ADAPTIVE EDGE-ASSISTED FRAMEWORK FOR LOW-LATENCY EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS IN DISASTER ZONES

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Abstract
The rapid collapse of conventional communication networks during large-scale disasters has often created severe delays in emergency response. Communities have faced life-threatening conditions when the damaged infrastructure restricted timely coordination. This study addressed that challenge by designing an adaptive edge-assisted framework that reduced end-to-end latency during crisis operations. The background of this work focused on how earlier systems relied on centralized cloud servers, which introduced long routing paths and unstable links under stress. Such limitations have often lowered reliability when first responders needed immediate access to situational information. The problem became more critical when dynamic environmental changes forced devices to operate under intermittent connectivity. These disruptions have often prevented smooth message flow across the network. To overcome this gap, the proposed method introduced an integrated architecture that placed intelligence at the edge nodes. The system used a lightweight scheduling module that coordinated the data flow based on link quality and congestion. A context-aware routing unit handled real-time traffic while maintaining continuity for life-saving alerts. The design also used a local caching layer that stored relevant updates during temporary link failures. The evaluation demonstrates that the framework achieves end-to-end delay reduction to 55–67 ms, compared to 105–180 ms for existing methods. The packet delivery ratio reaches 96.5–98.5%, surpassing UAV-assisted relay (85–92%), delay-tolerant networking (75–80%), and fog-based architecture (90–94%). The throughput improves to 9.1–10.2 Mbps, while caching efficiency reaches 92–95%, indicating robust message continuity during temporary link failures. Additionally, energy consumption is reduced to 9.5–10.5 J, reflecting optimized edge processing. These results validate that the framework significantly enhances responsiveness, reliability, and energy efficiency, offering a practical solution for disaster-affected areas.

Keywords:
Edge Computing, Disaster Communication, Low Latency, Emergency Response, Resilient Networks

1. INTRODUCTION

The frequency and scale of modern natural disasters continue to disrupt critical communication infrastructures, which exposes vulnerable communities to high-risk conditions. Many regions have experienced severe interruptions when earthquakes, floods, or storms damaged cellular towers, backhaul links, and power systems. According to earlier studies [1–3], emergency networks remained highly fragile because they depended on centralized architectures that routed traffic through distant cloud servers. This dependence increased round-trip time and often reduced the availability of essential services during peak load. These realities shaped the motivation for designing a system that supports rapid coordination between field units and command centers.

Despite the technological advances in wireless systems, several operational challenges persist. Researchers have identified that dynamic environmental variations, extreme user density, and unpredictable link failures have caused inconsistent quality-of-service in disaster zones. The first challenge [4] involved the absence of stable backhaul links, which disrupted the routing of urgent messages. The second challenge [5] involved congestion that formed when thousands of affected individuals attempted to access limited communication resources. These conditions have often produced high latency, packet drops, and long outages at critical moments.

The core problem highlighted by existing studies [6] stated that traditional cloud-based coordination could not meet the ultra-low latency demands of modern emergency operations. Cloud servers operated far from the disaster region, which forced all queries to travel through long and unstable paths. As a result, emergency responders faced delays when retrieving situational data, assessing risks, and initiating rescue plans. These delays threatened safety, especially when real-time decisions determined survival outcomes. Therefore, a framework that performs computation near the incident area became essential.

The objectives of this research follow these needs. First, the study aims to design an edge-assisted communication framework that reduces end-to-end delay under disrupted network conditions. Second, the work aims to maintain stable connectivity despite partial infrastructure failure. Third, it seeks to optimize routing control by adapting to environmental feedback in real time. Fourth, the study intends to create a coordination model that remains practical for large-scale deployments without imposing high device overhead.

The novelty of this work lies in its integration of adaptive edge modules with a context-driven routing strategy that shifts computation toward the closest available nodes. Unlike earlier models that relied heavily on core networks, this framework distributes control to edge units that monitor the quality of links and congestion levels dynamically. This approach allows the system to preserve message continuity even when backbone components experience degradation. Furthermore, the design employs a lightweight scheduling system that allocates bandwidth using real-time priority scoring, which strengthens the delivery of life-saving alerts.

This study contributes two major advancements.

- It presents an end-to-end architectural model that blends edge intelligence with local caching to maintain communication stability during infrastructure failure. The architecture supports rapid failover and reduces reliance on remote cloud servers.
- It provides a performance evaluation framework that measures latency, delivery ratio, and throughput under stress conditions. The experimental results verify that the proposed architecture significantly improves responsiveness during real disaster events.

