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# Design of a Superstrate Module for Simple Resonant Frequency Tuning

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**ABSTRACT** This paper proposes the design of a dual-band circularly polarized antenna with an exchangeable superstrate module to compensate for the unwanted frequency shift without the re-fabrication process. The proposed antenna consists of inner and outer circular ring patches printed on the same layer of a substrate, and the mushroom-shaped superstrate is inserted to the substrate hole placed in the middle of the inner ring patch. The proposed superstrate structure adaptively adjusts the resonant frequency by selecting appropriate heights of the superstrate module. By inserting the superstrate module with the height of 2 mm, the maximum frequency shift of 20 MHz was obtained with the improved gain of about 0.9 dB at 1.42 GHz without any deteriorations on the AR and radiation patterns.

**INDEX TERMS** Dielectric substrate, antennas, frequency control, dielectric devices.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Dual-band microstrip patch antennas with circular polarization (CP) have been widely adopted for global navigation satellite system (GNSS) and satellite digital audio radio service (SDARS) to maintain high reception reliability [1]–[3]. Current research trends for these applications are mainly focused on the miniaturization of antenna aperture since the given space for antennas is often limited to less than a quarter wavelength at a target frequency. Thus, there has been a tremendous effort to miniaturize the antenna size. The most common approach is the use of high permittivity materials for antenna substrates [4]–[6]. It is also well-known that the insertion of slots [7]–[9], shorting pins [10]–[12], or fractal geometries [13]–[15] are also popular miniaturization techniques. However, these techniques often produce narrow CP and impedance matching bandwidths that result in the increased frequency sensitivity. In other words, the antenna characteristics can be easily degraded by an unwanted frequency shift due to the existence of platform effects [16], mutual coupling [9], and fabrication error [17]. This performance degradation becomes more challenging for circularly polarized antennas whose AR and impedance matching

bandwidths should be overlapped [18]–[21]. Although some papers reported good results on the reduced sensitivity using an electromagnetically coupled feed structure [22], [23] and an air gap structure without the substrate [24], [25], they still require an extra re-fabrication process for an undesired frequency shift.

In this paper, we propose the design of a single-layer dual-ring CP antenna with an exchangeable superstrate module that can compensate for the unexpected frequency shift of both the AR and the reflection coefficient without the re-fabrication process. The proposed antenna consists of inner and outer circular ring patches that are printed on a substrate, and the substrate has a cylindrical hole in the middle of the inner ring patch. The superstrate module has a mushroom shape to be inserted to the cylindrical hole for minimized offset error between centers of the superstrate module and the ring patches. Note that the head of the superstrate module has an identical diameter with the inner patch, and its thickness is varied to adjust the effective dielectric constant only for the upper resonance. To demonstrate the feasibility, we first derive formulations of the theoretical effective permittivity for a circular ring patch antenna based on the cavity model [26]. The derived formulations are provided as a function of permittivity and the superstrate thickness with an assumption that the substrate, superstrate, and ground layers

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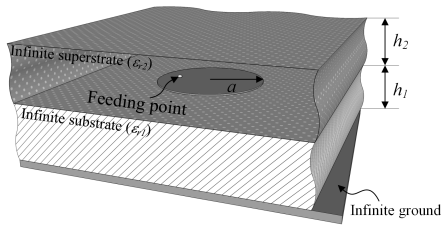


FIGURE 1. Conceptual geometry of the infinite superstrate patch antenna with the infinite ground.

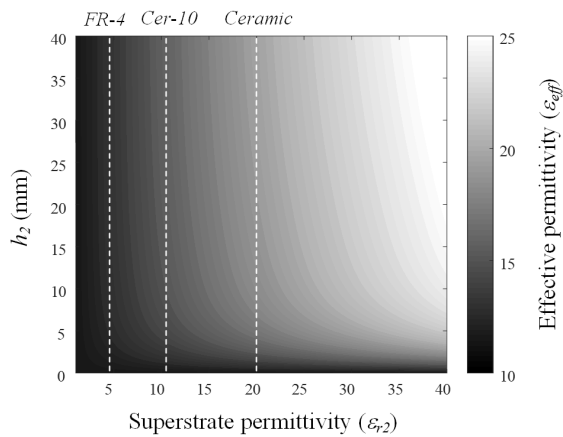


FIGURE 2. The effective permittivity of the ring patch antenna with the superstrate according to  $h_2$  and  $\epsilon_{r2}$ .

