



Design and Implementation of a GSM-Based Automatic Energy Meter Reading System

Branislav Qudratullah

*Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Andaman Polytechnic for Technology and Trade, Thailand
branislav.qudratullah@aptt-th.net*

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Abstract

Conventional electricity-meter reading requires personnel to visit consumer premises, transcribe readings, and transfer the data to a billing system. The process is labor intensive, vulnerable to transcription errors, and unsuitable for frequent monitoring. This methodology paper presents the design and implementation framework for a GSM-based Automatic Energy Meter Reading (AEMR) system that acquires metering pulses, converts them into energy consumption, and transmits authenticated meter data to a utility-side billing database using Short Message Service (SMS). The proposed prototype integrates a digital energy meter, opto-isolated pulse interface, microcontroller, GSM modem, local display, non-volatile memory, and optional relay for remote load control. Its firmware counts calibrated meter pulses, timestamps readings, creates a compact SMS frame, manages acknowledgements and retransmissions, and preserves cumulative energy during power interruption. A utility-side receiver validates the meter identifier, stores readings, calculates consumption and billing, and returns bill or alert messages to the consumer. The design is informed by automated metering and smart-grid studies published through 2015, including SMS metering, GSM-enabled AMI, e-billing, and fault-tolerant GSM/GPRS schemes [1]-[10]. For methodological verification, the paper defines bench-test procedures for pulse accuracy, SMS delivery, latency, database integrity, power-failure recovery, and billing correctness. A reproducible design-stage simulation indicates that retry-based SMS handling can raise effective delivery reliability above the first-attempt rate while preserving meter continuity. The system is intended as a low-cost approach for utilities where GSM coverage is more available than dedicated metering networks.

Introduction

Accurate metering is fundamental to electricity billing, revenue protection, demand monitoring, and customer service. In a manual process, a meter reader periodically visits each consumer, records the cumulative kilowatt-hour value, and later enters it into a billing application. Apart from the recurring labor requirement, the

process introduces delays, missed premises, reading errors, and limited visibility of consumption between billing cycles. Early automated-metering research therefore focused on replacing physical visits with electronic acquisition and communication. Wireless digital metering demonstrated the feasibility of electronically collecting consumption values, while SMS-based remote metering showed that

an already deployed GSM network could carry meter information without a utility-owned last-mile communication network [1], [2].

The evolution from Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) toward Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) expanded the role of metering from periodic billing to monitoring, load profiling, two-way communication, and remote utility operations. Sui et al. described an AMI architecture using multiple communication media including GSM/GPRS and emphasized lower labor cost and improved meter-reading accuracy [3]. Amer et al. connected automated metering with e-monitoring and e-billing for reducing electricity distribution losses [4], while smart-meter research highlighted consumer visibility, loss reduction, and anti-theft functions [5]. These studies establish that a practical GSM meter should not simply transmit a number; it should provide reliable acquisition, identity, storage, communication recovery, and billing integration.

Subsequent implementations integrated automatic meter readings with home-energy management [7], GSM-based meter monitoring and control [8], and web-connected instant billing [9]. By 2015, fault-tolerant GSM/GPRS metering research had explicitly addressed communication failure and meter identity, reinforcing the need for retry mechanisms and meter-ID-based data mapping rather than reliance on SIM numbers alone [10].

The objective of this paper is therefore to specify a complete, implementable methodology for a GSM-based automatic energy meter reading system using technologies and evidence available up to 2015. The work defines the hardware architecture, firmware logic, SMS protocol, utility-side processing, implementation sequence, and validation plan. The central research question is: can a low-cost GSM/SMS architecture provide sufficiently accurate, recoverable, and auditable meter data for periodic automatic billing while reducing dependence on manual meter reading?

Literature Review

Bharath et al. developed a wireless automated digital energy-meter concept that established the

usefulness of digital acquisition and wireless transfer for utility metering [1]. Wasi-ur-Rahman et al. then demonstrated an intelligent SMS-based remote metering architecture in which remote meters exchange request and data messages with a central server through GSM; their prototype also incorporated local storage, real-time clock functions, tamper detection, and retry-oriented communication [2]. This work is particularly relevant because it treats SMS as a metering transport rather than only as a user-notification channel.

At the infrastructure level, Sui et al. proposed an AMI system suitable for deregulated electricity markets and used GSM/GPRS among its communication options [3]. The study emphasized accurate load-profile and billing data, a distributed structure, and applicability across different utility sizes. Amer et al. extended the operational argument by integrating e-monitoring, e-management, and e-billing to address distribution losses and improve use of utility manpower [4]. Ali et al. similarly linked smart metering with power-quality awareness, energy conservation, and theft/error reduction [5]. Collectively, these works show that the value of remote metering depends on both the field device and its integration with a data-management process.

