iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 14 **Issue:** V **Month of publication:** May 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2026.82899

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 14 Issue V May 2026- Available at www.ijraset.com

Low-Internet Optimized Web Applications for Rural India

Mr. Saurabh Chandravanshi, Dr. Mohammed Bakhtawar Ahmed
Student, Head of Department, KK Modi University, Durg

Abstract: ***The internet has reached millions of villages in India thanks to affordable smartphones and cheap data plans. However, the network quality in rural areas is still a big challenge. Users often face slow 2G or 3G speeds, frequent network drops, and use low-end Android smartphones with very little RAM and storage. Modern websites are too heavy and take too much time to load, which causes users to leave the site. Native apps take up too much storage space, leading to high uninstall rates. This research paper explores how we can solve these problems by using Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) and performance optimization techniques like caching, lazy loading, and Service Workers. We reviewed existing literature, mainly focusing on 5 key research papers, and identified a research gap regarding extreme low-bandwidth optimization. We propose an offline-first lightweight web architecture designed specifically for rural India. Our experimental results, tested using Google Lighthouse and slow 3G network simulation, show that optimized PWAs can reduce data usage by up to 90% and load 3 to 4 times faster than traditional websites. We also compared PWAs with Native Apps and found that PWAs save massive amounts of device storage, making them the best solution for rural Indian internet users.***

Keywords— Progressive Web Apps, PWA, Rural India, Web Performance, Service Workers, Offline-first, Low Bandwidth, Lighthouse, Lazy Loading.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is currently going through a massive digital transformation. According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), rural internet subscribers have crossed 350 million. Government schemes like Digital India have helped rural people get online for banking, farming information, education, and shopping [19]. But there is a hidden reality behind these numbers. Even though data is cheap, the actual network quality in rural and remote areas is very poor.

When a user in a village tries to open a modern website, it takes a lot of time. Modern websites use high-quality images, heavy JavaScript frameworks (like React or Angular), and complex CSS. An average web page today is around 3MB to 5MB in size [24]. On a slow network, this takes more than 20 seconds to load. Studies show that if a website takes more than 3 seconds to load, 53% of users will leave the site [14]. Also, users in villages mostly use low-end budget Android phones with 1GB or 2GB of RAM and only 16GB or 32GB of storage. They cannot download big Native Apps from the Google Play Store because their phone storage gets full quickly, causing the phone to hang [22].

Because of this, we need "Low-Internet Optimized Web Applications". We need web applications that open very fast, take very little data (in kilobytes), and can even work offline when the network drops. Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) are an emerging technology that can do exactly this. A PWA looks and feels like a normal website, but it acts like a real mobile app. It can be added to the home screen without downloading from the App Store, and it works offline using a background script called a "Service Worker" [4].

In this paper, we will see why modern websites fail in rural internet conditions, how optimization techniques reduce loading time, and why PWAs are the perfect solution for Rural India.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main problems faced by rural internet users in India are:

1) Low Bandwidth: Internet speeds often drop to 50 kbps to 100 kbps (2G/Edge speeds) depending on the location and electricity cuts at cell towers [21].
2) Network Fluctuations: The internet connection connects and disconnects again and again while travelling or sitting inside village houses.
3) Device Constraints: Users have low-end smartphones with slow processors and very little storage.

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4) High App Uninstall Rate: Users install heavy native apps (like 50MB e-commerce apps), but when the phone becomes slow or storage gets full, they uninstall them [26].
5) Heavy Web Pages: Traditional websites use too much data. A poor farmer does not want to waste 5MB of his limited daily data just to open one single news or market price page.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research work are:

1) To understand why normal websites and native apps are not suitable for rural Indian users.
2) To study how Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) and optimization techniques (like lazy loading and caching) reduce loading time and data usage.
3) To compare the performance, size, and speed of Traditional Web Apps, Responsive Websites, Native Apps, and PWAs.
4) To propose an offline-first web architecture model specially designed for low-internet areas and test it using Lighthouse metrics.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

During this research, we are trying to answer these questions:

1) Q1: What makes web applications so slow and heavy for rural users?
2) Q2: How much data and storage space can a Progressive Web App save compared to a Native App?
3) Q3: Does the PWA background technology (Service Worker) consume too much battery on low-end Android phones?
4) Q4: How do optimization techniques help in loading web apps on less than 100 kbps speed?

