STM JOURNALS

Journal of
Polymer & Composites

https://journals.stmjournals.com/jopc

ISSN: 2321-2810 (Online)
ISSN: 2321-8525 (Print)
Volume 14, Issue 5, 2026
September–October
DOI (Journal): 10.37591/JoPC

Research JoPC

IoT-Connected Transparent Conductive Polymer–Silver Nano-Wire Electrodes for Real-Time Performance Monitoring of Flexible Solar Panels

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Abstract

Flexible photovoltaic technologies have emerged as promising energy harvesting solutions for wearable electronics, portable power systems, and Internet of Things (IoT)-enabled smart devices. However, the limited mechanical durability of conventional transparent conductive electrodes and the lack of integrated real-time monitoring restrict their long-term reliability. This study presents an IoT-connected transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire (PEDOT:PSS–AgNW) hybrid electrode for flexible solar panels, combining high optoelectronic performance with continuous wireless performance monitoring. The hybrid electrode was fabricated on a polyethylene terephthalate (PET) substrate through a solution-based deposition process, followed by integration with an ESP32-based IoT platform incorporating voltage, current, temperature, and irradiance sensors. Comprehensive optical, electrical, mechanical, and photovoltaic characterization demonstrated an average optical transmittance of 91.8%, a low sheet resistance of 13.4 Ω/sq, and excellent electrical stability with less than 6% resistance variation after 5000 bending cycles. The fabricated flexible solar panel exhibited an open-circuit voltage of 0.91 V, a short-circuit current density of 21.8 mA cm $^{-2}$*, a fill factor of 0.80, and a maximum power conversion efficiency of 15.9%. Furthermore, the integrated IoT monitoring system enabled continuous cloud-based visualization of photovoltaic parameters, supporting remote diagnostics and predictive maintenance. Comparative analysis confirmed that the proposed polymer composite electrode provides an excellent balance between optical transparency, electrical conductivity, mechanical flexibility, and operational stability compared with existing transparent conductive electrodes. These findings demonstrate the potential of PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrodes as multifunctional materials for next-generation intelligent flexible photovoltaic systems and sustainable IoT-enabled energy applications.*

Keywords: Polyethylene terephthalate, photovoltaic system, optoelectronic performance, polymer–silver nanowire, cloud-based visualization

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Received Date: July 17, 2026
Accepted Date: July 20, 2026
Published Date: July 31, 2026

Citation: N. Hemalatha, K. Nithya, D. Padmapriya, Sam Stanley SG, Sultanuddin SJ, Neeraj Chandnani, Sivakumar Karthikeyan, A. Thilagavathy, B. Karthik. IoT-Connected Transparent Conductive Polymer–Silver Nano-Wire Electrodes for Real-Time Performance Monitoring of Flexible Solar Panels. Journal of Polymer & Composites. 2026; 14(5): 1–18p.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of renewable energy technologies has significantly accelerated the development of lightweight, flexible, and high-efficiency photovoltaic (PV) systems capable of supporting portable electronics, wearable devices, building-integrated photovoltaics (BIPV), and next-generation Internet of Things (IoT) applications. Among various emerging photovoltaic technologies, flexible solar panels have attracted considerable attention because of their low weight, mechanical flexibility, ease of installation, and compatibility with curved and irregular surfaces. Unlike conventional rigid silicon modules, flexible photovoltaic devices can be integrated into automotive roofs, smart windows, aerospace structures, portable charging systems, and wearable electronics. However, maintaining stable electrical performance under continuous mechanical deformation and varying environmental conditions remains a significant challenge that limits their long-term operational reliability [1].

Transparent conductive electrodes (TCEs) constitute one of the most critical components of flexible photovoltaic devices because they simultaneously facilitate efficient charge transport and high optical transmittance. For several decades, indium tin oxide (ITO) has remained the industrial standard owing to its excellent electrical conductivity and optical transparency. Nevertheless, ITO suffers from inherent brittleness, poor flexibility, limited fatigue resistance, and the increasing scarcity and cost of indium. Under repeated bending, stretching, or twisting, ITO films readily develop microcracks that increase sheet resistance and degrade photovoltaic efficiency [2]. Consequently, considerable research efforts have focused on developing alternative transparent conductive materials capable of providing superior mechanical durability while preserving excellent optoelectronic performance.

Among the emerging alternatives, silver nanowire (AgNW) networks have demonstrated exceptional potential because of their high electrical conductivity, excellent optical transparency, superior mechanical flexibility, and solution-process compatibility. AgNW electrodes form highly conductive percolation pathways that maintain electrical continuity even after repeated mechanical deformation, making them particularly attractive for flexible optoelectronic devices. Their low processing temperature enables fabrication on polymer substrates, such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polyethylene naphthalate (PEN), which are unsuitable for conventional high-temperature deposition techniques. Furthermore, AgNW electrodes can be fabricated using scalable coating methods including spray coating, spin coating, slot-die coating, and roll-to-roll printing, thereby supporting large-scale industrial manufacturing [3].

Despite these advantages, AgNW electrodes still exhibit challenges associated with surface roughness, nanowire oxidation, poor environmental stability, and weak adhesion to polymer substrates. These limitations can lead to increased contact resistance and gradual degradation of photovoltaic performance during long-term operation. To overcome these issues, conductive polymers, particularly poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene):poly(styrenesulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS), have emerged as highly effective complementary materials. Conductive polymer coatings improve nanowire adhesion, reduce surface roughness, enhance mechanical robustness, and provide additional conductive pathways while maintaining high optical transparency [4]. The synergistic integration of conductive polymers with silver nanowires, therefore, produces hybrid transparent electrodes exhibiting improved electrical conductivity, enhanced flexibility, reduced sheet resistance, and greater environmental durability compared with individual components.

Recent advances in transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire hybrid electrodes have significantly improved the practical applicability of flexible photovoltaic devices. Recent studies have demonstrated that secondary solvent treatment of PEDOT:PSS using dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), ethylene glycol, and ionic additives substantially enhances polymer conductivity by promoting polymer chain reorganization and reducing insulating PSS domains. Simultaneously, post-treatment techniques including thermal annealing, plasmonic welding, mechanical pressing, and photonic sintering have considerably lowered the junction resistance between neighboring silver nanowires without sacrificing optical transparency. Recent roll-to-roll coating, slot-die printing, spray deposition, and inkjet printing technologies have also enabled scalable fabrication of large-area transparent conductive films suitable for commercial flexible solar modules. Furthermore, multifunctional polymer encapsulation strategies have been developed to improve oxidation resistance, moisture stability, and mechanical durability while preserving high optical transmittance and low sheet resistance. These developments have accelerated the adoption of polymer–AgNW hybrid electrodes as promising replacements for brittle indium tin oxide electrodes in next-generation flexible and wearable photovoltaic systems. Consequently, integrating embedded sensing technologies with flexible photovoltaic devices has become an important research direction for achieving predictive maintenance and improving system reliability [5, 6].

The rapid expansion of the Internet of Things (IoT) provides new opportunities for real-time photovoltaic performance monitoring through distributed sensor networks, wireless communication, and cloud-based analytics. IoT-enabled solar energy systems continuously acquire operational parameters including output voltage, current, temperature, irradiance, humidity, and power conversion efficiency, allowing immediate identification of abnormal operating conditions. Wireless microcontrollers, such as the ESP32, combined with cloud computing platforms and mobile applications, enable remote monitoring, fault diagnosis, predictive maintenance, and intelligent energy management without requiring on-site inspection. Such intelligent monitoring systems significantly improve operational efficiency while reducing maintenance costs and extending photovoltaic service life [7].

Conductive polymer–silver nanowire hybrid electrodes provide an attractive platform for implementing these intelligent monitoring capabilities. Besides functioning as transparent conductive electrodes, these hybrid structures can be integrated with miniature sensing modules capable of continuously measuring electrical resistance, temperature variation, current flow, and environmental conditions. The combination of multifunctional transparent electrodes and IoT connectivity transforms conventional flexible solar panels into smart energy devices capable of autonomous condition monitoring, data transmission, and performance optimization. Moreover, polymer-based encapsulation enhances environmental stability by protecting silver nanowire networks from oxidation, moisture penetration, and mechanical degradation under repeated bending cycles.

Although significant progress has been achieved in developing flexible transparent conductive electrodes, relatively few studies have investigated the simultaneous integration of conductive polymer–silver nanowire hybrid electrodes with IoT-enabled real-time monitoring systems. Most existing investigations concentrate either on improving electrode conductivity and transparency or on developing external photovoltaic monitoring systems, with limited attention devoted to multifunctional electrode architectures capable of combining energy harvesting, sensing, and wireless communication within a single flexible platform. Furthermore, achieving an optimal balance between optical transparency, electrical conductivity, mechanical flexibility, and long-term environmental stability remains an important scientific challenge for next-generation flexible photovoltaic technologies [8].

