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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A Novel Smart Optimized Capacitance-Based Sensor for Annular Two-Phase Flow Metering With High Sensitivity

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**ABSTRACT** Accurately determining phase fractions in two-phase flows is among the most significant issues in Industries related to the production and processing of petroleum and petrochemicals. There are numerous sensor types and configurations for measuring the void fraction. In this respect, the capacitance-based sensor is commonly recognized as one of the most precise and widely utilized sensors. In this essay, COMSOL Multiphysics software, which has been benchmarked, was used for simulations with various electrode architectures for measuring oil-air two-phase flow in an annular pattern. The initial electrode configurations were helix, double ring, concave and parallel plates. Finite element analysis utilizing COMSOL Multiphysics was executed to compare the electrode configurations. Results exposed disparate sensitivities for different electrode geometries. To get better results, a new electrode geometry called arrow-shaped which was optimized with Artificial intelligence (AI) was proposed and compared with the others. The sensor responses presented demonstrated that the proposed arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor had 21% higher sensitivity than the best-performing sensor among four other existing sensor designs, including concave, helix, double ring, and parallel plates. These results indicate the superior performance of the arrow-shaped sensor and its potential for use in high-sensitivity applications.

**INDEX TERMS** Annular regime, arrow-shaped, capacitive sensor, artificial intelligence, concave, optimization, sensitivity, two-phase.

## I. INTRODUCTION

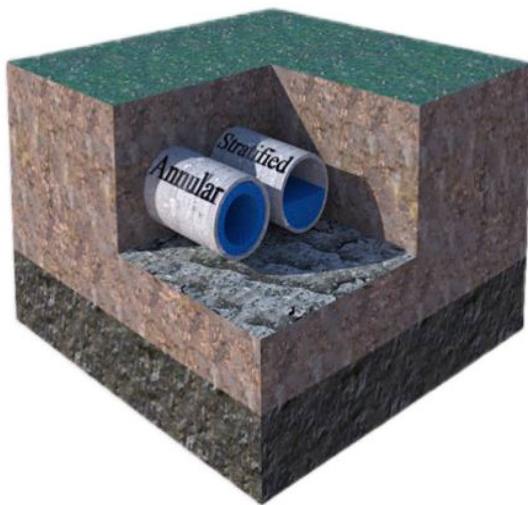
When it comes to the planning and construction of large-scale research facilities, understanding the attributes of two-phase gas-liquid flow patterns is essential. Nevertheless, it might be challenging to accurately Determine the flow of a combination comprising two phases [1]. Several types of commercially accessible meters use diverse measurement principles. [2], [3]. Each of these meters has some limitations.

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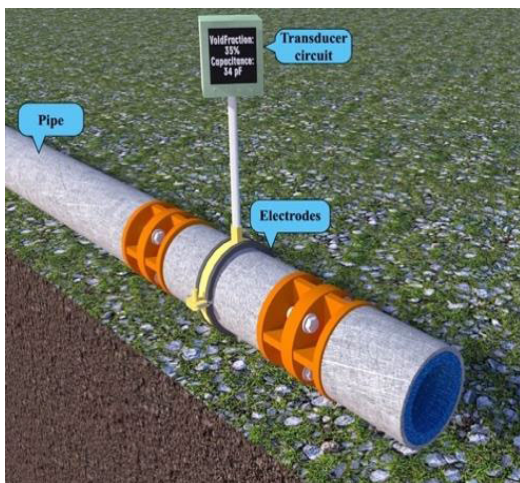
Almost all of them are flow regime dependent and the majority could only achieve acceptable accuracy with homogeneous flows. Flow-mixing instruments are typically used to address this issue [4]. One of the most ordinary measurements of gas-liquid two-phase flow is the segregation method, where the phases are separated and each flow measured separately. This method necessitated costly apparatus and had the potential to cause a disruption in the continuity of industrial processes besides, traditional methods cannot achieve the flow regime [5]. Accurate modeling of two-phase systems is required precise evaluation of pore space and discernment of

