engineering proceedings

Proceeding paper

A Novel MPPT based Solar Irradiance Estimator: Integration of a Hybrid Incremental Conductance Integral Backstepping Algorithm for PV systems with Experimental Validation†

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† Presented at the 4th International Electronics Conference on Applied Sciences, 27 October- 10 November 2023

Abstract: This paper develops a high performance maximum power point tracking (MPPT) based solar irradiance estimator for photovoltaic (PV) systems. The suggested estimator is constructed around a simple current-voltage based algebraic equation that hinges on the operation of the PV system at the maximum power point (MPP). In the realm of MPP operation, the overall system is driven by a nonlinear MPPT controller. To achieve this functioning, this paper integrates a hybrid incremental conductance integral backstepping (H-INC-IBS) controller for effective regulation of the PV system. This controller is specially chosen for its powerful potency in maximizing the dynamics of the PV system, leading to heightened robustness against changing environmental conditions. Simulations results are provided to position the suitability of the proposes estimator. Furthermore, the estimator is verified under experimental conditions, highlighting its soundness and practicality. By evaluations and comparisons against the conventional irradiance estimator, this paper aims to emphasize the superiority of the proposed solar irradiance estimator in providing more accurate estimation of solar irradiance for PV systems operating under the supervision of MPPT.

Keywords: PV ; MPPT; solar irradiance estimator; hybrid incremental conductance integral backstepping (H-INC-IBS)

Citation: Harrison, A.; Alombah, N.H.; Kamel, S.; Kotb, H.; Sherif S. M. Ghoneim5; Myasse, I.E. A Novel MPPT based Solar Irradiance Estimator: Integration of a Hybrid Incremental Conductance Integral Backstepping Algorithm for PV systems with Experimental Validation. *Eng. Proc.* **2023**, *5*, x. https://doi.org/10.3390/xxxxx

Academic Editor: Nunzio Cennamo

1. Introduction

In recent years, nonconventional energy sources, such as solar energy, have gained in popularity due to growing energy demands and environmental constraints. Through the use of photovoltaic (PV) cells, solar energy can easily be transformed into electrical energy. PV sources offer several advantages, including low maintenance costs, no moving or rotating parts, and pollution-free energy conversion. Despite such unique features, they are still very expensive, and more innovative techniques will be required to increase their efficiency and reduce their final cost [1]. For example, maximum power point tracking (MPPT) in PV systems have been identified as an important consideration for improving the operational efficiency of PV systems [2–5]. Operationally, solar irradiance is one of the most important and functional parameters of every PV system. Performance monitoring of such systems requires information related to the state of solar irradiance. Monitoring of solar irradiance is not only important for PV systems as the supervised parameter intersects largely with many interdisciplinary fields including agriculture and environmental science[6]. In the vein of measurement, the Pyranometer is considered one of the most common instruments for direct measurement of solar irradiance [7]. Pyranometers are not cost-effective, have several sensors, and must be position in the direction of their corresponding panels [8]. Rather than the expensive direct measurement of solar irradiance, numerous works are resorting to the estimation of this intricate parameter.

The method presented in [9] makes use of the short-circuit current of the PV module, which can be measured using a readily available current sensor. This is one of the simplest and most cost-effective methods for estimating irradiance, however, it can only provide moderate accuracy. Furthermore, it requires the periodic short-circuiting of the PV module terminals, which from an energy productivity point of view represents a poor approach. A similar work presented in [10], pretends to avoid the classical use of a solar irradiance sensor (Pyranometer) to estimate the irradiance. By using, a low-cost microcontroller, information on both short circuit current (Isc) and the open circuit voltage (Voc) is supervised. With these measurements, the method computes the electrical equation of the PV module using a fixed point iteration technique. The major limitation of the latter approach lies with the fact that the load must be periodically disconnected from the PV panel to measure the open circuit voltage, and short circuited to obtain the short circuit current. As a matter of direct measurements, it is intricate to seek both the Isc and the Voc of the solar panel. Hence the involved accuracy would be conditioned by the degree of asynchronization tolerated in the measurement of these parameters. In PV connected system, it is crucial to estimate the irradiance without altering the system operating point. For instance, a PV system composed of a solar panel and a maximum power point tracking (MPPT) controller is supposed to operate at a unique point, the maximum power point (MPP). Abruptly distorting this point by a short or open circuit can deteriorate the performance of the MPPT controller, which can further negatively affect the whole PV system from an energy point of view. This is the principal reason why the Isc and the Voc methods in [9,10], are not very encouraging for PV-connected systems. The method presented in [11] makes use of the interpolated link between the irradiance and voltage across a 50Ω resistor to mathematically calculate the former. The accuracy achieved by this method is moderate due to the approximate expression between solar irradiance and output voltage across the resistor. Furthermore, the major flaw in this method lies in its dependency on fitted data.

