

Harnessing Supercapacitors for Sustainable Energy Storage: A Technical Overview and Critical Analysis

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Abstract. The historic United Nations summit on 01st January 2016 adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and set the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Energy is a key part of the sustainable development agenda however the current renewable energy system faces several limitations like intermittency, grid integration challenges, and energy storage efficiency. Supercapacitor possesses high energy storage efficiency, high power density, and resource efficiency which enables them to contribute to different SDGs like promoting clean energy generation when integrated with renewable energy solutions (SDG 7), in industrial processes like water treatment plants it can energy efficiency reduce operational cost (SDG 6), it can also improve electric vehicle performance by improving energy efficiency and thereby contributing to SDG 11. Considering the different applications of supercapacitors in achieving sustainability, the current review article focuses on the importance of supercapacitors and their types. It also reviews different materials for electrodes and electrolytes and a note on future scope besides applications.

1 Introduction

Greenhouse and climate change are the two major concerns worldwide due to the significant dependency on fossil fuels, coal, and natural gas for energy sources. Therefore, there is a continuous demand for alternate, renewable, and eco-friendly sources for energy consumption. Although solar and wind are alternate sources, these have drawbacks in terms of fluctuating energy sources. The electrical system was introduced to overcome this problem, which constantly supplies energy without any fluctuation. The prime role of electrical energy storage devices is to act as a reservoir that stores the energy during production and supplies during requirements. The researchers are actively working on achieving the enhancement of the efficiency of devices used for storing electrical power. Unlike the conventional storage device that possesses a longer charging time and quick discharge drawback, supercapacitors (S.C) are the new era of technology that fulfils the above lacuna to a great extent. These devices boast exceptional power density, rapid charge and discharge capabilities, long lifespan, and eco-friendliness [1]. Fig. 1a shows the plot between specific power (S.P.) vs specific energy (S.E.) for different energy sources.

The highest specific energy is exhibited by fuel cells with lower specific power; however, the supercapacitor demonstrates the high-power output and moderate energy capacity. Nevertheless, the batteries showed intermediate potential in both S.P. and S.E. values. There is a huge demand for supercapacitors globally. The need for supercapacitors in the global market in 2014 was 0.46 billion dollars and is projected to grow to 8.33 billion dollars with an annual compound growth rate of 30 % by 2025 Fig. 1b [2].

The study provides a thorough examination of supercapacitors, emphasizing their importance in addressing environmental concerns. It systematically explores the global energy landscape, detailing the need for sustainable energy solutions. Through careful classification, it explores supercapacitors' workings, benefits, and applications. It also examines critical factors like electrode and electrolyte materials. The conclusion stresses the growing demand for hybrid supercapacitors and the need for ongoing advancements.

2 Classification of supercapacitor

Supercapacitor consists of two solid electrodes and a liquid electrolyte, which is different from a ceramic or electrolytic type of capacitor.

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These electrodes of S.C.s are separated by a separator, which is polarized by the voltage applied. The Supercapacitors (S.C.s) are classified into electric double-layer (EDL) capacitors, pseudo capacitors, and hybrid capacitors as shown Fig. 2.

2.1 Electric double-layer (EDL) capacitors

Helmholtz conceptualized the Electric double-layer (EDL) capacitor phenomenon [3]. The typical EDL capacitor is shown in Fig.3a. This capacitor works with the principle of forming double layers of electrochemical separation to store electrical energy. When a sufficient voltage is applied across the capacitor, the two layers of polarized ions are produced at the interfaces of electrodes. The first layer is induced within the solid electrode. The second layer, having opposite polarity, is customs from the dissolved and solvated ions disseminated in the electrolyte and moves near to the polarized electrode. A single layer of solvent molecules separates these two polarized ionic layers.