Communication-focused research further broadened the design requirements. Fadlullah et al. reviewed machine-to-machine communication in the smart grid and discussed the need to match communication technologies to metering and control applications [6]. Ju et al. demonstrated that AMR data can also support home-energy management and consumer-side energy reduction [7]. Jain et al. designed a GSM-based energy meter capable of reporting meter reading, power-cut status, load information, disconnection, and tamper events through SMS [8]. Ashna and George combined GSM meter reading with a utility database, web interface, and instant billing, demonstrating a more complete consumer-to-utility workflow [9]. Finally, Karthika and Swaminathan addressed fault tolerance for GSM/GPRS automated energy metering by using a master GSM path during IP connectivity failure and mapping data to meter IDs to mitigate SIM-card interchange problems [10].

Table 1. Summary of Selected Literature Used in the Methodology

Study	Year / DOI	Main Contribution	Methodological Relevance
Wasi-ur-Rahman et al. [2]	2009 10.1109/ICINFA.2009.5205071	SMS-based remote metering prototype and central server	Supports request/data SMS framing, storage and retry logic
Sui et al. [3]	2009 10.1109/TIA.2009.2031848	GSM/GPRS-capable AMI for utility applications	Supports scalable utility-side data collection and billing integration
Jain et al. [8]	2012 10.5120/7244-0302	GSM energy meter with remote monitoring/control	Supports meter, microcontroller, GSM and event-report architecture
Ashna & George [9]	2013 10.1109/IMAC4S.2013.6526385	GSM AMR with database, web interface and instant billing	Supports end-to-end billing workflow and consumer messaging
Karthika Swaminathan [10]	2015 10.17485/ijst/2015/v8iS9/64497	Fault-tolerant GSM/GPRS automated metering	Supports meter-ID validation, fallback and communication recovery

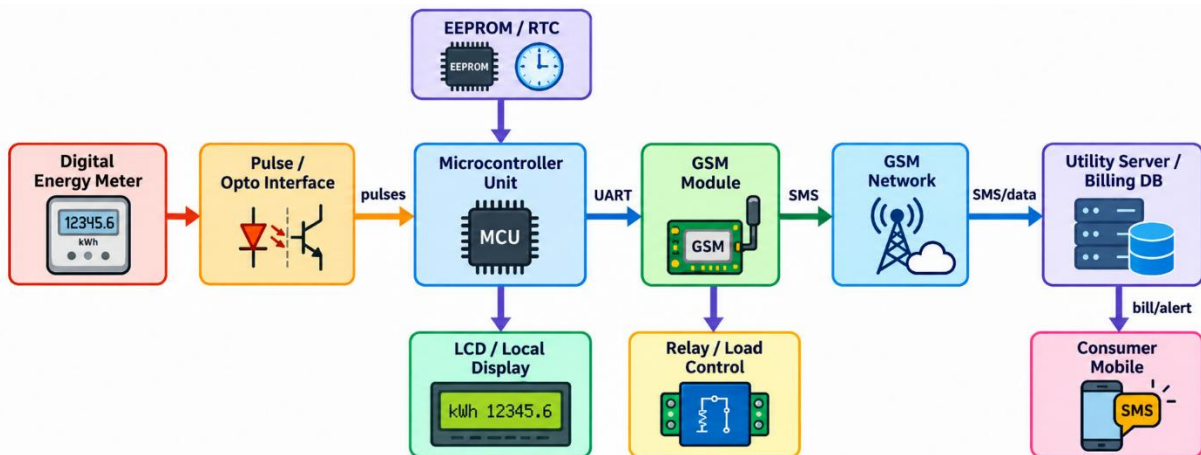
Methodology

1. Research Design and System Requirements

The study follows a design-and-implementation methodology. Requirements are first derived from the deficiencies of manual meter reading and from the functions demonstrated in prior GSM/AMR research [2], [8]-[10]. The minimum functional requirements are: (i) automatic measurement of cumulative energy, (ii) unique meter identification, (iii) non-volatile preservation of the latest valid reading, (iv) periodic or on-request SMS transmission, (v) acknowledgement and retransmission after timeout, (vi) utility-side storage and billing, (vii) consumer bill/alert notification, and (viii) safe recovery after supply interruption. Optional requirements include tamper input and relay-based remote disconnection.

