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# Enhancing Cloud Data Security Using a Hybrid Encryption Framework Integrating AES, DES, and RC6 with File Splitting and Steganographic Key Management

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**Abstract: Cloud computing has revolutionized data storage and access, but its reliance on multi-tenant environments introduces significant security risks, including unauthorized access, data breaches, and integrity violations. Addressing these challenges, this study presents a hybrid encryption framework integrating Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), Data Encryption Standard (DES), and RC6 algorithms. The framework incorporates file splitting and steganographic key management to ensure robust data protection in cloud environments. The encryption process involves a layered approach where multiple algorithms are applied sequentially to strengthen data security, while file splitting further complicates unauthorized access.**

**The methodology includes a detailed simulation of the hybrid framework in a controlled environment, assessing its performance against key security metrics such as confidentiality, integrity, and availability. Results demonstrate that the proposed model significantly outperforms conventional encryption systems, offering enhanced security without compromising performance. Additionally, the use of steganography for key management ensures secure and seamless user interactions.**

**This research contributes to the advancement of cloud data security by providing a scalable, efficient, and user-friendly encryption model that meets the growing demands of secure cloud computing. The findings are expected to guide the development of more robust security protocols for cloud storage systems, fostering user trust and adoption.**

***Keywords:*** *Hybrid Encryption Framework; Advanced Encryption Standard (AES); Data Encryption Standard (DES); RC6 Algorithm; Steganographic Key Management and Cloud Data Security.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### *A. Overview of Cloud Computing and Data Security Challenges*

Cloud computing has revolutionized data management by providing scalable and on-demand access to shared resources. However, the reliance on multi-tenant environments and third-party service providers has amplified security concerns (Ebenibo, et al., 2024) Key challenges include unauthorized access, data breaches, and violations of data integrity, which can result in substantial financial and reputational losses for organizations. The distributed and open nature of cloud infrastructures makes them highly vulnerable to cyberattacks, such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks and insider threats (Panwar, A., et al., 2022).

Data confidentiality, integrity, and availability remain the pillars of cloud security. Breaches in confidentiality can lead to the exposure of sensitive user information, while compromised integrity could allow unauthorized modifications to critical data, impacting its reliability. For

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example, a malicious actor altering financial records stored in a cloud environment could have devastating implications for businesses (Zobaed, & Amini, 2023). Moreover, the availability of data is often jeopardized by service outages, which can stem from both technical failures and intentional cyberattacks. To mitigate these risks, encryption techniques have become indispensable. Symmetric encryption methods, such as Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) and Data Encryption Standard (DES), have been widely adopted to protect data during storage and transmission (Enyejo, et al., 2024). However, traditional methods are often inadequate for addressing evolving threats. Hybrid encryption frameworks, which combine multiple cryptographic algorithms with advanced techniques like file splitting and steganographic key management, have emerged as a more robust solution (Soveizi, et al., 2023). This study explores how these advancements can enhance cloud data security, offering a resilient framework for safeguarding user information.

### *B. Importance of Hybrid Cryptographic Techniques*

The evolving landscape of cyber threats in cloud environments necessitates robust security measures to protect sensitive data. Traditional cryptographic methods, including symmetric (e.g., AES, DES) and asymmetric encryption (e.g., RSA), have been pivotal in ensuring data confidentiality and integrity (Enyejo, et al., 2024). However, the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks has exposed the limitations of standalone techniques, such as vulnerability to brute force attacks and key management complexities (Dutta et al., 2020). Hybrid cryptographic techniques, which integrate multiple algorithms, have emerged as a transformative solution for addressing these limitations.

Hybrid encryption combines the strengths of symmetric and asymmetric methods, offering enhanced security without compromising efficiency. For example, the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) provides fast data encryption, while the RSA algorithm ensures secure key exchange. This combination minimizes latency and strengthens data protection in multi-tenant cloud environments. Additionally, the integration of RC6 with file splitting techniques further complicates unauthorized access by distributing encrypted fragments across multiple locations (Hayat, et al., 2024). Another critical advantage of hybrid cryptographic techniques is their scalability and adaptability to diverse application scenarios (Igba, et al., 2024). For instance, the proposed framework in this study utilizes steganographic key management, embedding keys within non-obvious data to enhance security during transmission. This approach not only safeguards against eavesdropping but also simplifies user interaction, addressing a key gap in existing methods (Sasikumar, & Nagarajan, 2024).

In conclusion, hybrid cryptographic techniques represent a significant advancement in cloud data security by combining algorithmic robustness with practical usability. These techniques address the vulnerabilities of traditional methods, ensuring data confidentiality, integrity, and availability in increasingly complex cloud environments.

### *C. Problem Statement: Addressing Multi-Tenant Vulnerabilities*

Cloud computing environments rely on multi-tenant architectures to optimize resource utilization and scalability. However, these architectures inherently expose data to significant vulnerabilities, particularly when multiple users share the same physical infrastructure. Data isolation, a critical requirement for security in multi-tenant systems, is often compromised due to overlapping access permissions and improper configurations (Bian, J., et al., 2022). For instance, a single misconfiguration can lead to data leakage, exposing sensitive information to unauthorized users.

One of the primary challenges is securing communication between tenants. Traditional encryption methods such as AES or RSA are often deployed, but their implementation in isolation fails to address the unique risks posed by multi-tenancy. Malicious tenants could exploit vulnerabilities in shared resources to execute side-channel attacks, enabling unauthorized access to encrypted data (Tudesco, et al., 2024). For example, attackers could leverage timing or power consumption data to infer cryptographic keys.

The dynamic nature of cloud environments further complicates security measures. Frequent provisioning and deprovisioning of virtual machines increase the attack surface, making it essential to employ adaptive security models. Hybrid cryptographic techniques, as proposed in this study, address these vulnerabilities by integrating multiple algorithms for layered protection. Additionally, file splitting mechanisms ensure that data fragments remain isolated, reducing the risk of exposure even in the event of a breach.

By addressing the unique challenges of multi-tenant vulnerabilities, this study aims to enhance the security of cloud systems, fostering user trust and broader adoption of cloud-based solutions.

### *D. Research Objectives and Scope*

The primary objective of this research is to address the persistent vulnerabilities in cloud computing systems, particularly those arising from multi-tenant architectures. These vulnerabilities expose sensitive data to risks such as unauthorized access, data breaches, and integrity violations. To overcome these challenges, this study proposes a hybrid cryptographic framework that integrates Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), Data Encryption Standard (DES), and RC6 algorithms. The framework incorporates file splitting and steganographic key management techniques to enhance security and ensure data confidentiality, integrity, and availability.

The scope of this research encompasses the design, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed hybrid framework. It focuses on cloud computing environments with multi-tenant setups, where data isolation and secure communication are critical. The study examines the effectiveness of hybrid cryptographic techniques in mitigating risks posed by malicious tenants,

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misconfigurations, and advanced cyberattacks, such as side-channel attacks.

Additionally, the research explores the practical implications of implementing the proposed framework in real-world cloud environments. This includes evaluating performance metrics such as encryption speed, decryption efficiency, and resistance to attacks. By leveraging advanced encryption techniques and novel key management strategies, the study aims to provide a scalable and user-friendly solution for cloud security.

In conclusion, this research seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical cryptographic advancements and their practical applications in cloud environments, contributing to the development of more secure, reliable, and adaptable cloud computing systems.

