A Study on PWM Signal Generation and Signal Recovery Methods

Susmita Sain
Electronics and communications
Indian Institute Of Information Technology Guwahati
Guwahati, India
susmita.sain205@gmail.com

***Abstract*—This paper presents a comprehensive study on the generation and recovery of Pulse Width Modulated (PWM) signals using practical hardware and signal processing techniques. The PWM signals are generated experimentally using a 555 timer IC configured in astable mode, demonstrating a simple and cost-effective approach. For signal recovery, an envelope detector is employed to demodulate the PWM signals, enabling effective reconstruction of the original modulating signal. The experimental setup is implemented on a breadboard, validating the practical feasibility of the methods. Additionally, numerical analysis is performed using MATLAB to visualize the PWM waveform, the demodulated signal, and its Power Spectral Density (PSD), providing insights into the spectral characteristics and efficiency of the demodulation process. The results confirm the effectiveness of the proposed techniques for PWM signal generation and recovery, which are fundamental in various applications such as communication systems, power electronics, and control systems.**

***Index Terms*—Pulse Width Modulation (PWM), 555 Timer IC, Envelope Detector, Signal Generation, Signal Demodulation, Power Spectral Density (PSD), MATLAB, Signal Recovery**

I. Introduction

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) is a widely used technique in electronics and communication systems for controlling power delivery, signal processing, and data transmission. PWM signals are characterized by a fixed frequency with varying duty cycles, enabling efficient control over the output signal's average power. This technique finds applications in motor control, power supplies, audio amplification, and digital communication systems.

In this study, we focus on the generation and demodulation of PWM signals using practical hardware and software tools. The generation of PWM signals is achieved using the 555 timer IC configured in astable mode, which provides a stable frequency with adjustable duty cycles. For the demodulation or recovery of the original modulating signal, an envelope detector circuit is employed. This analog method of signal recovery is simple yet effective in extracting the message signal from the PWM waveform.

Additionally, the PWM signals and their corresponding demodulated outputs are analyzed using MATLAB to validate the experimental results and observe characteristics such as Power Spectral Density (PSD). The combination of hardware implementation on a breadboard and numerical analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of PWM signal generation and recovery techniques.

This paper is structured as follows: Section II discusses the general assumptions and notation used throughout the study. Section III presents the theory and working principles of PWM signal generation and demodulation. Sections IV and V describe the experimental setup and procedures for PWM generation and demodulation, respectively. Section VI provides the numerical results, including MATLAB plots and analysis. Finally, Section VII concludes the paper with key observations and potential applications.

II. General Assumptions and Notation

In this study, the following assumptions and notations are used consistently throughout the analysis and experimental procedures:

- The PWM signal is assumed to have a constant carrier frequency generated by the 555 timer IC, with variable duty cycle modulated by the input signal.
- The modulation index, defined as the ratio of the pulse width to the pulse period, varies between 0 and 1, representing the duty cycle range from 0% to 100%.
- The input message signal for PWM modulation is considered to be a low-frequency analog signal with amplitude and frequency within the operating limits of the 555 timer and envelope detector circuits.
- Noise and non-idealities such as component tolerances, power supply fluctuations, and environmental factors are assumed to be minimal but may affect the precision of the generated and demodulated signals.
- The envelope detector is assumed to operate within its linear region, ensuring accurate recovery of the amplitude variations corresponding to the PWM signal's duty cycle.

Notation:

- f_c : Carrier frequency of the PWM signal (Hz)
- T : Period of the PWM signal (s), where $T = \frac{1}{f_c}$
- D : Duty cycle of the PWM signal, defined as the ratio of the pulse width (t_{on}) to the period T, i.e., $D = \frac{t_{on}}{T}$
- $m(t)$: Original modulating signal or message signal
- $V_{PWM}(t)$: Voltage waveform of the generated PWM signal
- $V_{out}(t)$: Output voltage of the envelope detector representing the recovered signal

III. Theory and Working Principle

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) is a modulation technique where the width of pulses in a periodic signal is varied in proportion to the amplitude of a message signal. This method is efficient for controlling power delivery and encoding information.

A. Theory of PWM

Let the message (modulating) signal be represented as:

$$m(t) = A_m \sin(2\pi f_m t) \tag{1}$$

where A_m is the amplitude and f_m is the frequency of the message signal.

