10.48047/jocaaa.2026.35.01.77

Sustainable Cloud Computing Through Hardware Lifecycle Optimization

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Received: 28.01.2026 Revised: 02.02.2026

Abstract

The fast growth of the cloud computing infrastructure has increased the concern of the environment in terms of energy consumption, carbon emissions, and electronic waste production in the global data centres' operations. A strategic model to reduce these intersecting issues is to use hardware lifecycle optimization to increase the useful life of the server equipment by intelligently placing workloads, predicting failures, and actively reusing the equipment through reuse programs. Instead of conforming to aggressive refresh cycles that focus on the performance gain at the expense of abandoning functionality-based infrastructure, lifecycle-sensitive strategies align the workload needs with the hardware capabilities of heterogeneous populations of equipment of different ages and performance attributes. Container orchestration systems and advanced resource management systems make it practical to implement workload-aware deployment to place less important applications on optimized legacy infrastructure, and leave current-generation equipment to use cases with high performance requirements. Sustainability deliverables that can be put into place with the use of full lifecycle management include lower carbon emissions that would be caused by manufacturing avoidance, lower volumes of electronic waste, and better resource conservation, which will result in significant changes to the environment. Economic incentives such as lower procurement costs, better utilization of assets, and increased resilience in the supply chain co-locate the financial incentives with the environmental ones and make hardware lifecycle optimization both an ecological necessity and a commercially viable operational approach taken by cloud providers dedicated to responsible management of infrastructure. This work focuses on architectural and operational mechanisms rather than empirical quantification, aiming to establish a systems-level framework for lifecycle-driven sustainability in cloud infrastructure.

Keywords: Hardware Lifecycle Optimization, Sustainable Cloud Computing, Electronic Waste Reduction, Workload-Aware Deployment, Data Centre Energy Efficiency.

1. Introduction

The unparalleled proliferation of cloud computing infrastructure has resulted in serious environmental issues that require a strategic intervention by the technology providers, policymakers, and enterprise stakeholders in the entire global digital ecosystem. The energy consumption of data centres and data transmission networks has become a significant source of electricity in the global market, and the size of its demand is increasing along with the further digitalization of the economy, the growth of the use of artificial intelligence solutions, and the development of cloud services across all industries [1]. The International Energy Agency (IEA) notes that even though energy efficiency in data centres has become significantly more efficient due to technological advancement and optimization of operations, the total electricity consumption of data centres has been on the increase, with the digital services demand surpassing the efficiency in data centres [1]. This continuing incremental trend highlights the

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insufficiency of efficiency gains in dealing with the environmental ramifications of cloud infrastructure proliferation.

Simultaneously with the growing energy requirements, the short hardware lifecycle cycles defining hyperscale cloud computing add to the electronic waste problem on the planet, which has emerged as one of the fastest-growing waste streams globally by the Global E-waste Monitor [2]. Premature retirement of functional server equipment leads to loss of the embedded resources,such as precious metals, important raw materials, and the energy that was consumed during the manufacturing processes [2]. Hardware lifecycle optimization models can be used to tackle these interrelated issues by extending the useful life of infrastructure by intelligently placing workloads, using systematic reuse programs, and implementing predictive maintenance plans. The article discusses the environmental forces that demand sustainable cloud practices, assesses lifecycle-conscious approaches towards hardware utility extension, and evaluates the multidimensional results that could be obtained through an extensive application of such solutions in the context of cloud computing.

2. Environmental Impact of Hyperscale Cloud Infrastructure

The ecological footprint of hyperscale cloud services involves a variety of facets. These extend far beyond the amount of pure power that often occupies the sustainability debate in the technological industry. Data centres are important nodes of world energy systems. They require electricity continuously to run computers and to ensure relevant thermal conditions. Additionally, they power ancillary systems such as lighting, security, and administrative systems. According to the comprehensive analysis by the International Energy Agency, data centres and data transmission networks already represent a significant portion of global electricity demand [3]. This demand will grow as digital transformation gains momentum in economies and societies worldwide. Patterns of electricity usage by data centres are characterized by specific properties. These include high capacity factors resulting from 24x7 operation. Concentrated loads may also overstretch local grid infrastructure in areas with major facility clusters.