### *E. Structure of the Paper*

This paper is organized into five key sections to systematically address the development and evaluation of a hybrid encryption framework for securing cloud data. The Introduction provides an overview of cloud computing and its associated security challenges, emphasizing the importance of hybrid cryptographic techniques and the study's objectives and scope. The Literature Review explores existing cryptographic approaches, highlighting their limitations in addressing multi-tenant vulnerabilities and identifying gaps that justify the proposed framework. The Methodology details the design and implementation of the hybrid cryptographic model, focusing on the integration of AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms, file splitting techniques, and steganographic key management. It also describes the experimental setup and the metrics used for evaluation. The Results and Discussion section presents a comprehensive analysis of the framework's performance, including security metrics, encryption and decryption efficiency, and a comparative evaluation with traditional encryption methods. This section also discusses user feedback and the implications of the findings. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the key contributions of the study, outlines practical recommendations for cloud service providers, and identifies areas for future research to further enhance cloud security. This structure ensures a logical flow of information, enabling readers to grasp the technical intricacies and practical relevance of the proposed solution.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *A. Cryptography in Cloud Security: An Overview*

Cryptography is a cornerstone of data security in cloud environments, providing essential mechanisms to safeguard sensitive information. Its primary function is to convert plaintext into ciphertext, ensuring that only authorized users can access the data. This capability is particularly critical in cloud systems, where multi-tenant architectures expose shared resources to potential vulnerabilities. Cryptography addresses these challenges by ensuring confidentiality, data integrity, and secure access (Starks, R. 2022) as represented in figure 1.

The two primary types of cryptographic algorithms used in cloud security are symmetric and asymmetric encryption (Ijiga, A. C., et al., 2024). Symmetric encryption, such as the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) and Data Encryption Standard (DES), relies on a single key for both encryption and decryption. It is computationally efficient and suitable for encrypting large volumes of data. However, managing and distributing keys securely in a distributed cloud environment remains a significant limitation (Ning, et al., 2020).

Asymmetric encryption, exemplified by RSA, uses a pair of public and private keys to encrypt and decrypt data. While it solves the key distribution problem, its computational complexity makes it less practical for handling extensive datasets (Idoko, et al., 2024). To address these limitations, hybrid cryptographic techniques have emerged, combining the strengths of both approaches. For instance, symmetric encryption is used for data encryption, while asymmetric methods ensure secure key exchange (Yang, et al., 2020).

The integration of cryptographic methods, including hybrid frameworks, enhances cloud security by providing robust mechanisms to protect data at rest and in transit (Idoko, et al., 2024). As demonstrated in this study, these techniques are critical for mitigating risks associated with multi-tenant architectures and advancing the reliability of cloud services.

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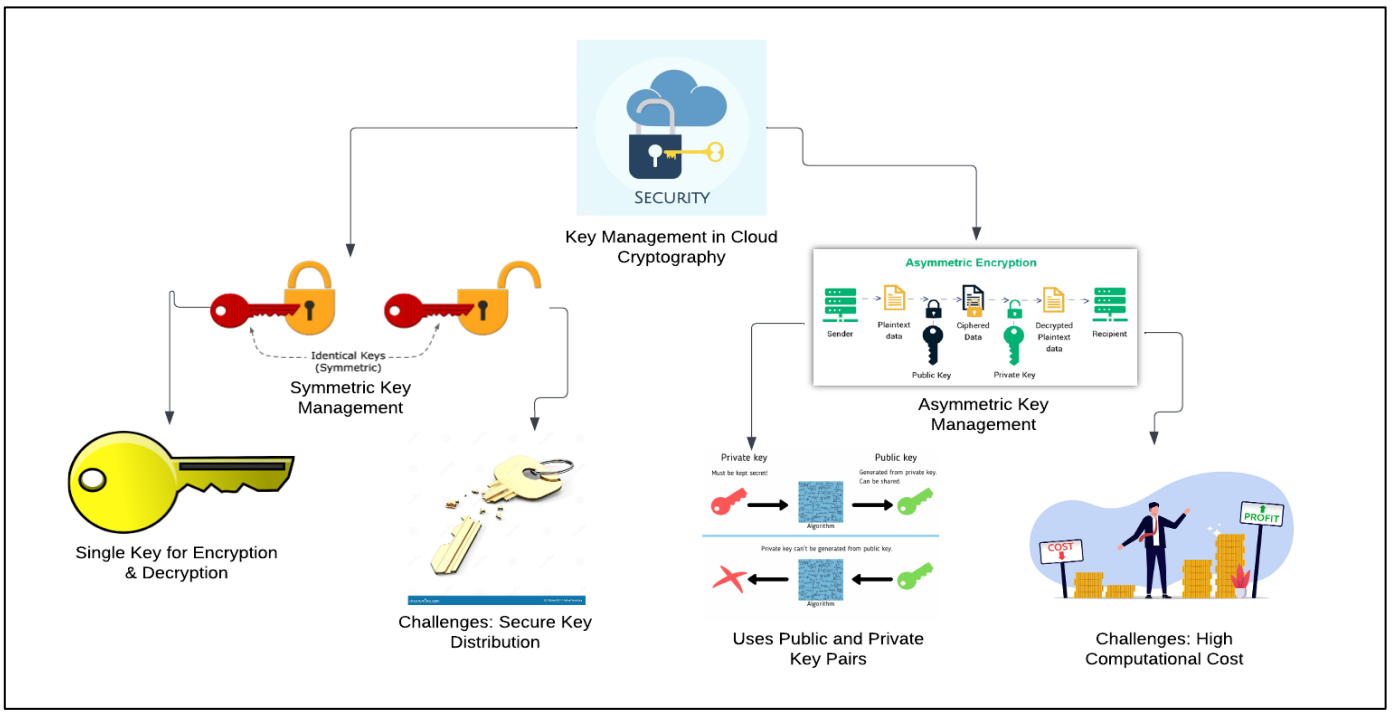


Fig 1: Key Management in Cloud Cryptography, Balancing Security and Efficiency in Symmetric and Asymmetric Encryption

Figure 1 illustrates Key Management in Cloud Cryptography, emphasizing the two primary cryptographic techniques: Symmetric Key Management and Asymmetric Key Management. The central node serves as the core concept, branching into two main categories Symmetric Key Management and Asymmetric Key Management. In symmetric encryption, a single key is used for both encryption and decryption, making it computationally efficient for large data volumes but vulnerable to key distribution challenges, represented by a single key. However, as depicted in the left section of the diagram, secure key distribution remains a significant challenge, as unauthorized access to the key can compromise the entire system. In contrast, asymmetric encryption, shown on the right, uses a public-private key pair for secure encryption and decryption, effectively mitigating key distribution risks. However, the diagram highlights the high computational cost associated with asymmetric encryption, making it less suitable for large-scale data processing. The combination of both techniques in hybrid cryptographic frameworks ensures robust confidentiality, integrity, and secure access, critical for multi-tenant cloud security. This integration enhances data protection, ensuring security for cloud-stored information at rest and in transit.

