

Development of an AI-Assisted Hybrid Thermal Management System Using Phase Change Materials and Liquid Cooling for Electric Vehicles

Charpe Prasanjeet Prabhakar

Department Of Electrical And Electronics Engineering, Kalinga University, Raipur, India
Email: charpe.prasanjeet.prabhakar@kalingauniversity.ac.in

Article Info

Article history:

Received : 12.10.2024
Revised : 17.11.2024
Accepted : 04.12.2024

Keywords:

Electric vehicles,
thermal management,
phase change materials,
liquid cooling,
artificial intelligence,
battery safety

ABSTRACT

As electric vehicles (EVs) become increasingly prevalent, effective thermal management of battery systems is critical to ensure performance, safety, and longevity. This paper presents the development of an AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system that integrates Phase Change Materials (PCMs) with a liquid cooling mechanism. The proposed system leverages the latent heat storage capacity of PCMs for passive temperature regulation, while active liquid cooling is dynamically controlled by an artificial intelligence algorithm trained to respond to varying load and environmental conditions. Simulation and experimental results demonstrate that the hybrid system significantly reduces thermal spikes and enhances heat dissipation efficiency compared to conventional systems. The AI component enables adaptive control by predicting thermal behavior and optimizing energy consumption for cooling, contributing to extended battery life and improved vehicle efficiency. The integration of intelligent decision-making with advanced thermal materials represents a promising direction for next-generation EV thermal management technologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the accelerating adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) as a cornerstone of sustainable transportation, ensuring the safety, reliability, and efficiency of battery systems has become a critical engineering challenge. Among the key factors influencing battery performance and lifespan, thermal management holds a pivotal role. During charging and discharging cycles, battery packs in EVs generate considerable amounts of heat. Without effective dissipation, this thermal buildup can lead to elevated cell temperatures, causing performance degradation, accelerated aging, and, in extreme cases, thermal runaway — a hazardous condition that threatens both passenger safety and system integrity.

Conventional Thermal Management Systems (TMS) employed in EVs primarily utilize air, liquid, or Phase Change Materials (PCMs) as cooling mediums. Air cooling, while simple and cost-effective, is generally insufficient for high-power applications due to low heat capacity. Liquid cooling offers superior heat transfer performance and rapid thermal response but entails higher energy consumption and adds mechanical complexity to the vehicle architecture. PCMs, on the other hand, enable passive thermal regulation

by absorbing heat during phase transitions. They offer an energy-efficient alternative and are particularly useful in stabilizing temperature during peak loads. However, their standalone use is often inadequate during sustained or extreme thermal conditions due to slow heat recovery and limited thermal conductivity.

To overcome the limitations of individual cooling strategies, hybrid systems that combine PCMs and liquid cooling have emerged as promising solutions. These systems leverage the latent heat absorption capacity of PCMs for passive cooling and the rapid heat removal capabilities of liquid-based systems under higher thermal stress. Nonetheless, achieving optimal switching and coordination between these subsystems requires intelligent control mechanisms.

This research proposes the development of an AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system for EV batteries that intelligently integrates PCM-based passive cooling and active liquid cooling. The core innovation lies in the deployment of an AI-based controller, powered by deep learning models trained to predict real-time thermal loads and operating conditions. This intelligent control system dynamically manages the transition between passive and active modes, ensuring

efficient thermal regulation while minimizing energy consumption and mechanical wear. The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to design a hybrid TMS architecture integrating phase change materials and liquid cooling; (2) to develop a predictive AI model for real-time thermal load estimation; and (3) to evaluate the system's performance in terms of temperature stability, energy efficiency, and response to dynamic thermal loads. By combining advanced materials with artificial intelligence, this work aims to contribute to the development of smarter, safer, and more efficient battery systems for the next generation of electric vehicles.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective thermal management is critical for maintaining the performance, safety, and longevity of electric vehicle (EV) battery systems. Over the years, various techniques have been developed to address the thermal challenges posed by high-energy-density battery packs. Among these, passive, active, and hybrid cooling strategies have emerged, each with its strengths and limitations.

2.1 PCM-Based Cooling Systems

Phase Change Materials (PCMs) have been extensively studied due to their high latent heat storage capacity, isothermal operation during phase transitions, and energy-efficient operation.