fluid movement patterns. The amount of gas that is contained within a pipe is proportional to the entire capacity of the pipe. This proportion is referred to as the void fraction [6]. Several techniques can be used to measure void fractions, such as Conductive sensing probes, impedance or capacitance sensing, quick-closing valves, and Radiative absorption ( $x$ -rays or  $\gamma$ -rays). However, interferometric probes cause disturbances in the flow field, and radiation attenuation methods can be costly and difficult to implement from a safety perspective. In contrast, the technique of measuring impedance is economical and feasible [7]. Additionally, capacitive technology is utilized in the process of determining the thickness of a liquid film [8]. In order to estimate real-time hold-up, a capacitance-based sensor system has been proposed [9]. This technique is on the basis of the diverse electrical qualities of each phase with different combinations and quantities in the tube, producing different permittivity distributions [10]. To detect these shifts, a capacitor is formed with electrodes on the tube's exterior [11]. One major benefit of capacitive sensing is that it is not obtrusive and does not cause any disruptions to the flow regime [12]. To gather hold-up measurements or tomographic reconstructions, capacitance-based sensors have advanced and shown good results for gas-liquid and liquid-liquid flow [13], [14]. Additionally, with regard to the gas-solid system [15]. Kendoush and Sarkis proposed a new method to improve the accuracy of void fraction measurement using capacitance sensors in two-phase flow, which involves taking into account the influence of electrode shape, electrode spacing, and dielectric constant of the fluids [16]. Abouelwafa et al. evaluated the outcomes of a comparison of numerous capacitance setups in gas-liquid two-phase tubes. In a Quantified flow regime, it has been determined that a structure composed of four concave plates is superior for increased sensitivity and manufacturing convenience [17]. Ahmad et al. examined the ring and concave type of capacitance sensor. An equivalent capacitance circuit was used to represent the phase fraction and evaluate the sensitivity of both ring and concave sensors. Furthermore, decreasing the distance among electrodes increases the sensitivity of the ring sensor. Additionally, the ring sensor exhibits greater sensitivity compared to the concave sensor at the same resolution [18]. Zhai et al. proposed a double helix capacitance sensor for the noninvasive measurement of liquid holdup in horizontal oil-water two-phase flow pipes, which offers a potential solution to the challenge of accurate measurement of two-phase flow in oil and gas production processes [19]. Jaworek et al. evaluated the vacancy fraction by utilizing five unique sensor designs with a radio frequency resonance circuit operating at a frequency of 80 MHz [20]. Elkow and Rezkallah developed capacitance sensors for measuring the void fraction in gas-liquid flows under both normal gravity and microgravity conditions, highlighting the versatility of this sensing technology in different operating environments [21]. Dos Reis and da Silva Cunha conducted an experimental study to investigate different configurations of

