MOSFET Self-Turn-On Phenomenon

Description

When a rising voltage is applied sharply to a MOSFET between its drain and source, the MOSFET may turn on due to malfunction. This document describes the cause of this phenomenon and its countermeasures.
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1. Self-turn-on

1.1. What is self-turn-on?

For example, inverter and non-isolated synchronous rectification converter circuits consist of a bridge using MOSFETs. When the MOSFETs switch at high speed, a fast rising voltage is applied across the drain and source terminals of the MOSFET in the off state. Depending on the voltage change over time $dv/dt$, a voltage is induced at the gate input of the MOSFET according to the ratio between its gate-drain capacitance $C_{gd}$ and gate-source capacitance $C_{gs}$. A current flowing to the gate resistor $R_G$ via $C_{gd}$ causes an excessive gate voltage.

The induced gate voltage exceeding the gate threshold voltage $V_{th}$ leads to false turn-on of the MOSFET. This phenomenon is called self-turn-on.

Figure 1.1 shows a non-isolated synchronous rectification converter. When the MOSFET $Q_1$ turns on while the MOSFET $Q_2$ is off, a fast rising voltage (with a high $dv/dt$ rate) is applied to $Q_2$. Figure 1.2 shows an inverter circuit configured as a bridge. If either one of the upper- or lower-arm MOSFETs ($Q_1$ or $Q_2$) turns on while the other one is off, a high-$dv/dt$ voltage appears across the drain and source terminals of the MOSFET in the off state.

A self-turn-on event creates a short circuit between $Q_1$ and $Q_2$. This not only increases power losses, but also might permanently damage the devices.
1.2. Self-turn-on mechanism

When a voltage with a dv/dt ramp is applied to a MOSFET, a current flows through its gate-drain capacitance \( C_{gd} \).

\[
i = C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt}
\]

This current \( i \) induces a voltage across the gate and source terminals of the MOSFET, which is expressed as:

\[
v_{gs} = R_g C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt} \left( 1 - \exp \left( \frac{-t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) R_g} \right) \right)
\]  \( \cdots \cdots (1) \)

(Here, the assumption is that the MOSFET capacitances, \( C_{gs} \) and \( C_{gd} \), do not change with the voltage.)

The cause of self-turn-on depends on the length of the period during which a high-dv/dt voltage is applied across the drain and source terminals:

**Phenomenon a: When the dv/dt period is shorter than \((C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G\) (i.e., when \( t \ll (C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G \))**

Approximating the term \( \exp \left( \frac{-t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) R_G} \right) \) in Equation (1) to \( 1 - \frac{t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) R_G} \) gives the following:

\[
v_{gs} \approx R_g C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt} (\cdots \cdots (2))
\]

When a MOSFET switches at very high speed in switching applications such as non-isolated synchronous rectification converters, the resulting rise in its gate voltage can be calculated using Equation (2).

**Phenomenon b: When the dv/dt period is longer than \((C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G\) (i.e., when \( t \gg (C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G \))**

Since \( \exp \left( \frac{-t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G} \right) \ll 1 \), \( v_{gs} \) is approximated as follows:

\[
v_{gs} \approx R_g C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt} (\cdots \cdots (3))
\]

Self-turn-on occurs: 1) when \( v_{gs} \) calculated using Equation (2) or (3) exceeds the gate threshold voltage \( V_{th} \) of the MOSFET, or 2) when the sum of \( v_{gs} \) and the residual gate-source voltage that has been driving the gate exceeds \( V_{th} \).

![Figure 1.3 Circuit with a MOSFET](image-url)
2. Simulation of self-turn-on
2.1. Non-isolated DC-DC converter
2.1.1. Method of checking for self-turn-on

Suppose that the MOSFET Q2 in Figure 2.1 turns off after synchronous rectification mode (in the on state shown by #2) and that the following dead-time period overlaps the turn-on of the MOSFET Q1. Then, a high-dv/dt voltage is applied to Q2, causing self-turn-on. This is the mechanism of the MOSFET self-turn-on in a DC/DC converter.

The MOSFET self-turn-on occurs in a DC/DC converter as follows:

1. The MOSFET Q1 turns on, causing a current to flow to L.
2. When the MOSFET Q1 turns off, the energy accumulated on L flows back through the source and drain of the MOSFET Q2. During this period, the low-side MOSFET Q2 turns on, acting as a synchronous rectifier.
3. Next, the MOSFET Q2 turns off. After a dead-time period, the MOSFET Q1 turns on. This causes a high dv/dt voltage to be applied to the MOSFET Q2.

