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Performance and Analysis of PWM Strategy with PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

Seema Bai Meena[1*], Lokesh Meena[2]

[1]*Department of Electrical Engineering, Rajasthan Technical University Kota, Rajasthan, India.*

[2]*Department of Electrical engineering, Govt. Engineering College, Baran, Rajasthan,India.*

**Corresponding author:* *Seema Bai Meena,Department of Electrical Engineering, Rajasthan Technical University Kota, Rajasthan, India.*

Abstract : The increasing demand for renewable energy sources has led to significant advancements in power electronics, particularly in the development of multilevel inverters. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) strategies implemented in a photovoltaic (PV)-based multilevel hybrid inverter. The integration of PV systems with multilevel inverters offers a promising solution to enhance the efficiency and reliability of renewable energy systems. This study explores various PWM techniques, including Sinusoidal PWM (SPWM), Space Vector PWM (SVPWM), and Selective Harmonic Elimination PWM (SHEPWM), focusing on their performance in terms of total harmonic distortion (THD), switching losses, and overall efficiency. A detailed simulation model of the PV-based multilevel hybrid inverter is developed using MATLAB/Simulink to evaluate the performance of different PWM strategies under varying operating conditions. The hybrid inverter topology combines the advantages of cascaded H-bridge and flying capacitor multilevel inverters, providing improved voltage levels and reduced harmonic content. The simulation results demonstrate that the SHEPWM strategy offers the lowest THD, while SVPWM provides a good balance between efficiency and switching losses. Moreover, this paper discusses the impact of environmental factors such as irradiance and temperature on the performance of the PV system and the hybrid inverter. The experimental validation of the simulation results is conducted using a laboratory-scale prototype, confirming the effectiveness of the proposed PWM strategies in real-world applications. The findings highlight the potential of PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters in enhancing the performance and reliability of solar power systems, paving the way for their wider adoption in renewable energy applications.

Keywords: Pulse Width Modulation (PWM), Multilevel Inverter, Photovoltaic (PV) Systems, Total Harmonic Distortion (THD), Hybrid Inverter

Introduction

The transition towards sustainable energy systems has led to an increased focus on the integration of renewable energy sources into the power grid. Among various renewable energy technologies, photovoltaic (PV) systems have gained significant attention due to their abundant availability and declining costs. However, the efficient conversion of solar energy into usable electrical power poses several technical challenges, primarily related to power quality and conversion efficiency. In this context, multilevel inverters have emerged as a promising solution to address these challenges by providing higher voltage levels and reduced harmonic distortion. Multilevel inverters, characterized by their ability to generate output voltages with multiple levels, offer significant advantages over traditional two-level inverters. These advantages include improved power quality, lower electromagnetic interference (EMI), and reduced voltage stress on power electronic components. The hybrid multilevel inverter topology, which combines the features of cascaded H-bridge and flying capacitor inverters, further enhances these benefits by providing greater flexibility in voltage level generation and improved reliability. Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) techniques play a crucial role in the performance of multilevel inverters. PWM strategies determine the switching patterns of the inverter's power devices, directly influencing the output voltage quality, harmonic content, and overall efficiency. Various PWM techniques, such as Sinusoidal PWM (SPWM), Space Vector PWM (SVPWM), and Selective Harmonic Elimination PWM (SHEPWM), have been developed to optimize the performance of multilevel inverters. Each of these techniques offers distinct advantages and trade-offs in terms of total harmonic distortion (THD), switching losses, and computational complexity. This paper aims to provide a detailed performance analysis of different PWM strategies implemented in a PV-based multilevel hybrid inverter. By leveraging the strengths of both cascaded H-bridge and flying capacitor topologies, the proposed hybrid inverter is expected to achieve superior performance in terms of voltage quality and efficiency. The study involves the development of a comprehensive simulation model using MATLAB/Simulink, which is used to evaluate the performance of various PWM strategies under different operating conditions. Additionally, the impact of environmental factors such as irradiance and temperature on the performance of the PV system and the hybrid inverter is investigated. The simulation results are validated through experimental testing using a laboratory-scale prototype, ensuring the practical applicability of the proposed PWM strategies. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the design and optimization of PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters, highlighting their potential for enhancing the performance and reliability of solar power systems.