capacitive sensors for measuring volumetric concentration in two-phase flows. The results showed that the sensitivity and accuracy of the sensors were influenced by the sensor configuration, electrode shape, and electrode material. The authors concluded that a careful selection of these parameters could lead to an optimal capacitive sensor design for measuring the volumetric concentration in two-phase flows [22]. Tollefsen and colleagues aimed to improve the sensitivity and accuracy of a helical capacitive sensor's independence to flow regimes by utilizing Finite Element Method (FEM) modeling to simulate the sensor. The researchers validated their simulation by employing various sensors and flow regime measurements, which demonstrated the highest discrepancy of 5% among the simulated and experimental outcomes [23]. Salehi and his colleagues conducted experimental and simulation studies to investigate architecture factors on the capacitance output for the concave and ring types of sensors. A linear association was discovered between output capacitance and porosity. Additionally, Salehi introduced a capacitive sensor system for measuring the phase fraction of a gasoline two-phase flow arrangement in 2017 [24]. In comparison to each other, double-ring and concave electrodes were employed. Observational conclusions demonstrated that concave architecture depends on flow regimes. Salehi et al. examined the new shape of electrode formations in different regimes for two-phase oil-air flow measurement [25]. The results demonstrate that each electrode shape has varied sensitivity. In the annular structure, the concave configuration exhibited higher sensitivity compared to the other shapes. Salehi and his co-workers proposed a new shape of electrode named TRFLC to identify the pattern of flow in two-phase oil-gas horizontal tubes [26]. Computational and mathematical calculations, combined with Digital Signal Processing (DSP) techniques, specifically Artificial Neural Network (ANN), are being extensively used as a highly effective mathematical tool to solve complex engineering problems in various fields such as electrical engineering [27], [28], [29], [30], civil engineering [31], [32], instrumentation and control engineering [33], [34], Nano electronic [35], [36], chemical, and petrochemical engineering [37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [42]. Recent research has focused on hardware acceleration for electrical tomography systems. Meribout et al. proposed a hybrid FPGA-GPU-based hardware accelerator for 2D Electrical Impedance Tomography [43], while Tiwari et al. developed a neural network-based data acquisition system [44]. Tiwari et al. reviewed electrical tomography hardware systems for real-time applications [45], while Teniou et al. designed a pipelined parallel hardware architecture for 2-D real-time electrical capacitance tomography imaging [46]. Saied et al. developed a real-time two-dimensional imaging system using electrical capacitance tomography [47]. These hardware systems offer significant improvements in imaging speed and accuracy. Also have potential applications in medical diagnosis, industrial monitoring, and environmental sensing. In our previous work, the COMSOL simulation was



(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 1.** (a) Stratified and annular flow regimes in a pipe. (b) Schematic view of a capacitance-based flow meter.

validated through experimental studies, and an artificial neural network (ANN) model was developed to accurately predict void fractions in various fluids [48]. The characteristics of gas-liquid two-phase flow patterns can give rise to different flow regimes, where the most common ones are stratified and annular, as demonstrated in Figure 1(a). Electrodes and a transducer circuit are the two components that make up capacitance-based sensors, as shown in Figure 1(b).

The novelty and main contribution of our paper specifically focus on proposing and improving a novel optimized arrow-shaped electrode geometry for capacitance-based sensors. This paper proposes a new type of capacitance-based sensor with an arrow-shaped design, which has demonstrated higher sensitivity than other sensor shapes for measuring gas-liquid two-phase annular flow patterns. The study further investigates the ideal construction of the proposed sensor by examining the sensitivity domain of the arrow-shaped sensor using the finite element method (FEM) through COMSOL Multiphysics software.



**FIGURE 2.** Two-phase annular flow pattern structure.

## II. VOID FRACTION MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES

The geometric distribution of the components inside a flow may impact the momentum, mass and energy transfer rates. Additionally, the flow inside each component or phase depends on the flow regimes, which is deemed a particular form of geometric distribution for the constituent [49]. In this project, an electrical capacitance-based sensor was used to provide Precise measurement outcomes using non-engaging and non-invasive methods. In multiphase flow, the dimensionless quantity of void fraction is regarded as the most crucial factor. Although void fraction was first used in the 1940s, it continues to be utilized today. The term ‘void fraction’ in multiphase flow refers to the fraction of a geometric domain engaged by a different phase, as illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts related polyphase flow terminology. The phase fractions for the two-phase oil-gas regime in annular flow were described using Equations (1) and (2). Several studies have explored various techniques for estimating void fraction values. Among these studies, Zehtaban and colleagues investigated void fraction in two-phase flows [50], while Giang T. Phan et al. focused on predicting void fraction [51]. Robert Hanus et al. conducted research on void fractions in basic flow regimes [52]. Barbosa et al. studied the characteristics of void fraction [53]. Fouladi et al. utilized an artificial neural network to predict void fractions in different fluids [54]. Additionally, Shahsavari et al. focused on the effect of different orientations in stratified two-phase flows [55].

$$V_{gas} = \frac{\pi R^2}{\pi R1^2} = \frac{R^2}{R1^2} \quad (1)$$

$$V_{water} = \frac{\pi R1^2 - \pi R^2}{\pi R1^2} = \frac{R1^2 - R^2}{R1^2} \quad (2)$$

## III. VALIDATION OF SIMULATION

In this paper, the capacitance-based sensors used for simulating polyphasic flows were created using COMSOL Multiphysics tools. To ensure accuracy, the simulations were initially benchmarked against the reference [48].