The method presented in [12] exploits the electrical current-voltage (I-V) nonlinear equations of the PV cell and some suitable reparameterization to compute the solar irradiance with a guaranteed level of stability. However, the method is PV model-based and demands some internal parameters of the PV module which are not often readily available. Although the irradiance is successfully computed with attractive stability, the accuracy of the method is conditioned by the measurement of the PV array temperature which is not often easy to acquire. An improved version of the estimator in [12] is presented in [13]. The work derives a nonlinear equation from which solar irradiance can be computed directly provided accurate measurements of PV array temperature, current and voltage are available. Compared to the previously reported estimator of solar irradiance, the latter work achieves superiority due to the following reasons; it does not require changing the PV operating point for sensing Isc and the Voc as in [9,10]; does not demand an iterative algorithm as in [10]. The method is void of approximate expressions or fitted data as in [11] and does not require the integration of data as in [12]. However, the accuracy of the method is conditioned by the measurement of temperature. In practice, PV systems are conditioned by continually changing environmental conditions. These varying conditions induce the systematic variation of the maximum power point. To improve the performance of PV systems, MPPT controllers are usually improvised between the PV system and load [14].

In the realm of MPPT, numerous algorithms and controllers have been proposed in the literature. A computational intelligent-based MPPT method is developed in [15]. The method combines a modified invasive weed optimization algorithm which belongs to the class of evolutionary algorithms and the P&O algorithm in a hybrid scheme. The hybrid technique is a pertinent improvement of the P&O algorithm as it enhances the search performance for the maximum power output of the PV systems. However, its principal limitation is the slow convergence of the tracking process attributed to the high time of the optimization algorithm. Furthermore, the algorithm does not tackle the problems of oscillations around the MPP exhibited by the conventional P&O. In a grid-connected regime, a hybrid optimization MPPT algorithm is proposed in [16], which combines fuzzy logic control and particle swarm optimization (PSO) applied to a buck-boost zeta DC-DC converter. The MPPT method is applied to grid injected PV system. However, the applicability of the algorithm to estimating the solar irradiance is not investigated by the authors. A hybrid MPPPT algorithm is proposed in [17], which combines a simplified firefly and neighborhood attraction firefly for maximum power point tracking. Using a high gain step-up SEPIC converter, the authors show that the new algorithm is efficient for MPPT operation, and high step-up voltage applications such as electric vehicle charging systems. However, the algorithm was not applied to the estimation of solar irradiance in PV systems. To address the problems of poor MPPT performance of MPPT algorithms under variable solar insolation, [18] synthesized a novel learning algorithm that is based on the TS-fuzzy Radial Basis Neural Network. Although the algorithm offers rapid PV power tracking under fluctuating solar irradiance, its complexity moderates its practical feasibility. Moreover, the suitability of the proposed MPPT method was not investigated for solar irradiance in PV systems.