The sources of electricity used in data centres have a major impact on carbon footprint. Facilities powered by renewable electricity achieve largely reduced carbon lifecycles compared to those relying on fossil fuel production. According to the International Energy Agency, renewable electricity deployment has been rising at a higher rate in recent years [3]. However, most data centre facilities remain connected to grids with high carbon content. This means electricity consumption is directly translated into greenhouse gas emissions. Such emissions contribute to climate change. Geographic differences in grid carbon intensity introduce environmental impact variations between facilities in different regions. This occurs even when facilities have identical equipment setups and operating procedures. These variations are especially significant for location choices and power acquisition strategies affecting sustainability outcomes.

The electronic waste trade around the world poses intricate environmental and social issues. This trade has arisen due to technology infrastructure activities. Many studies have investigated these transboundary waste streams. Research on e-waste trade networks has shown complex patterns in material transfer between nations [4]. Developing countries frequently receive large amounts of surplus equipment from the industrialized world. This occurs despite international accords aimed at controlling such flows. The dynamics of global e-waste trade reveal concerning patterns. Informal recycling activities in recipient nations often lack sufficient environmental regulations. Safety measures to prevent pollution and occupational health risks are inadequate [4]. These risks disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. Cloud infrastructure operators have an obligation to ensure their equipment scrap processing does not

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contribute to these deleterious trade flows. This requires attentively choosing recycling vendors. It also means verifying adequate handling throughout the entire disposition chain.

Cooling systems represent a major aspect of data centre environmental impact. They consume substantial electricity and necessitate water resources in many facility designs. This is particularly true for designs using evaporative cooling technologies. Dense computing hardware has demanding thermal characteristics. These require uninterrupted cooling processes. Cooling can account for significant portions of overall facility power consumption [3]. This remains true despite persistently increasing cooling efficiency. Novel strategies such as liquid cooling and free-air economization have been introduced. Data centre cooling has received growing attention due to water consumption concerns. This is especially relevant in water-stressed areas. Cloud facilities in these regions compete with agricultural, industrial, and municipal users for scarce water resources. The total water impact of global data centre operations constitutes a significant freshwater withdrawal. Sustainable operators must tackle this through efficiency enhancement and alternative cooling methods.

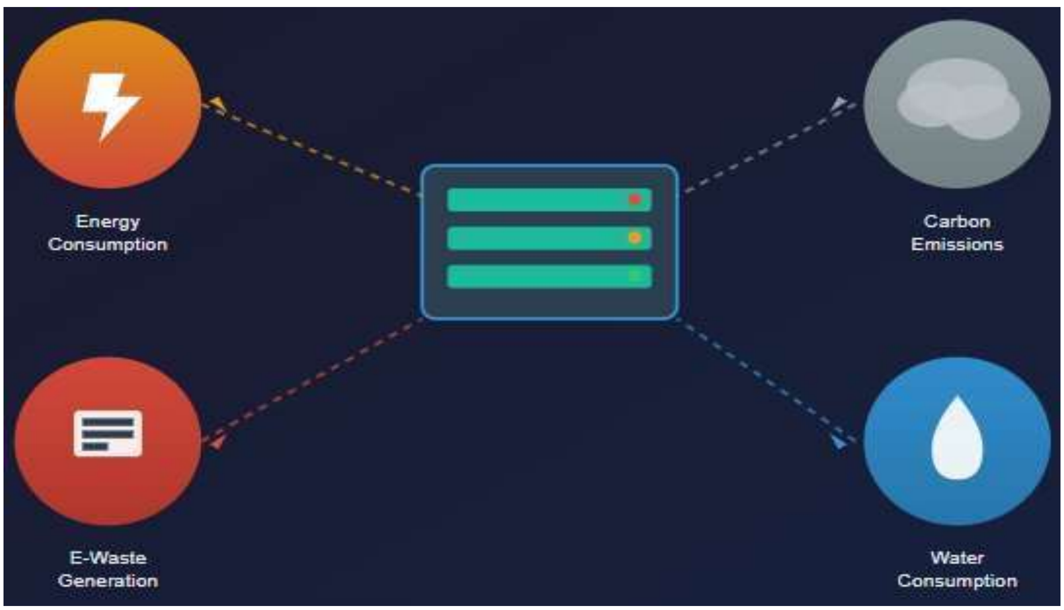

Fig 1: Environmental Impact of Hyperscale Cloud Infrastructure [3, 4]

