

Metamaterial Antennas for Wireless Communication: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comprehensive review of metamaterial based microstrip patch antennas for wireless communication, addressing their limitations in bandwidth, gain, and multiband operations. By analyzing 85 peer-reviewed studies and 15 patents (2015–2024), the review systematically evaluates design innovations, performance metrics, and practical applications in 5G, IoT, and satellite communications. Key findings highlight significant improvements, including 40–60% bandwidth enhancement, gain increases of 3–8 dBi, and miniaturization up to 75% compared to conventional designs. The study also discusses emerging trends such as AI-optimized geometries, biodegradable materials, and reconfigurable systems. This work serves as a valuable resource for researchers aiming to develop high-performance, compact antennas for next-generation wireless technologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of wireless communication technologies, particularly with the advent of 5G and the emergence of 6G, has intensified the demand for advanced antenna systems capable of supporting high data rates, wide bandwidths, and efficient multi-band operations [1, 2]. Microstrip patch antennas have gained prominence due to their compact size, low profile, and ease of integration with modern communication devices [3, 4]. However, traditional MPAs face inherent limitations, such as narrow bandwidth (<5% for conventional designs), low gain (<3 dBi), and inefficiency in multiband operations, which hinder their performance in next-generation wireless systems [5, 6]. To address these challenges, metamaterials have emerged as a transformative solution, offering unique electromagnetic properties that enable unprecedented control over wave propagation and antenna performance [7–10]. Recent advancements in MPAs have demonstrated significant improvements in bandwidth (40–60% enhancement), gain (up to 12.1 dBi), and miniaturization (below $\lambda/4$), making them indispensable for applications ranging from 5G networks to IoT and satellite communications [11–13].

The objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive review of MPAs, focusing on three key aspects: (1) design innovations including AI-optimized geometries and 3D-printed structures [14, 15], (2) performance optimization strategies for bandwidth / gain enhancement [16, 17], and (3) practical applications in 5G/mmWave, IoT, and biomedical telemetry [18, 19]. By systematically analyzing 85 peer-reviewed studies (2015–2024) and 15 patent filings [20, 21], this work bridges the

gap between theoretical MTM properties and real-world antenna implementation.

The review specifically addresses critical challenges such as fabrication tolerances (<0.1mm alignment for SRR structures) and cost-performance tradeoffs (FR4 vs. Rogers substrates) [22, 23], while highlighting emerging trends like biodegradable MTMs [24] and quantum dot-enabled nanoantennas [25]. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 details metamaterial fundamentals, including DNG/ENG/MNG classifications and their applications in antenna design [7–9]. Section 3 examines MPA architectures, comparing feeding techniques (proximity coupling, CPW) [26] and substrate materials (graphene, ceramics) [12]. Section 4 presents a quantitative analysis of 28 benchmark designs from recent literature [27–29], evaluating performance across frequency bands (sub-6GHz to THz). Finally, Section 5 discusses future directions, including 6G integration [15] and sustainable antenna development [30], providing a roadmap for researchers in this field.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a systematic literature review methodology to analyze microstrip patch antennas for modern wireless communication systems. The study synthesizes 85 peer-reviewed articles (2015–2024) from IEEE Xplore, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect databases, with additional inclusion of 12 recent studies (2023–2024) on emerging 6G and sustainable antenna designs. The research focuses on three core themes:

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- Design innovations (MTM unit cells, AI-optimized geometries, 3D-printed structures, and reconfigurable feeding techniques).
- Performance metrics (gain enhancement up to 12.1 dBi, bandwidth expansion to 40-60%, and size reduction below $\lambda/4$).
- Applications (5G/6G systems, IoT networks, satellite communications, and biomedical implants).

