# A New Family of Zero-Current-Switching Variable Frequency

# dc-dc Converters

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Abstract - A new family of zero-current-switching variablefrequency dc-dc converters is presented. It employs two unidirectional current switches, one diode, two small reactive components and a filter capacitor. Zero current turn-on and turn-off ensure low switching losses and smooth current waveforms result in low electromagnetic noise emission. The discontinuous operating mode and the variable switching frequency make the presented topology suitable for low-power applications or for high-power low-frequency applications where SCR's can be profitably used. Experimental results of a prototype confirm the theoretical expectations of the proposed solution.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for high-power density dc-dc converters has lead to a great effort in developing converter topologies capable of working at high switching frequency with reasonable overall efficiency [1-6]. The family of Quasi Resonant Converters (Zero-Current [1] or Zero-Voltage [2]) are valuable examples of such compact dc-dc converter structures. However, the sensitivity of the soft-switching condition on the load current and/or the input voltage greatly increases the device stresses [3], thus making them suitable for particular applications only, i.e. for those having reduced input and load variations.

This paper proposes a new family of dc-dc converters which employs two unidirectional current switches with zero current at both turn-on and turn-off. Besides the output filter capacitor, only two small reactive components are used, while output voltage control is achieved by switching frequency variation. Compared to zero current-switching quasi-resonant converter family (ZCS-QRC), the proposed solution ensures soft-switching condition independently on load or input voltage variation. This is, however, achieved using two unidirectional current switches in addition to the output diode, which practically implies that three devices are in series during the powering phase, thus making the proposed solution suitable for high voltage input. Moreover, the switching frequency is inversely proportional to the load resistance, thus making the proposed solution suited for applications with almost constant loads, as for any variable-frequency quasi-resonant converter.

The proposed family is based on a switching cell which generalizes the converter operation under different topologies. Steady-state analysis is firstly performed for the boost converter and then extended also to the buck and buckboost topologies. Voltage and current stresses for different topologies are also analyzed. Finally, a small signal model for the basic switching cell, suitable for control design of any of the proposed topologies, is also proposed. Experimental results of a boost converter prototype confirm the theoretical analysis and the foreseen performance.

#### **II. TOPOLOGY DESCRIPTION**

The core of the new family of ZCS-VF dc-dc converters is the switching cell depicted in Fig. 1. As we can see, it is composed by two unidirectional current switches  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , one diode D and two reactive components L and C<sub>a</sub>. The three cell ports P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub> and P<sub>3</sub> are all voltage ports, i.e. only voltage generators or smoothing capacitors can be connected to. Being P2 a voltage port, capacitor Ca can by substituted by a capacitor in parallel to diode D without modifying the cell operation. By connecting the input voltage generator and the output filter capacitor to two of the three cell ports and selecting the correct current direction, the basic converter topologies buck, boost, buck-boost are derived, as shown in Fig. 2. Since the cell operation is the same for all topologies, the boost converter is taken as an example and only its operation is described hereafter. For a better understanding of the converter behavior refers to Fig. 3, which reports the main converter waveforms during a switching period. Let us start the converter analysis at instant t = 0, where all switches and diodes are off, capacitor C<sub>a</sub> is charged to -U<sub>o</sub> and inductor current is zero.

# A. Charging Phase $0 < t < T_1$

During this interval,  $S_1$  is turned on and inductor current  $i_L$  and capacitor voltage  $u_{Ca}$  follow sinusoidal waveforms according to the following equations:

$$i_{L}(t) = \frac{U_{g} + U_{o}}{Z_{r}} \sin(\omega_{r}t)$$
(1.a)

$$u_{Ca}(t) = U_g - (U_g + U_o)\cos(\omega_r t)$$
(1.b)

where 
$$\omega_r = \frac{1}{\sqrt{LC_a}}$$
 and  $Z_r = \sqrt{\frac{L}{C_a}}$  are the resonant angular

frequency and the characteristic impedance respectively.