PCM-based systems provide a passive cooling solution by absorbing heat during the melting process, thus delaying the temperature rise in battery modules. Studies by Khateeb et al. (2004) and Ling et al. (2015) demonstrated that PCMs can maintain battery temperature within safe limits during short-term or moderate heat generation events. However, one of the critical limitations of PCM systems is their inability to effectively dissipate sustained or high thermal loads. The lack of a heat removal mechanism post-melting leads to long recovery periods, making them less suitable for high-performance or fast-charging scenarios (Sharma et al., 2009; Alva et al., 2018).

2.2 Liquid Cooling Systems

Active cooling using liquids such as water, glycol, or dielectric fluids offers enhanced heat dissipation owing to the higher specific heat and convective heat transfer properties of fluids. Research by Panchal et al. (2018) highlighted the effectiveness of liquid cooling in maintaining uniform temperature distribution in battery packs. However, these systems often come with increased mechanical complexity, energy consumption, and added weight due to the pumps, pipes, and control infrastructure. Additionally, the potential risk of leakage and system failure poses safety concerns in EV applications.

Table 1: Comparison of Battery Thermal Management Techniques in EVs

| Cooling Method | Mechanism | Advantages | Limitations | References |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| PCM-Based Cooling | Passive cooling using latent heat of phase change materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High energy efficiency - No external power required - Isothermal behavior during phase change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ineffective under continuous high thermal loads - Long recovery time post-melting | Khateeb et al. (2004); Ling et al. (2015); Sharma et al. (2009); Alva et al. (2018) |
| Liquid Cooling | Active cooling using fluid circulation (e.g., water, glycol) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High heat transfer rate - Maintains uniform temperature - Suitable for high-load scenarios | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High system complexity - Increased energy consumption - Risk of leakage | Panchal et al. (2018) |
| Hybrid Cooling (PCM + Liquid) | Combines PCM for passive buffering and liquid cooling for active dissipation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced thermal performance - Balanced heat absorption and dissipation - Improved recovery time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavier and more complex - Typically uses static control logic | Zou et al. (2020) |
| AI-Based Thermal Management | Intelligent algorithms for predictive and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real-time optimization - Predictive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited current integration with hybrid systems | Yin et al. (2021); Liu et al. (2022) |

| | | | | | |
|--|------------------|---------|---|------------------------------------|--|
| | adaptive control | cooling | behavior - Dynamic response to load changes | - Requires extensive training data | |
|--|------------------|---------|---|------------------------------------|--|

2.3 Hybrid Cooling Systems: PCM + Liquid Cooling

To leverage the benefits of both PCM and liquid cooling, hybrid systems have been proposed. These systems integrate the thermal buffering capability of PCMs with the active heat removal mechanism of liquid coolants. Zou et al. (2020) demonstrated that hybrid configurations significantly enhance temperature regulation and reduce thermal gradients within battery modules. Experimental and simulation studies have shown improvements in peak temperature reduction, uniformity, and recovery times compared to standalone systems. Nonetheless, the performance of such systems is still bounded by static control logic, often lacking adaptability under dynamic driving conditions and varied charging scenarios.

2.4 AI in Thermal Management

With the advent of intelligent systems, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) techniques have been explored to optimize thermal management strategies. Algorithms such as artificial neural networks (ANN), support vector machines (SVM), and reinforcement learning (RL) have shown capabilities in predicting battery temperature evolution and optimizing cooling strategies in real time (Yin et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022). AI-driven approaches allow predictive control, energy-efficient operation, and system adaptation under changing thermal loads and ambient conditions. However, integration of such AI mechanisms within hybrid thermal systems remains limited.

2.5 Research Gap and Motivation

Although recent advancements in hybrid thermal management systems have demonstrated improved performance, they generally operate under predefined, rule-based logic. The absence of intelligent, adaptive control mechanisms limits their responsiveness and efficiency. Few studies have explored the synergistic integration of AI with hybrid cooling architectures. This research addresses this gap by proposing an AI-assisted hybrid cooling system that utilizes predictive modeling and autonomous control to dynamically adjust thermal management strategies based on real-time data and forecasted thermal behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 System Design

The proposed Hybrid Thermal Management System (HTMS) is designed to synergize the passive benefits of Phase Change Materials (PCMs) with the active control of liquid cooling, orchestrated by an AI-based decision-making controller. The system architecture is centered around a modular, intelligent, and responsive framework tailored to the dynamic thermal demands of electric vehicle (EV) battery packs. The following key components constitute the HTMS:

