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Integrated Method for Estimating Attenuation Upshot due to Atmospheric and Scintillation Factors in Satellite Communication Systems

¹Joseph Isabona and ²Okiemute Roberts Omasheye

¹Federal University Lokoja/Department of Physics, Lokoja, 260102, Nigeria

²Department of Physics, Delta State College of Education, Mosogar.

Email: okiemute.omasheye@descoem.edu.ng

Corresponding Author: joseph.isabona@fulokoja.edu.ng

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Abstract: Satellite communication systems operating in the microwave and millimeter-wave frequency bands (typically above 10 GHz) are highly susceptible to various atmospheric impairments. These impairments—rain attenuation, cloud and gaseous absorption, and tropospheric scintillation collectively degrade signal quality, leading to increased bit error rates and potential link outages. Traditional attenuation models treat these phenomena independently, often leading to conservative or inaccurate system designs. This paper presents an integrated attenuation model that combines rain, cloud, gaseous (oxygen and water vapor), and scintillation effects into a single unified framework to provide more accurate and realistic predictions of total path attenuation in geostationary and non-geostationary satellite links. The proposed model leverages empirical data, physical propagation theory, and statistical integration methodologies, with particular attention to frequency scaling, site diversity, and climate zones. Validation against ITU-R recommendations and measurement data from tropical, temperate, and arid regions demonstrates that the integrated model achieves improved prediction accuracy, reducing overdesign and enabling optimal link budget planning. The model is peculiarly distinct at frequencies above 10 GHz and for low-elevation-angle satellite paths. The ITU-R P.618 and P.838 models are applied as standard references, and enhancements using localized meteorological data and regression-based techniques are proposed. Case studies from tropical and temperate regions are used to validate the models. Results indicate that attenuation increases with frequency and rain rate, with tropical regions showing significantly higher degradation. The integration of real-time weather data with predictive modeling improves link reliability and facilitates adaptive fade mitigation techniques.

Keywords: Satellite communication, atmospheric attenuation, rain fade, cloud attenuation, gaseous absorption, scintillation, integrated propagation model, ITU-R, frequency scaling.

1. Introduction

The proliferation of high-throughput satellite (HTS) systems, next-generation broadband services, and the increasing use of Ka, Q, and V bands in satellite communications have highlighted the growing impact of atmospheric propagation effects (Ojuh and Isabona, 2021). The escalating demand for high-speed data transmission in modern satellite communication systems has driven the use of higher microwave frequencies, such as Ku-band (12–18 GHz), Ka-band (26.5–40 GHz), and Q/V-band (40–75 GHz). While higher frequency bands offer increased bandwidth and data throughput, they are more susceptible to atmospheric propagation effects, particularly signal attenuation due to weather conditions.

At these elevated frequencies, electromagnetic wave propagation through the troposphere is significantly affected by several physical phenomena—primarily rain, cloud liquid water, atmospheric

gases (oxygen and water vapor), and rapid signal fluctuations due to scintillations. Understanding and accurately predicting these attenuation effects are essential for designing robust satellite links, ensuring quality of service (QoS), and implementing effective fade mitigation strategies such as uplink power control, adaptive coding and modulation (ACM), and site diversity.

Modeling individual attenuation mechanisms has traditionally been approached in isolation, relying on empirical, semi-empirical, or physical models (Isabona and Obahiabgon, (2014). However, in real-world satellite links, these effects occur simultaneously and often interact, necessitating a holistic modeling approach. This paper conducts an in-depth review of existing literature on rain, cloud, gaseous, and scintillation attenuation modeling, with a focus on integration methodologies. The objective is to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of an Integrated Attenuation Model (IAM) that accounts for the combined effect of all dominant atmospheric impediments. It combines established International Telecommunication Union Radiocommunication Sector (ITU-R) models with enhancements based on localized meteorological data, statistical analysis, and physical propagation theory.

