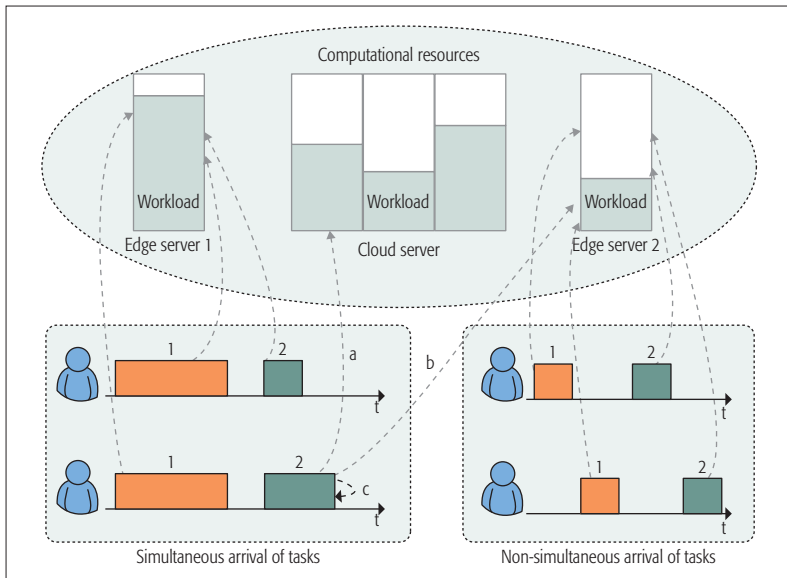


FIGURE 2. Scalability problem and selective offloading.

are aware of the locations and services of these IoT devices, and then are responsible for grouping these devices into virtual clusters. The devices in a virtual cluster are of similar services, and can aggregate the sensed data to a cluster head to further enhance energy efficiency. Moreover, in the edge computing plane, the edge servers in the hierarchical structure can exploit the low-latency interconnects between them to address the devices from a wide range of locations and improve the service visibility for the IoT devices.

High-performance computing as a service: The IoT services may have significantly various requirements in terms of latency, data volumes, and reliability. Traditional mobile cloud computing cannot fulfill the requirements of low latency and high reliability for industrial automation, e-health, and automatic driving. With the deployment of edge servers, MEC has the potential to make high-performance computing a service that resolves the latency fluctuation and delivers reliable services.

Workload aggregation: To complement the cloud, which cannot fulfill the reliability and latency requirements of IoT services, edge servers are deployed in proximity to users with high flexibility of geo-distribution. However, the deployment of edge servers faces a trade-off between resource efficiency and service provisioning during peak workloads. Specifically, the scarce deployment of edge servers will introduce excessive delay due to lack of computational resources, but provisioning more resources through dense deployment could result in poor resource utilization. The tree-structured hierarchical architecture of the edge servers ensures efficient resource utilization by aggregating services across different tiers of servers, and can sustain heavy workloads even during peak hours.

However, considering the resource bottlenecks in the edge servers, scalability is an inherent problem in the proposed architecture.

SCALABILITY PROBLEM

Services can be executed locally or offloaded to the cloud or edge servers. A large number of tasks that arrive at the same edge server will exhaust the computational resources and face scalability prob-

lems. Figure 2 illustrates the scalability problem in the proposed integration architecture. When tasks arrive non-simultaneously, the offloaded tasks can utilize the computational resources in turns, and achieve low latency and high reliability as desired. However, when tasks arrive simultaneously, offloading all the tasks to the same edge server may undergo severe resource scarcity and may suffer much longer service latency in consequence.

Especially in the IoT scenario, thousands of devices may wake up concurrently and compete for the limited resources in the edge servers. This not only significantly degrades the user experience for the services that require ultra low latency and high reliability, but also hampers the lifetimes of the IoT devices, since the devices have to stay active when waiting for the computation results. As a result, the resource bottlenecks and workloads of the edge servers introduce a trade-off between the number of offloaded tasks and the QoS. In addition, the heterogeneity among millions of devices and their services would intensify the scalability problem.

