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Received June 12, 2018, accepted July 11, 2018, date of publication July 25, 2018, date of current version August 28, 2018.

Digital Object Identifier 10.1109/ACCESS.2018.2859835

mm-Wave High Gain Cavity-Backed Aperture-Coupled Patch Antenna Array

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This work was supported in part by the National Natural Science Foundation of China under Grant 61427801 and Grant 61601040, in part by the 111 Project under Grant B17007, and in part by the Beijing Nova Program under Grant Z181100006218039.

ABSTRACT A wideband and high gain cavity-backed 4×4 patch antenna array is proposed in this paper. Each patch antenna element of the array is enclosed by a rectangular cavity and differentially-fed by the slot underneath. By optimizing the geometry of the radiating patch and the cavity, a very uniform E-field distribution at the antenna aperture is achieved, leading to the high array aperture efficiency and thus the gain. Taking advantages of the higher-order substrate integrated cavity excitation, the elements of the array are efficiently fed with the same amplitude and phase in a simplified feeding mechanism instead of the conventional bulky and lossy power-splitter-based feeding network. Measured results show the antenna bandwidth is from 56 to 63.1-GHz (16.1%) with the peak gain reaching 21.4 dBi. The radiation patterns of the array are very stable over the entire frequency band and the cross-polarizations are as low as -30 dB. These good characteristics demonstrate that the proposed array can be a good candidate for the future 60-GHz communication system applications.

INDEX TERMS mm-wave, cavity-backed, aperture coupled, substrate integrated waveguide, array antenna, higher order mode.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the unprecedented rapid development of the fifth generation (5G) wireless communications in recent years, mm-Wave frequency band, the 60-GHz band in particular, has emerged as one of the most promising candidates for the multi-gigabit wireless indoor communication systems. Due to the continues and the sufficient bandwidth, the communication systems at 60-GHz are capable of achieving a high data rate up to multiple gigabits per seconds, which opens the door to the future wireless data transfer, particularly for the transmission of the uncompressed high-definition video and ultra-fast file [1], [2]. As a vital portion of the communication systems, mm-Wave antennas or arrays that feature low cost, wideband and high gain are in increasing demand. To date, various types of antennas with good performances for mm-Wave applications have been proposed [3]–[29], such as patch antennas [3]–[7], grid antennas [8]–[11], aperture antennas [12]–[14], dipole antennas [15], [16], slot antennas [17]–[23], and cavity-backed antennas [24]–[31].

Although the 60-GHz technology offers various advantages over currently proposed or existing communications systems, it has the disadvantage of the lossy channel with the excess loss approximately up to 15dB/km due to oxygen absorption [32]. Therefore, increasing the transmitter or receiver antenna gain is not only desirable but inevitable to compensate the significant propagation loss caused by the oxygen absorption and ensure that a sufficient margin exists to overcome other loss, such as rain-induced fading. Generally, there are two approaches to increase the antenna gain. One is increasing the radiating aperture size of the antenna while the other is improving the antenna aperture efficiency. The latter is more favorable as antennas with large physical size are usually cost-ineffective and bulky in structure, which is difficult to be integrated into the front-end of the transceiver. To improve the aperture efficiency, cavity-backed antennas have been demonstrated an efficient approach [33]–[35]. By optimizing the cavity geometry and size, a very uniform E-field distribution can be achieved