To validate the COMSOL reconstruction, both an investigational study and an arithmetical study were conducted, as described in reference [48]. The present study involved

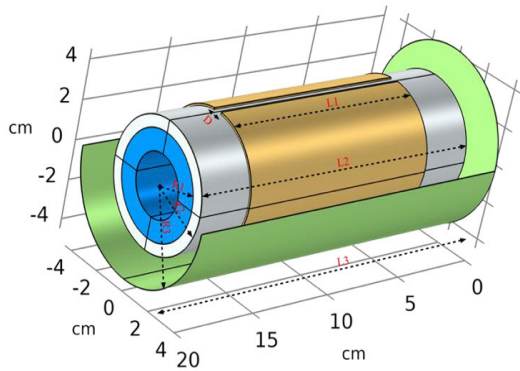


FIGURE 3. A diagrammatic representation of the configuration employed to authenticate the COMSOL Multiphysics simulation.

conducting experimental investigations and numerical examination on diverse electrode arrangements to measure the two-phase flow of air and water in annular patterns. In the current investigation, a concave capacitive sensor with the arrangement determined in [48] was first simulated. Soft copper electrodes with a thickness of 0.1 cm were used, with one electrode for exciting and the other for measuring. The interior pipe radius was  $R1 = 2.6$  cm, the exterior pipe radius was  $R2 = 3.2$  cm, and the radius of the considered earth was  $R3 = 4.5$  cm. The electrode length was  $L1 = 12$  cm and the pipe length was  $L2 = 18$  cm.  $L3 = 20$  cm was the length considered for Earth and the spacing between electrodes was  $D = 0.5$  cm. The relative permittivities of air, water and the pipe wall were adjusted to 1, 81, and 3.3, respectively. Figure 3 depicts the simulated structure used to validate the COMSOL simulation. Simulations were run using void fractions of 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, and 100 for the annular air-water two-phase flow. The comparison between the COMSOL simulation and the outcomes that were demonstrated in reference [48] is shown in Table 1 and

TABLE 1. Comparison of the COMSOL Multiphysics simulation's calculated results with [48] to validate the simulation.

Void fraction (present)	Reference capacitance [48] (pF)	Simulated capacitance with COMSOL (pF)	Relative difference
100	10.067	10.277	0.020
90	15.317	15.553	0.015
80	18.957	19.204	0.013
70	21.178	21.561	0.018
60	22.967	23.398	0.018
50	24.391	24.837	0.018
40	25.481	25.923	0.017
30	26.389	26.836	0.017
20	27.113	27.58	0.017
10	27.749	28.208	0.016
0	28.341	28.779	0.015

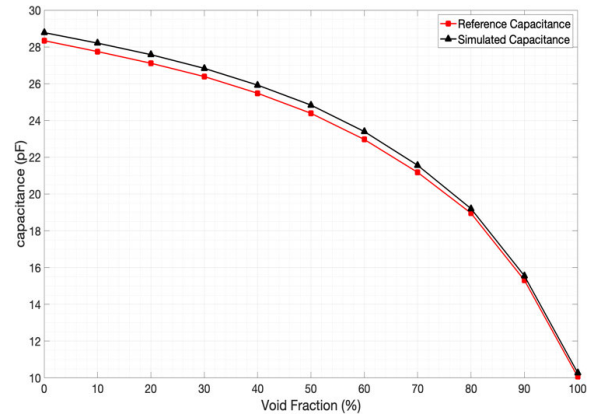


FIGURE 4. The validation of the simulation based on a comparison of the findings obtained by COMSOL Multiphysics with [39].

graphed in Figure 4. The comparison demonstrates a good agreement between the two. The mean relative difference between the reference capacitance and the simulated capacitance was 0.022, which is a negligibly small number. This small difference could be due to the considered earth or size of the meshed model. These findings imply that the simulated outcomes have been validated.