The carrier signal, which is typically a high-frequency triangular or sawtooth waveform, can be expressed as:

$$c(t) = A_c \cdot \text{sawtooth}(2\pi f_c t) \tag{2}$$

where A_c is the peak amplitude and f_c is the carrier frequency with $f_c \gg f_m$.

The PWM signal $p(t)$ is generated by comparing $m(t)$ and $c(t)$. The output is high when:

$$m(t) > c(t) \tag{3}$$

and low otherwise. This results in a pulse train where the pulse width varies with $m(t)$.

The duty cycle $D(t)$ of the PWM signal, which is the ratio of pulse width T_{on} to the total period T, can be defined as:

$$D(t) = \frac{T_{on}(t)}{T} \tag{4}$$

Assuming linear modulation, the duty cycle is directly proportional to the instantaneous amplitude of the message signal:

$$D(t) = \frac{1}{2}\left[1 + \frac{m(t)}{A_c}\right] \tag{5}$$

The output PWM signal $p(t)$ can be modeled as a rectangular pulse train with varying pulse width:

$$p(t) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} u\left(t - nT\right) - u\left(t - nT - D(t)T\right) \tag{6}$$

where $u(t)$ is the unit step function.

B. Working Principle of PWM

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) works by varying the width of pulses in a fixed-frequency pulse train according to the instantaneous amplitude of the input signal (modulating signal). The key idea is to encode the information in the time domain rather than in amplitude.

Let the modulating signal be $m(t)$ with amplitude range normalized between 0 and 1, and let the carrier signal be a periodic waveform (usually triangular or sawtooth) with period T and frequency $f_c = \frac{1}{T}$.

The PWM output is a pulse train where the pulse width $\tau(t)$ changes according to $m(t)$. The duty cycle $D(t)$ is defined as the ratio of the pulse width to the period:

$$D(t) = \frac{\tau(t)}{T}$$

The instantaneous duty cycle $D(t)$ is proportional to the instantaneous amplitude of the modulating signal $m(t)$:

$$D(t) = k \cdot m(t)$$

where k is a proportionality constant depending on circuit design, typically $k \leq 1$.

The average output voltage $V_{avg}(t)$ over one period T of the PWM signal is given by:

$$V_{avg}(t) = D(t) \times V_{dc}$$

where V_{dc} is the constant amplitude of the PWM signal's high state (e.g., supply voltage).

Thus,

$$V_{avg}(t) = k \cdot m(t) \cdot V_{dc}$$

This means that the average voltage of the PWM waveform over one period is directly proportional to the modulating signal amplitude $m(t)$. By controlling the duty cycle, PWM effectively encodes the analog input $m(t)$ into the time-domain pulse width.

In practical PWM generation using a 555 timer IC, the device generates a fixed frequency carrier waveform (often triangular or sawtooth), and the input message signal is applied to control the threshold voltage, thereby modulating the pulse width. The PWM output can then be filtered or demodulated to recover the original signal.

The advantage of PWM lies in its efficiency and simplicity, enabling effective signal control with minimal power loss.

IV. Generation of PWM

Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) signals can be generated using various methods, but one of the simplest and most effective ways in practical electronics is by using the 555 timer IC configured in astable mode. The 555 timer provides a stable oscillation frequency, and by varying the timing components or control voltage, the duty cycle of the output waveform can be modulated.

A. PWM Generation Using 555 Timer IC

The 555 timer IC is a versatile integrated circuit widely used for generating precise timing pulses. When configured in astable mode, it produces a continuous square wave with a specific frequency and duty cycle determined by external resistors and capacitors.

The output frequency f of the 555 timer in astable mode is given by:

$$f = \frac{1.44}{(R_1 + 2R_2)C}$$

where:

- R_1 and R_2 are the resistors connected to the timer,

- C is the timing capacitor.

The duty cycle D is calculated as:

$$D = \frac{R_1 + R_2}{R_1 + 2R_2} \times 100\%$$

In order to generate PWM signals, the 555 timer's control voltage pin (pin 5) or the resistor R_2 can be varied by the input analog signal. This causes the pulse width of the output signal to change proportionally to the amplitude of the input signal, effectively modulating the duty cycle.