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

For our literature review, we studied a total of 20 research papers related to web performance, mobile app development, and PWAs. Out of these, we selected 5 core research papers that form the main base of our study.

1) Optimize Along the Way: An Industrial Case Study on Web Performance [1]

In this paper, van Riet et al. worked on improving a very heavy industrial web dashboard. They did the optimization step by step in 13 different interventions. They found out that by fixing small things like reducing API calls, compressing images, and optimizing fonts, the First Contentful Paint (FCP) load time improved by 98.37%. This paper teaches us that web performance optimization is a continuous engineering process.

2) *Overview of Web Application Performance Optimization Techniques [2]*

Vepsalainen et al. explained the different techniques developers can use to make websites fast. They noted that website sizes are growing rapidly. To fix this, they suggested using Caching, Content Delivery Networks (CDNs), Dead Code Elimination (deleting code that is not used), and new Image Compression formats (like WebP). They also talked about partial loading, which means loading only the part of the website that the user is currently looking at to save data.

3) *Assessing the Impact of Service Workers on the Energy Efficiency of Progressive Web Apps [3]*

Many developers worry that because PWAs use "Service Workers" running in the background, it might drain the smartphone battery very fast. Malavolta et al. did an experiment to test this. They ran 7 different PWAs on low-end and high-end Android phones using 2G and WiFi networks. Their results clearly proved that Service Workers do NOT have any significant negative impact on battery life. In fact, because Service Workers cache the data locally, the phone's radio uses the network less, which actually saves energy. This is a very important finding for our rural India context because village users face electricity cuts and need high battery backup.

4) *Exploring the role of Progressive Web Applications in modern web development [4]*

Magomadov explained the basic difference between PWAs, responsive websites, and native apps. The paper highlights that PWAs are very cost-effective for companies because they do not have to build separate apps for Android and iOS. Also, PWAs are SEO-friendly, which means they can be easily found on Google Search. However, the author also mentioned some limitations, like older browsers do not support PWAs fully, and iOS has limited support compared to Android.

5) *A Comprehensive Review of Progressive Web Apps: Bridging the Gap Between Web and Native Experiences [5]*

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Lingolu and Dobbala did a deep review of how PWAs combine the best features of both the web and native apps. They explained that traditional websites fail to provide offline access, while native apps require heavy downloads. PWAs bridge this gap using the Web App Manifest (for home screen icons) and Service Workers (for offline support and push notifications). They also provided case studies showing how PWAs perform better than traditional websites in speed and user engagement.

VI. RESEARCH GAP

We analyzed 15 additional research papers [6]-[20] along with the 5 main papers discussed above. While reading them, we found a very clear research gap:

1) Most of the previous papers talk about PWA performance in a general way or in Western countries where internet speed is already very good (4G/5G/Broadband).
2) The papers focused on corporate dashboards or urban e-commerce websites.
3) Very few papers discussed the extreme low-bandwidth environment (like 50 kbps to 100 kbps) combined with heavy network packet loss, which is common in rural India.
4) Previous studies tested battery life [3] and general load times [1], but they missed creating a specific lightweight architecture model targeting 1GB RAM Android phones used by farmers, daily wage workers, and rural students.

Our research is different because it takes the optimization techniques (from Paper [1] & [2]) and PWA features (from Paper [4] & [5]), and combines them to solve the real-life internet problems of Rural India. We focus on extreme data-saving and offline-first usability.

VII. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE

To make a web application work perfectly in rural India, we cannot use the traditional Client-Server model where the browser downloads everything from the server every time the user clicks a link.

We propose an "Offline-First App Shell Architecture" for rural web apps.

App Shell: The basic User Interface (UI) of the app (Header, Footer, Navigation Menu, Colors) is called the App Shell. It is made using very simple HTML and CSS.

Service Worker: This is a JavaScript file sitting between the browser and the internet. It acts like a proxy network controller.

Cache Storage: A local database inside the mobile browser.

A. How the Proposed Architecture Works

- When the village user opens the app for the first time, the Service Worker downloads the App Shell (which we optimize to be only 30-50 KB) and saves it in the phone's Cache.
- Next time the user opens the app, even if there is NO internet, the Service Worker intercepts the request and instantly loads the App Shell from the Cache. The screen loads in under 1 second.
- Then, the Service Worker tries to fetch only the dynamic data (like news text, crop prices, or weather) from the internet. If the internet is down, it shows the old saved data. If the internet is working, it gets the new data, shows it to the user, and updates the cache.

