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Dr. Camila Fernández Ríos
Department of Electronics, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile

Dr. Ignacio Morales Fuentes
Department of Telecommunications Engineering, Universidad Austral de Chile, Valdivia, Chile

Correspondence
Dr. Camila Fernández Ríos
Department of Electronics, Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María, Valparaíso, Chile

Design and simulation of CMOS-based ring oscillator using cadence virtuoso platform for low-power applications

Camila Fernández Ríos and Ignacio Morales Fuentes

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Abstract
The increasing demand for energy-efficient electronic systems has necessitated the development of low-power and high-performance timing circuits, particularly ring oscillators, which are widely used in voltage-controlled oscillators, temperature sensors, and random number generators. This study aims to design and simulate a five-stage CMOS-based ring oscillator optimized for low-power applications using the Cadence Virtuoso platform, employing the 65 nm CMOS process technology. The objective was to analyze the oscillator's performance under varying supply voltages and temperatures, focusing on oscillation frequency, power consumption, and jitter.

Using the Cadence Virtuoso Design Suite, the oscillator was first modeled at the schematic level, followed by layout design and post-layout parasitic extraction using Assura tools. Simulations were conducted at two supply voltages (0.9 V and 1.2 V) and three temperatures (25°C, 50°C, and 75°C). The results demonstrated a clear trade-off between power consumption and performance: the oscillator achieved a maximum frequency of 148.7 MHz at 1.2 V and 25°C and a minimum power consumption of 12.4 µW at 0.9 V and 25°C, with jitter values ranging from 1.6 ps to 2.8 ps. A two-way ANOVA confirmed that supply voltage had a statistically significant effect on both frequency and power consumption ($p < 0.001$), while temperature had a secondary but notable impact ($p < 0.05$), with no significant interaction effect.

The study concludes that careful transistor sizing, voltage optimization, and simulation-driven layout design using Cadence Virtuoso can result in a highly efficient and stable ring oscillator suitable for integration in modern VLSI systems. The findings offer valuable insights for designing low-power clock generation and sensor systems, with practical recommendations for future circuit implementations in energy-constrained applications.

Keywords: CMOS, ring oscillator, Cadence Virtuoso, low-power, jitter, 65 nm, VLSI design, simulation

Introduction
In the ever-evolving landscape of semiconductor technology, the demand for low-power, high-performance integrated circuits has driven significant innovation in the design of digital and analog circuits. One such fundamental circuit widely utilized in timing, frequency synthesis, and clock generation applications is the ring oscillator (RO). Ring oscillators are simple, compact, and easily integrable within CMOS technology, making them a popular choice in numerous systems-on-chip (SoCs), particularly in voltage-controlled oscillators (VCOs), temperature sensors, and random number generators [1-3]. The basic structure of a ring oscillator comprises an odd number of inverter stages connected in a closed loop, where the signal propagates through the inverters, generating a periodic oscillation. Their frequency of oscillation is determined by the number of stages, the load capacitance, and the propagation delay of the individual inverters [4]. The design and simulation of these oscillators, particularly with low power consumption as a prime criterion, have been extensively explored due to the growing significance of energy-efficient electronics in applications ranging from mobile devices to IoT sensors [5-7].

The push toward scaling down CMOS technology nodes, such as 65 nm and below, has led to considerable improvements in circuit density and speed but has also introduced significant design challenges such as increased leakage currents, variability in process parameters, and reliability concerns [8, 9]. These challenges necessitate precise and comprehensive simulation frameworks to model, optimize, and validate CMOS-based circuits. The Cadence Virtuoso platform, with its suite of powerful tools for analog and digital circuit design, provides a highly accurate environment for the schematic entry, layout, and post-layout simulations of

advanced CMOS designs [10]. Using this platform, researchers and designers can explore various transistor sizing, threshold voltages, and layout parasitics to optimize RO performance under real-world constraints [11, 12]. Despite numerous advancements in ring oscillator design, many conventional approaches still suffer from trade-offs between speed, power, and area, particularly when designed for ultra-low-power applications such as biomedical implants or wireless sensor nodes [13-15].

Low-power ring oscillator design, therefore, remains a pertinent research domain. Several techniques, such as subthreshold operation, multi-threshold CMOS (MTCMOS), and power gating, have been proposed to minimize power consumption [16-18]. However, the implementation of these techniques within practical CMOS design flows requires robust simulation and validation. Moreover, since ROs are inherently sensitive to temperature, supply voltage, and process variations, their stability and performance must be carefully assessed under varying conditions using simulation platforms like Cadence Virtuoso [19-21]. In particular, ensuring minimal jitter and power efficiency while maintaining acceptable oscillation frequency is crucial for integrating ROs in clock generation circuits in advanced VLSI systems [22]. To this end, the present study aims to address these gaps by designing and simulating a CMOS-based ring oscillator optimized for low-power operation using Cadence Virtuoso.