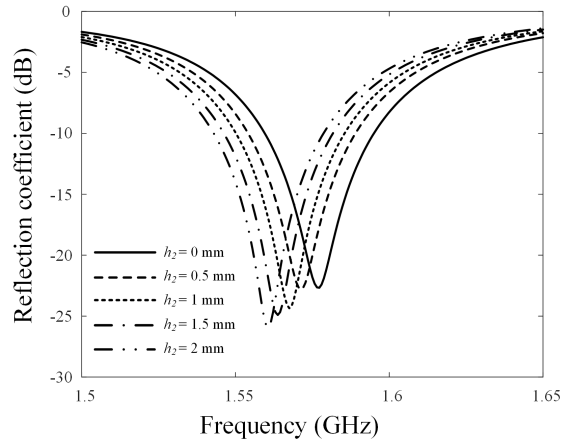
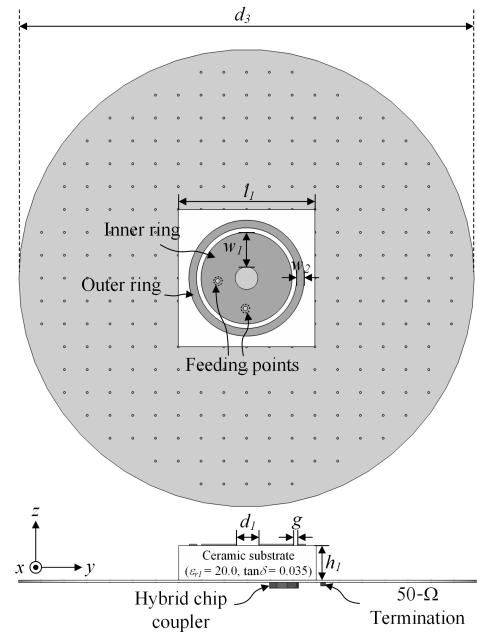
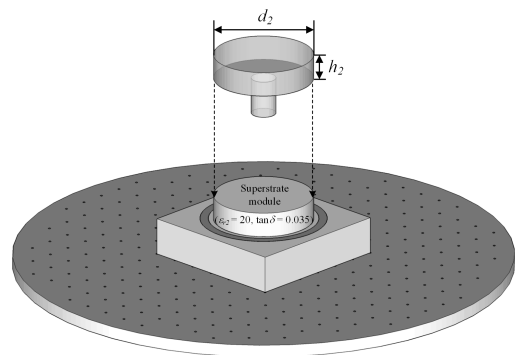


FIGURE 3. Reflection coefficients according to the variation of the superstrate height  $h_2$  by the FEKO EM simulation software.

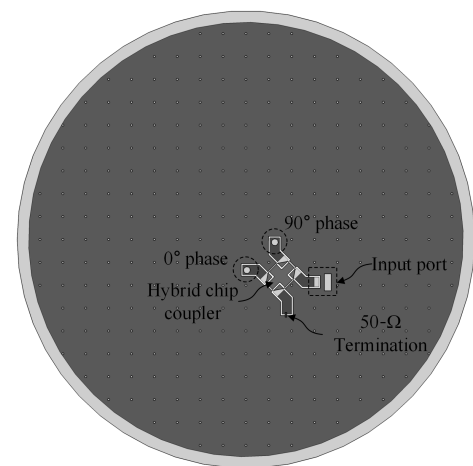
are infinite. Then, the derived results are compared with the data obtained from a commercial electromagnetic (EM) simulation software [27]. The proposed structure is further demonstrated by fabricating several superstrate modules with different thicknesses. The results confirm that the proposed structure provides the capability of frequency tuning with the maximum frequency shift of 20 MHz with maintaining the CP characteristic when the superstrate thickness is 2 mm. In addition, since the module is designed to affect only the



(a)



(b)



(c)

FIGURE 4. Geometry of the proposed antenna with the superstrate module. (a) Top and side view. (b) Isometric view with placing the superstrate module. (c) Bottom view.

TABLE 1. Design parameters of the proposed antenna.