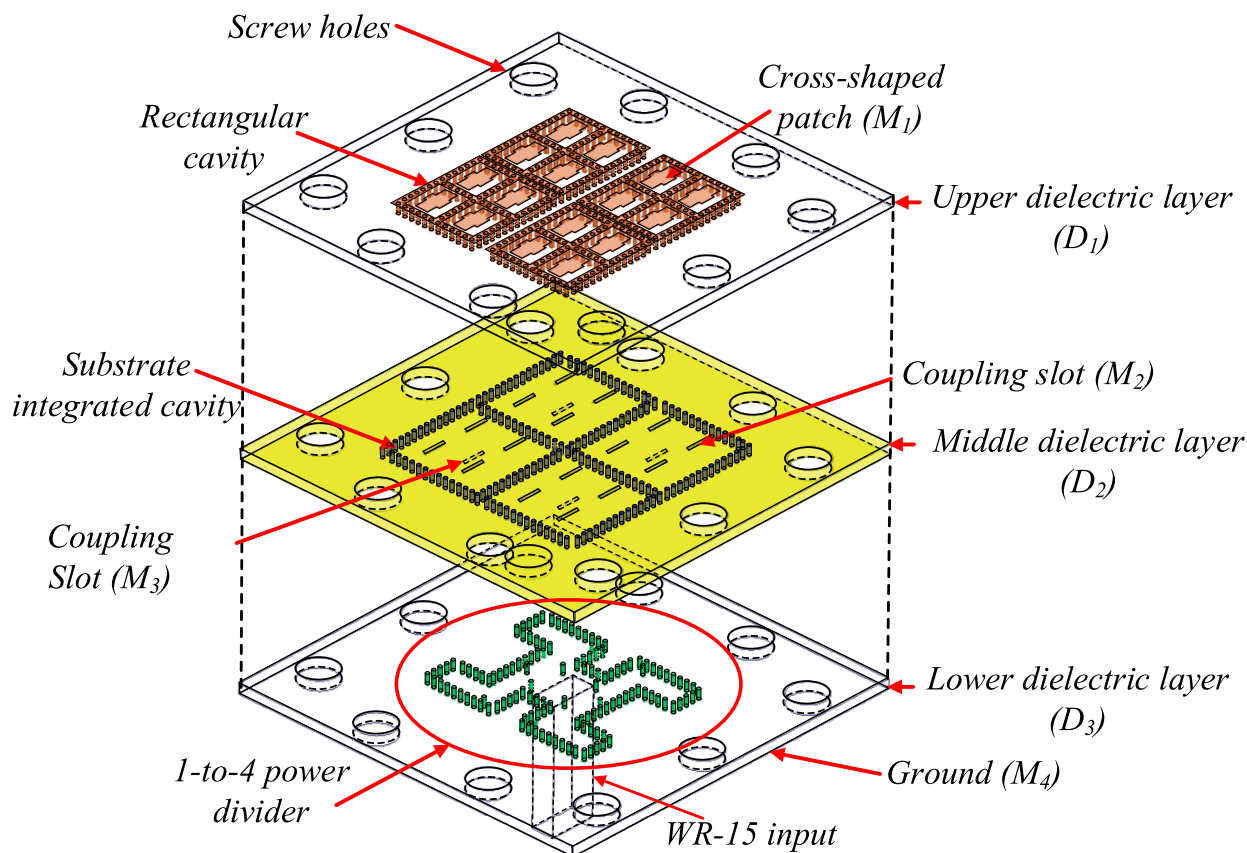


FIGURE 1. 3-D view of the proposed 4x4 antenna array.

at the aperture, leading to a high aperture efficiency [13], [36]–[38]. Moreover, the cavity can suppress the surface wave propagate along the substrate and also reduce the mutual coupling between the adjacent radiating elements of the array, which leads to a high radiation efficiency and stable radiation pattern over the wide frequency bandwidth.

Besides antenna gain and efficiency, the effect of the fabrication tolerance on antenna performance should not be neglected because of the very small wavelengths. Therefore, a highly accurate fabrication technology is required. Otherwise, the antenna performance including matching, gain as well as efficiency will be deteriorated. To alleviate the fabrication tolerance on the antenna performance, higher-order-mode substrate integrated cavity (SIC) excitation was proposed in [39] and [40] instead of other complicated feed networks to reduce the number of metal posts in the cavity for feeding elements of the antenna array. Nevertheless, their impedance bandwidths can be further improved for widespread applications.

In this paper, a new wideband cavity-backed patch antenna array with very high aperture efficiency as well as the gain is proposed for the 60-GHz applications. Firstly, a 2x2-element cavity-backed aperture-coupled patch antenna array is demonstrated, which exhibits high aperture efficiency as well as gain. Taking advantages of

the higher-order-mode cavity excitation, the elements of the array are efficiently excited with the same amplitude and phase in a simple TE₃₄₀ mode cavity, which eases the burdens of the conventional bulky and lossy feednetwork containing multiple power splitters and SIW-lines. The higher-order-mode cavity resonance is excited by a simple slot aperture located in the bottom center of the cavity. Then, the 2x2-element patch array is used as subarray to built a 4x4-element array, as shown in Fig. 1. Measured results show the antenna bandwidth is from 56 to 63.1-GHz (16.1%) with peak gain reaching 21.4 dBi. The radiation patterns of the array are very stable over the entire frequency band and the cross-polarizations are as low as -30 dB. These good characteristics demonstrate the proposed array can be a good candidate for the future 60-GHz communication systems.