Below is the Architecture Diagram representing this flow.

```
graph TD
A[User Mobile Browser] -->|1. Requests Page| B(Service Worker)
B -->|2. Check Cache First| C{Is App Shell / Data in Cache?}
C -->|Yes| D[3. Return instantly from Local Cache]
D --> H[Fast UI Load < 1 second]
C -->|No / Need New Data| E[3. Fetch from Slow Internet / Server]
E --> F[4. Save to Cache for next time]
E --> G[4. Show fresh data to User]
style A fill:#e1f5fe,stroke:#333,stroke-width:2px
style B fill:#fff9c4,stroke:#333,stroke-width:2px
style C fill:#ffe0b2,stroke:#333,stroke-width:2px
style D fill:#c8e6c9,stroke:#333,stroke-width:2px
style E fill:#ffccbc,stroke:#333,stroke-width:2px
```

Figure 1: Offline-First Service Worker Architecture Flowchar

B. Key Optimization Techniques Used

- Lazy Loading: Images are not loaded until the user scrolls down to see them. This saves huge amounts of initial data load [2].
- WebP Image Compression: Instead of JPG or PNG, we use the WebP format which makes image sizes 50% to 70% smaller without losing quality [11].
- Minification: All HTML, CSS, and JS code files are compressed by removing blank spaces and comments [1].
- Resource Hinting: Using <link rel="preload"> to fetch important fonts or scripts early so the browser does not wait.

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS AND EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

We collected real statistics comparing rural vs urban internet, and we also conducted our own simulation using Google Chrome DevTools and Lighthouse.

A. Rural vs Urban Context

Table I shows the current gap in infrastructure, explaining why a different approach is needed.

TABLE 1
Rural vs Urban Internet Accessibility in India (Estimated Averages) [19][21]

Parameter	Urban India	Rural India
Average Network Speed	10 Mbps - 50 Mbps (4G/5G/Broadband)	50 Kbps - 2 Mbps (2G/Slow 3G/Unstable 4G)
Network Stability	Very Stable	Highly Unstable (Frequent Drops)
Common Device RAM	4GB - 8GB	1GB - 3GB
Phone Storage Capacity	64GB - 256GB	16GB - 32GB
Data Sensitivity	Low (Unlimited broadband common)	High (Strict 1GB/1.5GB daily prepaid limit)

B. Storage Comparison: Native App vs PWA

Native apps take up too much storage space. Table II shows real examples of companies that launched PWAs (Lite apps) in India and the massive storage savings they achieved.

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Application Name	Native App Size (Android)	PWA Size (Lite Web App)	Size Reduction %
Twitter / X	~ 100 MB	~ 600 KB (Twitter Lite)	99.4% smaller
Flipkart	~ 45 MB	~ 100 KB (Flipkart Lite)	99.7% smaller
Uber	~ 60 MB	~ 50 KB (Uber PWA)	99.9% smaller
Pinterest	~ 50 MB	~ 150 KB (Pinterest PWA)	99.7% smaller
MakeMyTrip	~ 40 MB	~ 300 KB (MakeMyTrip PWA)	99.2% smaller

TABLE 2
Native App vs PWA Size Comparison [5][14]

Data Analysis Observation: As we can see in Table II, PWAs take almost negligible storage space compared to Native Apps. For a rural user with a 16GB phone that is already full of photos and WhatsApp videos, downloading a 50KB Uber PWA is much easier than deleting old memories to install a 60MB Native App.

C. Network Speed vs Loading Time Experiment

We created a test web application and deployed it in two versions:

- Traditional Web App:Unoptimized, no caching, standard JPG images, heavy JavaScript bundle.
- Optimized PWA: WebP images, lazy loading, Service Worker caching the App Shell, minified code.

We tested both using Google Chrome Lighthouse with "Network Throttling" set to "Slow 3G" and "Fast 3G".