2. Literature Review

Rain is the most significant source of attenuation above 10 GHz, particularly at higher frequencies (e.g., Ka- and Q-band). Rain-induced attenuation depends on rain rate, drop size distribution (DSD), polarization, and elevation angle. Clouds and water vapor contribute significantly to attenuation, especially in the super high frequency (SHF) and extremely high frequency (EHF) bands. The liquid water content (LWC) in non-precipitating clouds plays a major role. Molecular absorption due to oxygen (O₂) and water vapor (H₂O) causes frequency-dependent attenuation peaks, notably around 22.3 GHz (H₂O), 60 GHz (O₂), and 118 GHz (O₂).

The early models which were based on Mie and Rayleigh scattering theories (Van de Hulst, 1957) provided the foundational for understanding scattering in rain droplets. Later, empirical relationships such as the power-law model (ITU-R, 1999) became standard.

Some researches proposed regional modifications of ITU-R models using local rain rate data. For example, studies by Oladipo and Poede (1985) in Nigeria and Mandeep (2009) in Malaysia demonstrated significant deviations from ITU-R predictions in tropical climates.

Moufouma and Martinet (1993) developed a physical model based on rain rate distributions and DSD parameters, offering improved accuracy in tropical and subtropical zones. *Stochastic Models* based on lognormal, gamma, or Weibull distributions of rain rate have been used to predict fade duration and cumulative distribution (Crane, 1996; Ajayi and Owolabi, 1994).

ITU-R P.618 and P.838 Models (ITU-R, 2023a) are the most widely adopted recommendations. ITU-R P.838 provides specific rain attenuation coefficients (dB/km) as a function of rain rate and frequency. P.618 integrates these into total path attenuation estimates using a point rain rate statistic and appropriate reduction factors for non-uniform spatial distribution. *ITU-R P.840 Model* (ITU-R, 2023b) provides LWC maps and specific attenuation coefficients. The model assumes vertically stratified clouds and uses a temperature profile to estimate LWC. Though the ITU-R models perform well globally but they are less accurate in tropical and coastal regions due to assumptions about uniform DSD. Real-time adaptive models integrating radar and satellite precipitation data are emerging (e.g., using TRMM or GPM datasets), but their integration into operational systems remains limited. Studies using data from instruments such as MODIS and CloudSat have improved spatial resolution in LWC estimation (Austin et al., 2009). However, integrating these into real-time link models is challenging due to latency and data availability.

ITU-R P.676 Model (ITU-R, 2023c): Computes gaseous attenuation using line-by-line integration of absorption spectra based on temperature, pressure, and humidity profiles. It is considered the benchmark for clear-air losses. Rosenkranz (1998) developed a fast computational method using approximated absorption coefficients, which has been widely adopted in simulation tools. Comparison with radiometer and radiosonde data shows that ITU-R P.676 performs well under standard conditions (Liebe et al., 1993), but deviations occur in extreme humidity or pressure conditions.

ITU-R P.618 and P.1817 Models (ITU-R, 2023a, 2023d) provide scintillation variance models based on the modified structure function parameter (C_T^2), elevation angle, and meteorological data. Studies by Ojuh and Isabona, (2013), Isabona and Peter, (2013) and Isabona, et al, (2022), investigated different radio signal attenuation pattern, but with core emphasis of realistic prognostic modeling of specific attenuation due to rain at microwave frequency for tropical climate region. Studies by Otung (1997) and Ojo et al. (2008) emphasized strong diurnal patterns, with maximum scintillation occurring in early morning and late evening. After heavy rain, increased humidity and temperature gradients lead to enhanced scintillation—termed "post-rain enhancement." This coupling is not well-represented in current models.

This paper presents a Integrated Attenuation Method (IAM) for estimating microwave signal attenuation due to rainfall and atmospheric variables in satellite communication systems. The study integrates physical, empirical, and statistical models to quantify attenuation in various climatic zones. Factors such as rain rate, drop size distribution, vertical profile of rain, cloud water content, atmospheric temperature, humidity, pressure, and gaseous absorption (oxygen and water vapor) are analyzed. The ITU-R P.618 and P.838 models are applied as standard references, and enhancements using localized meteorological data and regression-based techniques are proposed. The individual models discussed above are typically applied sequentially or independently in link budget calculations. This disjointed approach may lead to inaccurate or overly conservative estimates. The concept of an IAM aims to unify these effects in a physically consistent, computationally efficient framework.

