Analysis of Alternating Current Limiter Circuit for Circuit Protection and Power Management

K. Manimaran
Dept of Computer Science and Business System
Rajalakshmi Institute of Technology

Dr. Maheswari Raja
Dean Innovations
Rajalakshmi Institute of Technology

Abstract

This paper examines the design, operation, and applications of an alternating current (AC) limiter circuit, a critical component in protecting electronic devices from overcurrent damage. An AC limiter ensures that current remains within a predefined threshold, providing reliable overcurrent protection in systems prone to sudden current surges. The study explores various AC limiter configurations, focusing on both passive and active component designs, and discusses their effectiveness, advantages, and limitations. Through simulations conducted in eSim software, the paper provides an interactive analysis of current-limiting behavior under different load conditions, offering insights into how AC limiters maintain stable performance and safeguard sensitive components. This work highlights the importance of AC limiters in power management and circuit protection, demonstrating their role in enhancing the reliability and longevity of electronic systems

Keywords: Current Thresholding, Current Limiting Circuit

I. INTRODUCTION

An AC current limiter circuit is designed to protect electronic components from excessive current flow, which can lead to overheating, damage, or failure. This circuit serves as a safeguard by limiting the amount of alternating current that can pass through to a load, ensuring that the current remains within safe operational parameters. By employing various techniques, such as using resistors, transistors, or specialized ICs, an AC current limiter effectively regulates the current flowing through the circuit without significantly affecting the voltage waveform. Its primary function is to prevent overcurrent conditions that can arise due to faults or load variations, making it essential in power supply systems, motor control, and applications where current regulation is critical. By maintaining current at predetermined levels, the AC current limiter enhances the reliability and longevity of electronic devices, ensuring consistent performance even in fluctuating conditions.

II. PURPOSE OF LIMITING CURRENT

Limiting current serves several important purposes in electrical and electronic circuits:

- Protection of Components: Excessive current in AC systems can cause overheating and damage to electronic components, such as resistors, capacitors, transformers, and integrated circuits. Current limiting ensures that components operate within their safe limits, prolonging their lifespan.

- Preventing Short Circuits: In the event of a short circuit, the AC current can spike dramatically, potentially leading to catastrophic failures. A current limiter can restrict this surge, protecting both the circuit and connected devices.

- Safety: Current limiters are essential for ensuring user safety in electronic devices, especially in applications where high currents are involved, such as HVAC systems, industrial machinery, and power distribution systems.

III. WORKING PRINCIPLE

The working principle of an AC current limiter revolves around controlling the amount of current flowing through a circuit to prevent damage to components and maintain safe operating conditions. Here are the key elements of how an AC current limiter functions:

1. Sensing Current: The current limiter typically includes a sensing mechanism to monitor the actual current flowing through the AC circuit. This can be achieved using a current transformer, current sensor IC, or a Hall Effect sensor. The sensed current is compared to a predefined threshold.

2. Control Mechanism: Once the current exceeds the set threshold, the control mechanism intervenes to limit the flow. This can involve several methods:

- Resistive Limiting: Adding a series resistor that adjusts its impedance when excessive current is detected. This increases the voltage drop across the resistor, reducing the current flowing to the load.
- Active Limiting: Using transistors and thyristors that actively regulate current flow. When the sensed current exceeds the threshold, the control circuit adjusts the power phase angle to limit current flow in the AC cycle.
- Feedback Mechanism: In some designs, feedback from the output is used to adjust the impedance or control elements dynamically, ensuring the current stays within safe limits.