When, at instant  $T_1$ , the auxiliary capacitor voltage  $u_{Ca}$  reaches the output voltage value, diode D starts its conduction. The duration of interval  $T_1$  is given by:

$$u_{Ca}(T_1) = U_o \Longrightarrow T_1 = \frac{1}{\omega_r} \cos^{-l} \left( -\frac{M-1}{M+1} \right)$$
(2)

where  $M = U_o/U_g$  is the voltage conversion ratio. Since  $\pi/2 < \omega_r T_l < \pi$ , from (2) the voltage conversion ratio M must be greater than one, thus revealing boost operation. The inductor current  $i_L$  at the end of interval  $T_1$  is given by:

$$i_{L}(T_{1}) = I_{1} = \frac{U_{g}}{Z_{r}}(1+M)\sin(\omega_{r}T_{1}) = \frac{2U_{g}}{Z_{r}}\sqrt{M}$$
 (3)

B. Powering Phase  $T_1 < t < T_1 + T_2$ 

When diode D starts conducting, the source and the inductor deliver energy to the output. The auxiliary capacitor voltage  $u_{Ca}$  remains clamped to the output voltage value  $U_o$ , while the inductor current  $i_L$  decreases linearly to zero, i.e.:

$$i_{L}(t) = I_{1} - \frac{U_{o} - U_{g}}{L}(t - T_{1})$$
 (4)  
**P**<sub>2</sub>



Fig. 1 - Basic switching cell of the new family of ZCS-VF dc-dc converters



Fig. 2 - The new family of ZCS-VF dc-dc converters: a) buck; b) boost; c) buck-boost



Fig. 3 - Main converter waveforms during a switching period. A) Charging Phase; B) powering phase; C) discharging phase; D) Idling phase

After a time  $T_2$ , the inductor current  $i_L$  goes to zero, thus determining the end of subinterval  $T_2$ . Its duration can be found by:

$$i_{L}(T_{1}+T_{2})=0 \implies T_{2}=\frac{2}{\omega_{r}}\frac{\sqrt{M}}{M-1}$$
(5)

C. Discharging Phase  $T_1+T_2 < t < T_1+T_2+T_r/2$ 

During this interval, which can be allocated anytime between the end of the powering phase and the beginning of the subsequent switching interval, switch  $S_2$  is turned on causing a half period oscillation between L and  $C_a$  and bringing the capacitor voltage  $u_{Ca}$  from the value  $U_o$  to the value  $-U_o$  (see Fig. 3). The inductor current and capacitor voltage waveforms during this interval are given by the following relations:

$$i_{L}(t) = -\frac{U_{o}}{Z_{r}} \sin(\omega_{r}(t - T_{1} - T_{2}))$$
 (6.a)

$$u_{Ca}(t) = U_{o} \cos(\omega_{r}(t - T_{1} - T_{2}))$$
 (6.b)

# D. Idling Phase

At the end of the discharging phase, there is an idling interval  $T_{idle}$  whose duration depends on the output voltage regulator. The converter regulation is thus achieved by switching frequency variations.

The voltage conversion ratio can be derived by observing that the current delivered to the output coincides with the inductor current during the powering interval  $T_2$  (see the shaded area highlighted in Fig. 3) which represents also the diode current. By equating the output current with the diode average current, the expression for voltage conversion ratio M as a function of the switching frequency  $f_s$  is derived as:

$$I_{\rm D} = \frac{I_1 T_2}{2T_{\rm s}} = I_{\rm o} \quad \Rightarrow \quad M = 1 + 2C_{\rm a} R_{\rm L} f_{\rm s}$$
(7.a)

By using normalized load resistance  $R_{LN} = R_L/Z_r$  and normalized switching frequency  $f_{sN} = f_s/f_r$ , (7.a) can be written as:

$$\mathbf{M} = 1 + \frac{\mathbf{R}_{\mathrm{LN}}}{\pi} \mathbf{f}_{\mathrm{sN}} \tag{7.b}$$

It is interesting to derive the maximum switching frequency, which is obtained imposing  $T_{idle}=0$ , as a function of voltage conversion ratio:

$$f_{sN max} = \frac{f_{smax}}{f_r} = \frac{T_r}{\frac{T_r}{2} + T_1 + T_2} = \frac{1}{F(M)}$$
(8)

where, by using (2) and (5), function F(M) is given by:

$$F(M) = 1 - \frac{1}{2\pi} \cos^{-1} \left( \frac{M-1}{M+1} \right) + \frac{\sqrt{M}}{\pi(M-1)}$$
(9)

