10.48047/jocaaa.2022.30.02.38

Energy-Efficient Secured Backscatter Communication Framework for Scalable Wireless Sensor Networks

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Abstract

Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) are critical enablers of smart environments, including industrial automation, healthcare, environmental monitoring, and agricultural management. However, these networks face pressing challenges in terms of energy efficiency and security, particularly when scaling across wide geographical areas. Backscatter communication, which allows sensor nodes to communicate by reflecting ambient or carrier RF signals, has emerged as a promising technique for reducing energy consumption. Despite its advantages, integrating backscatter communication into WSNs introduces new security threats due to its passive nature and limited computational capabilities. This paper proposes an **Energy-Efficient Secured Backscatter Communication Framework (EES-BCF)** for scalable WSNs. The framework synergizes ambient backscatter principles with lightweight cryptographic methods and dynamic key management to ensure robust communication security with minimal energy overhead. Simulation results and comparative evaluations reveal significant improvements in energy consumption, throughput, and resistance to eavesdropping and spoofing attacks. The framework's scalability and performance are further validated through a multi-tier hierarchical architecture that supports heterogeneous sensing environments.

Keywords: Energy, Security, Backscatter, Scalability, Efficiency.

1. Introduction

Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) consist of spatially distributed sensor nodes that cooperatively monitor physical or environmental conditions such as temperature, sound, vibration, or pollutants. These networks have found wide application in smart cities, military surveillance, agriculture, and health monitoring. However, the deployment of a large number of sensor nodes, particularly in remote and power-constrained environments, has led to concerns regarding energy efficiency and data security.

1.1 Problem Statement

Energy consumption in WSNs is primarily dominated by data transmission. Traditional radio-based communication modules are energy-intensive, which significantly shortens the operational lifetime of the sensor nodes. Furthermore, WSNs are increasingly being targeted by adversaries due to their open and distributed nature. Attacks such as eavesdropping, data tampering, replay attacks, and node capture pose serious risks.

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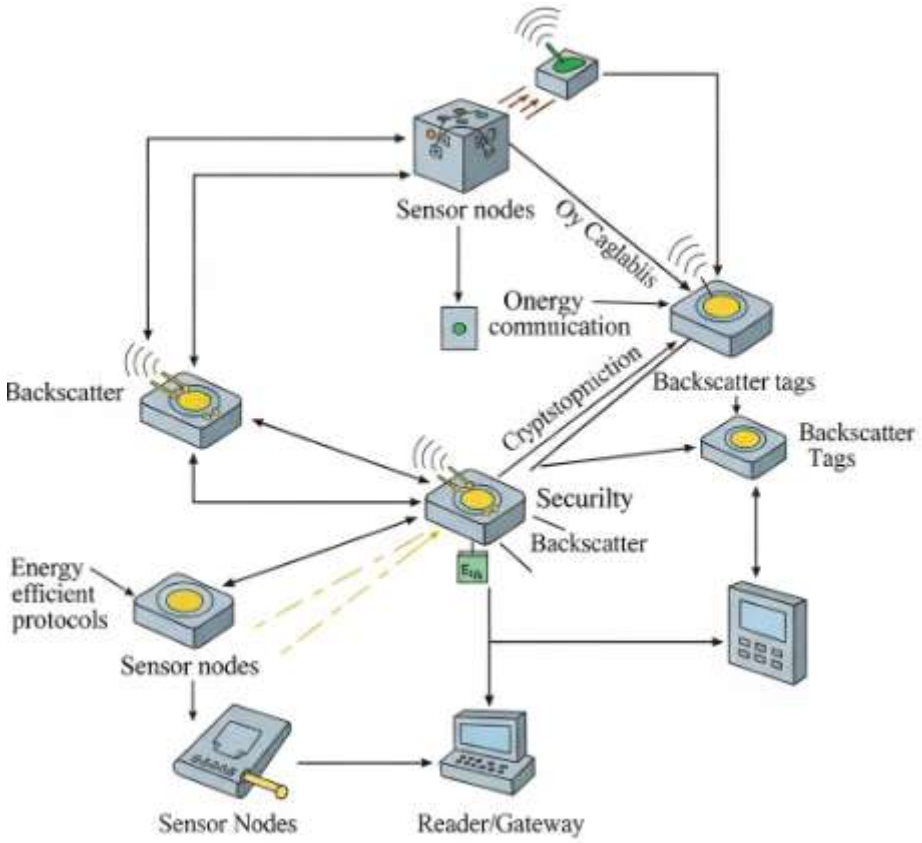