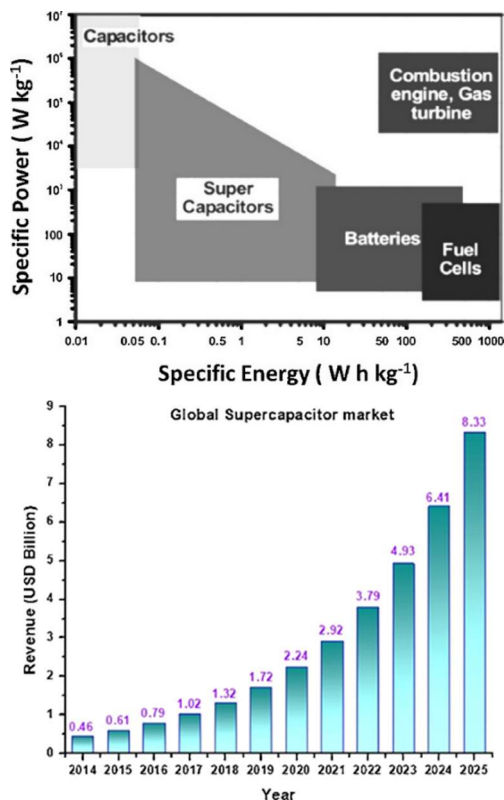


Fig. 1. (a) Specific power vs. Specific energy, (b) Global supercapacitor market [2]

The capacitance is calculated using the standard equation [4]-

$$C=(A\epsilon_0)/d \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

Here,

'C' denotes the capacitance in farads,

'A' stands for the surface area,

' ϵ_0 ' signifies the permittivity of free space,

'd' represents the effective thickness of the electric double-layer

2.2 Pseudo capacitors

The typical pseudo-capacitors is shown in Fig.3b. Pseudo-capacitors are the capacitors that charge the electrode due to electrochemical reactions without forming an intermediate layer. The energy density and capacitance obtained from Pseudo capacitors is higher than from EDL capacitors. The charging mechanism of Pseudo capacitors is fundamentally different from EDLC and works on the principle of pseudo-capacitive intercalation and the surface redox reaction. There is no phase transformation in this capacitor, so the charging process can be fast. The capacitance of the pseudo capacitors is obtained as per the following formula [5]-

$$C=(d(\Delta q))/(d(\Delta V)) \quad \text{--- (2)}$$

Here, ' Δq ' represents the charge acceptance, and ' ΔV ' denotes the change in potential.

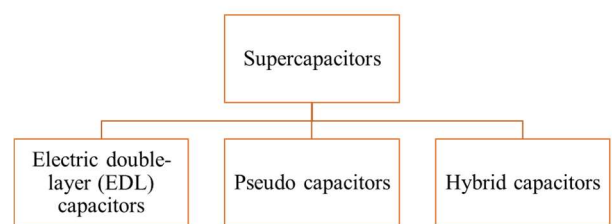


Fig. 2. Classification of supercapacitors

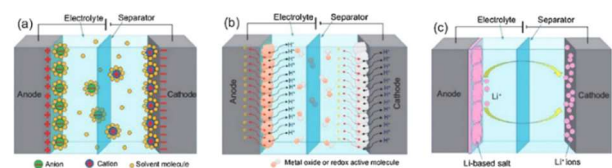


Fig. 3. Photograph of (a) electrical double-layer (EDL) capacitor (b) pseudo capacitor (PC) and (c) hybrid capacitor (HC) [2]

2.3 Hybrid capacitors

The conception of hybrid supercapacitors (HSCs) came into reality to enhance the energy density range, higher voltages, and less self-discharge [6]. The typical HSC is shown in Fig. 3c. This type of capacitor works on the principle of electrostatically and electrochemically charging the electrode, which replaces one of the EDLC electrodes with the coupling of different redox (Rox) and materials like graphene, activated carbon, metal oxides, and conducting polymers [7]. The combination has higher operational potential and can yield higher capacitance, about three times more than conventional EDL and pseudo capacitors. The specific capacitance (C_s) for hybrid capacitors is measured as per the following equation [8]-

$$C_s=I/(dV/dt(w)) \quad \text{--- (3)}$$

In this context, 'I' signifies the average current in amperes, 'w' refers to the total mass of the electrode, and dV/dt indicates the rate of voltage change over time.