By substituting (8) into (7.b), the maximum voltage conversion ratio  $M_{max}$  for a given load resistance is obtained solving the following implicit equation:

$$F(M_{max})(M_{max}-1) = \frac{K_{LN}}{\pi}$$
(10)

Fig. 4a shows the voltage conversion ratio M as a function of the normalized switching frequency  $f_{sN}$  for different values of normalized load resistance  $R_{LN}$ . As predicted by (7.b), a linear relation exists between output and control variables, thus simplifying the control design. All diagrams terminate on the maximum switching frequency curve given by (8). Fig. 4b, instead, reports the maximum voltage conversion ratio  $M_{max}$  as a function of the normalized load resistance  $R_{LN}$ . Note that for the boost converter  $M_{max}$  varies almost linearly with the normalized load resistance  $R_{LN}$ . This implies that for high voltage conversion ratios low characteristic impedances  $Z_r$  are required.



Fig. 4 – a) Voltage conversion ratio for the boost ZCS-VF converter at different normalized load resistance  $R_{\rm LN}$  values; b) maximum voltage conversion ratio achievable as a function of the normalized load resistance

#### III. EXTENSION TO OTHER BASIC CONVERTER TOPOLOGIES

Voltage conversion ratio for the other two basic topologies (buck and buck-boost) can be derived with the same methodology used for the boost converter, since the main converter waveforms are the same for all topologies. However, since each topology is simply obtained by rotation of the basic switching cell of Fig. 1, it is convenient to express the fundamental equations (2), (3) and (5) in a generalized form by using the notation of voltages and currents reported in Fig. 1. Comparing Fig. 1 with Fig. 2b, the following relations hold:

$$U_{ac} = U_g, U_{bc} = U_o, I_a = I_g, I_b = I_o$$
 (11)

Thus all equations from (1) to (6) plus (8) and (9) can be first rewritten in the generalized form using (11). Then, they can be applied to the specific topology. Moreover, the average input and output currents of the generalized switching cell can be expressed as follows:

$$I_{b} = \frac{I_{1}T_{2}}{2T_{s}} = 2C_{a}f_{s}\frac{U_{bc}U_{ac}}{U_{bc}-U_{ac}}$$
(12)

$$I_{a} = \frac{U_{bc}}{U_{ac}}I_{b} = 2C_{a}f_{s}\frac{U_{bc}^{2}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}}$$
(13)

# A. Buck ZCS-VF Converter

From Fig. 2a, we note that:  $U_{ac} = U_o - U_g, U_{bc} = -U_g, I_a = -I_o, I_b = I_g - I_o$  (14) The key equations for the buck converter result:

$$T_{1} = \frac{1}{\omega_{r}} \cos^{-1} \left( -\frac{M}{2 - M} \right)$$
(15)

$$I_1 = -\frac{2U_g}{Z_r} \sqrt{1 - M}$$
(16)

$$T_2 = \frac{2}{\omega_r} \frac{\sqrt{1 - M}}{M}$$
(17)

$$F(M) = 1 - \frac{1}{2\pi} \cos^{-1} \left( \frac{M}{2 - M} \right) + \frac{\sqrt{1 - M}}{\pi M}$$
(18)

Note that the negative value for  $I_1$  results because of the reversed current in the buck converter respect to the directions used in the switching cell definition. The voltage conversion ratio, which is derived from  $I_o = -I_a$  and (13), is given by:

$$M^2 = \frac{R_{LN}}{\pi} f_{sN}$$
(19)

The plot of M versus the normalized switching frequency  $f_{sN}$  for different values of normalized load resistance  $R_{LN}$  is shown in Fig. 5. Again, all curves terminate on the maximum switching frequency curve given by (8) and (18). It is interesting to note that, since the voltage conversion ratio is proportional to the square root of the load resistance, the buck topology achieves an "automatic" unity power factor when used as ac/dc rectifiers, so that the input current is proportional to input voltage without any frequency modulation [7].