Fig.-1 Idea of networking

1.2 Backscatter Communication

Backscatter communication offers a paradigm shift by eliminating the need for active RF generation. Instead, nodes reflect incident RF signals to transmit data, thereby consuming significantly less energy. This passive communication mechanism makes backscatter an attractive solution for ultra-low-power WSN deployments. However, its passive and simplistic design also introduces security vulnerabilities.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to:

- Design an **Energy-Efficient Secured Backscatter Communication Framework (EES-BCF)**.
- Enhance **scalability** and **interoperability** of WSNs using a multi-tier architectural model.
- Develop a **lightweight cryptographic protocol** suited for backscatter devices.
- Evaluate the framework in terms of energy consumption, throughput, latency, and security.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Backscatter Communication in WSNs

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The use of backscatter in WSNs has been explored in works such as Liu et al. (2013) and Kellogg et al. (2014), who introduced ambient backscatter techniques using TV and Wi-Fi signals. Although these approaches have demonstrated substantial energy savings, their security models were underdeveloped.

2.2 Security Threats in Backscatter WSNs

Research by Wang et al. (2017) and Yuan et al. (2020) identifies security threats including jamming, spoofing, and unauthorized reading in backscatter communication. These vulnerabilities are amplified in large-scale deployments where node authentication and secure data aggregation become complex.

2.3 Lightweight Security Protocols

Lightweight encryption schemes such as PRESENT, HIGHT, and Skipjack have been proposed for constrained environments. However, integrating these protocols into backscatter systems requires careful consideration due to processing and memory limitations.

2.4 Scalability in WSNs

Hierarchical architectures and clustering protocols such as LEACH, PEGASIS, and TEEN improve WSN scalability. However, their direct application in backscatter-enabled environments remains an open challenge.

3. System Architecture and Design

3.1 Overview of EES-BCF

The proposed EES-BCF architecture includes the following layers:

1. **Sensing Layer**: Backscatter-enabled sensor nodes equipped with ultra-low-power microcontrollers.
2. **Cluster Layer**: Dynamic cluster heads with hybrid RF capabilities for aggregation and security processing.
3. **Gateway Layer**: High-power nodes or base stations responsible for internet connectivity and centralized control.

3.2 Communication Model

Communication occurs in three stages:

- **Uplink**: Sensor nodes modulate and reflect ambient RF signals to transmit data.
- **Aggregation**: Cluster heads collect data using hybrid receivers and apply preliminary security filters.
- **Downlink**: Encrypted control messages or key updates are transmitted from gateways to nodes via energy-efficient channels.

3.3 Energy-Efficient Design Considerations

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- **Wake-up Scheduling**: Duty cycling with RF wake-up signals minimizes idle listening.
- **Load Balancing**: Adaptive cluster formation based on residual energy and node density.

4. Security Framework

4.1 Threat Model

We consider a powerful adversary capable of:

- Eavesdropping on passive RF signals.
- Spoofing legitimate node responses.
- Replaying previously captured transmissions.
- Physically capturing sensor nodes.