II. THE 2x2-ELEMENT SIC-EXCITED ARRAY

The geometry of the proposed 2x2-element cavity-backed patch antenna subarray is shown in Fig. 2. The array consists of three Rogers 5880 layers with a dielectric constant of 2.2 and thickness of 0.787mm. The 2x2 cross-shaped radiating patch antenna array incorporated with its rectangular cavity is located in the upper substrate (D₁). Each cross-shaped patch is differentially fed by the coupling slot right underneath the patch. The coupling slot is cut on the top wall

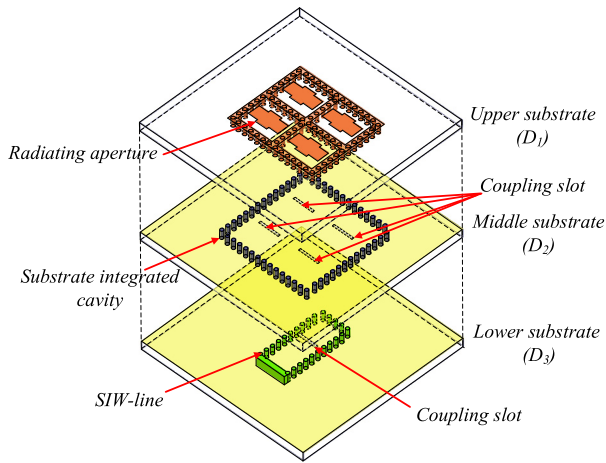


FIGURE 2. 3-D view of the proposed 2 × 2-element cavity-backed aperture-coupled patch antenna array.

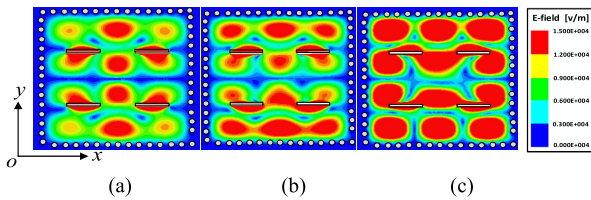


FIGURE 3. Electric field distributions in the cavity at (a) 57-GHz (b) 60-GHz and (c) 63-GHz.

of the substrate integrated cavity (SIC), which is implemented on the middle substrate (D_2) with metallized vias as sidewalls and metals as its top and bottom. The cavity is excited by the center slot in the bottom plane and the slot is cut on the top wall of the lower SIW lines. In order to obtain enough space to arrange the four cavity-backed antenna elements while maintaining a compact size simultaneously, the size of the SIC is adopted as 8.5 mm × 8.5mm. In this case, TE_{340} mode is excited in the cavity. The complex E-field distributions in the cavity at 57, 60 and 63-GHz are shown in Fig. 3. It is seen the TE_{340} mode exists over the operating frequency band although the mode slightly deteriorates as the frequency varies. In fact, the radiation performance of the array will not be affected by the mode deterioration due to the fact that the slots cut on the top of the cavity are symmetrical along the center plane, and thus the radiating elements are always excited with the same phase and amplitude.

To evaluate the performance of the proposed subarray, the simulated gains is shown in Fig. 4. It is observed that the gains are escalated from 14.3 to 15.3 dBi with its peak occurring at 60-GHz. In fact, this high gain is achieved due to the uniform E-field distributions at the antenna aperture, which can be easily realized by optimizing the cavity size and the patch geometry that enclosed. To better demonstrate this, the E-field distributions at the top surface of the antenna aperture are shown in Fig. 5. A very uniform

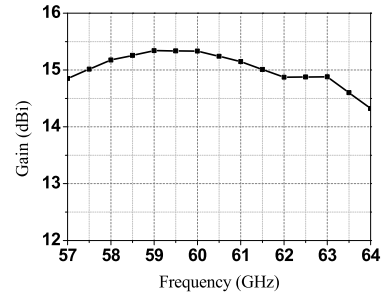


FIGURE 4. Simulated gain versus frequency of the proposed 2 × 2 antenna array.

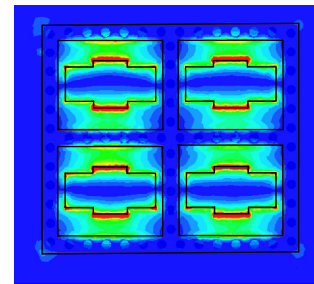


FIGURE 5. Surface E-field distributions at the array aperture.