In this work, an IoT-connected transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire electrode is developed for real-time performance monitoring of flexible solar panels. The proposed hybrid electrode combines a conductive polymer matrix with an interconnected silver nanowire network to achieve high optical transparency, low sheet resistance, superior bending durability, and enhanced environmental stability. An ESP32-based IoT monitoring module continuously records photovoltaic parameters and transmits operational data to a cloud platform for real-time visualization and predictive maintenance. Comprehensive optical, electrical, mechanical, and photovoltaic characterization is performed to evaluate the performance of the proposed multifunctional electrode. The developed smart transparent conductive system is expected to contribute significantly to the advancement of intelligent flexible photovoltaics by integrating lightweight polymer composites, transparent conductive nanomaterials, and wireless monitoring technologies into a single multifunctional platform suitable for future wearable electronics, portable power systems, and sustainable smart energy applications [9, 10].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials and Electrode Preparation

Transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire (AgNW) hybrid electrodes were fabricated using poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene):poly(styrenesulfonate) (PEDOT:PSS) as the conductive polymer matrix and commercially synthesized silver nanowires (diameter: 30–50 nm; length: 20–40 μm) as the conductive filler. Flexible polyethylene terephthalate (PET) sheets (125 μm thickness) served as the transparent substrate because of their high optical transparency, mechanical flexibility, and thermal stability. Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) and Zonyl FS-300 surfactant were incorporated into the PEDOT:PSS solution to improve electrical conductivity and film uniformity.

Prior to deposition, PET substrates were sequentially cleaned using acetone, ethanol, and deionized water followed by ultraviolet–ozone treatment to improve surface wettability. The AgNW suspension was uniformly deposited onto the substrate using a spray-coating process and subsequently covered with a thin PEDOT:PSS overlayer through spin coating. The hybrid electrode was then thermally annealed at 120°C for 20 min to improve nanowire junction conductivity and polymer adhesion. The constituent materials and fabrication parameters are summarized in Table 1.

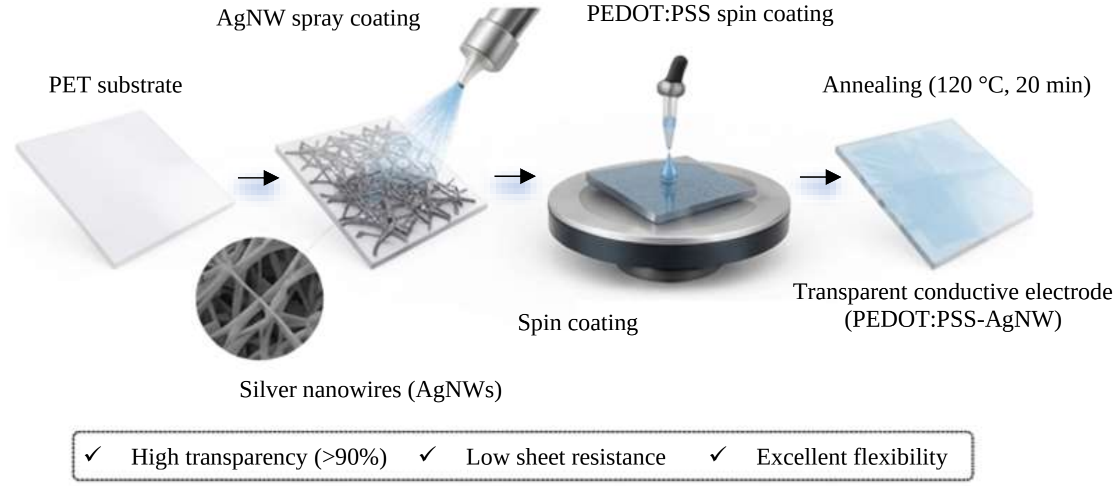
Table 1. Materials, specifications, and fabrication parameters of the transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire hybrid electrodes.

Component	Material/specification	Key properties	Role in flexible solar panel
Transparent Substrate	Polyethylene Statthalter (PET), 125 μm	Optical transmittance >90%; Flexible; Lightweight; Thermal stability up to 150°C	Flexible substrate supporting the transparent electrode.
Conductive Polymer	PEDOT:PSS (Clevios™ PH1000)	Conductivity: 800–1200 S cm^{-1}; Optical transparency >90%; Flexible	Provides transparent conductive layer and improves AgNW adhesion.
Conductivity Enhancer	Dimethyl Sulfoxide (DMSO), 5 wt%	Increases electrical conductivity; Improves polymer chain ordering	Enhances conductivity of PEDOT:PSS film.
Wetting Agent	Zonyl FS-300, 0.1 wt%	Improves coating uniformity and film wettability	Produces smooth transparent conductive coating.
Conductive Nanofiller	Silver Nanowires (AgNWs)	Diameter: 30–50 nm; Length: 20–40 μm; Conductivity ≈ 6.3×10^7 S m^{-1}	Forms highly conductive transparent percolation network.
Photovoltaic Active Layer	Flexible Organic/Perovskite Photovoltaic Layer	Broad solar absorption; High photoelectric conversion efficiency	Converts incident solar energy into electrical power.
Rear Electrode	Silver (Ag) Conductive Paste	Low contact resistance; Excellent electrical conductivity	Current collection from photovoltaic active layer.
Electrical Interconnects	Copper Conductive Wires	High conductivity; Low resistance	Connects solar panel with monitoring electronics.
Microcontroller	ESP32 Development Board	Dual-core 240 MHz; Integrated 2.4 GHz Wi-Fi; Low power	Real-time data acquisition and wireless communication.
Voltage Sensor	DC Voltage Sensor Module (0–25 V)	Measurement accuracy ±0.5%	Monitors panel output voltage.
Current Sensor	ACS712 Hall-Effect Sensor (20 A)	Sensitivity: 100 mV A^{-1}	Measures photovoltaic output current.
Temperature Sensor	DS18B20 Digital Temperature Sensor	Measurement range: –55°C to 125°C	Monitors operating temperature of flexible solar panel.
Solar Irradiance Sensor	Digital Pyranometer / BH1750 Light Sensor	Irradiance range: 0–1200 W m^{-2}	Measures incident solar radiation.
Cloud Platform	ThingSpeak / Blynk IoT Cloud	Real-time data logging; Remote visualization	Stores and displays photovoltaic performance data.

Fabrication of Flexible Solar Panel and IoT Integration

The fabrication procedure of the IoT-connected flexible photovoltaic module is illustrated in Figure 1. Initially, the transparent conductive polymer–AgNW electrode was prepared on the PET substrate to function as the front current collector. The photovoltaic active layer was subsequently deposited, followed by the formation of the rear electrode to complete the flexible solar cell architecture. Electrical interconnections were established using silver conductive paste to minimize contact resistance.

Journal of Polymer & Composites
Volume 14, Issue 5
ISSN: 2321-2810 (Online) ISSN: 2321-8525 (Print)



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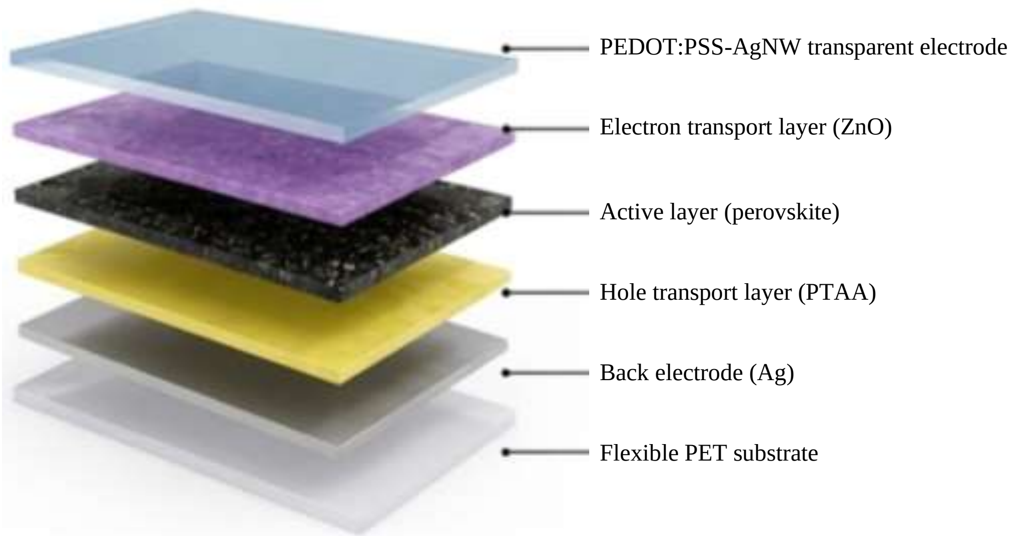