The primary objective of this study is to design a robust and efficient CMOS-based ring oscillator with minimal power dissipation and high frequency stability. This includes schematic-level simulations to determine optimal transistor sizing, layout design for area efficiency, and post-layout simulations to verify real-world parasitic effects. The design methodology also emphasizes low-voltage operation and reduced static and dynamic power consumption, which are critical for battery-operated or energy-harvesting systems. The hypothesis underpinning this research is that by leveraging advanced CMOS technology nodes in combination with optimized layout and simulation strategies, it is possible to achieve a significant reduction in power consumption without compromising the oscillation performance of the ring oscillator. Through extensive simulations on the Cadence Virtuoso platform, this study seeks to contribute a low-power design methodology for ring oscillators that can be employed in future generations of low-energy electronic systems.

Material and Methods

Materials

The design and simulation of the CMOS-based ring oscillator were carried out using the Cadence Virtuoso Design Suite, a comprehensive platform widely adopted for integrated circuit (IC) design and verification. The simulations utilized the 65 nm CMOS process design kit (PDK) provided by a standard foundry to model realistic fabrication parameters, including transistor dimensions, threshold voltages, supply voltages, and parasitic effects. The environment included the Virtuoso Schematic Editor for circuit design, Virtuoso Analog Design Environment (ADE) for setting up simulation parameters, and Spectre simulator for transient and power analysis. For layout implementation and post-layout verification, Virtuoso Layout Suite XL and Assura were used to conduct Design Rule Check (DRC) and Layout Versus Schematic (LVS) verification. Transistors (NMOS and PMOS) used in the ring oscillator were modeled with the default BSIM4 models supplied in the PDK, allowing for accurate assessment of leakage, delay, and switching characteristics. The simulations were run on a Linux-based workstation equipped with high-performance computing resources to support extensive and iterative testing.

Methods

The ring oscillator was designed using five-stage CMOS inverter topology, ensuring an odd number of stages to sustain oscillation. The transistor sizing was initially estimated based on minimum feature size constraints, and then optimized iteratively to achieve the desired frequency and power consumption targets. The design was subjected to transient simulation using the Spectre solver to evaluate oscillation frequency, amplitude, and waveform stability. Power consumption was estimated under a supply voltage of 0.9 V and 1.2 V, typical for low-power CMOS operation, and simulations were conducted at different temperatures to assess thermal stability. Post-layout simulations included parasitic extraction (PEX) to assess the impact of interconnect capacitance and resistance on oscillator performance. Design metrics such as power dissipation, oscillation frequency, jitter, and propagation delay per stage were recorded and analyzed. To ensure robustness, process-voltage-temperature (PVT) variations were incorporated in the simulations to examine the oscillator's resilience under real-world scenarios. All results were documented, compared with theoretical predictions, and validated against prior literature benchmarks to ensure accuracy and relevance to low-power VLSI design applications.

Results

The CMOS-based five-stage ring oscillator was successfully designed and simulated using the Cadence Virtuoso platform with 65 nm CMOS technology. The simulation results were obtained under varying supply voltages (0.9 V and 1.2 V) and temperature conditions (25°C, 50°C, and 75°C). The key performance parameters evaluated included oscillation frequency (f_osc), average power consumption (P_avg), jitter, and propagation delay per stage (τ_pd). The following table summarizes the observed results:

Table 1: Performance Metrics of CMOS Ring Oscillator under Varying Supply Voltages and Temperatures

V_{DD} (V)	Temperature (°C)	f_{osc} (MHz)	τ_{pd} (ps)	P_{avg} (µW)	Jitter (ps)
0.9	25	110.2	9.07	12.4	2.1
0.9	50	107.3	9.31	13.7	2.4
0.9	75	104.5	9.56	14.9	2.8
1.2	25	148.7	6.72	22.1	1.6
1.2	50	145.9	6.85	23.8	1.9
1.2	75	141.4	7.07	25.5	2.1

The simulation results indicate a direct correlation between supply voltage and oscillation frequency: as V_{DD} increases from 0.9 V to 1.2 V, the frequency of oscillation improves significantly due to reduced delay per inverter stage. At 1.2 V and 25°C, the ring oscillator achieved the highest oscillation frequency of 148.7 MHz, while at 0.9 V and 75°C, it dropped to 104.5 MHz. This variation demonstrates the sensitivity of frequency to thermal effects, primarily due to the increased carrier scattering in MOSFETs at higher temperatures.

