

# A 1.5 nW, 32.768 kHz XTAL Oscillator Operational From a 0.3 V Supply

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**Abstract**—This paper presents an ultra-low power crystal (XTAL) oscillator circuit for generating a 32.768 kHz clock source for real-time clock generation. An inverting amplifier operational from 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  oscillates the XTAL resonator and achieves a power consumption of 2.1 nW. A duty-cycling technique powers down the XTAL amplifier without losing the oscillation and reduces the power consumption to 1.5 nW. The proposed circuit is implemented in 130 nm CMOS with an area of 0.0625 mm<sup>2</sup> and achieves a temperature stability of 1.85 ppm/°C.

**Index Terms**—32 kHz XO, clock source, crystal (XTAL) oscillator, Internet of Things (IoT), real-time clock (RTC), subthreshold, ultra-low power (ULP).

## I. INTRODUCTION

ULTRA-LOW power (ULP) systems such as wireless sensor nodes (WSNs) for emerging Internet of Things (IoT) applications spend a large portion of their time in inactive or idle mode to save power. A typical operation of a ULP system constitutes a short burst of activity followed by a long idle time. The short burst of activity consumes higher power, whereas the power consumption in idle mode is relatively small. Spending a large time in the idle mode saves energy and can help with recharging the storage capacitor of energy harvesting ULP systems [1] from low energy ambient harvesting sources. To maximize idle time while remaining functional in a larger interconnected IoT network, these systems require precise clock to synchronize and wake-up the system at regular intervals. A real-time clock (RTC) utilizing an ULP oscillator is often used for this purpose. The total power consumption of such a system may be determined by the power consumption of the RTC. To reduce the power consumption and to increase the life-time of the system, the power consumption of the RTC needs to be reduced. In this paper, we present a 32.768 kHz crystal (XTAL) oscillator for RTC applications with a power consumption of 1.5 nW.

Widely varied circuit architectures ranging from on-chip oscillators to off-chip XTAL oscillators exist for the implementation of the RTC in an ULP system. A precision CMOS

relaxation oscillator is presented in [2]. It achieves a temperature stability of 60 ppm/°C, but its power consumption is 45  $\mu$ W for a 14 MHz clock. Further, the oscillator shows a power supply variation of 16 ppm/mV. A 150 nW, 100 kHz on-chip oscillator achieves a temperature stability of 5 ppm/°C for a temperature range of 20 °C–40 °C and 14 ppm/°C for a temperature range of 20 °C–70 °C [3]. The power supply variation of this oscillator is 0.1%/mV. The temperature stability and the power consumption of the oscillator make it suitable for ULP applications, but it requires a very controlled power supply. On-chip oscillators, using the gate leakage current, have been proposed in [4]–[6]. These designs employ calibration for temperature compensation and achieve a best temperature stability of 32 ppm/°C. The power supply variation of this oscillator is 0.42%/mV. Further, these oscillators can operate only at very low frequency (0.1–10 Hz) due to the low magnitude of gate-leakage current. The lower output frequency and higher power supply variation limits their usage for precise RTC applications.

A XTAL oscillator provides a very precise output frequency ( $\sim$ 5–20 ppm/°C) that is not affected by process or power supply variation by using an off-chip electro-mechanical XTAL resonator. Although off-chip components can increase the cost and volume of the system, XTALs are now being explored for ULP systems that require precise timing for wake-up or synchronization of a WSN in an IoT network. The power consumption of the XTAL used in ULP systems must be very small. Recent work on the design of 32 kHz XTAL oscillators show power consumption in the single digit nW range [7], [10], making it possible to use them for ULP applications. Power consumption of XTAL oscillators can be reduced by lowering the amplitude of oscillation by operating at lower voltages. Low power electronic watches use this technique to operate XTAL oscillator circuits in the subthreshold or weak inversion region of operation of the transistors [8]. The XTAL oscillator circuit proposed in [9] achieves a power consumption of 22 nW operating with a power supply ( $V_{DD}$ ) around 600 mV. A delay locked loop (DLL)-based XTAL [10] achieves a power consumption of 5.58 nW. It also achieves lower swing to reduce the power consumption in the XTAL's effective series resistance (ESR). However, to reduce the power consumption and to maintain low swing for oscillation, it needs two power supplies and two grounds. It also requires a large area for its implementation. A self-charging XTAL design reduces the power consumption to 1.89 nW [7]. In this circuit, XI and XO are operated in a self-charging loop, where both XI and XO are charged based on the operating phase of the oscillator using only the parasitic load capacitors. In conventional designs, the input of the oscillator XI is obtained from XO as a filtered output through

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89 the high quality XTAL. The spectrum of XI will contain only  
 90 the resonance frequency of the oscillator. However, the self-  
 91 charging scheme [7] charges XI too to maintain the oscillation.  
 92 The circuit used for charging XI can introduce additional fre-  
 93 quency components in XI, which may degrade the spectrum of  
 94 the oscillator.

95 In this work, we present a 1.5 nW, 32 kHz XTAL oscillator,  
 96 which operates the XTAL with a feedback amplifier operating  
 97 at 300 mV. We propose a technique of duty cycling the XTAL  
 98 oscillator in conjunction with operating them in a subthreshold  
 99 region. We achieve a measured average power consumption of  
 100 1.5 nW across 25 chips. In Section II, we present the opera-  
 101 tion of the XTAL. Section III presents the low power amplifier  
 102 design and Section IV presents the duty-cycling technique.  
 103 Section V presents measurement results.

## 104 II. XTAL OPERATION

105 An XTAL is an electromechanical resonator that resonates  
 106 at its natural frequency when excited with electrical energy.  
 107 Fig. 1(a) shows a conventional XTAL oscillator circuit. The  
 108 equivalent circuit of an XTAL consists of a series RLC circuit  
 109 with a parasitic parallel capacitor  $C_p$ . The frequency of oscil-  
 110 lation is mainly determined by the motional inductor  $L_m$  and  
 111 capacitor  $C_m$ . The ESR is the energy dissipating component of  
 112 the XTAL. The inverting amplifier provides the negative resis-  
 113 tance that overcomes the loss from ESR and pumps energy  
 114 into the XTAL, making it oscillate at its natural frequency.  
 115 The output frequency of the XTAL oscillator is very precise,  
 116 and its stability is usually specified at parts per million or  
 117 per billion (ppm/ppb). The extremely precise output frequency  
 118 of XTAL oscillators makes them a natural choice for imple-  
 119 menting clocks. Further, the frequency of oscillation is largely  
 120 independent of voltage and process variation.

### 121 A. Theoretical Analysis for Low-Power XTAL Oscillation

122 The XTAL circuit can be made to oscillate in series or par-  
 123 allel mode. Parallel mode is the commonly employed mode of  
 124 oscillation. In parallel mode, the XTAL is connected with an  
 125 inverting amplifier with two load capacitors connected in paral-  
 126 lel ( $C_L$ ), as shown in Fig. 1(a). In parallel mode, the XTAL  
 127 appears as an inductor and oscillates with the load capaci-  
 128 tors ( $C_L$ ). In order to oscillate, the circuit needs to meet the  
 129 Barkhausen or the negative resistance criteria of oscillation.  
 130 For negative resistance oscillation criteria, the amplifier needs  
 131 to present a negative resistance ( $R_{NEG}$ ) at resonant frequency,  
 132 whose absolute value should be greater than the XTAL's ESR  
 133 ( $R_{ESR}$ ) [11] ( $|R_{NEG}| > R_{ESR}$ ). We derive a theoretical anal-  
 134 ysis for a low power XTAL oscillator from the work presented  
 135 in [8]. Fig. 1(b) shows a hypothetical three point oscillator. The  
 136 negative resistance of the oscillator can be derived from [8, eq.  
 137 (16)] as follows:

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m C_L^2}{(g_m C_P)^2 + \omega^2 (C_L^2 + 2C_P C_L)^2}$$

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m}{(g_m C_P / C_L)^2 + \omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (1)$$

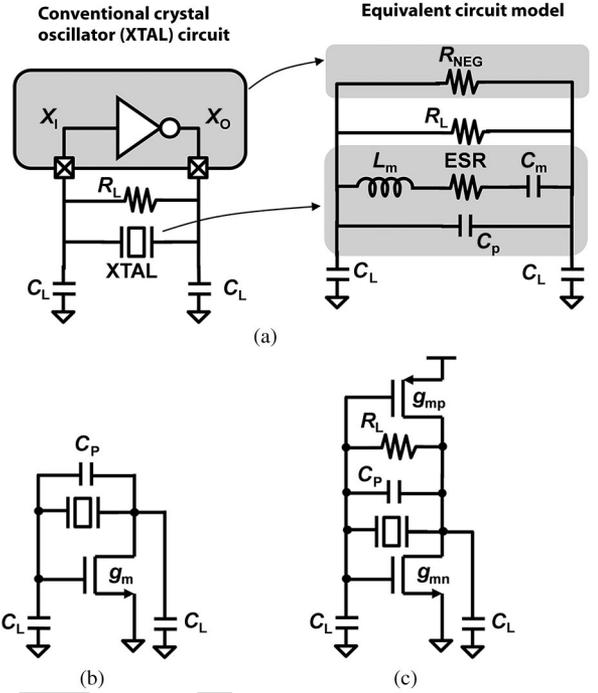


Fig. 1. (a) Conventional XTAL oscillator circuit and its equivalent representation. (b) Analysis of a three-point oscillator. (c) Practical implementation of XTAL oscillator with an inverter (push-pull oscillator).

Since  $(g_m C_P / C_L)^2 \ll \omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2$

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m}{\omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (2)$$

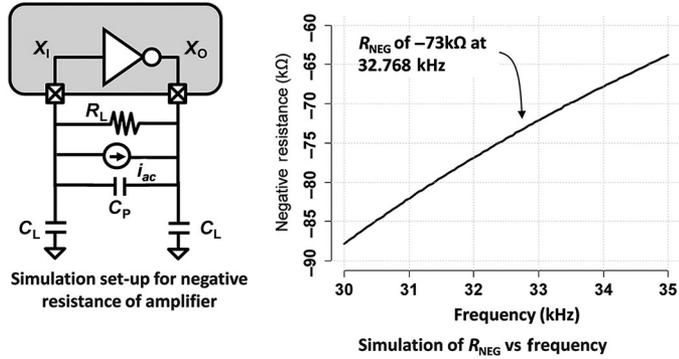
For an inverter-based oscillator, as shown in Fig. 1(c), the transconductance of both nMOS and pMOS devices will add, and the  $R_{NEG}$  can be approximately written as

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{(-g_{mn} - g_{mp})}{\omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (3)$$

For a device operating in subthreshold, the transconductance is given by

$$g_m = \frac{I_D}{nV_t} \quad (4)$$

where  $I_D$  is the drain source saturation current,  $n$  is the subthreshold slope approximately equal to 1.2, and  $V_t$  is the thermal voltage, which is 26 mV at room temperature. An nMOS biased at 7 nA of  $I_D$  gives a  $g_m$  of  $2.24 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$ . Using the same value for  $g_{mn}$  and  $g_{mp}$ , (3) gives an  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-180 \text{ k}\Omega$  for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and  $C_P$  of 1 pF. A power limit can be derived from (3) and (4) for various conditions. Assuming that a  $-60 \text{ k}\Omega$   $R_{NEG}$  is sufficient for oscillation for a 30 k $\Omega$  ESR XTAL, an inverter running at 0.3 V can realize oscillation at 0.7 nW for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF. If a lower  $C_L$  value of 3 pF is used, then it is possible to achieve oscillation at 0.28 nW. Further, if one can realize an oscillator circuit at 150 mV  $V_{DD}$  as used in [7], then the power required to achieve oscillation is 140 pW with



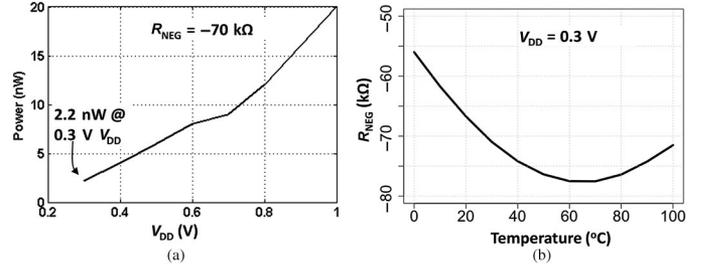
F2:1 Fig. 2. Design method for the XTAL oscillator circuit.

160 margin. In order to just barely meet the oscillation criteria, the  
161 power required sits at 70 pW.

### 162 B. Practical Design of a Low-Power XTAL Oscillator

163 The preceding section showed the theoretical power required  
164 to achieve oscillation. However, several practical issues can  
165 reduce the  $R_{NEG}$  at subthreshold current levels. In this section,  
166 we present the practical design method for realizing the  
167 required  $R_{NEG}$  for oscillation, and Fig. 2 shows the design  
168 method. In this circuit, XTAL is removed from the oscillator,  
169 and an *ac* current source is connected across the amplifier term-  
170 inal. The inverting amplifier presents an impedance to the  
171 applied *ac* current, which will have a real component at the  
172 oscillation frequency. The real component is the negative resis-  
173 tance ( $R_{NEG}$ ) of the amplifier at resonance. The value of  $R_{NEG}$   
174 is a function of frequency. Fig. 2 shows the simulation of the  
175  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier across frequency for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and a  
176  $C_P$  of 1 pF. The ESR of the XTAL oscillator at 32.768 kHz is  
177 typically in the range of 30 kΩ. The  $g_{mn}$  and  $g_{mp}$  of our oscil-  
178 lator is  $1.12 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$  and  $1.16 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$ , respectively, at  
179 a bias current of 7 nA and  $V_{DD}$  of 0.3 V. Plugging these val-  
180 ues in (3) yields a  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-90$  kΩ. However, Fig. 2 shows  
181 that we can achieve a  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-73$  kΩ. Further, the start-up  
182 time of the XTAL oscillator is in the range of  $\sim 1$  s because of  
183 the high quality factor ( $Q$ ) of the XTAL resonator. The  $R_{NEG}$   
184 of the amplifier also controls the start-up time, and a negative  
185 resistance with higher magnitude will reduce the start-up time  
186 of the XTAL [12].

187 The power consumption of the XTAL oscillator is deter-  
188 mined by the XTAL and the amplifier. XTAL's ESR dissipates  
189 energy in the form of heat loss, as Joule's heating, which  
190 depends on the amplitude of oscillation. To reduce the power  
191 consumption of the XTAL oscillator, the amplitude of oscil-  
192 lation is often reduced. This can be done by operating the  
193 amplifier in the subthreshold region [8], [9]. In this paper, we  
194 propose a 32 kHz XTAL oscillator circuit that consumes 1.5 nW  
195 of power. We first operate the XTAL oscillator in subthreshold  
196 at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  to reduce the power consumption to 2.2 nW. We  
197 further reduce the power by applying a duty-cycling technique  
198 to turn-off the amplifier often. This technique brings down the



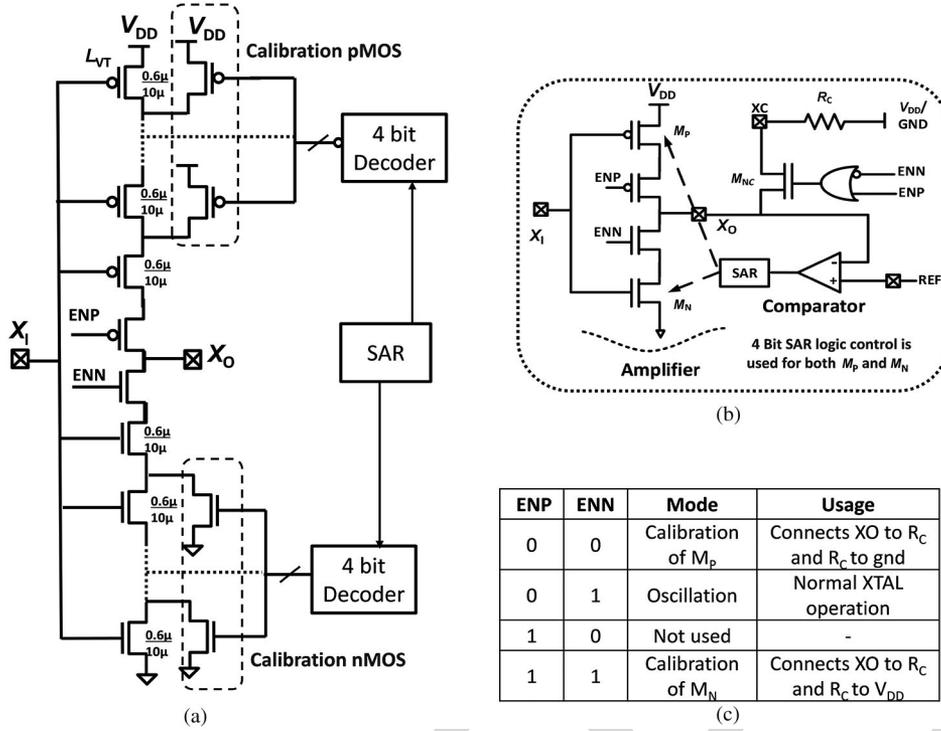
F3:1 Fig. 3. (a) Simulation of XTAL oscillator power consumption across  $V_{DD}$   
F3:2 with a fixed negative resistance of amplifier at  $-70$  kΩ. (b) Simulation of  
F3:3 negative resistance of the amplifier with temperature at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

over-all power consumption of the XTAL oscillator to 1.5 nW,  
improving the state-of-the-art by over 26%.