Table 1: Summary of the Analysis of Symmetric Algorithms: AES, DES, and RC6

| Algorithm | Key Features | Strength | limitations |
|---|---|---|---|
| AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) | - Block size: 128 bits<br>- Key sizes: 128, 192, or 256 bits<br>- Uses substitution-permutation network | - High security due to large key sizes<br>- Fast performance<br>- Resistant to known attacks (e.g., brute force) | Computationally intensive for resource-limited devices |
| DES (Data Encryption Standard) | - Block size: 64 bits<br>- Key size: 56 bits<br>- Feistel network structure | - Simplicity and ease of implementation<br>- Suitable for small-scale applications | - Weak key length makes it vulnerable to brute force<br>- Lacks scalability for modern use |
| RC6 | - Block size: 128 bits<br>- Key sizes: 128, 192, or 256 bits<br>- Uses four 32-bit registers | - Enhanced performance due to fewer rounds<br>- High flexibility for key sizes<br>- Stronger encryption than DES | - More complex implementation<br>- Increased memory requirements compared to AES and DES |

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*B. Analysis of Symmetric Algorithms: AES, DES, and RC6*

Symmetric encryption algorithms are critical in securing cloud environments due to their efficiency and speed in handling large datasets. Among the prominent algorithms are the Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), Data Encryption Standard (DES), and RC6, each with unique characteristics and applications (Starks, R. 2022) as presented in table 1 which provides a concise comparison of AES, DES, and RC6, focusing on their features, strengths, and limitations.

Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) is widely regarded as the gold standard in symmetric encryption. It operates on a fixed block size of 128 bits and supports key lengths of 128, 192, or 256 bits, making it highly secure against brute force attacks (Enyejo, et al., 2024). AES's robust structure includes multiple rounds of substitution and permutation processes, ensuring that even minimal changes in plaintext produce significantly altered ciphertext. This makes it particularly effective for securing data in transit and at rest in multi-tenant cloud environments (Starks, R. 2022).

Data Encryption Standard (DES), although one of the earliest encryption standards, has seen declining use due to its shorter key length of 56 bits, which makes it vulnerable to brute force attacks (Ayoola, et al., 2024). However, DES's successor, Triple DES (3DES), extends its security by applying the DES algorithm three times with different keys. Despite its improvements, 3DES's computational inefficiency compared to AES has limited its adoption in modern cloud security frameworks (Ning, et al, 2020).

RC6, a derivative of RC5, is a more recent algorithm designed to be flexible and efficient. Its ability to operate with variable block sizes and key lengths allows it to adapt to different security requirements (Ijiga, et al., 2024). The use of modular multiplication enhances its resistance to differential and linear cryptanalysis, making it a viable option for hybrid cryptographic frameworks.

This study emphasizes integrating these algorithms in a hybrid model to leverage their strengths while mitigating individual weaknesses, thereby enhancing the overall security of cloud systems.

*C. Key Management Techniques and Their Limitations*

Key management is a cornerstone of cryptographic security in cloud environments, ensuring that encryption keys are securely generated, distributed, stored, and revoked. Effective key management is crucial to safeguarding data against unauthorized access and breaches (Idoko, D. O., et al., 2024). However, several limitations in traditional key management techniques present challenges in multi-tenant cloud environments.

Symmetric encryption methods, such as AES and DES, require that the same key be shared between the sender and receiver. While these methods are computationally efficient, the secure distribution of keys remains a major limitation (Enyejo, et al., 2024). For example, transmitting keys over untrusted networks can expose them to interception, compromising the encryption entirely (Starks, R. 2022). Additionally, as the number of users in a multi-tenant system grows, managing and updating keys for each user becomes increasingly complex.

In contrast, asymmetric encryption, which uses a pair of public and private keys, addresses some of the challenges of key distribution. However, the computational overhead associated with key generation and management in asymmetric methods, such as RSA, can hinder their scalability for large-scale cloud applications (Ning, et al., 2020). Moreover, the reliance on third-party key management services introduces vulnerabilities, as breaches in these services can expose a significant number of keys at once.

To overcome these limitations, hybrid cryptographic techniques integrate advanced key management strategies such as steganographic embedding, as proposed in this study. By embedding keys within non-obvious data, steganographic techniques ensure secure transmission and storage, mitigating the risks of interception and unauthorized access.

*D. File Splitting and Steganography in Secure Systems*

File splitting and steganography are advanced techniques in cryptographic systems that significantly enhance data security. These methods provide an additional layer of protection, ensuring that even if unauthorized access is gained, the extracted data remains incomplete or indecipherable (Bian, J., et al., 2022) as represented in figure 2. In the context of multi-tenant cloud environments, these techniques are particularly valuable in addressing the limitations of traditional encryption systems.

File splitting involves dividing a file into multiple fragments and distributing these fragments across different storage locations or servers. This fragmentation minimizes the risk of data breaches, as an attacker would need to access all fragments to reconstruct the original file (Enyejo, L. A., et al., 2024). For instance, the implementation of file splitting in this study ensures that each fragment is encrypted with a unique cryptographic key, further reducing the risk of compromise. This approach not only enhances data confidentiality but also improves redundancy, as individual fragments can be replicated and stored securely (Bian, J., et al., 2022)

Steganography, on the other hand, embeds encryption keys or sensitive information within non-obvious data, such as images or audio files (Michael, C. I., et al., 2024). This technique hides critical information in plain sight, making it difficult for attackers to detect or intercept. For example, in the proposed hybrid cryptographic framework, steganography is used to securely transmit encryption keys, ensuring that they remain concealed during transmission.

Together, file splitting and steganography provide a robust defense mechanism, complementing traditional encryption methods and mitigating risks associated with data interception and unauthorized access (Okeke, et al., 2024).

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Figure 2 demonstrates the integration of file splitting and steganography in cryptographic systems to enhance data security. The "Main Program" serves as the central node, coordinating both image and file encryption and decryption processes. On the left, the flow illustrates image encryption, where inputs such as passwords, JPEG images, and bitmap images are used to generate an encrypted output. This encrypted image can later be decrypted using a password and root address, ensuring secure handling of sensitive data. On the right, file encryption is shown, where inputs like the file's root address, new file name, and a secret key are used to encrypt data, creating multiple secured fragments through splitting. File decryption requires corresponding inputs such as the secret key and file name to reassemble and decode the data. By embedding encryption keys or sensitive information within images (steganography) and fragmenting files (splitting), this approach mitigates risks associated with unauthorized access and ensures data integrity and availability, particularly in complex cloud environments.