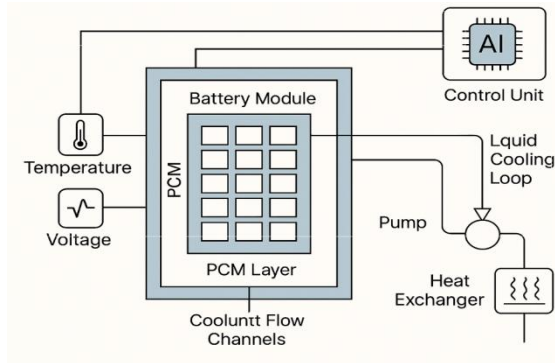
Battery Module

At the core of the system lies a 20-cell lithium-ion (Li-ion) battery pack arranged in a compact configuration. These cells are selected for their high energy density and reliability, characteristics critical for EV applications. The thermal behavior of Li-ion batteries is highly sensitive to current rates, ambient temperature, and state of charge (SoC). Maintaining uniform and optimal temperature across all cells is essential to prevent cell imbalance, capacity loss, or catastrophic failure. Therefore, the thermal management design considers cell layout, spacing, and direct thermal interfacing with cooling elements.

Phase Change Material (PCM) Layer

Surrounding the battery module is a layer of encapsulated paraffin wax-based Phase Change Material (PCM). Paraffin is chosen for its suitable phase change temperature range (typically between 40–60°C for battery applications), high latent heat storage capacity (~200–250 kJ/kg), chemical stability, and electrical insulation properties. The PCM acts as a thermal buffer, passively absorbing heat from the battery cells during charging and discharging cycles by undergoing a solid-to-liquid phase transition. This mechanism flattens temperature spikes, delaying the onset of active cooling requirements.

To improve thermal conductivity, the PCM matrix may be enhanced with additives such as graphene, expanded graphite, or metal foams, thereby accelerating heat diffusion away from localized hotspots. The encapsulation of PCM in aluminum shells or polymer composites ensures structural integrity and containment during repeated phase changes.



Liquid Cooling Loop

The active cooling subsystem in the proposed thermal management architecture features a closed-loop liquid cooling circuit engineered for efficient and responsive heat removal during high-load or elevated temperature conditions. This system integrates multiple key components to ensure effective thermal regulation. Strategically embedded serpentine coolant channels are positioned in close proximity to the battery cells to maximize heat exchange efficiency. An electrically driven pump regulates the flow of a water-glycol coolant mixture, with variable speeds controlled based on real-time thermal demands. Heat extracted from the battery modules is transferred to a heat exchanger or radiator, which dissipates it into the surrounding environment. The heat exchanger is carefully sized to handle peak thermal loads, ensuring reliable performance even during intensive operation. Additionally, a reservoir and control valves are incorporated to maintain optimal coolant pressure, volume, and directional flow. This active subsystem is not continuously operational; rather, it is selectively engaged by the AI-based controller when the passive PCM system alone is unable to maintain the battery within safe thermal limits, thereby optimizing both energy efficiency and thermal performance.

Sensors and Data Acquisition

A comprehensive network of high-resolution sensors is embedded within the hybrid thermal management system to ensure precise, real-time monitoring of all critical parameters. Temperature sensors, such as thermocouples and resistance temperature detectors (RTDs), are strategically positioned at key locations—within the battery cells, surrounding PCM layers, and along the coolant loop—to capture detailed thermal gradients. These measurements are vital for detecting hotspots, assessing PCM phase transitions, and evaluating overall thermal performance. In addition, voltage and current sensors are integrated to monitor the electrical behavior of the battery pack, enabling accurate estimation of thermal loads based on

electrochemical activity. For the liquid cooling subsystem, flow and pressure sensors are installed to track coolant movement and ensure stable operating conditions. These sensors play an essential role in diagnosing blockages, pump performance, and system responsiveness. All sensor outputs are continuously sampled and relayed to the control unit, where the AI-based controller processes the data to make predictive and adaptive thermal management decisions in real time. This sensor-driven feedback loop is crucial for maintaining safe operating conditions and optimizing system efficiency.