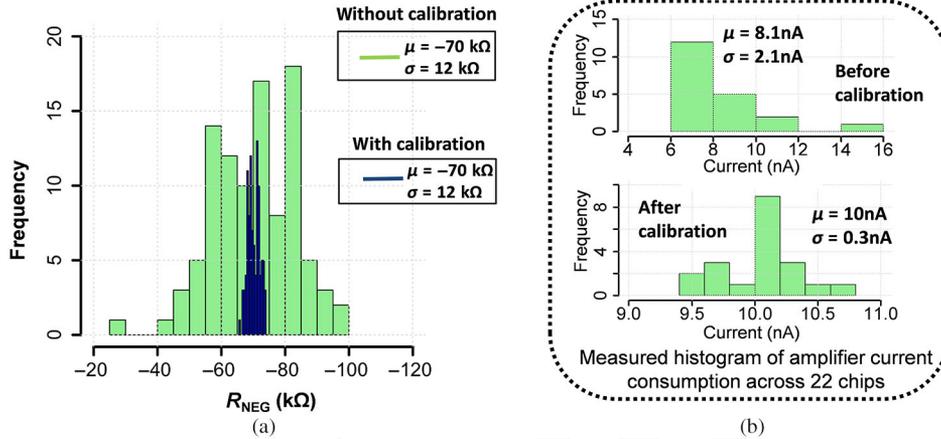
### 201 III. LOW POWER AMPLIFIER DESIGN

202 In this section, we present the design of the low power ampli-  
203 fier circuit. Various inverting amplifier architectures can be  
204 used to implement the amplifier. A simple push-pull inverter  
205 with a large bias resistor, as shown in Fig. 1, is one of the  
206 design options and is commonly used because it is single stage  
207 and hence consumes least amount of power [9]. However, the  
208 inverter circuit needs to be designed properly to meet the oscil-  
209 lation criterion. At lower drive strength (smaller sizes for *n*MOS  
210 and *p*MOS), the  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier is low and cannot  
211 meet the oscillation criterion. Increasing the size increases the  
212  $R_{NEG}$ . After a certain size, the  $R_{NEG}$  starts decreasing again  
213 because of the self-loading in the inverter through the gate-drain  
214 capacitance,  $C_{GD}$  (Miller-effect). Also, increasing the size of  
215 the inverter increases the power consumption. Therefore, the  
216 inverter needs to be sized properly for the power consumption,  
217 as well as for  $R_{NEG}$ . Further, the power consumption can also  
218 be reduced by operating the amplifier circuit at a lower  $V_{DD}$ . At  
219 lower  $V_{DD}$ , the amplifier device sizes are typically bigger than  
220 the sizes for higher  $V_{DD}$ . However, the overall power consump-  
221 tion decreases. Fig. 3(a) shows the power consumption of the  
222 amplifier circuit designed to provide a fixed negative resistance  
223 of  $-70$  kΩ at 32 kHz for different  $V_{DD}$ s with a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and  
224  $C_P$  of 1 pF. The power consumption increases with the voltage  
225 almost linearly. This is largely because the bias current of the  
226 amplifier almost remains the same for a given  $R_{NEG}$ , which can  
227 be confirmed by inspecting equations (3) and (4). As a result,  
228 power increases because of the increase in the  $V_{DD}$ . Therefore,  
229 the oscillator needs to be operated at a lower  $V_{DD}$  to reduce  
230 the power. Further, the  $g_m$  of the amplifier is a weak function  
231 of temperature, so the  $R_{NEG}$  does not vary a lot with temper-  
232 ature as shown in Fig. 3(b). Our amplifier consumes 5–10 nA  
233 of quiescent current during start-up, which decreases after the  
234 saturation of oscillation. The power consumption of the XTAL  
235 oscillator is 2–10 nW at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

236 Fig. 4(a) shows the circuit diagram of the proposed ampli-  
237 fier. We use low threshold ( $L_{VT}$ ) transistors with longer length  
238 to implement the amplifier.  $L_{VT}$  transistors give better perfor-  
239 mance at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ , owing to the lower threshold voltage,  
240 while a longer length of the transistor helps in reducing the



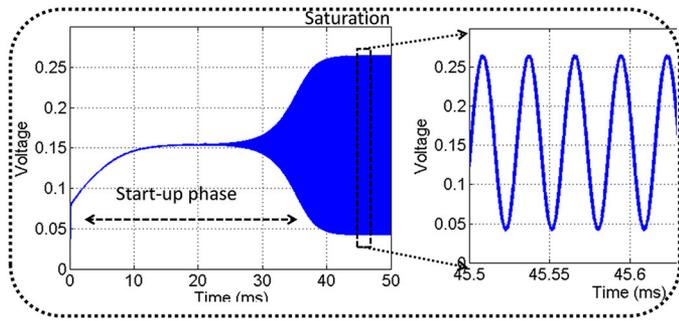
F4:1 Fig. 4. XTAL oscillator amplifier design and calibration control.

F5:1 Fig. 5. Performance of the amplifier characteristics showing  $R_{NEG}$  across 100 point Monte Carlo simulation and its bias current measured across 22 chips before  
F5:2 and after calibration.

241 bias current. The longer length device also helps in reducing  
242 the variation of the device characteristics at lower voltages. Use  
243 of long  $L_{VT}$  transistors also helps in getting better gain and  
244 hence higher  $R_{NEG}$ .

245 The amplifier was designed to operate in the subthreshold  
246 region with a  $V_{DD}$  of 0.3 V. Owing to the subthreshold region  
247 of operation, the amplifier bias current is sensitive to process  
248 variation. As a result, the negative resistance and power con-  
249 sumption of the amplifier can still show variation with process.  
250 At some process corners, the amplifier can consume higher  
251 power and give very high  $R_{NEG}$ ; and at other process corners,  
252 its  $R_{NEG}$  can be low, and it may fail to meet the oscillation cri-  
253 teria. We propose a calibration method to address this variation  
254 where we bias the amplifier with a fixed current. Equations (3)

and (4) show that a fixed bias current will give a fixed  $R_{NEG}$  255  
at a given temperature. Fig. 4(a) and (b) shows the calibration 256  
circuit. We set the drive strength of the amplifier transistors 257  
 $M_P$  and  $M_N$  using this circuit. The amplifier is enabled when 258  
 $ENP = 0$  and  $ENN = 1$ . For calibration of  $M_N$  to a given drive 259  
strength,  $ENN$  and  $ENP$  are set to one. This enables the calibra- 260  
tion circuit, where  $M_N$  gets connected to an external resistor 261  
through the switch  $M_{NC}$ .  $X_I$  is connected to  $REF$ , which is 262  
selected to be at  $V_{DD}/2$ . The size of the transistor  $M_N$  is 263  
changed using successive approximation register (SAR) logic 264  
with the comparator in a feedback loop. This happens in the fol- 265  
lowing way.  $X_I$  and  $REF$  are set to  $V_{DD}/2$  and the pull-down 266  
path is enabled, while the pull-up path is disabled. The external 267  
resistor  $R_C$  is connected to  $V_{DD}$ . If the drive strength of 268



F6:1 Fig. 6. Simulation result of the XTAL oscillator circuit operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$   
 F6:2 with a reduced  $Q$  XTAL resonator.

269  $M_N$  is high, then it will pull down the XO node below REF,  
 270 which will cause the comparator output to go low. This low  
 271 signal sets the SAR logic to decrease the drive strength of the  
 272 transistor  $M_N$ . The transistor  $M_N$  is realized using series con-  
 273 nection of several  $0.6 \mu/10 \mu$  nMOS as shown in Fig. 4(a).  
 274 The long transistors are connected in parallel with nMOS cali-  
 275 bration switches connected to ground, where only one nMOS  
 276 switch is on at a time to provide a given drive strength. The  
 277 SAR logic reduces or increases the drive strength of MN by  
 278 connecting more or fewer long transistors in series. The size of  
 279  $M_N$  is successively approximated, and it takes 5 clock cycles.  
 280 This way  $M_N$  can be sized to the right drive strength. Similarly,  
 281  $M_P$  is sized by setting ENN and ENP to zero and connecting  
 282 the external resistor to ground. We use an external resistance  
 283 such that the amplifier can be sized to supply 5–20 nA of bias  
 284 current, which provides enough drive strength to meet the crite-  
 285 ria for oscillation. The calibration is performed at lower  $V_{DD}$  of  
 286 0.3 V. Fig. 5(a) shows the variation of  $R_{NEG}$  across a 100 point  
 287 Monte Carlo simulation with and without calibration. The mean  
 288  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier without calibration is  $-70 \text{ k}\Omega$  with a  $3\sigma$   
 289 variation of  $36 \text{ k}\Omega$ , whereas the  $3\sigma$  variation with calibration  
 290 is  $5.4 \text{ k}\Omega$ . Fig. 5(b) shows the measurement of the amplifier  
 291 bias current before and after calibration. It varies from 6 to 16  
 292 nA across several chips. After calibration, the  $3\sigma$  variation of  
 293 the amplifier current was brought down 0.9 nA with a mean of  
 294 10 nA. Fig. 6 shows the simulation result of the XTAL oscil-  
 295 lator operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  with a power consumption of 2.2  
 296 nW. We achieve 2.2 nW power consumption for  $30 \text{ k}\Omega$  XTAL.  
 297 The power consumption of an XTAL with an ESR of  $50 \text{ k}\Omega$  is  
 298 going to be 5.6 nW at an  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-100 \text{ k}\Omega$  and 15 nW for a  
 299  $90 \text{ k}\Omega$  XTAL. We use a reduced  $Q$  resonator for this simulation  
 300 to reduce the start-up time and the simulation time. The  $Q$  is  
 301 reduced by lowering the motional inductance and by increas-  
 302 ing the motional capacitance of the resonator which has little  
 303 impact on the required oscillation criteria.

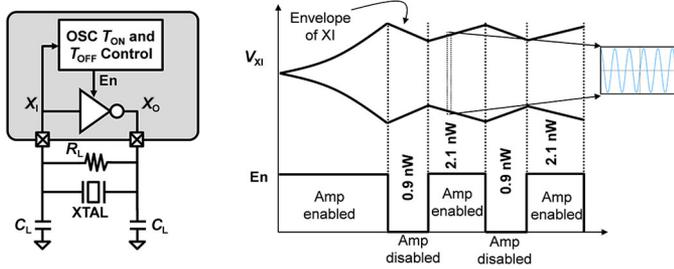
#### 304 IV. AMPLIFIER DUTY CYCLING

305 In order for the oscillator to start,  $|R_{NEG}| > \text{ESR}$ . The start-  
 306 up time, the time the oscillator takes to reach the full amplitude,  
 307 is also controlled by  $R_{NEG}$ . The higher the value of  $R_{NEG}$ ,  
 308 the faster will be the start-up [12]. However, a higher value  
 309 of  $R_{NEG}$  means higher power consumption. The amplitude

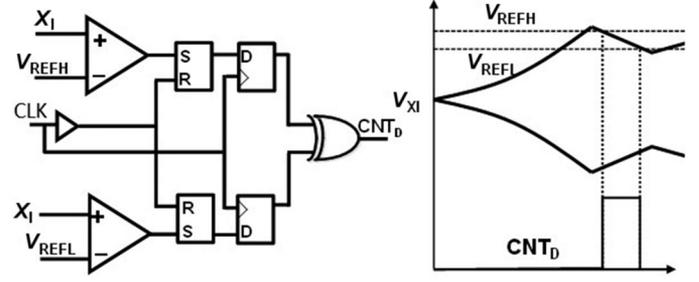
of oscillation saturates after start-up. After the oscillation sat- 310  
 urates, the  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier decreases because of the 311  
 nonlinearity in the circuit due to saturation, and effectively 312  
 $|R_{NEG}| = \text{ESR}$  at saturation [11]. The saturation of oscillation 313  
 creates higher harmonics, resulting in unnecessary power dissi- 314  
 pation. While higher power is needed during start-up [12], it is 315  
 not needed when the oscillation saturates. We propose further 316  
 improvements in the design to save this power. 317

The energy of a XTAL oscillator is stored in its equivalent 318  
 inductor and capacitors. After the saturation of oscillation, the 319  
 stored energy in the XTAL's equivalent inductor and capacitor 320  
 is saturated. After the saturation, if the amplifier is disabled, 321  
 the oscillation will start decaying; and if we enable it again, 322  
 it will start growing again. The power consumption becomes 323  
 negligible when the oscillator is disabled. However, oscilla- 324  
 tion does not die right away and decays slowly, with the time 325  
 constant given by  $R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$  of the XTAL. The output of 326  
 the XTAL oscillator is still useful and can be used to provide 327  
 the clock when it is decaying. Therefore, the power consump- 328  
 tion of a XTAL oscillator can be further reduced by switching 329  
 the amplifier. In our design, we switch the amplifier periodi- 330  
 cally, while keeping the amplitude of oscillation high enough 331  
 for the clock buffer circuit to detect the oscillation. The work 332  
 in [15] also proposes a duty-cycling technique to reduce the 333  
 power consumption of a 39 MHz XTAL oscillator. However, 334  
 there are several differences between our implementation and 335  
 the implementation of [15]. It implements a three stage ampli- 336  
 fier to reduce the short-circuit current, which is a concern for 337  
 high frequency oscillators. For low frequency oscillators such 338  
 as a 32 kHz oscillator operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ , the short circuit 339  
 current is small. Further, adding three stages of the amplifier 340  
 in our oscillator will increase the power consumption without 341  
 duty cycling as each stage will add power overhead. The sec- 342  
 ond main difference between our implementation and [15] is 343  
 that the control of switches to turn-off the oscillator is external 344  
 while our implementation is built internally. The authors in [15] 345  
 obtain the time of decay of oscillation using high- $V_T$  inverters 346  
 when they stop sensing the oscillations and use this information 347  
 to turn the oscillator back on again. This implementation can 348  
 bring the amplitude of oscillation low and cause higher jitter 349  
 at the output. Also, it uses a fixed time to turn on the oscilla- 350  
 tor, and the oscillator remains in saturation for more than the 351  
 required time. Our implementation proposes a method where 352  
 both TG and TD are proportional to the growth and decay of 353  
 the oscillation, which we will describe in the following sections. 354  
 This information is obtained without significantly reducing the 355  
 amplitude of oscillation. We obtain the correct duty-cycling 356  
 ratio, and the jitter of our clock is not significantly higher as 357  
 shown in Fig. 15. 358

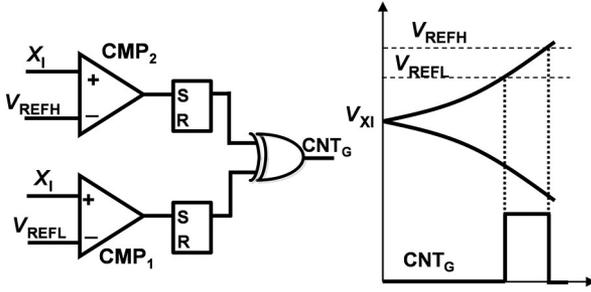
Fig. 7 shows the concept of the control scheme. When the 359  
 amplifier is disabled, the oscillation at XI will decay with a 360  
 time constant (TD), which is determined by the  $R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$ . 361  
 When the amplifier is enabled, it grows with a time constant 362  
 (TG), which is determined by  $|R_{NEG}| - R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$  [12]. 363  
 For optimal power savings, the amplifier should be disabled for 364  
 a time proportional to TD and enabled for a time proportional 365  
 to TG, as shown in Fig. 7. A counter running on the oscilla- 366  
 tor output frequency is enabled when the amplitude crosses a 367



F7:1 Fig. 7. Circuit diagram and operation of oscillator duty cycling.