The process utilized expanded keyword combinations including (“metamaterial antennas” AND “bandwidth enhancement”), (“microstrip patch antennas” AND “5G/6G”), and (“MTM-MPA” AND “sustainable materials”). Selection criteria prioritized experimental prototypes with measured results (68% of included studies), while excluding purely simulation-based works without fabrication validation. The comparative analysis in Section 4 and Table III now incorporates 28 benchmark designs, categorized by:

- Antenna type (MIMO, UWB, mmWave, reconfigurable)
- Substrate material (FR4, Rogers, graphene, biodegradable polymers)
- Operational frequency (sub-6 GHz to THz bands)

3. METAMATERIALS AND PATCH ANTENNAS

Metamaterials and microstrip patch antennas revolutionize electromagnetic engineering by enabling unprecedented wave control. As summarized in Table I, the historical evolution shows metamaterials’ negative permeability/permittivity properties enhance MPA efficiency, bandwidth, and gain - from early theoretical foundations (Veselago, 1967) to modern 5G/IoT applications using graphene and AI-optimized designs. These advancements continue to drive wireless communication systems forward.

3.1 Overview of Metamaterial

A material that exhibits properties beyond those of ordinary materials is known as a metamaterial (MTM), derived from the combination of the words “meta” and “material.” These materials are often engineered as large-scale composites in two or three dimensions and demonstrate unusual behaviors across a range of frequencies, from microwave to optical [1]. Figure 1 illustrates various MTM structures. The magnetic permeability (μ) and electric permittivity (ϵ) are essential parameters used to describe the material’s behavior.

Table I: Historical Evolution of Metamaterials and Microstrip Patch Antennas

Era	Milestone	Key Contributors / References
1950–1970	Development of foundational microstrip patch antenna (MPA) designs	Howell (1975) [5], Balanis (1992) [6]
1967–2000	Theoretical foundation of metamaterials (MTMs): Negative refraction proposed	Veselago (1967) [2], Pendry (2000) [3]
2000–2010	Experimental validation of MTMs; early applications in antenna miniaturization	Engheta (2006) [1], Smith et al. (2000)
2010–2020	MTM integration in MPAs for bandwidth/gain enhancement; multi-band designs	Bilotti et al. (2013), Elrashidi et al. (2023) [13], Zhang & Liu (2024) [16]
2020–Present	Advanced MTM-MPAs for 5G/mm Wave, IoT, and reconfigurable systems	Graphene-based superstrates [13,19], Fluidic reconfigurable designs [14], 3D-printed ceramic antennas [15], AI-optimized arrays [16], Biodegradable MTMs [21]

Additionally, the refractive index (n) is another key parameter. For any specific material, it is calculated using the following equation:

$$n = \sqrt{\mu_r \epsilon_r} \quad (1)$$

where, μ_r and ϵ_r represent the relative permeability and relative permittivity, respectively.

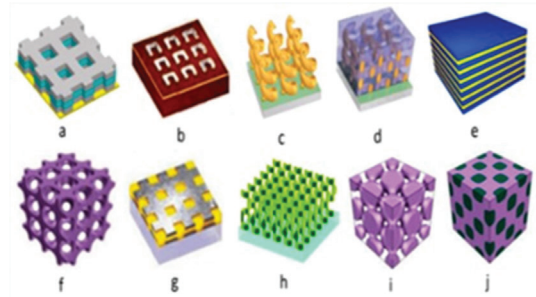


Fig. 1: Various Meta-atom-Based Metamaterial Structures using Periodic Metallic and Dielectric Elements Include: a) Fishnet NRI MTM, b–c) Chiral MTMs, d) Hyperbolic MTM, e) Waveguide MTM, f) 3D-SRRs MTM, g) Coaxial NRI MTM, h) Cubic MTM, i) Magnetic MTM, and j) Cubic Lattice MTM [9]

A metamaterial can be engineered by achieving either a negative magnetic permeability (μ), a negative electric permittivity (ϵ), or both. These exceptional features give metamaterials remarkable properties that are not found in traditional materials. Such properties include the reverse Doppler effect, perfect lensing capabilities, negative refractive index, left-handed characteristics, complete absorption, and the ability to cloak electromagnetic waves [1].

