Broadband Smart mmWave Front-End-Modules in Advanced FD-SOI with Adaptive-Biasing and Tuning of Distributed Antenna-Arrays

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Abstract-In this paper, we propose new correlation-aware realtime adaptive tuning of distributed antenna-arrays using innovative broadband physics-based RLC circuit synthesis. The resulting correlation-tuning solution combines software-based circuit-synthesis with hardware-based Smart-Control. The software circuit synthesis runs on advanced signal-processing resources. The hardware implementation of the adaptive antenna tuning exploits the Body-Biasing control and regulation available in FD-SOI technologies. Broadband (DC-40 GHz) SPDT switches, fabricated in 22 nm FD-SOI process from GLOBALFOUNDRIES, are proposed for integration with agile-tuners for real-time noise and load matching of distributed antenna-arrays in a varying stochastic electromagnetic environment. The SPDT switches are characterized, using on-wafer measurements in small and largesignal conditions, as a function of transistor back-gate bias, demonstrating performance improvements of 0.2dB in insertionloss, 2 dB in isolation, 1dB in P1dB and 4dB in IIP3. A Smart-Biasing-Module (SBM) is proposed demonstrating a wide range of bias control from 100pA to 300mA over ±8V with 24 bit resolution for adaptive-biasing control and regulation of RF and mmWave front-end-module building blocks.

Keywords—Smart Front-End-Modules, FD-SOI, Adaptive Body Biasing, 4-Terminal, Noise and Load-Matching, SPDT Switches.

I. INTRODUCTION

RF front-end-modules (FEMs) play a critical role in mobile devices since they are generally the block that consumes most of the power and therefore determines the energy-efficiency of the system [1]. As a consequence, the RF FEM tends to be the most non-linear part of the transmitter and also the most dominant stage in determining noise level, both of which may impact the quality of the communications. In transmit-mode, several techniques, including envelope tracking, Doherty, polar loop, and load-line-modulation provide efficiency improvements over classical class-AB amplifiers [2]. However, most of these efficiency improvement techniques require adaptive regulation loops to meet challenging linearity and power consumption requirements. In the receive path, multiple signal paths are typically used, combined with filter banks, to overcome the challenges associated with a single broadband RF signal path that would meet receiver sensitivity and noise-level requirements. Implementation of re-configurable and adaptive RF FEMs is expected to drive cost and size reduction with the benefit of a limited number of parallel RF signal paths. Broadband switches on high resistive silicon (HRS) substrate with low-loss, high isolation performance and extremely low harmonic distortion will enable next generation re-configurable FEMs. Such re-configurability requires environment awareness in order to properly compensate for stochastic changes affecting the efficiency and quality of the wireless link in real-time.



Fig. 1. (a) mm-Wave Front-End-Module with (b) Smart Biasing regulation integrated with advanced Signal-Processing and Distributed Antenna-Array, (c) Smart-Biasing Control Module.

These stochastic changes, resulting from fluctuations in the environmental electromagnetic (EM) properties, strongly affect the reflection coefficient of antenna elements while the FEMs are generally optimized for a specific load-impedance.

In this paper, a new correlation-aware real-time adaptive tuning of distributed antenna-arrays (see Fig. 1) is proposed using innovative physics-based RLC circuit synthesis combined with *Smart-Biasing* control and regulation [3-4]. The efficiency of the RLC synthesis solution is demonstrated in a broad frequency range from DC to 40 GHz, showing excellent agreement between modeling and measurement results. The extracted RLC circuit elements can be cast in the form of canonical eigen-state representations for linking EM-based parameters (*impedance, noise, correlation, radiation*) to signalprocessing brought close to the FEM RF channels.

II. MAIN RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Broadband Correlation-aware RLC Synthesis Solution

We introduce a *correlation-aware* RLC synthesis solution for linking electromagnetic theory-based fundamental analysis of wireless communication systems to classical circuit-theory based on Kirchhoff laws, properly accounting for impedance matching, interference and coupling between noisy radiating elements. Organically bridging the gap between the EMdescription of electric and magnetic fields and SPICE-netlist representation of induced currents and voltages will open new possibilities in communication system design for properly combining Information-Signal Theory (IT) and Physical-Information Theory (PT) into a unified approach. The Shannon–McMillan–Breiman theorem [5] provides a formal basis for such unified approach where Shannon's entropy can be directly related to Boltzmann's entropy for accurate extraction of key parameters characterizing the quality of RF wireless systems such as SNR, channel capacity, data rate and correlation between antennas in MIMO applications. Such approach will be facilitated by the emergence of advanced FDSOI technologies, bringing new operational attributes with transistors represented by four effective terminals: source, drain, gate, and body - the volume underneath the conduction channel. By regulating a voltage bias on this fourth terminal, the transistor's threshold voltage can be accurately controlled. The resulting adaptive-body-biasing (ABB) creates new paradigms for the convergence of analog and digital design solutions with improved RF performance and reduced energy consumption and process spread (see Fig. 2(a),(b)).