Literature Review

The development and optimization of multilevel inverters (MLIs) have been an active area of research due to their significant advantages in improving the performance of power electronic systems, particularly in renewable energy applications. This literature review explores the key advancements in MLI topologies, PWM strategies, and their integration with photovoltaic (PV) systems.

Multilevel Inverter Topologies

Multilevel inverters have evolved significantly since their inception, offering various topologies that enhance voltage levels and reduce harmonic distortion. The seminal work by Lai and Peng (1996) introduced multilevel converters as a new breed of power converters, emphasizing their potential for high-power applications. The primary topologies include the diode-clamped (neutral point clamped), flying capacitor, and cascaded H-bridge inverters.

Diode-Clamped Inverter: Meynard and Foch (1992) presented the concept of multilevel conversion using high voltage choppers and voltage-source inverters, laying the groundwork for the diode-clamped topology. This topology uses diodes to clamp the voltage levels, providing a step-like output waveform that reduces harmonic distortion. It is widely used in industrial applications due to its simplicity and reliability.

Flying Capacitor Inverter: Tolbert, Peng, and Habetler (1999) highlighted the flying capacitor topology, which uses capacitors to generate multiple voltage levels. This topology offers improved voltage balancing capabilities but requires a complex control strategy to manage the capacitor voltages effectively.

Cascaded H-Bridge Inverter: The cascaded H-bridge inverter, as detailed by Rodriguez, Lai, and Peng (2002), consists of multiple H-bridge cells connected in series, each producing a separate voltage level. This topology is particularly advantageous in renewable energy applications due to its modular structure and scalability.

Hybrid Topologies: More recent research, such as the work by Najafi, Yatim, and Elias (2012), has focused on hybrid multilevel inverters that combine features of different topologies to leverage their respective advantages. These hybrid inverters aim to provide higher voltage levels, improved efficiency, and reduced harmonic content, making them suitable for integration with PV systems.

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) Strategies

PWM techniques are crucial in determining the performance of MLIs, directly impacting the output voltage quality, harmonic distortion, and switching losses. Several PWM strategies have been developed to optimize MLI performance:

Sinusoidal PWM (SPWM): SPWM is one of the most commonly used techniques due to its simplicity and effectiveness in reducing harmonics. McGrath and Holmes (2002) explored various multicarrier PWM strategies, emphasizing SPWM's ability to produce a sinusoidal output voltage with low harmonic distortion.

Space Vector PWM (SVPWM): SVPWM, as discussed by Gupta and Khambadkone (2006), offers a more sophisticated approach by representing the inverter states as vectors in a two-dimensional plane. This technique optimizes the use of the DC bus voltage, resulting in better performance in terms of THD and efficiency.

Selective Harmonic Elimination PWM (SHEPWM): SHEPWM, highlighted by Rodriguez et al. (2005), involves pre-calculating switching angles to eliminate specific harmonics. This technique provides excellent harmonic performance but requires complex computations and is sensitive to parameter variations.

Hybrid PWM Techniques: Recent studies, such as those by Nguyen, Nguyen, and Lee (2012), have focused on hybrid PWM techniques that combine elements of different strategies to achieve a balance between performance and computational complexity. These techniques are particularly useful in MLIs for renewable energy systems, where efficiency and power quality are critical.

Integration with Photovoltaic Systems

The integration of PV systems with MLIs presents unique challenges and opportunities. PV systems generate DC power, which must be efficiently converted to AC for grid connection or local use. MLIs are well-suited for this task due to their ability to handle high power levels and produce high-quality AC output.

Impact of Environmental Factors: The performance of PV-based MLIs is influenced by environmental factors such as irradiance and temperature. Studies like those by Saeedifard and Iravani (2010) and Chithra and Jeevananthan (2013) have investigated the effects of these factors on MLI performance, emphasizing the need for robust control strategies to maintain efficiency and power quality under varying conditions.

Simulation and Experimental Validation: The effectiveness of different PWM strategies in PV-based MLIs has been extensively studied through simulation and experimental validation. For instance, Kouro et al. (2010) and Abu-Rub et al. (2010) developed detailed simulation models to evaluate the performance of various PWM techniques, while Rodriguez et al. (2007) validated these models using laboratory-scale prototypes.

Emerging Trends: Recent research has focused on optimizing the integration of MLIs with PV systems to enhance their overall performance. This includes the development of advanced control algorithms, hybrid topologies, and improved PWM strategies tailored for renewable energy applications.

