A Review of Existing Solar Panel Cleaning Systems

1 Devesh Tiwari , 2 Aditya Kulkarni, 3 Shubham Ghalsasi,
4 Mukund Kulkarni, 5 Rajani Sajjan, 6 Jagannath Nalavade
1,2,3,4,5,6Department of Computer Science and Engineering, MIT Art Design and Technology University, Pune, India
1deveshtiwari0652@gamil.com,
2aditya00003142462@gmail.com, 3ghalsasishubham@gamil.com,
4kmukund360@gmail.com, 5rajani.sajjan@mituniversity.edu.in, 6jagannath.nalavade@mituniversity.edu.in

Abstract

The accumulation of dust presents a substantial challenge to the efficiency of photovoltaic (PV) systems, leading to energy losses that can reach up to 50% in environments with heavy dust levels. This paper explores various automated solar panel cleaning solutions, with a focus on innovations such as Internet of Things (IoT)-enabled devices, mechanical cleaning technologies, and advanced methods like electrostatic cleaning and self-cleaning coatings. Automated solutions significantly reduce human intervention while conserving essential resources, proving particularly beneficial in areas facing water scarcity. Nonetheless, constraints such as water dependence, mechanical durability, and high initial implementation costs remain significant barriers. The integration of AI, IoT, and machine learning offers promising advancements for improved monitoring and operational efficiency. The study highlights the necessity of multidisciplinary collaborations to refine solar panel upkeep methods and enhance sustainable energy production across various regions.

Keywords— Photovoltaic systems, IoT, Arduino, Waterless systems, Electrostatic cleaning

Introduction

Solar photovoltaic (PV) technology is one of the prime drivers of worldwide renewable energy efforts, contributing significantly to driving growth in demand for cleaner energy sources. One of the classic drawbacks bearing on efficiency, however, is the presence of dust, which significantly degrades power generation potential. Scientists have presented a number of new solutions to address this, ranging from self-navigating robotic cleaning systems to waterless cleaning technologies and AI-based monitoring architectures. In this paper, these developments are analyzed in terms of applicability, environmental sustainability, and economic viability. Developments in IoT, microcontrollers, sensor networks, and machine learning algorithms have transformed solar panel maintenance, ranging from proactive monitoring to automated cleaning and real-time system diagnosis. Although these technologies facilitate improving efficiency, factors such as high installation cost, environmental adaptability, and mechanical wear remain to present challenges. The combination of IoT and AI holds much promise to overcome such challenges, opening the gates to region-based and scalable solutions to improve operational performance at the expense of maintaining affordability.

II. Literature Review

This paper outlines a fully automated and affordable robot system for solar panel cleaning. A mobile cleaning robot[1], with a rotatable brush, is able to travel independently over solar panels, brushing away contamination. Remote command and control for the robot come through a cloud-based interface[1], whilst a sensor module[1], in constant oversight of panel state, uses algorithms based on regression for predicting best times for cleaning.

Creating a robotic unit (illustrated as Figure 3D MODEL[1]) necessitates the usage of a stepper motor for translational movement, a PMDC (Permanent Magnet Direct Current) motor for rotating the brush, a control circuit housing, and solar-powered supply of energy. The device features a Particle Photon microprocessor for motor driving through its digital pins, and there is an onboard Wi-Fi module that offers cloud connectivity through wireless networks.

Sensors that are integrated with it track critical performance metrics for solar farms autonomously, give real-time status updates, and trigger cleaning cycles based on forecasting analytics if efficiency drops below specified levels. This offers a consistent power output with minimal human intervention[1][2][3][4].

Automatic Solar Panel Cleaning Syste

The primary objective of this project is to create and implement a micro-controller-based intelligent dust-cleaning system for solar panels. Based on Arduino-based programming, the system is automatically functional, with efficient dust cleaning and the aid of optimal solar panel performance.

The system comprises a set of components, such as a mild steel frame, aluminum L frames and channels, running lengths (rack), gear wheels, rubber wheels, DC gear motors, a rolling brush, an Arduino board, and driver boards. All of these components form a functional and efficient cleaning system[5][6][7].

The system works using a brush-driven mechanism controlled by Arduino. The cleaning brush moves both vertically and horizontally across the solar panels, powered by DC and gear motors[8][9][10]. Each complete cleaning cycle lasts 300 seconds, and once a panel array is fully cleaned, the system seamlessly moves to the next one, ensuring thorough and efficient operation.