The inherent environmental expenditures of server hardware are substantial. These include energy, water, chemicals, and materials used in manufacturing processes. These processes transform raw materials into advanced computing hardware. Semiconductor fabrication is particularly resource-consuming. It requires ultrapure inputs and produces different waste streams. This occurs despite being only one part of the entire server manufacturing system. The embodied environmental investment in every server unit represents a sunk cost. This cost is essentially forfeited by pre-empting equipment retirement. Hardware lifespan extension is becoming an even more critical sustainability measure [4]. The relative weight of embodied contribution to operational impacts increases with grid decarbonization. Traditional hardware refresh models focus on promoting hardware performance. They do not properly consider the environmental impacts of accelerated hardware replenishment. This lifecycle approach to hardware refresh directly challenges such traditional models.

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3. Extending Hardware Life Through Lifecycle-Aware Strategies

The concept of lifecycle-conscious hardware utilization represents a radical shift from traditional approaches. Old cloud infrastructure management frameworks focused on fleet homogeneity and aggressive hardware refurbishment schedules. These were chiefly influenced by performance factors. Studies on data centre energy efficiency indicate that historical growth trends, albeit significant, have been moderated by optimization strategies [6]. The International Energy Agency's critical review of data centre energy models highlights that efficiency gains have somewhat countered mounting workload volumes. The result of this efficiency curve is a platform for expanding hardware useful life. Operational upgrades can improve effectiveness without necessitating equipment replacement. This consequently decreases procurement amounts needed to meet increasing service demands. Importantly, it preserves the resources embodied in operational infrastructure.

In evaluating data centre electricity consumption patterns, various factors impact energy use [6]. These include improvement of equipment efficiency, innovations in facility design, and workload management practices. Together, these factors determine how well infrastructure converts electricity consumption to useful computing output. The IEA review emphasizes that understanding consumption models enables better decision-making. By recognizing such dynamics, cloud service providers can identify optimal intervention timing. They can make targeted investments to increase hardware usefulness. This involves enhancing current system performance as opposed to wholesale replacement. Optimization of operations, firmware updates, and configuration improvements can enhance deployed equipment performance. These measures can ensure competitive capability over longer durations than planned refresh cycles. This is achieved without the environmental impact associated with manufacturing new hardware.

Research on data centre energy optimization has established foundational strategies for improving efficiency in shared infrastructure settings. Ahmed's study on optimization strategies for data centre energy efficiency identifies multiple approaches for reducing power consumption [5]. These include virtualization techniques, workload consolidation, and intelligent resource allocation. Cloud service providers can implement these strategies to make informed decisions about energy costs of workload placement choices. This visibility into power consumption supports optimization strategies. These strategies consider energy efficiency metrics such as Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE), Carbon Usage Effectiveness (CUE), and watts-per-compute-unit ratios, as well as traditional performance metrics such as throughput, latency, transactions per second, and resource utilization rates. Such approaches may extend hardware life further. Existing equipment can be optimized to run efficiently rather than being replaced. Inefficiencies that could be addressed through better management no longer necessitate equipment replacement.

Optimization strategies developed for modern data centres provide complex approaches for matching workloads to appropriate hardware. These strategies consider energy efficiency features alongside performance demands. Research demonstrates that power usage can be optimized through various techniques including dynamic voltage scaling, server consolidation, and thermal management [5]. This enables cloud service providers to reduce energy demand across various workload-to-hardware assignments. They can choose configurations that minimize power usage without violating performance constraints. These features allow lifecycle extension. Cloud service providers can extract maximum value from available hardware through better utilization. Performance improvements need not rely solely on equipment upgrades.

Maintenance and replacement techniques can be applied at the component level. This enables systems to achieve longer lifespans by accounting for individual component degradation. Server systems comprise

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various components. These include processors, memory modules, storage devices, and power supplies. Each component exhibits different failure modes and deterioration characteristics over time. Failed or worn components can be selectively replaced [6]. This maintains functionality of remaining hardware that still satisfies operational needs. Overall system lifespan increases while material usage remains minimal. This maintenance method contrasts with wholesale system replacement. Traditional replacement methods dispose of large amounts of functional hardware alongside truly outdated or failed components.