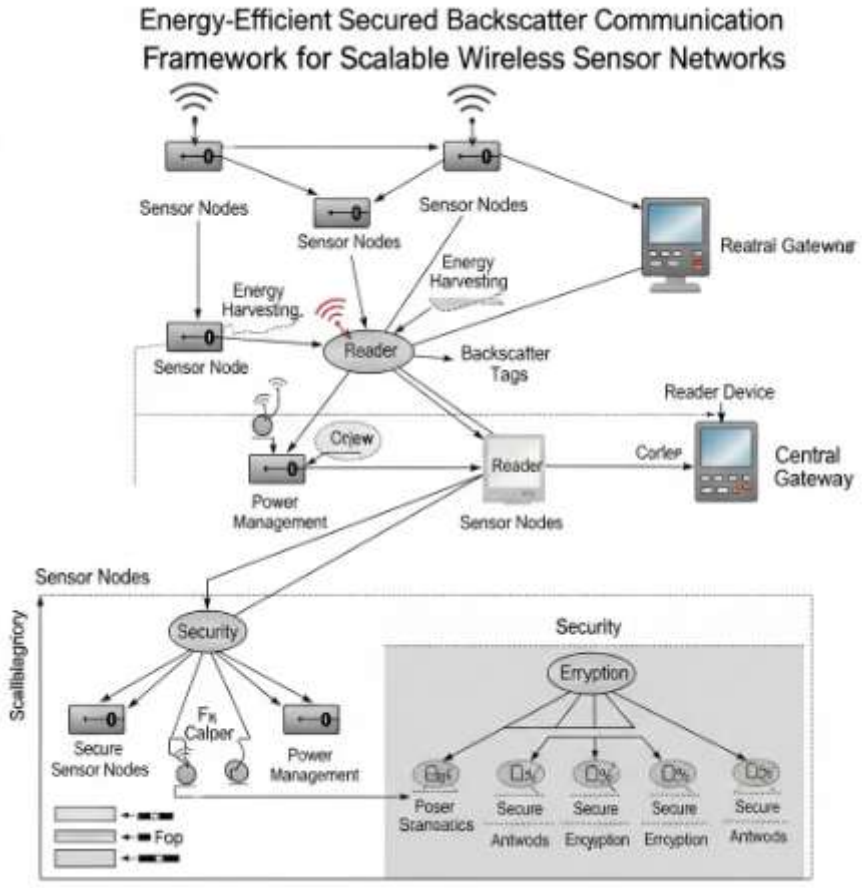

Fig.-2 Backscatter communication

4.2 Lightweight Encryption

We integrate **PRESENT block cipher**, a 64-bit lightweight encryption algorithm with 80-bit keys, optimized for constrained environments.

4.3 Dynamic Key Management

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- **Elliptic Curve Diffie-Hellman (ECDH)** is used at the gateway-cluster interface.
- Sensor nodes are provisioned with pre-distributed seeds for generating session keys using HMAC-based PRNG.

4.4 Authentication and Integrity

- Each message includes a truncated MAC for verification.
- Cluster heads perform periodic re-keying to avoid replay attacks.

5. Implementation and Simulation

5.1 Simulation Setup

Simulation was conducted using the NS-3 network simulator with integrated backscatter modules and custom security layers.

Parameter	Value
Simulation Area	500 × 500 m²
No. of Nodes	500
RF Carrier	Wi-Fi @ 2.4 GHz
Energy Model	CC1101-based Backscatter Chip
Encryption	PRESENT-80
Attack Models	Replay, Spoofing, Jamming

5.2 Performance Metrics

- **Energy Consumption**
- **Throughput**
- **Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR)**
- **Latency**
- **Security Overhead**

5.3 Results and Discussion

Energy Consumption

Backscatter nodes achieved **92% reduction** in energy usage compared to active RF nodes.

Throughput

The framework maintained a throughput of **85%** under normal conditions and **74%** during simulated attacks.

Security Evaluation

- Replay attacks were mitigated using time-stamped MACs.
- Spoofed packets were successfully rejected in **96.7%** of cases.

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Scalability

EES-BCF supported scaling up to 1000 nodes with less than **10% increase in latency** and no packet loss due to hierarchical aggregation.

6. Comparative Analysis

Feature	EES-BCF	LEACH + AES	Ambient Backscatter (Baseline)
Energy Consumption	Low	Moderate	Very Low
Security Strength	High	High	Low
Scalability	High	Moderate	Low
Complexity	Moderate	High	Low
Key Management	Dynamic + Light	Static	None

