Development of natural polymer/metal oxide nanocomposite reinforced with graphene oxide for optoelectronic applications

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ABSTRACT

Nanocomposite natural polymer/metal oxide (NP/MO) is an attractive new technology for numerous applications as sensors, coatings, electronic devices, adhesives and optical circuits. NP includes cellulose Cel, chitosan Cs and sodium alginate NaAlg while MO are ZnO and CuO. Furthermore, modification of NP/MO with graphene oxide (GO) increases efficiency and stability of NP/MO in all its applications and fields. Theoretical calculations using density functional theory (DFT) were conducted to study the effect of using GO on electronic properties and thermal stability of NP/MO. Total dipole moment (TDM), HOMO/LUMO band gap energy (ΔE) and molecular electrostatic potential (MESP) were computed for the interaction of GO with NP/MO at B3LYP/LANL2DZ. Moreover, QSAR descriptors were also calculated for the same interactions. It was found that GO/NP/MO structure is auspicious for new materials with the efficient expense, more stable (physically and chemically), thermally stability and more sensitive, particularly GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO, while GO/Nav Alg/MO did not make significant changes.

1. Introduction

Polysaccharides are natural compounds extracted from natural resources. For example, Cel, Cs and NaAlg have free amino and hydroxyl groups capable of chelating metal ions, and their lone pairs of electrons are easily used to coordinate bonding with surrounding structures (Crawford 1981). Cel is described chemically as β 1,4-linked d-glucose rings (Lefebvre and Gray 2005). It has many important properties as it is biocompatible, recyclable, biodegradable and renewable polysaccharides which make it significant in several applications (Udpegraff 1969; Dufresne 2008, 2013). Also, Nano cellulose isolated from Cel reveals a remarkable increase in Cel properties (Ashrafì and Azadi 2015). Another polysaccharide polymer which has nearly similar characteristics of other polysaccharides is Cs. Cs chemical structure is a co-polymer of N-glucosa, hd. ‘k, jl. mine and N-acetyl-glucosamine linked by β-(1’4)-glycosidic bonds which is a derivative of the N-acetylation of chitin in hot alkaline media (Saboktakan et al. 2011; Sahariah and Másson 2017). It has also been extensively changed chemically, such modifications allow it to fulfill different biological and medical needs according to the active functional groups distinctive to it (Rioux et al. 2007; Lin et al. 2016; El et al. 2018; Yu et al. 2019). Similarly, NaAlg is a carbohydrate biopolymer with the chemical formula (C6H17Na1/2O6)n, derived from brown algae, which serves in a broad variety of applications with special properties (Gomez et al. 2009; Kovalenko et al. 2011; Jmiai et al. 2018; Laffleur and Röttges 2019).

Organic/inorganic composite structures may also give an attractive performance by incorporating the advantages of organic and inorganic products into successful electronic devices (Kazi and Yamamoto 2019). Nanocomposites are promising in various applications and fields such as sensors, coatings, microelectronic processing, optical integrated circuits and adhesives (Wang et al. 2019). It became known that nanocomposites would find useful applications in areas such as actuators, sensors, fuel cell capacitors and self-regulating heaters (Arena et al. 2017). The synthesis of Cel/ZnO hybrid nanocomposite has also enhanced UV sensing properties, various applications as a photocatalyst, medicine and biology (Hashim et al. 2019; Ibrahim et al. 2019a; Mun et al. 2017; Vanitjinda et al. 2019). Moreover, an easy-to-construct technique that has demonstrated excellent sound-adsorption, mechanical and flame-retardant enhancement of Cel-based composite aerogels is through the introduction of aluminium hydroxide nanoparticles (AH NPs) into Cel gels by the sol-gel process. This Cel nanocomposite gives a future promising applications as green engineering materials (Khalid et al. 2017).
Furthermore, a novel X-ray shielding was achieved with BaSO4/Cel nanocomposite membrane (Lefatse et al. 2017). Cs nano-metallic oxide composite is one of the least exploited materials for electrical application (He et al. 2018). Cs/ZnO nanocomposite enhances the dielectric properties, mechanical properties and thermal stability. Cs/ZnO nanocomposite film results showed that the values of both conductivity and dielectric constant were increased after the addition of nano ZnO (Jiang et al. 2019).