Parameter	Value
$l_1$	50 mm
$w_1$	8 mm
$w_2$	0.6 mm
$h_1$	10 mm
$h_2$	0, 0.5, 2 mm
$d_1$	7.4 mm
$d_2$	23.4 mm
$d_3$	127 mm
$g$	0.4 mm

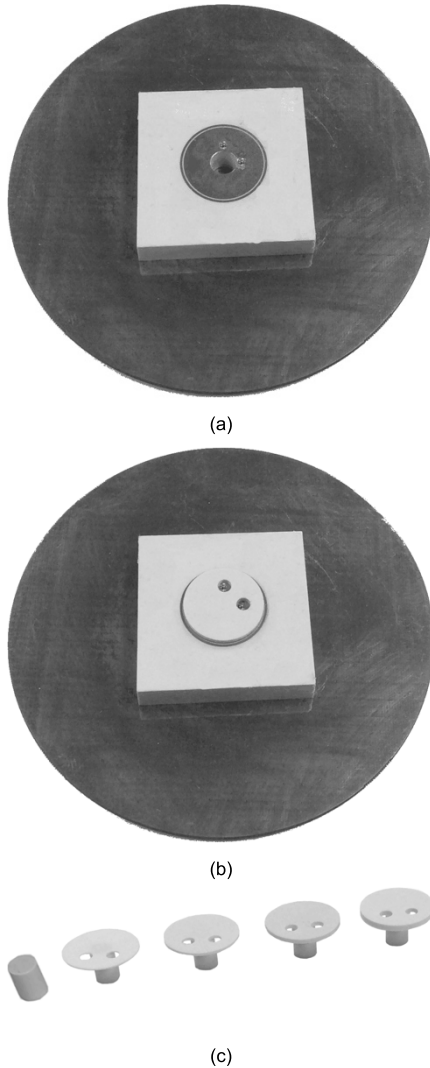


FIGURE 5. Photographs of the fabricated antenna. (a) The fabricated antenna without the superstrate module. (b) The fabricated antenna with the superstrate module. (c) The fabricated superstrate module with different head thicknesses.

upper resonance, the frequency interval between two resonances can also be adjusted by replacing the superstrate thickness.

II. THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

Fig. 1 illustrates a conceptual geometry of a circular patch antenna for radius  $a$  with an infinite superstrate, substrate,

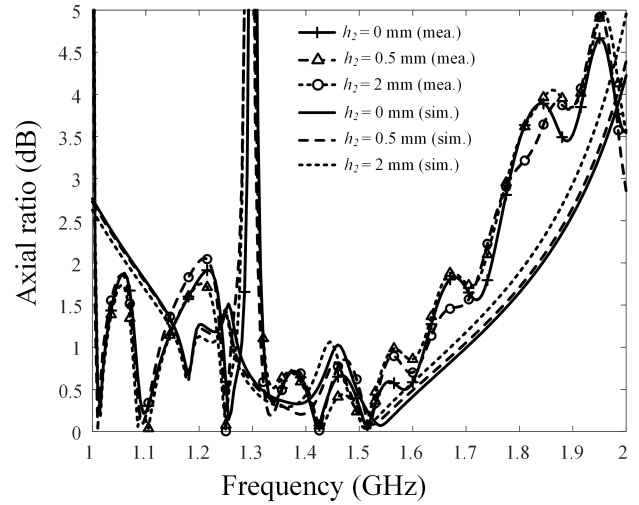


FIGURE 6. Measured axial ratios of the proposed antenna with different heights of the superstrate modules.

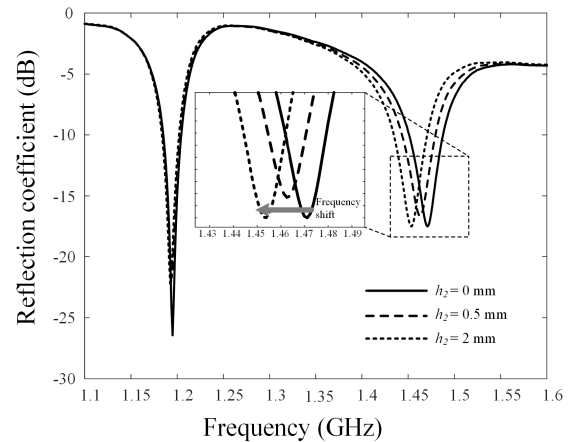


FIGURE 7. Measured reflection coefficients of the proposed antenna with different heights of the superstrate modules.

