

Holistic vs. Atomistic: A Comprehensive Comparative Study of Generative AI Architectures for Real-Time Personalized Nutrition Coaching

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Abstract- Personalized nutrition coaching applications aim to provide context-aware dietary recommendations aligned with an individual's health profile, medical constraints, and consumption habits. Traditionally, most nutrition analysis engines have relied on modular, rule-based, or ingredient-level classification architectures that process each component of the food label in isolation. With the rise of large language models (LLMs), it has become possible to construct "holistic" architectures capable of processing the entire contextual dataset—ingredients, nutrition table, and user profile—in a single inference call. This paper presents a comprehensive comparative study between two distinct design philosophies: (1) an atomistic Cache-and-Curate architecture based on decomposed multi-step classification, rule chaining, and database lookups; and (2) a holistic Single-Call Generative Architecture inspired by modern LLM capabilities. Using a gold-standard dataset annotated by registered dietitians, we evaluate accuracy, personalization depth, semantic coherence, latency, and operational cost. Results demonstrate that the holistic architecture significantly outperforms the atomistic pipeline across all metrics, achieving higher expert alignment, faster inference, richer user-specific reasoning, and substantially lower engineering overhead. The study provides one of the first empirical analyses of architectural paradigms for generative-AI-powered health applications and offers insights into the future direction of real-time contextual reasoning systems.

Keywords— Generative AI, Nutrition Analysis, LLM Architecture, Personalized Health, Contextual Reasoning, System Design

I. INTRODUCTION

With growing awareness of diet-related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disorders, and chronic inflammation, personalized nutrition tools have become increasingly important. These applications aim to interpret complex food labels and translate them into actionable health insights tailored to an individual's physiology, goals, and restrictions. Most existing mobile applications, however, rely on ingredient-level tagging, static risk mappings, and rule-based personalization. Such atomistic architectures struggle with contextual reasoning, cross-ingredient interactions, and user-dependent moderation thresholds.

The emergence of large language models (LLMs) offers a fundamentally different approach. Instead of decomposing the problem into narrow subtasks, a holistic architecture enables the system to reason across multiple dimensions simultaneously. When the full ingredient list, nutrition table, and user health profile are provided as input, LLMs can synthesize a unified report containing risk assessments, recommended serving limits, ingredient interactions, alternative suggestions, and personalized justifications.

The InnerVerse project implemented such an architectural shift, moving from a multi-call Cache-and-Curate model to a single-call generative engine. Although the transition yielded promising improvements in practice, no formal evaluation had

been performed. This paper addresses that gap by providing a rigorous, quantitative analysis of both architectures.

The main contributions are:

- A complete implementation of the atomistic Cache-and-Curate architecture representing existing market practices.
- A unified holistic LLM architecture capable of multi-dimensional contextual reasoning.
- A gold-standard dataset of expert-annotated product assessments for multiple health conditions.
- A multidimensional evaluation framework covering accuracy, personalization, coherence, latency, and cost.
- A detailed architectural comparison that highlights the advantages and trade-offs of each paradigm.

II. RELATED WORK

Existing research on digital nutrition systems falls into three primary categories: (1) Ingredient-based classifiers, which label each ingredient with traits such as "high glycemic," "allergenic," or "ultra-processed." Prior works [1] show that such models perform well on isolated classification tasks but lack contextual integration. (2) Rule-based dietary personalization, which applies conditional logic to user profiles to generate recommendations [2]. These systems tend to be rigid and difficult to scale. (3) LLM-based nutritional reasoning, which remains an emerging field. Recent studies highlight the strengths of LLMs in summarization and domain reasoning but provide limited guidance on system-level architecture choices. There is minimal research comparing multi-step atomistic pipelines with holistic LLM-driven systems. This study provides the first structured comparative evaluation of these two architectural paradigms in the context of real-time personalized nutrition.

III. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE COMPARISON

1. Atomistic Architecture (System A)

System A is modeled after traditional mobile nutrition apps using a segmented, modular approach:

- Ingredient Parsing: Extract each ingredient and pre-process using NLP normalization.
- Classification Stage: Each ingredient is passed into a lightweight classifier (LLM or ML model) to identify properties such as acidity, glycemic load, allergen category, and hyperpalatability.
- Database Lookups: Each classification result triggers a lookup into a curated ingredient property database.
- Rule Engine: Dozens of IF-ELSE rules tailor the output based on user conditions.
- Aggregation: Partial evaluations are stitched together to generate a final report.

Limitations

- Context fragmentation due to independent micro-decisions.
- High latency from multiple model calls and database queries.
- Poor handling of ingredient interactions (e.g., sodium-potassium balance).
- Rule-engine brittleness and scalability issues.
- Difficulty generating natural-language moderation guidance.

Holistic Architecture (System B)

System B uses a single LLM call where the entire structured dataset is passed as input:

- Full ingredient list
 - Complete nutrition table
 - User health profile (conditions, goals, allergies, medication interactions)
 - Consumption patterns and lifestyle metadata
- The LLM produces:
- A holistic overall rating.
 - Ingredient interaction analysis.
 - Risk severity grading by condition.
 - Quantitative moderation advice (e.g., 20g/day safe threshold).
 - Personalized alternatives with rationale.

Advantages

- End-to-end contextual reasoning.
- Zero manual rule engineering.
- High coherence and consistency.
- Lower latency due to a single inference.
- Easily extensible to additional user metadata.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A dataset of 100 commercially available food products was selected across categories such as snacks, beverages, cereals, sauces, and nutritional supplements. Ten representative user health profiles were constructed, covering conditions including:

- Type 2 Diabetes
- Hypertension
- PCOS
- Obesity
- High Cholesterol
- Lactose Intolerance
- Gluten Sensitivity
- Thyroid Disorders
- Athletic High-Protein Requirement
- General Wellness

Five registered dietitians independently generated expert assessments for each product–profile pair.

These included:

- Overall verdict
- Ingredient-level justification
- Personalized advice
- Serving-size recommendations
- Safety warnings

Both architectures were run on the full dataset, generating 1000 system reports for evaluation.

1. Evaluation Metrics

- **Accuracy:** Agreement with expert overall verdict.
- **Personalization Score:** Expert-rated relevance to health profile.
- **Coherence:** Ingredient-to-verdict logical consistency.
- **Latency:** Average inference time.
- **Operational Cost:** Token usage, database overhead, and engineering complexity.

V. RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the primary findings.

Table 1: Comparative Evaluation of Architectures

Metric	Atomistic	Holistic
Accuracy Alignment	52%	90%
Personalization Score	2.1 / 5	4.4 / 5
Coherence	Low	Very High
Average Latency	4.8 sec	1.4 sec
Operational Cost	High	Moderate
Engineering Overhead	Very High	Low

The holistic architecture outperformed the atomistic system across all metrics. Notably, experts rated the moderation advice of the holistic system as “substantially more actionable,” citing improved quantitative thresholds and clearer risk reasoning.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that atomistic architectures are fundamentally limited by their decomposed structure. They excel in well-defined classification tasks but falter in cross-dimensional reasoning. For example, diabetes-related risk depends not only on sugar quantity but also fiber content, ingredient interactions, and serving-size context. Atomistic systems cannot naturally integrate these variables.

Holistic systems leverage the reasoning capabilities of LLMs to model complex relationships. They provide explanations aligned with human dietitians and generate personalized advice with minimal engineering effort. However, they require careful prompt engineering, dataset structuring, and safety constraints to ensure reliability.

VII. Conclusion

This study provides the first systematic evaluation of atomistic and holistic architectures for generative AI-based nutrition analysis. The holistic model demonstrates clear advantages in accuracy, coherence, latency, and ease of maintenance. The results suggest that future health applications should adopt unified contextual inference rather than rule-based decomposition, unlocking richer

personalization and more human-like dietary recommendations.

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