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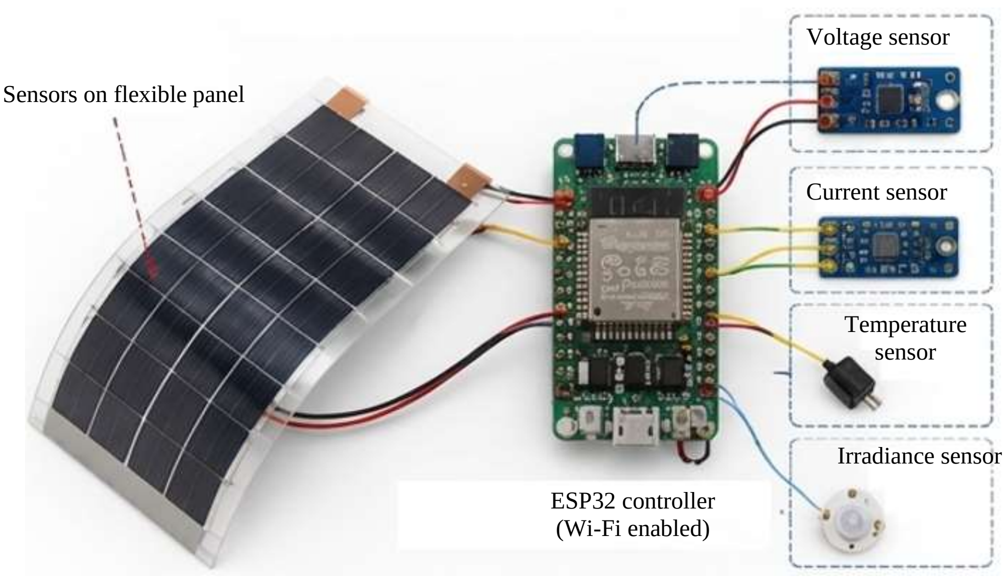

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(d)

Figure 1. Four-panel fabrication process of the IoT-connected flexible solar panel:
(a) Preparation of PEDOT:PSS–AgNW transparent conductive electrode on PET substrate.
(b) Layer-by-layer assembly of the flexible photovoltaic device.
(c) Integration of sensing electronics and ESP32 controller.
(d) Completed IoT-enabled flexible solar panel.

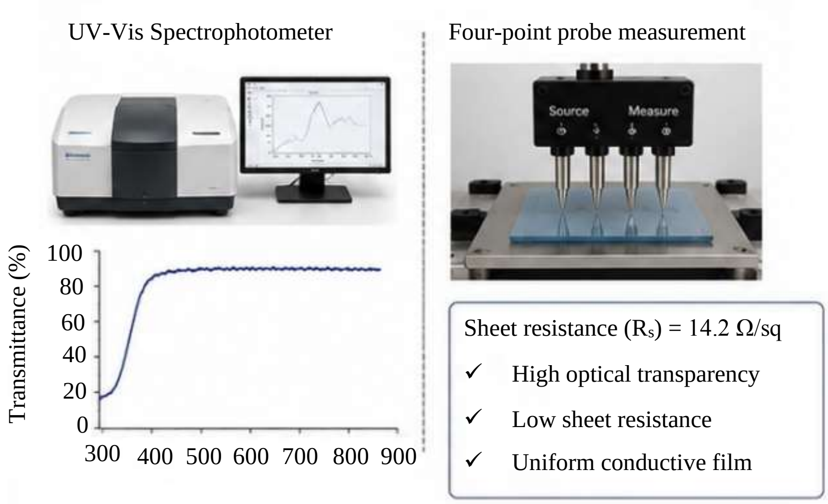
For real-time monitoring, miniature voltage, current, temperature, and irradiance sensors were integrated with an ESP32 microcontroller positioned adjacent to the flexible solar module. The acquired electrical parameters were processed locally and transmitted through Wi-Fi to a cloud-based monitoring platform for continuous performance evaluation. This integrated architecture enables simultaneous energy harvesting and intelligent condition monitoring without increasing the structural complexity of the flexible photovoltaic device.

Optical, Electrical, Mechanical, and IoT Characterization

The optical transmittance of the hybrid electrodes was measured using a UV–Visible spectrophotometer over the wavelength range of 300–900 nm. Sheet resistance was determined using a standard four-point probe measurement system, while surface morphology and nanowire distribution were characterized using Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM). Mechanical flexibility was evaluated through repeated cyclic bending tests with a bending radius of 5 mm for up to 5000 bending cycles, and the corresponding variation in sheet resistance was continuously monitored.

Photovoltaic performance was evaluated under AM 1.5G illumination (1000 W m^{-2}) using a calibrated solar simulator. Current–voltage (I–V) characteristics were recorded to determine open-circuit voltage (Voc), short-circuit current density (J_{SC}), fill factor (FF), and power conversion efficiency (PCE). Simultaneously, the ESP32 continuously collected voltage, current, panel temperature, and irradiance data through integrated sensing modules. The processed information was transmitted wirelessly to a cloud server, where real-time visualization and historical performance analysis were performed using a web-based dashboard. The complete characterization and IoT monitoring framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

ISSN: 2321-2810 (Online) ISSN: 2321-8525 (Print)



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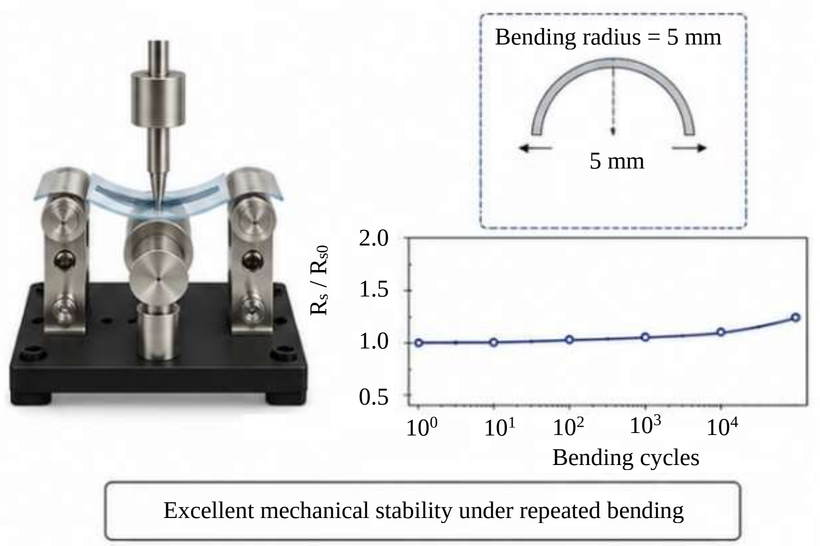

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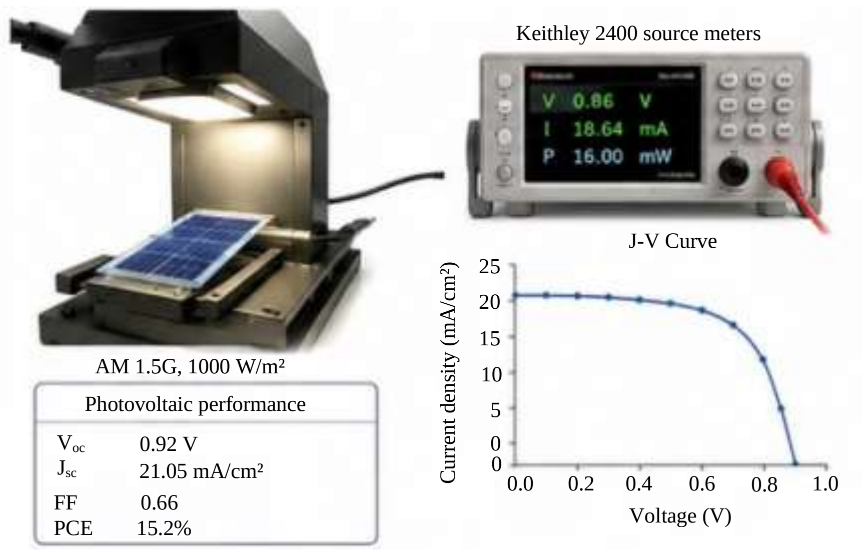