In Fig. 2, the blue parts of the edge servers and the cloud server denote their workloads (i.e., the congestion of tasks). Specifically, edge server 1 is congested by the offloaded tasks and cannot serve the offloaded tasks promptly (i.e., face the scalability problem). As dictated in Fig. 2, using selective offloading, a device can:

- Execute its task locally
- Offload its task to edge server 2 under light workload (e.g., via dual connectivity) [15]
- Offload its task to the cloud through the edge computing plane so as to alleviate the scalability problem and balance the workloads among edge servers

PROPOSED REQUEST AND ADMISSION FRAMEWORK FOR THE GREEN IOT

Green networking, which aims at reducing energy consumption and minimizing operational costs, plays an important role in the IoT paradigm. This is even more crucial for energy-constrained sensors, which are expected to run autonomously for long periods. The longer active time, as described in the scalability problem, would hamper the lifetimes of IoT devices, which necessitates selective offloading for energy saving. However, the selective offloading schemes in [9, 10] require coordination among devices, which results in a waste of energy in millions of IoT devices. In this section, we discuss the key challenges in offloading in MEC, and propose a request and admission framework for the green IoT.

CHALLENGES OF OFFLOADING IN MEC

Offloading strategies for task partitioning have been extensively studied in mobile cloud computing (e.g., [5, 6]). In [5], a dynamic programming approach was developed to minimize the execution latency under cost constraints. In [6], an adaptive receding horizon offloading strategy among multiple devices was proposed, where the solver can adjust its offloading decision according to environmental dynamics (e.g., fluctuating latency). However, compared to the cloud, the edge servers in MEC are heterogeneous and rather limited in terms of storage and computational capabilities. The competition for the computational resources

introduces couplings of decision making among devices. As a result, offloading in MEC is more challenging than in mobile cloud computing.

The studies in [9, 10] verify the scalability problem due to the resource bottlenecks and propose selective offloading schemes. In particular, in [9], the offloading competition among multiple devices was modeled as a sequential offloading game, where the mobile devices made offloading decisions sequentially to obtain a stable offloading result. Assuming that tasks are extremely resource demanding, in [10], only one task was selected for offloading at the same time, and both offline and online algorithms were proposed to optimize the allocation of wireless and computational resources. In [12], a heuristic scheme based on a sub-modular optimization method was proposed to jointly optimize offloading decisions and resource allocation, but only for delay-tolerant services.

Developing efficient offloading schemes in MEC for IoT faces the following challenges.

Coordination costs: Coordination among devices consumes energy and incurs further latency due to communication overhead. Moreover, the coordination costs increase exponentially with the number of devices, and therefore, enabling coordination may be cost-prohibitive when the scale of IoT (millions of devices) is considered.

Couplings among task partitioning: Current selective offloading schemes in MEC [9, 10, 12] only consider offloading services as a whole instead of offloading part of a service to increase efficiency as in [5, 6]. This is because the resource bottlenecks of the edge servers introduce strong couplings among task partitioning of different devices. Solving the problem optimally requires full knowledge on both the devices and edge servers, including future task arrivals and channel conditions.

Heterogeneity of edge servers and devices
Both edge servers and IoT devices are heterogeneous in terms of computing and storage capabilities, as well as desirable services. The heterogeneity makes the selection of the offloaded devices even more challenging. For instance, the cloud, with abundant computational resources, may prefer to execute resource-intensive and delay-tolerant services, while offloading the delay-sensitive services with large volumes of data to edge servers may achieve high reliability and low latency, and reduce the energy consumption on backhaul links.

In summary, the coordination costs necessitate the development of a lightweight scheme for the IoT devices, while the couplings among task partitioning require frequent communication among devices and even the exact prediction of future task arrivals and channel conditions to resolve the scalability problem. Moreover, the selection of offloaded devices from a large number of IoT devices is even more challenging due to the heterogeneity of edge servers and devices.

REQUEST AND ADMISSION FRAMEWORK FOR THE GREEN IOT

The proposed request and admission framework is lightweight in terms of signaling overhead, where the devices can send offloading requests independently while the servers only admit selected requests. This is because the dependency of task partitioning among multiple devices can be decoupled by encapsulating the latency requirement in the offloading requests to the computing servers.