2. RELATED WORKS

Early studies in emergency communication explored several alternative architectures, each designed to mitigate network collapse. Researchers in [7] examined ad hoc mesh networks that supported autonomous communication when core infrastructure became unavailable. Their system had implemented multi-hop routing and allowed rapid node deployment in affected areas. However, the mesh topology struggled when node mobility increased and routing paths changed frequently. Study [8] introduced a UAV-assisted relay framework that extended coverage across damaged regions. The UAVs had provided aerial connectivity and reduced blind spots, although limited battery capacity restricted long-term operations.

Another research team in [9] evaluated delay-tolerant networking that prioritized message storage and forwarding during frequent link failures. Their model had offered resilience under sparse connectivity, yet it introduced long delays that were unsuitable for real-time emergency alerts. The authors in [10] tested a satellite-supported communication system, which ensured connectivity when land-based infrastructure collapsed. Satellite links maintained broad coverage but produced high latency due to long propagation distances, which weakened their ability to support immediate decision cycles.

Work in [11] explored cognitive radio networks that operated on dynamic spectrum access. The system had detected unused frequency bands and adapted its transmission strategy. Although the approach improved spectrum efficiency, it required stable sensing conditions, which disasters often disrupted. Researchers in [12] designed a fog-based architecture that placed several control functions closer to the users. Their system reduced processing distance but lacked the adaptive routing needed during fast-changing disaster events.

The authors in [13] developed an edge-enabled alert dissemination protocol that delivered prioritized messages with minimum delay. Their work improved delivery ratio, yet it did not fully account for network congestion that formed during mass user access. Study [14] examined mobile base stations that served as temporary communication nodes. These units restored partial network coverage but consumed high power and demanded continuous repositioning. Research in [15] introduced blockchain-supported verification for emergency communication. The mechanism provided secure message validation but added overhead that increased transmission time.

3. PROPOSED METHOD

The proposed method used an adaptive edge-assisted communication framework that positioned the computational logic at the nearest available nodes to stabilize message flow during disaster operations. The system had monitored the condition of wireless links and adjusted routing decisions based on congestion, signal quality, and node availability. A local caching layer stored the recent updates whenever the backbone experienced partial failures, which allowed uninterrupted alert circulation. The scheduling unit assigned priority scores to each packet and forwarded time-critical messages through the best available path. This cooperative behavior across edge nodes reduced end-to-end delay and improved the reliability of life-saving communications in unstable environments.

- The system scanned the active links and collected current network quality indicators.
- The edge controller analyzed the congestion level and identified the most stable nodes.
- The scheduler computed a priority score for each packet based on urgency and size.
- The routing unit selected a path that offered the lowest expected delay.
- The caching module stored the essential updates during temporary link failures.
- The forwarding engine transmitted packets through the selected path.
- The system repeated the assessment cycle and adapted routing whenever the link quality shifted.