The literature on multilevel inverters and PWM strategies highlights significant advancements in improving the performance and efficiency of power electronic systems, particularly in renewable energy applications. The integration of PV systems with MLIs offers a promising solution for enhancing the reliability and power quality of solar energy systems. Ongoing research continues to refine these technologies, exploring new topologies, control strategies, and PWM techniques to meet the growing demand for sustainable and efficient energy solutions.

PWM Strategy for Multilevel Inverters

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) is a critical control technique used in multilevel inverters (MLIs) to manage the output voltage and improve power quality. PWM strategies determine the switching patterns of the power electronic devices within the inverter, directly affecting the output waveform, harmonic distortion, and overall efficiency. This section provides a detailed overview of various PWM strategies employed in MLIs, including their principles, advantages, and challenges.

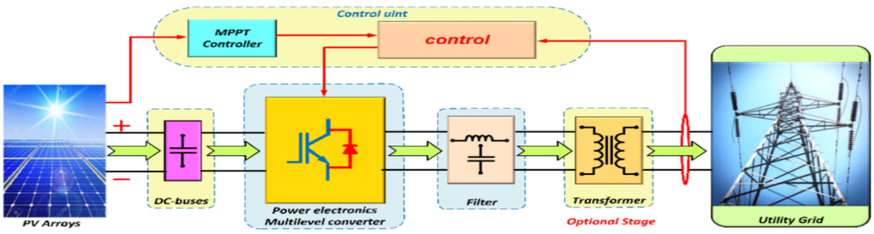

Fig.1: A photovoltaic (PV) system with power electronics and the needed control.

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1. Sinusoidal PWM (SPWM)

Principle: Sinusoidal PWM (SPWM) is one of the most widely used modulation techniques for MLIs. In SPWM, a sinusoidal reference waveform is compared with a high-frequency triangular carrier waveform. The intersection points between the reference and carrier waveforms determine the switching instants of the inverter switches. For a multilevel inverter, multiple carrier waveforms are used, each corresponding to different voltage levels.

Advantages:

- **Simplicity:** SPWM is relatively simple to implement and requires minimal computational resources.
- **Harmonic Reduction:** By modulating the output voltage to follow a sinusoidal pattern, SPWM effectively reduces lower-order harmonics in the output waveform.
- **Flexibility:** It can be easily adapted for different inverter topologies and voltage levels.

Challenges:

- **Switching Losses:** The high switching frequency of the carrier waveform can lead to significant switching losses.
- **Complexity in Multilevel Implementation:** For higher-level inverters, managing multiple carrier waveforms can become complex.

2. Space Vector PWM (SVPWM)

Principle: Space Vector PWM (SVPWM) is a more sophisticated modulation technique that represents the inverter's output voltages as vectors in a two-dimensional plane. The SVPWM method divides the plane into sectors, and the reference voltage vector is synthesized by switching between the nearest vectors (switching states) that define the vertices of these sectors.

Advantages:

- **DC Bus Utilization:** SVPWM can utilize the DC bus voltage more effectively, resulting in a higher output voltage.
- **Lower THD:** SVPWM typically produces lower Total Harmonic Distortion (THD) compared to SPWM.
- **Improved Efficiency:** The optimal switching pattern reduces switching losses and enhances overall efficiency.

Challenges:

- **Complex Implementation:** SVPWM requires more complex calculations and control logic, which can increase the computational burden.
- **Sensitivity to Parameter Variations:** The performance of SVPWM can be affected by variations in system parameters, such as DC bus voltage and load conditions.

3. Selective Harmonic Elimination PWM (SHEPWM)

Principle: Selective Harmonic Elimination PWM (SHEPWM) aims to eliminate specific lower-order harmonics by pre-calculating the switching angles. These angles are determined through solving nonlinear transcendental equations that correspond to the desired harmonic elimination and fundamental voltage requirements.

Advantages:

- **Harmonic Control:** SHEPWM can precisely eliminate specific harmonics, resulting in a clean output waveform.
- **Reduced Switching Frequency:** By focusing on specific switching angles, SHEPWM can reduce the overall switching frequency, minimizing switching losses.

Challenges:

- **Complexity in Angle Calculation:** The calculation of switching angles involves solving complex nonlinear equations, which can be computationally intensive.
- **Sensitivity to Parameter Changes:** The pre-determined angles are sensitive to changes in operating conditions, such as load variations and DC bus voltage fluctuations.