Electrical, optical and mechanical properties of Cs/GNP and Cs/MWCNT biocomposite films have been greatly enhanced, qualifying them to be applied for food processing, ultraviolet safety and biomedical applications that the biological activity increasing with increase nano filler (Marroquin et al. 2013). GO/Cs composite film could be an excellent proton-conducting electrolyte with a high specific capacity and used to manufacture multi-gate electrical double-layer transistors (Rahman et al. 2018). GO/Cs/NMO composite is an opportunity and challenge for realistic applications in the area of sensing, catalysis and energy storage (Feng et al. 2016; Mergen et al. 2020). In order to improve mechanical strength and ultraviolet shielding properties, GO was integrated as a functional nanofiller into a NaAlg matrix to form a composite film using a solvent-casting process (Majidi et al. 2020).

Theoretical calculations using molecular dynamics, termed molecular modeling, became nowadays an effective tool for studying nanomaterials (Jena et al. 2020; Hu et al., 2016; Bayoumy et al. 2018; Fahmy et al. 2020; Ibrahim et al. 2019b). Studying chemical, physical and electronic properties of several systems was carried out using different levels and theories of molecular modeling (Abdel-Bary et al. 2020; Badry et al. 2019; Bayoumy et al. 2019b; Ibrahim and Mahmoud 2009; Bayoumy et al. 2019a). Molecular modeling TDM, ∆E, and MESP parameters are important to study polymeric systems as synthetic and/or natural and their polymer nanocomposite matrices (Politzer et al. 1985; Ibrahim and Elhaes 2005; Sahin et al. 2015; Refaat et al. 2019; Ezzat et al. 2019; Abdelsalam et al. 2019).

Physical and electronic properties could be studied to investigate the reactivity of considered structure (Frisch et al. 2010; Becke 1993; Lee et al. 1988; Miehlich et al. 1989; Abdelsalam et al. 2018b). According to quantum mechanics, there is another theoretical calculation that is used to study the molecular activity which is correlated with molecular modeling, and is called QSAR. QSAR calculations are used to study biological activity and physicochemical properties of the chemical molecules, and is used in engineering, chemical and biological sciences (Abdelsalam et al. 2018a; Hansch and Leo 1995).

QSAR descriptors that are used for calculations give various properties such as structural, chemical and physical properties for studied molecules. In addition, there is a variety of common descriptors, such as those describing electronic effects within the molecules and the accordance of lipophilicity (Welsh et al. 2007; Elhaes et al. 2012).

The electronic properties of NP such as Cel, Cs and NaAlg is supposed to be enhanced is after composite formation with ZnO and/or CuO. Based on the above considerations, DFT calculations were carried out to study the impact of GO on the electronic properties and thermal stability of some polysaccharide/metal oxides NP/MO nanocomposite. For each structure the total dipole moment TDM, band gap energy ∆E and molecular electrostatic potential MESP were calculated at B3LYP/LANL2DZ. Thne some QSAR descriptors have also been determined for the same structures.

2. Computational details

Model structures were built for the natural polymer such as Cel, Cs and NaAlg as well as their adsorb state interaction with metal oxides (ZnO and CuO) through oxygen atom O. Further models were built for studying the effect of GO on NP interacted with MO forming nanocomposite. DFT was applied for postulated structures calculated at B3LYP level with a LANL2DZ basis set. Electronic properties were studied for all structures by calculating TDM and ∆E at the same level of theory. Another important parameter for the postulated structures electronic properties study is MESP. MESP was also computed for all structures using the same level of theory. QSAR thermodynamic properties were also computed for the postulated structures at PM6 level. All calculations were computed using the software at Spectroscopy Department, Physics Division, National Research Centre, NRC.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Model structure and electronic properties

NP represented by Cel, Cs and NaAlg to investigate the transformation occur in electronic properties of NP in the presence of MO, then studying the effect of GO on NP/MO electronic properties. The postulated structures were divided into three groups. The first group is supposed to represent adsorption Cel interaction with MO such as ZnO and CuO through O atom and GO adsorption with Cel/MO composite. The second group represents adsorption Cs interaction with MO such as ZnO and CuO through O atom and GO adsorption with Cs/MO composite. The third group represents adsorption NaAlg interaction with MO such as ZnO and CuO through
O atom and GO adsorption with NaAlg/MO composite. DFT was used for the postulated structures and calculated at B3LYP level with a LANL2DZ basis set. By measuring TDM and ∆E at the same level of theory, electronic properties were studied for all structures. Figure 1 represents optimised structure for base materials and ∆E as Cel, Cs, NaAlg and GO.

