Containerized Microservices for Mobile Applications Deployed on Cloud Systems

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**Abstract—** The present study centers on a comprehensive examination of contemporary mobile application development paradigms, with a specific emphasis on the containerization of backend services and administrative procedures inside a public cloud-based environment. Considering the increasing prevalence of cloud computing in the software business, the objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the benefits, constraints, and fundamental factors inherent in these emerging technologies and processes. To accomplish this goal, the study utilizes a comprehensive approach, including a systematic analysis of existing literature, a thorough examination of pertinent use cases, and an assessment of open-source technologies. The results support the proposition that the utilization of containerized microservices significantly enhances the capacity to effectively expand, oversee, and administer mobile apps that are hosted on cloud platforms. The findings possess significant importance within the domain of software engineering, providing helpful advice pertaining to the selection of optimum architectural choices and deployment methodologies.

**Keywords—**microservices, mobile application, public cloud, containerization

1. Introduction

In the context of a more digitized environment, contemporary deployment tactics have undergone significant transformations, facilitated by technologies like as Continuous Integration (CI), Continuous Delivery (CD) [1-3], Docker, and Kubernetes. These technologies have the dual benefit of streamlining the deployment process and greatly decreasing the likelihood of integration difficulties via the use of automated build and test methods. CI procedures facilitate the frequent merging of changes made by developers back into the main branches, hence accelerating the development cycle. In addition, the robust characteristics of cloud resources, which are further enhanced by the presence of data centers scattered worldwide, provide exceptional benefits in terms of scalability and security.

The academic discourse lacks a full knowledge of concerns regarding development cycle, scalability, and post-deployment maintenance of mobile apps, which presents a substantial gap that this study seeks to address. There is a lack of academic research that specifically examines the impact of containerized microservices on the performance, manageability, and scalability of mobile apps deployed on cloud platforms.

Considering the significant potential for transformation offered by cloud computing and containerization technologies such as Docker and Kubernetes, it is crucial and opportune to conduct comprehensive research. This assertion has special validity as enterprises progressively shift their focus towards mobile technology, hence elevating the significance of effectively implementing and overseeing mobile apps as a matter of utmost importance for company operations.

To fill the research gap identified earlier, the primary objective of this study is to examine the latest technologies in mobile application development, with a specific emphasis on backend containerization. This study aims to analyze the merits and drawbacks linked to several post-deployment management strategies in cloud-based systems. Furthermore, the article intends to assess the impact of containerization technologies on the scalability, operational efficiency, and overall manageability of mobile applications that are deployed on cloud infrastructures.

1. Literature Review

Cloud computing has emerged as a disruptive paradigm in the modern technology world, significantly reshaping company operations and service delivery. Cloud computing is characterized by five fundamental attributes as defined by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). These attributes, including On-Demand Self-Service, Broad Network Access, Resource Pooling, Rapid Elasticity, and Measured Service, form the foundation of cloud computing's operational capabilities [4]. These characteristics together enable organizational adaptability, cost-effectiveness, and scalability. The cloud may be accessible via many deployment modes, including the public cloud. Public clouds are managed and operated by external service providers, like Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google Cloud Platform (GCP), and Microsoft Azure. These clouds enable customers to access computational resources through the internet. It is worth mentioning that the ownership and management of all hardware, software, and supporting infrastructure under this approach are exclusively held by the cloud provider. Access is mostly attained using conventional web browsers, rendering it a very advantageous option for a diverse range of tasks, including those of a temporary or exploratory character.

The academic discussion pertaining to cloud computing has mostly centered on its service models, namely Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), and Software as a Service (SaaS) [5], each possessing distinct advantages and drawbacks. Nevertheless, a noticeable deficiency exists in the existing body of scholarly work regarding the use of cloud computing in the context of deploying mobile applications. The need for further investigation arises from the potential transformative impact of combining the fundamental attributes of cloud computing with the features of public cloud to revolutionize the administration and deployment of mobile applications.

The microservice architectural style has become a significant paradigm, particularly in the context of cloud-native applications. The architectural approach described involves the decomposition of an application into discrete, autonomous services [6]. These services are designed to encapsulate certain business functionalities and interact with one another through well-defined application programming interfaces (APIs). The architectural idea of technology agnosticism allows teams to have the flexibility to choose the most suitable technology stack for each individual microservice.