4. Hybrid PWM Techniques

Principle: Hybrid PWM techniques combine elements of different PWM strategies to leverage their respective advantages while mitigating their drawbacks. These techniques can involve the use of SPWM and SVPWM in different operating modes or integrating SHEPWM with other modulation methods to balance harmonic elimination and switching losses.

Advantages:

- **Adaptive Performance:** Hybrid PWM techniques can adapt to different operating conditions, optimizing performance across various scenarios.
- **Balanced Trade-offs:** By combining different strategies, hybrid techniques can achieve a good balance between harmonic performance, efficiency, and computational complexity.

Challenges:

- **Implementation Complexity:** The integration of multiple PWM strategies requires sophisticated control algorithms and can increase the complexity of the inverter control system.
- **Tuning and Optimization:** Achieving the optimal balance between different PWM strategies often requires careful tuning and optimization, which can be time-consuming.

Comparative Analysis

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the different PWM strategies, a comparative analysis is essential. This analysis focuses on key performance metrics such as Total Harmonic Distortion (THD), switching losses, computational complexity, and adaptability to different inverter topologies.

Total Harmonic Distortion (THD):

- **SPWM:** Moderate THD, effective for basic harmonic reduction.
- **SVPWM:** Lower THD compared to SPWM due to optimized switching patterns.
- **SHEPWM:** Very low THD with targeted harmonic elimination.
- **Hybrid PWM:** Can achieve low THD by combining the strengths of multiple strategies.

Switching Losses:

- **SPWM:** High switching losses due to high carrier frequency.
- **SVPWM:** Lower switching losses with optimized vector switching.
- **SHEPWM:** Reduced switching losses by minimizing the switching frequency.
- **Hybrid PWM:** Balanced switching losses through adaptive strategy selection.

Computational Complexity:

- **SPWM:** Low complexity, suitable for simple applications.
- **SVPWM:** High complexity due to vector calculations and sector determination.
- **SHEPWM:** High complexity from solving nonlinear equations.

- **Hybrid PWM:** Variable complexity depending on the combination of strategies used.

Adaptability:

- **SPWM:** Highly adaptable to different topologies and voltage levels.
- **SVPWM:** Suitable for high-performance applications with specific parameter tuning.
- **SHEPWM:** Requires precise parameter control, less adaptable to dynamic changes.
- **Hybrid PWM:** Highly adaptable by leveraging multiple strategies to meet varying requirements.

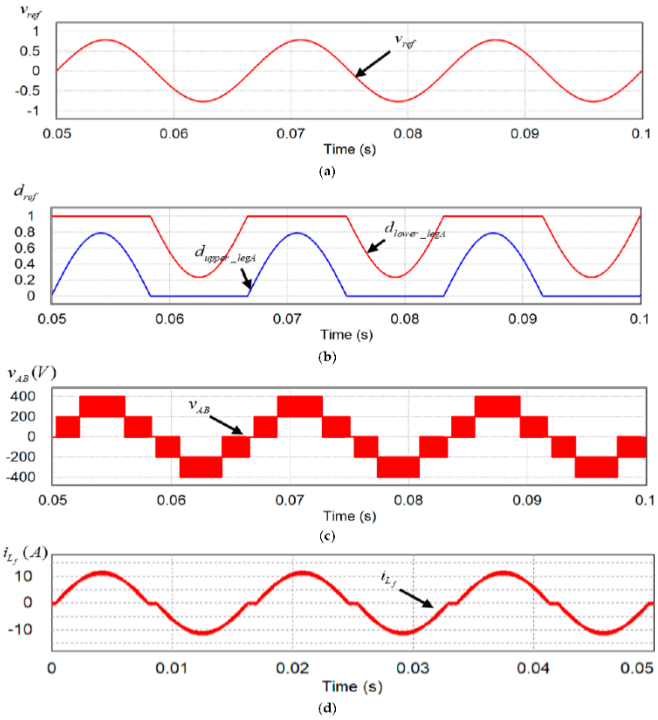

Fig.2: PWM Output

PWM strategies are vital for the optimal performance of multilevel inverters, particularly in renewable energy applications such as PV systems. Each PWM technique offers unique advantages and faces specific challenges. Understanding these trade-offs is essential for selecting and implementing the most appropriate PWM strategy for a given application. Ongoing research continues to explore innovative PWM techniques and hybrid approaches to enhance the efficiency, reliability, and power quality of multilevel inverters in the context of sustainable energy systems.

PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

The integration of photovoltaic (PV) systems with multilevel inverters (MLIs) has emerged as a promising solution to improve the efficiency, reliability, and power quality of renewable energy systems. A PV-based multilevel hybrid inverter combines the benefits of multiple inverter topologies to maximize the advantages of each, resulting in superior performance. This section delves into the structure, operation, and benefits of PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters.

Structure of PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

A PV-based multilevel hybrid inverter typically combines the features of cascaded H-bridge and flying capacitor or diode-clamped topologies to create a more efficient and flexible system. The basic structure of such an inverter includes:

1. **PV Array:** The PV array consists of multiple solar panels connected in series and parallel configurations to generate the desired voltage and current levels. The DC output from the PV array serves as the input to the inverter.

2. **DC-DC Converter:** This stage is often used to regulate the DC voltage from the PV array and maximize the power extraction using Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT) algorithms. The converter adjusts the operating point of the PV array to ensure it operates at its maximum power point under varying environmental conditions.

3. **Multilevel Inverter Stages:**

- **Cascaded H-Bridge (CHB):** This stage consists of several H-bridge inverter cells connected in series. Each H-bridge cell is powered by a separate DC source, which can be derived from the PV array or a DC-DC converter. The CHB stage generates multiple voltage levels by switching the H-bridge cells in a coordinated manner.

- **Flying Capacitor or Diode-Clamped Stage:** This stage is added to enhance the number of voltage levels and improve voltage balancing. Flying capacitor inverters use capacitors to generate intermediate voltage levels, while diode-clamped inverters use diodes for the same purpose.

4. **Control System:** The control system manages the operation of the inverter, ensuring optimal performance and stability. It includes PWM controllers, MPPT algorithms, and protection mechanisms to handle faults and ensure safe operation.

Operation of PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

The operation of a PV-based multilevel hybrid inverter involves several key steps:

1. **DC Voltage Regulation:** The DC-DC converter regulates the output voltage from the PV array and implements MPPT to ensure maximum power extraction. The regulated DC voltage is then supplied to the multilevel inverter stages.

2. **Multilevel Voltage Synthesis:** The cascaded H-bridge stage synthesizes the AC output voltage by switching the H-bridge cells in a coordinated manner. Each H-bridge cell generates a stepped voltage waveform, and the combination of these waveforms produces a high-quality AC output with multiple voltage levels.

3. **Voltage Balancing and Harmonic Reduction:** The flying capacitor or diode-clamped stage further refines the output voltage by adding intermediate voltage levels. This reduces the total harmonic distortion (THD) and improves the power quality.

4. **PWM Control:** The control system employs various PWM strategies to optimize the switching patterns of the inverter. Techniques like SPWM, SVPWM, and SHEPWM are used to minimize THD, reduce switching losses, and improve overall efficiency.

5. **Grid Synchronization:** If the inverter is connected to the grid, synchronization mechanisms ensure that the output voltage and frequency match the grid parameters. This involves phase-locked loops (PLLs) and other synchronization algorithms.

Benefits of PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

1. **Improved Efficiency:** By combining multiple inverter topologies, hybrid inverters can achieve higher efficiency compared to single-topology inverters. The cascaded H-bridge stage provides high voltage levels with low switching losses, while the flying capacitor or diode-clamped stage enhances voltage balancing and reduces harmonics.

2. **Reduced Harmonic Distortion:** The multilevel structure of hybrid inverters results in a stepped output voltage waveform that closely approximates a sinusoidal waveform. This significantly reduces THD, improving the power quality and reducing the need for additional filtering.

3. **Modular Design:** The modular nature of the cascaded H-bridge topology allows for easy scalability and maintenance. Additional H-bridge cells can be added to increase the voltage levels or replace faulty cells without affecting the overall system performance.
4. **Enhanced Reliability:** Hybrid inverters benefit from the redundancy and fault tolerance provided by multiple inverter stages. If one stage fails, the other stages can continue to operate, ensuring uninterrupted power supply.
5. **Optimal MPPT Performance:** The DC-DC converter stage with MPPT ensures that the PV array operates at its maximum power point under varying environmental conditions, maximizing energy harvest and system efficiency.
6. **Flexibility in Topology:** The combination of different inverter stages allows for greater flexibility in system design. This enables the integration of various renewable energy sources and storage systems, making hybrid inverters suitable for diverse applications.