TABLE 1. Dimensions of the proposed antenna array.

Parameter	S	l_1	l_2	l_3	l_4	l_5	l_6
Value (mm)	40	1.50	3.41	2.84	1.89	2.0	3.24
Parameter	l_7	l_8	l_9	l_{10}	l_{11}	w_1	w_2
Value(mm)	2.45	8.47	1.86	2.68	3.0	1.09	1.11
Parameter	w_3	w_4	w_5	w_6	w_7	w_8	w_9
Value(mm)	0.5	0.16	0.18	0.72	0.56	0.49	0.68
Parameter	d	d_1	d_2	g_x	g_y		
Value (mm)	0.3	1.26	0.2	30	30		

E-field distributions can be observed in each cavity, indicating that the high aperture efficiency as well as the gain can be achieved.

III. THE 4 × 4-ELEMENT SIC-EXCITED ARRAY

Based on the proposed 2 × 2 cavity-backed subarray, the 4 × 4-element array is proposed and verified, as shown in Fig. 1. 4 × 4 cross-shaped radiating patch array together with its cavity is implemented on the upper layer (D_1). They are excited by the four substrate integrated cavities that are realized in the middle substrate (D_2). The 1-to-4 SIW-based power splitter is implemented on the lower layer (D_3), which is directly fed at the center by the WR-15 waveguide. The distances between the adjacent subarrays are 8.5 mm in both the x-direction and y-direction. Top view of each layer of the array is shown in Fig. 6 and the detailed dimensions of the proposed 4 × 4 array are given in Table 1.