Fig. 9. Circuit to obtain the time constant for the decay of oscillation  $T_D$ .

F9:1



F8:1 Fig. 8. Circuit to obtain the time constant for the growth of oscillation TG.

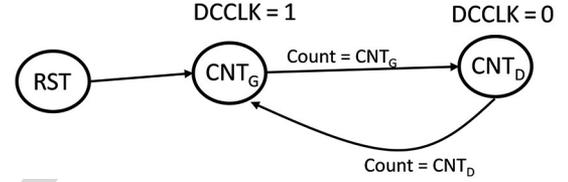
368 set threshold. It counts until  $CNT_G$  and stops when the ampli- 397  
 369 tude crosses a higher threshold. This gives us a digital output 398  
 370 proportional to TG. Similarly, a  $CNT_D$  proportional to TD 399  
 371 can be obtained. A clock with the period ( $CNT_G + CNT_D$ ) 400  
 372 is obtained, with  $CNT_G$  as High and  $CNT_D$  as low, as shown 401  
 373 in Fig. 7. The proposed technique enables a calibrated switch- 402  
 374 ing of the amplifier of the XTAL oscillator and helps in cutting 403  
 375 down the power further down to a measured average power of 404  
 376 1.5 nW. 405

### 377 A. Obtaining Time of Growth of Oscillation

378 Fig. 8 shows the circuit to obtain the TG of the oscillation. 410  
 379 It consists of comparators and SR flip-flop. Reference voltages 411  
 380  $V_{REFH}$  and  $V_{REFL}$  are used for one time calibration to obtain 412Q1  
 381 the TG of the oscillator. Threshold voltages  $V_{REFH} = 220$  mV 413  
 382 and  $V_{REFL} = 200$  mV are applied at the negative terminal of 414  
 383 the comparators, while XI is applied at the positive terminal. 415  
 384 Once oscillation amplitude goes above  $V_{REFL}$ , the output of 416  
 385  $CMP_1$  goes high, and corresponding SR flip-flop is set. This 417  
 386 sets  $CNT_G$  to high. A counter is enabled using this signal 418  
 387 to count. The amplitude of oscillation keeps on increasing. 419  
 388 Once the oscillation crosses  $V_{REFH}$ ,  $CMP_2$  goes high and sets 420  
 389  $CNT_G$  to zero. This stops the counter and sets the value of the 421  
 390 counter, which is proportional to the growth of oscillation. The 422  
 391 value is digital and is stored, while the time constant circuit is 423  
 392 disabled to save power. 424

### 393 B. Obtaining Time of Decay of Oscillation

394 Fig. 9 shows the circuit implementation for obtaining TD for 425  
 395 the oscillator. The circuit is very similar to the circuit used for 426  
 396 obtaining TG. It also enables a counter, which counts when XI 427

Fig. 10. Digital state machine for generating duty-cycling clock  $DC_{CLK}$ .

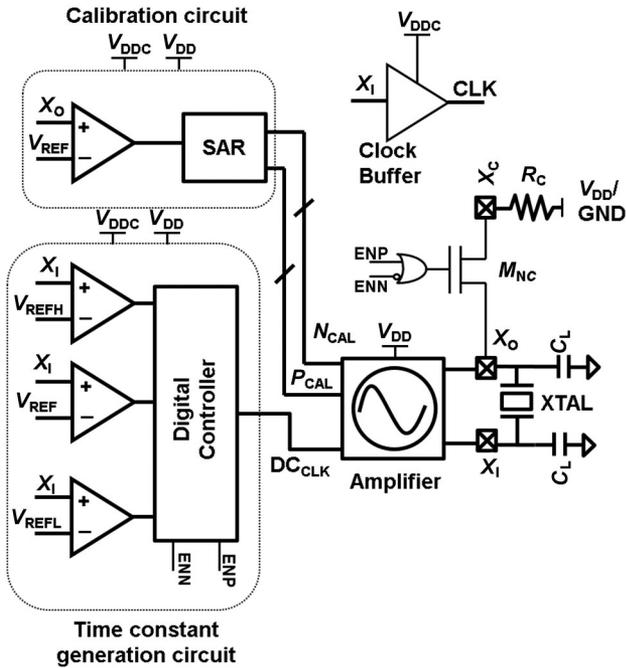
F10:1

is between  $V_{REFH}$  and  $V_{REFL}$ . While TG is obtained when the 397  
 amplifier is enabled, TD is obtained when it is disabled. Both 398  
 TG and TD are stored digitally, and their corresponding cir- 399  
 cuits are disabled to save power. After obtaining TG and TD, 400  
 the oscillator control turns on the amplifier for time = TD and 401  
 turns it off for time = TG. 402

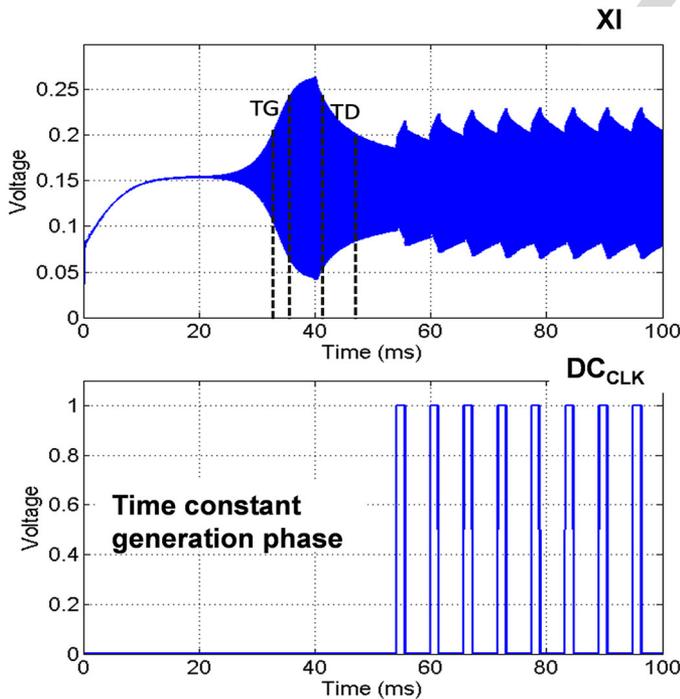
Fig. 10 shows the digital controller for generating the duty- 403  
 cycling clock  $DC_{CLK}$  for the oscillator. A counter running 404  
 on oscillator output frequency is enabled for the duty-cycling 405  
 mode. It counts for  $CNT_G$  and sets  $DC_{CLK}$  high in that state. 406  
 It then goes to second state and counts for  $CNT_D$  and sets 407  
 $DC_{CLK}$  low for that state. It sets both TG and TD, and a running 408  
 $DC_{CLK}$  is realized. 409

### C. Complete Circuit Architecture

410 Fig. 11 shows the complete circuit diagram of the proposed 411  
 XTAL oscillator circuit. First, the calibration of the amplifier is 412Q1  
 performed, which can be done once after manufacturing. The 413  
 calibration circuit sets the drive strength of the amplifier and 414  
 compensates for the process variation. After the calibration, the 415  
 time constant generation circuit obtains the time of growth (TG) 416  
 and time of decay (TD) of the oscillator. These time constants 417  
 are used to configure the clock ( $DC_{CLK}$ ) to switch the ampli- 418  
 fier on and off. The duty cycle of  $DC_{CLK}$  is determined by 419  
 TG and TD with high time = TG and low time = TD. Both 420  
 the calibration circuit and the time constant generation circuit 421  
 are operated at higher power supply,  $V_{DDC}$  at 0.9 V. The power 422  
 consumption of the time constant generation and calibration 423  
 circuit is 4  $\mu$ W. We perform calibration and time constant gen- 424  
 eration only once at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  and at room temperature. Once 425  
 the  $DC_{CLK}$  is configured, the time constant generation circuit 426  
 is powered down. Similarly, the calibration circuit is powered 427  
 down after calibration and all the digital bits are stored. 428  
 This eliminates the power overhead of the calibration circuit 429  
 or time constant generation circuit. The power consumption 430



F11:1 Fig. 11. Complete circuit architecture of the ULP XTAL oscillator.



F12:1 Fig. 12. Simulation of the duty-cycle XTAL oscillator at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

431 is given by the amplifier with duty cycling. A clock buffer is  
 432 used along with a level converter to up-convert the clock to  
 433 higher voltage if needed. The level converter implements an  
 434 ULP converter [13] and consumes less than 1 nW for level  
 435 converting the XTAL output from 300 mV to 0.9 V. Fig. 12  
 436 shows the simulation result of the duty-cycling XTAL oscilla-  
 437 tor. After time constant generation phase, the XTAL operates in  
 438 the duty-cycling mode, providing a stable clock with a power  
 439 consumption of 1.5 nW.

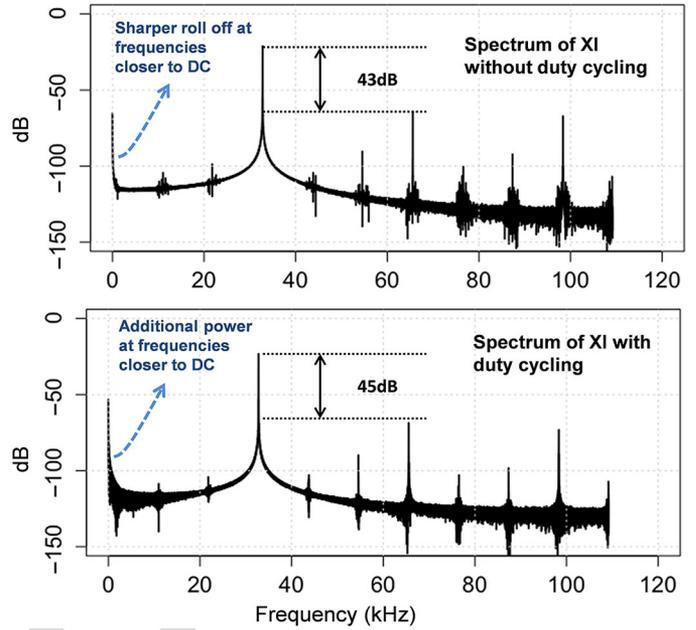


Fig. 13. Spectrum of XI with and without duty cycling.

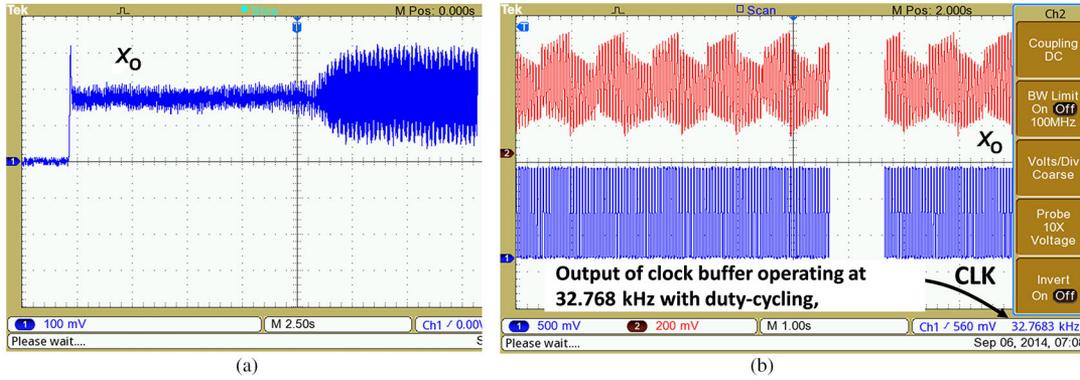
F13:1

The time constants TG and TD are both multiples of the clock  
 440 period. In our design, the 32.768 kHz clock will be an exact  
 441 multiple of  $DC_{CLK}$ , which is derived from the XTAL output.  
 442 Further, the high Q of the XTAL makes TG and TD really large,  
 443 and the frequency of  $DC_{CLK}$  is between 2 and 50 Hz. Fig. 13  
 444 shows the spectrum of XI with and without duty cycling. The  
 445 duty-cycling spectrum shows slightly higher power in frequen-  
 446 cies closer to DC. This will result in increase in jitter, which is  
 447 shown in Fig. 15.  
 448

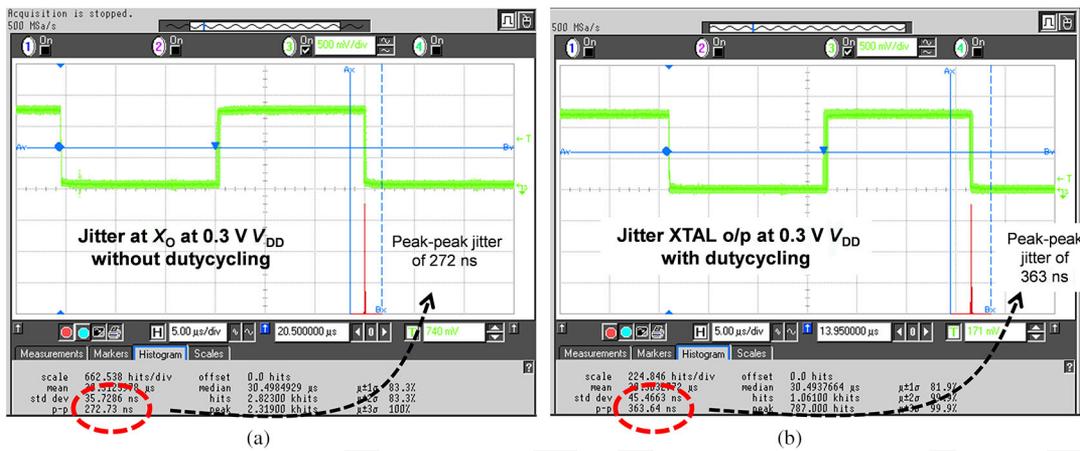
#### D. Nonlinear Effects

449

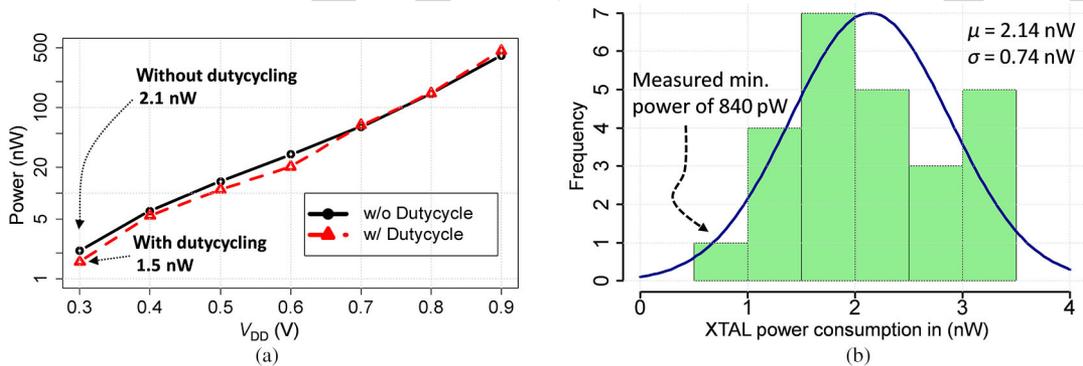
We use small signal analysis to realize the oscillation criteria,  
 450 where the negative resistance of the amplifier is calculated at the  
 451 bias condition of the amplifier. The small signal analysis gives  
 452 the accurate behavior of the oscillator when the amplitude of  
 453 oscillation is small. However, nonlinearity in the circuit man-  
 454 ifests when the amplitude of oscillation starts becoming large.  
 455 As the amplitude of oscillation increases, the gain of the ampli-  
 456 fier decreases as transistors inside the amplifier can no longer  
 457 stay in saturation. The decrease in the gain will start reduc-  
 458 ing the effective negative resistance of the amplifier. The higher  
 459 value of negative resistance over XTAL oscillator's ESR during  
 460 start-up causes an exponential growth of amplitude. However,  
 461 as the amplitude increases, the gain of the amplifier drops, caus-  
 462 ing a decrease in the negative resistance. At saturation, the  
 463 effective negative resistance (large signal value) of the ampli-  
 464 fier becomes equal to the ESR of the XTAL and the circuit  
 465 reaches steady state condition. Two main concerns are high-  
 466 lighted with respect to using an inverter-based XTAL oscillator  
 467 in [8]. The first concern is the finite capacitance looking at the  
 468 output of the power supply used for the inverter-based ampli-  
 469 fier. The finite capacitance on the power supply results in the  
 470 distortion leading to poor frequency stability. Since we use the  
 471 XTAL oscillator in an energy harvesting application, the power  
 472



F14:1 Fig. 14. Measured output waveform of the XTAL oscillator circuit. (a) Start-up of the XTAL oscillator at 0.4 V  $V_{DD}$ . (b) Measurement of the waveform at  $X_O$   
 F14:2 with duty-cycling and producing the output clock at 32.768 kHz.