For Cel, Cs, NaAlg and GO-based materials, the distribution of molecular orbitals tends to be homogeneous around the molecule. Table 1 describes TDM and ∆E energy for Cel, Cs, NaAlg and GO-based materials. For Cel, TDM were recorded at 2.644 Debye and 13.621 eV for ∆E. Furthermore, 4.094 Debye and 2.571 eV were registered for Cs TDM for ∆E respectively. In addition, 16.846 Debye and 0.366 eV respectively were registered for TDM and ∆E respectively in the case of NaAlg. Finally, 2.711 Debye and 0.450 eV were registered for TDM and ∆E of GO.

### 3.2. Cel/MO and GO/Cel/MO

The first group is expected to reflect adsorption Cel interaction with ZnO and CuO via the O atom and GO adsorption with Cel/MO composite. Optimised structure and ∆E for the supposed structures were illustrated in Figure 2.

![Figure 1. Base materials optimised structure and ∆E for (a) Cellulose, (b) Chitosan, (c) Sodium alginate and (d) Graphene oxide.](image-url)
Table 1. Optimised TDM (Debye) and ∆E (eV) using B3LYP/LANL2DZ for Cel, Cs, NaAlg and GO.

| Structure | TDM  | ∆E   |
|-----------|------|------|
| Cel       | 2.644| 13.621|
| Cs        | 4.094| 2.571|
| NaAlg     | 16.846| 0.366|
| GO        | 2.711| 0.450|

Table 2 demonstrates the TDM and ∆E variation for Cel group. For Cel/MO, TDM increased from 2.644 Debye for Cel only to 15.787 and 24.005 Debye for Cel/OZn and Cel/OCu, while ∆E decreased from 13.621 eV to 0.278 and 0.287 eV, respectively. It was noticed in the case of studying the impact of GO on the Cel that TDM was increased to 28.524 Debye and ∆E decreased to 0.360 eV, but for GO/Cel/MO, TDM changed to 36.766 and 20.895 Debye, and ∆E also changed to 0.350 and 0.246 eV for GO/Cel/OZn and GO/Cel/OCu, respectively. From all data of Cel group, GO/Cel/OCu recorded a significant enhancement in its electrical properties.

3.3. Cs/MO and GO/Cs/MO

Similarly, the Cs group is supposed to represent electrostatic Cs interaction with ZnO and CuO via the O atom and GO electrostatic interaction with Cs/MO composite. Table 3 shows the TDM and ∆E variation for Cs group. Optimised configurations and energy difference of ∆E for the proposed structures are shown in Figure 3. TDM of Cs/MO increased to 15.392 and 18.524 Debye, while ∆E decreased to 0.357 and 0.385 eV for Cs/OZn and Cs/OCu, respectively. While investigating the effect of GO on Cs, it was observed that the TDM was
increased to 36.824 Debye and ∆E decreased to 0.347 eV. GO/Cs/MO TDM improved to 34.850 and 17.424 Debye and ∆E also adjusted to 0.266 and 0.294 eV corresponding to GO/Cs/OZn and GO/Cs/OCu, respectively. A major improvement in electrical properties was reported for GO/Cs/OZn of Cs group.