Fig. 5 - Voltage conversion ratio for the buck ZCS-VF converter at different normalized load resistance R<sub>LN</sub> values

### B. Buck-Boost ZCS-VF Converter

From Fig. 2c, we note that:

$$U_{ac} = -U_g, U_{bc} = -U_o - U_g, I_a = -I_g - I_o, I_b = -I_o$$
 (20)

Thus, the fundamental relations for the buck-boost converter are derived as:

$$T_{1} = \frac{1}{\omega_{r}} \cos^{-1} \left( -\frac{M}{2+M} \right)$$
(21)

$$I_1 = -\frac{2U_g}{Z_r}\sqrt{1+M}$$
(22)

$$T_2 = \frac{2}{\omega_r} \frac{\sqrt{1+M}}{M}$$
(23)

$$F(M) = 1 - \frac{1}{2\pi} \cos^{-1} \left( \frac{M}{2+M} \right) + \frac{\sqrt{1+M}}{\pi M}$$
(24)

Also for this topology the current direction is reversed, thus justifying the minus sign in (22). The voltage conversion ratio, which is derived from  $I_o = -I_b$  and (12), is given by:

$$\frac{M^2}{1+M} = \frac{R_{LN}}{\pi} f_{sN}$$
(25)

The control curves, i.e the plot of M versus the normalized switching frequency  $f_{sN}$  for different value of normalized load resistance  $R_{LN}$ , are reported in Fig. 6 together with the maximum switching frequency curve given by (8) and (24). Except for very low values of the normalized switching frequency, the voltage conversion ratio varies almost linearly with the switching frequency.



Fig. 6 - Voltage conversion ratio for the buck-boost ZCS-VF converter at different normalized load resistance  $R_{\rm LN}$  values

It is interesting to observe that the resonant capacitor  $C_a$  can have different connections without changing the converter behavior. For example, as far as the buck-boost converter is concerned, if the connection of  $C_a$  in the point **c** is moved to point **a**, the resulting topology becomes the same as that of the boost one with the exception of the output diode, which is inverted, and with the swap of the driving signals between switches  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ .

# **IV. DEVICE STRESSES**

This section describes device voltage and current stresses of the proposed ZCS-VF converter topologies. From the analysis of the boost converter reported in section II, we can observe that:

- the maximum S<sub>1</sub> voltage stress occurs at the end of the discharging phase for the switch and at the end of the powering phase for the series blocking diode;
- the maximum S<sub>2</sub> voltage stress occurs at the end of the powering phase for the switch and at the end of the discharging phase for the series blocking diode;
- the maximum D voltage stress occurs at the end of the discharging phase;
- the switch current stresses are proportional to the corresponding switch voltage stresses (through the characteristic impedance of the resonant tank);
- the diode current stress is given by the inductor current value at the end of the charging phase (current  $I_1$ ).

From the above information, voltage and current stresses for all topologies has been derived and summarized in Table I. Note that current stresses are proportional to the inverse of  $Z_r$ . This means that high voltage conversion ratios, which require low characteristic impedances  $Z_r$  (Fig. 4b), imply high switch current stresses.

Unfortunately, the calculated voltage stresses are only theoretical values, since the parasitic oscillations, that occur in a real converter between the resonant inductance L and the switch parasitic capacitance during the idle phase, increase the actual voltage stress and require a proper damping snubber.

TABLE I DEVICE VOLTAGE AND CURRENT STRESSES

		1		
	Topology	Voltage Stress		Current Stress
		Ûs	$\hat{U}_{D}$	
$\mathbf{S}_1$	Buck	$2 \cdot U_g - U_o$	Uo	$(2 \cdot U_g - U_o)/Z_r$
	Boost	Ug+Uo	Uo-Ug	$(U_g+U_o)/Z_r$
	Buck-boost	$2 \cdot U_g + U_o$	Uo	$(2 \cdot U_g + U_o)/Z_r$
<b>S</b> <sub>2</sub>	Buck	Ug	Ug	$U_g/Z_r$
	Boost	Uo	Uo	$U_o/Z_r$
	Buck-boost	Ug+Uo	Ug+Uo	$(U_g+U_o)/Z_r$
D	Buck	$2 \cdot U_g$		I <sub>1</sub>   (see (16))
	Boost	$2 \cdot U_o$		I <sub>1</sub>   (see (3))
	Buck-boost	$2 \cdot (U_g + U_o)$		$ I_1 $ (see (22))