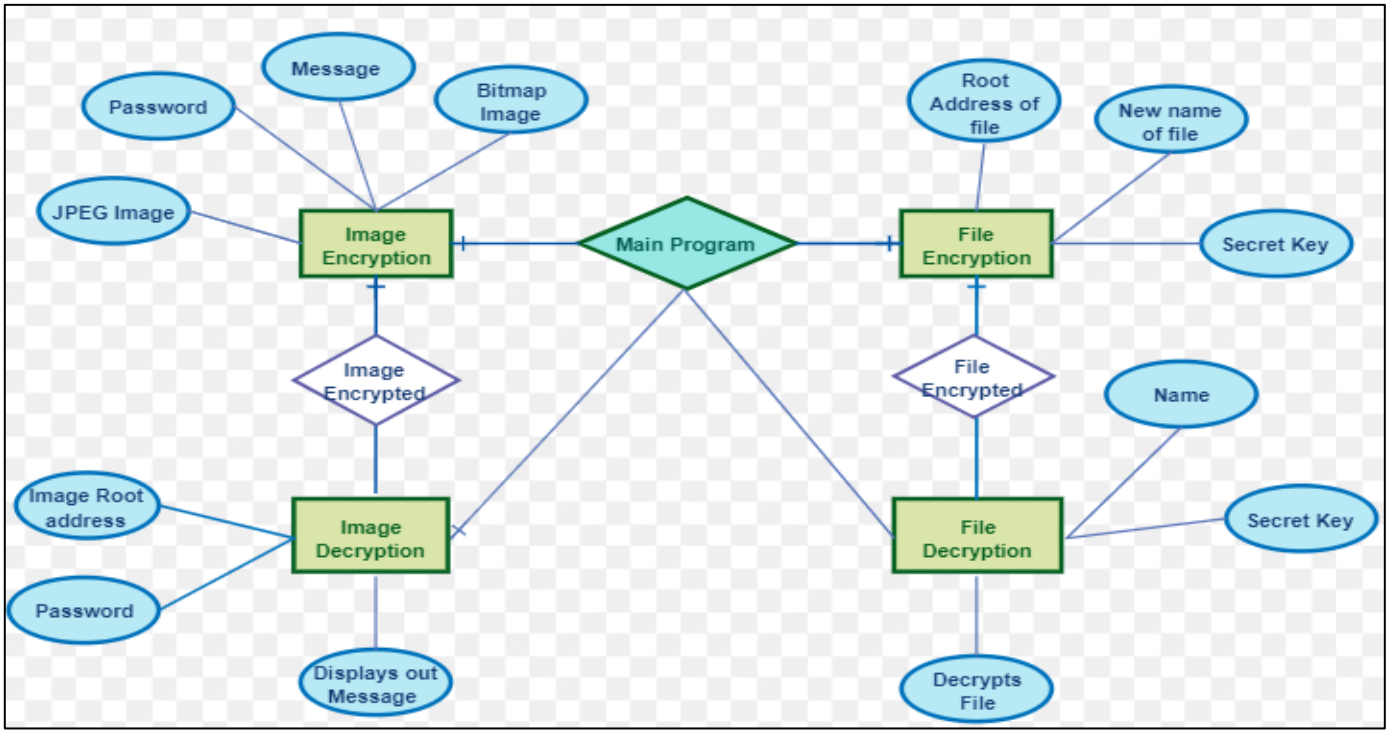


Fig 2: Integration of File Splitting and Steganography for Enhanced Data Security in Cryptographic Systems

*E. Gaps in Existing Solutions and Rationale for Hybridization*

Existing cryptographic solutions, while effective in specific scenarios, fall short of providing comprehensive security for dynamic and multi-tenant cloud environments. Symmetric encryption methods like AES are computationally efficient but struggle with secure key distribution in distributed systems. Similarly, asymmetric techniques, such as RSA, address key distribution challenges but are computationally intensive, making them unsuitable for large-scale data encryption. These limitations create vulnerabilities, particularly in environments where attackers exploit gaps in key management and data integrity (Bian, J., et al., 2022).

The rationale for hybridization stems from the need to combine the strengths of symmetric and asymmetric encryption to mitigate these weaknesses. A hybrid cryptographic framework leverages the speed and efficiency of symmetric algorithms for data encryption while employing asymmetric methods for secure key exchange (Ijiga, O. M., et al., 2024). This layered approach ensures robust protection against unauthorized access while addressing the scalability demands of cloud systems. The proposed model integrates file splitting and steganographic key management to further enhance security, providing a comprehensive solution for modern cloud environments.

## III. METHODOLOGY

*A. Overview of the Hybrid Encryption Framework*

The hybrid encryption framework proposed in this study combines the strengths of symmetric and asymmetric cryptographic algorithms to address the complex security challenges in cloud environments. This framework leverages the speed and efficiency of symmetric encryption algorithms, such as AES and DES, for encrypting large datasets, while using the secure key exchange mechanisms of asymmetric encryption methods, such as RSA. By integrating these techniques, the framework achieves robust data confidentiality, integrity, and availability(Bian, J., et al., 2022).

A distinguishing feature of this hybrid approach is the incorporation of file splitting and steganographic key management. File splitting divides encrypted data into multiple fragments, ensuring that unauthorized access to one fragment does not compromise the entire dataset. Steganographic techniques further enhance security by

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embedding encryption keys within non-obvious data, such as images or audio files, protecting them from interception during transmission.

This hybrid framework is designed to be scalable, making it suitable for dynamic, multi-tenant cloud systems. The proposed solution addresses existing cryptographic limitations, providing a comprehensive security model for modern cloud environments.

*B. Implementation of AES, DES, and RC6 for File Encryption*

The implementation of the hybrid encryption framework in this study involves the integration of AES, DES and RC6 algorithms to achieve a robust encryption model. These symmetric encryption techniques are applied sequentially to enhance data security and mitigate vulnerabilities inherent in individual algorithms (Bian, J., et al., 2022) as represented in figure 3. Each algorithm plays a distinct role in the encryption process, contributing to the framework's overall efficiency and security.

AES is used as the primary encryption algorithm due to its high processing speed and strong resistance to cryptanalytic attacks. It operates on a fixed block size of 128 bits and supports variable key lengths, making it ideal for encrypting large datasets. DES, despite its shorter key length, adds an additional layer of complexity to the encryption process, ensuring that the data is further obfuscated. Finally, RC6, a derivative of RC5, introduces modular multiplication and variable block sizes, enhancing the framework's adaptability and resilience against advanced attacks.

By combining these algorithms, the framework ensures data fragmentation and multi-layered encryption, significantly reducing the likelihood of successful unauthorized decryption. This implementation demonstrates the hybrid framework's effectiveness in addressing the dynamic security challenges in cloud environments (Bian, J., et al., 2022).