F15:1 Fig. 15. Measurement of jitter at clock buffer out CLK without duty-cycling and with duty-cycling techniques.



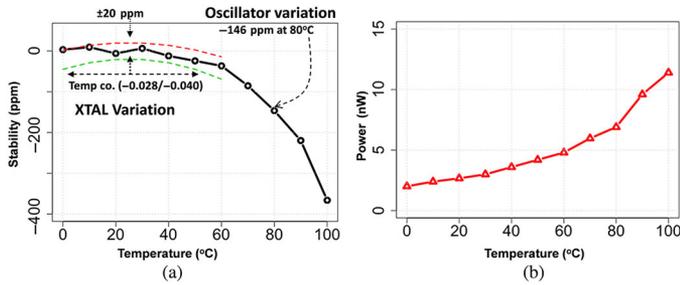
F16:1 Fig. 16. Measured power consumption of XTAL.

supply will see 100's of  $\mu\text{F}$  to few mF of cap at the output. With  
 lower power consumption and large output capacitance on the  
 power supply, we did not see increased instability in the output  
 frequency of the oscillator. The second concern is with respect  
 to power. Authors in [8] point out that higher power in the oscil-  
 lator results in distortion due large value of  $g_m$  of the amplifier.  
 This is a concern even with current source-based amplifier.  
 Fig. 13 shows that the power in the second harmonic is roughly  
 43 dB below the fundamental at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . At higher volt-  
 age of 0.9 V  $V_{DD}$ , we see that second harmonic is roughly  
 34 dB below the fundamental, resulting in an increase in relative

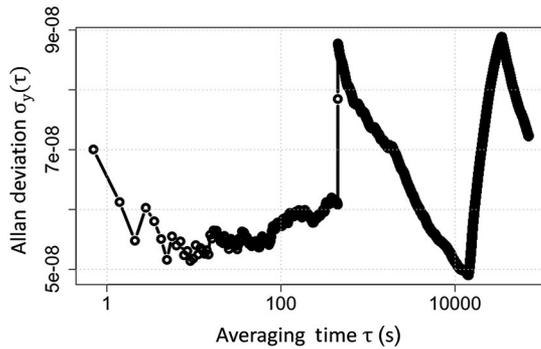
power in harmonics due to higher power. The main advantage  
 of inverter-based oscillator is that the trans-conductance of both  
 nMOS and pMOS are added, which results in overall lower  
 power consumption for the same negative resistance.

## V. MEASUREMENT RESULTS

The proposed XTAL circuit was implemented in a 130 nm  
 CMOS process. It uses a 3 G $\Omega$  external biasing resistor. The  
 XTAL resonator used for this circuit has a Q of 90,000, an ESR  
 of 30 k $\Omega$ , and a  $C_L$  of 6 pF. The XTAL's performance was



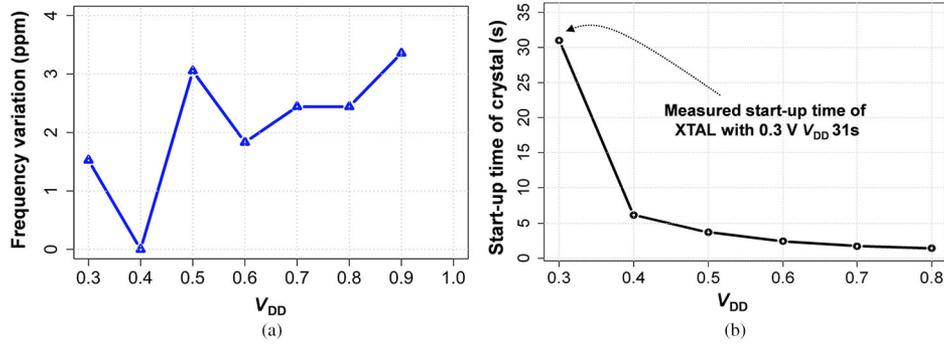
F17:1 Fig. 17. Measured stability and power of the XTAL with temperature, w/o duty  
 F17:2 cycling,  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$  shows stability of  $1.87\text{ ppm}/^\circ\text{C}$  for a temperature variation  
 F17:3 of  $0^\circ\text{C}$ – $80^\circ\text{C}$ .



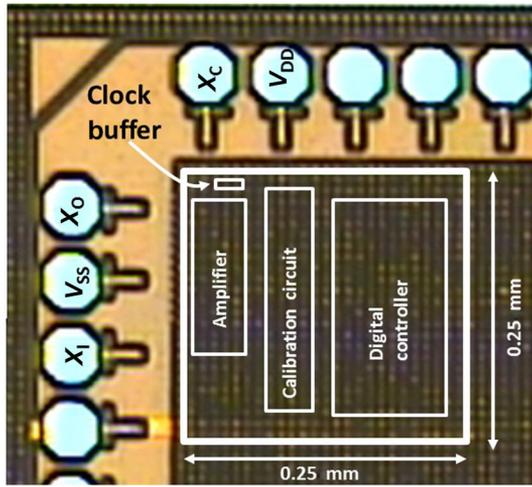
F18:1 Fig. 18. Allan deviation measurement of the XTAL output with duty cycling at  
 F18:2  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$  for approximately 20 h.

493 measured from  $V_{DD}$  of  $0.3$ – $0.9\text{ V}$  with a temperature variation  
 494 from  $0^\circ\text{C}$  to  $100^\circ\text{C}$ . Our measurements were performed with  
 495 a Keithly power supply with a  $2.2\text{ mF}$  capacitance on the supply.  
 496 Fig. 14(a) shows the measured start-up waveform at XO  
 497 of the XTAL at  $0.4\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . The operation of the XTAL at  
 498  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$  was measured indirectly by monitoring the clock-  
 499 buffer output but the waveform at XO cannot be produced at  
 500 this voltage because of the loading effects from the measure-  
 501 ment instruments. Fig. 14(b) shows the measured waveform at  
 502 XO with duty-cycling technique. The output waveform shows  
 503 that oscillation is sustained with duty cycling and that the out-  
 504 put clock provides a clock with a period of  $32.768\text{ kHz}$ . Fig. 15  
 505 also shows the measurement of jitter at the output of the clock  
 506 buffer. The RMS jitter without duty cycling is  $272\text{ ns}$  and with  
 507 duty cycling is  $363\text{ ns}$ . Fig. 16(a) shows the power consump-  
 508 tion measurement of the XTAL by varying  $V_{DD}$ . The measured  
 509 average power consumption of the XTAL across 25 chips is  
 510  $2.1\text{ nW}$  without duty cycling and  $1.5\text{ nW}$  with duty cycling  
 511 at room temperature and  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . The proposed technique  
 512 does not show significant power improvement at higher  $V_{DD}$ .  
 513 This is because the bias current at higher  $V_{DD}$  is much higher  
 514 than required for oscillation. The output of the oscillator stays  
 515 well below the full-rail with the duty cycling technique which  
 516 increases the power consumption because of the short-circuit  
 517 current in the amplifier as well as in the clock buffer. The over-  
 518 head of the short-circuit current reduces the benefit of duty  
 519 cycling at higher  $V_{DD}$ . We can save more power, if we config-  
 520 ure the oscillator for lower power at higher  $V_{DD}$  where

duty-cycling technique will show improvement as the short circuit 521  
 current in the amplifier will decrease. We also configured 522  
 the XTAL for minimum power consumption required for a sus- 523  
 tained oscillation. Fig. 16(b) shows the measured minimum 524  
 mean power consumption for a sustained oscillation without 525  
 duty cycling across 25 chips is  $2.1\text{ nW}$  with a sigma of  $0.71$  526  
 $\text{nW}$ . Measurement for one chip showed a minimum power con- 527  
 sumption of  $840\text{ pW}$ , where it is approaching the theoretical 528  
 power consumption limit set by (3) and (4). Fig. 17(a) shows 529  
 the stability of the oscillator over  $0^\circ\text{C}$ – $100^\circ\text{C}$  at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . 530  
 The chip was calibrated at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$  and room tempera- 531  
 ture. We maintained this configuration for varying temperature 532  
 and power supply measurements. Our frequency stability is 533  
 $-146\text{ ppm}$  at  $80^\circ\text{C}$ . Fig. 17(a) also shows the variation of the 534  
 XTAL. Our frequency stability is within the bounds of XTAL 535  
 variation. The measured frequency stability from  $0^\circ\text{C}$  to  $80^\circ\text{C}$  536  
 is  $1.85\text{ ppm}/^\circ\text{C}$ . The output frequency with duty-cycling tech- 537  
 nique is  $2.5\text{ ppm}$  below the frequency of oscillation without 538  
 duty cycling at  $20^\circ\text{C}$ . The stability of the overall system is 539  
 $-150\text{ ppm}$  between  $0^\circ\text{C}$  and  $80^\circ\text{C}$ . Fig. 18 shows the measure- 540  
 ment of Allan deviation of the XTAL with duty cycling 541  
 operating at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . The measurements were taken with a 542  
 $\tau$  of  $0.7\text{ s}$  for approximately 20 h in lab environment. The mea- 543  
 surement shows Allan deviation of less than  $10^{-7}$ . Fig. 19(a) 544  
 shows the variation of the oscillator's frequency with  $V_{DD}$ . The 545  
 power supply variation of our oscillator is less than  $7\text{ ppm/V}$ . 546  
 Fig. 19(b) shows the measured start-up time of the XTAL. The 547  
 measurement for the start-up time were taken with the oscilla- 548  
 tor configured for minimum power consumption at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . 549  
 The worst case start-up time is  $31\text{ s}$  for  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . The lower 550  
 margin on ESR gives higher start-up time. However, our circuit 551  
 can also start-up in a higher current configuration with all the 552  
 calibration bits programmed high, which can reduce the start- 553  
 up time. The circuit can then make use of the lower power 554  
 configuration. Fig. 20 shows the die photo and the implementa- 555  
 tion of the XTAL oscillator. The area of XTAL oscillator is 556  
 $0.0625\text{ mm}^2$ . The Q of the XTAL resonator used for the XTAL 557  
 oscillator is  $90,000$ , and its ESR is  $30\text{ k}\Omega$ . We used an external 558  
 $2\text{ pF}$  load capacitor, which combines with parasitic load 559  
 capacitance to result in an oscillation frequency of  $32.7683\text{ kHz}$  560  
 at room temperature. Table I shows the comparison summary 561  
 of the proposed XTAL circuit with previous work. Our XTAL 562  
 oscillator circuit consumes  $1.5\text{ nW}$  of power and has an area of 563  
 $0.0625\text{ mm}^2$ . It has over  $26\%$  lower power compared to [7] and 564  
 over  $3.7\times$  lower power and  $8\times$  lower area compared to [10]. We 565  
 operated the XTAL circuit at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ , with a duty-cycling 566  
 technique. The circuit in [7] uses a self-charging technique to 567  
 operate the XTAL at  $0.15\text{ V }V_{DD}$  to achieve a power consump- 568  
 tion of  $1.89\text{ nW}$ . The circuit in [10] uses a DLL-based 569  
 technique and employs two power supplies and two grounds for 570  
 the amplifier stage. Our circuit uses a single power supply for 571  
 the amplifier. Previously reported work achieves a power consump- 572  
 tion of  $22\text{ nW}$  [9] by reducing the amplitude of oscillation. 573  
 We reduce the amplitude of oscillation by operating the circuit 574  
 at  $0.3\text{ V }V_{DD}$ . The proposed circuit provides a low power, lower 575  
 area XTAL oscillator circuit. It applies lower voltage design 576  
 in conjunction with a duty-cycling technique to achieve lower 577  
 power suitable for ULP devices in IoT networks. 578



F19:1 Fig. 19. (a) Measured frequency variation with  $V_{DD}$ . (b) Measured start-up time of XTAL with  $V_{DD}$ .



Parameter	Value
Technology	130 nm bulk CMOS
Total area	250 $\mu\text{m} \times$ 250 $\mu\text{m}$
XTAL's ESR	30 k $\Omega$
XTAL's Q-factor	90 000
XTAL's $C_m$	3.5 fF
XTAL's shunt cap	1.5 pF
$C_L$	6 pF*
Feedback res. ( $R_L$ )	3 G $\Omega$
Calibration res. ( $R_c$ )	15 M $\Omega$
XTAL freq. tolerance	$\pm$ 20 ppm

\*The load capacitor includes the parasitic capacitance as well as external capacitance

F20:1 Fig. 20. Die photo of the XTAL circuit and parameters for the configuration in Fig. 1.

T1:1  
T1:2

TABLE I  
COMPARISON SUMMARY OF THE DUTY-CYCLED OSCILLATOR WITH PREVIOUS LOW-POWER XTAL

	[7]	[10]	[9]	[14]	This work
Operating frequency	32 kHz	32 kHz	32 kHz	32kHz	32kHz
Area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	0.03	0.3	N/A	25	0.0625
Power consumption (nW)	1.89 @0.15V $V_{DD}$ 10 @0.3V $V_{DD}$	5.58	22	220	1.5 @ 0.3V $V_{DD}$
Operating $V_{DD}$ (V)	0.15–0.5	0.92–1.8	0.71	3	0.3–0.9
Number of power/Gnd	1/1	2/2	1/1	1/1	1/1
Amplitude of oscillation	N/A	100 mV	65 mV	N/A	230 mV
Temperature stability	-48.8 ppm -20–80°C	-133 ppm -20–80°C	N/A	N/A	-146 ppm (w/o duty cycling) -150 ppm (w duty cycling) 0–80°C
Power supply variation	85 ppm/V	N/A	N/A	2 ppm/V	7 ppm/V
Technology	28 nm	0.18 $\mu\text{m}$	2 $\mu\text{m}$	2 $\mu\text{m}$	0.13 $\mu\text{m}$

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659 variation tolerant circuit design methodologies, and low energy electronics for  
660 medical applications.