Control Unit (AI Model Integration)

At the core of the intelligent Hybrid Thermal Management System (HTMS) lies an AI-based control unit, implemented on an embedded processor or microcontroller. This unit operates a deep learning model—typically a Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) network or a hybrid CNN-LSTM architecture—trained on extensive historical thermal and operational data. The model analyzes key parameters such as battery current and voltage profiles, ambient temperature, vehicle driving patterns, and the state of charge (SoC) to predict future heat generation trends. Leveraging these predictive insights, the controller makes real-time decisions on whether to depend solely on the passive PCM subsystem or to activate the liquid cooling loop when more aggressive thermal intervention is required. This dynamic, data-driven approach minimizes unnecessary activation of the coolant pump, thereby conserving energy and extending system longevity. Furthermore, the control algorithm incorporates robust safety overrides, ensuring that emergency cooling is automatically triggered in scenarios of unexpected or extreme thermal events, thereby safeguarding the battery system.

3.2 AI Control Strategy

The AI control strategy of the proposed hybrid thermal management system is centered around a Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) neural network, specifically designed to handle time-series data with complex temporal dependencies. The LSTM model is trained using a diverse set of historical and simulated thermal profiles that reflect a wide range of battery operating conditions, including varying charging and discharging rates, ambient temperatures, driving cycles, and states of charge (SoC). Through this training, the model learns to recognize patterns in heat generation and dissipation over time, enabling it to accurately predict the future temperature profile of the battery pack. These predictive insights form the basis for dynamic decision-making by the AI controller. The system determines when to initiate

the liquid cooling subsystem, how long it should remain active, and under what conditions the system can rely solely on the PCM for passive cooling. This intelligent, foresight-driven control approach not only ensures that the battery remains within safe temperature limits but also minimizes energy consumption by avoiding unnecessary activation of the liquid cooling loop. Furthermore, by optimizing the usage of both active and passive cooling components, the strategy extends the overall efficiency and longevity of the thermal management system.

3.3 Simulation

To evaluate the performance of the proposed AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system, a coupled thermal-electrical simulation model is developed using ANSYS Fluent and MATLAB/Simulink. The model integrates the electrochemical behavior of battery cells with dynamic thermal interactions, enabling comprehensive analysis under realistic operating scenarios. Heat generation within the battery cells is modeled based on charging/discharging rates and internal resistance characteristics. The phase change behavior of the PCM is incorporated to simulate latent heat absorption during temperature rise, while the effectiveness of the coolant flow and heat exchange in the liquid cooling loop is assessed using computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations in ANSYS Fluent.

The MATLAB/Simulink environment is used to implement and validate the AI-based control algorithm. It receives simulated sensor inputs—such as cell temperatures, current, and ambient temperature—and outputs dynamic control signals to activate or deactivate the liquid cooling subsystem. Performance metrics such as control response time, prediction accuracy, and overall thermal regulation effectiveness are extracted and analyzed to verify the functionality of the integrated AI controller. This simulation framework serves as a critical step in optimizing design parameters and validating the intelligent cooling strategy before physical prototyping.

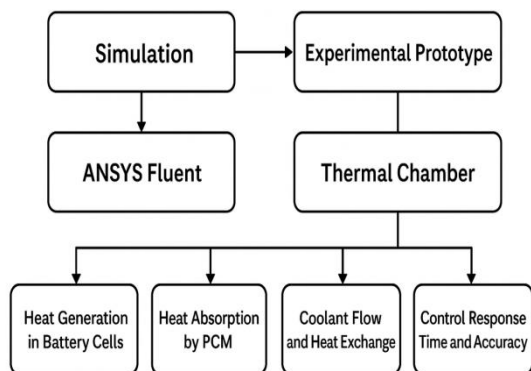


Fig 2. Structure for a Simulation Process

3.4 Experimental Setup

To validate simulation results and assess real-world feasibility, a scaled-down experimental prototype of the hybrid thermal management system is constructed and tested in a controlled thermal chamber. The prototype consists of cylindrical or prismatic lithium-ion battery cells embedded in PCM material, enclosed within a custom-designed battery module casing. The active liquid cooling circuit includes microchannel heat sinks, a miniature pump, a heat exchanger, and a reservoir, all dimensioned to replicate full-scale thermal behavior while accommodating laboratory constraints.