Although numerous maximum power point tracking algorithms have been recently developed, it is evident that only a few have shown the possibility of exploiting the PV system at the maximum power point (MPP) to estimate solar irradiance. This is would be an effective approach because certain impositions and sensors such as temperature sensors are not required. Moreover, such a method is PV model free, hence can provide better levels of accuracy. The most prominent work in this vein is the MPPT-based estimator recently proposed in [6]. The latter presented a simplified MPPT-based equation to compute the solar irradiance on the PV module. Considering that the estimator depends on MPP, its performance is dictated by MPPT operation. Originally the authors proposed the conventional MPPT algorithms such as P&O to drive the PV system at MPP. Recent progress in MPPT research has shown that conventional algorithms present problems such as oscillations at the maximum power point and a tradeoff between dynamic response and steady-state oscillations [3,5,7]. These problems are inherent in conventional MPPT algorithms and will consequently impact the performance of the MPPT-based estimator. Therefore, to improve the performance of the estimator it is crucial to regulate the PV system using MPPT controllers that will ensure an overall high performance of the solar estimator. It is noticed from the literature that MPPT algorithms have not received sufficient attention on the subject of solar irradiance estimation. The present state of the literature shows that only the conventional MPPT algorithms have successfully been applied to the estimation of solar irradiance in PV systems. On the other hand, these conventional algorithms are limited and do not allow for maximizing the potential of the MPPT system to estimate solar irradiance.

In this paper, we seek to improve the performance of the conventional MPPT-based estimator by regulating the PV system with a recently proposed nonlinear MPPT controller. The MPPT controller is based on the hybrid incremental conductance integral backstepping (H-INC-IBS) algorithm [14]. Because of its nonlinear features, this controller is a very robust choice for MPPT applications. In this way, the proposed estimator derives the robust characteristics of the H-INC-IBS

Table 1. Comparative study between the proposed estimator and previously published works.

Ref	Year	Method of solar irradiance estimation	MPPT Algorithm	Key remarks
[9]	2013	Short circuit current method	N/A	-Requires periodic short-circuiting of the PV terminals - Not suitable for connected PV systems
[10]	2012	Short circuit-open circuit voltage method	N/A	-Requires periodic short-circuiting and open-circuiting of PV terminals - Not suitable for connected PV systems
[11]	2011	Interpolation method	N/A	Requires fitted data
[12]	2014	PV model-based	N/A	Requires some internal parameters of the PV model, which are not often fully available
[13]	2016	Analytical method	N/A	Analytical equation relies on internal parameters of the PV model
[19]	2021	N/A	Hybrid P&O based Modified Invasive Weed optimization algorithm	MPPT not evaluated for irradiance estimation
[16]	2019	N/A	Hybrid PSO-Fuzzy logic controller	MPPT not evaluated for irradiance estimation
[17]	2022	N/A	Firefly optimization MPPT algorithm	MPPT not evaluated for irradiance estimation
[18]	2022	N/A	TS-fuzzy Radial Basis Neural Network	MPPT not evaluated for irradiance estimation
[6]	2018	MPPT-Based	Conventional algorithm	-Oscillations at steady-state due to limitations of the conventional algorithm - Low dynamic response under fast-changing irradiance conditions
[Proposed]	2023	MPPT-Based	H-INC-IBS	-Negligible oscillations at steady-state -Suitable for fast-changing conditions due to the robustness of H-INC-IBS - Better accuracy than [6]

A comparative study of the proposed estimator and previously published works is presented in Table.1, confirming that MPPT based estimation of irradiance has been limited to conventional algorithms. Due to the shortcomings of the conventional scheme, estimated solar irradiance fluctuates significantly at steady state and is unreliable in the event of fast-changing operating conditions. In order to demonstrate the unique features of the proposed estimator, it is compared against the estimator based on the conventional MPPT algorithm. Simulation and experimental results showed substantial improvements in estimator performance when the proposed nonlinear MPPT controller is used to drive the PV system. The rest of this paper is composed as follows. The design of the proposed system is presented in section 2. In section 3, major results are discussed, while a conclusion ends the paper in section 5.