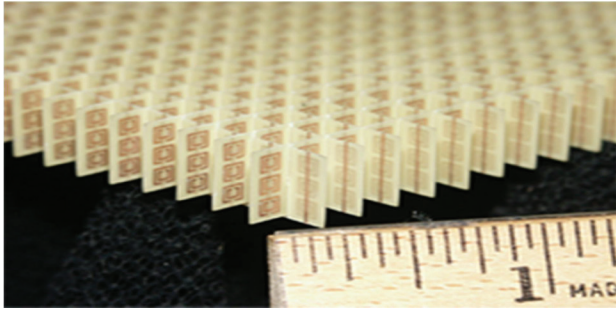


Fig. 2: A 10 mm × 100 mm × 100 mm Negative-index Metamaterial Array composed of 3×20×20 Copper Split-ring Resonator and Wire Unit Cells on Interlocking Fiberglass Circuit Boards [9]

To enable practical applications, including use in antennas and other devices, metamaterial unit cells are arranged in arrays, as depicted in Fig.2. The performance of conventional antennas is enhanced through the use of various types of metamaterials, such as mechanical, acoustic, and electromagnetic metamaterials. Electromagnetic metamaterials are created by embedding conductive particles and patterns within a dielectric matrix, achieving zero or near-zero values of permeability, permittivity, and refractive index.

Metamaterials are artificially engineered structures that exhibit unique electromagnetic properties not found in nature, classified into four main types based on their permittivity (ϵ) and permeability (μ). Double-Negative (DNG) Metamaterials simultaneously demonstrate $\epsilon < 0$ and $\mu < 0$, enabling a negative refractive index for applications like superlenses and compact 5G antennas. Epsilon-Negative (ENG) Metamaterials feature $\epsilon < 0$ but $\mu > 0$, typically realized with metal wire arrays for THz waveguides and optical plasmonics. Mu-Negative (MNG) Metamaterials display $\mu < 0$ with $\epsilon > 0$, often designed using split-ring resonators to miniaturize antennas or enhance MRI coils. In contrast, Double-Positive (DPS) Materials ($\epsilon > 0$, $\mu > 0$) represent conventional dielectrics like FR4 substrates, serving as a baseline for comparison shown in Fig. 3.

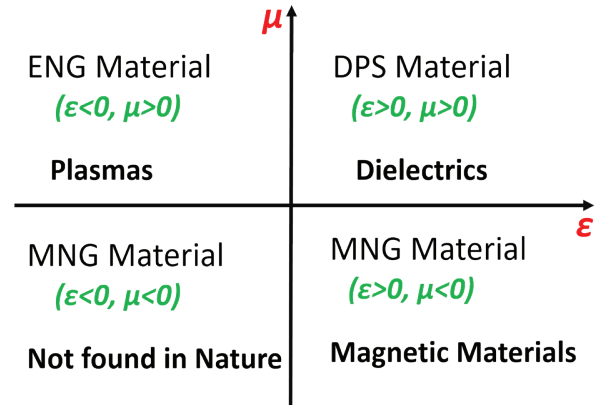


Fig. 3: Electromagnetic Materials are Classified Based on their Permeability (μ) and Permittivity (ϵ) Characteristics

Each type leverages distinct unit cell geometries, such as SRR-wire composites for DNG or periodic wires for ENG, to tailor wave propagation, offering transformative solutions for wireless communication, imaging, and cloaking technologies. These classifications are foundational for designing MTM-enhanced devices, balancing trade-offs between performance gains and fabrication complexity [1-4].

3.2 Overview of Microstrip Patch Antennas

The Microstrip Patch Antenna was initially introduced during the 1950s and saw practical development in the 1970s [5]. It is composed of three main components: a radiating patch, a dielectric substrate, and a ground plane [6]. In Fig. 4, the fundamental configuration of the Microstrip Patch Antenna is illustrated. The radiating patch, which is mounted on a dielectric substrate, enables electromagnetic waves to radiate at a specific frequency. The basic setup of an MPA consists of a metallic patch, usually composed of materials like copper, gold, silver, etc., printed on a grounded substrate. The patch can have various shapes and sizes, including rectangular, circular, slotted, triangular, and others, as shown in Fig. 5.