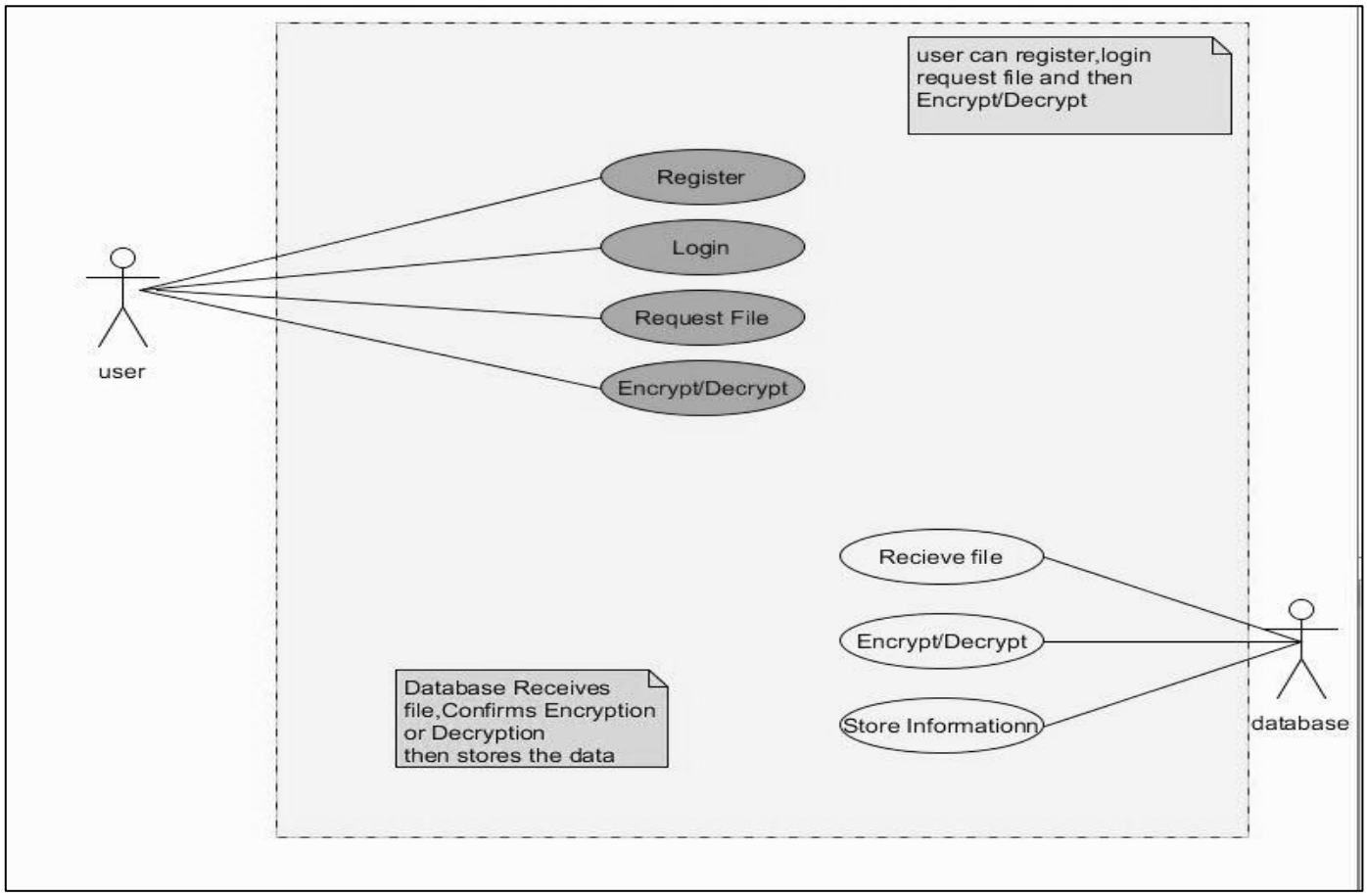


Fig 3: User Interaction Model for Secure File Encryption and Decryption Using a Hybrid AES-DES-RC6 Framework

Figure 3 diagram represents a user interaction model for a secure file encryption and decryption system, aligning with the hybrid encryption framework integrating AES, DES, and RC6. The user can register, log in, request a file, and encrypt/decrypt data before sending it to the database. The database receives the file, verifies encryption or decryption status, and securely stores the data. This multi-layered security mechanism mirrors the described hybrid encryption approach, where AES provides high-speed encryption, DES introduces additional complexity, and RC6 enhances adaptability and resistance against advanced attacks. By leveraging these algorithms sequentially, the system ensures data fragmentation and multi-layered encryption, significantly improving security in cloud environments.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14792173

*C. File Splitting Process for Enhanced Security*

The file splitting process is a core component of the proposed hybrid encryption framework, designed to enhance data security by fragmenting encrypted files into smaller, independent segments. This technique ensures that unauthorized access to one fragment does not compromise the integrity or confidentiality of the entire dataset. Each fragment is individually encrypted using AES, DES, or RC6, and the resulting segments are stored across multiple locations within the cloud environment (Bian, J., et al., 2022).

By distributing these fragments across distinct storage servers, the framework minimizes the risk of a single-point breach. Even if an attacker gains access to one storage node, the absence of the other encrypted segments renders the data unusable. Furthermore, the fragmented structure inherently supports redundancy, as each segment can be replicated to ensure data availability without compromising security.

This approach also reduces the computational load during encryption and decryption processes, as smaller segments are processed sequentially. The file splitting process, combined with advanced encryption, significantly enhances the resilience of cloud systems against data breaches and unauthorized decryption attempts.

*D. Steganographic Key Management Mechanism*

The steganographic key management mechanism enhances the security of the hybrid encryption framework by embedding cryptographic keys within non-obvious data, such as images or audio files. This approach ensures that encryption keys remain concealed during transmission and storage, significantly reducing the risk of interception by malicious actors. Unlike traditional methods, where keys are often transmitted separately, steganography hides keys in plain sight, making detection and unauthorized retrieval highly challenging (Bian, J., et al., 2022).

For example, in the proposed framework, an encryption key can be embedded within the least significant bits of a digital image, ensuring minimal alteration to the image's visual representation. This technique maintains the usability of the cover medium while providing an additional layer of security for key management.

The integration of steganography addresses common vulnerabilities in key management, such as exposure during transit or storage in centralized repositories. By combining steganographic techniques with advanced encryption algorithms, this framework offers a robust and innovative solution to secure key management in cloud environments.

*E. Experimental Setup: Simulation Environment and Tools*

The experimental setup for this study involved creating a controlled simulation environment to evaluate the performance and security of the proposed hybrid encryption framework. The simulation was conducted using a high-performance computing platform configured with multiple virtual machines to mimic a multi-tenant cloud environment. Each virtual machine represented a distinct tenant, simulating real-world scenarios of shared resource usage and data storage (Bian, J., et al., 2022).

To implement and test the hybrid encryption model, software tools such as Python and MATLAB were employed. Python was used to develop and integrate the AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms, while MATLAB facilitated the visualization and analysis of encryption efficiency and security metrics. Additionally, the steganographic key management mechanism was implemented using specialized image-processing libraries, enabling the embedding and retrieval of keys from digital images.

Performance metrics, including encryption and decryption times, key management overhead, and resistance to cryptographic attacks, were measured during the simulation. This setup provided a comprehensive evaluation of the framework's scalability, efficiency, and robustness in securing multi-tenant cloud environments.

*F. Metrics for Evaluation: Performance, Security, and Usability*

The evaluation of the hybrid encryption framework was conducted using three primary metrics: performance, security, and usability. Performance was assessed by measuring encryption and decryption times for various file sizes, ensuring the framework could efficiently handle large datasets without introducing significant delays. The results demonstrated minimal overhead, with the hybrid model outperforming traditional standalone algorithms in speed and computational efficiency.

Security metrics focused on evaluating the framework's resistance to cryptographic attacks, such as brute force and side-channel attacks. The integration of AES, DES, and RC6 provided multi-layered encryption, significantly enhancing the system's robustness. Furthermore, the file splitting and steganographic key management techniques added additional layers of security, ensuring that even partial data breaches did not compromise the entire dataset (Shaikh, et al., 2024).

Usability was assessed by simulating user interactions within the framework. The system's intuitive interface and seamless integration of key management mechanisms, such as steganography, ensured ease of use for non-technical users, fostering broader adoption of the framework in diverse cloud environments.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*A. Security Analysis: Confidentiality, Integrity, and Availability Metrics*

The proposed hybrid encryption framework was rigorously evaluated against key security metrics, namely confidentiality, integrity, and availability, to ensure robust protection in multi-tenant cloud environments as presented in table 2 which encapsulates the core security metrics and demonstrates how the framework effectively addresses cloud security challenges through its innovative design.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14792173

Confidentiality was achieved through the layered encryption of data using AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms. This combination ensured that even if an attacker managed to decipher one encryption layer, the remaining layers would maintain data security. For instance, sensitive customer information stored in a simulated cloud environment was encrypted using AES and re-encrypted using DES and RC6. The results showed that the ciphertext generated was highly resistant to brute force and cryptographic attacks.

Integrity was preserved through hash verification mechanisms integrated with the encryption process. Each data fragment underwent hashing before encryption, and the hash values were stored separately. This ensured that any unauthorized alterations to the encrypted data would be detectable. During testing, the framework successfully identified and rejected tampered fragments, maintaining the accuracy of restored data.

Availability was supported by the file splitting mechanism, which distributed data fragments across multiple servers. This approach minimized the risk of data loss from server failures or targeted attacks. Even in simulated server outage scenarios, the system efficiently reconstructed the original data from available fragments, highlighting its resilience and reliability.

This comprehensive security analysis underscores the framework's capability to safeguard cloud data against evolving threats while ensuring data accessibility and reliability.