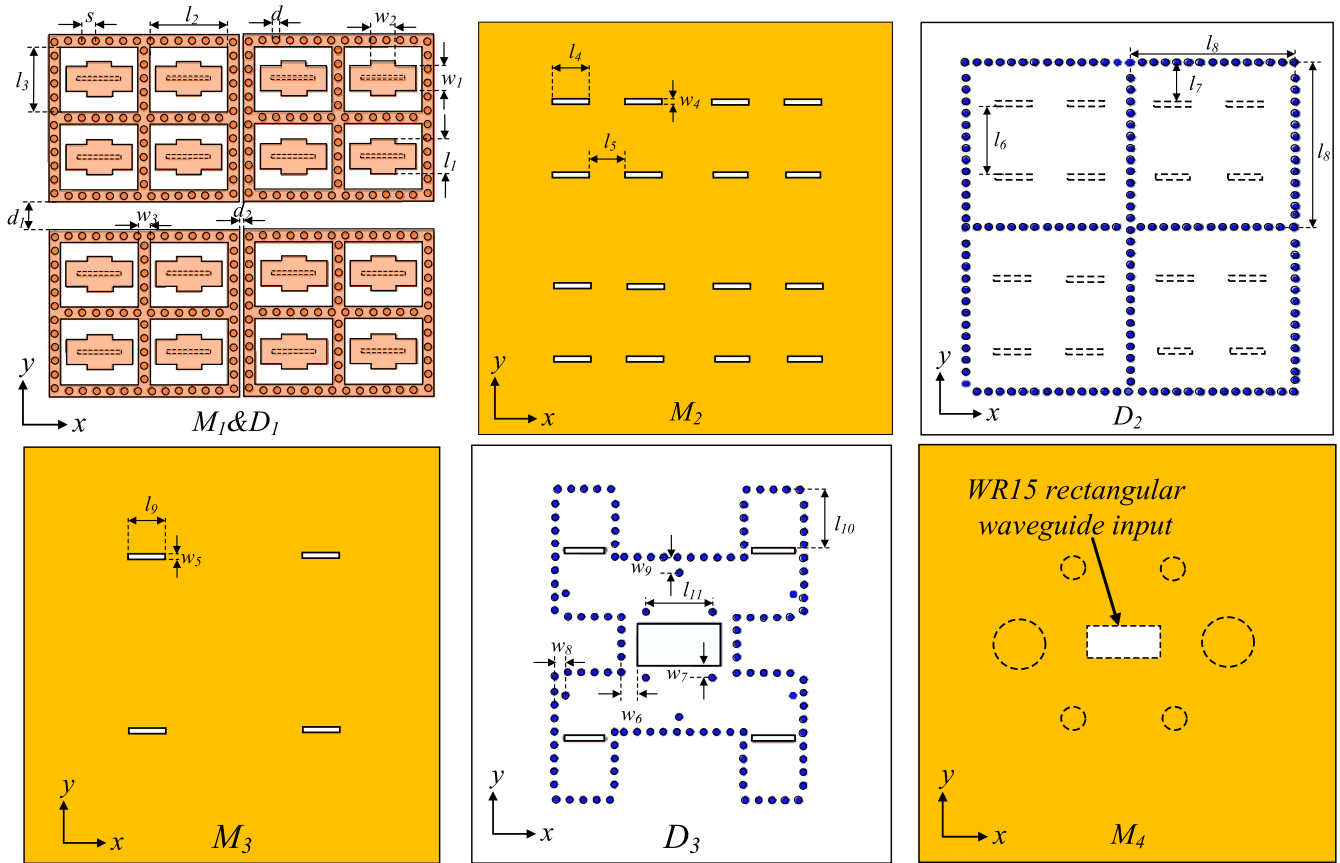


FIGURE 6. Top view of each layer of the array.

A. WAVEGUIDE-FED 1-TO-4 POWER SPLITTER

The amplitude and phase balance of the 1-to-4 power splitter are crucial to the antenna performance. Therefore, the proposed differentially-fed 1-to-4 power splitter is carefully designed and evaluated, as shown in Fig. 7. The simulated performance of the 1-to-4 power divider together with the WR15-to-SIW transition is given in Fig. 8. It is seen that the S_{11} is below -15 dB from 57 to 64-GHz. The energy is equally divided into the four output ports and the phase imbalance is less than 0.5° , indicating the good performance of the proposed waveguide-fed 1-to-4 power splitter.

B. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

A prototype is fabricated and measured to verify the design, as shown in Fig. 9. Three Rogers 5880 laminates are fabricated independently and then stacked together by screw holes. Thermally & Electrically Conductive Adhesive (TECA) films are used to bond the dielectric layers and wipe out the possible air between them. The reflection coefficient of the array, which is measured by a Vector Network Analyzer MS4646B, is shown in Fig. 10. The simulated -10 dB bandwidth is from 57 to 64.2-GHz (17.7%) and the measured result is from 56 to 63.1-GHz (16.1%). The antenna gain versus

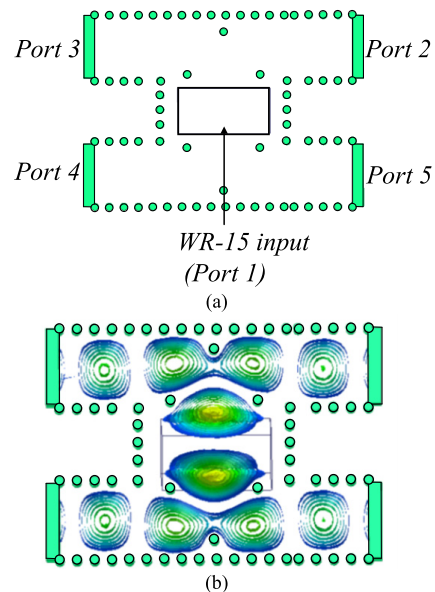


FIGURE 7. (a) WR-15 differentially-fed 1-to-4 power splitter. (b) E-field distributions in the waveguide.

frequency is shown in Fig. 11. The gains are escalated from 19.6 to 21.6 dBi for simulation and from 19.9 to 21.4 dBi for measurement. The formula for calculating aperture efficiency

TABLE 2. Comparison of Different arrays working at 60 GHz.

Ref.	Antenna Type	Feeding Network	No. of layer	Volume (length × width × height) (mm ³)	-10dB Impedance Bandwidth	Peak Gain (dBi)	Aperture efficiency	Radiation efficiency
[3]	L-probe patch(LTCC)	stripline	10	14.1×14.4×1 (2.82×2.88×0.2λ ₀)	29%	17.5	Not given	>80%
[4]	Patch array	CPW	1	17×17×3.8 (3.4×3.4×0.76λ ₀)	25.5%	16.7	Not given	Not given
[8]	Grid array	Microstrip line	6	15×15×0.6 (3.0×3.0×0.12λ ₀)	11.5	17.7	59.9%	Not given
[21]	Slot (PCB)	SIW (Series)	1	30.7×30.7×0.508 (6.1×6.1×0.1λ ₀)	4,1%	22	41.2%	68%
[25]	Slot antenna (PCB)	SIW (Parallel)	1	14×13.5×0.635 (2.8×2.7×0.13λ ₀)	11.6%	12.2	Not given	Not given
[28]	Cavity (LTCC)	SIW (Parallel)	20	24.6×31×2.0 (4.9×6.2×0.4λ ₀)	17.1%	22.1	42.3%	44.4%
[30]	Cavity-backed patch antenna(PCB)	SIW (Parallel)	4	16.3×17.1×2.3 (3.26×3.42×0.46λ ₀)	22.6%	19.6	80%	54.5%
This work	Cavity-backed patch (PCB)	SIW (higher-order-mode)	3	30×30×2.4 (6.0×6.0×0.48λ ₀)	>18.2%	21.4	70.3%	95%(Sim)