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## QUERIES

- Q1: Please reword the sentence beginning with “First, the calibration. . .” so that your meaning will be clear to the reader.  
Q2: Please provide page range for Refs. [1], [3]–[7], [9], [10], and [14].  
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# A 1.5 nW, 32.768 kHz XTAL Oscillator Operational From a 0.3 V Supply

Aatmesh Shrivastava, Divya A. Kamakshi, and Benton H. Calhoun

**Abstract**—This paper presents an ultra-low power crystal (XTAL) oscillator circuit for generating a 32.768 kHz clock source for real-time clock generation. An inverting amplifier operational from 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  oscillates the XTAL resonator and achieves a power consumption of 2.1 nW. A duty-cycling technique powers down the XTAL amplifier without losing the oscillation and reduces the power consumption to 1.5 nW. The proposed circuit is implemented in 130 nm CMOS with an area of 0.0625 mm<sup>2</sup> and achieves a temperature stability of 1.85 ppm/°C.

**Index Terms**—32 kHz XO, clock source, crystal (XTAL) oscillator, Internet of Things (IoT), real-time clock (RTC), subthreshold, ultra-low power (ULP).

## I. INTRODUCTION

ULTRA-LOW power (ULP) systems such as wireless sensor nodes (WSNs) for emerging Internet of Things (IoT) applications spend a large portion of their time in inactive or idle mode to save power. A typical operation of a ULP system constitutes a short burst of activity followed by a long idle time. The short burst of activity consumes higher power, whereas the power consumption in idle mode is relatively small. Spending a large time in the idle mode saves energy and can help with recharging the storage capacitor of energy harvesting ULP systems [1] from low energy ambient harvesting sources. To maximize idle time while remaining functional in a larger interconnected IoT network, these systems require precise clock to synchronize and wake-up the system at regular intervals. A real-time clock (RTC) utilizing an ULP oscillator is often used for this purpose. The total power consumption of such a system may be determined by the power consumption of the RTC. To reduce the power consumption and to increase the life-time of the system, the power consumption of the RTC needs to be reduced. In this paper, we present a 32.768 kHz crystal (XTAL) oscillator for RTC applications with a power consumption of 1.5 nW.

Widely varied circuit architectures ranging from on-chip oscillators to off-chip XTAL oscillators exist for the implementation of the RTC in an ULP system. A precision CMOS

relaxation oscillator is presented in [2]. It achieves a temperature stability of 60 ppm/°C, but its power consumption is 45  $\mu$ W for a 14 MHz clock. Further, the oscillator shows a power supply variation of 16 ppm/mV. A 150 nW, 100 kHz on-chip oscillator achieves a temperature stability of 5 ppm/°C for a temperature range of 20 °C–40 °C and 14 ppm/°C for a temperature range of 20 °C–70 °C [3]. The power supply variation of this oscillator is 0.1%/mV. The temperature stability and the power consumption of the oscillator make it suitable for ULP applications, but it requires a very controlled power supply. On-chip oscillators, using the gate leakage current, have been proposed in [4]–[6]. These designs employ calibration for temperature compensation and achieve a best temperature stability of 32 ppm/°C. The power supply variation of this oscillator is 0.42%/mV. Further, these oscillators can operate only at very low frequency (0.1–10 Hz) due to the low magnitude of gate-leakage current. The lower output frequency and higher power supply variation limits their usage for precise RTC applications.

A XTAL oscillator provides a very precise output frequency ( $\sim$ 5–20 ppm/°C) that is not affected by process or power supply variation by using an off-chip electro-mechanical XTAL resonator. Although off-chip components can increase the cost and volume of the system, XTALs are now being explored for ULP systems that require precise timing for wake-up or synchronization of a WSN in an IoT network. The power consumption of the XTAL used in ULP systems must be very small. Recent work on the design of 32 kHz XTAL oscillators show power consumption in the single digit nW range [7], [10], making it possible to use them for ULP applications. Power consumption of XTAL oscillators can be reduced by lowering the amplitude of oscillation by operating at lower voltages. Low power electronic watches use this technique to operate XTAL oscillator circuits in the subthreshold or weak inversion region of operation of the transistors [8]. The XTAL oscillator circuit proposed in [9] achieves a power consumption of 22 nW operating with a power supply ( $V_{DD}$ ) around 600 mV. A delay locked loop (DLL)-based XTAL [10] achieves a power consumption of 5.58 nW. It also achieves lower swing to reduce the power consumption in the XTAL's effective series resistance (ESR). However, to reduce the power consumption and to maintain low swing for oscillation, it needs two power supplies and two grounds. It also requires a large area for its implementation. A self-charging XTAL design reduces the power consumption to 1.89 nW [7]. In this circuit, XI and XO are operated in a self-charging loop, where both XI and XO are charged based on the operating phase of the oscillator using only the parasitic load capacitors. In conventional designs, the input of the oscillator XI is obtained from XO as a filtered output through

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89 the high quality XTAL. The spectrum of XI will contain only  
 90 the resonance frequency of the oscillator. However, the self-  
 91 charging scheme [7] charges XI too to maintain the oscillation.  
 92 The circuit used for charging XI can introduce additional fre-  
 93 quency components in XI, which may degrade the spectrum of  
 94 the oscillator.

95 In this work, we present a 1.5 nW, 32 kHz XTAL oscillator,  
 96 which operates the XTAL with a feedback amplifier operating  
 97 at 300 mV. We propose a technique of duty cycling the XTAL  
 98 oscillator in conjunction with operating them in a subthreshold  
 99 region. We achieve a measured average power consumption of  
 100 1.5 nW across 25 chips. In Section II, we present the opera-  
 101 tion of the XTAL. Section III presents the low power amplifier  
 102 design and Section IV presents the duty-cycling technique.  
 103 Section V presents measurement results.

## 104 II. XTAL OPERATION

105 An XTAL is an electromechanical resonator that resonates  
 106 at its natural frequency when excited with electrical energy.  
 107 Fig. 1(a) shows a conventional XTAL oscillator circuit. The  
 108 equivalent circuit of an XTAL consists of a series RLC circuit  
 109 with a parasitic parallel capacitor  $C_p$ . The frequency of oscil-  
 110 lation is mainly determined by the motional inductor  $L_m$  and  
 111 capacitor  $C_m$ . The ESR is the energy dissipating component of  
 112 the XTAL. The inverting amplifier provides the negative resis-  
 113 tance that overcomes the loss from ESR and pumps energy  
 114 into the XTAL, making it oscillate at its natural frequency.  
 115 The output frequency of the XTAL oscillator is very precise,  
 116 and its stability is usually specified at parts per million or  
 117 per billion (ppm/ppb). The extremely precise output frequency  
 118 of XTAL oscillators makes them a natural choice for imple-  
 119 menting clocks. Further, the frequency of oscillation is largely  
 120 independent of voltage and process variation.

### 121 A. Theoretical Analysis for Low-Power XTAL Oscillation

122 The XTAL circuit can be made to oscillate in series or par-  
 123 allel mode. Parallel mode is the commonly employed mode of  
 124 oscillation. In parallel mode, the XTAL is connected with an  
 125 inverting amplifier with two load capacitors connected in paral-  
 126 lel ( $C_L$ ), as shown in Fig. 1(a). In parallel mode, the XTAL  
 127 appears as an inductor and oscillates with the load capaci-  
 128 tors ( $C_L$ ). In order to oscillate, the circuit needs to meet the  
 129 Barkhausen or the negative resistance criteria of oscillation.  
 130 For negative resistance oscillation criteria, the amplifier needs  
 131 to present a negative resistance ( $R_{NEG}$ ) at resonant frequency,  
 132 whose absolute value should be greater than the XTAL's ESR  
 133 ( $R_{ESR}$ ) [11] ( $|R_{NEG}| > R_{ESR}$ ). We derive a theoretical anal-  
 134 ysis for a low power XTAL oscillator from the work presented  
 135 in [8]. Fig. 1(b) shows a hypothetical three point oscillator. The  
 136 negative resistance of the oscillator can be derived from [8, eq.  
 137 (16)] as follows:

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m C_L^2}{(g_m C_P)^2 + \omega^2 (C_L^2 + 2C_P C_L)^2}$$

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m}{(g_m C_P / C_L)^2 + \omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (1)$$

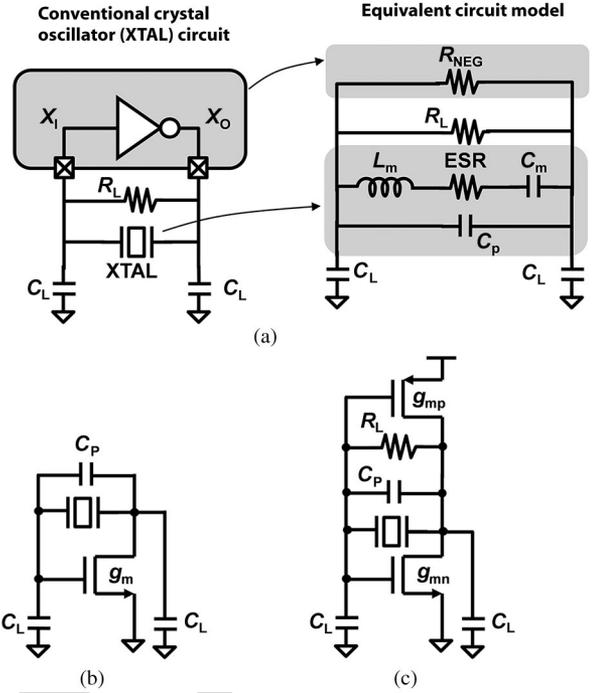


Fig. 1. (a) Conventional XTAL oscillator circuit and its equivalent representation. (b) Analysis of a three-point oscillator. (c) Practical implementation of XTAL oscillator with an inverter (push-pull oscillator).

$$\text{Since } (g_m C_P / C_L)^2 \ll \omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2 \quad \text{F1:1}$$

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{-g_m}{\omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (2) \quad \text{F1:2}$$

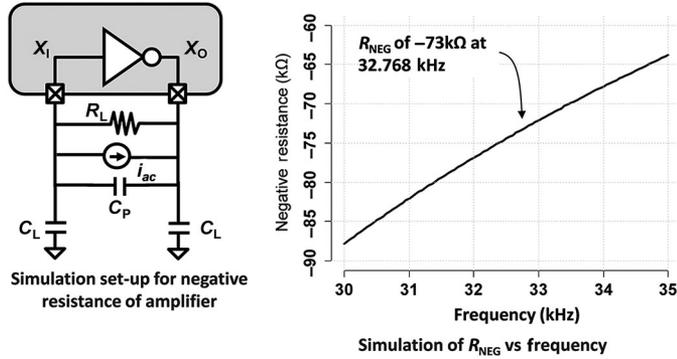
For an inverter-based oscillator, as shown in Fig. 1(c), the transconductance of both nMOS and pMOS devices will add, and the  $R_{NEG}$  can be approximately written as

$$R_{NEG} = \frac{(-g_{mn} - g_{mp})}{\omega^2 (C_L + 2C_P)^2}. \quad (3) \quad \text{F1:3}$$

For a device operating in subthreshold, the transconductance is given by

$$g_m = \frac{I_D}{nV_t} \quad (4)$$

where  $I_D$  is the drain source saturation current,  $n$  is the subthreshold slope approximately equal to 1.2, and  $V_t$  is the thermal voltage, which is 26 mV at room temperature. An nMOS biased at 7 nA of  $I_D$  gives a  $g_m$  of  $2.24 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$ . Using the same value for  $g_{mn}$  and  $g_{mp}$ , (3) gives an  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-180 \text{ k}\Omega$  for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and  $C_P$  of 1 pF. A power limit can be derived from (3) and (4) for various conditions. Assuming that a  $-60 \text{ k}\Omega$   $R_{NEG}$  is sufficient for oscillation for a  $30 \text{ k}\Omega$  ESR XTAL, an inverter running at 0.3 V can realize oscillation at 0.7 nW for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF. If a lower  $C_L$  value of 3 pF is used, then it is possible to achieve oscillation at 0.28 nW. Further, if one can realize an oscillator circuit at 150 mV  $V_{DD}$  as used in [7], then the power required to achieve oscillation is 140 pW with



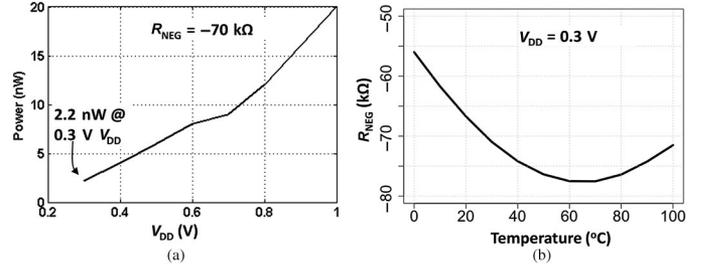
F2:1 Fig. 2. Design method for the XTAL oscillator circuit.

160 margin. In order to just barely meet the oscillation criteria, the  
 161 power required sits at 70 pW.

### 162 B. Practical Design of a Low-Power XTAL Oscillator

163 The preceding section showed the theoretical power required  
 164 to achieve oscillation. However, several practical issues can  
 165 reduce the  $R_{NEG}$  at subthreshold current levels. In this section,  
 166 we present the practical design method for realizing the  
 167 required  $R_{NEG}$  for oscillation, and Fig. 2 shows the design  
 168 method. In this circuit, XTAL is removed from the oscillator,  
 169 and an *ac* current source is connected across the amplifier ter-  
 170 minal. The inverting amplifier presents an impedance to the  
 171 applied *ac* current, which will have a real component at the  
 172 oscillation frequency. The real component is the negative resis-  
 173 tance ( $R_{NEG}$ ) of the amplifier at resonance. The value of  $R_{NEG}$   
 174 is a function of frequency. Fig. 2 shows the simulation of the  
 175  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier across frequency for a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and a  
 176  $C_P$  of 1 pF. The ESR of the XTAL oscillator at 32.768 kHz is  
 177 typically in the range of 30 kΩ. The  $g_{mn}$  and  $g_{mp}$  of our oscil-  
 178 lator is  $1.12 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$  and  $1.16 \times 10^{-7} \Omega^{-1}$ , respectively, at  
 179 a bias current of 7 nA and  $V_{DD}$  of 0.3 V. Plugging these val-  
 180 ues in (3) yields a  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-90$  kΩ. However, Fig. 2 shows  
 181 that we can achieve a  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-73$  kΩ. Further, the start-up  
 182 time of the XTAL oscillator is in the range of  $\sim 1$  s because of  
 183 the high quality factor ( $Q$ ) of the XTAL resonator. The  $R_{NEG}$   
 184 of the amplifier also controls the start-up time, and a negative  
 185 resistance with higher magnitude will reduce the start-up time  
 186 of the XTAL [12].