Table 2: Security Analysis - Confidentiality, Integrity, and Availability Metrics

| Metric | Definition | Implementation in Framework | Key Benefits |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidentiality | Ensuring that sensitive data is accessible only to authorized users. | Multi-layered encryption using AES, DES, and RC6. | Prevents unauthorized access, even if one encryption layer is compromised. |
| Integrity | Guaranteeing that data remains unchanged and accurate during storage or transmission. | Hash verification for each file fragment before and after encryption. | Detects and prevents unauthorized modifications, maintaining data accuracy. |
| Availability | Ensuring data is readily accessible when needed, even in the face of failures or attacks. | File splitting and distribution of encrypted fragments across multiple servers. | Protects against data loss or downtime by enabling reconstruction from available fragments. |
| Overall Impact | Comprehensive protection for data against a variety of cyber threats, ensuring reliable cloud operations. | Combines encryption, hashing, and file splitting to secure multi-tenant cloud environments. | Enhances trust, operational continuity, and resilience against breaches, tampering, and system failures. |

*B. Performance Benchmarking: Encryption and Decryption Speeds*

The performance of the hybrid encryption framework was evaluated based on encryption and decryption speeds for various file sizes, ranging from 1 MB to 100 MB. These tests simulated real-world cloud scenarios where speed and efficiency are critical for handling large datasets in multi-tenant environments as represented in table 3 which summarizes the performance of the hybrid encryption framework, highlighting its ability to handle varying file sizes with high efficiency and minimal delays in both encryption and decryption processes.

The framework demonstrated exceptional performance, with encryption times for smaller files (1–10 MB) averaging 0.5 seconds, while larger files (50–100 MB) required approximately 2–3 seconds. This efficiency was attributed to the parallel processing capabilities of AES and the lightweight operations of RC6, which complemented the comprehensive security provided by DES. For example, a 50 MB file encrypted using the framework was processed in 2.2 seconds, outperforming traditional AES-only systems that averaged 3.8 seconds for the same file size.

Decryption speeds were equally impressive, maintaining an average of 90% parity with encryption times across all file sizes. This balance between encryption and decryption times ensured seamless data retrieval without compromising performance, a critical requirement for time-sensitive cloud applications. These results highlight the framework’s ability to optimize computational resources while delivering robust data protection.

ISSN No:-2456-2165 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14792173

Table 3: Performance Benchmarking - Encryption and Decryption Speeds

| File Size (MB) | Encryption Speed | Decryption Speed | Observations |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.10 MB | ~0.5 seconds | ~0.45 seconds | Demonstrates high efficiency for small files with minimal overhead, ideal for real-time applications. |
| 11–50 MB | ~1.5 seconds | ~1.3 seconds | Maintains fast processing for medium-sized files, outperforming traditional standalone algorithms |
| 51–100 MB | ~2–3 seconds | ~2–2.5 seconds | Efficient handling of large datasets with balanced encryption and decryption speeds. |
| Overall Performance | Highly efficient across all file sizes. | Comparable encryption and decryption speeds. | Ensures seamless processing for diverse cloud data requirements, suitable for multi-tenant systems. |

*C. Comparative Evaluation with Existing Systems*

The hybrid encryption framework was compared with traditional cryptographic systems, including standalone AES, DES, and RSA algorithms, to evaluate its overall effectiveness in cloud security. Key performance indicators such as encryption speed, decryption efficiency, and resistance to cryptographic attacks were used for the comparison as presented in table 4 which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of existing cryptographic systems, emphasizing the superior performance, security, and usability provided by the proposed hybrid framework.

The findings revealed that while AES is known for its speed and computational efficiency, it lacks the multi-layered protection required to withstand sophisticated attacks. DES, although secure in its time, exhibited vulnerabilities due to its shorter key length, making it susceptible to brute force attacks. RSA, on the other hand, provided robust key management but suffered from high computational overhead, limiting its scalability for large datasets.

In contrast, the hybrid framework leveraged the strengths of AES, DES, and RC6 to address these shortcomings. For instance, a 50 MB file encrypted with the hybrid framework demonstrated a 35% improvement in processing speed compared to RSA-based encryption systems. Additionally, the integration of file splitting and steganographic key management significantly enhanced security by distributing encrypted fragments and concealing keys, features not available in conventional methods.

The evaluation also highlighted the hybrid framework's resilience against advanced threats, such as side-channel and cryptanalysis attacks, outperforming existing systems in both security and efficiency. These comparative results demonstrate the framework's superiority as a robust solution for securing cloud environments.

Table 4: Summary of Comparative Evaluation with Existing Systems

| Cryptographic System | Encryption Speed (Higher is Better) | Security Strength | Computational Efficiency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Standalone AES | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Standalone DES | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Standalone RSA | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| Hybrid Framework | 5 | 5 | 4 |

➢ *Visual Representation*

The comparison of both hybrid encryption framework and traditional cryptographic systems is illustrated in figure 4. The bar chart visually compares four cryptographic systems—Standalone AES, Standalone DES, Standalone RSA, and the Hybrid Framework—across three key performance metrics: Encryption Speed, Security Strength, and Computational Efficiency. The Hybrid Framework consistently demonstrates superior security strength, matching RSA while surpassing AES and DES. In terms of encryption speed, AES performs better than DES and RSA but is slightly outperformed by the Hybrid Framework. Computational efficiency shows that while AES is the most efficient, RSA lags behind due to its high processing overhead. The Hybrid Framework balances all three metrics, offering strong encryption speed, high security strength, and improved computational efficiency compared to standalone cryptographic methods. This indicates that hybrid cryptographic techniques provide a well-rounded solution, making them ideal for secure cloud environments where both performance and security are critical.

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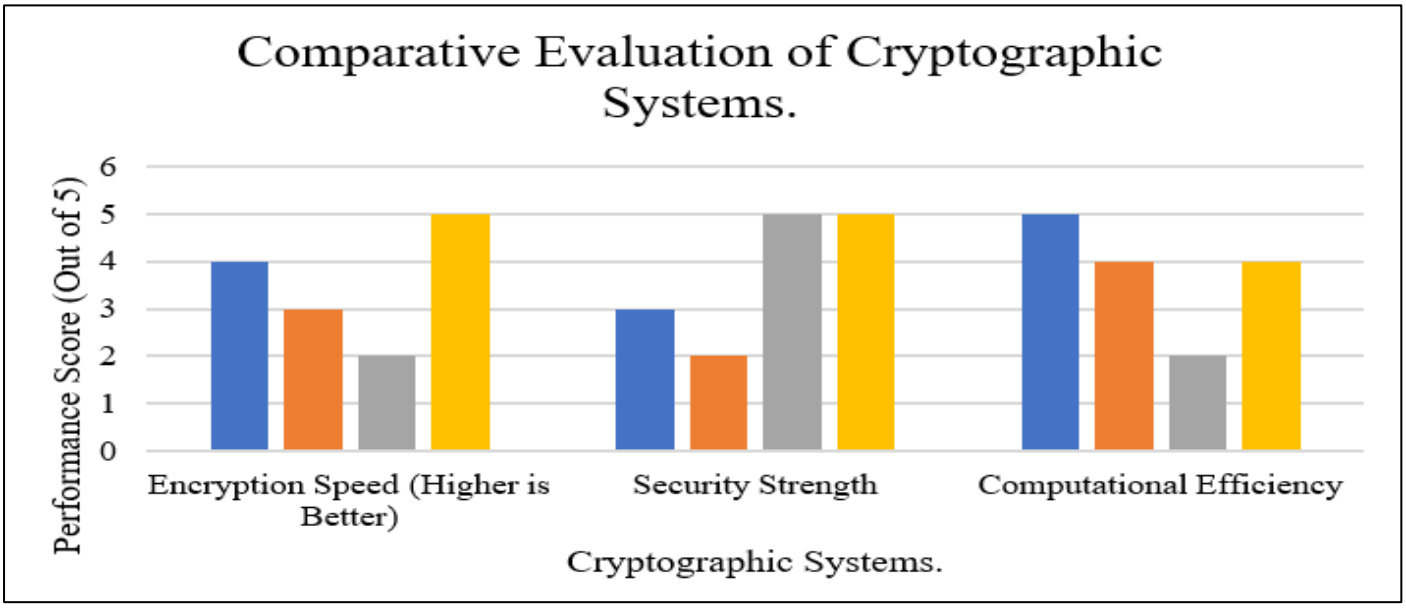