#### IV. CONFIGURATION OF THE SUGGESTED SENSOR

The presented arrow-shaped sensor consisted of five components: an insulating pipe, an earthed screen, a transducer circuit, an exciting electrode, and a measuring electrode. The sensor's electrode design was optimized through a passive approach based on the study of existing sensors. Also, artificial intelligence was utilized to improve the design. The arrow-shaped sensor is shown in three dimensions in Figure 5(a), while Figure 5(b) illustrates a cross-sectional

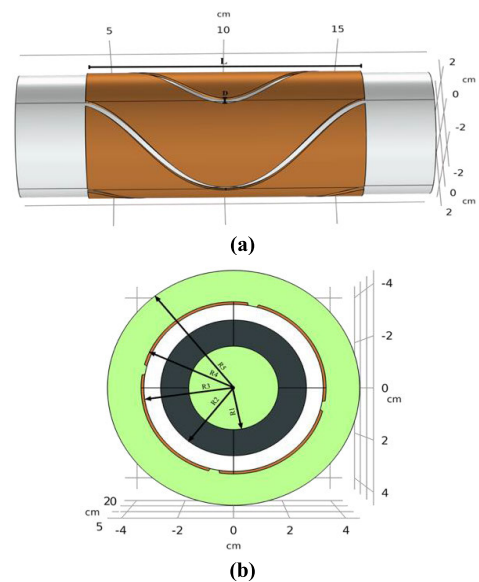
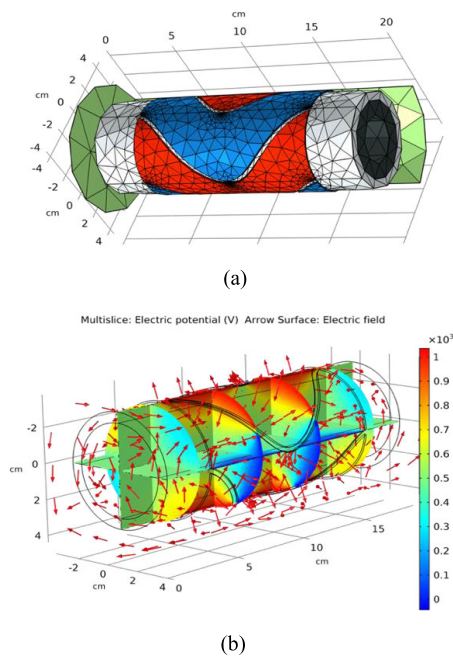


FIGURE 5. (a) Three dimensions view of the proposed sensor. (b) Diagrammatic section of the arrow-shaped sensor which has been located in the center of the pipe.



**FIGURE 6. (a) Mesh representation of the suggested sensor. (b) An instance of a FEM simulation of the arrow-shaped sensor for an annular flow pattern.**

view of the sensor, with the fluid mixture inside the pipe represented by the central area. The length of the electrode, the radius of air inside the pipe, the internal radius of the pipeline, the external radius of the pipeline, the external radius of the electrode and the radius of the earthed screen as  $L, R_1, R_2, R_3, R_4, R_5$ , respectively. To Simulate the proposed sensor, soft copper plates were utilized as electrodes, quartz glass as the pipe material, and oil and air as the fluid and gas phases, respectively. The finite element mesh model of the arrow-shaped sensor is shown in Figure 6(a), while Figure 6(b) depicts the outcomes of the FEM simulation.