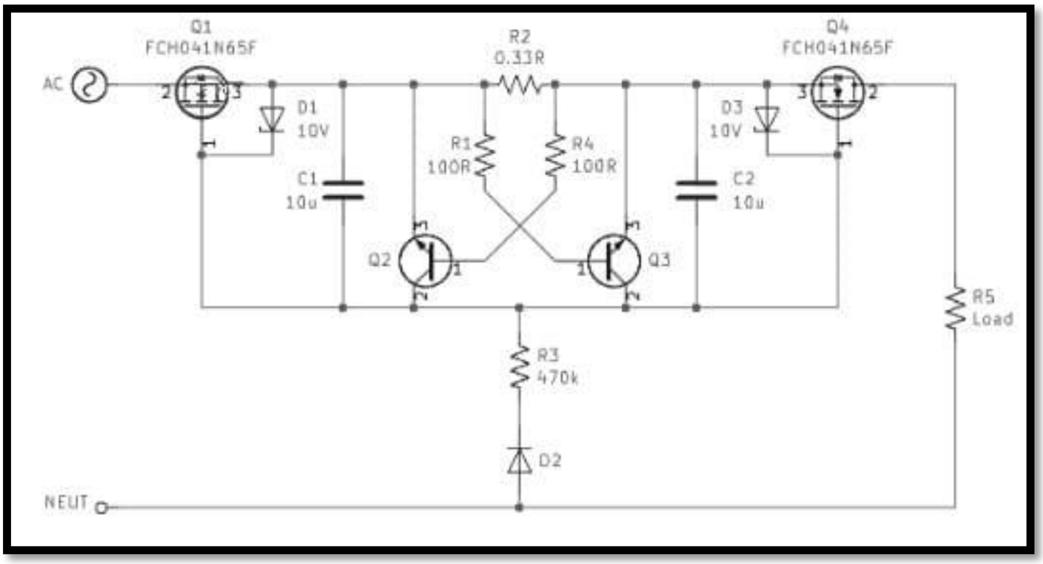
3. Cut-off Action: In more advanced designs, if the current exceeds the limit significantly or for an extended duration, the circuit may enter a protection mode, completely shutting off the output or reducing the current to a safe level until conditions normalize.

4. Hysteresis: Many current limiters incorporate hysteresis to prevent rapid on-off cycling around the current limit threshold. This feature helps to stabilize the circuit and avoid unnecessary interruptions.

5. Reset Mechanism: Once the overcurrent condition is resolved (e.g., the load is reduced or the fault is cleared), the current limiter allows the current to return to normal levels, either automatically or via a manual reset mechanism.

This AC current limiting approach is crucial for maintaining stable and safe operation in AC systems, safeguarding equipment, and ensuring continuity in performance.

CIRCUIT DIAGRAM



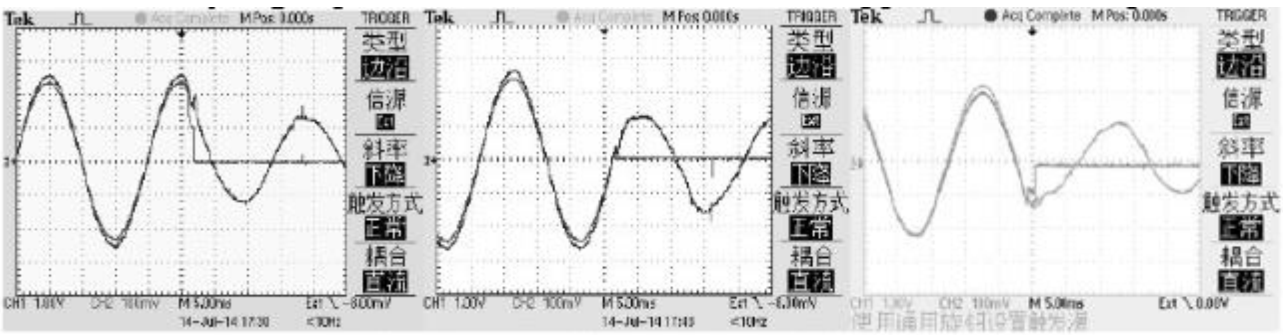


Fig. 1: AC current limiter for inrush current limiting

The AC current limiter circuit for inrush current limiting uses a transistor (MOSFET) and a sense resistor to regulate current flow to a load. In this design, a sense resistor is placed in series with the load to monitor the load current. The voltage drop across this resistor is compared to a reference voltage set by a voltage divider or other passive components. When the inrush current exceeds the desired limit, the voltage across the sense resistor triggers the transistor, which then reduces or limits the current to the load.

In AC circuits, this setup effectively prevents excessive inrush currents, which often occur when devices are powered on or when large capacitive loads are charged. By limiting the inrush current, the circuit protects the load from potential damage due to current surges without the need for a complex control circuit or operational amplifier. This simple and efficient design enhances the safety and reliability of AC-powered devices by controlling initial current spikes while maintaining normal operation during steady-state conditions.