and the ground. The substrate and the superstrate have relative permittivity of  $\epsilon_{r1}$  and  $\epsilon_{r2}$  with heights of  $h_1$  and  $h_2$ , respectively. In the past study, the resonant frequency  $f_{r,nm}$  of the circular patch antenna is formulated as

$$f_{r,nm} = \frac{\alpha_{nm}c_0}{2\pi a_{eff} \sqrt{\epsilon_{eff}}}, \tag{1}$$

where  $\alpha_{nm}$  is the  $m^{th}$  zero of the derivative of the Bessel function of order  $n$ ,  $\epsilon_{eff}$  is the effective permittivity of the patch antenna in the existence of the superstrate. The effective radius is denoted as  $a_{eff}$ , and  $c_0$  is the velocity of light in free space [28]. The detailed expression for  $\epsilon_{eff}$  was introduced in [29], which can be written as

$$\begin{aligned} \epsilon_{eff} = & \epsilon_{r1}p_1 + \epsilon_{r1}(1-p_1)^2 \\ & \times \left[ \epsilon_{r2}^2 p_2 p_3 + \epsilon_{r2} \left\{ p_2 p_4 + (p_3 + p_4)^2 \right\} \right] \\ & \times \left[ \epsilon_{r2}^2 p_2 p_3 p_4 + \epsilon_{r1} (\epsilon_{r2} p_3 + p_4) (1-p_1-p_4)^2 \right]^{-1} \\ & + \epsilon_{r2} p_4 \left\{ p_2 p_4 + (p_3 + p_4)^2 \right\} \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

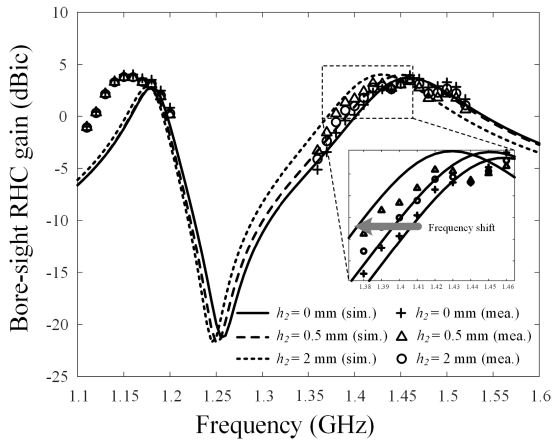


FIGURE 8. Bore-sight RHC gains of the proposed antenna with different heights of the superstrate modules.

The parameters  $p_1$ ,  $p_2$ ,  $p_3$ , and  $p_4$  indicate relationships between the substrate and superstrate heights of  $h_1$  and  $h_2$  with the effective radius, and their definitions are presented in [29]. To make these equations be more feasible for the circular ring patch antenna, we modify the formula of the effective radius  $a_{eff}$  as

$$a_{eff} = a\sqrt{1+q} \quad (a = a_1/a_2), \quad (3)$$

where  $a$  is the ratio between the inner radius  $a_1$  and the outer radius  $a_2$ . In our approach, we use the ratio  $a$  to compute  $a_{eff}$  because the total field can be obtained from the superposition