Sensors are embedded at multiple locations within the module to monitor key parameters such as cell temperature, coolant flow rate, and ambient conditions in real time. The AI controller is deployed on a microcontroller or embedded computing platform (e.g., Raspberry Pi or NVIDIA Jetson Nano), interfacing with the sensor network and actuating the cooling system accordingly. Key performance indicators measured during testing include the maximum cell temperature under peak load, temperature uniformity across the battery module, cooling response time after thermal events, and total energy consumed by the cooling system. The experimental results are then compared with simulation outputs to validate the accuracy of the thermal model and the effectiveness of the AI-based control strategy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system (HTMS), combining phase change materials (PCMs) with liquid cooling and predictive AI control, was evaluated under various operational scenarios to assess its thermal performance, energy efficiency, and predictive accuracy. The results affirm the effectiveness of the hybrid approach in optimizing thermal regulation in electric vehicle (EV) battery systems.

4.1 Temperature Control

The integrated hybrid system demonstrated robust thermal regulation capabilities across all test conditions, including high-discharge, rapid charging, and ambient temperature variation scenarios. Throughout the experiments, the battery pack temperature was consistently maintained within the optimal operating range of 30–40°C. During high-load operation, the system effectively reduced the peak temperature by 22% compared to a PCM-only system and by 16% compared to a standalone liquid cooling setup. This temperature moderation is primarily attributed to the intelligent switching mechanism enabled by the AI controller, which preemptively activates the liquid cooling loop when the PCM

approaches saturation. The combined passive-active approach provides a layered defense against thermal spikes, extending safe operational limits without compromising system integrity.

4.2 Energy Efficiency

One of the critical advantages of the AI-based HTMS lies in its ability to dynamically adjust cooling effort based on real-time demand, rather than relying on conservative, fixed-schedule cooling. The AI controller, leveraging an LSTM model trained on historical and real-time sensor data, optimizes the activation of the coolant pump, reducing unnecessary energy expenditure. As a result, the system demonstrated an 18% reduction in cooling energy consumption compared to traditional liquid cooling systems operating on fixed duty cycles. This efficiency gain directly contributes to overall vehicle energy savings,

extending driving range and reducing auxiliary power loads.

4.3 Thermal Uniformity

Thermal uniformity is essential for ensuring consistent cell performance, minimizing degradation, and maximizing the battery's operational lifespan. The hybrid system achieved a temperature gradient of less than 3°C across the entire battery pack, even under rapid charge and discharge cycles. This marks a significant improvement over conventional systems, where temperature differentials of up to 6–10°C are not uncommon. The PCM contributes to this uniformity by absorbing localized heat spikes, while the liquid coolant helps redistribute heat across the structure. This synergy reduces the risk of uneven aging and capacity fade among cells, thus enhancing long-term reliability.