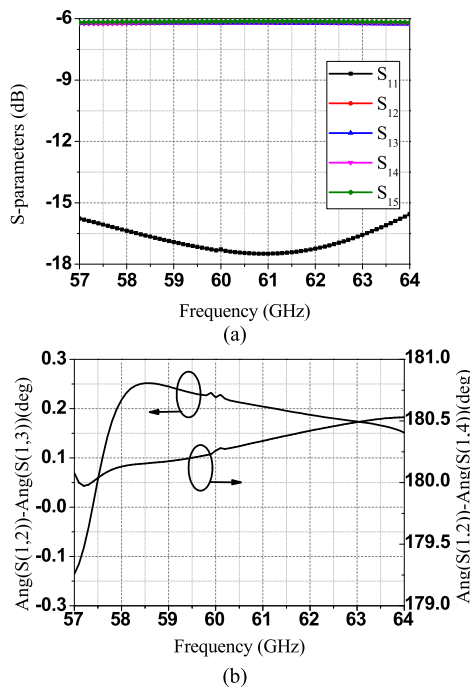


FIGURE 8. (a) S-parameters of the 1-to-4 power splitter. (b) Phase imbalance of the output ports.

of an aperture antenna ϵ_{ap} is given by [41]:

$$\epsilon_{ap} = \frac{G\lambda^2}{4\pi A_p} \tag{1}$$

where G and A_p are the gain and the physical aperture of the antenna, respectively. Considering that the relatively large area ($30 \times 30 \text{ mm}^2$) of the proposed array is due to the

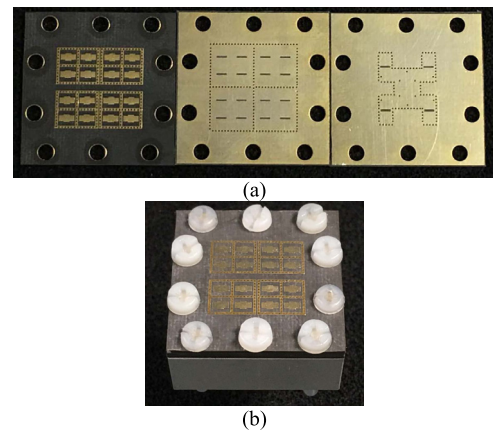


FIGURE 9. Prototype of the antenna array. (a) Top view of each layer. (b) Assemble view.

peripheral area occupied by the screw holes and this peripheral area contributes little to the antenna gain, we simulated the antenna boresight gain with dielectric margins that are occupied by the screw hole removed, as shown in Fig. 11. Under this circumstance, the size of the physical radiating area is $20 \text{ mm} \times 20 \text{ mm}$ and the calculated aperture efficiency is about 70.3% at 61 GHz, which is acceptable for the array antenna.

The radiation patterns of the array at 57, 60 and 63-GHz are given in Fig. 12. The patterns are measured by using the far-field mm-Wave measurement system. Due to the system limitation, only half of the sphere is measured. It is seen the patterns are generally symmetrical with its main beam and the highest gain fixed at its boresight. Cross polarizations

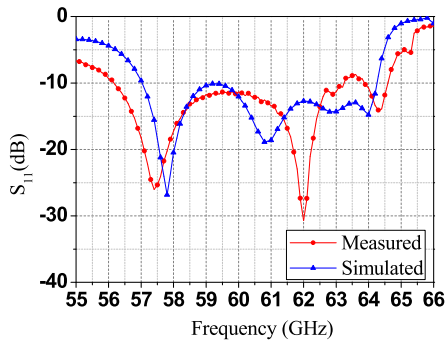


FIGURE 10. simulated and measured reflection coefficient.