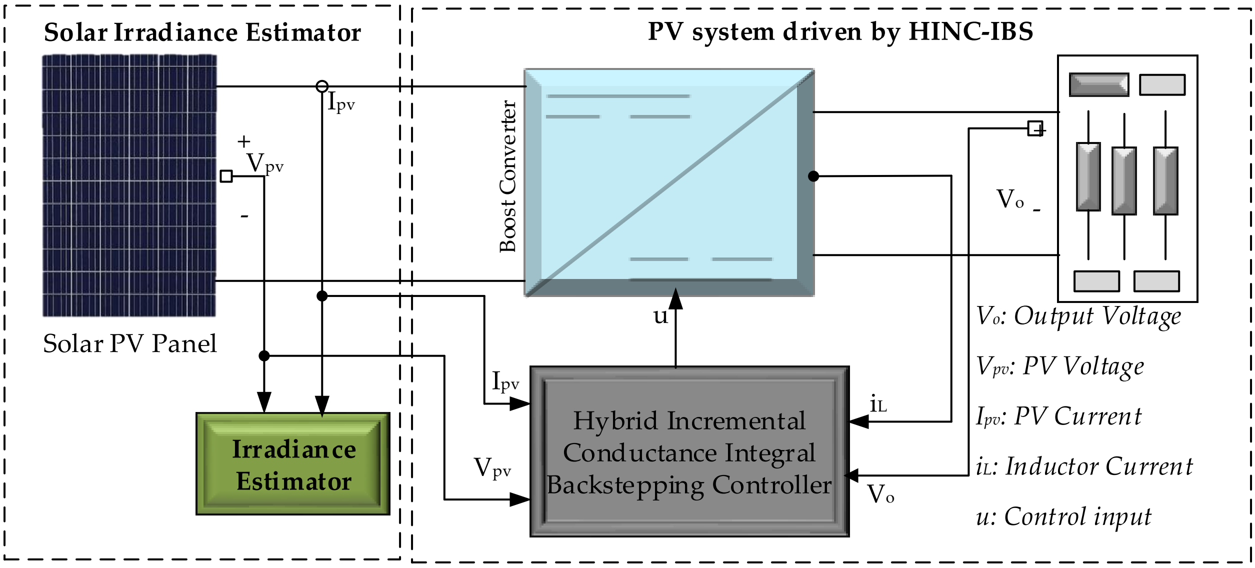

Figure 1. Block Diagram of the proposed system.

2. Design of the proposed system

The PV system under study is presented in Fig.1. It consists of a solar PV panel, a dc-dc boost converter coupled with load, an MPPT system (H-INC-IBS MPPT), and an estimator of solar irradiance. The solar PV panel is driven by the H-INC-IBS MPPT controller. The estimator receives measurements of current and voltage from readily available current and voltage sensors and makes use of the system's operation at the MPP to compute the solar irradiance. In the real, of MPPT, the boost converter as seen in Fig,2 used to implement the regulatory algorithm.

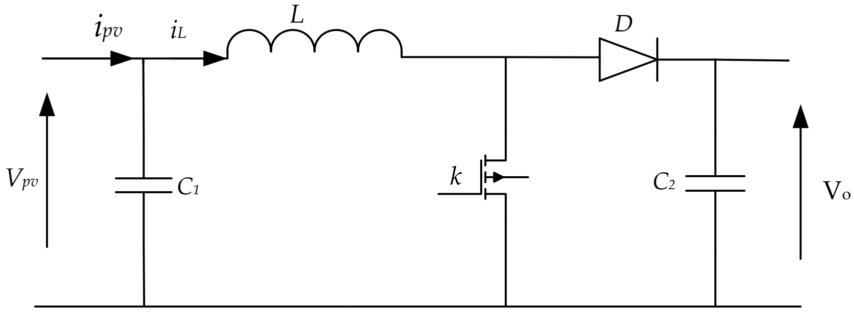

Figure 2. Block Diagram of the proposed system.