187 The power consumption of the XTAL oscillator is deter-  
 188 mined by the XTAL and the amplifier. XTAL's ESR dissipates  
 189 energy in the form of heat loss, as Joule's heating, which  
 190 depends on the amplitude of oscillation. To reduce the power  
 191 consumption of the XTAL oscillator, the amplitude of oscil-  
 192 lation is often reduced. This can be done by operating the  
 193 amplifier in the subthreshold region [8], [9]. In this paper, we  
 194 propose a 32 kHz XTAL oscillator circuit that consumes 1.5 nW  
 195 of power. We first operate the XTAL oscillator in subthreshold  
 196 at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  to reduce the power consumption to 2.2 nW. We  
 197 further reduce the power by applying a duty-cycling technique  
 198 to turn-off the amplifier often. This technique brings down the



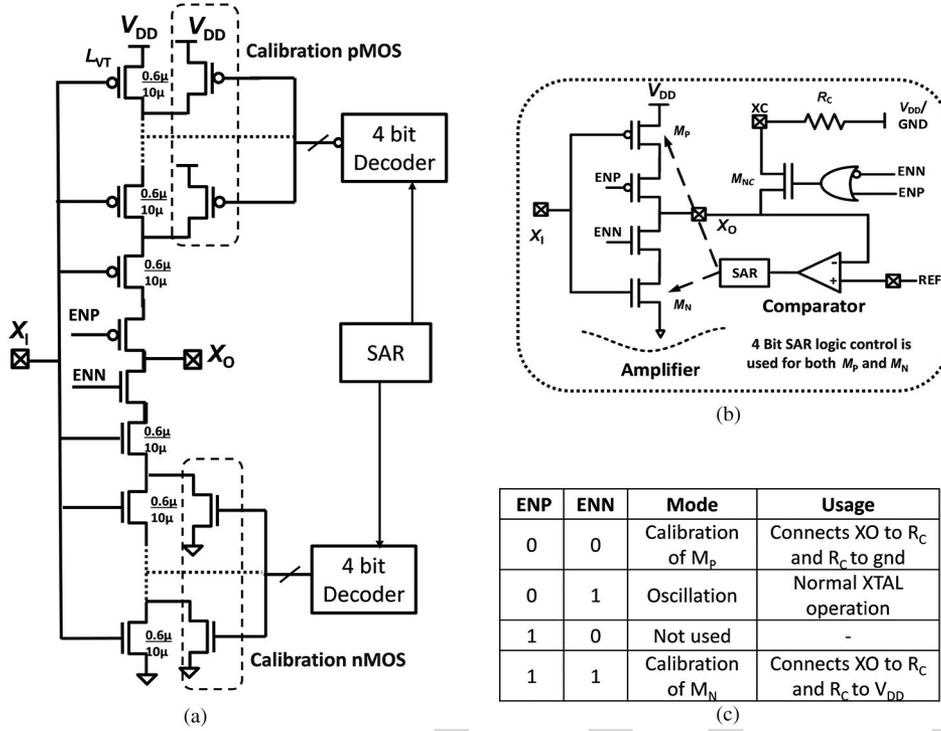
F3:1 Fig. 3. (a) Simulation of XTAL oscillator power consumption across  $V_{DD}$   
 F3:2 with a fixed negative resistance of amplifier at  $-70$  kΩ. (b) Simulation of  
 F3:3 negative resistance of the amplifier with temperature at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

over-all power consumption of the XTAL oscillator to 1.5 nW,  
 improving the state-of-the-art by over 26%.

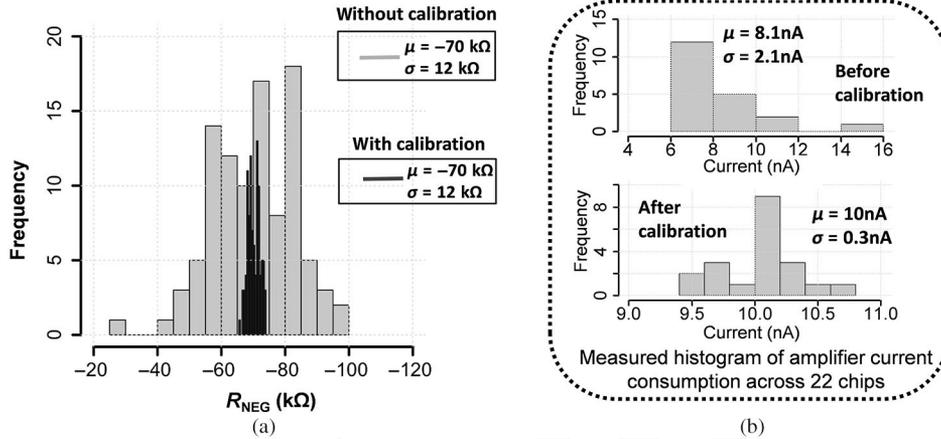
### 201 III. LOW POWER AMPLIFIER DESIGN

202 In this section, we present the design of the low power ampli-  
 203 fier circuit. Various inverting amplifier architectures can be  
 204 used to implement the amplifier. A simple push-pull inverter  
 205 with a large bias resistor, as shown in Fig. 1, is one of the  
 206 design options and is commonly used because it is single stage  
 207 and hence consumes least amount of power [9]. However, the  
 208 inverter circuit needs to be designed properly to meet the oscil-  
 209 lation criterion. At lower drive strength (smaller sizes for *n*MOS  
 210 and *p*MOS), the  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier is low and cannot  
 211 meet the oscillation criterion. Increasing the size increases the  
 212  $R_{NEG}$ . After a certain size, the  $R_{NEG}$  starts decreasing again  
 213 because of the self-loading in the inverter through the gate-drain  
 214 capacitance,  $C_{GD}$  (Miller-effect). Also, increasing the size of  
 215 the inverter increases the power consumption. Therefore, the  
 216 inverter needs to be sized properly for the power consumption,  
 217 as well as for  $R_{NEG}$ . Further, the power consumption can also  
 218 be reduced by operating the amplifier circuit at a lower  $V_{DD}$ . At  
 219 lower  $V_{DD}$ , the amplifier device sizes are typically bigger than  
 220 the sizes for higher  $V_{DD}$ . However, the overall power consump-  
 221 tion decreases. Fig. 3(a) shows the power consumption of the  
 222 amplifier circuit designed to provide a fixed negative resistance  
 223 of  $-70$  kΩ at 32 kHz for different  $V_{DD}$ s with a  $C_L$  of 6 pF and  
 224  $C_P$  of 1 pF. The power consumption increases with the voltage  
 225 almost linearly. This is largely because the bias current of the  
 226 amplifier almost remains the same for a given  $R_{NEG}$ , which can  
 227 be confirmed by inspecting equations (3) and (4). As a result,  
 228 power increases because of the increase in the  $V_{DD}$ . Therefore,  
 229 the oscillator needs to be operated at a lower  $V_{DD}$  to reduce  
 230 the power. Further, the  $g_m$  of the amplifier is a weak function  
 231 of temperature, so the  $R_{NEG}$  does not vary a lot with temper-  
 232 ature as shown in Fig. 3(b). Our amplifier consumes 5–10 nA  
 233 of quiescent current during start-up, which decreases after the  
 234 saturation of oscillation. The power consumption of the XTAL  
 235 oscillator is 2–10 nW at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

236 Fig. 4(a) shows the circuit diagram of the proposed ampli-  
 237 fier. We use low threshold ( $L_{VT}$ ) transistors with longer length  
 238 to implement the amplifier.  $L_{VT}$  transistors give better perfor-  
 239 mance at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ , owing to the lower threshold voltage,  
 240 while a longer length of the transistor helps in reducing the



F4:1 Fig. 4. XTAL oscillator amplifier design and calibration control.

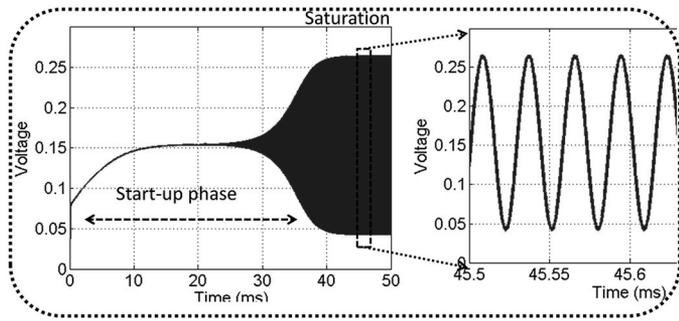


F5:1 Fig. 5. Performance of the amplifier characteristics showing  $R_{NEG}$  across 100 point Monte Carlo simulation and its bias current measured across 22 chips before  
 F5:2 and after calibration.

241 bias current. The longer length device also helps in reducing  
 242 the variation of the device characteristics at lower voltages. Use  
 243 of long  $L_{VT}$  transistors also helps in getting better gain and  
 244 hence higher  $R_{NEG}$ .

245 The amplifier was designed to operate in the subthreshold  
 246 region with a  $V_{DD}$  of 0.3 V. Owing to the subthreshold region  
 247 of operation, the amplifier bias current is sensitive to process  
 248 variation. As a result, the negative resistance and power con-  
 249 sumption of the amplifier can still show variation with process.  
 250 At some process corners, the amplifier can consume higher  
 251 power and give very high  $R_{NEG}$ ; and at other process corners,  
 252 its  $R_{NEG}$  can be low, and it may fail to meet the oscillation cri-  
 253 teria. We propose a calibration method to address this variation  
 254 where we bias the amplifier with a fixed current. Equations (3)

and (4) show that a fixed bias current will give a fixed  $R_{NEG}$  255  
 at a given temperature. Fig. 4(a) and (b) shows the calibration 256  
 circuit. We set the drive strength of the amplifier transistors 257  
 $M_P$  and  $M_N$  using this circuit. The amplifier is enabled when 258  
 $ENP = 0$  and  $ENN = 1$ . For calibration of  $M_N$  to a given drive 259  
 strength,  $ENN$  and  $ENP$  are set to one. This enables the calibra- 260  
 tion circuit, where  $M_N$  gets connected to an external resistor 261  
 through the switch  $M_{NC}$ .  $X_I$  is connected to  $REF$ , which is 262  
 selected to be at  $V_{DD}/2$ . The size of the transistor  $M_N$  is 263  
 changed using successive approximation register (SAR) logic 264  
 with the comparator in a feedback loop. This happens in the fol- 265  
 lowing way.  $X_I$  and  $REF$  are set to  $V_{DD}/2$  and the pull-down 266  
 path is enabled, while the pull-up path is disabled. The external 267  
 resistor  $R_C$  is connected to  $V_{DD}$ . If the drive strength of 268



F6:1 Fig. 6. Simulation result of the XTAL oscillator circuit operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$   
 F6:2 with a reduced  $Q$  XTAL resonator.

269  $M_N$  is high, then it will pull down the XO node below REF,  
 270 which will cause the comparator output to go low. This low  
 271 signal sets the SAR logic to decrease the drive strength of the  
 272 transistor  $M_N$ . The transistor  $M_N$  is realized using series con-  
 273 nection of several  $0.6 \mu/10 \mu$  nMOS as shown in Fig. 4(a).  
 274 The long transistors are connected in parallel with nMOS cali-  
 275 bration switches connected to ground, where only one nMOS  
 276 switch is on at a time to provide a given drive strength. The  
 277 SAR logic reduces or increases the drive strength of MN by  
 278 connecting more or fewer long transistors in series. The size of  
 279  $M_N$  is successively approximated, and it takes 5 clock cycles.  
 280 This way  $M_N$  can be sized to the right drive strength. Similarly,  
 281  $M_P$  is sized by setting ENN and ENP to zero and connecting  
 282 the external resistor to ground. We use an external resistance  
 283 such that the amplifier can be sized to supply 5–20 nA of bias  
 284 current, which provides enough drive strength to meet the crite-  
 285 ria for oscillation. The calibration is performed at lower  $V_{DD}$  of  
 286 0.3 V. Fig. 5(a) shows the variation of  $R_{NEG}$  across a 100 point  
 287 Monte Carlo simulation with and without calibration. The mean  
 288  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier without calibration is  $-70 \text{ k}\Omega$  with a  $3\sigma$   
 289 variation of  $36 \text{ k}\Omega$ , whereas the  $3\sigma$  variation with calibration  
 290 is  $5.4 \text{ k}\Omega$ . Fig. 5(b) shows the measurement of the amplifier  
 291 bias current before and after calibration. It varies from 6 to 16  
 292 nA across several chips. After calibration, the  $3\sigma$  variation of  
 293 the amplifier current was brought down 0.9 nA with a mean of  
 294 10 nA. Fig. 6 shows the simulation result of the XTAL oscil-  
 295 lator operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  with a power consumption of 2.2  
 296 nW. We achieve 2.2 nW power consumption for  $30 \text{ k}\Omega$  XTAL.  
 297 The power consumption of an XTAL with an ESR of  $50 \text{ k}\Omega$  is  
 298 going to be 5.6 nW at an  $R_{NEG}$  of  $-100 \text{ k}\Omega$  and 15 nW for a  
 299  $90 \text{ k}\Omega$  XTAL. We use a reduced  $Q$  resonator for this simulation  
 300 to reduce the start-up time and the simulation time. The  $Q$  is  
 301 reduced by lowering the motional inductance and by increas-  
 302 ing the motional capacitance of the resonator which has little  
 303 impact on the required oscillation criteria.

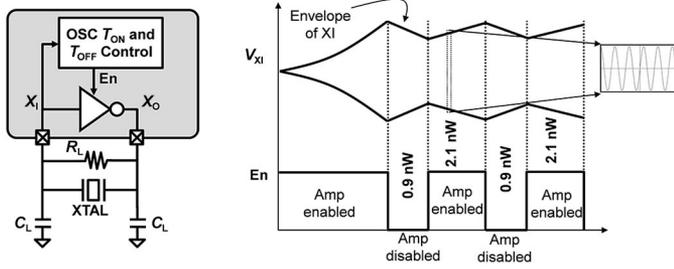
#### 304 IV. AMPLIFIER DUTY CYCLING

305 In order for the oscillator to start,  $|R_{NEG}| > \text{ESR}$ . The start-  
 306 up time, the time the oscillator takes to reach the full amplitude,  
 307 is also controlled by  $R_{NEG}$ . The higher the value of  $R_{NEG}$ ,  
 308 the faster will be the start-up [12]. However, a higher value  
 309 of  $R_{NEG}$  means higher power consumption. The amplitude

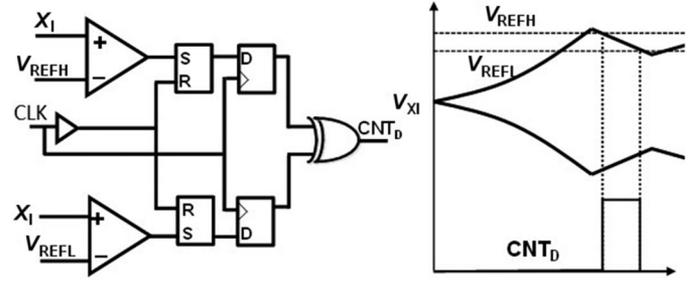
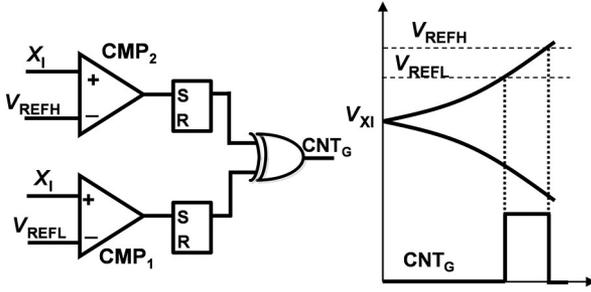
of oscillation saturates after start-up. After the oscillation sat- 310  
 urates, the  $R_{NEG}$  of the amplifier decreases because of the 311  
 nonlinearity in the circuit due to saturation, and effectively 312  
 $|R_{NEG}| = \text{ESR}$  at saturation [11]. The saturation of oscillation 313  
 creates higher harmonics, resulting in unnecessary power dissi- 314  
 pation. While higher power is needed during start-up [12], it is 315  
 not needed when the oscillation saturates. We propose further 316  
 improvements in the design to save this power. 317

The energy of a XTAL oscillator is stored in its equivalent 318  
 inductor and capacitors. After the saturation of oscillation, the 319  
 stored energy in the XTAL's equivalent inductor and capacitor 320  
 is saturated. After the saturation, if the amplifier is disabled, 321  
 the oscillation will start decaying; and if we enable it again, 322  
 it will start growing again. The power consumption becomes 323  
 negligible when the oscillator is disabled. However, oscilla- 324  
 tion does not die right away and decays slowly, with the time 325  
 constant given by  $R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$  of the XTAL. The output of 326  
 the XTAL oscillator is still useful and can be used to provide 327  
 the clock when it is decaying. Therefore, the power consump- 328  
 tion of a XTAL oscillator can be further reduced by switching 329  
 the amplifier. In our design, we switch the amplifier periodi- 330  
 cally, while keeping the amplitude of oscillation high enough 331  
 for the clock buffer circuit to detect the oscillation. The work 332  
 in [15] also proposes a duty-cycling technique to reduce the 333  
 power consumption of a 39 MHz XTAL oscillator. However, 334  
 there are several differences between our implementation and 335  
 the implementation of [15]. It implements a three stage ampli- 336  
 fier to reduce the short-circuit current, which is a concern for 337  
 high frequency oscillators. For low frequency oscillators such 338  
 as a 32 kHz oscillator operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ , the short circuit 339  
 current is small. Further, adding three stages of the amplifier 340  
 in our oscillator will increase the power consumption without 341  
 duty cycling as each stage will add power overhead. The sec- 342  
 ond main difference between our implementation and [15] is 343  
 that the control of switches to turn-off the oscillator is external 344  
 while our implementation is built internally. The authors in [15] 345  
 obtain the time of decay of oscillation using high- $V_T$  inverters 346  
 when they stop sensing the oscillations and use this information 347  
 to turn the oscillator back on again. This implementation can 348  
 bring the amplitude of oscillation low and cause higher jitter 349  
 at the output. Also, it uses a fixed time to turn on the oscilla- 350  
 tor, and the oscillator remains in saturation for more than the 351  
 required time. Our implementation proposes a method where 352  
 both TG and TD are proportional to the growth and decay of 353  
 the oscillation, which we will describe in the following sections. 354  
 This information is obtained without significantly reducing the 355  
 amplitude of oscillation. We obtain the correct duty-cycling 356  
 ratio, and the jitter of our clock is not significantly higher as 357  
 shown in Fig. 15. 358

Fig. 7 shows the concept of the control scheme. When the 359  
 amplifier is disabled, the oscillation at XI will decay with a 360  
 time constant (TD), which is determined by the  $R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$ . 361  
 When the amplifier is enabled, it grows with a time constant 362  
 (TG), which is determined by  $|R_{NEG}| - R_{ESR}$  and  $L_m$  [12]. 363  
 For optimal power savings, the amplifier should be disabled for 364  
 a time proportional to TD and enabled for a time proportional 365  
 to TG, as shown in Fig. 7. A counter running on the oscilla- 366  
 tor output frequency is enabled when the amplitude crosses a 367



F7:1 Fig. 7. Circuit diagram and operation of oscillator duty cycling.