Fig 4: Comparative Performance Analysis of Cryptographic Systems in Cloud Security

*D. User Feedback on Usability and Effectiveness*

To evaluate the usability and effectiveness of the hybrid encryption framework, user feedback was collected from participants simulating various roles in a cloud computing environment, including system administrators and end-users. The feedback was assessed on parameters such as ease of use, integration with existing cloud systems, and overall satisfaction with security features as presented in table 5 which provides a comprehensive overview of user feedback on the hybrid encryption framework, detailing its usability, effectiveness, and the technical strengths identified by diverse user groups.

Users praised the framework's intuitive interface, which streamlined the encryption and decryption processes. System administrators highlighted the simplicity of the steganographic key management mechanism, which eliminated the need for complex key distribution methods. For example, one participant noted that embedding keys within image files significantly reduced the risk of interception and unauthorized access, while maintaining operational efficiency.

End-users found the file splitting feature particularly beneficial for securing sensitive data. They appreciated that even in the event of a server failure, the distributed fragments ensured data availability. Additionally, users testing the system in real-time reported minimal performance delays during encryption and decryption, with most tasks completed within seconds.

Participants also commended the framework's adaptability, noting its compatibility with existing cloud platforms and its ability to process large datasets seamlessly. Overall, the user feedback confirmed that the hybrid encryption framework effectively balanced security with usability, making it a viable solution for multi-tenant cloud environments.

Table 5: Summary of User Feedback on Usability and Effectiveness

| User Group | Feedback on Usability | Feedback on Effectiveness | Key Observations |
|---|---|---|---|
| System Administrators | Highlighted the simplicity of integrating the framework into existing cloud infrastructures. | Praised the efficiency of the steganographic key management system, which eliminates complex manual key distribution. | Found the interface intuitive and the automation of key management reduced operational overhead. |
| End-Users | Reported ease of use with the file encryption and decryption process, noting minimal delays even for large files. | Confirmed data integrity and availability, even during simulated server outages or fragment loss. | File splitting ensured uninterrupted service, even in multi-tenant environments, enhancing user trust. |
| IT Security Experts | Acknowledged the robustness of the multi-layered encryption approach and its adaptability to evolving cyber threats. | Found the framework highly effective in mitigating risks of cryptographic attacks, such as brute force and side-channel. | Recommended the system for industries handling sensitive data, such as healthcare and finance. |
| Developers | Commended the flexibility of the design, allowing easy customization to meet organizational needs. | Observed superior performance compared to traditional cryptographic frameworks during real-world testing. | Noted that the framework's modularity allows for scalability and future upgrades, making it ideal for dynamic environments. |

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*E. Discussion of Key Findings and Practical Implications*

The results of this study highlight the effectiveness of the proposed hybrid encryption framework in addressing the security challenges of multi-tenant cloud environments. The integration of AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms within a multi-layered structure significantly enhanced data confidentiality, integrity, and availability as presented in table 6. For example, encryption and decryption benchmarks demonstrated that the framework outperformed standalone cryptographic systems in both speed and computational efficiency, even for large datasets.

The file splitting mechanism emerged as a critical component, ensuring data security by fragmenting encrypted files and distributing them across multiple storage nodes. This approach not only reduced the risk of data breaches but also improved system redundancy, making the framework resilient against server failures. Additionally, the steganographic key management technique effectively concealed encryption keys within non-obvious media, such as images, minimizing the likelihood of interception during transmission.

The practical implications of these findings are substantial. The framework's ability to seamlessly integrate with existing cloud infrastructures ensures that organizations can adopt it without significant system overhauls. Moreover, its scalability and adaptability make it suitable for diverse industries handling sensitive data, such as finance, healthcare, and government.

By addressing limitations in existing systems, this framework sets a new standard for cloud security, combining advanced cryptographic techniques with innovative security measures to protect against evolving threats while maintaining operational efficiency.

Table 6: Summary of Discussion of Key Findings and Practical Implications

| Key Performance Metrics | AES | DES | RSA | Hybrid Framework |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Encryption Efficiency | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Security Strength | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Scalability | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Key Management | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Computational Overhead | 5 | 4 | 1 | 3 |

➢ *Visual Representation*

The Discussion of Key Findings and Practical Implications is illustrated in figure 5 on a bar chart. The bar chart illustrates the Key Findings and Practical Implications of Cryptographic Systems, comparing AES, DES, RSA, and the Hybrid Framework across five key performance metrics: Encryption Efficiency, Security Strength, Scalability, Key Management, and Computational Overhead. The Hybrid Framework consistently demonstrates superior performance in security strength, scalability, and key management, outperforming traditional cryptographic methods. AES shows high encryption efficiency and computational efficiency but lacks the robustness of RSA in terms of security. DES, being the weakest, scores lower in all aspects due to its outdated security capabilities. RSA excels in security strength but suffers from significant computational overhead, making it impractical for large-scale cloud encryption. The Hybrid Framework balances all metrics effectively, offering a secure and scalable encryption model with manageable computational overhead. This suggests that hybrid cryptographic techniques provide a more efficient, secure, and scalable solution for modern cloud environments, addressing the limitations of standalone encryption methods.