Business teams often emphasize the urgent need for the prompt incorporation of novel features, a conducive atmosphere that fosters creativity and swift experimentation, and the flexibility to deploy changes instantly without being constrained by predetermined deployment timelines. attributes of microservices, including heightened adaptability, ingenuity, and expeditious implementation of features, provide significant benefits in augmenting the performance and usefulness of mobile applications. The interaction between mobile apps as front-end and cloud based microservice systems as backend often highlights the significance of data storage, synchronization, and security.

Nevertheless, its architectural design has specific intricacies that need scientific investigation. While the initial administration of individual services may seem simpler, the complexity of the total system increases, especially in relation to deployments and interactions between services. The complexity of network latency and fault management increases with the expansion of services. The dispersed nature of the architecture introduces additional complexities to operations like as testing and debugging. The difficulty of data integrity arises from the fact that each service maintains its own data repository, which requires the implementation of methods such as eventual consistency.

Numerous potential remedies have been suggested to tackle these issues. Containerization and orchestrators serve as fundamental components for facilitating flexible deployment and scalability in various computing environments. Several deployment techniques, including blue-green deployment, rolling deployment, and canary deployment, are designed to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between expeditious feature delivery and the reliability of services. Docker and Kubernetes have been examined as possible techniques for enabling seamless service operation. Furthermore, the use of DevOps methods and the utilization of (CI/CD) pipelines have been widely promoted as means to automate and optimize deployment procedures [7].

The dearth of scholarly investigation in the academic discourse surrounding the utilization of containerized microservices for deploying mobile applications on cloud systems has prompted the current study, which seeks to shed light on the influence of containerization technologies on the progress and adoption of mobile apps in cloud environments.

1. Methodology & Data Collection

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1. Technologies for frontend development

Mobile app development has primarily seen three types of platform technologies: native, hybrid, and cross-platform. Each represents a unique combination of development languages, integrated development environments (IDEs), level of access to smartphone features, and user experience. Native technologies, such as Swift for iOS and Java or Kotlin for Android, offer superior performance and a high level of access to device capabilities, as they use dedicated IDEs such as Xcode and Android Studio. However, they require parallel development and support for each platform. On the other hand, hybrid technologies such as Apache Cordova (HTML, CSS, and JavaScript) offer a write-once, run-anywhere model with a moderate level of device access. However, they can compromise the app's performance and feel less "native". Finally, cross-platform technologies such as React Native (JavaScript and JSX) and Flutter (Dart) attempt to bridge this gap. Using their own IDEs such as Visual Studio Code or IntelliJ IDEA, these technologies facilitate a single codebase that compiles to native code, providing a more native user experience while providing significant access to device features. However, cross-platform technologies may still be a bit behind native technologies in terms of accessing the latest platform-specific features or when dealing with highly complex graphical interfaces. It is important to carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of each platform in the context of the specific requirements of the project to make an informed choice [9].

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The emergence of cloud-based platforms, such as Expo and GitHub Codespaces, has significantly contributed to the advancement of mobile application development, reaching unparalleled levels of quality and performance. The controlled environment provided by Expo greatly enhances the speed of development cycles via features such as real-time code compilation, a collection of pre-configured native modules, and the availability of Web, Android, and iOS emulators on demand. Consequently, the need for complex local configurations is eliminated. In a similar vein, GitHub Codespaces offers a comprehensive cloud-based IDE that facilitates real-time coding, debugging, and testing. These technologies, along with several others, bring about a significant change in the realm of mobile development by offering production-like environments at any stage of the programming process.

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1. Technologies for backend containerization

Containerization is an approach in software development where an application's code, all its dependencies, and configurations are packaged into a binary file called an image. Images are read-only "templates" and are stored in a registry that acts as a repository or library for images. The image is transformed into a running container instance that can be started, stopped, moved, and deleted. Containers are created for the different parts of the application: web service, database, caching, etc. Software containerization enables developers and IT professionals to automatically renew new changes across environments. Containers also isolate applications from each other in a shared operating system. Applications run on the container host. From an application perspective, instantiating an image means creating a container. Another benefit of containerization is scalability. Scaling happens quickly: new containers are created for short-term tasks. Containers offer the benefits of isolation, portability, flexibility, and control over the entire application lifecycle. The big public cloud service providers that could be used are Azure, Google Cloud, AWS etc.