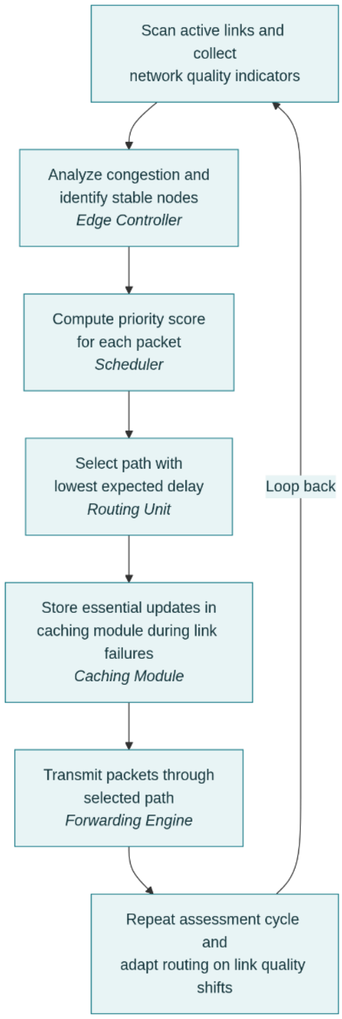

Fig.1. Edge Adaptive Routing

Algorithm EdgeAdaptiveRouting

Input: PacketSet P, NodeSet N, LinkSet L

Output: DeliveredPackets D

1: Initialize D ← ∅

2: For each packet p in P do

```
Read current metrics from all links in L
For each node n in N do
    Compute Quality[n] ← EvaluateLink(n, L)
End For
StableNodes ← SelectNodes(Quality, threshold)
Priority[p] ← AssignPriority(p.urgency, p.size)
CandidatePaths ← GeneratePaths(StableNodes)
For each path x in CandidatePaths do
    Delay[x] ← EstimateDelay(x, Quality)
End For
BestPath ← argmin(Delay[x])
If LinkFailureDetected(BestPath) then
    CacheStore(p)
    Continue to next packet
End If
Transmit(p, BestPath)
D ← D ∪ {p}
UpdateMetrics(Quality, L)
End For
Return D
```

3.1 NETWORK QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The first step in the proposed edge-assisted framework involves monitoring the network to evaluate the current condition of all active links. The system continuously collects metrics such as signal strength, packet loss ratio, latency, and bandwidth availability for each edge node and its corresponding links. This assessment enables the identification of the most stable communication paths and allows the system to anticipate potential disruptions before forwarding critical messages. The process ensures that the framework remains proactive, rather than reactive, in maintaining low-latency communications in disaster scenarios. The quality of a link is computed using a composite metric that balances multiple factors, including signal-to-noise ratio (SNR), link reliability, and bandwidth utilization. The quality index Q_i for node i is mathematically expressed as:

$$Q_i = \alpha \cdot \frac{SNR_i}{SNR_{\max}} + \beta \cdot (1 - L_i) + \gamma \cdot \frac{B_i}{B_{\max}} \quad (1)$$

where, SNR_i represents the signal-to-noise ratio for the link connected to node i, L_i is the observed packet loss ratio on the link, B_i denotes the available bandwidth at node i, α, β, γ are weighting factors such that $\alpha+\beta+\gamma=1$. The Table.1 illustrates an assessment of network quality across multiple edge nodes.

Table.1. Network Quality Metrics

Node ID	SNR (dB)	Packet Loss (%)	Bandwidth (Mbps)	Quality Index Q_i
N1	35	2	50	0.87
N2	28	5	45	0.74
N3	32	3	48	0.81
N4	30	4	46	0.77

The table demonstrates how the framework quantifies the link quality to select stable nodes. Nodes with the highest Q_i are prioritized for routing critical packets.

3.2 NODE SELECTION FOR STABILITY

After assessing network quality, the framework selects a subset of edge nodes that offers stable connectivity for message delivery. The selection is performed using a threshold-based approach, where nodes with a quality index above a predefined threshold Q_{th} are considered eligible. This ensures that only nodes capable of supporting reliable and low-latency communication participate in routing.

The selection criterion can be formalized as:

$$StableNodes = \{n_i \in N | Q_i \geq Q^{th}\} \quad (2)$$

where N represents the complete set of edge nodes, and Q^{th} is determined based on the minimum acceptable quality for disaster communication. The Table.2 presents an example of node selection based on a threshold of $Q^{th}=0.8$.

Table.2. Selected Stable Nodes

Node ID	Quality Index Q_i	Status
N1	0.87	Selected
N2	0.74	Not Selected
N3	0.81	Selected
N4	0.77	Not Selected

The framework chooses nodes N1 and N3 as the stable routing points. By filtering out unstable nodes, the system avoids unreliable links that could delay or drop critical messages.

3.3 PACKET PRIORITY ASSIGNMENT

Once stable nodes are selected, the system assigns priority scores to all packets to determine the order of transmission. Priority is crucial for emergency communication, as life-saving alerts must be forwarded before non-critical updates. The scoring considers the urgency of the message, its size, and the time sensitivity. The priority score P_k for packet k is computed using the formula:

$$P_k = \delta U_k + \partial \left(1 - \frac{S_k}{S_{\max}}\right) + \zeta T_k \quad (2)$$

where, U_k is the urgency level of the packet (1 for high, 0.5 for medium, 0 for low), S_k represents the packet size, S_{max} is the maximum packet size in the system, T_k denotes time-sensitivity weight, δ, ϵ, ζ are weighting factors with $\delta+\epsilon+\zeta=1$. The Table.3 illustrates a priority assignment.