Key Observations After Testing:

- i. Rack and pinion mechanism functioned as expected, operating smoothly.
- ii. Linear actuator system performed well and met all the required design criteria.
- iii. Cleaning brush effectively removed dust, though sticky dust posed a bit of a challenge.

Solar Panel Cleaning Bot For Enhancement of Efficiency

The paper introduces a handy robotic cleaning system designed specifically for solar panels. This innovative bot is built to adapt to different angles—from flat horizontal surfaces to completely vertical setups—ensuring thorough cleaning regardless of panel positioning[11][12][13]. At its core, the system is powered by an Arduino Uno R3 microcontroller, which seamlessly controls all its components. The goal is simple: to improve solar panel efficiency by removing dust and dirt, all while keeping costs low and streamlining the cleaning process.

This Solar Panel Cleaning Bot is designed with a moving cleaning head that sweeps across the panels with minimal manual effort and optimal water usage. A stainless steel rod and motorized trolleys guide its movement, ensuring precise cleaning action[14][15][16]. The bot is supported by a sturdy aluminum alloy frame, while a mild steel shaft, DC motor, and nylon fiber brushes take care of the scrubbing. These densely packed brushes rotate with the help of a securely mounted motor, and ball bearings ensure smooth operation. For mobility, the bot is equipped with polyolefin wheels and is easy to handle using a U-shaped aluminum grip[17][18]. It even includes copper nozzles for water spraying, which are fed through fiber-reinforced PVC pipes for efficient cleaning. The entire system is managed by the Arduino Uno R3 microcontroller (ATmega328P), which oversees the motor driver, LCD display, and solenoid valve functions. To keep everything running efficiently, the bot relies on a 12V Lipo battery, making it a practical and cost-effective solution for maintaining clean solar panels.

This compact, systematic device helps ensure solar panels remain in top condition, delivering consistent energy output without the hassle of excessive manual cleaning.

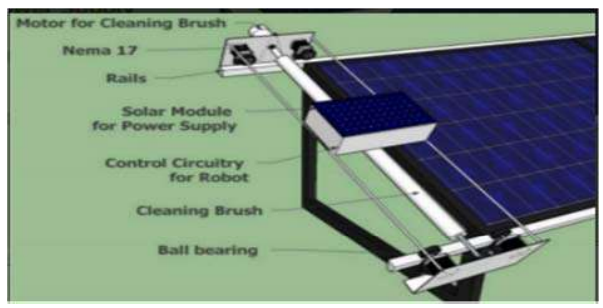

Figure 1. Cleaning system of solar panel

Smart Solar Panel Monitoring System

This article presents a new system that improves the efficiency of solar panels through real-time tracking and self-cleaning. By utilizing Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for dust and fault detection, the system guarantees panels to be high-performance and reliable. With sophisticated image processing and cloud connectivity, the solution optimizes solar energy output and is cost-effective and intelligent[18][19].

The system is constructed with a mix of Raspberry Pi, Arduino Uno, ESP32 Module, Voltage and Current Sensors, Dust Sensor, Raspberry Pi Camera Module, Servo Motor, LiPo Battery, Solenoid Valve, 16x2 LCD Display, Copper Nozzles, Nylon Fiber Brushes, Ball Bearings, and Bearing Housing—all in an attempt to keep solar panels at an efficient rate.

Important elements such as voltage and current sensors, integrated with Arduino and ESP32, continue to monitor data from solar panels[20][21]. IoT Dash receives data, enabling live monitoring and far-end analysis with cloud systems. Simultaneously, a Pi Camera Module-mounted Raspberry Pi snaps photos of the solar panels. OpenCV is used to analyze the images in order to determine micro-cracks, hotspots, and dust. In cases of dust, the system also automatically initiates a wiping action, energized by a servo motor, that cleans the solar panels without interference.

The system combines Arduino Uno with current and voltage sensors, sending information wirelessly via ESP32 to IoT Dash for real-time inspection. Furthermore, image processing methodologies with Raspberry Pi and Pi Cam module aid in detecting dust and damage. The servo motor automatically starts the cleaning process whenever needed, keeping the panels clean and efficient with very little maintenance.

This smart, automated system makes solar panel operation easier, more intelligent, and more efficient, greatly minimizing maintenance work while maximizing energy output.Automatic Solar Panel Cleaning System Based on Arduino for Dust Removal This article describes a new and water-conserving solar panel cleaning system, especially for regions with scarce water resources, like deserts. The system works in two easy steps: first, an exhaust fan removes dust particles from the surface of the panel, and subsequently, a wiper removes loose material.