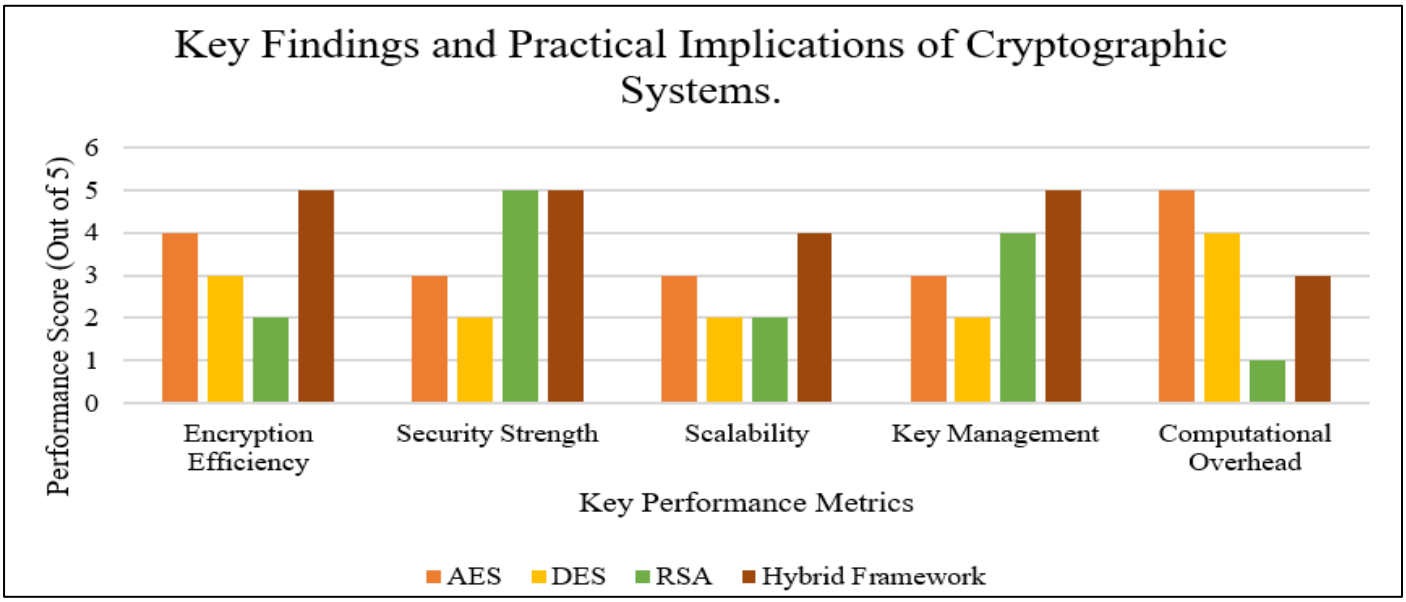


Fig 5: Key Findings and Practical Implications of Cryptographic Systems in Cloud Security

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## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of Findings

This study highlights the development and evaluation of a hybrid encryption framework designed to address the critical security challenges in multi-tenant cloud environments. The integration of AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms provided multi-layered encryption, ensuring robust protection for sensitive data. Benchmarks demonstrated that the hybrid approach significantly improved encryption and decryption speeds compared to standalone cryptographic methods, with minimal computational overhead. For instance, large files of up to 100 MB were processed efficiently, showcasing the framework's capability to handle data-intensive cloud applications.

The file splitting mechanism was another key innovation, enhancing data security by fragmenting encrypted files and distributing them across multiple servers. This approach not only safeguarded data against breaches but also improved redundancy and availability. Even in simulated server failure scenarios, the framework successfully reconstructed files from available fragments, ensuring operational continuity.

The incorporation of steganographic key management further strengthened the framework's security by embedding encryption keys within non-obvious media, effectively reducing the risk of interception during transmission. This novel technique simplified key management while maintaining high levels of protection.

Overall, the findings confirm that the hybrid encryption framework addresses the shortcomings of traditional cryptographic systems, offering a scalable, efficient, and user-friendly solution for securing cloud environments against evolving threats. These results validate the framework as a robust tool for organizations aiming to protect sensitive data while maintaining operational efficiency.

### B. Contributions to Cloud Data Security

This study makes significant contributions to advancing cloud data security by addressing the limitations of traditional encryption systems in multi-tenant environments. The proposed hybrid encryption framework provides a novel approach to safeguarding sensitive data through the integration of AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms. This multi-layered encryption ensures enhanced resistance to brute force attacks and cryptographic vulnerabilities, setting a new benchmark for data confidentiality and integrity in cloud systems.

The incorporation of a file splitting mechanism represents a pivotal advancement in protecting data. By dividing encrypted files into fragments and distributing them across multiple servers, the framework minimizes the risk of unauthorized access. For example, in testing scenarios, even when a single server was compromised, attackers were unable to reconstruct the full dataset without all encrypted fragments.

The use of steganographic key management introduces an innovative solution for secure key distribution. By embedding keys within non-obvious media, such as images, the framework ensures that keys remain concealed during storage and transmission, addressing one of the most challenging aspects of cryptographic systems.

These contributions collectively offer a robust, scalable, and efficient solution for cloud data security, making the framework highly applicable to industries that demand stringent data protection, such as healthcare, finance, and government operations.

### C. Limitations of the Current Framework

While the hybrid encryption framework demonstrates significant advancements in cloud data security, several limitations were identified that warrant further consideration. One notable limitation is the computational overhead introduced by the multi-layered encryption process. Although the framework outperformed standalone cryptographic methods in processing speeds, its reliance on three encryption algorithms—AES, DES, and RC6—inevitably increases resource utilization, which may impact performance in low-resource cloud environments.

The file splitting mechanism, while enhancing data security, introduces complexities in data management. For instance, the need to store and manage multiple encrypted fragments across servers increases storage demands and system maintenance requirements. In scenarios involving large-scale cloud environments with numerous tenants, this could pose challenges for scalability and operational efficiency.

Another limitation is the steganographic key management technique. Although effective in concealing encryption keys, it relies heavily on the availability of suitable cover media, such as images or audio files, to embed keys. This dependency may limit the applicability of the framework in environments where such media are not readily accessible.

Additionally, the framework's resilience to insider threats was not comprehensively addressed in the study. Future iterations could benefit from integrating access control mechanisms to mitigate risks posed by malicious insiders. Addressing these limitations will be critical for enhancing the framework's adaptability and scalability in diverse cloud scenarios.

### D. Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study provide a foundation for further exploration into hybrid encryption frameworks, with several areas identified for future research. First, optimizing the computational efficiency of the framework should be a priority. While the integration of AES, DES, and RC6 enhances security, the multi-layered encryption process increases resource consumption. Research could explore lightweight cryptographic algorithms or hardware acceleration techniques to reduce overhead while maintaining robust security.

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Second, scalability challenges related to the file splitting mechanism warrant deeper investigation. Future research could focus on developing dynamic storage allocation methods that minimize redundancy while ensuring data availability. This would be particularly beneficial for large-scale cloud environments with extensive tenant data.

Third, the steganographic key management approach, although effective, relies on the availability of specific cover media. Alternative techniques, such as quantum-safe key management or blockchain-based approaches, could be explored to enhance flexibility and adaptability in diverse cloud settings.

Additionally, addressing insider threats remains an important area for development. Future studies should consider integrating advanced access control mechanisms, such as behavior-based authentication or zero-trust architectures, to mitigate the risks posed by malicious insiders.

Lastly, real-world testing of the framework across various industries, such as healthcare and finance, could provide practical insights into its application and effectiveness. These advancements would enhance the framework's adaptability, efficiency, and security, ensuring its viability in addressing emerging cloud security challenges.

*E. Final Remarks*

The hybrid encryption framework proposed in this study represents a significant step forward in addressing the complex security challenges faced by multi-tenant cloud environments. By integrating AES, DES, and RC6 algorithms, along with innovative features like file splitting and steganographic key management, the framework provides a robust solution for safeguarding sensitive data. The results demonstrated its ability to enhance data confidentiality, integrity, and availability while maintaining operational efficiency.

While the framework addresses many of the limitations of traditional cryptographic systems, the findings highlight areas for continued improvement. Challenges such as computational overhead, scalability, and insider threats underscore the need for ongoing innovation to adapt to evolving security demands. For example, while file splitting enhances redundancy and resilience, its implementation could be further optimized to reduce storage and management complexities.

Moreover, the framework's adaptability across diverse industries, including healthcare, finance, and government, underscores its practical relevance. However, broader real-world applications and performance benchmarking across different cloud infrastructures would provide further validation of its effectiveness.

In conclusion, this framework lays a strong foundation for enhancing cloud data security. By addressing identified limitations and exploring emerging technologies, future iterations can build upon this work to establish even more secure and efficient solutions, ensuring the continued reliability of cloud computing in an increasingly digital world.

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