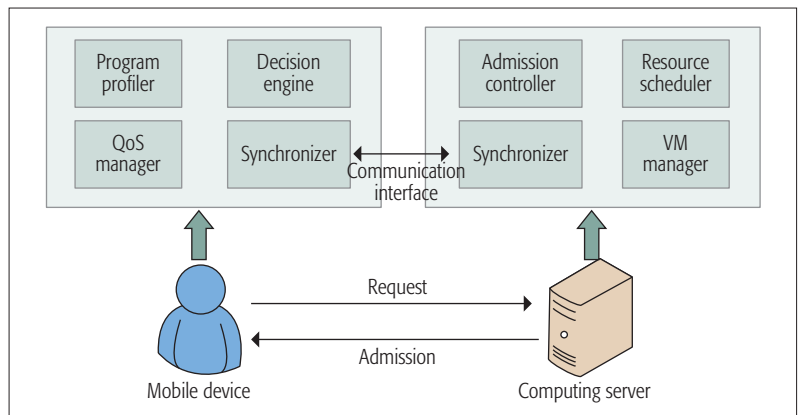


FIGURE 3. The proposed request and admission framework.

The latency requirements are set as the deadlines of each task determined by the task partitioning schemes, and the edge servers make best efforts to satisfy the requirements such that the tasks can be executed without delays. Besides, the task partitioning schemes in [5] can help devices select the offloaded server among multiple edge servers. The working procedure of the proposed request and admission framework consists of three stages:

- Each mobile device partitions its tasks independently, and sends an offloading request to the selected computing server including the latency requirements and other intrinsic features of the device and its service (e.g., the memory requirement, the thread CPU time, and the needed CPU cycles of the service).
- Each server receives the offloading requests, only admits the selected users for offloading, and pre-allocates the computational resources to satisfy latency requirements.
- Mobile devices offload their tasks according to the admission results.

The proposed lightweight framework enables the selection functionality in both servers and devices to reduce signaling overhead, where only the information on offloading requests and admission results must be exchanged through the communication interface. As shown later, the signaling overhead can be further reduced by enabling the devices to be self-nominated and self-denied for offloading.

Figure 3 shows the major blocks of the proposed request and admission framework, which can be operated at the devices and servers separately. The blocks in mobile devices mainly include program profilers, QoS managers, decision engines, and synchronizers. In particular, the program profiler monitors the program parameters such as execution time, acquired memory, thread CPU time, number of instructions, and method calls; the QoS manager determines the service requirements (e.g., the latency, energy consumption, and reliability) and estimates the required latency and energy consumption for execution of the service; the decision engine is responsible for the task partitioning and selects the desired server to send offloading requests; and the synchronizer handles the communication and synchronization between devices and servers in order to ensure integrity of the offloaded data. On the other hand, the blocks in computing servers consist of synchronizers, admission controllers, resource schedulers, and virtual machine (VM)

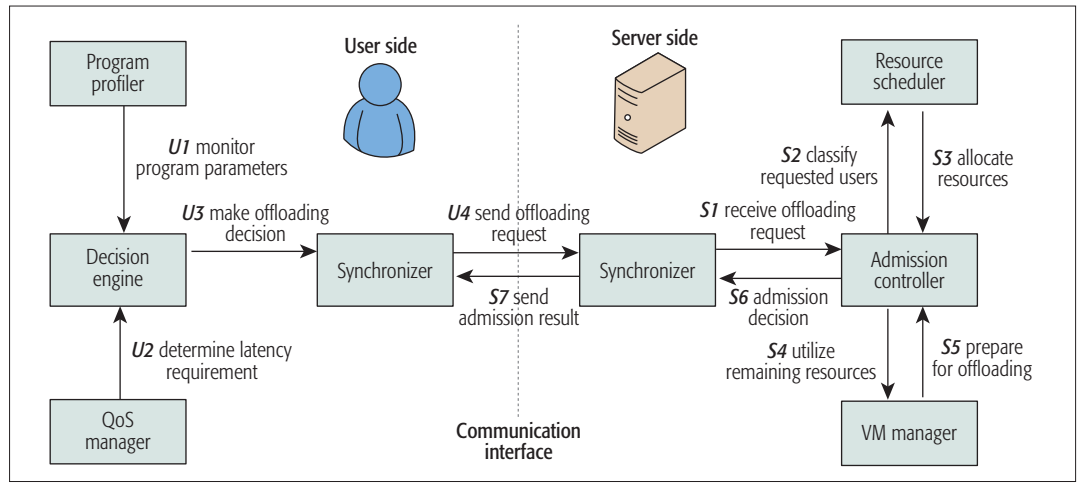


FIGURE 4. Flow diagram of our proposed selective offloading scheme.