At this point in time, the gate and drain-source voltages and currents of the MOSFET Q2 are measured.

(The gate current caused by the dv/dt ramp is calculated as \( i_G \approx C_{gd} \cdot (dv/dt) \).
(During the dead-time period from the turn-off of the MOSFET Q2 to the turn-on of Q1, a current flows through the body diode of the MOSFET Q2. Synchronous rectification MOSFETs in motor applications operate in the same manner while a current flows back through the body diode.)

Assuming the use of surface-mount MOSFETs, their lead inductances are not considered here.

![Figure 2.1 Simulation circuit model and simplified waveforms](image-url)
2.1.2. Adding an external gate-source capacitor to prevent self-turn-on

When a MOSFET switches at high speed, a voltage is induced according to the ratio between its gate-drain and gate-source capacitances. The induced voltage is superimposed on its gate voltage and might cause undesired self-turn-on. In our first simulation, the MOSFET used did not experience self-turn-on under typical conditions. So, we added a large gate resistor \( R_{G2} = 20 \, \Omega \) only to \( Q_2 \) to force a self-turn-on phenomenon to occur and then simulated the effect of an external gate-source capacitor. Because the MOSFETs in a DC/DC converter are driven at a very high frequency (300 to 500 kHz), the dead-time period from the turn-off of the MOSFET \( Q_2 \) to the turn-on of the MOSFET \( Q_1 \) is very short.

A simulation showed that the external gate-source capacitor is effective in reducing a rise in the gate voltage, \( C_{gd}/(C_{gs}+C_{gd}) \cdot v(t) \), which is a function of the ratio between gate-source and gate-drain capacitances. However, because the MOSFET \( Q_2 \) had a large gate resistor \( R_{G2} \), the effect of the external gate-source capacitor was affected by a rise in the gate voltage due to \( R_{G2} \cdot C_{gd} \cdot (dv/dt) \). The addition of a capacitor also increased the time required to discharge the gate charge after the MOSFET \( Q_2 \) turned off. As a result, the gate discharge current remained when the MOSFET \( Q_1 \) turned on, making \( Q_2 \) more susceptible to self-turn-on, contrary to our expectation. As demonstrated by this simulation, you should examine both the gate discharge time and the dead time when adding a capacitor between the gate and source terminals of a MOSFET for the purpose of self-turn-on prevention.

For accurate simulation, it is important to select appropriate devices and conditions.

Assuming the use of surface-mount MOSFETs, their lead inductances are not considered here.

Figure 2.2a Simulation circuit model
A rise in voltage caused by the insertion of a capacitor was reduced. However, the capacitor increased the time required to discharge the gate charge. When a large capacitor was used, the gate charge could not be discharged within the dead-time period; consequently, the capacitor increased the short-circuit current due to self-turn-on.

**Figure 2.2b Waveforms of the circuit of Figure 2.2a**
2.1.3. Changing the slope of the voltage-versus-time curve \((dv/dt)\) to prevent self-turn-on

Next, we simulated the impact of the fast changing drain-source voltage (with a high \(dv/dt\) rate) on the MOSFET self-turn-on. (We intentionally selected simulation conditions that would cause self-turn-on.)

We experimented with different gate resistors \(R_{G1}\) for the high-side MOSFET \(Q_1\) in order to change the \(dv/dt\) rate of the drain-source voltage of the MOSFET \(Q_2\) and determined whether self-turn-on occurs as a result.

The voltage superimposed on the gate is expressed as \(C_{gd}/(C_{gs}+C_{gd}) \cdot v(t)\). A simulation showed that reducing the \(dv/dt\) rate of the drain-source voltage helped prevent self-turn-on. This is probably because when the \(dv/dt\) rate is small, \(t\) is outside the range of \(v(t)\) in which the equation is satisfied and \(v(t)\) became smaller as a result.

![Simulation circuit model](image)

**Figure 2.3a Simulation circuit model**
Figure 2.3b Waveforms of the circuit of Figure 2.3a
2.1.4. Effect of the gate resistor on self-turn-on

We simulated the occurrence of self-turn-on in the circuit shown in Figure 2.4a using different gate resistors $R_{G2}$ for the low-side MOSFET $Q_2$. (We intentionally selected simulation conditions that would cause self-turn-on.) Our simulation showed that the circuit with a larger gate resistor is more susceptible to self-turn-on. This is probably because the increase in the gate resistance caused the current and voltage resulting from the discharging of the gate charge persisted longer, offsetting the positive effect of the reduced $dv/dt$ rate on the gate voltage. In reality, increasing the gate resistance did not significantly affect the gate current for the MOSFET $Q_2$ during the $dv/dt$ period.