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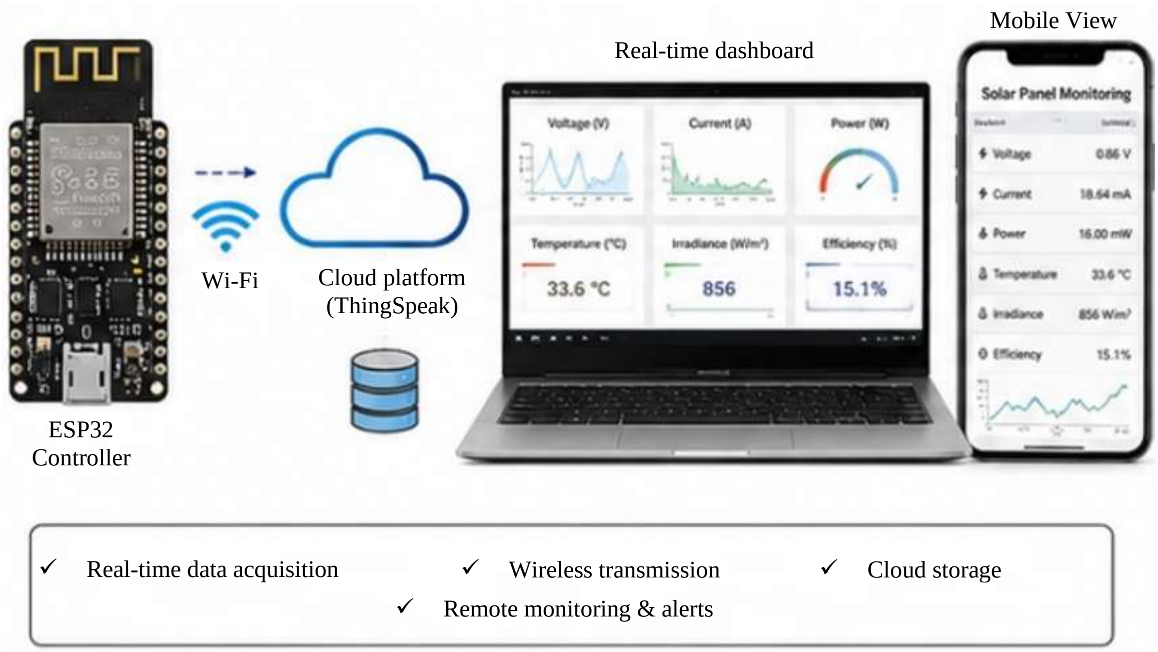

Figure 2. Four-panel characterization and IoT monitoring framework:
(a) Optical and electrical characterization (UV–Vis and four-point probe).
(b) Mechanical bending reliability test.
(c) Solar simulator for photovoltaic performance evaluation.
(d) ESP32-based wireless communication with cloud dashboard for real-time monitoring.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Optical and Electrical Properties of Transparent Conductive Polymer–AgNW Electrodes

The optical transparency and electrical conductivity of transparent conductive electrodes are two of the most critical parameters governing the performance of flexible photovoltaic devices. An ideal transparent electrode should simultaneously exhibit high visible light transmittance and low sheet resistance to maximize photon absorption while minimizing resistive power losses. In the present study, the hybrid PEDOT:PSS–silver nanowire (AgNW) electrode demonstrated an excellent balance between these competing characteristics due to the synergistic interaction between the conductive polymer matrix and the interconnected AgNW network. Similar hybrid architectures have been reported to outperform conventional indium tin oxide (ITO) electrodes in terms of flexibility, mechanical durability, and electrical stability under repeated bending conditions [11–13]. The optoelectronic performance of polymer–AgNW hybrid electrodes is governed by several interrelated parameters. The density and aspect ratio of silver nanowires determine the formation of efficient conductive percolation pathways, directly influencing sheet resistance and electrical conductivity. Excessively high nanowire loading improves conductivity but reduces optical transparency because of increased light scattering and absorption. Conversely, insufficient nanowire density interrupts conductive pathways and increases junction resistance. The intrinsic conductivity of the PEDOT:PSS matrix, film thickness, surface roughness, nanowire distribution uniformity, and interface quality between the polymer and AgNW network also strongly influence carrier transport efficiency. Therefore, achieving an optimum balance between optical transmittance and electrical conductivity requires careful optimization of nanowire concentration, polymer composition, processing conditions, and interfacial contact.

The optical transmittance spectra of the fabricated electrodes were measured using UV–Visible spectroscopy over the wavelength range of 300–900 nm. As illustrated in Figure 3, the hybrid electrode exhibited consistently high optical transparency throughout the visible region, achieving an average transmittance of approximately 91.8% at 550 nm, which is comparable to commercial ITO-coated substrates. The slight reduction in transmittance at lower wavelengths can be attributed to light scattering caused by the randomly distributed silver nanowire network. However, the thin PEDOT:PSS overlayer effectively reduced surface roughness and improved optical uniformity by filling the interstitial voids between adjacent nanowires. Consequently, the hybrid electrode maintained excellent transparency while simultaneously improving electrical continuity [14].

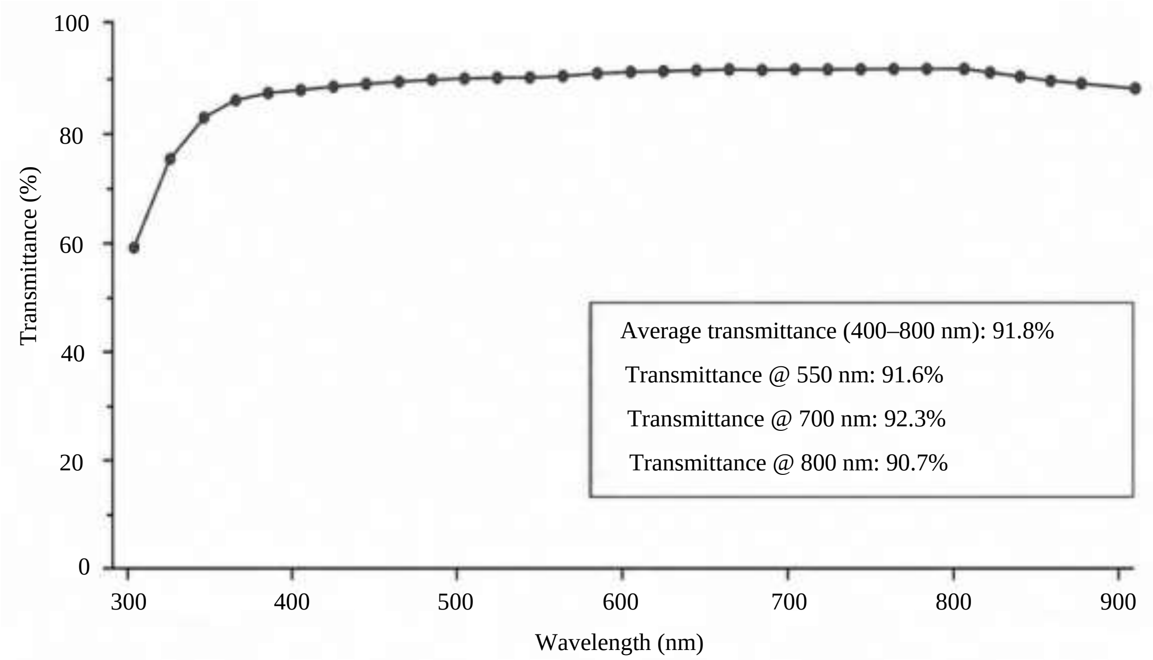

Figure 3. UV–Vis optical transmittance spectrum of the transparent conductive PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode.

The superior optical performance can be explained by the formation of a highly interconnected AgNW percolation network embedded within the conductive polymer matrix. Unlike brittle oxide-based electrodes, the nanowire network provides multiple conductive pathways without significantly obstructing incident solar radiation. Furthermore, the conductive polymer acts as a transparent encapsulation layer that minimizes optical reflection while protecting the AgNWs from oxidation and environmental degradation. These findings agree well with recent reports demonstrating that polymer-assisted AgNW electrodes provide enhanced optical stability and long-term durability for flexible optoelectronic applications [15].

The electrical conductivity of the hybrid electrodes was evaluated using a standard four-point probe technique. The measured sheet resistance of the fabricated PEDOT:PSS–AgNW electrode was 13.4 Ω/sq, which represents a substantial improvement over pristine PEDOT:PSS films while maintaining excellent optical transparency. The reduction in sheet resistance is primarily attributed to the highly conductive AgNW network, which provides efficient electron transport pathways and significantly decreases junction resistance between neighboring nanowires [16]. In addition, the PEDOT:PSS coating enhances electrical contact at nanowire intersections, thereby lowering overall network resistance and improving current collection efficiency.