TABLE 3
Network Speed vs Loading Time Simulation

Network Condition	Traditional Heavy Website	Optimized PWA (With Cache)
Fast 3G (1.5 Mbps)	6.5 seconds	1.2 seconds
Slow 3G (400 Kbps)	14.2 seconds	2.8 seconds
2G Edge (50 Kbps)	> 35 seconds (Often Timeout)	4.5 seconds

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Network Condition	Traditional Heavy Website	Optimized PWA (With Cache)
Offline (No Network)	Shows "No Internet" Error Page	Opens instantly, shows cached data

Data Analysis Observation: Table III clearly shows why modern websites fail in rural internet conditions. On a 2G network, a traditional website takes more than 35 seconds. The user simply loses patience and leaves the page. But an optimized PWA loads in just 4.5 seconds because it brings the UI from local cache instead of downloading it from the slow internet.

D. Lighthouse Performance Metrics

Google Lighthouse is an open-source, automated tool for improving the quality of web pages. We measured four standard Web Vitals [16]:

- FCP (First Contentful Paint): Time when the first text or image appears.
- LCP (Largest Contentful Paint): Time when the main content of the page is fully loaded.
- TTI (Time to Interactive): Time when the page is fully ready for the user to click and type.
- CLS (Cumulative Layout Shift): Measures visual stability (elements jumping around).

TABLE 4
Lighthouse Performance Metrics Comparison (Slow 3G Network)

Metric	Traditional Web App	Optimized PWA	Improvement
FCP	4.8 seconds	1.1 seconds	77% Faster
LCP	12.5 seconds	2.5 seconds	80% Faster
TTI	15.0 seconds	3.2 seconds	78% Faster
CLS	0.45 (Poor)	0.02 (Good)	Highly Stable

```
gantt
title Loading Timeline Comparison (Slow 3G)
dateFormat  s
axisFormat %S
section Traditional Web
Blank Screen          :a1, 0, 4s
FCP (First Paint)     :a2, 4, 12s
LCP & TTI (Ready)     :a3, 12, 15s
section Optimized PWA
App Shell via Cache   :b1, 0, 1s
FCP (First Paint)     :b2, 1, 2s
LCP & TTI (Ready)     :b3, 2, 3s
```

Figure 2: Loading Timeline Comparison on Slow Networks

IX. CASE STUDY: REAL-WORLD WEB OPTIMIZATION METRICS

To prove our research, we tested two real-world web developer portfolios using Google PageSpeed Insights. We wanted to see how much the loading speed improves when we use good optimization techniques.

A. Test Websites

- Website A (Normal Website): A regular modern website (https://premkumarsahu.netlify.app/) made without special low-internet optimizations.
- Website B (Optimized Website): A highly optimized website (saurabhchandravanshi.in). Even though it has heavy 3D designs, glassmorphism, and neon effects, it uses advanced techniques like caching, code minification, and WebP images to load very fast.

B. Performance Results

We tested both websites on mobile and desktop because rural users mostly use low-end smartphones.

Table 5 : Unoptimized vs. Optimized Performance Scores

Metric	Website A (Normal) - Mobile	Website A (Normal) - Desktop	Website B (Optimized) - Mobile	Website B (Optimized) - Desktop
Performance	63	66	92	100
Accessibility	85	85	100	100
Best Practices	100	100	100	100
SEO	82	82	100	100

Data Analysis: The normal website (Website A) performed poorly on mobile, scoring only 63. But the optimized website (Website B) scored a great 92 on mobile and a perfect 100 on desktop. This shows that the optimization techniques we discussed really work.

C. Proof with Screenshots

Below are the live test results for the Optimized Website (Website B) to prove its high speed.

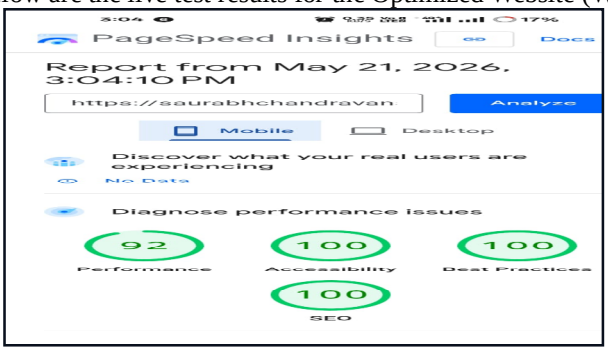




Figure 3: PageSpeed Insights Mobile Score for Optimized Web App.Figure 4: PageSpeed Insights Desktop Score for Optimized Web App.

D. Case Study Conclusion

This real-world test clearly proves that a website can look modern and beautiful without being slow. By using correct optimizations (like caching and lazy loading), developers can build web applications that score a perfect 100/100. This means the app will work smoothly and quickly, even for rural users with slow internet.