**V. SENSITIVITY FIELD OF THE ARROW-SHAPED SENSOR**

Configuration of the electrodes is a crucial criterion for capacitance computation since it influences the electric field’s susceptibility distribution. Using a 3-D arithmetical finite element examination, the effect of the arrow-shaped sensor’s geometry on output response was investigated. The meshed FEM was drawn using the COMSOL Multiphysics 5.5 software. In the model documentation, Electrostatics was selected, and the fluent ingredient was subdivided towards 19280 3-D tetrahedral pieces. In the finite component computation, the sensitivity of the arrow-shaped electrode was estimated in the annular flow pattern. A 3D geometry was used to calculate the capacitance differences caused by the sub-domain permittivity shift to estimate the electrode sensitivity sphere. The retort of the arrow-shaped sensor in an annular regime qualified to obtained by repeating the process at every particular test spot in the measured area. Equation 3 provides the definition of the overall sensitivity.

$$S_o = C_o - C_g \tag{3}$$

In this equation 3,  $C_o$  and  $C_g$  represent the computed capacitances of the pure oil and gas in the pipes, respectively, and were used as reference values to calculate the void fraction in the two-phase flow. In the calculation, the interior radius of the tube was set to  $R_2 = 2.6$  cm, the exterior radius of the tube was set to  $R_3 = 3.2$  cm, and the overall length of the electrode was set to  $L = 12$  cm. The dielectric constants of air ( $\epsilon_{gas}$ ) and oil ( $\epsilon_{oil}$ ) are set to 1 and 2.2, correspondingly, while the dielectric constants of the tube wall are set to 3.3. The capacitance value between the stimulating and measuring electrodes inside the pipe can be determined using electromagnetic theory. How potential is distributed throughout a three-dimensional electrostatic field is outlined by equation 4.

$$\begin{aligned} \nabla^2 V(x, y, z) &= \frac{\partial^2 V}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 V}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 V}{\partial z^2} \\ &= -\frac{\rho(x, y, z)}{\epsilon(x, y, z)} \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

where  $V(x, y, z)$ ,  $\rho(x, y, z)$ , and  $\epsilon(x, y, z)$  were the spatial variation of electric potential, the charge distribution, and the permittivity dispersion of the medium among the measuring and exciting electrodes, respectively. If how the charges are spread out in a three-dimensional electrostatic field is ignored, Laplace’s equation can be used to describe how the electrical potential is spread out. Due to the difficulty of the mathematical solution required to determine the potential dissemination [19], the finite element approach is favored. When the potential distribution within the sensor has been determined, the capacitance value can be calculated using equation 5.

$$C = \frac{Q}{V_c} = \frac{\oint_s \epsilon(x, y, z) \nabla V(x, y, z) ds}{V_c} \tag{5}$$

In this scenario,  $s$  stands for the electrode surface, and  $V_c$  represents the potential difference between the two electrodes. The capacitance value between the stimulating and measuring electrodes can be determined using the Gauss law by applying a voltage between them (1 volt applied to the stimulating electrode and zero volts applied to the detector electrode). The impact of sensor characteristics on the sensitivity field was studied. The findings obtained using the FEM and Artificial intelligence (AI) are depicted in Table 2 and Figure 7. Table 2 shows that under the same condition, the four-blade sensor had the maximum sensitivity when compared to others. The

**TABLE 2. The comparison of blade numbers and sensor overall sensitivity.**

The number of blades	Overall sensitivity (pF)
2	2.034
4	2.232
6	1.891
8	1.704
10	1.533

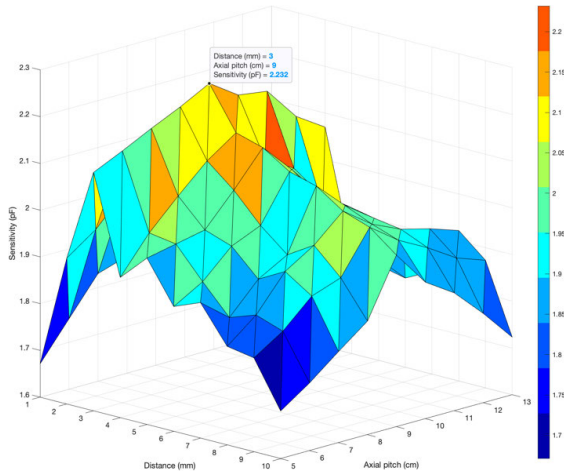


FIGURE 7. Sensitivity map of the arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor.

sensitivity map of the arrow shape sensor is illustrated in Figure 7. According to Figure 7, sensitivity increases as the distance between each electrode blade decreases. Moreover, it shows that sensitivity decreases as distance decreases below 0.3 cm. As shown in Figure 7, another factor affecting the sensitivity stands the axial pitch. This sensor has the highest sensitivity, around 90 mm of the axial pitch.