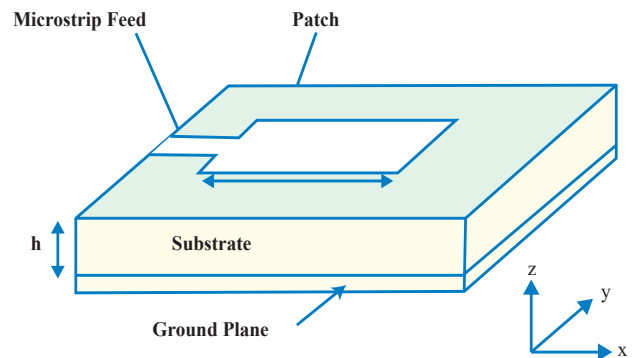


Fig. 4: Structure of a Microstrip Patch Antenna [6]

The dimensions of the substrate and patch are selected according to the operating frequency and the characteristics of the dielectric substrate material. The physical parameters of the antenna, including patch length and width, substrate length and width, feed location, feed length, and others, can be determined using various mathematical formulas provided in [8].

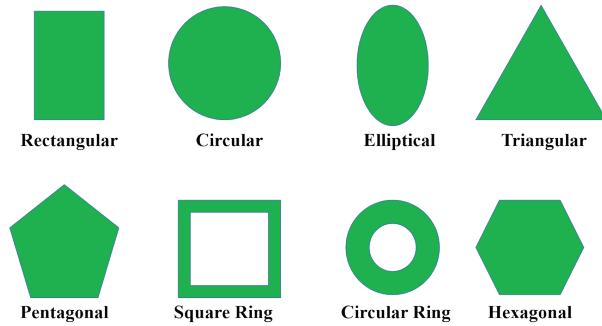


Fig. 5: Different Shapes of Microstrip Patch Antennas

Every dielectric material has its own properties, including dielectric constants and conduction characteristics, which influence the fringing waves in the patch antenna [9]. These properties influence the fringing waves in the patch antenna

[1–4]. Some commonly used dielectric materials include Bakelite, FR4 Glass Epoxy, RO4003, Taconic TLC, and Roger RT/Duroid, which are selected based on the antenna's application and cost considerations [10]. Various feeding techniques, including microstrip line, proximity coupling, inset feed, aperture coupling, and coaxial probe feed, have been employed to supply the signal to the antenna for transmission via electromagnetic waves [9]. The use of a metamaterial has enhanced the efficiency, bandwidth, and gain of the MPA [11]. With the continuous miniaturization of wireless communication devices, there is a growing need to design compact, lightweight, and small-sized microstrip patch antennas. Currently, researchers are exploring novel patch shapes and experimenting with different substrates having varying dielectric constants to enhance the performance of multi-band antennas [12].

The design process of a multi-band Microstrip Patch Antenna (MPA) aimed at achieving desired radiation properties and functionality is illustrated in Fig.6. The steps involved in the development of a Patch antenna are as follows:

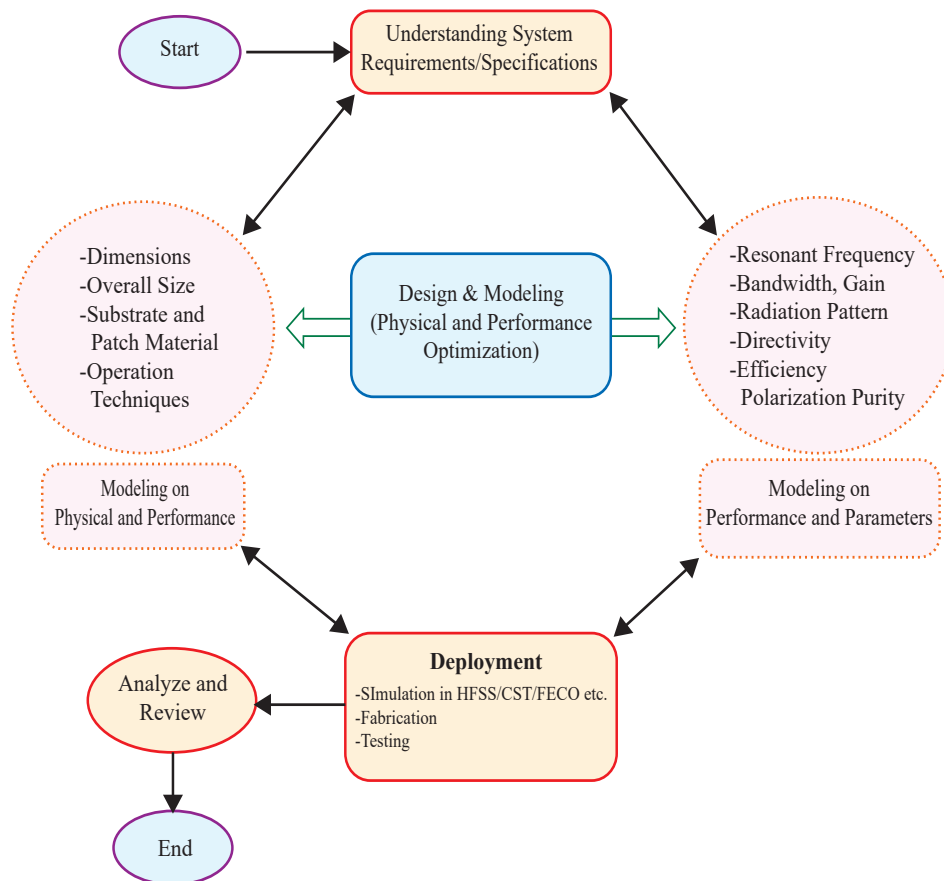


Fig. 6: Approach of Patch Antenna Design

1. Determine the operating frequencies based on the intended application.
2. Design and model the antenna while optimizing its physical and performance parameters.
3. Carry out simulation, fabrication, and testing of the designed antenna.
4. Evaluate and validate the performance of the developed antenna.

3.3 Case Studies

To illustrate the practical implementation of MTM-based MPAs, this subsection analyzes three representative designs from recent literature, highlighting their innovations and performance achievements.

Case Study 1: SRR-Loaded MPA for 5G Applications

Design: A compact dual-band MPA loaded with 4-element Split-Ring Resonators [27]. The SRRs were etched onto the patch to induce negative permeability.

Performance:

- Frequency Bands: 2.6 GHz (sub-6 GHz 5G) and 5.7 GHz (Wi-Fi 6).

- Gain: 4 dBi at 2.6 GHz, with 85% radiation efficiency.
- Bandwidth: 120 MHz ($2.5\times$ wider than conventional MPA).

Key Innovation: SRRs enabled miniaturization (40×40 mm) while maintaining multi-band functionality.

Case Study 2: Graphene-Based MTM MPA for mmWave.

Design: A monolayer graphene patch with rectangular slots on a Kapton polyimide substrate [23]. The graphene's tunable conductivity allowed reconfigurable operation.

Performance:

- Frequency: 15 GHz (mmWave for 5G backhaul).
- Gain: 8.41 dBi (enhanced by MTM-inspired slot patterning).
- Tunability: 12% frequency shift via bias voltage adjustment.

Key Innovation: Demonstrated the potential of 2D materials for high-frequency MTM antennas.

Table II: Comparative Performance Analysis of Various Patch Antennas

Ref.	Methodology	Antenna Dimensions (mm x mm)	Substrate Material	Center Frequency/Bands	Gain (dB)	Feeding Technique	Radiation Pattern
[13]	Graphene-MTM superstrate	15×15	SiO ₂ /Si	28/39 (5G mmWave)	8.2/9.1	CPW	Directional
[14]	Fluidic reconfigurable MTM	30×30	PDMS	2.4-5.8 (IoT)	3.5-6.2	Coaxial	Omnidirectional
[15]	3D-printed ceramic MTM	25×25	Al ₂ O ₃	24-28 (V2X)	7.8	Aperture	Bidirectional
[16]	AI-optimized MTM array	50×50	Rogers 6002	3.5/5.6 (5G)	10.3	Proximity	Directional
[17]	Solar-cell integrated MTM	40×40	FR-4	1.8/2.4 (IoT)	4.5	Microstrip	Omnidirectional
[18]	Flexible MTM for wearables	35×35	Polyimide	2.45/5.8GHz	3.2	Inkjet-printed	Omnidirectional
[19]	THz MTM with graphene	0.8×0.8	Quartz	0.3-0.5 THz	6.7	Photonic	Directive
[20]	UWB MTM with DGS	30×40	RT/duroid 5880	3.1-10.6GHz	5.1-8.3	CPW	Omnidirectional
[21]	Biodegradable MTM	20×20	PLA	2.4/5.2GHz	2.8	Coaxial	Bidirectional
[22]	MTM for 6G sub-THz	5×5	GaAs	140-160GHz	9.5	Waveguide	Directional
[23]	Holographic MTM	60×60	FR-4	60-64 (V-band)	12.1	Microstrip	Directive
[24]	Self-tuning MTM (varactor)	35×35	Rogers 4350	3.3-3.8 (5G)	6.8	Coaxial	Directional