3 Materials

The capacitors' functionality, electrical, and thermal characteristics depend on the type of electrode material, their combination, type of electrolyte, and separator materials. The followings are some essential materials concerning the supercapacitor materials-

3.1 Electrode materials

Electrodes materials used in supercapacitors are usually thin coatings of layers of conductive material on a metallic rod. The prime requirement for electrodes is fundamental properties like decent conductivity, superior temperature stability, high chemical stability, eco-friendliness, corrosion resistance, high surface areas, high specific volume, and low cost [9]. The commonly used electrodes for S.C. are- carbon-based, metal oxides, conductive polymers and nanocomposites.

3.1.1 Carbon-based material

Carbon-based electrodes are frequently used electrode for supercapacitors. This is due to high availability, conventional production processes, and low cost [10]. Carbon electrodes are available in various dimensional structures (i.e. from 1D to 3D), such as tube to sheet, and in the form of foam. The specific capacitance (C_s) increases with the surface area of the electrode.

3.1.2 Metal oxide

Metal oxide materials are also viable options for electrode usage in supercapacitors due to their high specific capacitance and minimal resistance. The construction of a supercapacitor is simple and low cost and produces high energy and power. Commonly used metal oxide materials include nickel oxide (NiO), ruthenium dioxide (RuO₂), manganese oxide (MnO₂), and iridium oxide (IrO₂). [11].

3.1.3 Conductive polymer

Conducting polymers is one of the electrode materials in supercapacitors. Researchers are highly interested in this subject due to its considerable potential applications, simple manufacturing process, and affordability [12]. Conductive polymers use different electrodes configurations. In one setup, known as the n/p type, one component carries a negative charge while the other bears a positive charge. In this arrangement, the storage and release of energy involve the reduction-oxidation process.

3.1.4 Nanocomposite

Nanocomposite materials are two-phase materials, where one is a continuous phase called matrix and the other is of dispersed phase at the nanoscale [13, 14, 15]. These materials are stronger, stiffer, superior thermal, electrical mechanical properties than those of virgin material [16, 17]. Nanocomposite electrodes are the type

of electrode where a nanoparticle, usually carbon-based material, is filled in the matrix of either metal oxide or conducting polymer [18]. This resulting nanocomposite offers an advanced means of physical and chemical charge storage compared to a single pristine electrode. Various types of nanocomposites include carbon-carbon, carbon-metal oxide, and carbon-conductive polymer composites. Table 1 summarizes different electrode materials utilized in supercapacitors, detailing their specific capacitance (C_s) measured in Farads per gram (Fg^{-1}) and energy density (E_d) in Watt-hours per kilogram ($WhKg^{-1}$). The materials encompass Multi-Walled Carbon Nanotubes (MWCNT), Graphene, Manganese Oxide/Carbon Nanotube composite (MnOx/CNT), Nitrogen-Doped Graphene, Manganese Oxide (Mn₃O₄), Ruthenium Dioxide (RuO₂), a composite of Polyaniline/Carbon Nanofiber/Graphene Nanoplatelet (PANI/CNF/GNP), a composite of Polythiophene/Multiwalled Carbon Nanotube, and a composite of Poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) nanowires/Carbon Cloth (PEDOT-NWs/CC).

Table 1: Different electrode materials for supercapacitors

Electrode material	Specific capacitance (C_s) Fg^{-1}	Energy density (E_d) $WhKg^{-1}$	Reference
MWCNT	50	-	[19]
Graphene	-	85.6	[20]
MnOx / CNT	388	-	[21]
Nitrogen-Doped Graphene	248.4	-	[22]
Mn ₃ O ₄	72	23.4	[23]
RuO ₂	1715	-	[24]
PANI/CNF/GNP	421.5	25.3	[25]
Polythiophene/multiwalled carbon nanotube	216	-	[26]
PEDOT-NWs/CC	256.1	182	[27]