IV. PROPOSED SYSTEM

The proposed system introduces an AC Current Limiter circuit implemented using eSim software. This circuit is designed to demonstrate the functionality of inrush current regulation and protection, which is essential in power electronics. The AC current limiter works by restricting the current flow to a safe level, preventing excessive inrush current that could damage sensitive components in a circuit. It ensures reliable operation and protects against overcurrent conditions during startup or sudden load changes, making it crucial for applications where circuit safety, longevity, and stable current supply are critical.

eSIM CIRCUIT

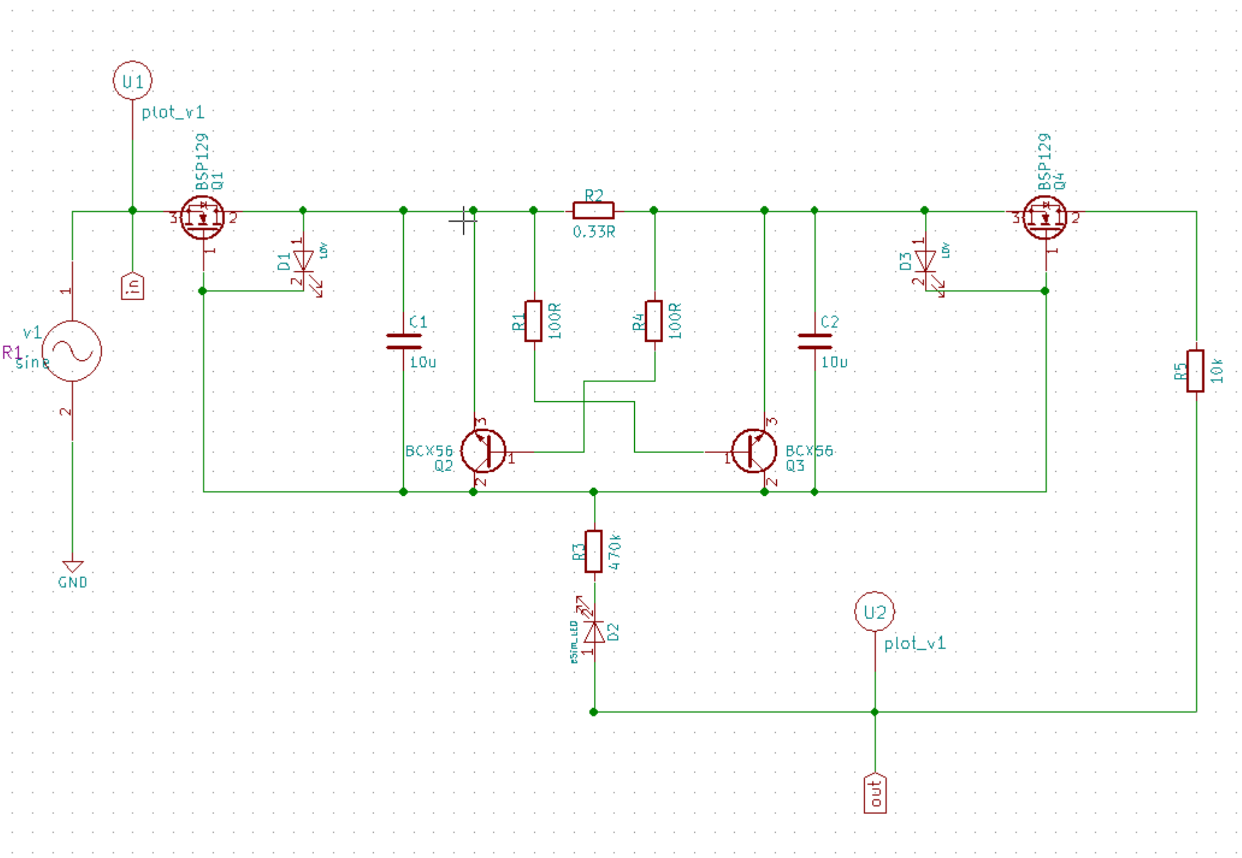


Fig. 3: Alternate Current Limiter Circuit in eSIM

Figure 3 presents the circuit diagram of an AC Current Limiter designed within the eSim software environment. Key components include a MOSFET acting as the current-controlling element, resistors setting the inrush current limit threshold, and a sensing resistor used to monitor the current flow. The MOSFET operates in conjunction with the sensing resistor to regulate the current: when the inrush current exceeds the predefined threshold, the voltage across the sensing resistor increases, triggering the MOSFET to limit or reduce the current flow. This configuration ensures that the inrush current stays within safe limits, protecting the circuit from overcurrent conditions during startup or sudden load changes and demonstrating its effectiveness in providing reliable current regulation in power-sensitive applications.