B. Experimental Setup

In this study, the 555 timer IC was set up on a breadboard with fixed resistors R_1 and R_2, and a timing capacitor C chosen to produce a carrier frequency suitable for PWM. The analog input signal, whose amplitude is to be encoded, was applied to the control voltage pin through a coupling circuit. As the input voltage varied, the output pulse width changed accordingly, producing the PWM waveform.

This method offers a simple and low-cost solution for generating PWM signals, widely used in applications such as motor control, communication systems, and signal processing.

C. Output Waveform

The generated PWM signal exhibits a constant frequency with variable pulse widths. The duty cycle increases as the amplitude of the input signal increases, maintaining the proportionality essential for faithful signal representation.

V. Demodulation of PWM

Demodulation or recovery of the original signal from the Pulse Width Modulated (PWM) waveform is a crucial step in many communication and control applications. In this work, an envelope detector circuit is employed to demodulate the PWM signal generated using the 555 timer IC.

A. Principle of PWM Demodulation

The PWM signal consists of pulses of varying widths, where the pulse duration encodes the amplitude of the original analog signal. To recover the original signal, it is necessary to extract the envelope of the PWM waveform, which corresponds to the instantaneous amplitude of the input signal.

An envelope detector is a simple and effective circuit for this purpose. It typically consists of a diode, a resistor, and a capacitor arranged in a configuration that allows the capacitor to charge quickly to the peak voltage of each pulse and discharge slowly through the resistor. This charging and discharging action smooths the PWM pulses into a continuous voltage proportional to the pulse width.

B. Envelope Detector Circuit

The envelope detector circuit used in this experiment includes:

- A diode for rectification of the PWM pulses,
- A capacitor for storing the peak voltage,
- A resistor to provide a discharge path for the capacitor.

The time constant $\tau = RC$ of the envelope detector must be chosen carefully. It should be large enough to filter out the high-frequency carrier pulses but small enough to follow the variations in the modulating signal.

C. Mathematical Description

Let the PWM signal be represented as a pulse train $x(t)$ with pulse width $\tau_p(t)$ modulated by the original signal $m(t)$. The output of the envelope detector $y(t)$ can be approximated as the average voltage of the PWM pulses over time, which is proportional to the duty cycle:

$$y(t) \approx V_{peak} \times \frac{\tau_p(t)}{T}$$

where:

- V_{peak} is the peak voltage of the PWM pulses,
- $\tau_p(t)$ is the pulse width at time t,
- T is the PWM period (inverse of carrier frequency).

Since the pulse width $\tau_p(t)$ varies proportionally with the original message $m(t)$, the envelope detector output $y(t)$ effectively reconstructs $m(t)$.

D. Experimental Setup

The PWM output from the 555 timer IC was fed into the envelope detector circuit assembled on the breadboard. The diode used was a standard silicon diode (e.g., 1N4148), with the resistor and capacitor values selected to achieve an optimal time constant. The demodulated output was observed on an oscilloscope and compared with the original input signal.

E. Resulting Waveform

The envelope detector successfully recovered the original signal's waveform from the PWM pulses, with slight smoothing due to the RC filtering effect. This recovered signal is used for further processing or analysis.

VI. Numerical Results

To validate the theoretical understanding and practical implementation of PWM signal generation and demodulation, we performed simulations using MATLAB. The setup closely mirrors the physical implementation conducted on a breadboard using a 555 timer IC for PWM generation and an envelope detector for demodulation. The objective was to observe the quality of signal reconstruction and analyze the spectral properties of the PWM signal.

A. PWM Signal Visualization

Fig. 1 displays the generated PWM signal using a modulated duty cycle. The varying width of the high pulses accurately reflects the modulation of the original message signal. This confirms that the duty cycle is effectively encoding the amplitude of the message.