Firmware and software optimizations are perhaps the most appealing lifecycle extension techniques. They expand hardware capabilities without requiring physical modifications. No additional materials are consumed. These optimizations align with broader data centre efficiency strategies identified in current research [5]. Updates can increase security posture and improve power consumption characteristics. Instruction execution efficiency also improves. Similarly, operating system improvements, hypervisor updates, and workload runtime optimizations benefit cloud service providers. Administrators can retrieve better performance from current equipment through software changes alone. These improvement mechanisms can meaningfully extend hardware life through continuous development. Deployed hardware evolves beyond its initial deployment state through ongoing enhancements.

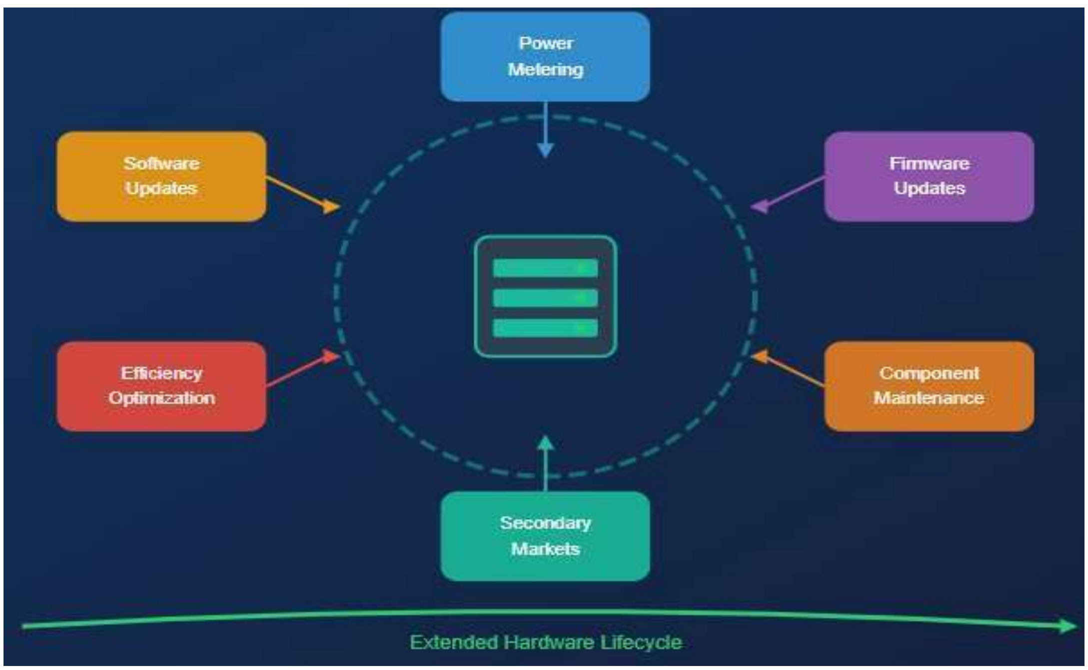

Fig 2: Extending Hardware Life Through Lifecycle-Aware Strategies [5, 6]

Secondary markets for server equipment offer economic means of broadening equipment usefulness. They provide ways to match equipment with subsequent uses beyond initial deployment settings. Organizations with stringent performance demands may find their equipment no longer meets their needs. However, this equipment can retain significant value for users with different requirement profiles. Certification and warranty provisions for refurbished equipment help address buyer reliability concerns [6]. They also motivate equipment maintenance that preserves resale value. Such market mechanisms keep functional hardware in productive use. Equipment avoids entering waste streams prematurely. Financial gains from remarketing equipment partially offset original procurement costs.

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4. Workload-Aware Deployment and Resource Matching

Workload-sensitive workload deployment strategies put into practice lifecycle optimization concepts and principles by systematically aligning the needs of the applications with the capabilities of the infrastructure of heterogeneous populations of hardware, consisting of different ages and performance properties. The studies conducted by Google in managing large-scale clusters have shown that complex resource management systems can enhance efficiency by a large margin, by placing workloads across the available infrastructure, in comparison to the use of simple allocation methods [7]. The cluster management problems explored in this study can also be applied to the lifecycle optimization scenarios in which heterogeneous hardware generations can have different capability profiles that need to be aligned to the different workload demands in order to realize the best total fleet value.