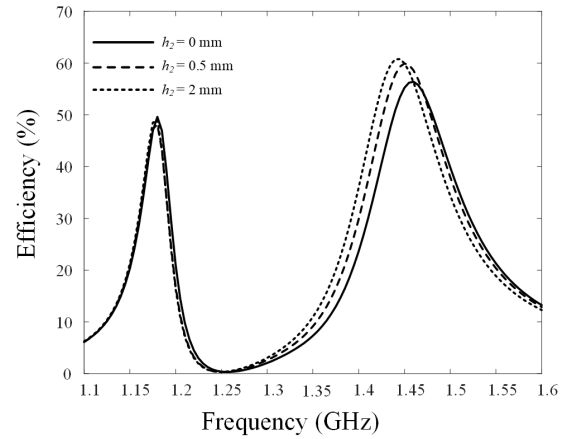
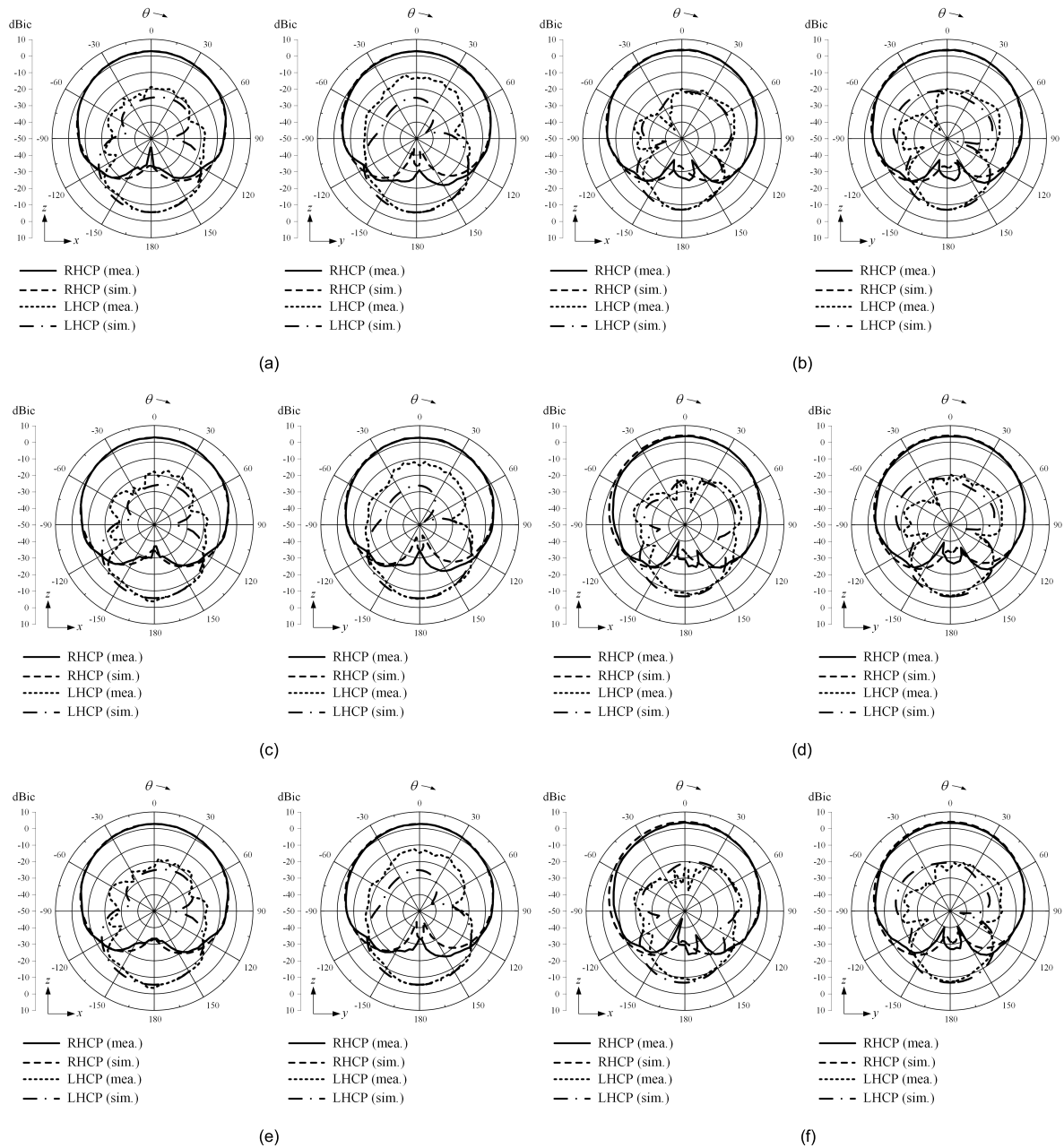


FIGURE 9. Efficiency of the proposed antenna with different heights of the superstrate modules.

of the fields radiated by the inner and outer edges of the ring patch [30]. Substituting the calculated  $a_{eff}$  for (2) leads to  $\epsilon_{eff}$  as a function of  $\epsilon_{r2}$  and  $h_2$ , as shown in Fig. 2, when assuming  $\epsilon_{r1} = 20$  and  $h_1 = 10$  mm. The dashed lines indicate the relative permittivity of some commercial materials such as FR-4 ( $\epsilon_{r2} = 4.4$ ), Cer-10 ( $\epsilon_{r2} = 10$ ), and Ceramic ( $\epsilon_{r2} = 20$ ). As can be observed, adjustments of  $h_2$  and  $\epsilon_{r2}$  result in different  $\epsilon_{eff}$  that can tune  $f_{r,min}$  without changing the shape of the physical antenna size. For example,  $\epsilon_{eff}$  of the antenna with Cer-10 varies between 11 and 15.5 for  $h_2$  from 0 mm to 40 mm, which gives the maximum adjustment of the resonant point  $f_{r,min}$  by 17.1%.