Because the MOSFETs in a real-world DC/DC converter switch at a very high frequency (300 to 500 kHz), a small gate resistor and a short dead-time period are typically used. Although we used a large gate resistor for this simulation in order to force self-turn-on to occur, such a large resistor is unlikely to be used in an actual DC/DC converter. In the event of self-turn-on, it will be difficult to work around the self-turn-on problem by adding an external gate resistor.

Assuming the use of surface-mount MOSFETs, their lead inductances are not considered here.

MOSFET used
30 V/16 A, $C_{iss}$:1350 pF, $C_{rss}$:63 pF

![Figure 2.4a Simulation circuit model](image)

![Figure 2.4b Gate current and voltage of the low-side MOSFET Q2](image)
Figure 2.4c $v_{GS}$ and $i_D$ waveforms of the high-side and low-side MOSFETs
2.2. Inverter circuit configured as a bridge

2.2.1. Method of checking for self-turn-on

Figure 2.5 shows an inverter circuit configured as a bridge. When the MOSFET Q1 in this circuit turns on, a high dv/dt voltage is applied across the drain and source terminals of the MOSFET Q2. Consequently, a current flows to the gate resistor via the gate-drain capacitance C_gd of Q2, lifting its gate voltage. As a result, the MOSFET Q2 might falsely turn on.

The basic operation of the inverter circuit is shown in Figure 2.5. In a simulation, we applied a train of two pulses to the gate of the MOSFET Q1 in order to examine the self-turn-on of the MOSFET Q2 as follows:

1. The first gate pulse applied to the MOSFET Q1 causes a current to flow to the inductor L.
2. When the MOSFET Q1 turns off, this current flows back through the body diode of the MOSFET Q2.
3. Upon application of the second gate pulse to Q1, the body diode of Q2 enters reverse recovery t_r mode. Thereafter, a high-dv/dt drain-source voltage is applied Q2. As a result, a current flows to the gate resistor R_g2 for the MOSFET Q2, lifting its gate voltage.

The assumption is that through-hole MOSFETs are used. L is the inductance of the package lead.
2.2.2. Effect of the gate resistor on self-turn-on

In order to examine the effect of the gate resistor, we performed simulations, changing the
value of the gate resistor $R_{G2}$ for the MOSFET $Q_2$ (in the off state) in the range from 50 Ω to 200
Ω. The larger the gate resistance $R_{G2}$, the more susceptible the MOSFET becomes to
self-turn-on. ($v_{GS} = R_G \cdot C_{gd} \cdot (dv/dt)$)

The current flowing to the gate of a MOSFET is limited by the associated gate resistor. The
greater the gate resistance, the smaller the gate current. However, because voltage is the
product of current and resistance, the greater the gate resistance, the greater the gate voltage
becomes. Self-turn-on occurs when the gate voltage exceeds $V_{th}$. (We intentionally selected
simulation conditions that would cause self-turn-on.)

![Simulation circuit model](image)

The assumptions are that through-hole
MOSFETs are used and that the package lead
has an inductance of 2 nH.

**Figure 2.6a Simulation circuit model**
The self-turn-on of the $Q_2$ causes a short-circuit current to flow to both $Q_1$ and $Q_2$ upon turn-on of $Q_1$.

Figure 2.6b Turn-on curves
2.2.3. Effect of the slope of the voltage-versus-time curve (dv/dt) on self-turn-on

This section discusses the effect of the dv/dt rate of the drain-source voltage on self-turn-on. Since $v_{GS} = R_G \cdot C_{gd} \cdot (dv/dt)$, a rise in the gate voltage can be reduced by reducing dv/dt.

In order to adjust the dv/dt rate while the MOSFET Q2 is in reverse recovery $t_{rr}$ mode, the value of the gate resistor $R_G$ for the MOSFET Q1 in the gate driver was changed under the conditions in which self-turn-on occurs (with a 200-Ω gate resistor connected to the MOSFET Q2). The MOSFET Q2 can be made less susceptible to self-turn-on by increasing the $R_G$ value to reduce the dv/dt rate. (We intentionally selected simulation conditions that would cause self-turn-on.)

![Simulation circuit model](image)

Simulations were performed with 50- and 200-Ω $R_G$.