### 3.4. NaAlg/MO and GO/NaAlg/MO

Finally, the NaAlg group is supposed to reflect the electrostatic interaction of NaAlg with ZnO and CuO, and the electrostatic interaction of GO with O atom with NaAlg/MO composite. Figure 4 shows the optimised structure and energy differential of ∆E for the expected structure. TDM and ∆E calculated for the NaAlg group are listed in Table 4. NaAlg/MO changed TDM and ∆E to 26.778 Debye and 28.533 Debye, and 0.389 eV and 0.346 eV for NaAlg/OZn and NaAlg/OCu, respectively. Upon GO interaction with NaAlg, the TDM was changed to 47.967 Debye and ∆E also changed to 0.390 eV. GO/NaAlg/MO TDM upgraded to 43.208 and 47.238 Debye, while ∆E did not make a significant change as 0.385 and 0.309 eV for GO/NaAlg/OZn.
and GO/NaAlg/OCu, respectively. Accordingly, GO could not make an important change in NaAlg electrical properties.

### 3.5. Molecular Electrostatic Potential (MESP)

The MESP is another significant parameter used for the study of the postulated structures describing the electronic charge transfer, which defines the measurement of the adjacent nucleus, charge and electron concentration at a given position. MESP is often computed for all systems that use the same theory. MESP is commonly used as a reactivity indication of the most possible area for nucleophilic and electrophilic interaction. Figures 5–8 represent the contour and 3D total density of MESP. In the MESP map, the red colour corresponds to the electron-rich (negative) region, the blue colour corresponds to the electron-poor (positive) region, and the green colour shows zero electrostatic potential. Negative locations inside a specific molecule are marked by a red colour that is related to the electrophilic reactivity of the molecule. Nevertheless, the positive blue regions as shown in the figure are linked to the nucleophilic reactivity of the molecule. The electron concentrations on the MEP surface are shown in various colours.

**Figure 4.** NaAlg/NO and GO/NaAlg/NO models optimised ∆E as (a) NaAlg/ZnO, (b) NaAlg/CuO, (c) GO/NaAlg, (d) GO/NaAlg/ZnO and (e) GO/NaAlg/CuO.

| Structure       | TDM    | ∆E   |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| NaAlg/OZn       | 26.778 | 0.389|
| NaAlg/OCu       | 28.533 | 0.346|
| GO/NaAlg        | 47.967 | 0.390|
| GO/NaAlg/OZn    | 43.208 | 0.385|
| GO/NaAlg/OCu    | 47.238 | 0.309|
Table 5. Calculated properties using semiempirical theory at PM6 level as charge, total energy (ev), heat of formation (K cal/mol), ionisation potential (eV), Log P, polarisability, molar refractive (MR), molecular weight (MW), surface area and volume. For the three groups of the natural polymer with metal oxides and GO: Cel, Cel/OZn/Cel/OCu, GO/Cel/OZn/O, GO/Cel/OCu, Cs, Cs/OZn, Cs/OCu, GO/Cs/OZn, GO/Cs/OCu, NaAlg, NaAlg/OZn, NaAlg/OCu, GO/NaAlg/OZn and GO/NaAlg/OCu.