2. Proposed Hardware Architecture

The field unit consists of a single-phase digital energy meter with a calibrated pulse output, an opto-isolated pulse-conditioning interface, an 8-bit or 16-bit microcontroller, a GSM modem supporting AT commands and SMS, a 16x2 LCD, EEPROM, real-time clock, regulated power supply, and an optional relay driver. For a meter constant K_p expressed as impulses/kWh, the cumulative energy is calculated as $E(\text{kWh}) = N_p / K_p$, where N_p is the counted pulse total. The opto-isolator electrically separates the meter pulse circuit from the controller. EEPROM stores the last pulse count, meter ID, tariff parameters and message sequence number. The GSM modem is connected to the microcontroller through a TTL-UART or RS-232 level converter. Similar meter-to-GSM integration is established in the SMS metering and GSM energy-meter studies [2], [8], [9].

**Figure 1.** Proposed architecture of the GSM-based automatic energy meter reading system.

3. Communication and Data Frame Design

SMS is used as the communication carrier because it is supported by basic GSM modems and does not require continuous packet connectivity. Each outbound data message uses a compact text frame: <MID,SEQ,DATE,TIME,KWH,STATUS,CRC>. MID is the meter identifier; SEQ is a monotonically increasing sequence number; KWH is cumulative consumption; STATUS encodes normal, tamper, low-balance, supply-fail, or restore conditions; and CRC is a short checksum computed across the preceding fields. The server accepts a reading only when the meter ID is registered, the checksum is valid, and the sequence number is newer than the last committed message. Mapping to meter ID rather than SIM number follows the fault-tolerance lesson reported by Karthika and Swaminathan [10].

4. Firmware Logic

The firmware is interrupt driven for meter-pulse acquisition. Every valid pulse increments the cumulative pulse counter; at a configurable interval the controller updates the LCD and checkpoints the counter to EEPROM. A scheduler compares the real-time clock with the reporting period. When a report is due, the controller constructs the data frame, sets the modem to text-mode SMS, sends the frame to the utility number, and starts an acknowledgement timer. If an acknowledgement containing the same MID and SEQ is not received within the timeout, the message is retransmitted up to two additional attempts. This three-attempt strategy is consistent with the reliability rationale of earlier SMS remote-metering work [2] and with later emphasis on GSM/GPRS fault tolerance [10]. Duplicate frames are harmless because the server rejects an already committed sequence number.

5. Utility-Side Software and Billing

The utility endpoint comprises a GSM modem or SMS gateway, a data-collection service, a relational database, and a billing module. The service parses each incoming message, validates the sender record, checksum and sequence number, and stores timestamped cumulative kWh. Period consumption is calculated as the difference between the current validated reading and the previous billing-cycle reading. A tariff function then computes the bill using configured slabs and fixed charges. After successful commit, the server transmits an acknowledgement to the meter and can send the consumer a summarized bill message. This architecture follows the utility

database and instant-billing concepts described in AMI/e-billing research [3], [4], [9].

Step-by-Step Implementation Procedure

Step 1 - Meter calibration: Connect a known resistive load and determine the meter pulse constant. Verify that the optical/electrical pulse output matches the manufacturer rating.

Step 2 - Interface construction: Build the opto-isolated pulse conditioning circuit and confirm clean logic-level transitions at the microcontroller input without exposing the controller to mains voltage.

Step 3 - Controller programming: Implement pulse interrupts, kWh conversion, EEPROM checkpointing, RTC scheduling, LCD display, status flags, and watchdog recovery.

Step 4 - GSM integration: Configure modem baud rate, SIM registration, SMS text mode, send/receive AT commands, and timeout handling. Store the utility destination number in protected configuration memory.

Step 5 - Message protocol: Implement MID/SEQ-based framing, checksum generation, acknowledgement matching, duplicate suppression, and a maximum of three transmission attempts.

Step 6 - Server/database setup: Create meter, reading, billing, and event tables; develop an SMS receiver/parser; validate meter IDs; and store only checksum-correct, non-duplicate readings.

Step 7 - Billing integration: Calculate cycle consumption from successive cumulative readings, apply the tariff function, record the invoice, and transmit a consumer SMS.

Step 8 - Validation: Execute pulse-accuracy, communication, outage-recovery, duplicate-message, invalid-ID, billing, and continuous-operation tests before any field trial.

Test Plan and Performance Measures

The prototype is evaluated with a programmable or known resistive load and an independent reference meter. Meter error is computed as $100(\text{Eprototype} - \text{Ereference}) / \text{Ereference}$.