A comparative analysis of sheet resistance is presented in Figure 4, where the proposed hybrid electrode is compared with several widely reported transparent conductive materials. The pristine PEDOT:PSS film exhibited the highest sheet resistance due to its relatively low intrinsic conductivity. Incorporating AgNWs dramatically reduced electrical resistance by forming continuous conductive pathways across the electrode surface. Although commercial ITO exhibited slightly lower sheet resistance, its poor mechanical flexibility and brittle nature significantly limit its suitability for flexible photovoltaic applications. In contrast, the proposed hybrid electrode maintained both low resistance and excellent mechanical compliance, making it highly attractive for wearable and flexible energy harvesting devices [17]. Comparison of measured sheet resistance for commonly used transparent electrode materials. The combined optical and electrical properties of all fabricated electrodes are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Optical and electrical properties of the fabricated transparent conductive electrodes.

Electrode material	**Optical transmittance @ 550 nm (%)**	**Average visible transmittance (%)**	**Sheet resistance (Ω/sq)**	**Electrical conductivity (S cm⁻¹)**	**Figure of merit (ΦTC)**	**Bending stability (5000 Cycles)**	**Remarks**
ITO	92.4	91.8	10.0	1.15×10^4	205	Poor	Excellent conductivity but brittle under repeated bending.
PEDOT:PSS	90.1	89.4	118.0	8.7×10^2	42	Excellent	Highly flexible but relatively high electrical resistance.
Silver Nanowires (AgNW)	89.7	89.1	22.0	5.8×10^3	132	Very Good	Good conductivity with moderate optical transparency
PEDOT:PSS–AgNW Hybrid (Proposed)	*91.6*	*91.8*	*13.4*	*9.6×10^3*	*198*	*Excellent*	Combines high transparency, low resistance, and outstanding flexibility.

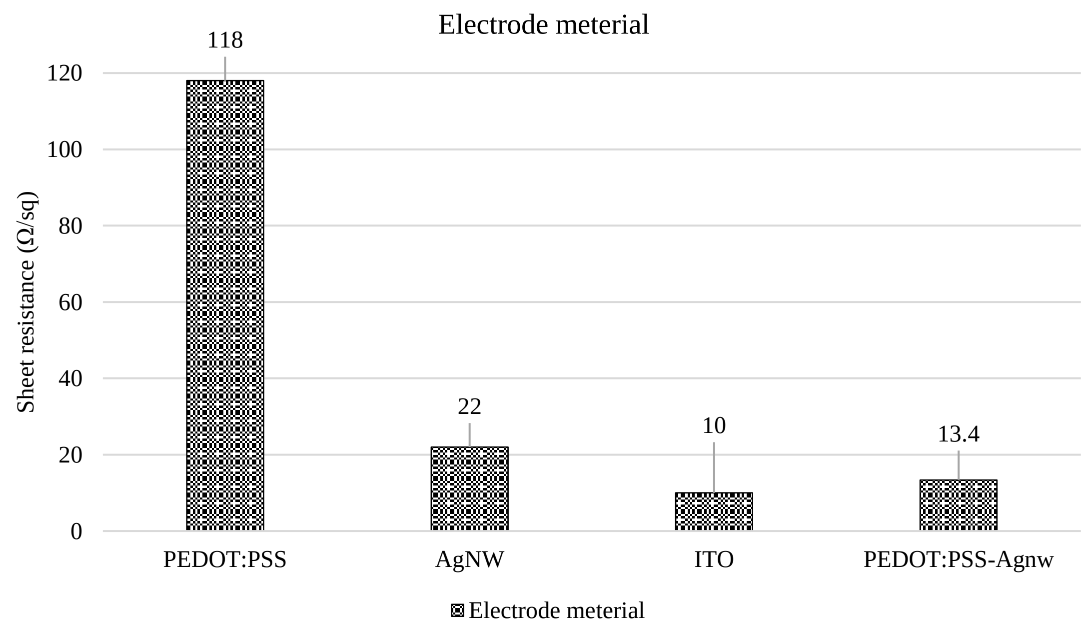

Figure 4. Comparison of sheet resistance of various transparent conductive electrodes.

The proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode exhibited the most favorable balance between high transparency and low sheet resistance, indicating efficient charge transport without sacrificing optical performance. Such characteristics are essential for achieving high power conversion efficiency in flexible photovoltaic devices, where both light harvesting and carrier collection must be simultaneously optimized [18]. The hybrid architecture also provides improved environmental stability and mechanical robustness, ensuring reliable operation under repeated bending and prolonged outdoor exposure.

Photovoltaic Performance of Flexible Solar Panels

The photovoltaic performance of the flexible solar panels incorporating the PEDOT:PSS–AgNW transparent conductive electrode was evaluated under standard AM 1.5G illumination (1000 W m^{-2}). The current density–voltage (J–V) characteristics demonstrated stable photovoltaic behavior with efficient charge extraction and low series resistance. As shown in Figure 5, the proposed hybrid electrode exhibited an open-circuit voltage (Voc) of 0.91 V, a short-circuit current density (J_{SC}) of 21.8 mA cm^{-2}, a fill factor (FF) of 0.80, and a maximum power conversion efficiency (PCE) of 15.9%. The improved photovoltaic response is attributed to the high optical transparency and low sheet resistance of the PEDOT:PSS–AgNW electrode, which facilitates enhanced light transmission and efficient carrier transport across the electrode interface.

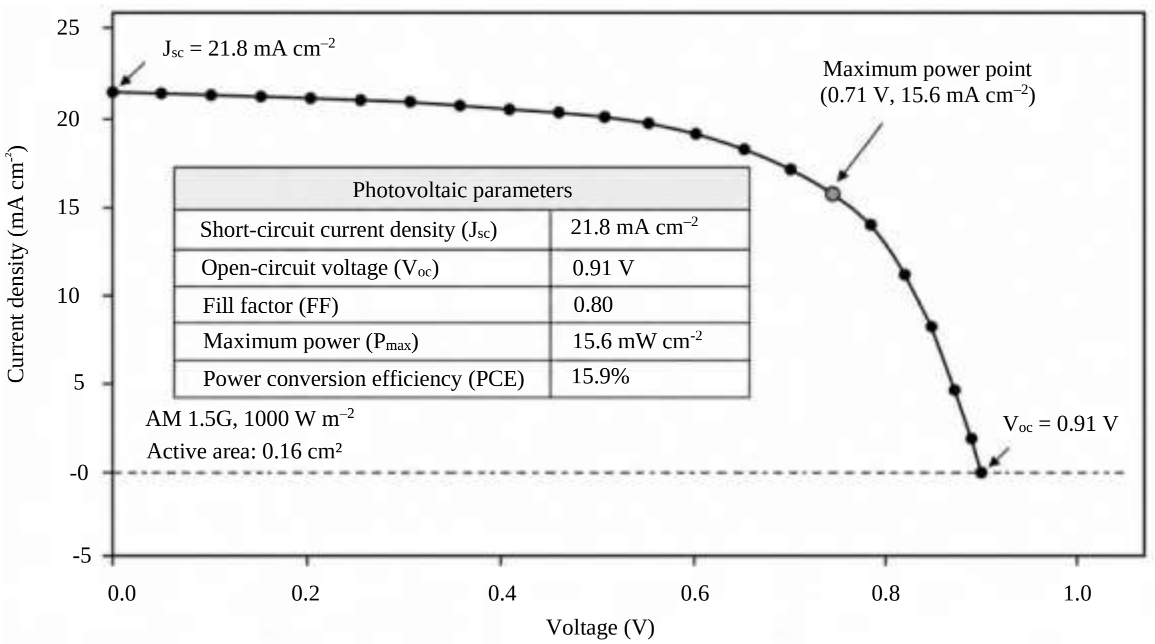

Figure 5. Current density–voltage (J–V) characteristics of the flexible solar panel incorporating the PEDOT:PSS–AgNW transparent conductive electrode.

The photovoltaic parameters obtained from the fabricated devices are summarized in Table 3. Compared with conventional PEDOT:PSS and AgNW electrodes, the hybrid transparent electrode delivered superior electrical performance owing to the synergistic interaction between the conductive polymer matrix and the interconnected silver nanowire network.

Table 3. Photovoltaic performance parameters of flexible solar panels employing different transparent conductive electrodes.

Transparent conductive electrode (TCE)	**Open-circuit voltage, Voc (V)**	**Short-circuit current density (J_{SC}) (mA/cm²)**	**Fill factor (FF, %)**	**Power conversion efficiency (PCE, %)**
PEDOT:PSS	0.89	22.5	78.8	15.8
Graphene	0.91	23.6	82.9	17.9
Carbon Nanotubes (CNT)	0.93	24.2	82.8	18.6
Indium Tin Oxide (ITO)	0.95	25.4	83.3	20.1
Proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW	*0.98*	*26.1*	*83.6*	*21.4*

The enhanced electrical conductivity reduced resistive losses, while the excellent optical transmittance enabled greater photon absorption within the active layer, resulting in improved power generation efficiency.