In the proposed scheme, the delay-sensitive tasks are given high priority for processing, and hence, the delay-tolerant tasks are queued at the edge server under heavy workload. As a result, the edge server only processes delay-tolerant tasks under light workload, and offloads the queueing tasks to the cloud to avoid excessive queueing delay under heavy workload.

managers. Specifically, the synchronizer receives the offloading requests; the admission controller selects the devices for offloading according to its current available resources; and the resource scheduler and VM manager allocate the computational resources and activate the VM to prepare for the offloading from the selected devices.

IMPLEMENTING THE SELECTIVE OFFLOADING SCHEME

In this section, we demonstrate the implementation of the proposed request and admission framework in a multi-user MEC scenario, where the LTE macro BS is co-located with an edge server of limited computational resources, denoted by f_0 . The proposed selective offloading scheme follows the working procedure of the request and admission framework, as summarized in Fig. 4.

The working procedure mainly consists of:

1. Forming the offloading requests at the devices
2. Allocating the resources under the latency requirements at the resource scheduler
3. Exploiting the heterogeneity among devices to select the energy-saving services for offloading at the admission controller

In the proposed scheme, the delay-sensitive tasks are given high priority for processing, and hence, the delay-tolerant tasks are queued at the edge server under heavy workload. As a result, the edge server only processes delay-tolerant tasks under light workload, and offloads the queueing tasks to the cloud to avoid excessive queueing delay under heavy workload. In the following, we analyze these steps in detail to illustrate the selective offloading scheme.

OFFLOADING REQUEST FORMATION

The offloading requests are formed at each mobile device independently.

A task can be described in terms of:

1. Input D_i , including system settings, program codes, and input parameters

2. The number of CPU cycles required to accomplish the task, denoted by C_i

The information about D_i and C_i can be obtained through the program profiler. The latency and energy consumption of local execution, denoted by T_i^l and E_i^l , respectively, can be obtained at the QoS manager [9, 10]. Besides, the QoS manager can determine the latency requirement T_i^{req} based on the deadlines determined by the task partitioning schemes [5, 6].

A task can also be offloaded for remote execution to the servers. A typical remote computing approach consists of three stages:

1. Uploading the input
2. Remote execution at the edge server
3. Receiving the computation result

The size of computation result is much smaller than that of input, and the overhead can be neglected [9]. As a result, the total remote computation time of device i can be obtained as $T_i^r = T_i^l + T_i^e$, which is composed of two parts: the uplink transmission time $T_i^l = D_i/R_i$ and the remote execution time $T_i^e = C_i/f_i$. R_i is the achieved data rate of device i for the uplink transmission, and f_i is the allocated computational resources by the edge server. The energy consumption for remote computation of device i can be given by $E_i^r = (p_i/\{\zeta_i\}) T_i^l$, where ζ_i is the power amplifier efficiency of device i .

Then the decision engine can apply the existing offloading strategies in [5, 6], to determine the server to send offloading requests. The offloading request of device i consists of both the latency requirement and intrinsic features of the device.

COMPUTATIONAL RESOURCE ALLOCATION

At the server side, the synchronizer receives the offloading requests. Then the problem of interest becomes selecting the offloaded tasks and allocating the limited resources to minimize the system energy consumption while satisfying the latency requirements of all the offloading requests.

Note that the tasks have to be accomplished before the deadlines (i.e., the latency requirements) determined by task partitioning. As a result, the allocated computational resources should satisfy $f_i \leq f_i^{\min} = C_i/(T_i^{req} - T_i^l)$, where f_i^{\min} denotes the minimum resources allocated to device i under the latency requirements. In order

to enhance the scalability and save energy, the resource scheduler allocates the minimum computational resources to the admitted tasks according to

$$f_i = s_i f_i^{\min} = s_i C_i / (T_i^{\text{req}} - D_i / R_i) \quad (1)$$

where $s_i \in \{0,1\}$ denotes whether the task is admitted for offloading or not (i.e., the task is offloaded when $s_i = 1$).

OFFLOADING DECISION

The heterogeneity of devices and their IoT services makes offloading more beneficial for some devices, and local execution more beneficial for others. For instance, a delay-sensitive service at a resource-restrained device will benefit from offloading. Therefore, we introduce the following condition to prioritize emergency tasks for offloading.

Condition 1. If $T_i^l > T_i^{\text{req}}$, the admission controller selects device i for offloading.