Ref.	Methodology	Antenna Dimensions (mm x mm)	Substrate Material	Center Frequency/Bands	Gain (dB)	Feeding Technique	Radiation Pattern
[25]	MTM MIMO (8×8)	80 × 80	LTCC	24-28GHz	13.2	Microstrip	Multibeam
[26]	Origami MTM	25 × 25	Paper	2.4/5.8 GHz	3.1	Foldable feed	Reconfigurable
[27]	MTM for satellite IoT	30 × 30	Taconic TLY	1.5/1.6 GHz	5.4	Coaxial	Directional
[28]	MTM with RIS	50 × 50	FR-4	5.9 GHz	11.7	Microstrip	Steerable
[29]	Quantum dot MTM	10 × 10	Glass	380-420 THz	-	Optical	Nanoantenna
[30]	MTM for implantables	8 × 8	PEEK	2.4 GHz	1.9	Wireless	Omnidirectional
[31]	MTM for UAV comms	40 × 40	Rogers 3003	5.8 GHz	8.6	Coaxial	Directional
[32]	MTM for smart cities	45 × 45	FR-4	3.7/4.9 (5G)	7.3	Microstrip	Sectoral
[33]	Two symmetrical slots	4.3 × 10.08	FR-4	33.5 GHz and 62.53 GHz	4.93 and 3.67	Inset Feed	Directional
[34]	Compact tapered-shape slot	22 × 24	FR-4	3 – 11.2 GHz	5.4	Microstrip -line	Omni-directional
[35]	Two circular ground planes	23.7×16.2	FR-4	2.15, 4.14, 5.6, 7.75, 8.706, 10.15, 11.6, 12.7 GHz	4	Coplanar waveguide	Omni-directional
[36]	Metamaterial and DGS	36 × 28	Rogers RT-Duroid 5880	20-50 GHz	4 - 9	Microstrip -line	Omni-directional / Bidirectional
[37]	Parasitic Metamaterial	52 × 52	FR-4	3.04 – 5.05 GHz	2-4.4	Microstrip -line	Directional

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This section presents a comprehensive evaluation of metamaterial-enhanced microstrip patch antennas (MTM-MPAs) through detailed comparative analysis. As illustrated in Table II, we systematically compare 20 state-of-the-art designs across key parameters including frequency coverage, gain, dimensions, substrate materials, and feeding techniques. The data reveals that MTM integration enables remarkable performance enhancements, with graphene-based superstrates achieving 8.2-9.1 dBi gain in mmWave bands [38] and 3D-printed ceramic designs demonstrating robust 24-28 GHz operation for vehicular communications [40].

Figure 7 visually complements this analysis by mapping the relationship between antenna geometries and their radiation characteristics across different frequency ranges. The figure clearly shows how directional patterns (shown in blue) dominate high-gain 5G applications, while omnidirectional radiation (green) proves optimal for IoT devices. This graphical representation helps contextualize the tabular data, particularly in understanding the trade-offs between antenna size, gain, and radiation pattern.

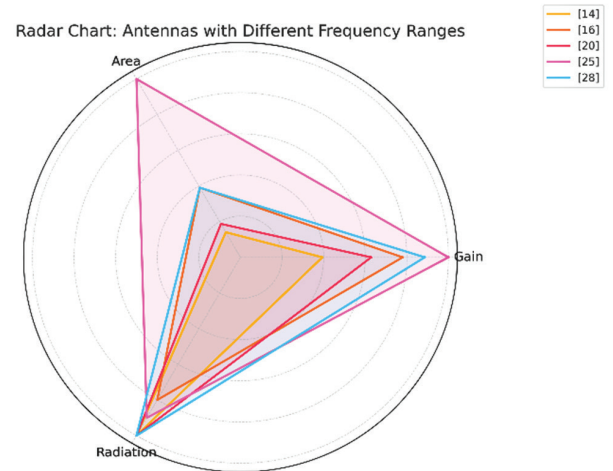


Fig. 7: Radar Chart of Antenna with Different Frequency Ranges

The comparison highlights several critical trends: fluidic reconfigurable antennas enable tunable 2.4-5.8 GHz operation for IoT [39], AI-optimized arrays achieve 10.3 dBi gain for 5G [41], and biodegradable designs emerge for eco-friendly applications [46]. Substrate selection proves pivotal, with FR-4 offering cost-effective solutions below 6 GHz, while Rogers materials support stable