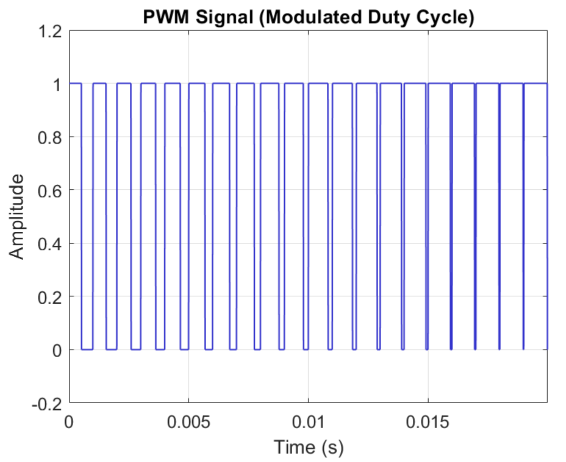

Fig. 1. PWM Signal (Modulated Duty Cycle)

B. Power Spectral Density (PSD)

The frequency domain analysis of the PWM signal is shown in Fig. 2. The Power Spectral Density (PSD) plot reveals distinct spectral components, indicating a wide range of frequency content due to the sharp transitions in the PWM waveform. The presence of strong harmonics at regular intervals is consistent with the rectangular pulse nature of the PWM signal. Most of the power is concentrated in the lower frequency region, as expected.

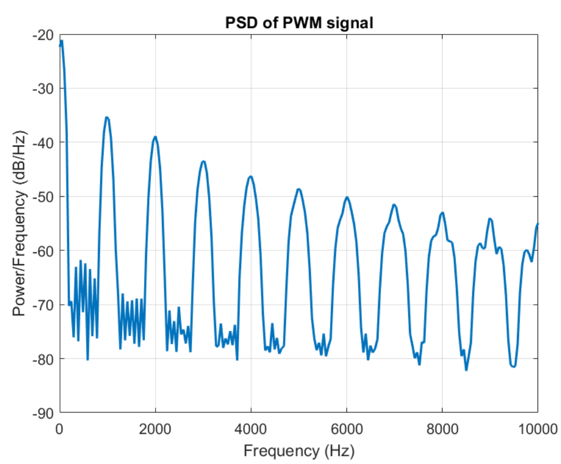

Fig. 2. Power Spectral Density of PWM Signal

C. Signal Demodulation

Fig. 3 compares the original message signal with the demodulated output obtained using an envelope detector. The blue solid curve represents the original message signal, while the red dashed curve shows the recovered signal. The close match between the two curves confirms that the envelope detector effectively demodulates the PWM signal and reconstructs the original message with minimal distortion.

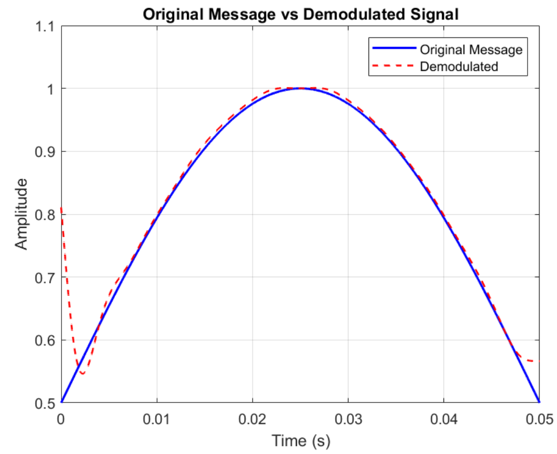

Fig. 3. Original Message vs. Demodulated Signal

D. Discussion

The simulation results validate the experimental setup, showing that:

- The 555 timer IC can generate PWM signals with duty cycles modulated by an analog input.
- The PSD plot reveals that PWM is spectrally rich, with dominant frequency components predictable by Fourier series analysis of rectangular waveforms.
- The envelope detector successfully recovers the original message signal with high fidelity.

These findings confirm that the method is both theoretically sound and practically reliable for analog-to-digital transmission using PWM.

VII. Conclusion

This paper presented the generation and demodulation of PWM signals using a 555 timer IC and an envelope detector. The PWM signal was generated by modulating the pulse width in proportion to the input analog signal and successfully demodulated to retrieve the original message.

Theoretical analysis and system assumptions were supported by mathematical modeling, while experimental validation was performed using MATLAB simulations. The comparison between the original and demodulated signals confirmed effective signal recovery. Additionally, the PSD plot highlighted the frequency components introduced by modulation.

The results demonstrate the practicality and accuracy of using PWM for analog signal transmission and recovery. Future enhancements could focus on filtering techniques to further reduce distortion during demodulation.

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