#### V. SMALL SIGNAL MODEL

Control design for the proposed ZCS-VF converter family requires the knowledge of its dynamic behavior. To this purpose, a small-signal model is here derived starting from the general switching cell of Fig. 1. Perturbing the input and output average currents (12)-(13) under small-signal assumptions, the following equations have been derived:

$$\hat{\mathbf{i}}_{b} = \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{b}}{\partial \mathbf{U}_{bc}} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{bc} + \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{b}}{\partial \mathbf{f}_{s}} \hat{\mathbf{f}}_{s} + \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{b}}{\partial \mathbf{U}_{ac}} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{ac}$$
(26.a)  
$$= -\mathbf{g}_{o} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{bc} + \mathbf{k}_{o} \hat{\mathbf{f}}_{s} + \mathbf{g}_{f} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{ac}$$
(26.b)  
$$\hat{\mathbf{i}}_{a} = \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{a}}{\partial \mathbf{U}_{ac}} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{ac} + \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{a}}{\partial \mathbf{f}_{s}} \hat{\mathbf{f}}_{s} + \frac{\partial \mathbf{I}_{a}}{\partial \mathbf{U}_{bc}} \hat{\mathbf{u}}_{bc}$$
(26.b)

 $= g_i \hat{u}_{ac} + k_i f_s + g_r \hat{u}_{bc}$ 

which correspond to the circuit model shown in Fig. 7.



Fig. 7 - Small-signal model of the basic switching cell

The parameter expressions of model (26.a)-(26.b) are given by:

$$g_{o} = \frac{1}{r_{o}} = -\frac{\partial I_{b}}{\partial U_{bc}} = 2C_{a}f_{s}\left(\frac{U_{ac}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}}\right)^{2}$$
(27.a)

$$g_{f} = \frac{\partial I_{b}}{\partial U_{ac}} = 2C_{a}f_{s} \left(\frac{U_{bc}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}}\right)^{2}$$
(27.b)

$$k_{o} = \frac{\partial I_{b}}{\partial f_{s}} = 2C_{a} \left( \frac{U_{ac} U_{bc}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}} \right)$$
(27.c)

$$g_{i} = \frac{1}{r_{i}} = \frac{\partial I_{a}}{\partial U_{ac}} = 2C_{a}f_{s} \left(\frac{U_{bc}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}}\right)^{2}$$
(28.a)

$$g_{r} = \frac{\partial I_{a}}{\partial U_{bc}} = 2C_{a}f_{s}U_{bc}\frac{U_{bc} - 2U_{ac}}{(U_{bc} - U_{ac})^{2}}$$
(28.b)

$$k_{i} = \frac{\partial I_{a}}{\partial f_{s}} = 2C_{a} \left( \frac{U_{bc}^{2}}{U_{bc} - U_{ac}} \right)$$
(28.c)

These relations can than be applied to any of the basic topologies. For example, by applying the small-signal model to the boost converter of Fig. 2b, the parameters reported in Table II and the equivalent circuit of the output stage of Fig. 8 have been obtained. From Fig. 8, the transfer function between the control variable  $f_s$  and the output voltage has been derived as follows:

$$G_{c}(s) = \frac{\hat{u}_{o}(s)}{\hat{f}(s)} = k_{o} \frac{R_{p}}{1 + s R_{p} C}$$
(29)

where  $R_p = \frac{r_o R_L}{r_o + R_L} = R_L \frac{M-1}{M}$ . Using the expressions

reported in Table II we have obtained:

$$G_{c}(s) = \frac{\hat{u}_{o}(s)}{\hat{f}(s)} = \frac{2C_{a}R_{L}U_{g}}{1 + sR_{L}C\frac{M-1}{M}}$$
(31)

which is a simple first order transfer function, as usually obtained in converters operating in discontinuous mode.