Fig. 2. Design performances in terms of speed and spread control resulting from Adaptive-Body-Biasing (*VPW and VNW referring to p/n wells*) in advanced FDSOI Technologies.

The proposed *correlation-aware* RLC synthesis solution is built using eigen-states EM-based modal representation accounting for distributed floating local ground references, in accordance with the *four-terminal* representation of transistors in FDSOI technologies. The ability of the proposed solution to map physical design parameters into a broadband physicsbased RLC equivalent circuit model is demonstrated using parameterizable CPW matching transmission lines accounting for harmonic distortions. The resulting RLC synthesis enables Q-controllable components with compact broadband equivalent circuit representation fully scalable with respect to the device geometry and architecture with the following attributes:

- Meaningful interpretation of synthesized RLC elements.
- Broadband accuracy with minimal complexity.
- Preservation of passivity and causality.



Fig. 3. Broadband power-dependent RLC-synthesis (a) of matching-networks for smart-antenna tuning in SOI technologies. RLC-synthesis versus measurement for (b) S11-magnitude, (c) S11-phase, (d) S21-magnitude, and (e) S21-phase.

Table I. Eigen-State Operators and Associated RLC-Synthesis.



		[11] 2011	[1] 20	2] 14	[13] 2017	[14] 2017	[15] 2018	[16] 2019	This Work 2020	
Technology	-	45-RFSOI	180nn	n SOI	130nm SOI	40nm SOI	45-RFSOI	22FDX	22FDX	
RonCoff	[fs]	/	/		/	/	90	98	98	
Substrate		13.5 Ωcm	$> 1 \text{ k}\Omega \text{cm}$		$> 1 \text{ k}\Omega \text{cm}$	/	$> 1 \text{ k}\Omega \text{cm}$	10 Ωcm	10 Ωcm	
Switch Type		SPDT	SPDT		SPDT	SPDT	SPDT	SPDT	SPDT	
Topology		Series-Shunt with matching	Series- with ma	Shunt atching	Series-Shunt with matching	Series-Shunt	Series-Shunt	Transform- based	Series- Shunt with matching	Series- Shunt
Band	[GHz]	DC-60	DC-40		DC-50	DC-50	DC-50	26.5-29.5	DC-40	
IL (@ 28 GHz)	[dB]	1.4	1.1	2.1	1.0	1.4	0.7	1.6	1.66	2.29
ISO (@ 28 GHz)	[dB]	30	16.5	17.5	32	33	24	22	33.4	
P1dB	[dBm]	7.1	11	15	14	21	29.5	/	20.5	
IIP3	[dBm]	18.2	25.8	/	27	/	46	/	38.5	
Switching time	[ns]	0.35	/	/	10	/	/	/	0.25	
Size	[10 ⁻³ mm ²]	39	25	/	40	/	4	150	34	1.8

Table II. State-of-the-art mm-wave SPDT modules in SOI technologies.

The RLC synthesis derived in Table-I, based on eigen-states represented in Fig. 3(a), incorporates combined thermal and power-dependent effects. Thermal noise in strongly coupled arrays can be correlated. In [6], a method is proposed for the analysis of this thermal noise correlation and for the estimation of its effect on the system noise temperature, which becomes dependent on scan angle. It is observed that the correlated part of the noise can play a significant role in the *mutual-information* of lossy antenna array systems.



Fig.4 Harmonic distortion of SOI substrates for RF and mmWave applications (a) Measured H2 compared to simulation results, (b) H3 [8].

In Fig. 4(a) and 4(b) power-dependent effects of harmonic distortions are shown for passive interconnects as building blocks of feeding and matching networks. In Fig.4(a), the

measured second harmonics (H2) are properly captured by the proposed nonlinear model developed based on physical considerations. In Fig. 4(b), the measured third harmonic (H3) components at the output port of CPW and TFMS lines at 0-V DC bias are plotted versus the output power at the fundamental (H1). The harmonic components obtained from the measurement of a thru-line on a standard calibration alumina substrate are reported in Fig. 4(b), highlighting the nonlinearity floor levels of the measurement setup [7-9]. TFMS lines with shielding from the silicon substrate show the lowest level of harmonic distortion.

B. Adaptive-Body-Biasing for Smart-Front-End-Modules

22FDX/12FDX FD-SOI is seen as a driving technology for low power RF SOCs and ASICs suitable for unifying *Smart-IoT* and *Cognitive mmWave* applications with the following benefits:

- Very low FD-SOI FET capacitance for ultra-broadband mmWave circuits.
- Stacked SOI FETs for high output power (Pout) and poweradded efficiency (PAE) power amplifier (PA), switch [9-10], low-noise amplifier (LNA) integration with TRX; low PA self-heating (20 nm-thick BOX).
- Back-gate knob for performance tuning over temperature, process and aging.
- Allows wide threshold voltage (V_{th}) adjustment to accommodate process, voltage and temperature (PVT) variations.
- Can be used to tune RF performance for the targeted use conditions.
- Ultra-low power and area for analog-to-digital (ADC) or digital-to-analog (DAC) converters (<10 fJ/conv).
- High density (>5M gates/mm²), high performance, ultralow power digital signal processing (DSP) for digital filtering and high speed serializer/deserializer. Such capability opens new avenues for bringing intelligence and cognition to RF and FEMs using advanced signalprocessing.