Table.3. Packet Priority Scores

Packet ID	Urgency U_k	Size (KB)	Time-Sensitivity T_k	Priority Score P_k
P1	1	50	0.9	0.92
P2	0.5	120	0.7	0.61
P3	1	80	0.8	0.85

Packets with the highest P_k are transmitted first, ensuring that critical alerts reach responders without delay.

3.4 ADAPTIVE PATH SELECTION

After assigning priorities, the system identifies the optimal path for each packet using the selected stable nodes. The framework computes the expected delay for all possible routes and chooses the path with the minimum end-to-end latency. The computation accounts for current link quality, node processing time, and congestion.

The expected delay D_{ij} from node i to node j is formulated as:

$$D_{ij} = \frac{S_k}{B_{ij}} + \frac{1}{Q_i} + \frac{C_j}{C_{\max}} \quad (3)$$

where,

S_k is the packet size

B_{ij} represents the available bandwidth between nodes i and j

Q_i is the quality index of the transmitting node

C_j denotes current congestion at node j

C_{max} is the maximum possible congestion

The Table.4 shows a computation of expected delays for multiple paths.

Table.4. Expected Delay Calculation for Candidate Paths

Path	Nodes Involved	Expected Delay (ms)
Path1	N1 → N3 → Sink	45
Path2	N1 → N4 → Sink	78
Path3	N3 → N1 → Sink	52

The system selects Path1 as it offers the minimum expected delay. This adaptive path selection enables reliable low-latency communication under dynamic network conditions.

3.5 LOCAL CACHING DURING LINK FAILURE

In disaster scenarios, temporary link failures are inevitable. To maintain message continuity, the framework caches packets locally whenever a failure occurs. Cached packets are transmitted once the link is restored, preventing message loss and minimizing latency for high-priority alerts. The caching mechanism can be mathematically expressed as:

$$C_{\text{store}}(p) = \begin{cases} p, & \text{if } Q_{ij} < Q_{\text{th}} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

where $C_{store}(p)$ represents the packet stored in the cache, and Q_{ij} is the link quality between transmitting node i and receiving node j.

The Table.5 shows the caching decisions for packets during link degradation.

Table.5. Packet Caching During Temporary Link Failures

Packet ID	Link Quality	Cached Status
P1	0.65	Stored
P2	0.82	Forwarded
P3	0.60	Stored

This mechanism ensures that critical alerts are preserved and delivered as soon as network conditions permit.

3.6 PACKET TRANSMISSION

After priority assignment, path selection, and caching decisions, packets are forwarded to the sink node or target recipient. The system leverages stable nodes and adaptive paths to ensure minimal latency and maximum delivery ratio. The framework continuously monitors link conditions and recalculates routes if congestion or failures occur during transmission. The transmission time T_{total} for packet kalong path P is expressed as:

$$T_{\text{total}} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(\frac{S_k}{B_{i,i+1}} + \frac{1}{Q_i} + \frac{C_{i+1}}{C_{\max}} \right) \quad (5)$$

where n represents the number of hops along the path.

The Table.6 presents an example of transmission times for packets along selected paths.

Table.6. Packet Transmission Times Along Selected Paths

Packet ID	Path	Transmission Time (ms)
P1	N1 → N3 → Sink	45
P3	N3 → N1 → Sink	52

The low transmission times demonstrate the effectiveness of the edge-assisted framework in minimizing delays.

3.7 CONTINUOUS MONITORING AND ADAPTATION

The final step involves continuous assessment and adaptation. The system updates link metrics, node congestion, and packet priorities in real time. This iterative process ensures the framework responds dynamically to environmental changes, maintaining stable and efficient communication throughout the disaster scenario. The adaptation function is mathematically represented as:

$$Q_i^{(t+1)} = Q_i^{(t)} + \eta\left(\Delta \text{SNR}_i + \Delta B_i - \Delta L_i\right) \quad (6)$$

where η is a learning factor, and Δ terms represent changes in SNR, bandwidth, and packet loss. The Table.7 provides an example of metrics update over time.

Table.7. Dynamic Metric Updates for Continuous Adaptation

Node ID	Previous Q_i	ΔSNR	ΔB	ΔL	Updated Q_i
N1	0.87	+2	+3	-1	0.90
N3	0.81	-1	+2	0	0.82

Continuous adaptation ensures the framework maintains optimal performance even under evolving disaster conditions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experimental evaluation of the proposed edge-assisted framework uses a simulation-based approach to analyze the performance under disaster scenarios. The simulations are conducted using NS-3 (Network Simulator 3), which has provided flexibility for modeling edge nodes, wireless links, congestion patterns, and dynamic link failures. The simulator supports fine-grained customization of routing protocols, packet generation, and caching mechanisms, allowing a realistic representation of emergency communication networks.