The resource management systems that have been produced in large-scale computing environments can be used to offer an architectural pattern that can be used in the operation of lifecycle-conscious infrastructure. Studies that consider cluster management at scale indicate that the workload placement choice has a strong effect on resource utilization efficiency, whereby the ineffective workload placement choice leads to stranded capacity despite aggregate demand exceeding the available resources [7]. Such results encourage the investment in advanced scheduling to one that is able to take into account several placement aspects such as hardware generation, component age, energy efficiency nature, and workload performance needs. Optimal placement when there is heterogeneity in the hardware is far more complex, and a combination of an algorithmic method is needed that is capable of searching large solution spaces to determine placements that meet the multidimensional constraints.

Container orchestration platforms have become the key to the realization of workload-aware deployment strategies in modern cloud environments. As part of the information regarding sustainable software engineering in Azure Kubernetes Service, it is stated that the distribution of containerized workloads can be effectively spread across the infrastructure available and meet the needs of resource limitations and optimization goals [8]. Container orchestration offers the abstraction of application deployment to core hardware dependencies, which means that complex place policy can be used to locate workloads to the relevant infrastructure, based on current conditions and needs. The flexibility enables lifecycle optimization as it enables older hardware to support the relevant workload without the need to modify applications and/or change deployment.

The principles of sustainable software engineering that are formulated in the context of cloud-native applications introduce models that are to be used when assessing the environmental impact in addition to the traditional performance and cost measures during application development and deployment cycles. According to the documentation by Microsoft, application design that is conscious of sustainability views resource efficiency, proper scaling, and the use of infrastructure as its major concerns and not as supplementary ones [8]. Applications designed in these principles possess properties that are friendly to lifecycle-optimized deployments, such as resource-efficient usage, graceful performance under limited conditions, and infrastructure heterogeneity tolerance. These design styles allow applications that can be run on older hardware when they are suitable without compromising the quality of service.

Performance sensitivity characterization is the ability to make fine workloads to hardware correspondence that extends beyond capability correspondence to application tolerance of performance variations. Different applications have different sensitivities to infrastructure-related attributes such as processing speed, memory latency, storage throughput, and network bandwidth. High-performance sensitive applications need high-quality infrastructure to sustain an acceptable level of service, whereas the less sensitive ones can be put into old hardware that provides satisfactory but not optimal performance [7].

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Illustrated systematization of workload performance sensitivity establishes the information base of smart placement of workloads that allocate high-performance hardware to the truly demanding use cases and place the tolerant workloads on the right legacy infrastructure.

Quality of service frameworks formulate a mechanism of varying workload treatment according to the proclaimed requirements and the service level promises made. Workloads that run under lax quality of service commitments can afford to run on older hardware with smoothly degraded performance properties, whereas those that have strict guarantees have preferred access to high-quality infrastructure [8]. These models allow cloud providers to provide specific levels of service using specific hardware generations and develop pricing mechanisms that persuade customers to optimally describe what they need instead of falling back on the high-end. The distribution of demand among hardware generations guarantees the fact that the older equipment can still be used in productive applications, and it will become an income-generating investment that will not be deemed unprofitable to keep going.