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the implemented finite element method in COMSOL Multiphysics was utilized to optimize and compare different geometrical structures of capacitance-based sensors for phase fraction evaluation in two-phase flows. The arrow-shaped sensor was compared against concave, double ring, helix, and parallel plate configurations. The optimal physical arrangement of the arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor was determined to be the distance between the sensor blades was 0.3 cm and the axial pitch was 9 cm. The capacitance at void fractions ranging from 0 to 100% was measured to evaluate the performance of the arrow-shaped

TABLE 3. Measurement results were obtained using the arrow-shaped sensor in the annular oil-air flow regime, as calculated with COMSOL Multiphysics.

Void Fraction (%)	Recorded Capacitance (pF)
100	29.851
90	30.309
80	30.738
70	31.106
60	31.426
50	31.610
40	31.787
30	31.932
20	32.036
10	32.071
0	32.083

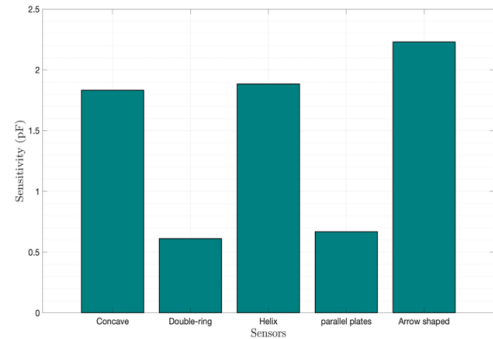


FIGURE 8. Comparison of the concave, double ring, helix, and parallel plate capacitance-based sensors, as calculated with COMSOL Multiphysics.

sensor and the results are summarized in table 3. The overall sensitivity of the sensors was also compared and the results are presented in Figure 8. Notably, the overall sensitivity of the arrow-shaped sensor was found to be 22% higher than the concave, 264% higher than the double ring, 21% higher than the helix, and 234% higher than the parallel plates. Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that the arrow-shaped sensor outperforms the other sensor configurations in terms of overall sensitivity. Thus, it may be a better choice for accurately determining phase fractions in two-phase flows in the petroleum and petrochemical industries. The findings of this study could contribute to the development of more accurate and reliable sensors for phase fraction measurement in various industrial applications.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study identified the precise quantification of void fractions in two-phase flows in the petroleum and petrochemical sectors as a pressing issue. To address this issue, a novel arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor was proposed and optimized with the aim of improving sensitivity. The sensitivity of the arrow-shaped sensor was computed using the implemented finite element method in the benchmarked version of COMSOL Multiphysics 5.5. The geometry of the arrow-shaped sensor was optimized with AI to achieve the possible maximum sensitivity. The optimal structures of the sensor were determined to include a blade distance of 0.3 cm, an axial pitch of the electrodes of 9 cm, and four blades. Based on the FEM results, the proposed sensor’s overall sensitivity was 2.23 pF. The proposed sensor showed greater sensitivity in measuring phase fractions in oil-air filled tubes when using arrow-shaped surface electrodes, as compared to other electrode configurations. Additionally, the presented sensor responses showed that the proposed arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor showed 21% higher sensitivity than the best sensor among the other four existing sensor designs, which include concave plates, helix, double ring and parallel plates. While our study focused on the annular flow regime, future studies could investigate the performance of the optimized capacitance-based sensor in other flow regimes to determine the optimal design parameters

for those regimes and to further validate the applicability of the sensor in various flow conditions. These findings indicated that the arrow-shaped capacitance-based sensor shows significant promise in precisely determining phase fractions in two-phase flows within the industries related to the production and processing of petroleum and petrochemicals. The development of sensors with enhanced sensitivity and accuracy could significantly improve the efficiency and productivity of these industries.

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