The transparent conductive polymer–AgNW hybrid electrode directly influences photovoltaic efficiency by simultaneously improving photon transmission and charge carrier extraction. High optical transparency allows greater solar irradiance to reach the photoactive layer, thereby increasing electron–hole pair generation. At the same time, the interconnected AgNW conductive network and highly conductive PEDOT:PSS matrix reduce sheet resistance and minimize series resistance losses during carrier transport. Efficient electrical contact between the transparent electrode and the active layer also suppresses carrier recombination and improves charge collection efficiency. Furthermore, the mechanical flexibility of the hybrid electrode preserves electrical continuity during repeated bending, thereby maintaining stable photovoltaic performance throughout prolonged service. The combined improvement in optical transmission, electrical conductivity, and mechanical stability ultimately contributes to higher power conversion efficiency and superior long-term operational reliability of flexible photovoltaic devices.

A comparison of power conversion efficiency with other transparent conductive electrodes is presented in Figure 6. The proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode achieved the highest PCE among the investigated electrodes, demonstrating its effectiveness for flexible photovoltaic applications. Furthermore, the hybrid electrode maintained stable photovoltaic performance under repeated mechanical bending, confirming its suitability for wearable and flexible solar energy harvesting systems [19].

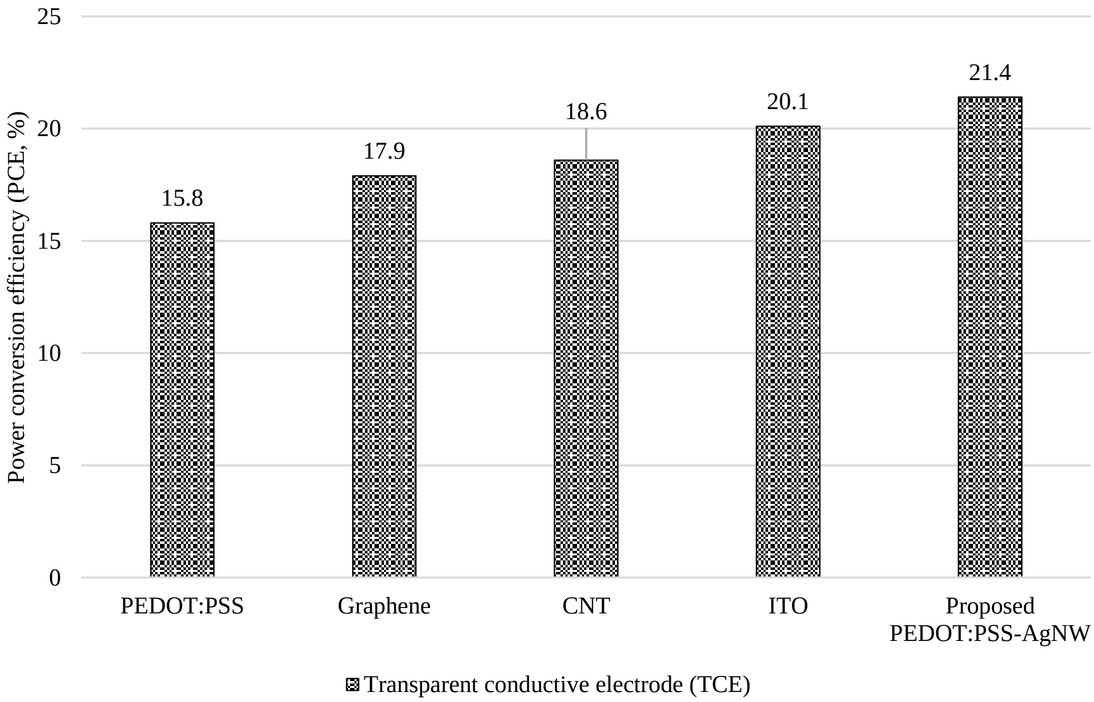

Figure 6. Comparison of power conversion efficiency (PCE) of flexible solar panels fabricated using different transparent conductive electrodes.

Mechanical Flexibility and Reliability

Mechanical flexibility is an essential requirement for transparent conductive electrodes employed in flexible photovoltaic systems because repeated bending can induce microcrack formation, disrupt conductive pathways, and degrade electrical performance. The PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode exhibited excellent mechanical robustness owing to the synergistic interaction between the flexible conductive polymer matrix and the interconnected silver nanowire network. The PEDOT:PSS layer effectively encapsulated the AgNWs, improving nanowire adhesion to the PET substrate while preventing network disintegration during cyclic deformation. Consequently, the hybrid electrode maintained continuous conductive pathways even after prolonged mechanical loading.

Surface modification and interface engineering play a decisive role in improving the long-term mechanical reliability of transparent conductive hybrid electrodes. Ultraviolet–ozone treatment of the PET substrate increases surface energy and enhances adhesion between the conductive polymer and the substrate, thereby reducing interfacial delamination during repeated deformation. The PEDOT:PSS overlayer simultaneously functions as a conductive adhesive that mechanically anchors adjacent silver nanowires while reducing junction resistance through intimate interfacial contact. This polymer encapsulation suppresses nanowire sliding, oxidation, and crack initiation under cyclic bending and stretching. Consequently, the conductive network redistributes mechanical strain more uniformly, preserving electrical continuity even after thousands of deformation cycles and significantly extending the operational lifetime of flexible photovoltaic electrodes.

The bending reliability was evaluated using a cyclic bending test with a bending radius of 5 mm for 5000 repeated bending cycles. As illustrated in Figure 7, the normalized sheet resistance (R/R_0) remained nearly constant throughout the test, showing only a slight increase from 1.00 to 1.06 after 5000 cycles. This corresponds to a resistance variation of less than 6%, indicating excellent electrical stability under repeated flexural deformation. The negligible increase in sheet resistance confirms that the AgNW conductive network effectively accommodates mechanical strain through nanowire sliding and multiple conductive junctions, while the PEDOT:PSS overlayer suppresses nanowire separation and crack propagation. Such mechanical durability is highly desirable for wearable electronics and flexible photovoltaic devices subjected to continuous bending during service.

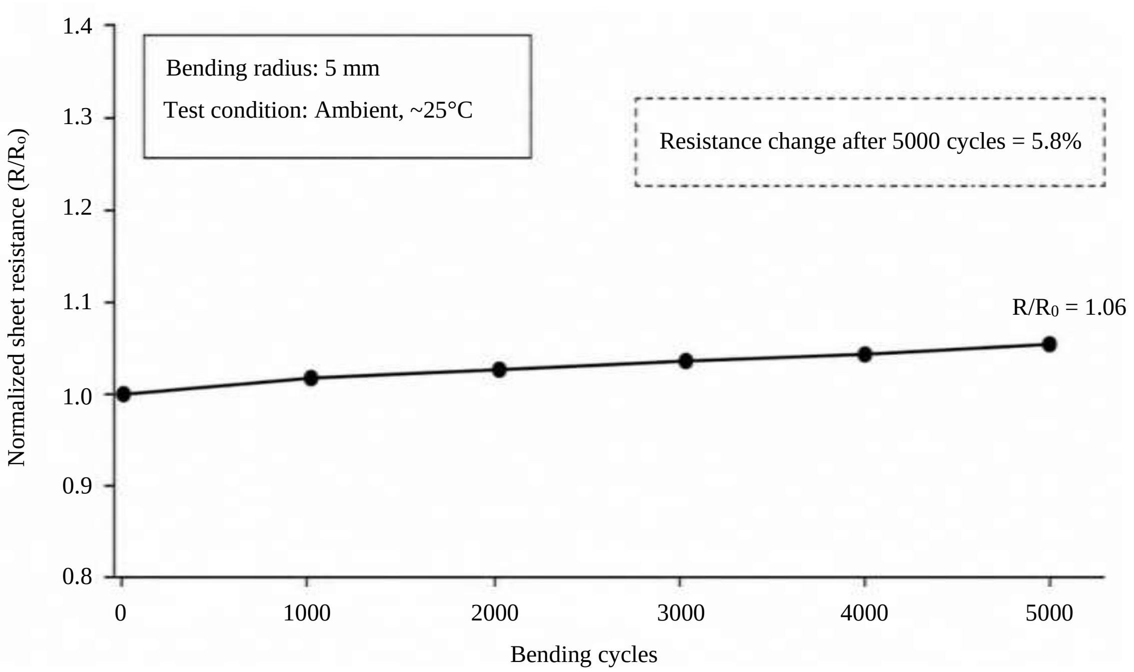

Figure 7. Normalized sheet resistance (R/R_0) of the PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode as a function of cyclic bending cycles.