OUTPUT WAVEFORM

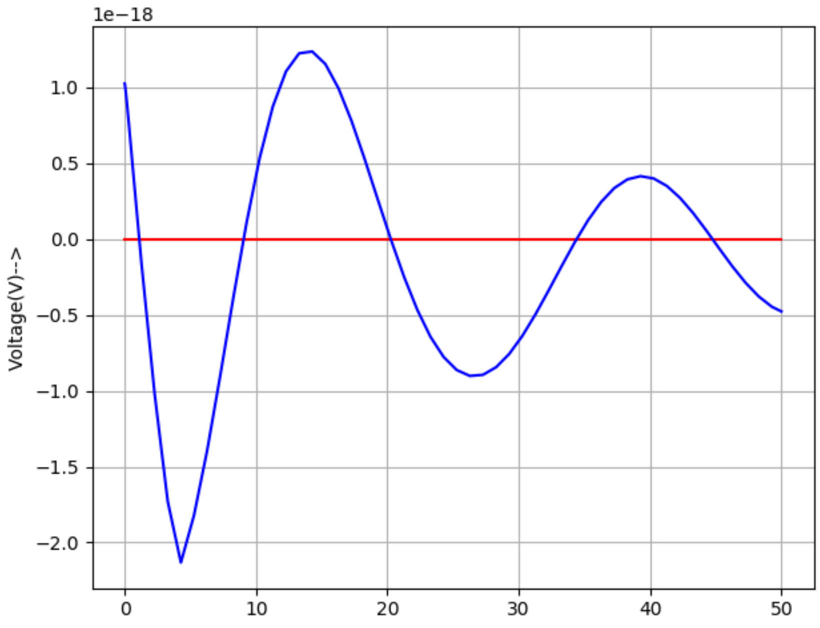


Fig. 4: Output Waveform Alternate Current Limiter Circuit in eSim

Figure 4 showcases the output waveform of the Alternate Current Limiter circuit simulated using eSim software. The graph displays the voltage behavior in an AC current limiter circuit over time. The oscillatory waveform observed in the blue line suggests the presence of an inrush current that initially fluctuates before gradually stabilizing. The waveform oscillates around the baseline, represented by the red line at zero volts, which indicates the circuit's response to inrush current conditions and subsequent damping as the current limiter regulates the flow.

Key observations from the graph:

1. **Initial Surge**: There is a noticeable spike at the beginning, indicating an initial inrush current.
2. **Damping Effect**: The oscillations decrease over time, showing that the AC current limiter effectively dampens the initial inrush and gradually brings the current within safe limits.
3. **Stable Regulation**: Toward the end of the graph, the waveform approaches a more stable state, indicating successful limitation of the inrush current.

In summary, this graph shows that an AC current limiter allows the voltage to oscillate initially due to the inrush current. As the current limiter engages, it gradually reduces the amplitude of these oscillations, effectively limiting the inrush current to protect the circuit. After an initial surge, the limiter stabilizes the voltage fluctuations, preventing excessive current and ensuring safe, controlled power flow within the circuit. This behavior demonstrates the AC current limiter's effectiveness in protecting against inrush currents, enhancing the stability and safety of AC-powered systems.

Appilications of AC current limiter

1. **Motor Protection**: Prevents damage from inrush currents and overloads, extending motor life and avoiding overheating.
2. **Power Supplies**: Protects sensitive components by limiting current, reducing the risk of short-circuits and overloads.
3. **Lighting Systems**: Manages surges in high-intensity discharge lamps or LEDs, preventing damage from current fluctuations.
4. **Household Appliances**: Safeguards devices like air conditioners and refrigerators against electrical surges, ensuring safe operation.
5. **Industrial Equipment**: Prevents damage in heavy machinery, such as pumps and welding machines, by limiting current during high-demand operations.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the design and simulation of an AC Current Limiter circuit using eSim provided valuable insights into its essential role in power electronics. By controlling current within safe limits, the AC current limiter protects circuits from potential damage and ensures reliable operation under varying load conditions. The simulation in eSim allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the current limiter's performance, demonstrating its effectiveness in maintaining stable output and preventing excessive current flow. This study reinforces the importance of AC current limiters in safeguarding electronic components, particularly in applications where fluctuating current can lead to equipment failure or safety risks.

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