The resource-restrained devices with delay-sensitive tasks satisfying Condition 1 are prioritized for offloading, since their local computing capabilities cannot fulfill the latency requirements (i.e., $T_i^l > T_i^{\text{req}}$). Then the edge server pre-allocates f_i^{\min} resources to these devices, determines its remaining resources $\tilde{f}_0 = f_0 - \sum_{i^l > T_i^{\text{req}}} f_i^{\min}$, and checks the following condition to exclude some devices from offloading.

Condition 2. If $(T_i^f)_{\min} = T_i^l + C_i / \tilde{f}_0 > T_i^{\text{req}}$ or $E_i^f \geq E_i^l$, device i executes its task locally.

If this condition is satisfied, even allocating all the remaining resources to device i cannot satisfy its latency requirements, or offloading will not save energy. Thus, the device is excluded from offloading and chooses to execute the task locally.

Note that the classification of requested users in S2 of Fig. 4 can be distributed to the IoT devices to further reduce the signaling overhead of MEC. Particularly, devices satisfying Condition 1 can be self-nominated to send an indication to the edge server for offloading prioritization. Then the edge server broadcasts its remaining resources \tilde{f}_0 to the devices. After receiving \tilde{f}_0 , the devices satisfying Condition 2 can be self-denied for offloading without sending offloading requests. As a result, only the undetermined devices that are neither self-nominated nor self-denied send offloading requests to the edge server, which leads to the reduction of signaling overhead in implementation.

After receiving the offloading requests from the undetermined devices, the resource scheduler allocates the minimum computational resources by Eq. 1. Then the selective offloading problem can be reduced to a binary linear programming problem, which can be efficiently solved through a branch and bound algorithm.

NUMERICAL RESULTS

In this section, numerical results are presented to demonstrate the performance improvements brought by our proposed selective offloading scheme. We consider a single macrocell network with a radius of 250 m, which is co-located with an edge server with $f_0 = 10$ GHz. The radio communication parameters follow the Third Genera-

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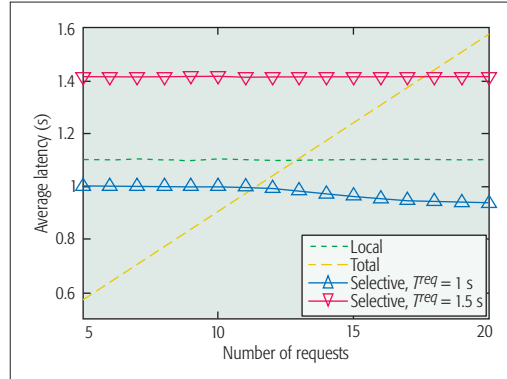


FIGURE 5. Comparison of average latency. Selective offloading approaches to the latency requirements.

tion Partnership Project (3GPP) specification. As an example of a complex application, we adopt the face recognition application [9] where $D = 420$ kB and $C = 1000$ MCycles. The computational capability of devices is uniformly distributed in $[0.5, 1.5]$ GHz. We set the latency requirements T^{req} as 1 s or 1.5 s for delay-sensitive and delay-tolerant applications, respectively. Next, we evaluate the average latency and energy consumption of selective offloading, local execution, and total offloading when the number of offloading requests n varies from 5 to 20.

Figure 5 shows the average per-user latency in both delay-sensitive and delay-tolerant applications. Our scheme can leverage the computational resources in the devices and edge servers, and make effective task admission to satisfy both stringent and loose latency requirements. In particular, the average latency of our scheme approaches $T^{\text{req}} = 1$ s of delay-sensitive applications, and is about 1.4 s for delay-tolerant applications. Irrespective of n , the average latency of local execution is 1.1 s, violating the latency requirement of delay-sensitive applications with $T^{\text{req}} = 1$ s. The average latency of total offloading grows linearly with N , and is up to 1.6 s when $N = 20$. This is because the scalability problem due to resource scarcity is intensified with increasing n .