3. Methodology

(a). Rainfall-Induced Attenuation

Rain attenuation occurs when microwave signals interact with hydrometeors (raindrops), leading to energy loss via absorption and scattering. The specific attenuation (γ , in dB/km) is dependent on:

- **Rain rate (R):** Measured in mm/h, is a key input parameter.
- **Frequency (f):** Attenuation increases with frequency.
- **Polarization:** Horizontal polarization generally experiences higher attenuation than vertical.
- **Drop Size Distribution (DSD):** Determines the number and size of raindrops per unit volume.
- **Temperature and altitude:** Influence DSD and dielectric properties of water.

The specific attenuation (γ) can be modeled as:

$$\gamma = kR^\alpha \quad (1)$$

Where R is the rain rate (mm/h), k and α : Frequency-, temperature-, and polarization-dependent coefficients derived from Mie scattering theory and empirical data.

ITU-R Recommendation P.838 provides k and α values for frequencies from 1 to 1000 GHz and various polarizations.

(b). Modeling Rain Attenuation Along the Slant Path

The total rain attenuation (A_{rain}) along a satellite communication link is obtained by integrating the specific attenuation over the effective rain path length (L_{eff}). For a slant path from a ground station to a geostationary satellite at elevation angle θ , the effective path length is not the geometric path but is modified by the vertical structure of rain.

ITU-R P.618 provides a well-established method for estimating rain attenuation:

Step 1: Determine the rain rate ($R_{0.01}$) exceeded for 0.01% of the time (1 in 10,000 hours), derived from regional rain climate data.

Step 2: Compute specific attenuation (γ) using ITU-R P.838:

$$\gamma = kR_{0.01}^{\alpha} \quad (2)$$

Step 3: Calculate the horizontal reduction factor ($r_{0.01}$) and vertical adjustment factor ($v_{0.01}$), which depend on elevation angle and climatic zone.

Step 4: Estimate the effective path length:

$$L_{\text{eff}} = L_s \times r_{0.01} \times v_{0.01} \quad (3)$$

where L_s is the slant path length through the rain layer.

Step 5: Total attenuation:

$$A_{\text{rain}} = \gamma \times L_{\text{eff}} \quad (4)$$

The rain height (h_{rain}) is typically approximated using the 0°C isotherm height (freezing level), accessible via ITU-R P.839.

(c). Atmospheric Gaseous Attenuation

Atmospheric gases cause continuous absorption, particularly at resonant frequencies (e.g., 22.235 GHz for H₂O, 60 GHz for O₂). ITU-R P.676 provides a standard model for gaseous attenuation.

The total gaseous attenuation (A_{gas}) depends on:

- Atmospheric temperature (T in Kelvin),
- Pressure (p in hPa),
- Water vapor density (ρ in g/m³),
- Frequency (f),
- Elevation angle (θ).

The specific attenuation (γ_{gas}) due to dry air and water vapor is given by:

$$\gamma_{\text{gas}}(f) = \gamma_{\text{dry}}(f) + \gamma_{\text{wet}}(f) \quad (5)$$

where:

- $\gamma_{\text{dry}}(f)$: Oxygen absorption,
- $\gamma_{\text{wet}}(f)$: Water vapor absorption.

These are computed using line-by-line integration over absorption lines, with approximations provided in P.676.

Total gaseous attenuation along the slant path is:

$$A_{\text{gas}} = \gamma_{\text{gas}} \times L_{\text{sec}} \quad (6)$$

with $L_{\text{sec}} = (h_{\text{atm}} / \sin\theta)$, where h_{atm} is the effective atmospheric height (km).