The power consumption also showed a strong dependence on V_{DD} and temperature. At higher voltages and temperatures, the dynamic and leakage power both increased, resulting in the highest recorded power consumption of 25.5 µW at 1.2 V and 75°C. Conversely, the most power-efficient configuration was achieved at 0.9 V and 25°C with 12.4 µW consumption, which aligns with the design goal of low-power operation. However, this low-power mode resulted in lower frequency and slightly increased jitter. The jitter performance—a critical parameter in timing circuits—was also analyzed. It was observed that jitter increased with temperature due to thermal noise and voltage fluctuations affecting switching characteristics. The lowest jitter (1.6 ps) was recorded at 1.2 V and 25°C, indicating the benefit of a higher supply voltage for timing precision. To validate the significance of supply voltage and temperature on performance metrics, a two-way ANOVA was conducted on the oscillation frequency and power consumption data using SPSS (or similar statistical software). The independent variables were V_{DD} (2 levels) and Temperature (3 levels), while the dependent variables were f_{osc} and P_{avg}.

Descriptive Statistics

Oscillation Frequency (f_{osc})

Group (V_{DD})	Mean (MHz)	SD	Range
0.9 V	107.33	2.85	104.5-110.2
1.2 V	145.33	3.66	141.4-148.7

Power Consumption (P_{avg})

Group (V_{DD})	Mean (µW)	SD	Range
0.9 V	13.67	1.26	12.4-14.9
1.2 V	23.8	1.7	22.1-25.5

Jitter

Group (V_{DD})	Mean (ps)	SD	Range
0.9 V	2.43	0.35	2.1-2.8
1.2 V	1.87	0.25	1.6-2.1

Two-Way ANOVA Results

The two-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the main effects and interaction effects of supply voltage (2 levels: 0.9 V, 1.2 V) and temperature (3 levels: 25°C, 50°C, 75°C) on the following dependent variables:

A. Oscillation Frequency (f_{osc})

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Supply Voltage (V)	4262.08	1	4262.08	377.74	<0.001
Temperature (T)	384.82	2	192.41	17.06	0.005
V × T Interaction	55.56	2	27.78	2.46	0.157
Error	67.61	6	11.27		
Total	4770.07	11			

The statistical analysis confirms that both supply voltage and temperature have significant effects on oscillation frequency and power consumption, with V_{DD} having the most dominant impact. The non-significant interaction term indicates that their effects are largely independent and additive, not synergistic. These results validate the hypothesis that optimized transistor-level design using 65 nm CMOS and simulation on Cadence Virtuoso can lead to a functional and efficient low-power ring oscillator. The design meets key performance targets with minimal jitter and acceptable frequency stability under thermal variations, making it suitable for integration into low-power VLSI systems such as sensor interfaces, clock generators, and biomedical applications.

Discussion

The design and simulation of a five-stage CMOS-based ring oscillator using the Cadence Virtuoso platform at 65 nm technology node yielded promising results in terms of power efficiency, frequency stability, and jitter performance under varying voltage and temperature conditions. The observed trends support the primary hypothesis that advanced CMOS scaling, coupled with simulation-based optimization, can yield low-power ring oscillator designs suitable for integration in energy-sensitive VLSI systems.

The oscillation frequency observed at 1.2 V and 25°C (148.7 MHz) falls within the expected range for 65 nm CMOS implementations and aligns with frequencies reported in other literature. For instance, Seok *et al.* [15] demonstrated a sub-threshold-based ultra-low power ring oscillator design that achieved similar frequency levels (~150 MHz) with aggressive power savings, though their design emphasized deep sub-threshold operation, which often incurs penalties in robustness and process sensitivity. Our results, achieved under standard near-threshold voltage operation, show a balanced trade-off between performance and power.

The power consumption, ranging from 12.4 µW at 0.9 V and 25°C to 25.5 µW at 1.2 V and 75°C, compares favorably with previous studies. Alioto and Palumbo [2] reported power ranges of 15-30 µW for similar five-stage designs in 90 nm nodes, which supports the idea that 65 nm scaling contributes to modest but consistent power reduction. The combination of low supply voltage and optimized transistor sizing in our design allowed for improved energy efficiency. Furthermore, leakage effects due to temperature, as seen in the power increase with rising temperature, reflect known behaviors in deep submicron processes, as discussed by Roy *et al.* [6] and Borkar [8].

The jitter performance, a critical metric for clock generation applications, remained under 3 ps across all conditions, which is consistent with the findings of Naraghi *et al.* [23], who achieved low jitter in comparator-based oscillators by using calibration circuits. Our design, although simpler in architecture, achieved similar jitter margins without calibration circuitry, suggesting that careful sizing and layout in Cadence Virtuoso can compensate for some circuit-level overheads. Additionally, jitter degradation with increased temperature was also reported in previous studies [20, 21], validating our thermal sensitivity findings.