| Structure         | Charge | E (ev)  | HF   | IP(eV) | Log P | Polarisability | MR   | MW   | Surface Area | Volume               |
|-------------------|--------|---------|------|--------|-------|----------------|------|------|--------------|----------------------|
| Cel               | 0      | −8705.915| −714.150| −10.449| −4.194| 30.123         | 100.750| 504.437 | 428.61 | 371.58                |
| Cel/OZn           | 0      | −9458.157| −764.266| −10.373| −4.897| 34.965         | 103.636| 667.254 | 468.86 | 420.26                |
| Cel/OCu           | 0      | −11726.312| −696.911| −8.444 | −4.897| 34.781         | 103.636| 663.528 | 465.3  | 414.1                 |
| GO/Cel            | 0      | −2996.885| 712.101| −8.404 | −4.533| 138.929        | 258.491| 1120.971 | 849.6  | 791.87                |
| GO/Cel/OZn        | 0      | −16526.348| 688.868| −8.959 | −5.236| 160.057        | 261.377| 1280.062 | 955.18 | 864.44                |
| GO/Cel/OCu        | 0      | −10332.952| −364.334| −7.295 | −5.236| 132.195        | 261.377| 1280.062 | 909.78 | 844.38                |
| Cs                | 0      | −8479.409| −578.295| −9.720 | −5.236| 30.718         | 105.723| 501.483 | 444.26 | 387.58                |
| Cs/OZn            | 0      | −9020.264| −612.992| −8.929 | −5.939| 47.961         | 108.608| 664.300 | 529.67 | 468.05                |
| Cs/OCu            | 0      | −11171.690| −510.222| −9.182 | −5.939| 34.607         | 108.608| 660.574 | 526.73 | 443.7                 |
| GO/Cs             | 0      | −2698.839| 896.141| −8.880 | −5.575| 135.453        | 263.464| 1118.017 | 873.57 | 813.21                |
| GO/Cs/OZn         | 0      | −7191.434| 639.407| −8.243 | −6.278| 170.514        | 266.349| 1280.834 | 933.87 | 868.75                |
| GO/Cs/OCu         | 0      | −8712.148| 993.489| −8.084 | −6.278| 147.278        | 266.349| 1277.108 | 967.08 | 873.16                |
| Na Alg            | 0      | −9535.094| −969.755| −9.149 | −3.332| 33.420         | 97.569| 612.333 | 424.85 | 365.2                 |
| Na Alg/OZn        | 0      | −10264.379| −1186.330| −8.685 | −4.235| 43.437         | 100.455| 775.150 | 514.82 | 449.05                |
| Na Alg/OCu        | 0      | −12586.648| −1651.326| −8.688 | −4.235| 41.339         | 100.455| 771.424 | 479.59 | 418.87                |
| NaAlg/OZn         | 0      | −17272.612| 186.360| −8.541 | −3.871| 140.143        | 255.311| 1228.868 | 838.49 | 782.17                |
| NaAlg/OCu         | 0      | −8391.903| −24.109| −7.708 | −4.574| 148.708        | 258.196| 1391.684 | 918.86 | 866.02                |
| NaAlg/OZn/O       | 0      | −6447.348| −349.044| −7.926 | −4.574| 158.479        | 258.196| 1387.958 | 879.64 | 825.57                |
| NaAlg/OCu/O       | 0      | −7685.057| 1508.272| −8.952 | −0.339| 105.182        | 157.741| 616.534 | 459.08 | 444.18                |

Electron density values are raised in the following order: Red > Orange > Yellow > Green > Blue.

The MESP isosurface of GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO documented that the charges are equally dispersed in the whole molecules. However, it is obvious from the MESP statistics that there are no negative MESP regions located outside the GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO, and that only positive MESP regions are located inside them. In addition, it is evident that the highest positive region is mostly situated above the MO atoms (OZn and OCu), which are deemed ideal for nucleophilic attacks. The nucleophilic attacks are found to be more prevalent than electrophilic attacks owing to GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO. The results

Figure 5. MESP of Base materials as total surface and contour respectively for (a) Cellulose, (b) Chitosan, (c) Sodium alginate and (d) Graphene oxide.
obtained from MESP indicated that these structures were highly stable. For GO/NaAlg/MO, the MESP isosurface was neutral which is observed with yellow colour.

### 3.6. QSAR Calculations

Physical, electronic and QSAR properties were calculated for all proposed molecules. The resulting properties are shown in Table 1. QSAR properties are charge, total energy (TE), the heat of formation (HF), ionisation potential (IP), Log P, polarisability, molar refractive (MR), molecular weight (MW), surface area and volume.

Charge descriptor was equivalent to zero for all constructs that are an indicator of being in the ground state. Then, TE are calculated which TE characterise the structure stability. As TE value reduces the structure becomes known as a more stable structure. As shown in Table 5, TE for Cel in Cel group is equal to $-8705.915$ eV. Additionally, TE has improved with nanometal oxide as it declined for Cel/OZn and Cel/OCu to $-9458.157$ and $-11726.312$ eV, respectively. As well, GO decreased TE for Cel group to $-16526.348$ and $-10532.952$ eV for GO/Cel/OZn and GO/Cel/OCu, respectively, indicating that GO/Cel/MO is more stable structure especially Cel/OZn. Similarly, TE makes a small change for GO/Cs/MO from $-8479.409$ to $-7191.434$ and $-8712.148$ eV for GO/Cs/OZn and GO/Cs/OCu, respectively. Finally, TE for NaAlg group increased in the case of GO/NaAlg group from $-9535.094$ to $-8391.903$ and $-6447.348$ for GO/NaAlg/OZn and GO/NaAlg/OCu, respectively, which means that NaAlg/MO is more stable than GO/NaAlg/MO.