Fully-Depleted (FD) SOI with ultra-thin-body and BOX (UTBB) is the most advanced flavor of SOI today. This versatile technology offers high-performance LNAs and PAs, along with low loss switches [9-10], towards full monolithic integration of mm-wave FEMs. The unique architecture of FD-SOI devices incorporates a back-gate beneath the BOX, which can be biased to further boost performance. Ultra-wideband SPDT switches (targeting Ka-band) have been fabricated using 22 nm FD-SOI technology (22FDX [®]) from GLOBALFOUNDRIES, featuring three different types of back-gate configurations offered in the foundry library. The impact of the three types of FD-SOI back-gate on the SPDT figures of merit (FoMs) is analyzed, having in mind the use of the Smart-Biasing-Module (SBM) in future designs.

The SPDT switches were designed based on a series-shunt topology, as shown in Fig. 4, for wideband functionality. The designs were made to achieve the lowest possible insertionloss (IL) while maintaining an isolation (ISO) of 30 dB at 28 GHz. A stack of three transistors was used in each branch targeting 20 dBm of input power 1-dB compression point. NFET devices with 20 nm nominal gate length were used to implement the SPDTs.



Fig. 5. Schematic of the SPDT switches with back-gate biasing control.

Three SPDTs were fabricated based on the three types of transistors: regular-Vth (RVT), super-low-Vth (SLVT) and no back-gate implant (BFMOAT), as shown in Fig. 5. The sizes chosen to achieve these specs are W_{series} of 72 μ m and W_{shunt} of 29.4 µm. The bias resistors at the gate and back-gate terminals are 9.20 k Ω , and the resistors in parallel with the FETs are 2.45 k Ω . SPDTs with and without matching circuits are considered in this work. To reduce return loss, inductors of 150 pH can be added as series elements at all three ports. Table-II benchmarks our results against state-of-the-art mmwave SPDT modules in SOI from [11-16] and shows our designs to be competitive. It also highlights that by forgoing the inductor matching circuits, a drastic reduction in SPDT area is achievable at the price of a degraded IL (2.29 dB at 28 GHz). We show that conventional-well devices (Fig. 6) with regular-V_{th} (RVT) and flipped-well devices with superlow-V_{th} (SLVT) make for the best switches below 20 GHz, thanks to the back-gate bias improving device channel resistance and reducing insertion-loss. We also show how the back-gate bias can be used to boost large-signal FoMs, such as P1dB and IIP3.



Fig. 6. Simple representation of the three different flavors (RVT, SLVT, BFMOAT) of UTBB-FD-SOI devices considered for the implementation of the mm-wave SPDT switches. The source (S), drain (D), gate (G) and back-gate (BG) terminals are depicted.

The third device, named BFMOAT, lacks the back-gate contact, as the substrate region directly beneath the BOX is specially treated in order to reduce substrate parasitics. Thanks to this, we were able to confirm that these devices are the best choice for switch applications above 40 GHz.

Further improvements of SPDT switches in terms of their DC and RF performance [17-30], accounting for radiation effects, will benefit the following enablers [31-34]:

- Unifying modeling & measurement through converging complementarities in time and frequency-domains [31].
- Qualifying industrial over-the-air (OTA) test solutions handling energy-based metrics [33].
- Enabling smart chip-package-PCB-antenna co-design solutions using advanced FD-SOI RFIC technologies [34].

III. CONCLUSION

In this paper, new correlation-aware real-time adaptive tuning of front-end-modules (FEMs) integrated with distributed antennas, using innovative broadband power-level dependent physics-based RLC circuit synthesis compliant with four-terminal devices, was proposed. The resulting Smart-Tuning solution, in operating the convergence of Smart-IoT and Cognitive-mmWave applications, exploits the adaptive-biasing control available in FD-SOI technologies. Studies of its effects on the RF performance of integrated SPDT switches fabricated in 22 nm FD-SOI technology have demonstrated improvement in key RF parameters. Beyond standard figures of merit used for qualifying SPDT switches, new requirements related with time and frequency domain correlation will lead to new metrics accounting for radiation effects (e.g., non-reflective smart-loading) and powerdependent harmonic signatures (e.g., TDD operation). A smart-biasing-module (SBM) has been developed and experimentally evaluated demonstrating a wide range of bias control from 100pA to 300mA over $\pm 8V$ with 24 bit resolution. Smart-control and regulation in FEMs will open new possibilities for merging Information-Signal Theory (IT) and Physical-Information Theory (PT) into a unified approach. This will foster a wide range of applications in mobile communications with smart devices and systems including machine-learning and artificial-intelligence brought to FEMs operating at RF, mmWave and optical frequencies [35-36].

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