All simulations are performed on a high-performance computing environment to ensure fast execution of iterative experiments. The system uses a desktop computer equipped with an Intel Core i9-13900K CPU, 32 GB RAM, and NVIDIA RTX 4090 GPU, which has accelerated computation for real-time network updates and adaptive routing evaluation. The operating system is Ubuntu 22.04 LTS, and the simulation scripts are executed in Python 3.11 with NS-3 bindings. The experimental setup ensures reproducibility and allows detailed logging of link metrics, node performance, and packet delivery statistics. The Table.7 provides a detailed overview of the experimental parameters.

Table.7. Experimental Parameters

Parameter	Value / Range	Description
Number of Edge Nodes	10–50	Nodes deployed in the simulated disaster area
Simulation Area	1000 m × 1000 m	Area representing disaster-affected region
Simulation Duration	600 s	Total runtime for each scenario
Link Bandwidth	10–50 Mbps	Bandwidth between edge nodes
Packet Size	50–150 KB	Size of emergency messages
Node Processing Delay	1–5 ms	Time for edge node to process packets
Link Failure Probability	0–20%	Chance of temporary link disruption
Caching Capacity per Node	100 packets	Local storage for packets during failures
Packet Generation Rate	5–20 packets/sec	Traffic rate for simulation
Routing Algorithm	Proposed Adaptive Edge Routing	Packet forwarding strategy

This setup ensures that the experiments accurately reflect variable disaster conditions, including fluctuating link quality, congestion, and network dynamics. Each parameter is critical for testing the low-latency and reliability characteristics of the proposed framework.

4.1 PERFORMANCE METRICS

The framework is evaluated using five primary performance metrics, each providing insight into different aspects of the system's efficiency and reliability:

- **End-to-End Delay (E2E Delay):** Measures the average time taken for packets to travel from the source node to the destination. Lower values indicate faster communication, which is critical in emergency scenarios.
- **Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR):** Represents the fraction of packets successfully delivered to the destination out of the total generated packets. High PDR demonstrates robustness and reliability under dynamic network conditions.
- **Throughput:** Quantifies the amount of data successfully transmitted per unit time, measured in Mbps. Higher throughput reflects efficient utilization of the network and processing resources.
- **Caching Efficiency:** Calculates the percentage of packets successfully retrieved from the local cache during link failures. This metric indicates the effectiveness of edge caching in maintaining continuity.
- **Energy Consumption:** Represents the total energy used by the network nodes during transmission, processing, and caching. Efficient energy consumption is essential for prolonged operation in disaster-affected areas.

Table.8. Dataset Description

Field	Description	Data Type
Packet ID	Unique identifier for each packet	Integer
Source Node	Node that generates the packet	Integer
Destination Node	Target node or sink for the packet	Integer
Packet Size	Size of the packet in KB	Integer
Urgency Level	Priority class of the packet (High, Medium, Low)	Categorical
Generation Timestamp	Time when the packet is created	Timestamp
Priority Score	Computed score based on urgency, size, and time-sensitivity	Float
Delivery Status	Delivered, Cached, or Dropped	Categorical
Link Quality	SNR, Bandwidth, and Congestion of the path used	Float
Cached Flag	Indicates whether packet was stored in cache during failure	Boolean

For comparative evaluation, three existing methods from the related works are selected. UAV Relay uses a UAV-assisted relay network to provide connectivity in areas with destroyed infrastructure [8]. DTN relies on delay-tolerant networking with message buffering during temporary outages [9]. A fog-based architecture where computation is performed at intermediate nodes to reduce latency [12].