Figure 6 demonstrates the average per-user energy consumption. The energy consumption of total offloading and local execution is relatively stable, and can be lower than that of selective offloading with increasing n when $T^{\text{req}} = 1$ s. This is at the cost of violating latency requirements, as shown in Fig. 5. We also see that the energy consumption of selective offloading in delay-tolerant applications stays low (0.085J), which is 22 percent less than local execution. However, for delay-sensitive applications, the energy consumption of selective offloading only stays low and stable when $N < 12$. The energy consumption increasingly grows (up to 11 percent higher than that of local execution) as N increases from 12 to 20, since offloading the tasks of some resource-restrained devices may not save energy. This reveals the inherent trade-off

The proposed selective offloading scheme can minimize the energy consumption of devices under latency requirements, and the signaling overhead can be further reduced by enabling the devices to be self-nominated or self-denied for offloading.

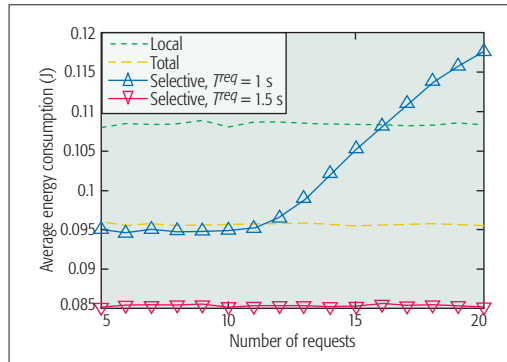


FIGURE 6. Comparison of average energy consumption. The trade-off between latency and energy consumption is inherent.

between latency and energy consumption in MEC, that is, latency and energy consumption cannot be minimized at the same time.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we propose a three-layer integration architecture of the cloud, MEC, and IoT, and develop a lightweight request and admission framework to resolve the scalability problem by offloading only selected services. By encapsulating latency requirements in offloading requests, the framework can be operated at devices and edge servers separately without the need to coordinate among devices. The proposed selective offloading scheme can minimize the energy consumption of devices under latency requirements, and the signaling overhead can be further reduced by enabling the devices to be self-nominated or self-denied for offloading. Numerical results show that, by prioritizing the emergency offloading requests, selective offloading is able to satisfy the latency requirements of different services and save energy for the IoT devices.

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BIOGRAPHIES

XINCHEN LYU received his B.E. degree from Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT), China, in 2014. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree at BUPT. His research interests include mobile edge computing and radio resource management.

HUI TIAN received her M.S. in micro-electronics and Ph.D. degree in circuits and systems from BUPT in 1992 and 2003, respectively. Currently, she is a professor at BUPT and the Network Information Processing Research Center director of the State Key Laboratory of Networking and Switching Technology. Her current research interests mainly include radio resource management, cross-layer optimization, M2M, cooperative communication, mobile social networks, and mobile edge computing.

LI JIANG received her Ph.D. degree from the School of Information and Communications Engineering, BUPT, in 2017. She was also with Simula Research Laboratory as a visiting scholar from 2015 to 2016. She is currently an associate professor with the School of Automation, Guang Dong University of Technology. Her current research interests include D2D communications, energy harvesting, physical layer security, and mobile social networks.

ALEXEY VINEL is a professor of computer communications with the School of Information Technology, Halmstad University, Sweden. He received his Ph.D. degree from the Institute for Information Transmission Problems, Russia, in 2007. His research interests include wireless communications, vehicular networking, cooperative intelligent transportation systems, and autonomous driving.

SABITA MAHARJAN received her M.Eng. in wireless communication from the Antenna and Propagation Laboratory, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan, in 2008, and her Ph.D. degree in network and distributed systems from the University of Oslo and Simula Research Laboratory, Norway, in 2013. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow with Simula Research Laboratory. Her current research interests include resource optimization, network security, game theory, smart grid communications, and the Internet of Things.

STEIN GJESSING received his Dr.Phil. degree in computer science from the University of Oslo in 1985. He is currently a professor of computer science with the Department of Informatics, University of Oslo, Norway, and an adjunct researcher at Simula Research Laboratory. His current research interests include network and transport protocols, network resilience, cognitive radio networks, and the smart grid. His original research was in the field of object-oriented concurrent programming. He has researched computer interconnects such as the scalable coherent interface (IEEE Standard 1596), and local area network/metropolitan area networks such as the resilient packet ring (IEEE Standard 802.17).

YAN ZHANG received his Ph.D. degree from the School of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is currently a full professor with the Department of Informatics, University of Oslo. His current research interests include next-generation wireless networks leading to 5G, green and secure cyber-physical systems (e.g., smart grid, healthcare, and transport). He is a Regional Editor, an Associate Editor, on the Editorial Boards, and a Guest Editor of a number of international journals.