The most used and established technology is Docker [10-11]. It is an open-source project to automate the deployment of applications as portable, self-contained containers that can run on-premises or in the cloud. It is also a company that promotes and develops this technology. Docker containers can run on Linux or Windows. Advantages for developers are accelerated introduction of new programmers to the project, eliminating conflicts in applications, updating, and migrating software. Fig. 1 presents a comparison between a virtual machine and a Docker container [12].

Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated

1. Comparation between virtual machines and Docker containers [12]

Virtual machines include the application, required libraries, and a complete operating system. Full virtualization requires more resources, more startup time in comparison.

Docker containers include the application and all its dependencies. However, they share the OS kernel with other containers running as isolated processes in the user space of the host operating system. (except for Hyper-V containers, where each container runs inside a dedicated virtual machine). Even though Docker simplifies the application packaging process, a solution like Kubernetes is needed to manage these containers, especially at scale. Kubernetes automates the deployment and scheduling of application containers in a cluster, provides self-healing capabilities (such as automatic container restart, rescheduling, and replication), and facilitates horizontal scalability [13].

Kubernetes provides high-level operations to be performed through the code of the microservices themselves. Robots with instructions that are transferred to the cloud machines, the so-called "cluster": a set of Linux or Windows virtual machines (node points) on which the applications themselves are deployed (but not directly). Kubernetes takes care of routing and logistics of microservices (most used in this architecture).

Docker and Kubernetes are platforms that are used to facilitate deployment strategies such as: blue green deployment, rolling deployment, and canary deployment.

**Blue-green deployment** - This strategy involves two identical production environments, Blue and Green [14]. Only one of these environments is active at any time. Let's say the "Blue" environment is alive and serving traffic. If must deploy a new version of the application, a "green" environment is deployed. Then tests could be done extensively in this separate environment. Once the stability and performance are satisfactory, the router is switched to a "green" environment, which then becomes active. The "blue" environment remains inactive until the next release, giving the ability to quickly roll back if needed.

**Rolling deployment** - In rolling deployment, a new version of the application is gradually deployed to several instances at once, rather than all at once, while the remaining instances still hold the old version [15]. This allows for careful deployment and maintains service availability during deployment. If problems occur, the deployment process can be halted and only a subset of instances will be affected.

**Canary release** - Named after the practice of sending a canary into a mine to check for hazardous gases, a Canary deployment involves introducing a change to a small subset of users before applying it to the entire infrastructure. The goal is to test the new release on a small portion of traffic, making sure it works as expected, before rolling it out to the wider user base [16]. If something goes wrong, only the Canary instances are affected, and can roll back the changes without affecting all users.

The Canary Release deployment model may be particularly suitable for a cloud-based order management system. This strategy involves progressively applying changes to a subset of users before applying them to the entire system. By segmenting the deployment in this way, it is possible to monitor the impact of system changes in real time, thereby reducing the risk of widespread disruption. It offers a complete test environment for new features or modifications to the order management system, enterprise resource planning, fleet management and monitoring systems, allowing the team to identify potential problems before they affect all end users. Production test patterns are strategies used in software development to ensure that the software functions as expected in a production environment. These models can help prevent software defects, improve system resilience, and maintain quality and reliability. A/B testing is one such model that, in the context of a cloud-based order management system, enables data-driven decision-making by allowing the simultaneous deployment of different versions of system improvements or new features to subsets of users, thereby allowing comparative performance evaluations [17-22].

All these strategies provide different ways to reduce risk and minimize downtime during deployment and can be chosen based on the specific needs and circumstances of the project.