The converter is made up of a coupling capacitor C_1, inductance L, switch K, diode D, and output capacitor C_2. This converter among other power electronics converter topologies is chosen for its simplicity and higher efficiency in MPPT PV applications [20]. The following average dynamical model regulates the operation of the converter in continuous conduction mode [21]:

$$\begin{cases} \dot{x_1} = i_{PV} - \dfrac{x_2}{C_1} \\ \dot{x_2} = \dfrac{x_1}{L} - \dfrac{x_3}{L}(1-u) \\ \dot{x_3} = \dfrac{x_2}{C_2}(1-u) - \dfrac{x_3}{C_2 R} \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

Where $[x_1\ x_2\ x_3]^T = \left[V_{pv}\ i_L\ V_o\right]^T = x$ are the state variables of the converter u is the control input. A nonlinear controller can be designed to exploit this full dynamic and realize the control objective. We desire that PV voltage operate at a certain MPP reference V_{ref}. Since this variable is the first state of the system, it can be written as $x_{1ref} = V_{ref}$. The controller is then constructed based on the integral backstepping controller algorithm, whose design is benchmarked by Lyapunov theory. To ensure that the system operates at the MPP the following control framework is adopted [14]

$$u = 1 - \frac{L}{x_3}\left(K_2 e_2 + \frac{x_1}{L} + K_1^2 C_1 e_1 + K_1 e_2 + kK_1 C_1 p - \dot{i}_{PV} + C_1 \ddot{x}_{1ref} - C_1 k e_1 - \frac{e_1}{C_1}\right) \quad (2)$$

Where, $e_1 = x_1 - x_{1ref}, \varphi = C_1(K_1 e_1 + \frac{i_{PV}}{C_1} - \dot{x}_{1ref} + kp), e_2 = x_2 - \varphi$ and $p = \int_o^t (e_1)dt$

In this design, the reference system is provide by an incremental conductance algorithm [14]. Thus, the synergic combination of the control law in Eq. (2) alongside the INC result to H-INC-IBS, which represents the nonlinear MPPT controller adopted in this paper. Therefore, provided the system operates at the MPP, an estimator of solar irradiance can be designed to exploit this conditions. In this work, we present a model-free-MPPT estimator of solar irradiance for PV systems operating at the MPP. The major benefit of this estimator is the fact it does not induce a change in the operating point of the PV system. The main estimator equation can be written as [6];

$$\hat{G} = G_{ref}\left(\frac{I_{sc-ref} + (I_{pv} - I_{mpp})}{I_{sc-ref} + \left(\frac{K_i}{K_v}\right)(R_s \Delta I + (V_{pv} - V_{mpp}))}\right) \quad (3)$$

Where, G_{ref} is the irradiance at standard test condition (STC), that is $1000\,W/m^2$, I_{sc-ref} is the panel short-circuit current at STC. The temperature coefficient of short circuit current (K_i) and open circuit voltage (K_v) are readily available from the panel specification. The estimator depends on the series resistance of the PV (R_s) which is unaffected by environmental conditions. Also the terms I_{mpp} and V_{mpp} are the MPP current and voltage. Therefore with a suitable current and voltage sensor for sensing PV current, I_{pv} and voltage, V_{pv}, the solar estimate of solar irradiance, $\hat{G}$ can be obtained provided the PV system is operated at the MPP.