Fig. 9. Circuit to obtain the time constant for the decay of oscillation  $T_D$ . F9:1

F8:1 Fig. 8. Circuit to obtain the time constant for the growth of oscillation TG.

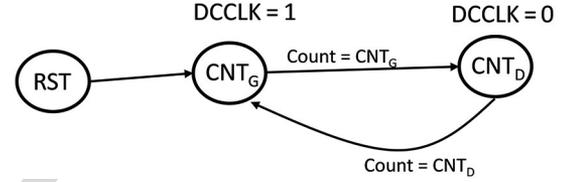
368 set threshold. It counts until  $CNT_G$  and stops when the ampli- 397  
 369 tude crosses a higher threshold. This gives us a digital output 398  
 370 proportional to TG. Similarly, a  $CNT_D$  proportional to TD 399  
 371 can be obtained. A clock with the period ( $CNT_G + CNT_D$ ) 400  
 372 is obtained, with  $CNT_G$  as High and  $CNT_D$  as low, as shown 401  
 373 in Fig. 7. The proposed technique enables a calibrated switch- 402  
 374 ing of the amplifier of the XTAL oscillator and helps in cutting 403  
 375 down the power further down to a measured average power of 404  
 376 1.5 nW.

### 377 A. Obtaining Time of Growth of Oscillation

378 Fig. 8 shows the circuit to obtain the TG of the oscillation. 410  
 379 It consists of comparators and SR flip-flop. Reference voltages 411  
 380  $V_{REFH}$  and  $V_{REFL}$  are used for one time calibration to obtain 412Q1  
 381 the TG of the oscillator. Threshold voltages  $V_{REFH} = 220$  mV 413  
 382 and  $V_{REFL} = 200$  mV are applied at the negative terminal of 414  
 383 the comparators, while XI is applied at the positive terminal. 415  
 384 Once oscillation amplitude goes above  $V_{REFL}$ , the output of 416  
 385  $CMP_1$  goes high, and corresponding SR flip-flop is set. This 417  
 386 sets  $CNT_G$  to high. A counter is enabled using this signal 418  
 387 to count. The amplitude of oscillation keeps on increasing. 419  
 388 Once the oscillation crosses  $V_{REFH}$ ,  $CMP_2$  goes high and sets 420  
 389  $CNT_G$  to zero. This stops the counter and sets the value of the 421  
 390 counter, which is proportional to the growth of oscillation. The 422  
 391 value is digital and is stored, while the time constant circuit is 423  
 392 disabled to save power.

### 393 B. Obtaining Time of Decay of Oscillation

394 Fig. 9 shows the circuit implementation for obtaining TD for 424  
 395 the oscillator. The circuit is very similar to the circuit used for 425  
 396 obtaining TG. It also enables a counter, which counts when XI 426

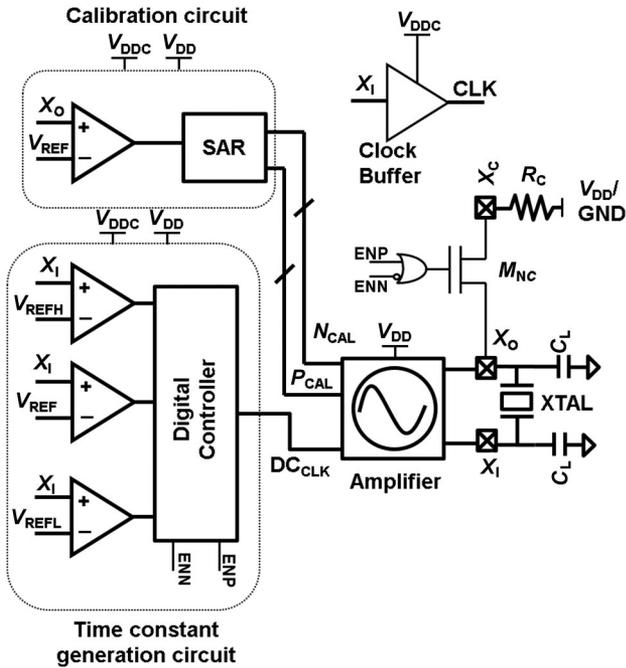
Fig. 10. Digital state machine for generating duty-cycling clock  $DC_{CLK}$ . F10:1

is between  $V_{REFH}$  and  $V_{REFL}$ . While TG is obtained when the 397  
 amplifier is enabled, TD is obtained when it is disabled. Both 398  
 TG and TD are stored digitally, and their corresponding cir- 399  
 cuits are disabled to save power. After obtaining TG and TD, 400  
 the oscillator control turns on the amplifier for time = TD and 401  
 turns it off for time = TG. 402

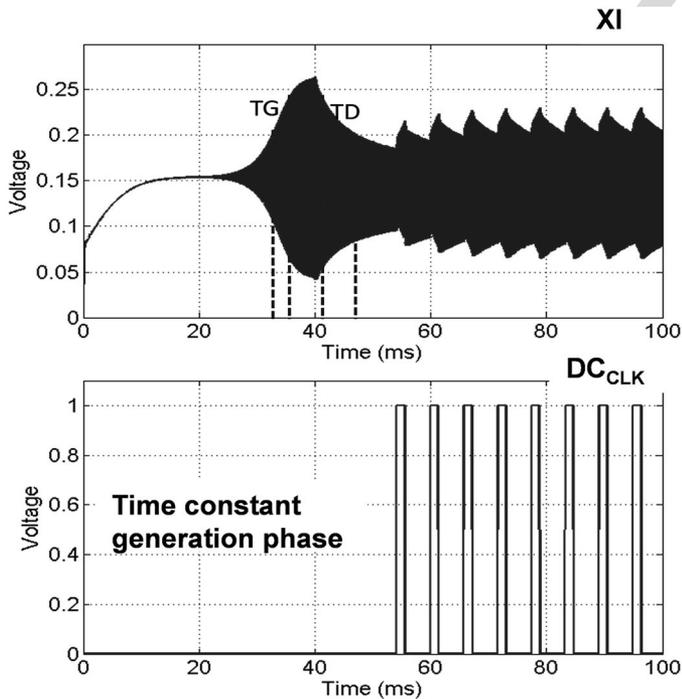
Fig. 10 shows the digital controller for generating the duty- 403  
 cycling clock  $DC_{CLK}$  for the oscillator. A counter running 404  
 on oscillator output frequency is enabled for the duty-cycling 405  
 mode. It counts for  $CNT_G$  and sets  $DC_{CLK}$  high in that state. 406  
 It then goes to second state and counts for  $CNT_D$  and sets 407  
 $DC_{CLK}$  low for that state. It sets both TG and TD, and a running 408  
 $DC_{CLK}$  is realized. 409

### C. Complete Circuit Architecture

410 Fig. 11 shows the complete circuit diagram of the proposed 411  
 XTAL oscillator circuit. First, the calibration of the amplifier is 412Q1  
 performed, which can be done once after manufacturing. The 413  
 calibration circuit sets the drive strength of the amplifier and 414  
 compensates for the process variation. After the calibration, the 415  
 time constant generation circuit obtains the time of growth (TG) 416  
 and time of decay (TD) of the oscillator. These time constants 417  
 are used to configure the clock ( $DC_{CLK}$ ) to switch the ampli- 418  
 fier on and off. The duty cycle of  $DC_{CLK}$  is determined by 419  
 TG and TD with high time = TG and low time = TD. Both 420  
 the calibration circuit and the time constant generation circuit 421  
 are operated at higher power supply,  $V_{DDC}$  at 0.9 V. The power 422  
 consumption of the time constant generation and calibration 423  
 circuit is 4  $\mu$ W. We perform calibration and time constant gen- 424  
 eration only once at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  and at room temperature. Once 425  
 the  $DC_{CLK}$  is configured, the time constant generation circuit 426  
 is powered down. Similarly, the calibration circuit is powered 427  
 down after calibration and all the digital bits are stored. 428  
 This eliminates the power overhead of the calibration circuit 429  
 or time constant generation circuit. The power consumption 430



F11:1 Fig. 11. Complete circuit architecture of the ULP XTAL oscillator.

F12:1 Fig. 12. Simulation of the duty-cycle XTAL oscillator at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ .

431 is given by the amplifier with duty cycling. A clock buffer is  
 432 used along with a level converter to up-convert the clock to  
 433 higher voltage if needed. The level converter implements an  
 434 ULP converter [13] and consumes less than 1 nW for level  
 435 converting the XTAL output from 300 mV to 0.9 V. Fig. 12  
 436 shows the simulation result of the duty-cycling XTAL oscilla-  
 437 tor. After time constant generation phase, the XTAL operates in  
 438 the duty-cycling mode, providing a stable clock with a power  
 439 consumption of 1.5 nW.

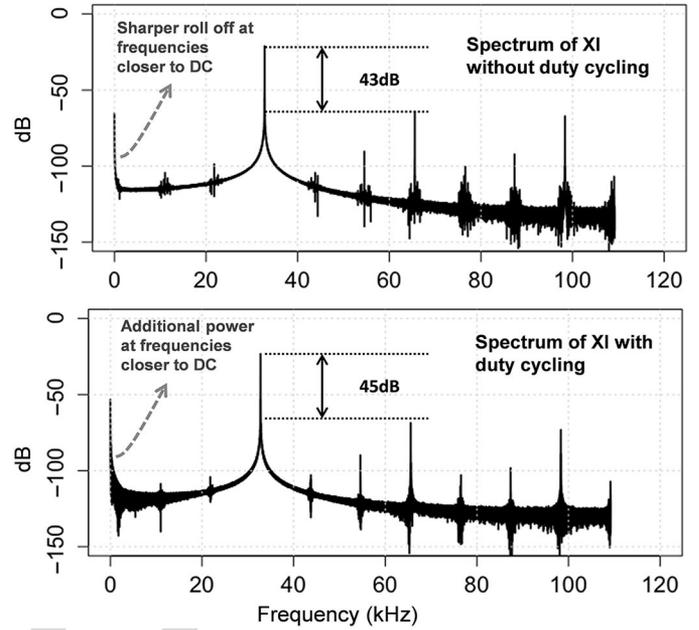


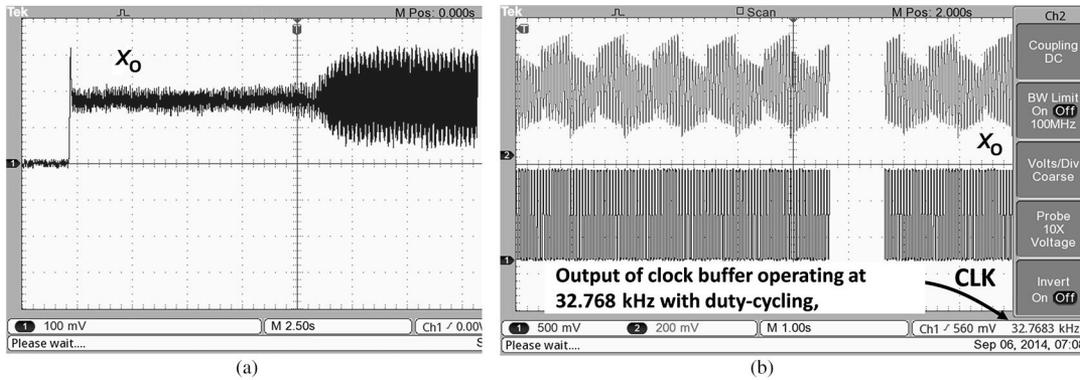
Fig. 13. Spectrum of XI with and without duty cycling.

F13:1

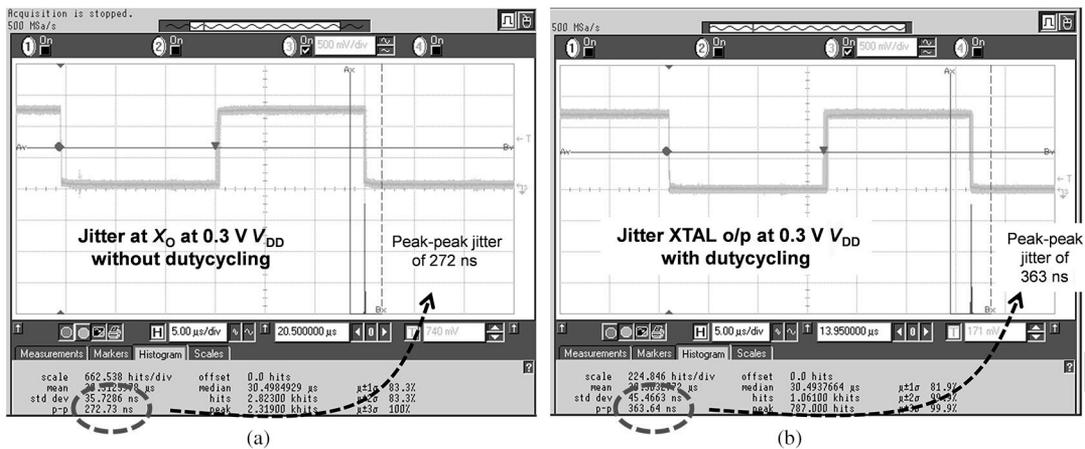
440 The time constants TG and TD are both multiples of the clock  
 441 period. In our design, the 32.768 kHz clock will be an exact  
 442 multiple of  $DC_{CLK}$ , which is derived from the XTAL output.  
 443 Further, the high Q of the XTAL makes TG and TD really large,  
 444 and the frequency of  $DC_{CLK}$  is between 2 and 50 Hz. Fig. 13  
 445 shows the spectrum of XI with and without duty cycling. The  
 446 duty-cycling spectrum shows slightly higher power in frequen-  
 447 cies closer to DC. This will result in increase in jitter, which  
 448 is shown in Fig. 15.