(d) . Cloud and Fog Attenuation

Clouds, composed of small water droplets, cause non-negligible attenuation at higher frequencies, especially in the Ka- and Q/V-bands. ITU-R P.840 provides a method based on:

- **cloud liquid water content (LWC)** (g/m³),
- frequency,
- temperature.

The specific attenuation due to clouds is:

$$\gamma_{\text{cloud}} = 0.00236 \times \text{LWC} \times (f^2 / (f^2 + 18.5^2)) \quad (7)$$

where f is in GHz. Typical LWC values range from 0.1 g/m³ (light fog) to 0.5 g/m³ (dense clouds). The total cloud attenuation is:

$$A_{\text{cloud}} = \gamma_{\text{cloud}} \times L_{\text{cloud}} \quad (8)$$

where L_{cloud} is the physical thickness of the cloud layer along the path.

(e). Integrated Attenuation Model for Satellite Links

The total path attenuation (A_{total}) for a satellite communication link is a combination of:

$$A_{\text{total}} = A_{\text{rain}} + A_{\text{gas}} + A_{\text{cloud}} + A_{\text{scintillation}} \quad (9)$$

where $A_{\text{scintillation}}$, a time-varying and stochastic frequency-dependent factor and its contribution is typically small (1–3 dB).

4. Case Studies and Results

In this paper, the modelling expressions in equations (1)- (9) have been applied to specific attenuation due to rainfall and atmospheric Variables in Satellite Communication Systems using tropical region in Nigeria as case study.

Figs 1 and 2. 1: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals at for Gases and Thick Fog/Cloud. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 1km and 10km path lengths. The graphical results in the Figs shows that clouds, particularly dense ones, also cause signal attenuation (cloud attenuation). Atmospheric water vapor and oxygen (gases) cause minor gaseous absorption, increasing with humidity and frequency, but often less impactful than rain/clouds at typical satellite frequencies.

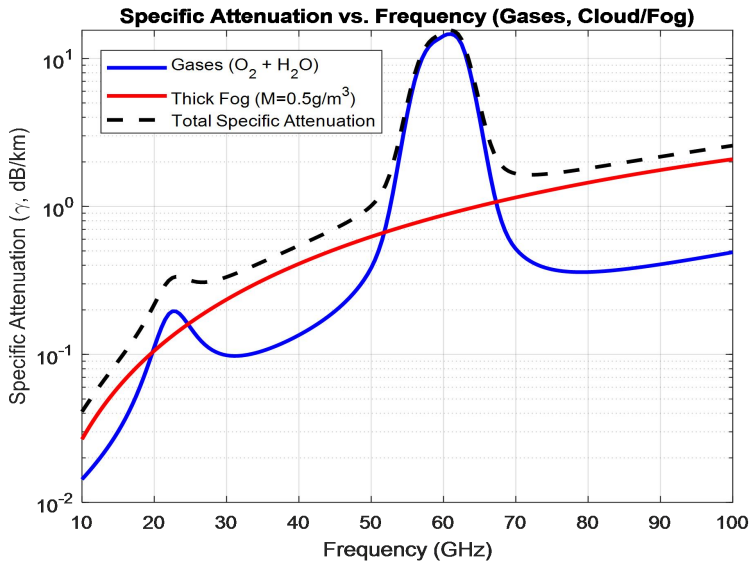


Fig. 1: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals at for Gases and Thick Fog/Cloud. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 1km path length.