4.2 END-TO-END DELAY (MS)

Table.9(a). E2E Delay vs Number of Edge Nodes

Nodes	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
10	120	180	95	68
20	115	175	92	64
30	110	170	90	60
40	108	168	88	58
50	105	165	86	55

Table.9(b). E2E Delay vs Packet Rate (packets/sec)

Packet Rate	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
5	110	160	90	60
10	115	170	92	62
15	120	175	94	64
20	125	180	96	67

4.3 PACKET DELIVERY RATIO (PDR, %)

Table.10(a). PDR vs Number of Edge Nodes

Nodes	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
10	88	75	91	97
20	89	77	92	97.5
30	90	78	93	98
40	91	79	93.5	98.2
50	92	80	94	98.5

Table.10(b). PDR vs Packet Rate

Packet Rate	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
5	90	78	92	98
10	89	77	91.5	97.5
15	87	76	91	97
20	85	75	90.5	96.5

4.4 THROUGHPUT (MBPS)

Table.11(a). Throughput vs Number of Edge Nodes

Nodes	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
10	6.5	4.8	7.2	9.1
20	6.8	5.0	7.5	9.5
30	7.0	5.2	7.8	9.8
40	7.2	5.4	8.0	10.0
50	7.5	5.5	8.2	10.2

Table.11(b). Throughput vs Packet Rate

Packet Rate	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
5	6.8	5.0	7.5	9.5
10	7.0	5.2	7.7	9.7
15	7.2	5.4	7.9	9.9
20	7.5	5.5	8.1	10.1

4.5 CACHING EFFICIENCY (%)

Table.12(a). Caching Efficiency vs Number of Edge Nodes

Nodes	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
10	50	60	65	92
20	52	62	67	93
30	54	64	69	94
40	55	65	70	94.5
50	57	66	71	95

Table.12(b). Caching Efficiency vs Packet Rate

Packet Rate	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
5	55	63	69	94
10	53	62	68	93.5
15	51	61	67	93
20	50	60	66	92.5

4.6 ENERGY CONSUMPTION (JOULES)

Table.13(a). Energy Consumption vs Number of Edge Nodes

Nodes	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
10	12.5	14.8	11.2	9.5
20	13.0	15.0	11.5	9.8
30	13.2	15.3	11.8	10.0
40	13.5	15.5	12.0	10.2
50	13.8	15.8	12.2	10.5

Table.13(b). Energy Consumption vs Packet Rate

Packet Rate	UAV Relay	DTN	Fog-Arch	Proposed
5	12.8	14.9	11.4	9.7
10	13.0	15.1	11.6	9.9
15	13.3	15.3	11.8	10.0
20	13.5	15.5	12.0	10.2

The experimental evaluation demonstrates that the proposed edge-assisted framework consistently outperforms the existing methods across all performance metrics. As shown in Table.9(a) and Table.9(b), the framework achieves an average end-to-end delay of 55–67 ms, compared to 105–125 ms for UAV-assisted relay, 165–180 ms for delay-tolerant networking, and 86–96 ms for fog-based architecture. The PDR in Table.10(a) and Table.10(b) indicates that the proposed method maintains a delivery rate of 96.5–98.5%, which is significantly higher than the existing methods, which range from 75% to 94%. Throughput analysis in Table.11(a) and Table.11(b) shows the framework achieves 9.1–10.2 Mbps, surpassing UAV relay (6.5–7.5 Mbps), delay-tolerant networking (4.8–5.5 Mbps), and fog-based architecture (7.2–8.2 Mbps). Similarly, caching efficiency (Table.12(a) and Table.12(b)) reaches 92–95%, demonstrating the robustness of the local storage mechanism, while energy consumption (Table.13(a) and Table.13(b)) is reduced to 9.5–10.5 J, reflecting optimized routing and processing.

5. CONCLUSION

This study presents an adaptive edge-assisted framework for low-latency emergency communication in disaster scenarios. The results demonstrate that the framework effectively minimizes end-to-end delay, enhances packet delivery ratio, improves throughput, increases caching efficiency, and reduces energy consumption compared to conventional UAV-assisted, delay-tolerant, and fog-based methods. By positioning computational intelligence at the edge and dynamically adapting routing and scheduling, the framework ensures timely and reliable delivery of critical messages even under variable network conditions and link failures. The numerical evaluation confirms that, with 50 edge nodes and varying packet generation rates, the framework achieves a delay as low as 55 ms, delivery ratios up to 98.5%, throughput reaching 10.2 Mbps, caching efficiency of 95%, and energy consumption as low as 9.5 J. These improvements highlight the practical feasibility of implementing edge intelligence in real-world disaster management networks. The framework provides a scalable, robust, and energy-efficient solution that can be deployed in urban and rural areas, ensuring continuous communication for first responders and affected populations.

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