Applications of PV-Based Multilevel Hybrid Inverter

1. **Grid-Connected PV Systems:** Hybrid inverters are widely used in grid-connected PV systems to convert the DC output from the PV array into high-quality AC power for grid injection. Their high efficiency and low THD make them ideal for maintaining grid stability and power quality.
2. **Off-Grid and Hybrid Systems:** In off-grid and hybrid PV systems, hybrid inverters manage the power flow between the PV array, battery storage, and local loads. Their modular design and high reliability ensure a continuous power supply, even in remote locations.
3. **Large-Scale Solar Farms:** In large-scale solar farms, PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters are used to handle the high power levels generated by extensive PV arrays. Their scalability and efficiency make them suitable for utility-scale applications.
4. **Microgrids:** Hybrid inverters play a crucial role in microgrids by integrating multiple renewable energy sources and managing power distribution. Their ability to operate in both grid-connected and islanded modes enhances the flexibility and resilience of microgrids.

Future Scope

PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters represent a significant advancement in the field of power electronics and renewable energy systems. By combining the strengths of various inverter topologies, these hybrid inverters offer superior performance in terms of efficiency, power quality, and reliability. Their application in PV systems, both grid-connected and off-grid, highlights their potential to support the transition to sustainable energy solutions. Ongoing research and development continue to refine these technologies, aiming to further enhance their performance and broaden their application scope in the evolving energy landscape. The future scope of PWM strategies in PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters holds immense potential for advancing renewable energy systems. One significant area is the development of advanced control algorithms incorporating machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies can enable adaptive control strategies that optimize PWM patterns in real-time, accounting for varying environmental conditions and load demands, and enhance predictive maintenance for higher reliability. Nonlinear control techniques such as sliding mode control (SMC), fuzzy logic, and neural networks can also be explored to improve robustness and dynamic performance. Enhanced PWM strategies are another critical focus. Dynamic hybrid PWM techniques that can switch between different PWM strategies based on real-time performance metrics can optimize efficiency and power quality. Additionally, advanced versions of selective harmonic elimination PWM (SHEPWM) can dynamically adjust to mitigate a broader range of harmonics under different operating conditions. Multi-objective PWM optimization can balance the trade-offs between total harmonic distortion (THD) reduction, efficiency, and switching losses, and improve the integration of energy storage systems like batteries or supercapacitors. Inverter topologies can be further optimized by developing new configurations such as modular multilevel converters (MMCs) and asymmetric multilevel inverters. These topologies can offer superior scalability and performance while reducing component count. Integrating emerging technologies, such as wide bandgap semiconductors (like SiC and GaN) and 3D

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printed inverter components, can lead to higher switching frequencies, improved efficiency, and innovative designs. Grid interaction and smart grid integration present another promising area. Enhancing the capabilities of PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters to provide advanced grid support functions, such as reactive power compensation, voltage regulation, and frequency stabilization, is essential. Developing grid-forming inverters that can operate in both grid-tied and islanded modes will contribute to smart grid stability and reliability. Integrating Internet of Things (IoT) technology for real-time monitoring, control, and optimization, along with robust cybersecurity measures, will ensure secure and efficient operation in smart grid environments. Environmental and economic considerations are also crucial. Research into green manufacturing processes and comprehensive lifecycle assessments can reduce the environmental impact of inverter components. Cost reduction strategies, such as achieving economies of scale and mass production, will make advanced inverters more accessible. Developing affordable high-performance inverters without compromising reliability will broaden their market reach and support the transition to renewable energy. In summary, the future scope of PWM strategies in PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters encompasses innovative approaches and technologies that can significantly enhance performance, efficiency, and sustainability. These advancements will play a crucial role in the ongoing evolution of renewable energy systems and the development of smarter, more resilient power infrastructure.

Discussion

In conclusion, the future of PWM strategies in PV-based multilevel hybrid inverters promises significant advancements in renewable energy systems. By leveraging advanced control algorithms, enhanced PWM techniques, and optimized inverter topologies, these inverters can achieve higher efficiency, better power quality, and improved reliability. Integration with smart grids, coupled with environmental and economic considerations, will further enhance their applicability and sustainability. These innovations will play a vital role in advancing the performance and accessibility of renewable energy technologies, supporting the global transition towards sustainable energy solutions.

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