 TABLE II

 SMALL-SIGNAL MODEL PARAMETERS OF THE BOOST CONVERTER

Input section	Output section
$g_i = \frac{1}{R_L} \frac{M^2}{M-1}$	$g_{o} = \frac{1}{R_{L}} \frac{1}{M-1}$
$g_{f} = \frac{M}{R_{L}} \frac{M-2}{M-1}$	$g_{f} = \frac{1}{R_{L}} \frac{M^{2}}{M-1}$
$k_i = 2C_a U_g \frac{M^2}{M-1}$	$k_o = 2C_aU_g \frac{M}{M-1}$



Fig. 8 - Output section of the boost small-signal model

# V. DESIGN OUTLINE

As an example, let us consider boost ZCS-VF converter described in the section II with the following specifications: minimum input voltage ( $U_{gmin}$ ), maximum input voltage ( $U_{gmax}$ ), output voltage ( $U_o$ ), minimum load resistance ( $R_{Lmin}$ ), and maximum switching frequency ( $f_{smax}$ ).

By using the specified maximum voltage conversion ratio and the minimum load resistance, the characteristic impedance  $Z_r$  is calculated from (10). Then, from (7.b), the resonance frequency  $f_r$  is found at minimum input voltage and load resistance. This choice allows to design the converter so that at the minimum input voltage and at the maximum output power it works at the limit between discontinuous and continuous mode. A small margin is needed in order to cope with the converter losses and in order to ensure enough dynamic capability during step load variations. From the definition of  $\omega_r = 2\pi f_r$  and  $Z_r$ , the values of the resonant components L and C<sub>a</sub> are easily derived. Finally, the output filter capacitor value is calculated in the usual manner by imposing the desired output voltage ripple at the switching frequency.

# VI. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

An experimental prototype was built and tested in order to verify the theoretical analysis. The converter specifications were:

minimum input voltage:	$\dots U_{gmin} = 24V$
maximum input voltage:	$U_{gmax} = 36V$
output voltage:	$U_{o} = 48V$
minimum load resistance:	$\dots R_{Lmin} = 50\Omega$
maximum switching frequency:.	$f_{smax} = 125 \text{kHz}$

The major converter parameters used in the prototype are: L=7.18 $\mu$ H, C<sub>a</sub> =141nF, C=100uF. These values has been obtained using the procedure outlined in section V; however, due to the low input voltage, a low efficiency is expected, so that a big safety margin was taken in order to meet the desired specifications.

Fig. 9 shows the resonant inductor current  $i_L$ , the resonant capacitor voltage  $u_{Cr}$  and  $S_2$  drain-source voltage during a switching period for the minimum input voltage and the nominal output power. Note that, the discharging phase when the inductor current is negative, was allocated just before the charging phase: this allowed to remove the series blocking diode of  $S_2$ , thus reducing the power loss during the discharging phase. The experimental waveforms agree quite well with the predicted ones except for the parasitic oscillations, already mentioned, during the idle phase: a  $R_d$ - $C_d$  snubber was used ( $R_d = 120\Omega$ ,  $C_d = 2nF$ ) in parallel to switch  $S_2$  in order to limit its voltage stress and damp the oscillations (the snubber dissipation is below 1W).

In Fig. 10 is reported the voltage conversion ratio M as a function of the switching frequency for three different load resistances. Note that the expected linear behavior is almost satisfied.

# VII. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper a new family of zero-current-switching variable-frequency dc-dc converters are presented. The zero current turn-on and turn-off reduce both switching losses and the electromagnetic noise emission. Compared to zero current-switching quasi-resonant converter family (ZCS-QRC), the proposed solution ensures soft-switching condition independently on load or input voltage variation at the expense of a large number of switches. The discontinuous operating mode and the variable switching frequency make the presented topology suitable for low-power applications or for high-power low-frequency applications where SCR's can be profitably used. Experimental results of a prototype based on the boost ZCS-VF topology confirm the theoretical expectations.



 $\begin{array}{l} \mbox{Fig. 9} - \mbox{Main converter waveforms in a switching period. From top to bottom:} \\ \mbox{inductor current } i_L (5A/div), \mbox{resonant capacitor voltage } u_{Cr} (40V/div), \mbox{drainsource voltage of switch } S_2 (20V/div) \end{array}$ 



Fig. 10 – Measured voltage conversion ratio as a function of the switching frequency for three different load resistances

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