TABLE 2. Antenna performance comparisons.

Design	Structure of the substrate layer	Operating frequency band	Frequency tuning technique	Overlapping bandwidth (GHz) [lower, upper (%)]	Max. gain (dBic)	Patch dimension ( $\lambda_0$ ) in center frequency
[18]	Single	Wideband	–	9.03 – 11.12 21	12.5 (array)	$1.1 \times 1.1 \times 0.02$
[19]	Stacked	Wideband	–	2.28 – 2.77 19.4	5.7	$0.3 \times 0.3 \times 0.02$
[20]	Stacked	Wideband	PIN diode	2.44 – 2.5 2.43	6	$0.72 \times 0.72 \times 0.12$
[21]	Stacked	Dual	–	2.25, 5.1, 5.4 –	7	$0.21 \times 0.21 \times 0.02$
[22]	Stacked	Dual	–	– 1.3, 1.1	5.2	$0.21 \times 0.21 \times 0.02$
[23]	Single	Dual	Air gap superstrate w/ parasitic patch	– 1.1, 1.3	7	$0.16 \times 0.16 \times 0.02$
Proposed work	Single	Dual	Superstrate module	1.18 – 1.20, 1.44 – 1.47 1.51, 2.47	3.2	$0.06 \times 0.06 \times 0.06$



**FIGURE 10.** Comparison of simulated and measured radiation patterns of RHC and LHC gains in *zx*- and *zy*- planes. (a)  $h_2 = 0$  mm at 1.18 GHz. (b)  $h_2 = 0.5$  mm at 1.18 GHz. (c)  $h_2 = 2$  mm at 1.18 GHz. (d)  $h_2 = 0$  mm at 1.42 GHz. (e)  $h_2 = 0.5$  mm at 1.42 GHz. (f)  $h_2 = 2$  mm at 1.42 GHz.

To confirm the calculated results, we model the ring patch antenna with the infinite geometry using the FEKO EM Software. The antenna is designed by: inner and outer radii of 11.7 mm and 1.3 mm,  $\epsilon_{r1} = \epsilon_{r2} = 20$ , and  $h_1 = 10$  mm. Fig. 3 shows simulated reflection coefficients as the superstrate height  $h_2$  increases from 0 mm to 2 mm at an interval of 0.5 mm. As can be seen, the increment of  $h_2$  shifts the resonance frequency toward lower bands with the maximum variation of 17 MHz, which covers the entire GPS L1 band ( $1563 \text{ MHz} \leq \text{frequency} \leq 1587 \text{ MHz}$ ).

### III. PROPOSED STRUCTURE AND MEASURED RESULTS

Fig. 4 shows the geometry of the single-layer dual-ring CP antenna with the superstrate module. The proposed antenna consists of inner and outer circular ring patches with widths of  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , respectively. The gap between two ring patches is  $g$ , which adjusts the dual-frequency band ratio [31], and the diameter of the cylindrical hole in the middle of the inner ring patch is designed by  $d_1$ . The head of the superstrate module has diameter  $d_2$  and thickness  $h_2$ , and the antenna substrate has edge length  $l_1$  with thickness  $h_1$ . For CP properties,

the inner patch is fed by two pins of an external hybrid chip coupler (XC1400P-03S from Anaren) for the quadrature excitation [32], and the feeding network is embedded at the bottom of the printed circuit board (PCB). The PCB has diameter  $d_3$  and is also used as the antenna ground. Note that, in our approach, the same dielectric properties of  $\epsilon_{r1} = \epsilon_{r2} = 20$  and  $\tan\delta = 0.035$  are employed for both the superstrate module and the antenna substrate, and other design parameters are specified in Table 1.

Figs. 5(a) and 5(b) show photographs of the fabricated antenna without and with the superstrate model, and Fig. 5(c) presents fabricated superstrate modules with various thicknesses:  $h_2 = 0$  mm,  $h_2 = 0.5$  mm,  $h_2 = 1$  mm,  $h_2 = 1.5$  mm, and  $h_2 = 2$  mm. These modules are designed to fit into the substrate hole so that the off-set error is minimized by aligning the center of the module with the antenna center.