#### D. Nonlinear Effects

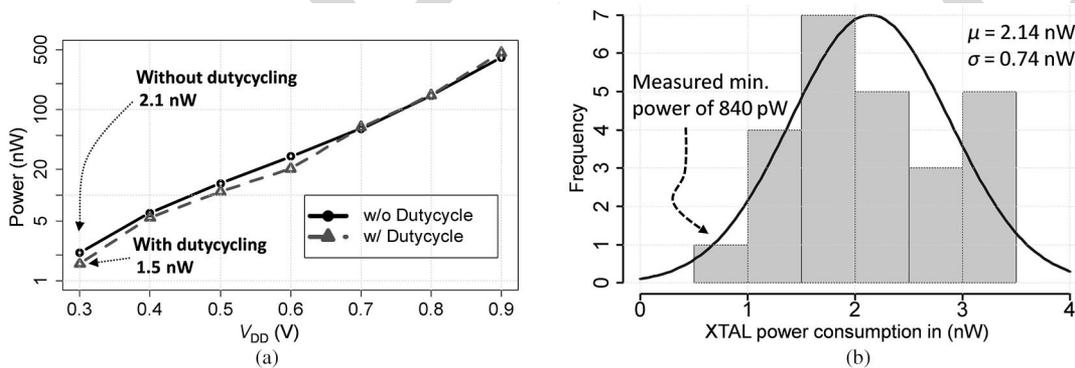
449 We use small signal analysis to realize the oscillation criteria,  
 450 where the negative resistance of the amplifier is calculated at the  
 451 bias condition of the amplifier. The small signal analysis gives  
 452 the accurate behavior of the oscillator when the amplitude of  
 453 oscillation is small. However, nonlinearity in the circuit man-  
 454 ifests when the amplitude of oscillation starts becoming large.  
 455 As the amplitude of oscillation increases, the gain of the ampli-  
 456 fier decreases as transistors inside the amplifier can no longer  
 457 stay in saturation. The decrease in the gain will start reduc-  
 458 ing the effective negative resistance of the amplifier. The higher  
 459 value of negative resistance over XTAL oscillator's ESR during  
 460 start-up causes an exponential growth of amplitude. However,  
 461 as the amplitude increases, the gain of the amplifier drops, caus-  
 462 ing a decrease in the negative resistance. At saturation, the  
 463 effective negative resistance (large signal value) of the ampli-  
 464 fier becomes equal to the ESR of the XTAL and the circuit  
 465 reaches steady state condition. Two main concerns are high-  
 466 lighted with respect to using an inverter-based XTAL oscillator  
 467 in [8]. The first concern is the finite capacitance looking at the  
 468 output of the power supply used for the inverter-based ampli-  
 469 fier. The finite capacitance on the power supply results in the  
 470 distortion leading to poor frequency stability. Since we use the  
 471 XTAL oscillator in an energy harvesting application, the power  
 472



F14:1 Fig. 14. Measured output waveform of the XTAL oscillator circuit. (a) Start-up of the XTAL oscillator at 0.4 V  $V_{DD}$ . (b) Measurement of the waveform at  $X_O$   
 F14:2 with duty-cycling and producing the output clock at 32.768 kHz.



F15:1 Fig. 15. Measurement of jitter at clock buffer out CLK without duty-cycling and with duty-cycling techniques.



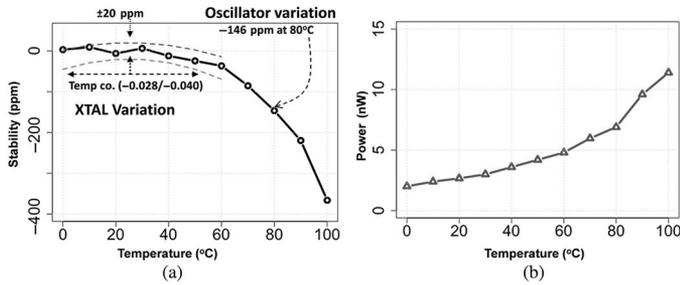
F16:1 Fig. 16. Measured power consumption of XTAL.

473 supply will see 100's of  $\mu\text{F}$  to few mF of cap at the output. With  
 474 lower power consumption and large output capacitance on the  
 475 power supply, we did not see increased instability in the output  
 476 frequency of the oscillator. The second concern is with respect  
 477 to power. Authors in [8] point out that higher power in the oscil-  
 478 lator results in distortion due large value of  $g_m$  of the amplifier.  
 479 This is a concern even with current source-based amplifier.  
 480 Fig. 13 shows that the power in the second harmonic is roughly  
 481 43 dB below the fundamental at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . At higher volt-  
 482 age of 0.9 V  $V_{DD}$ , we see that second harmonic is roughly  
 483 34 dB below the fundamental, resulting in an increase in relative

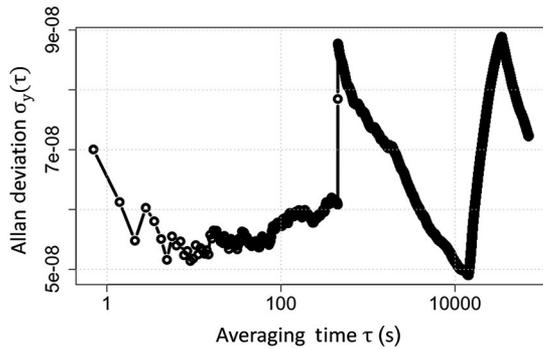
power in harmonics due to higher power. The main advantage  
 of inverter-based oscillator is that the trans-conductance of both  
 nMOS and pMOS are added, which results in overall lower  
 power consumption for the same negative resistance.

## V. MEASUREMENT RESULTS

The proposed XTAL circuit was implemented in a 130 nm  
 CMOS process. It uses a 3 G $\Omega$  external biasing resistor. The  
 XTAL resonator used for this circuit has a Q of 90,000, an ESR  
 of 30 k $\Omega$ , and a  $C_L$  of 6 pF. The XTAL's performance was



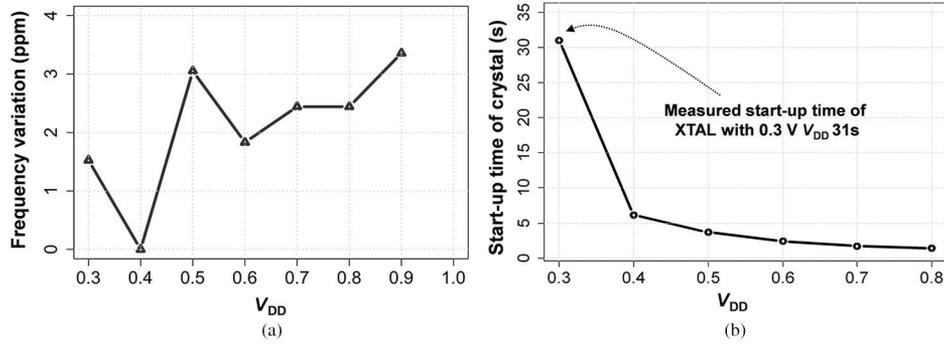
F17:1 Fig. 17. Measured stability and power of the XTAL with temperature, w/o duty  
 F17:2 cycling, 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  shows stability of 1.87 ppm/°C for a temperature variation  
 F17:3 of 0 °C–80 °C.



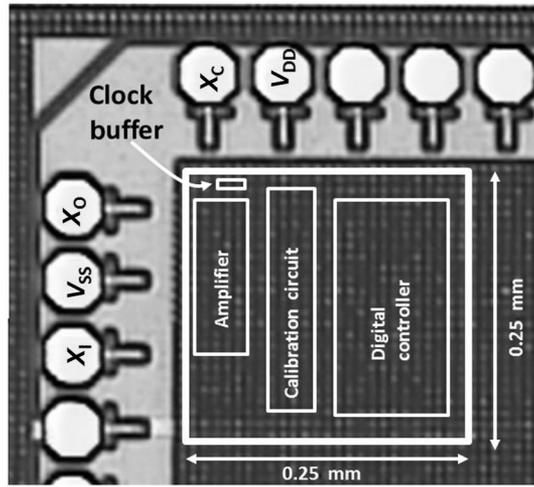
F18:1 Fig. 18. Allan deviation measurement of the XTAL output with duty cycling at  
 F18:2 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  for approximately 20 h.

493 measured from  $V_{DD}$  of 0.3–0.9 V with a temperature variation  
 494 from 0 °C to 100 °C. Our measurements were performed with  
 495 a Keithly power supply with a 2.2 mF capacitance on the supply.  
 496 Fig. 14(a) shows the measured start-up waveform at XO  
 497 of the XTAL at 0.4 V  $V_{DD}$ . The operation of the XTAL at  
 498 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  was measured indirectly by monitoring the clock-  
 499 buffer output but the waveform at XO cannot be produced at  
 500 this voltage because of the loading effects from the measure-  
 501 ment instruments. Fig. 14(b) shows the measured waveform at  
 502 XO with duty-cycling technique. The output waveform shows  
 503 that oscillation is sustained with duty cycling and that the out-  
 504 put clock provides a clock with a period of 32.768 kHz. Fig. 15  
 505 also shows the measurement of jitter at the output of the clock  
 506 buffer. The RMS jitter without duty cycling is 272 ns and with  
 507 duty cycling is 363 ns. Fig. 16(a) shows the power consump-  
 508 tion measurement of the XTAL by varying  $V_{DD}$ . The measured  
 509 average power consumption of the XTAL across 25 chips is  
 510 2.1 nW without duty cycling and 1.5 nW with duty cycling  
 511 at room temperature and 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . The proposed technique  
 512 does not show significant power improvement at higher  $V_{DD}$ .  
 513 This is because the bias current at higher  $V_{DD}$  is much higher  
 514 than required for oscillation. The output of the oscillator stays  
 515 well below the full-rail with the duty cycling technique which  
 516 increases the power consumption because of the short-circuit  
 517 current in the amplifier as well as in the clock buffer. The over-  
 518 head of the short-circuit current reduces the benefit of duty  
 519 cycling at higher  $V_{DD}$ . We can save more power, if we config-  
 520 ure the oscillator for lower power at higher  $V_{DD}$  where

duty-cycling technique will show improvement as the short circuit 521  
 current in the amplifier will decrease. We also configured 522  
 the XTAL for minimum power consumption required for a sus- 523  
 tained oscillation. Fig. 16(b) shows the measured minimum 524  
 mean power consumption for a sustained oscillation without 525  
 duty cycling across 25 chips is 2.1 nW with a sigma of 0.71 526  
 nW. Measurement for one chip showed a minimum power con- 527  
 sumption of 840 pW, where it is approaching the theoretical 528  
 power consumption limit set by (3) and (4). Fig. 17(a) shows 529  
 the stability of the oscillator over 0 °C–100 °C at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . 530  
 The chip was calibrated at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$  and room tempera- 531  
 ture. We maintained this configuration for varying temperature 532  
 and power supply measurements. Our frequency stability is 533  
 –146 ppm at 80°C. Fig. 17(a) also shows the variation of the 534  
 XTAL. Our frequency stability is within the bounds of XTAL 535  
 variation. The measured frequency stability from 0 °C to 80 °C 536  
 is 1.85 ppm/°C. The output frequency with duty-cycling tech- 537  
 nique is 2.5 ppm below the frequency of oscillation without 538  
 duty cycling at 20 °C. The stability of the overall system is 539  
 –150 ppm between 0 °C and 80 °C. Fig. 18 shows the mea- 540  
 surement of Allan deviation of the XTAL with duty cycling 541  
 operating at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . The measurements were taken with a 542  
 $\tau$  of 0.7 s for approximately 20 h in lab environment. The mea- 543  
 surement shows Allan deviation of less than  $10^{-7}$ . Fig. 19(a) 544  
 shows the variation of the oscillator’s frequency with  $V_{DD}$ . The 545  
 power supply variation of our oscillator is less than 7 ppm/V. 546  
 Fig. 19(b) shows the measured start-up time of the XTAL. The 547  
 measurement for the start-up time were taken with the oscilla- 548  
 tor configured for minimum power consumption at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . 549  
 The worst case start-up time is 31 s for 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . The lower 550  
 margin on ESR gives higher start-up time. However, our circuit 551  
 can also start-up in a higher current configuration with all the 552  
 calibration bits programmed high, which can reduce the start- 553  
 up time. The circuit can then make use of the lower power 554  
 configuration. Fig. 20 shows the die photo and the implementa- 555  
 tion of the XTAL oscillator. The area of XTAL oscillator is 556  
 0.0625 mm<sup>2</sup>. The Q of the XTAL resonator used for the XTAL 557  
 oscillator is 90,000, and its ESR is 30 k $\Omega$ . We used an external 558  
 2 pF load capacitor, which combines with parasitic load 559  
 capacitance to result in an oscillation frequency of 32.7683 kHz 560  
 at room temperature. Table I shows the comparison summary 561  
 of the proposed XTAL circuit with previous work. Our XTAL 562  
 oscillator circuit consumes 1.5 nW of power and has an area of 563  
 0.0625 mm<sup>2</sup>. It has over 26% lower power compared to [7] and 564  
 over  $3.7\times$  lower power and  $8\times$  lower area compared to [10]. We 565  
 operated the XTAL circuit at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ , with a duty-cycling 566  
 technique. The circuit in [7] uses a self-charging technique to 567  
 operate the XTAL at 0.15 V  $V_{DD}$  to achieve a power consump- 568  
 tion of 1.89 nW. The circuit in [10] uses a DLL-based 569  
 technique and employs two power supplies and two grounds for 570  
 the amplifier stage. Our circuit uses a single power supply for 571  
 the amplifier. Previously reported work achieves a power consump- 572  
 tion of 22 nW [9] by reducing the amplitude of oscillation. 573  
 We reduce the amplitude of oscillation by operating the circuit 574  
 at 0.3 V  $V_{DD}$ . The proposed circuit provides a low power, lower 575  
 area XTAL oscillator circuit. It applies lower voltage design 576  
 in conjunction with a duty-cycling technique to achieve lower 577  
 power suitable for ULP devices in IoT networks. 578



F19:1 Fig. 19. (a) Measured frequency variation with  $V_{DD}$ . (b) Measured start-up time of XTAL with  $V_{DD}$ .



Parameter	Value
Technology	130 nm bulk CMOS
Total area	250 $\mu\text{m} \times$ 250 $\mu\text{m}$
XTAL's ESR	30 k $\Omega$
XTAL's Q-factor	90 000
XTAL's $C_m$	3.5 fF
XTAL's shunt cap	1.5 pF
$C_L$	6 pF*
Feedback res. ( $R_L$ )	3 G $\Omega$
Calibration res. ( $R_c$ )	15 M $\Omega$
XTAL freq. tolerance	$\pm$ 20 ppm

\*The load capacitor includes the parasitic capacitance as well as external capacitance

F20:1 Fig. 20. Die photo of the XTAL circuit and parameters for the configuration in Fig. 1.

T1:1  
T1:2

TABLE I  
COMPARISON SUMMARY OF THE DUTY-CYCLED OSCILLATOR WITH PREVIOUS LOW-POWER XTAL

	[7]	[10]	[9]	[14]	This work
Operating frequency	32 kHz	32 kHz	32 kHz	32kHz	32kHz
Area (mm <sup>2</sup> )	0.03	0.3	N/A	25	0.0625
Power consumption (nW)	1.89 @0.15V $V_{DD}$ 10 @0.3V $V_{DD}$	5.58	22	220	1.5 @ 0.3V $V_{DD}$
Operating $V_{DD}$ (V)	0.15–0.5	0.92–1.8	0.71	3	0.3–0.9
Number of power/Gnd	1/1	2/2	1/1	1/1	1/1
Amplitude of oscillation	N/A	100 mV	65 mV	N/A	230 mV
Temperature stability	-48.8 ppm -20–80°C	-133 ppm -20–80°C	N/A	N/A	-146 ppm (w/o duty cycling) -150 ppm (w duty cycling) 0–80°C
Power supply variation	85 ppm/V	N/A	N/A	2 ppm/V	7 ppm/V
Technology	28 nm	0.18 $\mu\text{m}$	2 $\mu\text{m}$	2 $\mu\text{m}$	0.13 $\mu\text{m}$

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670 subthreshold digital circuits, SRAM design for end-of-the-roadmap silicon,  
671 variation tolerant circuit design methodologies, and low energy electronics for  
672 medical applications.

## QUERIES

- Q1: Please reword the sentence beginning with “First, the calibration. . .” so that your meaning will be clear to the reader.  
Q2: Please provide page range for Refs. [1], [3]–[7], [9], [10], and [14].  
Q3: Please provide year of publication for Ref. [12].

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