The assumptions are that through-hole MOSFETs are used and that the package lead has an inductance of 2 nH.

Figure 2.7a Simulation circuit model
The self-turn-on of the Q₂ causes a short-circuit current to flow through Q₁ and Q₂ upon turn-on of Q₁.

Drain current and voltage waveforms of upper arm MOSFET at self-turning on

Gate current of lower arm MOSFET

Gate voltage of lower arm MOSFET

Figure 2.7b Turn-on curves
3. Preventing self-turn-on

3.1. Preventing MOSFET self-turn-on in a non-isolated DC-DC converter

When a voltage is applied to a MOSFET, a current generally flows via its gate-drain capacitance $C_{gd}$. This current is expressed as $i = C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt}$.

As a result, a voltage is induced across the gate and source terminals:

$$v_{GS} = R_G C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt} \left(1 - \exp \left(\frac{-t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) R_G}\right)\right)$$

(Here, the assumption is that MOSFET capacitances, $C_{gs}$ and $C_{gd}$, do not change with the voltage.)

In an ultra-high-frequency (300- to 500-kHz) non-isolated DC/DC converter, the MOSFETs in it also switch at a very high frequency. In this case, a self-turn-on phenomenon occurs when the gate-source voltage $v_{GS}$ of the MOSFET exceeds its $V_{th}$. $v_{GS}$ is expressed as follows:

- **When the $dv/dt$ transient is shorter than $(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G$**
  
  (i.e., when $t < (C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G$)

  $$v_{GS} = \frac{C_{gd}}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd})} v(t)$$

  (where, $v(t)$ can be considered to be equal to the supply voltage $V$ when $t$ is short.)

**Preventing self-turn-on**

Selecting MOSFETs with a high $V_{th}$ and a low $C_{gd}/C_{gs}$ ratio is of primary importance. In addition, a DC/DC converter circuit can be designed with:

- a capacitor between the gate and source terminals of the MOSFET in order to further reduce the $C_{gd}/C_{gs}$ ratio. (Figure 3.1)

Care should be exercised, however, because adding a capacitor between the gate and source terminals of a MOSFET affects its switching speed.

It might be possible to reduce the $dv/dt$ rate by slowing the turn-on of only the high-side device. However, this does not often serve as an effective solution because switching losses increase, considering many DC/DC converters are designed to operate at a high frequency.

![Figure 3.1 Adding a capacitor across the gate and source terminals](image-url)
3.2. Preventing MOSFET self-turn-on in an inverter configured as a bridge

When a voltage is applied to a MOSFET, a current generally flows via its gate-drain capacitance ($C_{gd}$). This current is expressed as $i = C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt}$.

As a result, a voltage is induced across the gate and source terminals:

$$v_{GS} = R_G C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt} \left( 1 - \exp \left( \frac{-t}{(C_{gs} + C_{gd})R_G} \right) \right)$$

(Here, the assumption is that MOSFET capacitances, $C_{gs}$ and $C_{gd}$, do not change with the voltage.)

Inverter circuits are typically used at a switching frequency of around 20 kHz. So, the MOSFETs in an inverter circuit are not required to switch as fast as those in a non-isolated DC/DC converter. $v_{GS}$ fluctuates early during the $dv/dt$ period according to the ratio between the gate-drain and gate-source capacitances, but a self-turn-on phenomenon is affected most significantly by the result of the following equation. When $v_{GS}$, which is calculated as follows, exceeds the $V_{th}$ of a MOSFET, it experiences self-turn-on.

**When the dv/dt transient is longer than $(C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G$ (i.e., $t > (C_{gs} + C_{gd}) \cdot R_G$)**

$$v_{GS} \approx R_G C_{gd} \frac{dv}{dt}$$

**Preventing self-turn-on**

Selecting MOSFETs with a high $V_{th}$ and a low $C_{gd}$ is of primary importance. In addition, an inverter circuit can be designed as follows to prevent self-turn-on:

- Reduce the $dv/dt$ rate during turn-on. (Increase the turn-on resistance.) (Figure 3.2)
- Reduce $R_G$ during turn-off. (Reduce the turn-off resistance.) (Figure 3.2)
- Use a negative gate voltage. (Figure 3.3)
- Use a shunt circuit at the gate. (Figure 3.4)

![Figure 3.2 Using separate gate resistors for turn-on and turn-off](image)

![Figure 3.3 Using a negative gate power supply](image)

![Figure 3.4 Adding a shunt circuit](image)
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