3.2 Electrolyte materials

The primary function of electrolytes is to act as a medium that offers the mechanism for ion transport between the cathode and anode. Electrolytes are crucial for the operation of supercapacitors. To ensure smooth charging, the electrolyte concentration must be sufficiently high to prevent depletion issues. The key properties of electrolytes include conductivity and temperature coefficient [28], which determine the equivalent series resistance of supercapacitors. Table 2 summarizes various electrolyte materials used in supercapacitors. The listed materials include solutions such as 0.5 M K₂SO₄, 2 M Li₂SO₄, 1 M KOH (at a rate of 5 mVs⁻¹), 2 M KOH, 6 M KOH, 0.1 M H₂SO₄, and 1 M LiClO₄. These electrolyte solutions demonstrate varying specific capacitance and energy density values, reflecting their potential utility in supercapacitor applications.

Table 2. Different electrolyte materials for supercapacitors

Electrolyte material	Specific capacitance (C _s) Fg ⁻¹	Energy density (E _d) WhKg ⁻¹	Reference
0.5 M K ₂ SO ₄	110	20	[29]
2 M Li ₂ SO ₄	1145	57	[30]
1 M KOH	1376 at (5 mVs ⁻¹)	0.55 (mWhcm ⁻³)	[31]
2 M KOH	1065	-	[32]
6 M KOH	1045	51	[33]
0.1 M H ₂ SO ₄	380	-	[34]
1 M LiClO ₄	20.7 (F/cm ³)	1.5 (mWh cm ⁻³)	[35]

4 Applications

The advanced supercapacitors with superior performance have many applications like automobile, computer and memory chips, medical and industrial applications, electric grids, battery monitoring, etc. The supercapacitors also have defence applications like avionics, emergency power, munitions, radar, radio frequency communications and vehicles [7] as shown in Fig.4.



Fig. 4. Defence application of supercapacitors [7]

5 Conclusion

This chapter expounds the advancement in the field of supercapacitor and offers an insight into the requirement for supercapacitors in the modern era. The basic principles, the storage mechanism, the classification of different types of supercapacitors (S.C.) and the materials for electrodes and electrolytes have been reported. It is observed that supercapacitors like EDLC and pseudo capacitor has limited usage and the development of hybrid S.C. systems is currently the essential requirement to enhance the applicability range. The demand for hybrid supercapacitors is growing rapidly, particularly in the realm of hybrid electric vehicles and military uses.

6 Future Scope

The future scope of supercapacitors toward sustainability and SDGs is promising, spanning various avenues. Potential improvements and ongoing research areas are summarized in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Potential improvements and ongoing research

Area	Scopes of Improvement	Reference
Advanced Energy Storage Solution	Supercapacitors have the potential for further advancements in energy storage. The potential areas of improvement can focus on improving energy density, efficiency, and lifespan of capacitors. It acts as an enabler for more widespread adoption of renewable energy sources, thereby contributing to SDG 7.	[36,37,38, 39]
Grid Integration and Stability	Capacitors can be pivotal for enhancing grid stability and reliability. It can provide fast-response energy storage solutions. Attempts in future research are focussed on developing smart grid technologies that integrate capacitors to manage fluctuations in renewable energy generation and demand. It will thereby support SDG 9 by improving the resilience and efficiency of energy infrastructure.	[40, 41,42,43]
Electrification of Transportation:	Capacitors have potential in applications in electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs). However, the charging capabilities of capacitors have to improve, and thereby the range and performance of EVs will increase. It will contribute to SDG 11 by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.	[44,45,46, 47]
Decentralized Energy Systems:	Decentralized energy systems can enable communities to generate, store, and distribute their own renewable energy locally. Capacitors can play a cardinal role on the same by exploring avenues to integrate capacitors into microgrid and off-grid systems. It will enhance energy access, affordable material, and resilience in underserved areas, supporting SDG 7 and SDG 13.	[48,49, 50,51,52,53]

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