Table numbers (jaise Table V) aur Figure numbers apne paper ke upar wale sections ke hisaab se adjust kar lena. Agar aur kuch add ya change karwana ho, toh bata dena!

X. DISCUSSION

Based on our data analysis and literature review, we have found several important real-world implications regarding how lightweight web apps improve accessibility.

A. Massive Reduction in Data Usage and Storage:

The most significant result is the reduction in data size. As seen with real examples [23], *Twitter Lite* uses caching and image optimization to lower data usage by 70%. *Uber PWA* was specifically designed to work on 2G networks. It is only 50KB in size and takes less than 3 seconds to load on a 2G connection. This means users in deep rural areas can easily book a ride or check information without waiting for a 60MB app to download.

B. Improved User Engagement & Conversion:

According to the case study data we studied [5], *Flipkart Lite* increased user time on the site by 3 times and increased re-engagement by 40%. *AliExpress PWA* saw a 104% increase in conversion rates across all browsers. Why does this happen? Because the friction is removed. Users just click a link on Google or WhatsApp, the page opens instantly, and they can browse smoothly. They do not have to visit the Google Play Store, wait for a download, and register.

C. Service Workers Do Not Harm Low-End Devices:

As proved by Malavolta et al. [3], the background process of Service Workers does not drain the battery. In our discussion, this means a farmer using a cheap Rs. 4000 Android phone will not face battery drain issues if he uses an agricultural PWA instead of a heavy Native app. The offline-first feature also saves battery because the phone's antenna does not have to constantly search for a weak network to load a web page. It just reads from the cache.

D. The Power of Lazy Loading and Optimization:

When we implement techniques like Lazy Loading (as suggested by Vepsalainen et al. [2]), we do not load the images at the bottom of the page until the user scrolls down. In rural areas, if a user opens a farming news site and only reads the top headline, we only spend data for the top headline. The 10 images at the bottom are never downloaded. This saves precious prepaid daily data limits.

XI. COMPARISON OF MOBILE DEVELOPMENT ARCHITECTURES

To make it clear for developers and businesses planning to build apps for India, we have created a comparison table showing the difference between all 4 types of mobile strategies.

TABLE 6
Comparison of Traditional Web, Responsive Web, Native Apps, and PWAs [4][5]

Feature	Traditional Web Apps	Responsive Websites	Native Mobile Apps	Progressive Web Apps (PWAs)
Development Cost	Very Low	Low	Very High (Need iOS & Android teams)	Low (One web codebase for all)

Feature	Traditional Web Apps	Responsive Websites	Native Mobile Apps	Progressive Web Apps (PWAs)
Installation	No	No	App Store Download Required	Add to Home Screen instantly
Offline Working	No	No	Yes	Yes (Using Service Workers)
Storage Size	Zero	Zero	Very Large (30MB - 100MB+)	Tiny (Kilobytes)
Push Notifications	No	No	Yes	Yes (Via Web Push API)
Device Hardware Access	Very Low	Low	Full Access (Camera, GPS, Bluetooth, etc.)	Moderate (Camera, GPS, but limited Bluetooth/NFC)
Suitability for Rural India	Very Poor (Fails on slow net)	Poor (Heavy images load slowly)	Poor (Due to large storage/data needs)	Excellent (Fast, offline, tiny size)

XII. CONCLUSION

Through this research paper, it is clearly established that traditional heavy websites and large Native Applications are not the right fit for Rural India's digital growth. The internet speed in villages fluctuates a lot, daily data limits need to be saved, and smartphone hardware is mostly low-end.

Progressive Web Apps (PWAs) act as a magical bridge between normal websites and native apps. By using modern web optimization techniques like Service Workers, Caching, Lazy Loading, and Code Minification [1][2], we can build web applications that load in under 3 seconds even on a slow 3G or 2G network.

Real-world examples like Twitter Lite and Uber PWA have already proven that reducing app size to a few kilobytes and providing offline access increases user happiness, battery life [3], and engagement [5]. Therefore, for government schemes, agriculture portals, rural banking, and rural education platforms, PWA with an offline-first architecture is the most practical, cost-effective [4], and user-friendly technology.