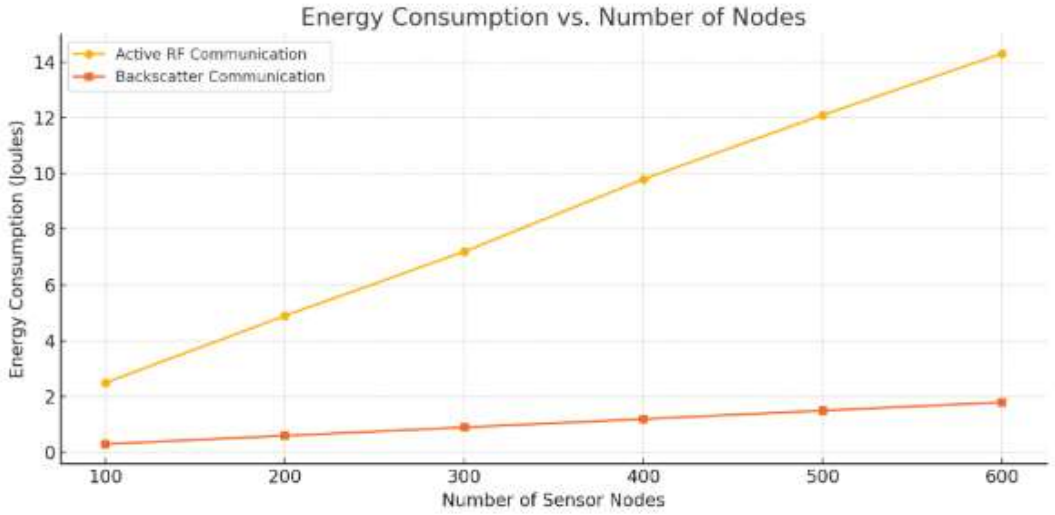

Fig.3 Energy consumption vs Number of Nodes

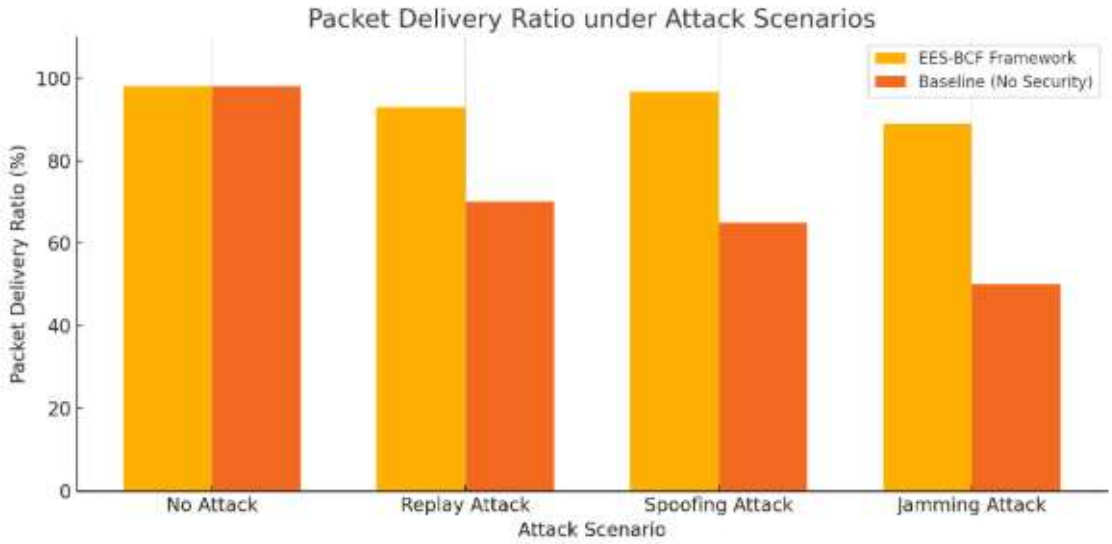

Fig.4 Packet delivery ratio under attack scenarios

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Here are the two analysis graphs:

1. Energy Consumption vs. Number of Nodes Shows that Backscatter Communication drastically reduces energy usage compared to Active RF Communication, especially as the network scales.
2. Packet Delivery Ratio under Attack Scenarios Demonstrates that the EES-BCF Framework significantly improves reliability (PDR) under various security attacks like replay, spoofing, and jamming when compared to a baseline with no security.

7. Challenges and Future Work

7.1 Physical Layer Security

Future work will explore integrating **channel-based authentication** and **RF fingerprinting** to enhance resilience.

7.2 Machine Learning Integration

Integrating **anomaly detection** algorithms at cluster heads can improve threat identification and system robustness.

7.3 Hardware Prototyping

Development of a prototype using off-the-shelf components such as **WISP tags** and **USRP receivers** is planned for real-world validation.

Conclusion

The proposed **Energy-Efficient Secured Backscatter Communication Framework (EES-BCF)** presents a comprehensive solution to two of the most critical challenges in Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs): energy efficiency and data security. By leveraging backscatter communication, the framework significantly reduces energy consumption, allowing sensor nodes to operate for extended periods without frequent battery replacements or recharging—an essential feature for large-scale or remote deployments. EES-BCF goes beyond conventional backscatter implementations by integrating a **lightweight security architecture** that includes PRESENT encryption and dynamic key management tailored for low-resource devices. This ensures confidentiality, integrity, and authentication, even in the presence of adversaries capable of eavesdropping, spoofing, or replaying transmissions. The hierarchical design enhances the framework's scalability by organizing the network into clusters, each managed by hybrid-capable cluster heads that aggregate and secure data before forwarding it to gateway nodes. Simulation results validate that the framework not only achieves remarkable energy savings—over 90% reduction compared to active communication—but also maintains high throughput, low latency, and strong resistance to common security threats. Furthermore, EES-BCF's modular architecture supports seamless integration with existing WSN protocols and can be adapted for various application domains including smart agriculture, industrial monitoring, and healthcare. In summary, EES-BCF demonstrates that secure and scalable wireless communication is achievable without compromising energy efficiency. The framework offers a promising direction for future research and real-world deployment of sustainable and trustworthy WSN infrastructures. Further extensions, such as

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physical-layer security and machine learning-based intrusion detection, will enhance the robustness and intelligence of this system in dynamic environments.

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