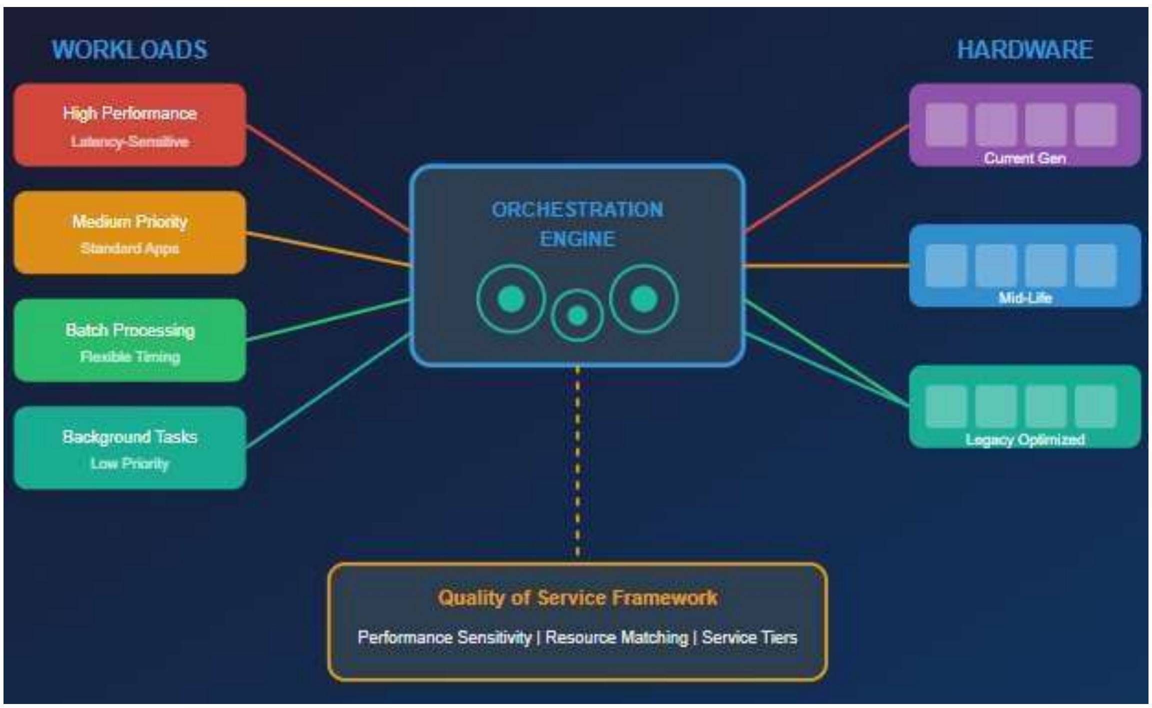

Fig 3: Workload-Aware Deployment and Resource Matching [7, 8]

The economic impact of workload-sensitive deployment is not solely about direct hardware savings and can also include the energy-saving benefits that can be achieved by means of optimal positioning. Studies have shown that the nature of workloads greatly determines the pattern of energy consumption, with a particular workload consuming more or less energy on a given hardware setup compared to others [7]. Placement algorithms that exploit energy efficiency and performance requirements can minimize the total infrastructure energy usage through allocating workloads to hardware on which they can run optimally. These energy savings augment the environmental advantages of lifecycle extension by decreasing the operational impact, as well as the reduction in the impact of embodied impact through the service life of hardware.

5. Sustainability, Economic, and Societal Outcomes

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The performance indicators achievable through comprehensive hardware lifecycle optimization are substantial. These include carbon emission reductions, decreased electronic waste, and resource optimization. Together, these factors create significant environmental impact when implemented at the grand scale of global cloud infrastructure. Environmental reporting demonstrates organizational commitment to mitigating the environmental footprint of cloud operations [9]. This is achieved through multiple approaches such as purchasing renewable energy, improving operational efficiency, and addressing hardware lifecycle management. Environmental transparency through complete sustainability reporting enables stakeholders to assess provider performance. It also establishes accountability systems ensuring continuous improvement in environmental outcomes.

Carbon reduction policies recorded in major provider environmental reports address two emission categories. These include operational emissions related to electricity use and embodied emissions embedded within infrastructure hardware and facilities. Google's environmental programs exemplify this comprehensive approach [9]. The company ensures that electricity consumption is matched with equivalent carbon-free energy sources. This effectively neutralizes the climate impact of operational energy consumption. Extended hardware lifespans provide additional embodied carbon coverage. Responsible material sourcing and proper end-of-life management compensate for high carbon emissions in manufacturing. These emissions would otherwise be wasted through premature equipment disposal. Such comprehensive models considering both operational and embodied effects demonstrate advanced understanding of digital infrastructure's complete carbon footprint.

Circular economy principles offer conceptual frameworks for redesigning cloud infrastructure. These frameworks envision circulating material flows rather than linear sequences from production to disposal. The focus on maintaining materials in productive states for extended periods aligns directly with lifecycle optimization goals [9]. Maximum value should be extracted from hardware before end-of-life processing. Implementing circular approaches requires specific organizational capabilities. These include equipment refurbishment programs and component recovery systems. Partnerships with certified recyclers capable of extracting full material value from retired equipment are essential. These functions transform end-of-life processing from waste generation to value recovery. Embedded resources are reabsorbed into productive processes.