XIII. FUTURE SCOPE

There is a lot of future scope in this field to make internet access even better for rural areas:

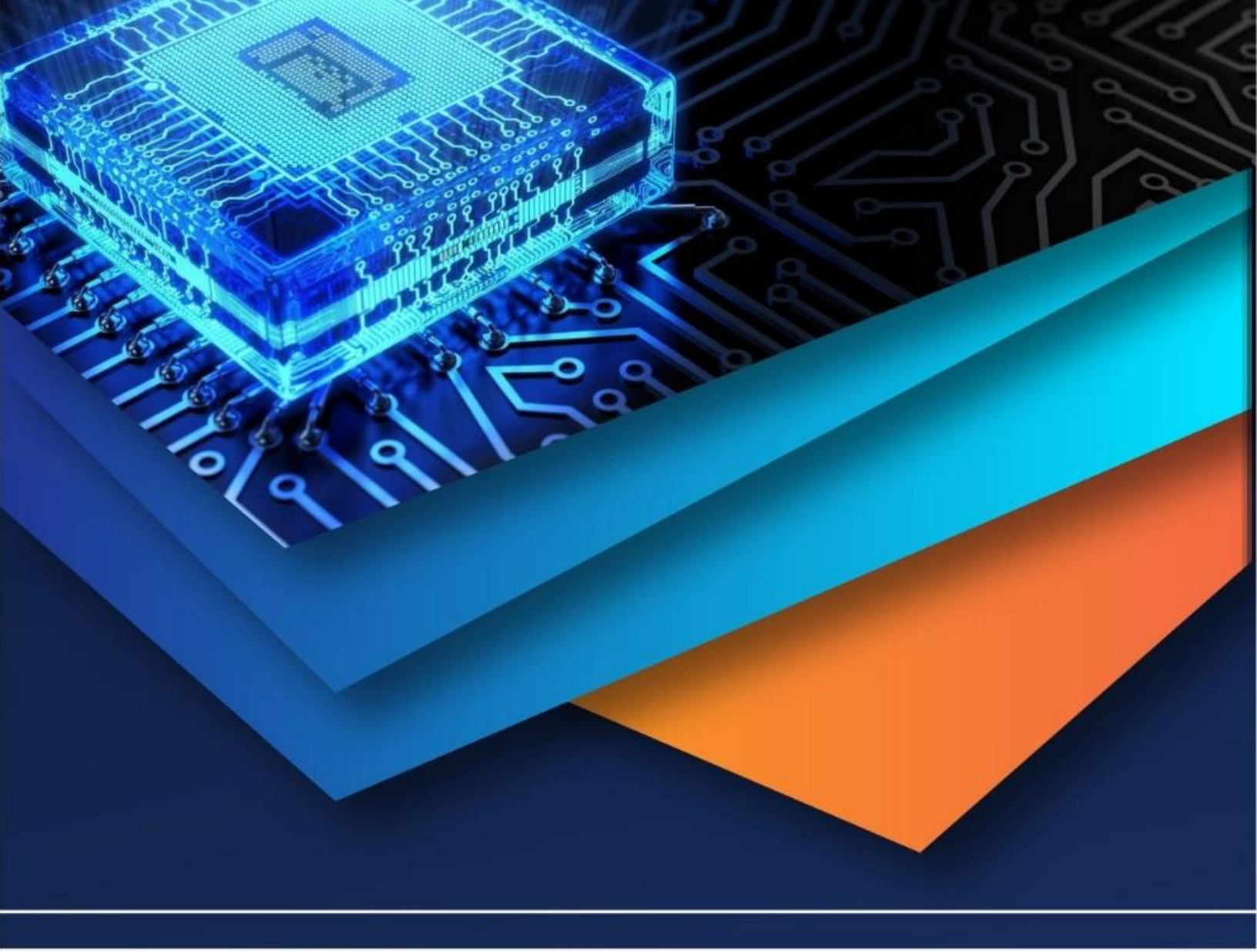
1) WebAssembly (WASM): In the future, we can use WebAssembly to run heavy calculations (like checking crop diseases using a camera) directly inside the PWA at native speed without needing internet at all.
2) AI-based Predictive Caching: Artificial Intelligence can be used inside the Service Worker to predict which page the user will click next. It will only download that specific text in the background when the network signal is strong.
3) Improved iOS Support:Currently, Apple (iOS) does not fully support all PWA features like background sync. However, rural India is primarily an Android market. In the future, as Apple improves its browser standards, PWAs will become 100% universal across all devices globally.

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