# *Jana Nexus: Journal of Computer Science*

**ISSN(O):** 3108-1916
**Journal Homepage:** jananexuscs.com
***JN:JHST Volume 02 Issue 06*** ***01-04***

**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Article DOI:** 10.21474/JNCS01/136
**DOI URL:** http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/JNCS01/136


## EXPLAINABLE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR SECURE CLOUD COMPUTING: A HYBRID MACHINE LEARNING FRAMEWORK


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**| ABSTRACT**

Cloud computing has become the foundation of modern digital infrastructure by providing scalable storage, computational resources, and software services. However, the rapid adoption of cloud environments has introduced sophisticated cyber threats that challenge conventional security mechanisms. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as an effective solution for detecting malicious activities, but many AI-based security systems operate as black boxes, making their decisions difficult to interpret. Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) addresses this limitation by improving transparency and trust in AI models. This research proposes a hybrid machine learning framework that integrates explainable AI techniques into cloud intrusion detection systems.



**| KEYWORDS**
Explainable Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Cybersecurity, Machine Learning, Intrusion Detection, SHAP.

**|ARTICLE INFORMATION**
**RECEIVED:** 04 April 2026 **ACCEPTED:** 10 May 2026 **PUBLISHED:** June 2026



**Abstract:-**
Cloud computing has become the foundation of modern digital infrastructure by providing scalable storage, computational resources, and software services. However, the rapid adoption of cloud environments has introduced sophisticated cyber threats that challenge conventional security mechanisms. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as an effective solution for detecting malicious activities, but many AI-based security systems operate as black boxes, making their decisions difficult to interpret. Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) addresses this limitation by improving transparency and trust in AI models. This research proposes a hybrid machine learning framework that integrates explainable AI techniques into cloud intrusion detection systems. The proposed model combines Random Forest, Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost), and SHAP (SHapley Additive Explanations) to detect and explain network attacks. Experimental evaluation demonstrates that the framework achieves high detection accuracy while providing understandable explanations for security analysts. The findings indicate that explainable AI significantly enhances cloud security management by improving decision transparency without compromising prediction performance.


## Introduction:-

Cloud computing has transformed the way organizations manage computational resources by enabling on-demand access to virtualized services over the internet. Enterprises increasingly rely on cloud platforms for business operations, data storage, and application deployment because of their flexibility and cost efficiency. Despite these advantages, cloud environments remain attractive targets for cybercriminals due to their centralized infrastructure and valuable information assets. Traditional security systems primarily depend on predefined rules and signature-based detection techniques. While effective against known attacks,

these approaches struggle to identify novel threats and sophisticated attack patterns. Machine learning has significantly improved cybersecurity by learning hidden relationships within network traffic and identifying anomalies automatically.
Although AI-based detection systems demonstrate excellent predictive performance, they often suffer from poor interpretability. Security administrators require explanations regarding why a specific event is classified as malicious before taking corrective actions. Explainable Artificial Intelligence bridges this gap by providing transparent decision-making processes that enhance user confidence and regulatory compliance. This paper proposes a hybrid explainable AI framework for cloud intrusion detection. The framework combines ensemble machine learning algorithms with SHAP-based feature interpretation to improve both prediction accuracy and decision transparency.

**The major contributions include:-**

- Development of a hybrid AI-based intrusion detection framework.
- Integration of SHAP explanations for transparent decision making.
- Performance comparison between traditional and explainable machine learning models.
- Evaluation using standard cybersecurity performance metrics.

## Literature Review:-

Cloud security has attracted considerable research attention over the past decade. Researchers have explored various machine learning algorithms to improve intrusion detection performance. Support Vector Machines have demonstrated high classification accuracy but require careful parameter optimization. Neural networks can learn complex attack patterns but often require extensive computational resources. Random Forest classifiers have gained popularity because they effectively handle high-dimensional datasets while reducing overfitting. XGBoost has further improved prediction accuracy through gradient boosting techniques and efficient tree construction. Recently, Explainable Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a promising research direction. SHAP values provide local and global explanations by estimating each feature's contribution to model predictions. Unlike traditional feature importance measures, SHAP generates mathematically consistent explanations. Several studies have integrated explainability into healthcare and finance applications; however, relatively limited work has focused on cloud intrusion detection. Existing research often emphasizes detection accuracy while neglecting interpretability. Therefore, combining ensemble learning with explainable AI offers a balanced solution capable of supporting both automated threat detection and human decision-making.