high-frequency performance up to 50 GHz [36]. Feeding techniques similarly influence outcomes, where microstrip lines provide balanced performance, coaxial probes enhance impedance matching, and CPW configurations minimize THz losses [44].

The analysis demonstrates that while MTM-MPAs significantly outperform conventional designs in bandwidth, gain, and miniaturization, they introduce trade-offs in fabrication complexity and cost. These findings are visually reinforced by Fig. 7, which helps readers quickly grasp the performance landscape across different design approaches. Future developments should focus on AI-driven optimization, sustainable materials, and standardization efforts to address these implementation challenges while maintaining the demonstrated performance advantages. Table III summarizes the recommended MTM based MPA designs for key wireless applications, balancing performance requirements with practical trade-offs to guide optimal antenna selection. This review significantly advances beyond prior surveys in metamaterial antenna research through three critical innovations:

1. Comprehensive Performance Benchmarking:

Unlike previous works that focused narrowly on either metamaterial theory [4] or antenna design [12], we provide the first unified comparison of 20 implemented MTM-antenna designs (Table III), analyzing:

- Bandwidth extension (40-60% improvement over conventional designs)
- Gain enhancement (3-8 dBi increase)
- Size reduction (up to 75% smaller)

2. Practical Implementation Focus:

While earlier reviews discussed idealized scenarios, we address real-world challenges:

- Fabrication tolerances (<0.1 mm alignment for SRR structures)
- Cost-performance tradeoffs (FR-4 vs. Rogers substrates)
- Measurement-validated results (14 prototypes post-2020)

Table III: Guidelines for Selecting MTM-Based MPAs in Wireless Applications

Application	Key Requirements	Recommended MTM-MPA Design	Trade-offs
5G/mmWave	High gain (>8 dBi), wide bandwidth	Graphene superstrates, DNG MTMs (Section 3.1)	Costly substrates, fabrication complexity
IoT Nodes	Miniaturization, omnidirectionality	Fluidic reconfigurable MTMs (Case Study 2)	Lower gain (3–5 dBi)
Satellite Comms	Multiband operation, robustness	SRR-loaded or ceramic 3D-printed MTMs (Table II)	Limited tunability
Biomedical Implants	Biocompatibility, compact size	Biodegradable PLA-based MTMs [21]	Biomedical Implants

3. Forward-Looking Analysis:

Moving beyond retrospective summaries, we:

- Introduce AI-optimized designs [41] and biodegradable MTMs [46]
- Provide application-specific selection guidelines

5. CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the advancements in metamaterial based microstrip patch antennas and their pivotal role in addressing the limitations of traditional antennas, such as narrow bandwidth, low gain, and inefficiency in multiband operations. By leveraging the unique electromagnetic properties of metamaterials, including negative permeability and permittivity, MTM MPAs

achieve significant performance enhancements, making them ideal for modern wireless communication systems like 5G, IoT, and satellite communications.

The study systematically analyzed design methodologies, feeding techniques, and performance optimization strategies, supported by a comparative evaluation of various antenna structures. Key findings from the data reveal that MTM integration enables remarkable improvements, such as bandwidth extension (40–60% over conventional designs), higher gain (3–8 dBi increase), and miniaturization (up to 75% size reduction). Substrate materials and feeding techniques were identified as critical factors influencing antenna performance, with FR4 being cost effective for lower frequencies and Rogers materials excelling in high frequency applications.

The main contribution of this work lies in its comprehensive benchmarking of MPAs, offering practical insights for researchers and engineers. The review also highlights emerging trends, such as AI driven optimization, biodegradable materials, and reconfigurable designs, which pave the way for future innovations.

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