Fig. 6 presents the measured and simulated AR as a function of frequency. The simulated data for different  $h_2$  are specified by solid, dashed, and dotted lines, and those of the same lines with plus, circle and triangle markers indicate measured results. The tendency of the measured AR curve agrees well with that of the simulation, and the maximum difference is less than 1.3 dB within the 3-dB AR bandwidth, which is greater than 475 MHz for all  $h_2$  values.

Fig. 7 presents the measured reflection coefficients of the fabricated antenna, and the solid, dashed, and dotted lines indicate results when  $h_2 = 0$  mm,  $h_2 = 0.5$  mm, and  $h_2 = 2$  mm, respectively. As we aimed, the resonant frequency tends to shift toward the lower frequency band with the minimum values of  $-17.3$  dB at 1.472 GHz ( $h_2 = 0$  mm),  $-16.6$  dB at 1.464 GHz ( $h_2 = 0.5$  mm), and  $-17.5$  dB at 1.452 GHz ( $h_2 = 2$  mm). In addition, the lower resonance is not affected by the superstrate height because the alignment above the inner ring patch is firmly fixed to avoid overlapping the outer ring patch.

Fig. 8 shows variations of the measured and simulated bore-sight gains for the right-hand circular (RHC) polarization according to  $h_2$ . The simulated data for different  $h_2$  are specified by solid, dashed, and dotted lines. Plus, circle, and triangle markers indicate measured results. Due to the resonance shift, the bore-sight gain also tends to shift toward the lower frequency band as  $h_2$  increases. This implies that the gain can be further improved by exchanging the substrate module to compensate for the unexpected frequency shifts. For example, the measured gain at 1.42 GHz is 2.3 dBic without the superstrate, and this can be improved to 3.6 dBic by using the superstrate with  $h_2 = 2$  mm, while the gain of the lower resonance maintains to be identical as 3.1 dBic at 1.18 GHz. To more interpret the CP characteristics, the overlapping bandwidth is calculated in the upper and lower frequency band, which means that the bandwidths are overlaid between the return-loss bandwidth and the axial ratio bandwidth of the CP antenna [18]–[20]. The overlapping bandwidths of 37 MHz (2.51 %), 36 MHz (2.46 %), and 36 MHz (2.47 %) are obtained in the upper frequency band with changing  $h_2$  of 0 mm, 0.5 mm, and 2 mm although the

minimum overlapping bandwidth of 20 MHz (1.51 %) is conserved in the lower band. We also compare the performances between the proposed antenna and the reference CP antennas, and the detailed explanations are specified in TABLE 2.

Fig. 9 illustrates that the proposed antenna maintains the efficiency of 49.1 % in the lower band despite of varying the superstrate height  $h_2$ , in contrast, the efficiency in the upper frequency band gradually increases from 56.4 % to 60.7 % as  $h_2$  is changed from 0 mm to 2 mm. This result is due to the fact that the dielectric loss of the superstrate module does not affect the efficiency of the outer ring patch since the superstrate has the same diameter as the inner ring patch.

Fig. 10 shows measured radiation patterns for various  $h_2$  values in comparison with the simulated data. We present patterns for both the RHC and left-hand circular (LHC) gains in  $zx$ - and  $zy$ - planes at 1.18 GHz and 1.42 GHz. In the bore-sight direction, the measured results of the cross-polarization levels are lower than  $-16$  dB in both  $zx$ - and  $zy$ -planes at 1.18 GHz, and those at 1.42 GHz are maintained to be less than  $-23.2$  dB in  $zx$ -plane and  $-22.9$  dB in  $zy$ -plane without serious pattern distortions in the upper hemisphere.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

we have proposed the design of a single-layer dual-ring CP antenna using the mushroom-shaped superstrate module that can compensate for the unwanted frequency shift. The superstrate module was designed as the mushroom-shape in order to easily insert the exact center of the antenna to tune the resonant frequency, and the proposed antenna had inner and outer circular ring patch for the dual-band operation. As a verification process, we fabricated the proposed antenna and the superstrate modules with various heights. The maximum frequency shift was observed as 20 MHz with the improved gain of about 0.9 dB at 1.42 GHz. The AR values were below 3 dB in both upper and lower frequency band, and the cross-polarization levels of the fabricated antenna were less than  $-16$  dB without pattern distortions despite of changing the height of superstrate module. These results demonstrate that the proposed antenna is suitable for tuning the unexpected frequency shift to enhance the gain without any distortions on the AR and the patterns.

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