Electronic waste management by cloud service providers has substantial environmental and social consequences. This results from the concentrated volumes of equipment flowing through retirement processes. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) highlights that effective electronics recycling prevents dangerous substances from entering the environment [10]. These substances include lead, mercury, and flame retardants. Proper recycling also enables reuse of valuable materials in new products. Cloud service providers handling high volumes of server equipment can develop exemplary recycling programs. These programs maximize material recovery while ensuring proper treatment of hazardous elements. Such initiatives establish industry standards that influence broader e-waste management practices.

Donation programs provide additional avenues for extending hardware utility beyond commercial deployment. Working equipment can be transferred to educational institutions, nonprofits, and other recipients. These organizations may derive continued value from systems no longer meeting commercial requirements. According to the EPA, donating used electronics to schools and other institutions extends product lifecycle [10]. It also provides technology access to underserved communities. Cloud service providers can design equipment retirement programs that identify donation opportunities before directing

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equipment to recycling. This approach maximizes overall utility from hardware investments. It also supports technology access goals aligned with broader corporate social responsibility commitments.

Lifecycle optimization delivers significant economic benefits. These include direct cost savings from decreased procurement needs, improved asset utilization, and extended depreciation periods. Financial returns on infrastructure investments improve substantially. Large capital investments in hyperscale infrastructure create significant pressure to maximize long-term asset productivity [9]. This contrasts with short-term approaches emphasizing high replacement frequency and accelerated capital consumption. Lifecycle optimization investments that extend average equipment service life generate measurable returns. These returns manifest as avoided procurement costs and enhanced capital efficiency. Benefits compound across large equipment populations. These financial advantages provide strong business justifications for sustainability investments. Such justifications exist independent of environmental motivations.

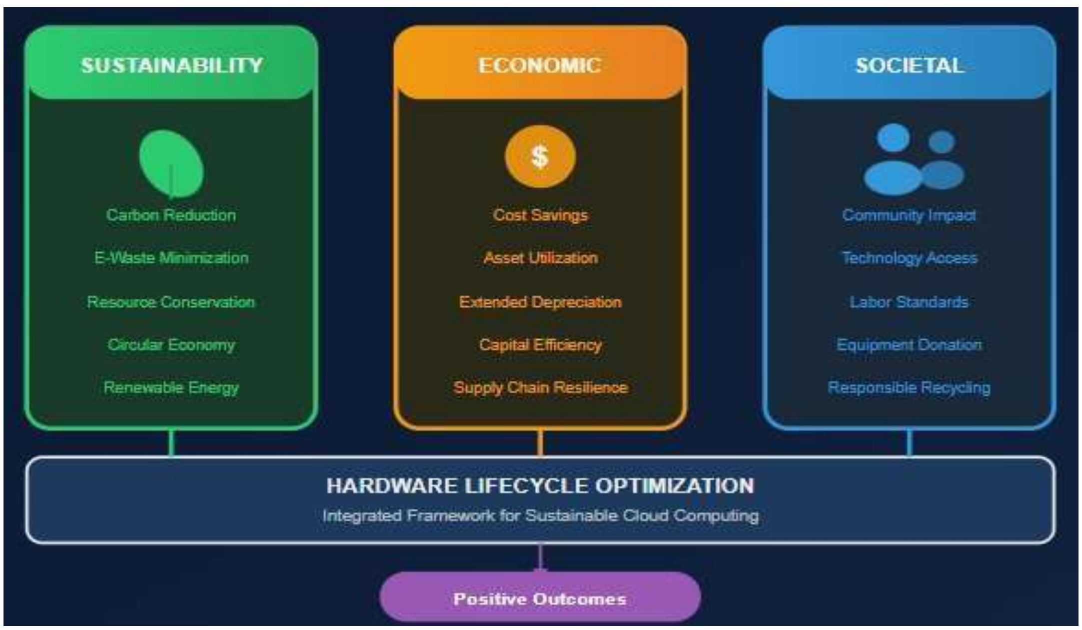

Fig 4: Sustainability, Economic, and Societal Outcomes [9, 10]

Social consequences of sustainable cloud infrastructure management extend beyond environmental benefits. These include supply chain responsibility, labor policies, and community impacts throughout cloud operations' geographic footprint. Purchasing power concentration within large cloud service providers creates both opportunities and obligations [10]. These enable influence over upstream manufacturing processes through procurement specifications and supplier negotiations. Equipment disposition practices similarly affect downstream recycling operations and processing communities. Holistic lifecycle responsibility requires attention to these extended impacts alongside direct operational considerations. Cloud service providers serve as custodians of global technology value chains. Their influence extends well beyond immediate business territories.