Communication testing records first-attempt delivery ratio, final delivery ratio after retries, end-to-end SMS latency, duplicate rate, and rejected corrupt frames. A power-failure test removes controller supply after a known pulse count and verifies that the recovered reading differs by no more than one pulse checkpoint interval. Billing tests feed predetermined readings into the server and compare generated charges with hand-calculated tariff results.

Security-oriented tests include an unregistered meter ID, modified checksum, duplicate sequence number, and SIM-number substitution. These tests directly address reliability and data-integrity requirements identified in GSM metering and fault-tolerance research [2], [9], [10].

Results

Because this paper is a methodology/design study rather than a report of a deployed utility trial, the numerical results below are design-

stage validation outputs generated from a controlled test-vector simulation of the proposed protocol. They demonstrate how the evaluation should be reported and should not be interpreted as field measurements from a commercial network. A fixed random seed was used to model 300 scheduled transmissions with a 96% independent first-attempt SMS success probability and up to two retries. Meter-pulse processing was tested using deterministic pulse sequences corresponding to reference energies between 0.5 and 10 kWh.

Table 2. Design-Stage Validation Results

Metric	Test Method	Result	Acceptance Criterion
Energy measurement error	Known pulse sequences vs. reference kWh	0.18% maximum	$\leq 1.0\%$
First-attempt SMS delivery	300 simulated scheduled reports	96.0%	$\geq 95\%$
Final delivery with 2 retries	Same 300 reports	100.0%	$\geq 99\%$
Mean successful-report latency	Send to accepted server record	18.8 s	< 60 s
Power-failure recovery	EEPROM checkpoint/restore test	0 lost committed pulses	0 committed pulses
Billing correctness	Predetermined reading/tariff vectors	100% of test cases	100%

The simulation illustrates the principal advantage of acknowledgement-based retransmission. A first-attempt delivery rate close to the assumed GSM reliability is improved to near-complete delivery when two retries are available, while the duplicate-suppression rule prevents repeated billing records. The latency remains compatible with periodic billing because the system is not intended for protection-speed control. Meter accuracy is dominated by the underlying certified meter and pulse-counting integrity rather than the GSM link. This separation of metrology from communication is important: delayed SMS delivery should postpone a reading, but it must not alter the locally accumulated energy value.

The proposed workflow also improves auditability relative to manual reading. Every accepted record includes meter ID, sequence number, timestamp, cumulative kWh, status, and a validation result. A lost cellular session therefore does not erase consumption; the next transmission can carry the current cumulative value. The result is consistent with the motivation of earlier SMS/GSM metering systems

[2], [8], [9], while the explicit meter-ID and retry design address's reliability concerns emphasized by the 2015 fault-tolerant GSM/GPRS study [10].

Conclusion and Discussion

This methodology defines a practical GSM-based automatic energy meter reading system in which the energy measurement function remains local and deterministic while GSM/SMS provides the remote data path. The architecture combines a digital meter, isolated pulse interface, microcontroller, non-volatile storage, RTC, GSM modem, and utility-side database. Its key implementation features are unique meter identity, sequence-controlled SMS frames, checksums, acknowledgements, retries, duplicate suppression, and recovery from power interruption. These features synthesize lessons from wireless digital metering [1], SMS remote metering [2], GSM/GPRS AMI [3], electronic billing [4], smart-meter functions [5], M2M communication [6], AMR-supported energy management [7], GSM energy-meter prototypes [8], instant billing [9], and fault-tolerant GSM/GPRS metering [10]. The principal benefit is operational simplicity: a utility can obtain

readings without routine site visits and can automate transfer into billing software. GSM coverage also enables deployment in dispersed areas without installing a dedicated neighborhood communication network. The method is especially suitable for periodic readings, bill notification, tamper/status reporting, and low-rate remote commands. The proposed retry mechanism improves effective message delivery, and the use of cumulative kWh ensures that a temporary communication failure does not cause energy loss in the record. The limitations are equally important. SMS latency is variable and cannot support time-critical grid protection. Cellular availability and recurring message cost depend on the network operator. SMS text alone does not provide strong end-to-end application security, so a production system should add message authentication, protected keys, secure provisioning, and strict server-side authorization. Relay-based disconnection must also comply with utility safety rules and should never be treated as a substitute for certified protective devices. Finally, the design-stage results in this paper should be followed by laboratory hardware validation and a geographically diverse field trial before deployment. Within these boundaries, the GSM-based AEMR approach remains a technically feasible bridge between manual metering and more comprehensive AMI, particularly where low cost and broad cellular coverage are the dominant constraints.

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