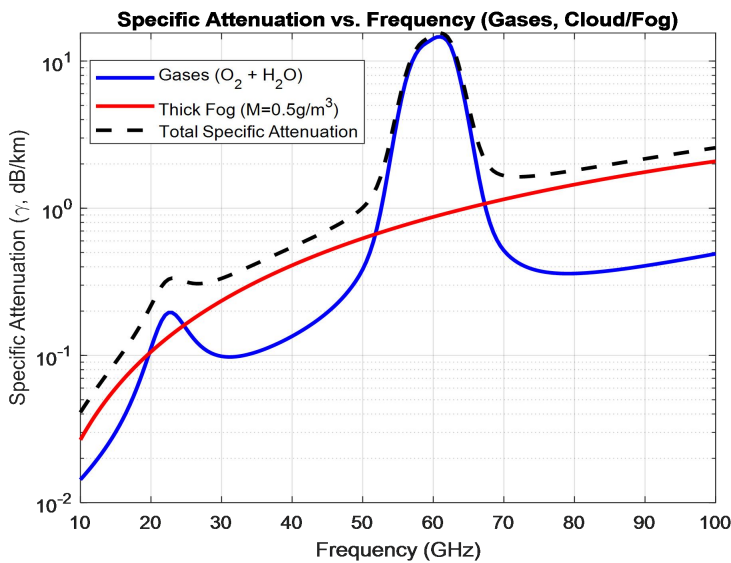


Fig. 2: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals at for Gases and Thick Fog/Cloud. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 10km path length.

Figs. 4 and 5 reveal the total specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals for Gases and Rain rate at 25 mm/hr and 50 mm/hr, respectively. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 1 km and 10km path lengths. The graphical Figs show that rain and atmospheric gases disrupt satellite signals primarily through attenuation (weakening), which can in turn leads to data loss, slower speeds, or outages, with heavy rain (high water droplets) scattering/absorbing higher frequency signals more significantly, while gases like water vapor and oxygen introduce path delays and minor signal distortions, making satellite communication unreliable during severe weather.

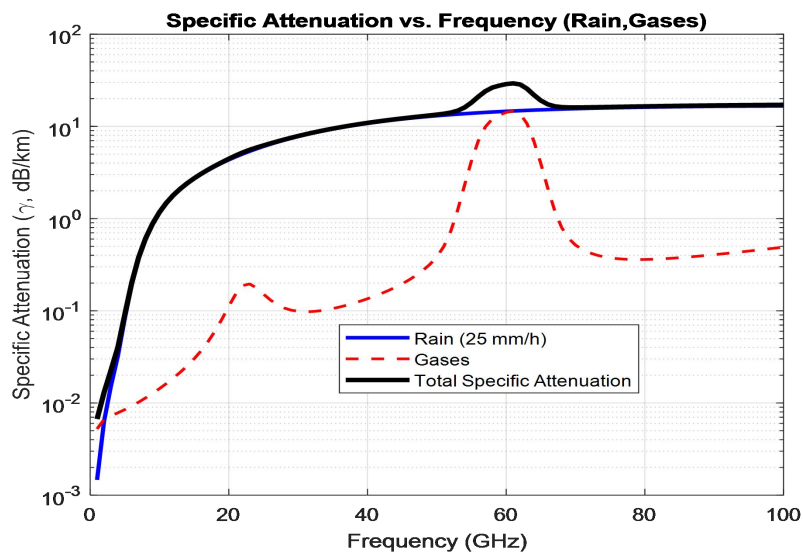


Fig. 3: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals for Gases and Rain rate of 25mm/hr. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 1km path length.

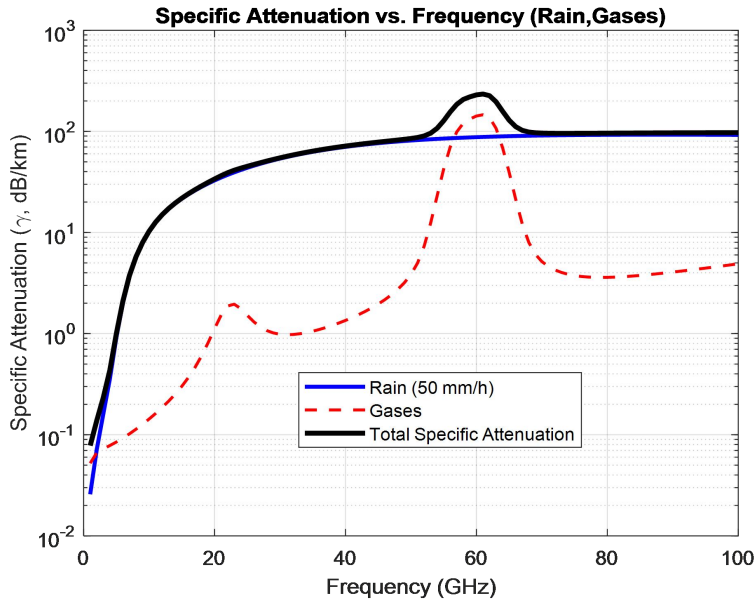


Fig. 4: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for vertical and horizontal polarized signals for Gases and Rain rate of 50mm/hr. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus Frequency for 10km path length.