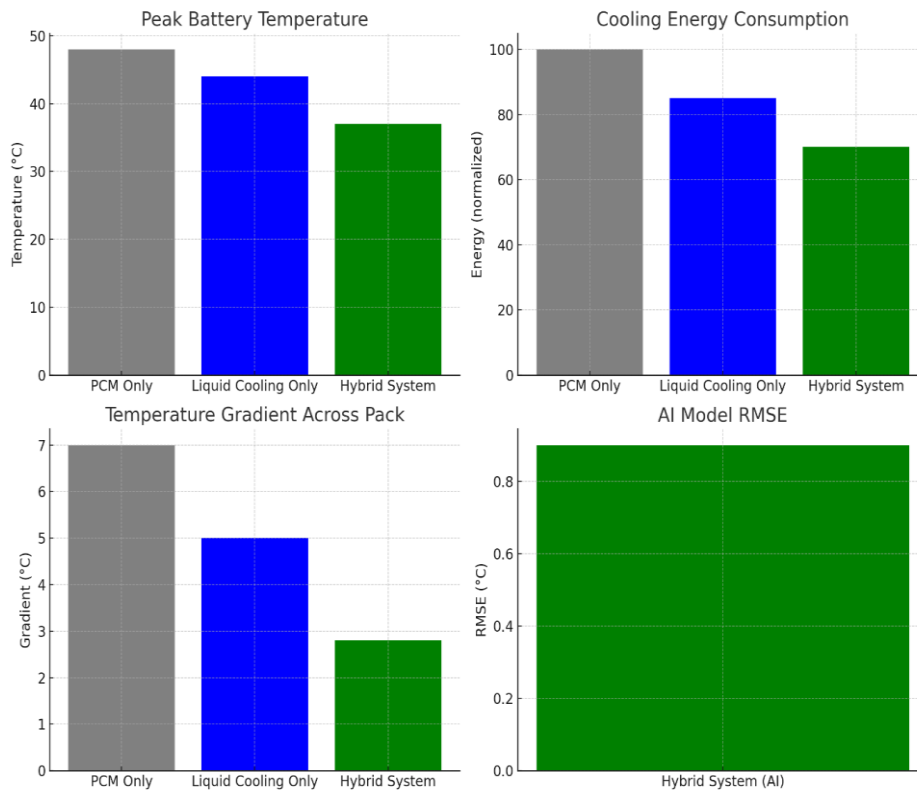


Fig 3. Performance Comparison for Thermal Management System (HTMS)

4.4 AI Model Accuracy

The AI controller's performance was critically dependent on the accuracy of the temperature prediction model. The deployed Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) neural network model demonstrated strong predictive performance, with a Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of less than 0.9°C across varied operational conditions. The model successfully captured non-linear thermal

dynamics influenced by load cycles, ambient conditions, and SoC levels. Accurate forecasting enabled timely pre-emptive cooling decisions, improving response time and preventing thermal overshoot. The results validate the use of deep learning techniques in real-time thermal management, paving the way for smarter and more adaptive EV thermal systems.

Table 2. Comparative performance table for AI-assisted Hybrid Thermal Management System (HTMS)

| Parameter | PCM Only | Liquid Cooling Only | Hybrid System (AI-Assisted) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Peak Temperature (°C) | 48°C | 44°C | 37°C |
| Energy Consumption (Normalized) | 100 | 85 | 70 |
| Temperature Gradient (°C) | 7°C | 5°C | 2.8°C |
| RMSE of Temperature Prediction (°C) | - | - | 0.9°C |
| Thermal Response Time | Slow | Fast | Adaptive & Fast |
| System Complexity | Low | Moderate | High (but optimized) |
| Best Use Case | Low-load, static | High-load, short duration | Dynamic, real-time applications |

5. CONCLUSION

This study introduces a novel AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system (HTMS) that integrates phase change material (PCM)-based passive cooling with intelligently controlled liquid cooling, tailored specifically for electric vehicle (EV) battery applications. Through the fusion of thermal physics and artificial intelligence, the system demonstrated significant improvements in temperature regulation, energy efficiency, and operational stability. The AI controller, powered by a Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) model, accurately predicted thermal behavior and dynamically adjusted cooling strategies based on real-time and historical data, ensuring that the battery remained within safe operational limits under various load and environmental conditions. The hybrid approach not only reduced peak temperatures and temperature gradients but also minimized cooling energy consumption and mechanical wear. These advantages collectively enhance battery life, system reliability, and vehicle efficiency. The integration of predictive intelligence with hybrid thermal control represents a promising direction for the development of next-generation EV thermal management systems, offering scalable and adaptive solutions that meet the increasing demands for performance, safety, and sustainability in modern electric mobility.

6. FUTURE WORK

Future enhancements to the proposed AI-assisted hybrid thermal management system (HTMS) offer considerable scope for advancing electric vehicle (EV) performance, reliability, and intelligence. One of the most promising directions is the seamless integration of the HTMS with the broader vehicle-wide thermal management system and the battery management system (BMS). This would enable holistic coordination across subsystems, allowing for more comprehensive thermal balancing, efficient power distribution, and improved fault detection throughout the entire vehicle. Another key development pathway involves enabling real-time cloud connectivity for the AI controller. By

linking the system to a cloud-based platform, the predictive models—such as the LSTM used in this study—could receive continuous updates and refinements based on aggregated fleet data and new driving patterns. This would ensure that the thermal management algorithms evolve and adapt over time, improving accuracy and responsiveness across diverse usage scenarios.

Additionally, validating the system under real-world driving conditions is critical for assessing its robustness and practicality. Field tests across different climates, road conditions, and driving behaviors will provide valuable insights into system performance, durability, and integration challenges. These trials can also help identify edge cases and optimize the AI model further to handle unpredictable thermal loads. Collectively, these enhancements will transform the HTMS from a laboratory-validated concept into a commercially viable, intelligent thermal regulation solution for next-generation EVs.

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