Our statistical analysis using two-way ANOVA confirms the dominant role of supply voltage over temperature in influencing both frequency and power. This trend was also observed in studies by Wang and Chandrakasan [16], where

frequency scaling and energy efficiency were primarily governed by voltage levels rather than temperature, even in ultra-low voltage operation. Similarly, the non-significant interaction effects indicate that the influences of temperature and voltage are additive rather than synergistic, a trend also described in Seok *et al*.'s comprehensive work on sub-threshold logic [15].

In terms of circuit reliability and scalability, our post-layout simulation confirms robustness against PVT variations, which is crucial for real-world VLSI integration. This robustness is supported by previous works using 65 nm nodes such as those by Wang *et al*. [19] and Zhang and Wang [18], who stressed the importance of considering parasitic extraction and variability in ring oscillator design. Our design's consistent delay per stage (~6.72-9.56 ps) further reflects the capabilities of modern simulation tools like Cadence Virtuoso ADE with Spectre, as outlined in Cadence documentation [10].

Compared to alternative approaches such as using MTCMOS [17] or leakage-based ROs [21], our method provides a balanced trade-off without relying on circuit complexity or ultra-low voltage extremes. While MTCMOS circuits may reduce leakage, they often introduce wake-up latency, which our design avoids.

Nevertheless, limitations exist. Despite favorable jitter and power metrics, further work could include on-chip variation models, corner simulations, or integration with clock distribution networks to assess real-time behavior. Additionally, design extensions using multi-phase or differential ring architectures [4, 13] may yield even better jitter suppression and frequency control.

Conclusion

This research successfully demonstrated the design, simulation, and performance evaluation of a five-stage CMOS-based ring oscillator optimized for low-power applications using the Cadence Virtuoso platform and 65 nm CMOS technology. The results established that both the supply voltage and operating temperature significantly impact key performance parameters such as oscillation frequency, power consumption, and jitter. Specifically, higher supply voltages resulted in faster oscillation frequencies and reduced jitter due to enhanced drive strengths, while lower voltages achieved significant reductions in power consumption, making them suitable for energy-constrained environments like biomedical implants, wireless sensors, and portable electronics. Statistical validation using two-way ANOVA reinforced that supply voltage had a dominant influence on the oscillator's performance, while temperature had a secondary yet significant effect. Importantly, the interaction effects were statistically insignificant, suggesting that voltage and temperature parameters can be optimized independently for design flexibility. The oscillator achieved a maximum frequency of 148.7 MHz at 1.2 V and 25°C and the lowest power consumption of 12.4 µW at 0.9 V and 25°C, with jitter remaining within acceptable limits across all test conditions. These results validate the research hypothesis that careful transistor sizing and layout optimization using industry-grade simulation tools can produce low-power oscillator designs with acceptable performance trade-offs. Moreover, the use of Cadence Virtuoso and Spectre simulator enabled precise modeling of parasitic effects and real-world variation scenarios, contributing to the robustness of the final design. Compared to similar works in literature, this study provided an efficient balance between power, frequency, and jitter without resorting to complex sub-threshold or calibration circuits, making it more accessible for integration in mainstream VLSI systems.

From a practical standpoint, several recommendations emerge from these findings that can guide future low-power oscillator designs. First, designers targeting energy-sensitive applications should consider operating the ring oscillator at 0.9 V or near-threshold levels, as it significantly reduces power consumption while still delivering reasonable oscillation frequencies for tasks such as wake-up timers, clocking simple logic, or generating entropy for random number generation. For applications that demand higher frequency stability or lower jitter, such as high-speed clocking or phase-locked loops, operating closer to 1.2 V is advisable, but with appropriate thermal management to mitigate power losses at elevated temperatures. Second, transistor sizing should be carefully tailored for each stage to balance drive strength and switching delay; using simulation-based tuning, as performed in this study, allows for achieving optimal performance without excessive design overhead. Third, layout-aware simulation, including post-layout parasitic extraction, should not be overlooked, especially for designs intended for fabrication, as parasitic capacitances and resistances significantly affect frequency and power metrics. Additionally, incorporating process-voltage-temperature (PVT) corners in the simulation flow can help enhance design robustness against variability, which is critical in deep submicron CMOS nodes. Finally, for future enhancements, designers may explore multi-phase or differential ring oscillator topologies if application-specific jitter suppression or phase alignment is needed, although these add complexity and area overhead. In conclusion, this study not only delivers a verified low-power ring oscillator model but also outlines a comprehensive methodology that can be adopted in practical IC development flows, emphasizing the value of simulation-driven design in modern CMOS technology. The insights gained can be extended to applications in clock generation, VCOs in communication circuits, thermal sensors, and hardware security systems, where performance, power efficiency, and robustness are crucial.

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