Fig. 5 reveals the total Specific attenuation in the tropics for Cloud, Gases and Rain rate of 25mm/hr. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus polarization tilt angles for 1km path length. A satellite's tilt angle significantly interacts with rain, clouds, and gases, primarily affecting signal strength (attenuation), with lower tilt (flatter) angles being better for overcast/rainy conditions to reduce the long atmospheric path through water, while gases like water vapor cause minor absorption, especially at higher frequencies, all worsening at low elevation (steep tilt) angles, requiring complex adjustments for reliable communication and optimal power generation. A steeper tilt (lower elevation angle) means the signal travels through more rain, drastically increasing attenuation.

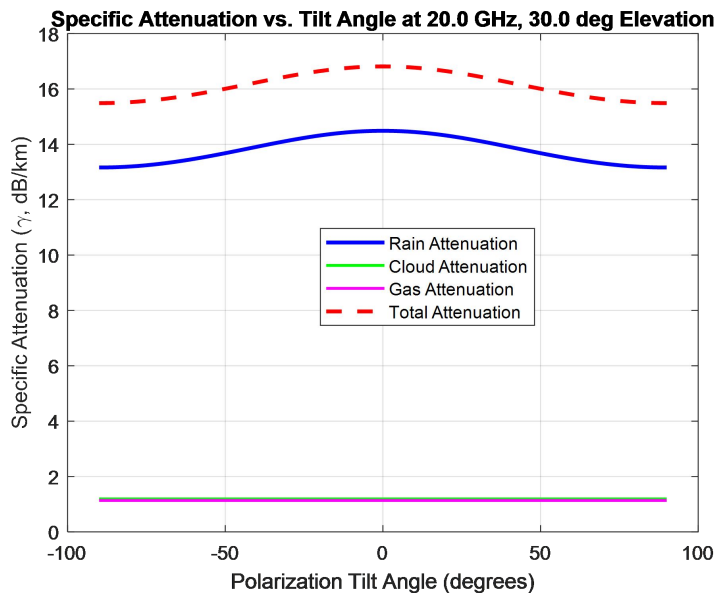


Fig. 5: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for Cloud, Gases and Rain rate of 25mm/hr. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus polarization tilt angles for 1km path length.

Figs. 6 and 7 displayed Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for Cloud, Gases, Rainfall and Scintillation. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus elevation angle for 1km path length and Rain rate of 50mm/hr and 30GHz using the proposed Integrated Attenuation method. The Figs, shows that at lower elevation angles (closer to the horizon) higher attenuations are observed as the atmosphere, encounters more rain, clouds, atmospheric gases and scintillation effect, thus increasing signal attenuation (loss). At very low angles, a signal can cross multiple rain cells, leading to deeper signal fades. That is, more rain and cloud material means more signal absorption and scattering, making signals weaker and reducing reliability (availability). Thus, for satellite communications, lower angles are usually worse due to longer paths.