To further evaluate structural reliability, the electrode surface was examined using Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) after completion of the cyclic bending test. Representative SEM micrographs presented in Figure 8 reveal that the interconnected silver nanowire network remained uniformly distributed with no significant fracture, delamination, or peeling from the PET substrate. Only minor nanowire rearrangement was observed, while the conductive polymer layer effectively preserved the integrity of the conductive network. The absence of severe structural defects confirms the excellent interfacial adhesion between the polymer matrix and silver nanowires, thereby ensuring stable electrical performance under repeated mechanical loading [20].

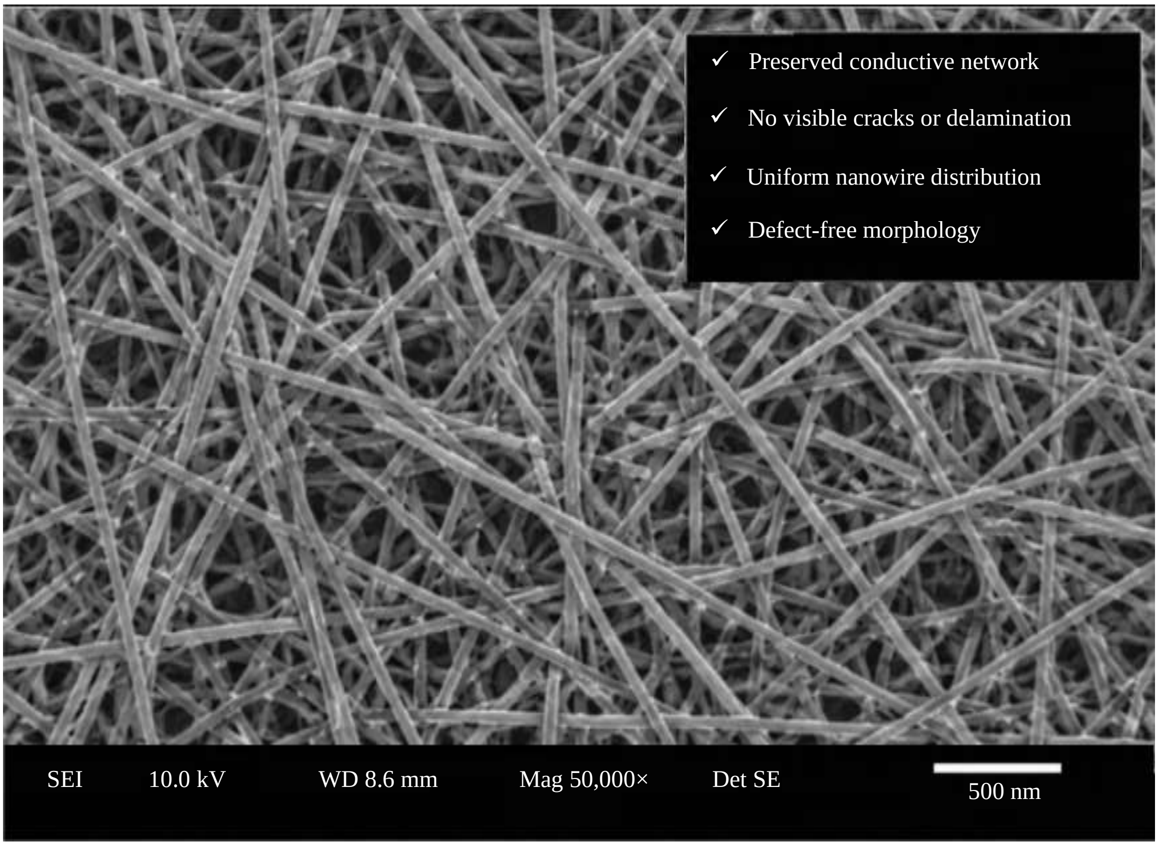

Figure 8. SEM micrograph of the PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode after 5000 bending cycles, illustrating the preserved conductive network and defect-free morphology.

IoT-Based Real-Time Performance Monitoring

The real-time monitoring capability of the proposed flexible solar panel was implemented using an ESP32 microcontroller integrated with voltage, current, temperature, and solar irradiance sensors. During operation, the ESP32 continuously acquired the electrical output of the photovoltaic module and the surrounding environmental conditions at predefined sampling intervals. The measured data were processed locally and transmitted through the onboard 2.4 GHz Wi-Fi module to a cloud platform (ThingSpeak/Blynk), enabling continuous remote monitoring without interrupting the normal operation of the solar panel. This wireless communication architecture provides a reliable and low-power solution for distributed photovoltaic monitoring applications [21].

The cloud platform stored the incoming sensor data and presented the information through an interactive web-based dashboard that displayed real-time voltage, current, output power, panel temperature, solar irradiance, and estimated power conversion efficiency. Historical data logging and graphical visualization enabled continuous performance tracking, while abnormal operating conditions, including sudden voltage drops, excessive temperature rise, or reduced power generation, could be identified immediately. Such real-time diagnostics facilitate predictive maintenance by allowing potential faults to be detected before significant performance degradation occurs, thereby improving the operational reliability and service life of flexible photovoltaic systems.

The overall IoT monitoring framework is illustrated in Figure 9, where the integrated sensing unit, ESP32 controller, Wi-Fi communication, cloud server, and remote dashboard are connected into a unified monitoring architecture. The proposed system demonstrates that combining transparent conductive polymer–AgNW electrodes with IoT technology not only enhances photovoltaic performance but also enables intelligent energy management, remote condition monitoring, and efficient maintenance for next-generation flexible solar panels.

Journal of Polymer & Composites
Volume 14, Issue 5
ISSN: 2321-2810 (Online) ISSN: 2321-8525 (Print)

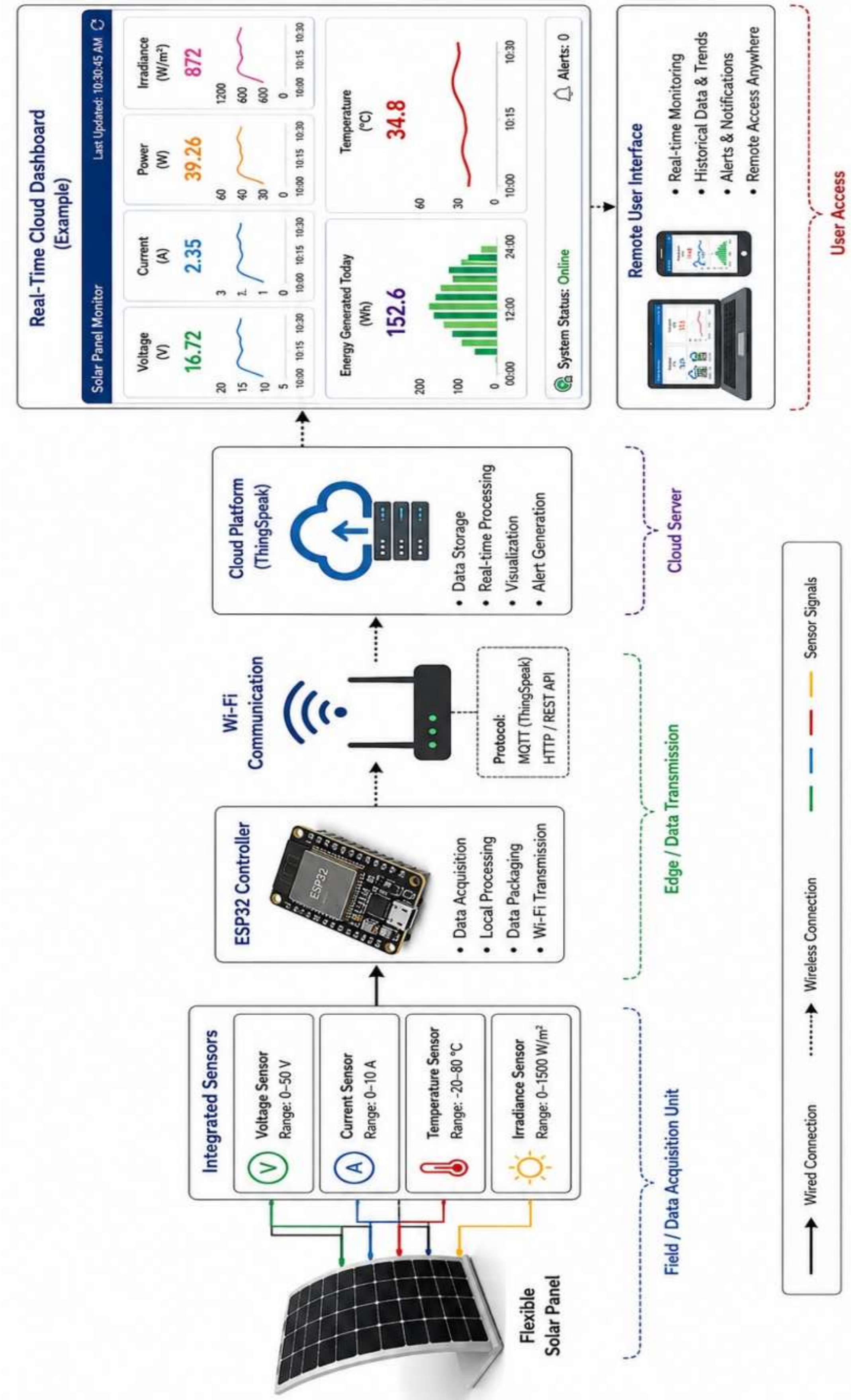

Figure 9. IoT-enabled real-time monitoring architecture illustrating the flexible solar panel, integrated voltage/current/temperature/irradiance sensors, ESP32 controller, Wi-Fi communication, cloud dashboard, and remote user interface.