This system does not use water whatsoever, thereby eliminating wastage and scratch protection for the panels. The system is made up of easily accessible components and has been extensively tested to confirm its efficiency and protection of the panels.

The device incorporates devices like Arduino Uno microcontroller, DC gear motor, motor driver module, wheels, LDR sensor, push button, fan, buck-boost converter, solar panel, and 7805 IC.

The cleaning process begins with a sunlight-tracking system controlled by an LDR sensor and microcontroller that turns the system on between 10-11 AM daily. A buck-boost converter offers a constant 12V DC power supply. Dust cleaning begins with an exhaust fan that collects loose particles, followed by a soft cloth wiper for fine cleaning. The cleaning shaft, powered by a DC gear motor, moves up and down on four motor-driven wheels. A motor driver module and relay switch ensure smooth coordination of motor and wiper movement. The microcontroller constantly monitors panel conditions, voltage, and current to ensure optimal cleaning processes. This system is designed to run efficiently with low power consumption, utilizing components such as the Arduino Uno and buck-boost converter to optimize solar power efficiency.

The Study of Dust Removal Using Electrostatic Cleaning System for Solar Panels

This research delves into electrostatic cleaning as an effective approach to tackle dust accumulation on photovoltaic (PV) solar panels—an essential component of renewable energy systems. Dust buildup can drastically reduce the performance of PV panels, especially in dry regions with high dust levels and minimal rainfall. Electrostatic cleaning employs high-voltage electric fields to efficiently remove over 90% of dust within minutes. This technique eliminates the need for water or abrasive materials, making it both cost-effective and energy-efficient.

Its advantages make it particularly suited for large-scale solar farms in areas facing water scarcity. As traditional cleaning methods often struggle with high costs, labor intensity, and environmental concerns, there is an increasing demand for innovative alternatives. While technologies such as self-cleaning nanocoatings and surface acoustic wave (SAW) systems show potential, their high expenses have limited their widespread use. Electrostatic cleaning emerges as a practical, energy-efficient, and sustainable solution that boosts the efficiency and lifespan of solar panels, even in the most challenging environments.A new intelligent system design for cleaning the photovoltaic solar panel surface.

This research emphasizes the powerful role of fuzzy logic in optimizing photovoltaic (PV) systems. Fuzzy logic, which simulates human decision-making processes and manages uncertain or ambiguous data, uses membership functions such as triangular or trapezoidal shapes to classify inputs and outputs based on environmental factors.

The proposed intelligent cleaning system employs an Arduino micro-controller and fuzzy logic algorithms to automate the maintenance of PV panels. By analyzing real-time data, including sunlight intensity, pollution levels, and panel efficiency, the system determines the best cleaning times and methods. Sensors gather the necessary data, and the fuzzy logic mechanism evaluates it to ensure optimal performance. This automated approach can increase energy output by 15% to 20%, while also lowering operational expenses.

Particularly advantageous for large-scale solar installations, this technology helps overcome critical challenges in renewable energy by boosting efficiency, promoting sustainability, and improving the cost-effectiveness of solar power generation.

III. Conclusion

This in-depth review addresses the developments in automated and intelligent solar panel cleaning systems, all with the goal of enhancing energy efficiency while addressing challenges such as dust buildup and environmental fluctuations. These sophisticated systems leverage cutting-edge technologies, including microcontrollers, image processing, and IoT platforms, to deliver accurate cleaning, monitor panel performance, and optimize operational timetables. From waterless cleaning systems designed for arid climates to designs that leverage electrostatic or fuzzy logic approaches, these systems address diverse environmental conditions and resource limitations. One of the standout features of these technologies is the integration of sensors, including ultrasonic, infrared, and weather sensors, with cloud-based dashboards. These facilitate real-time calibration and remote monitoring, ensuring scalability and resilience. Other standout developments include regression models for calculating cleaning requirements, CNN-based approaches for identifying panel damage, and energy-efficient motorized systems, all with the goal of sustainability and cost-effectiveness. There are, however, challenges to large-scale implementation, including high initial costs, reliance on stable internet connectivity, and limited effectiveness against hard or corner dust. Despite these challenges, these systems emphasize eco-friendly designs, reducing water consumption and using energy-efficient components. Overall, these developments represent a major leap forward in renewable energy optimization, driving innovation in sustainable photovoltaic technologies.

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