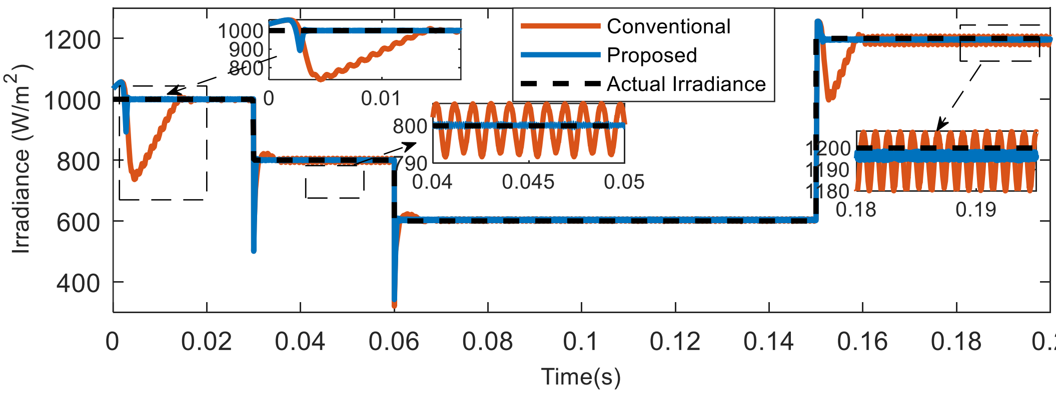

Figure 3. Simulations results of the estimators under fast changing irradiance and temperatures.

2. Results and Discussion

The proposed system is primality implemented in MATLAB/Simulink and verified via simulations and experiments. To position the performance of the estimator, it is compared against the conventional one proposed in [6]. For this, a 60W solar panel is adopted throughout the comparison [22]. The boost converter parameter are as follows: $L = 0.3mH$, $C_1 = C_2 = 37uF$, at the switching frequency of $250kHz$. The parameters of the controller are given as: $[k, K_1, K_2]$ =[47.1853, 13750, 10000]. The response of the estimators to fast changing irradiance and temperature is presented in Fig.3. It can be seen that both estimators show a noticeable performance in tracking the fast-changing irradiance. However, the proposed reveals a faster tracking performance, reduced steady-state ripples and better, resulting to a better estimation accuracy. To verify the obtain simulation outcome, an experimental set-up is mounted to record solar irradiance and temperature on the PV modules. The acquired data is used for a further assessment of the estimator as revealed in Fig. 4. It is evident that the proposed estimator agrees closely with the experimental irradiance than the conventional, confirming it superiority. The mean error of both estimators with reference to the actual experimental solar irradiance is computed, revealing a value of 3.4967% for the conventional against a record of 2.1911% for the proposed. Such a result further confirms the accuracy superiority of the suggested estimator

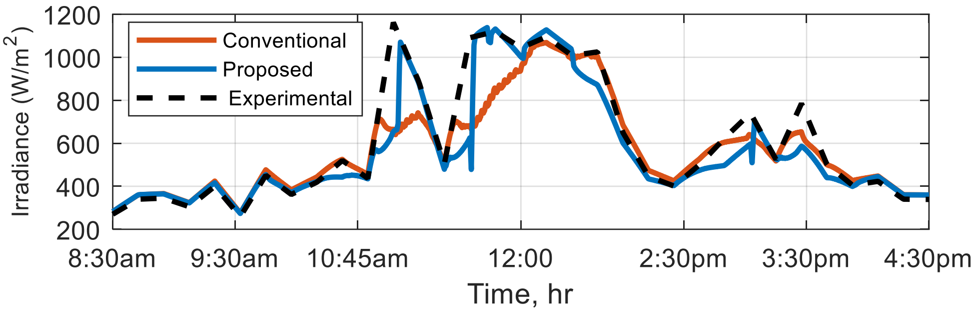

Figure 4. Experimental results of the estimators under real climatic conditions

2. Conclusion

An estimator of solar irradiance for PV systems operating at the maximum power point has been proposed in this paper. It was verified that it is possible to exploit the PV system operating at the maximum power point to compute the solar irradiance using a simple algebraic equation. The estimator equation requires the actual measurements of PV current and voltage, which can be easily sought using commercially available sensors. The operation of the PV system at the MPP was supervised using a H-INC-IBS controller. It was further confirmed that the estimator offers superior performance than a similar one driven by the conventional algorithm. The accuracy of the proposed estimator measured by the mean error was found to be 2.1911% as compared to the 3.4967% for the estimator based on the conventional MPPT algorithm. The effectiveness of the proposed estimator was further validated using some experiments under real environmental conditions.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable

Data Availability Statement: Data will be made available by the corresponding author upon request

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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