6. Future Directions and Industry Integration

The sustainable cloud computing in the future will be more focused on the lifecycle optimization with the core infrastructure planning, procurement, and product design processes, instead of looking at

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sustainability as a specific project that may be dealt with as a different program. Existing best practices have shown that being responsible to the environment and being commercially viable can support each other instead of contradicting them, and that such precedents would probably affect the practice industry-wide, as values of responsibility grow more intense among customers, investors, and regulators. Implementing the lifecycle considerations in the strategic implementation of cloud operations would entail organizational modifications that cover procurement specification, operational processes, retirement processes, and measurement systems, collectively instill sustainability into the regular decision-making processes.

New regulatory demands in various jurisdictions are an indicator that governments are paying attention to data centre environmental performance, which will probably force practices that are already voluntary in the industry to become best practices. Compliance requirements based on regulatory frameworks on data centre energy efficiency, carbon disclosure, and electronic waste management are directly supported by the lifecycle optimization capabilities. Companies that actively establish good sustainability capacities put themselves at a better position to abide with the changing demands and to evade possible discontinuities caused by regulatory shifts that trap the unprepared operators, who are forced to make changes to the normative practices.

The technologies of artificial intelligence and machine learning can promise significant benefits of optimizing the lifecycle by improving the characterization of workloads, predictive maintenance, and the optimal allocation of resources. The research groundwork that has been developed so far on the management of clusters at scale is a place of departure in creating more advanced optimization systems that are able to take lifecycle considerations and the more conventional scheduling criteria. Automated systems that could make optimization choices in real time can react to the changing environment more quickly than process-driven approaches and may reach the same efficiency level that cannot be attained in manually-managed systems, and also keep up with the changing workload due to the capacity to adapt to changing workload patterns and infrastructure states.

When the industry works together on the sustainability standards and standards of best practice, the lifecycle optimization approaches are more readily adopted, as the individual organizations have to put in fewer efforts to develop their effective programs. Core initiatives with regard to equipment certification standards, component interoperability requirements, and end-of-life processing specifications provide a common infrastructure that reduces barriers to entry and provides quality standards that could help assure the market of refurbished equipment and recycled materials. These forms of collaboration are especially useful in dealing with issues that cut across organizational borders, such as the development of secondary markets and investment in recycling infrastructure, involving the coordination of many stakeholders across technology value chains.

The sustainability metrics of hardware lifecycle management can be measured and reported to make accountability and continuous improvement possible, and give transparency to stakeholders regarding organizational performance in terms of the environment. Standardized measurement procedures and reporting models can be used to achieve meaningful benchmarking and minimize compliance burden due to harmonized requirements that allow meaningful comparison across organizations and across time. The changing environment of the sustainability reporting demands poses incentives to the creation of effective measurement solutions capable of meeting various stakeholder informational demands, as well as assisting with the management and optimization processes on the internal level.

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Conclusion

Prior studies estimate that embodied emissions account for a substantial fraction of a server's lifetime carbon footprint. Optimization of the lifecycle of hardware is a revolutionary business model of cloud computing that meets the eco-friendliness of cloud computing infrastructure and portrays an attractive financial rationale of cloud computing providers and business operators. The environmental case is based on conserving the embedded resources in the manufacturing of servers, minimizing the production of electronic waste, and minimizing the constant consumption of resources that is experienced in the traditional hardware replacement cycles. With the help of workload-sensitive deployment strategies, proactive maintenance programs, and organized equipment reuse programs, cloud operators can make meaningful extensions to the lifecycle of hardware, and this without reducing customer service quality in a wide range of applications. The economic case fits well into sustainability goals due to less capital expenditure on the acquisition of new equipment, better use of the current assets in the population of heterogeneous infrastructure, and greater capacity to endure disruption in the supply chain. In the future, the regulatory trend, investor demand, and customer needs will positively reward companies that show environmental leadership in terms of demonstrated hardware life cycle and reduced waste. Cloud platforms as accountable custodians of global infrastructure can play a competitive differentiation role and make a valuable contribution to climate change and resource constraint issues that impact all areas of the digital economy.

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