When it comes to deployment strategies, Docker can be useful in blue-green deployments, as a new container can be set up with the new version of the application and traffic can be directed to it when it's ready. For rolling and canary deployments, Docker allows easy creation and management of the required separate instances. Kubernetes can help by managing two different sets of pods (blue and green). Service objects can be used to switch traffic between the two environments. Kubernetes initially supports this strategy through its Rolling deployment strategy. It allows updating of an implementation by gradually replacing old modules with new ones. This function ensures that at least a certain number of packages are always available during the update, and at most a certain number of packages are created above the desired amount. Kubernetes can gradually transition traffic to the new version of the application and monitor performance. If the new version works well, redirecting the traffic could continue until the new version handles all requests. If something goes wrong, the traffic could be redirected back to the older, stable version.

1. After deployment management of cloud microservices

Installing a service to a cloud is not the final step of the deployment and effective system logging and monitoring are essential management procedures. Understanding their complex duties and the vast array of tools available is essential to ensuring optimal system functionality. Infrastructure monitoring and application monitoring are the two main categories. Infrastructure monitoring involves estimating and controlling system resources such as CPU, memory, disk space, and network traffic. Due to its comprehensive resource monitoring capabilities and capacity to identify constraints, tools such as Nagios are well suited for this purpose. In contrast, application monitoring focuses on the functionality and efficiency of the application in the system. It addresses aspects such as response time, error rate, and transaction tracking that are critical to a seamless order management system user experience.

Maintaining a system log is a supplement to monitoring. It helps developers in tracking bugs and understanding the sequence of events that led to system failure. For example, the ELK (Elasticsearch, Logstash, Kibana) stack is an open-source logging system that collects logs from various sources [23-25], stores them for quick retrieval (Elasticsearch), processes and transforms them (Logstash), and then visualizes them in user-friendly manner (Kibana). This use of resources lays the foundation for a robust, reliable, and efficient procurement management system. ELK enables not only quick identification of system errors, but also proactive problem solving, thus facilitating the delivery of a quality product to the end user.

Monitoring is important for application administration and management, especially in the context of APIs. The purpose of monitoring could be mainly in the following directions:

• Anticipation and preventive measures: Identify potential problems before they escalate.

• Diagnose problems as soon as they become apparent.

• Operational Oversight: Gain a deep understanding of API efficiency and usage patterns.

• Significance of observation:

• Customer Expectations: In today's digital age, customers expect API to deliver consistent performance and availability.

• Functionality Protection: Reliable monitoring mechanisms are required to ensure that the API functions optimally and meets its service level objectives.

Some important metrics to track in an API ecosystem are:

• Requests per second: This metric provides insight into the current API traffic and demand.

• Monitoring the number of crashes can help identify recurring issues or vulnerabilities early.

• Latency: Estimating the response time of an API gives insight into its efficiency and performance.

• Number of users: Monitoring the number of active users can provide insight into the demand and popularity of the system.

• Session Count: This provides an overview of user interaction and engagement with the API.

• Understanding the geographic distribution of users can help optimize server location and improve user experience.

• Monitoring CPU usage can reveal potential limitations or areas requiring optimization.

• RAM Usage: Regular monitoring of memory usage ensures that the system is not overloaded and is running efficiently.

1. Conclusion

This paper explores the dynamics of mobile application development technologies, backend containerization, and post-deployment management, emphasizing the importance of making informed technology choices and implementing effective monitoring and logging practices for successful software development projects.

Mobile application development encompasses various frontend platform technologies, including native, hybrid, and cross-platform approaches, each offering distinct advantages and limitations. The choice of technology depends on project requirements and an important part of the project requirements is also the backend part of the mobile application. Backend containerization, a pivotal aspect of modern software development, involves packaging an application's code, dependencies, and configurations into images that can be deployed as containers. Docker, a widely adopted open-source platform, simplifies application deployment, and offers benefits like scalability, isolation, portability, and flexibility. Container orchestration tools like Kubernetes automate container management and facilitate scalability and self-healing.

Effective post-deployment management of cloud microservices includes robust monitoring and logging. Infrastructure monitoring monitors system resources, while application monitoring assesses functionality and efficiency. Tools like Nagios excel at resource monitoring, while application monitoring tools focus on response time, error rates, and transaction tracking. Implementing a comprehensive logging system, such as the ELK stack (Elasticsearch, Logstash, Kibana), enables quick error identification and proactive issue resolution, enhancing the overall product quality.

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