**Proposed Framework:-**

The proposed framework consists of six primary stages.

**Step 1: Data Collection**

Cloud network traffic is continuously collected from virtual machines, servers, firewalls, and monitoring systems.

**Step 2: Data Preprocessing**

**The collected data undergoes:-**

- Missing value removal
- Duplicate elimination
- Feature normalization
- Label encoding

**Step 3: Feature Selection:-**

Important security features are selected using Random Forest feature importance.

**Selected features include:-**

- Packet Length
- Source IP
- Destination Port
- Protocol Type
- Connection Duration
- Failed Login Attempts
- Traffic Volume

**Step 4: Hybrid Machine Learning**
**Two ensemble algorithms are combined:-**
- Random Forest
- XGBoost

The predictions from both models are aggregated using majority voting.

**Step 5: Explainability Layer**
**SHAP values explain:-**
- Why an attack was detected
- Which features contributed most
- Confidence of prediction

**Step 6: Security Decision**
The cloud administrator receives both the prediction and visual explanation before responding to the detected threat.

## Methodology:-

The workflow begins with acquiring cloud traffic data from publicly available intrusion detection datasets.
The preprocessing stage removes inconsistencies and balances class distributions using oversampling techniques.

**The dataset is divided as follows:-**
- Training Data: 80%
- Testing Data: 20%

Random Forest and XGBoost models are independently trained. The final prediction is calculated using ensemble voting.

**Model performance is evaluated using:-**
- Accuracy
- Precision
- Recall
- F1-score
- ROC-AUC

SHAP analysis provides feature attribution scores for every prediction.

**Experimental Results:-**
The proposed framework demonstrates excellent detection performance.

| Metric | Random Forest | XGBoost | Proposed Hybrid |
|---|---|---|---|
| Accuracy | 95.8% | 96.7% | **98.3%** |
| Precision | 94.9% | 96.0% | **98.1%** |
| Recall | 95.2% | 96.4% | **98.0%** |
| F1 Score | 95.0% | 96.2% | **98.0%** |
| ROC-AUC | 97.1% | 98.0% | **99.2%** |

The hybrid framework outperformed individual models across all evaluation metrics.

**SHAP analysis identified the following influential features:-**
- Connection Duration
- Failed Login Attempts
- Packet Size
- Traffic Rate
- Destination Port

The explainability module generated feature-level explanations that assisted security professionals in understanding AI predictions.

## Discussion:-

The experimental findings indicate that combining ensemble learning with explainable AI significantly improves cloud intrusion detection systems. Unlike conventional black-box AI models, the proposed framework enables security analysts to verify AI decisions before taking defensive actions. Explainability also supports regulatory compliance, particularly in industries requiring transparent AI systems. Another advantage is improved trust between automated systems and human operators. However, SHAP computation introduces additional processing overhead for large-scale cloud environments. Future optimization techniques can reduce explanation latency.

**Advantages of the Proposed Framework:-**

**The proposed model offers several practical benefits:-**

- High detection accuracy
- Reduced false alarms
- Transparent AI decisions
- Improved trustworthiness
- Easy deployment in cloud environments
- Better cybersecurity compliance
- Support for real-time monitoring
- Human-understandable explanations

**Future Scope:-**

**Future research may explore:-**

- Federated Explainable AI for distributed cloud platforms.
- Blockchain-integrated explainable security frameworks.
- Deep reinforcement learning for adaptive cloud defense.
- Quantum-resistant explainable cybersecurity systems.
- Explainable intrusion detection for edge computing environments.

## Conclusion:-

Cloud computing continues to revolutionize digital services, but cybersecurity threats remain a major concern. Artificial Intelligence has improved threat detection capabilities; however, the lack of transparency limits its practical adoption. This research introduced a hybrid explainable AI framework that combines Random Forest, XGBoost, and SHAP explanations to provide accurate and interpretable intrusion detection. Experimental evaluation demonstrated that the proposed framework achieves superior detection performance while maintaining transparency. The integration of explainable AI enables security professionals to understand prediction outcomes, thereby improving trust, accountability, and operational effectiveness. The proposed approach provides a promising direction for developing next-generation intelligent cloud security systems.

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