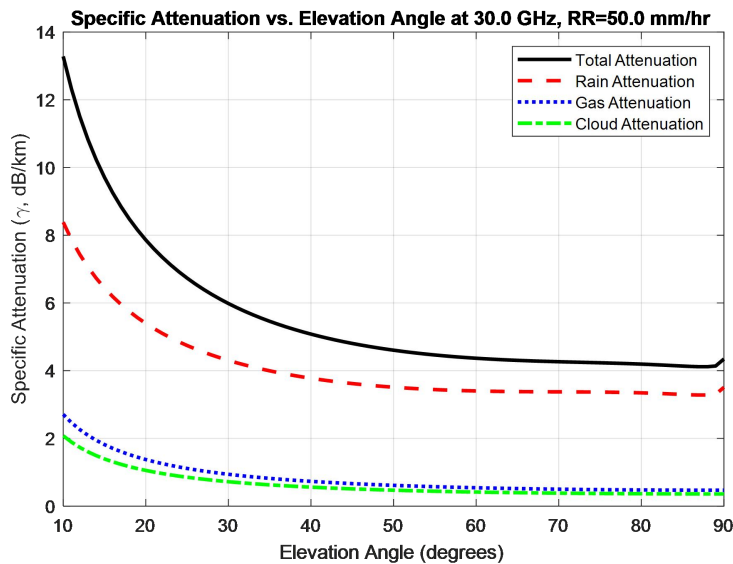


Fig. 6: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for Cloud, Gases and Rainfall. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus elevation angle for 1km path length and Rain rate of 50mm/hr and 30GHz

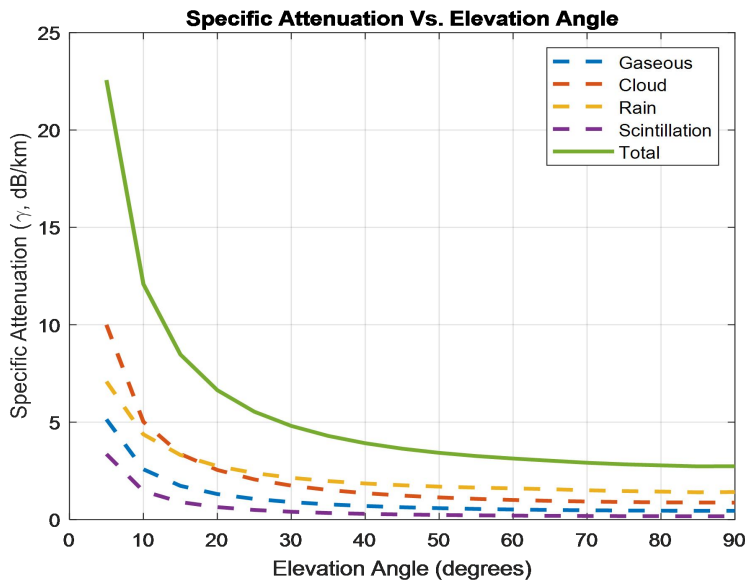


Fig. 7: The Total Specific attenuation in the tropics for Cloud, Gases, Rainfall and Scintillation. The attenuation is been plotted as a function of versus elevation angle for 1km path length and Rain rate of 50mm/hr and 30GHz using the proposed Integrated Attenuation expression in equation (9).

12. Conclusion

Rainfall and atmospheric variables significantly affect microwave signal propagation in satellite communication systems. Accurate estimation of signal attenuation is essential for system design, link availability, and quality of service. The ITU-R models provide a standardized framework, but regional variations in rainfall climatology and atmospheric conditions necessitate localized enhancements. This literature review has examined the state of the art in modeling rain, cloud, gaseous, and scintillation attenuation in satellite communication systems. While individual models—particularly those standardized by ITU-R—offer solid foundations, their isolated application fails to capture the complex, interacting nature of atmospheric propagation impairments.

The development of an Integrated Attenuation Model (IAM) has been proposed and employed in this paper as a compelling solution for improving the accuracy of satellite link design and fade mitigation. Though progress has been made toward integration through joint statistics and data-driven methods, significant challenges remain in modeling non-linear interactions, ensuring real-time applicability, and achieving global validity. Future research should prioritize the creation of open-access, multi-source propagation databases, the development of hybrid modeling frameworks, and the incorporation of IAM into next-generation satellite network management systems. Only through such integrated and adaptive approaches can satellite communication systems maintain high availability and reliability in the face of increasingly dynamic atmospheric conditions. Future satellite systems must incorporate real-time atmospheric monitoring and adaptive countermeasures to mitigate weather-induced degradation, especially at higher frequency bands.

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