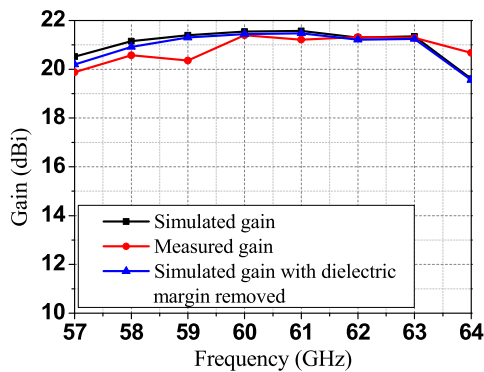


FIGURE 11. Simulated and measured antenna gains.

are lower than -40 dB and -30 dB for the simulation and measurement, respectively. The sidelobes are generally below -12 dB at both planes. The discrepancy between the simulation and measurement is due to the fabrication tolerance and other uncertainties such as dielectric change of the substrate, etc.

The simulated radiation patterns and the gain of the array without the top patch are also given in the Fig. 13 and 14, respectively. As can be seen, the side lobes of the radiation patterns deteriorate at high frequencies. At 60 and 63-GHz, the side lobe levels are worse than -10 dB. The gain of the array also shows about 1.6 to 2 dB drop over the frequency band compared with the proposed design. Therefore, we can conclude that adding the top patch can help to improve the radiation performance of the array through properly adjusting the geometry of the patch.

C. DISCUSSION

Table 2 compares the key characteristics of the proposed antenna array with other 60-GHz antenna arrays. Although patch antenna array with L-probe feed [3], CPW feed [4] and grid array antenna with microstrip feed [8] show many excellent performances including wide impedance matching and good radiation patterns. The aperture efficiency and the gain are lower than the proposed one. Besides, CPW and microstrip line are relatively lossier in 60-GHz frequency band compared with SIW feeding, especially at the discontinuities. In order to obtain high aperture efficiency as well as

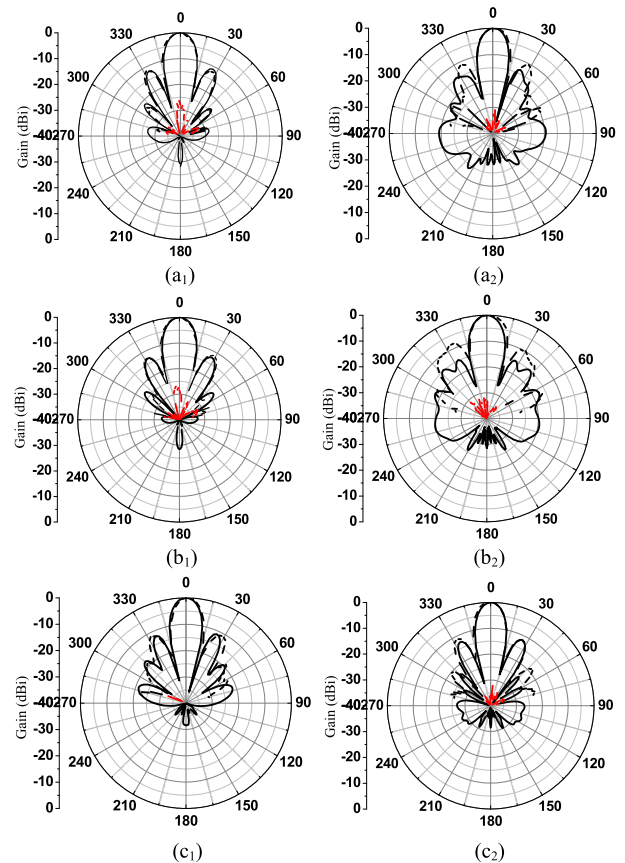


FIGURE 12. Simulated and measured radiation patterns of the proposed array. (Simulated: solid line. Measured: dash line). (a₁) XOZ-plane@58-GHz. (a₂) YOZ-plane @58-GHz. (b₁) XOZ-plane @60-GHz. (b₂) YOZ-plane @60-GHz. (c₁) XOZ-plane @63-GHz. (c₂) YOZ-plane @63-GHz.