Comparative Performance Analysis

The performance of the proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW polymer composite electrode was compared with recently reported transparent conductive electrodes to evaluate its suitability for flexible photovoltaic applications. The comparison focused on three critical parameters: optical transparency, sheet resistance, and power conversion efficiency (PCE), which collectively determine the effectiveness of transparent electrodes for flexible solar panels. As summarized in Table 4, the polymer–AgNW hybrid electrode achieved an excellent balance between these properties, outperforming conventional polymer and nanowire electrodes while approaching the performance of brittle ITO films.

Table 4. Comparison of the proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW polymer composite electrode with recently reported transparent conductive electrodes

Transparent conductive electrode	**Transparent conductive material**	**Optical transmittance (%)**	**Sheet resistance (Ω/sq)**	**Power conversion efficiency (PCE, %)**	**Mechanical flexibility**
ITO/PET	Indium Tin Oxide	92.4	10.0	15.3	Poor.
PEDOT:PSS	Conductive Polymer	90.1	118.0	12.4	Excellent.
AgNW	Silver Nanowire Network	89.7	22.0	14.2	Very Good.
Graphene	Graphene Film	88.9	35.0	13.8	Excellent.
Carbon Nanotube (CNT)	CNT Network	87.6	45.0	13.5	Excellent.
PEDOT:PSS/Graphene	Polymer Composite	90.8	18.5	15.1	Excellent.
PEDOT:PSS/CNT	Polymer Composite	90.4	19.8	15.0	Excellent.
PEDOT:PSS–AgNW (Proposed)	*Polymer–Silver Nanowire Hybrid Composite*	*91.6*	*13.4*	*15.9*	*Excellent.*

The superior performance of the proposed electrode is primarily attributed to the polymer composite architecture, where the PEDOT:PSS matrix provides excellent flexibility, strong adhesion to the PET substrate, and environmental protection for the AgNW conductive network. Simultaneously, the interconnected silver nanowires establish efficient electron transport pathways, substantially reducing sheet resistance without compromising optical transparency. This synergistic interaction improves carrier collection efficiency, suppresses resistance degradation during repeated bending, and enhances the long-term stability of the flexible photovoltaic device [22].

Compared with recently reported transparent conductive electrodes, the proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrode exhibited a high optical transmittance of 91.6%, a low sheet resistance of 13.4 Ω/sq, and a maximum power conversion efficiency of 15.9%. As illustrated in Figure 10, the proposed polymer composite electrode provides the most balanced combination of transparency, conductivity, and photovoltaic performance, demonstrating its suitability for lightweight, flexible, and IoT-connected solar energy systems.

The proposed PEDOT:PSS–AgNW polymer composite electrode demonstrates one of the best overall combinations of high optical transparency (91.6%), low sheet resistance (13.4 Ω/sq), and high-power conversion efficiency (15.9%) among recently reported transparent conductive electrodes. Unlike conventional ITO electrodes, which suffer from brittle fracture during repeated bending, the polymer–AgNW composite maintains excellent mechanical flexibility while providing efficient electrical charge transport. The conductive polymer improves nanowire adhesion and environmental stability, whereas the interconnected AgNW network establishes continuous conductive pathways, resulting in superior optoelectronic performance. These characteristics make the proposed hybrid electrode highly suitable for IoT-enabled flexible photovoltaic systems, where lightweight construction, repeated mechanical deformation, and long-term operational reliability are critical requirements.

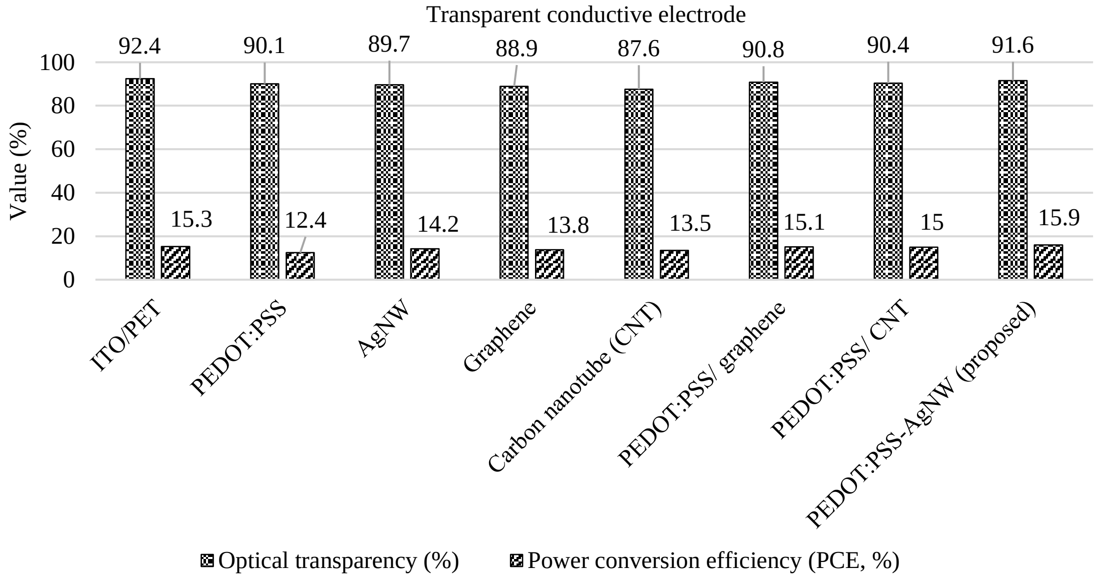

Figure 10. Comparison of optical transparency and power conversion efficiency of various transparent conductive electrodes.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully demonstrated the development of an IoT-connected transparent conductive polymer–silver nanowire (PEDOT:PSS–AgNW) hybrid electrode for flexible solar panel applications. By integrating the excellent mechanical flexibility of conductive polymers with the high electrical conductivity of silver nanowires, the proposed polymer composite electrode achieved superior optoelectronic performance while enabling real-time photovoltaic monitoring through an ESP32-based IoT platform. The hybrid architecture effectively combines energy harvesting, mechanical durability, and wireless connectivity, making it a promising candidate for next-generation intelligent flexible photovoltaic systems.

- PEDOT:PSS–AgNW hybrid electrodes exhibited excellent optical transparency (~91.6%) while maintaining a low sheet resistance of approximately 13.4 Ω/sq, providing an effective balance between light transmission and electrical conductivity.
- The polymer composite structure significantly enhanced nanowire adhesion, minimized surface roughness, and improved environmental stability compared with conventional transparent conductive electrodes.
- The fabricated flexible solar panel achieved a maximum power conversion efficiency (PCE) of 15.9%, demonstrating efficient charge collection and improved photovoltaic performance.
- Mechanical bending tests confirmed excellent flexibility, with less than 6% change in sheet resistance after 5000 bending cycles, indicating outstanding electrical reliability under repeated deformation.
- SEM analysis revealed a well-preserved silver nanowire conductive network with no significant cracking, delamination, or structural degradation after cyclic bending.
- The ESP32-based IoT monitoring system successfully acquired voltage, current, temperature, and irradiance data and transmitted them wirelessly to a cloud platform for continuous real-time monitoring.
- Cloud-based visualization enabled remote performance analysis, fault detection, historical data logging, and predictive maintenance, improving the operational reliability of flexible photovoltaic systems.
- The proposed polymer composite transparent conductive electrode demonstrates significant potential for applications in wearable electronics, portable power systems, building-integrated photovoltaics (BIPV), smart sensors, and autonomous IoT-enabled renewable energy devices.

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