high gain, patch antennas that are enclosed by the cavity are used in many array designs [21], [25], [29], [30]. Although these designs can achieve very good performance including wide impedance matching, high gain as well as aperture efficiency, they are usually equipped with large SIW (parallel) based feeding network, which consists of plenty of SIW-based power dividers and long SIW lines. Therefore, the loss of the feed network is nonnegligible, which will eventually give rises to the drop of the antenna radiation efficiency. Compared with these works, the proposed design exhibits two advantages. Firstly, the proposed array shows higher radiation efficiency because it uses less power dividers by taking advantages of the high-order-mode cavity excitation. More importantly, the proposed array can be extended to larger array design, such as 8×8 and 16×16 -element array using even higher resonant modes without sacrificing the radiation efficiency much. Secondly, the proposed array uses fewer vias compared with the design in [30]. This reduces the cost of the antenna. Moreover, at 60-GHz, the effect of the fabrication tolerance on antenna performance should not be neglected because of the very small wavelengths. The fabrication tolerance will affect the antenna performance including

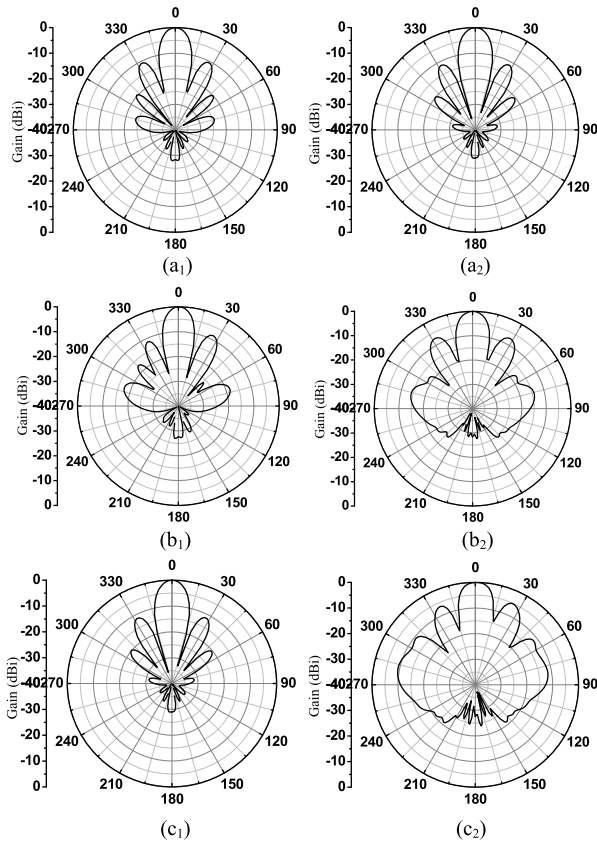


FIGURE 13. Simulated radiation patterns of the array without the top patch. (a₁) XOZ-plane@58-GHz. (a₂) YOZ-plane @58-GHz. (b₁) XOZ-plane@60-GHz. (b₂) YOZ-plane @60-GHz. (c₁) XOZ-plane@63-GHz. (c₂) YOZ-plane @63-GHz.

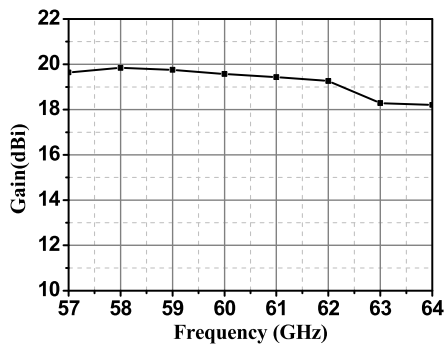


FIGURE 14. Simulated antenna boresight gain of the array without top patch.

matching, gain as well as efficiency. Therefore, the proposed array that uses fewer vias can generally have more stable performance. With these good features, the proposed cavity-backed patch antenna array can be used in the future 60-GHz communication systems.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, a wideband high gain cavity-backed patch antenna array is proposed and demonstrated in this paper. By optimizing the geometry of the radiating patch and the

cavity, a very uniform E-field distribution at the antenna aperture is achieved, resulting in the high array aperture efficiency and thus the gain. Taking advantages of the higher-order substrate integrated cavity excitation, the elements of the array are efficiently fed with the same amplitude and phase with a simplified feeding network. Measured results show the antenna bandwidth is from 56 to 63.1-GHz (16.1%) with peak gain reaching 21.4 dBi. The radiation patterns of the array are very stable over the entire frequency band and the cross-polarizations are as low as -30 dB.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

(Jianfeng Zhu and Chen-Hao Chu contributed equally to this work.)

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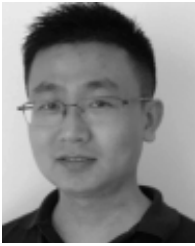
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