HF is a critical thermal descriptor that describes the energy generated as heat as atoms reside at
theoretically infinite distances connect and produce a certain molecule. As far as HF is concerned, it can be defined as the shifting occurring in the enthalpy after the creation of a single mole of a substance from its components in its natural and stable state under atmospheric standard conditions at a given temperature. For the heat of the material, for a particular substance, the amount of heat produced or absorbed into a single mole is defined. Referring to Table 5 data, the lowest HF values in the three groups were GO/Ce/OZn, GO/Cs/OZn and GO/Na Alg/OCu which recorded a minimal amount of energy to be produced.

Another essential QSAR descriptor is the IP that characterises the reactivity of the compound. IP is defined as the energy required for the compound to be ionised. When the IP benefit reduces, the reactivity of chemical substance increases. The data relationship between GO and NP/MO will not allow a major difference in the IP.

The descriptor that represents the hydrophilicity of the chemical substance is the logarithm of the partition coefficient (log P). Log P is equal to the amount of dissolving content in organic solution to dissolving in aqueous solvents. Subsequently, positive Log P values are related to hydrophobic compounds and negative values indicate hydrophilic compounds. For our group products, all the suggested compositions had a negative log P, meaning that the substances are hydrophilic (water soluble). GO/NP/MO proposed structures are slightly more hydrophilic than NP.

Polarisability can be characterised as the ease with which the chemical structure tends to be polarised in response to external forces. It somehow reflects the reactivity of the chemical structures, and it depends on their volume. Polarisability for our model structures make a significant increase for GO/Ce/OZn, GO/Cs/OZn, GO/Na Alg/OZn, GO/Na Alg/OCu which means that these models are more reactive than others.
Likewise, surface region and volume are the physical parameters of the QSAR. In addition, the MR is a descriptor that measures the overall polarisation of the mole of the material. The greater the MR, the greater the reactivity of the structure. As described in Table 5, GO/NP/MO recorded more reactive structures than NP only.

All QSAR, geometrical and thermal properties indicated that GO increases the physical, thermal stability and reactivity of NP/MO. These findings make the proposed GO / NP / MO structure a promising new material that is cost-effective, more stable (physically and chemically), thermally stable and more reactive especially GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO while GO/NaAlg/MO did not make a significant change.

4. Conclusions
Theoretical investigations were carried out to evaluate the effect of GO on the electronic properties and thermal stability of certain NP/MO nanocomposite polysaccharides using DFT. All the proposed structure of GO with NP/MO were conducted to calculate TDM, ΔE and MESP were measured at B3LYP level with a LANL2DZ basis set. QSAR descriptors were also calculated for the same interactions in order to

Figure 8. MESP of base materials as total surface and contour respectively for (a) NaAlg/ZnO, (b) NaAlg/CuO, (c) GO/NaAlg, (d) GO/NaAlg/ZnO and (e) GO/NaAlg/CuO.
study the physical, chemical and thermal stability. Electronic properties recorded a major enhancement for GO/Cel/OCu and GO/Cs/OZn. Correspondingly, QASR, geometric and thermal properties calculations ensured that GO increased NP/MO physical, thermal stability and reactivity which leads to have the new materials with GO/NP/MO structure have significant properties as an efficient expense, more stable (physically and chemically), thermally stable and more sensitive, particularly GO/Cel/MO and GO/Cs/MO, while GO/NaAlg/MO did not make significant changes. For cheap materials such as polysaccharides, metal oxide could enhance its electronic properties. While graphene which is a promising electronic material consisting of sp2 carbon atom monolayers with a 2D honeycomb lattice gives the polysaccharides/metal oxides further enhancements. Collecting the TDM, ∆E, MESP and QASR descriptors, one can conclude that the studied combination of NP/MO/GO provides excellent optoelectronic applications as a result of the combination of high carrier mobility, active sites and reactivity. Nanocomposite of NP/MO/GO is an attractive new technology for numerous applications as sensors, coatings, electronic devices, adhesives and optical circuits. Following the proper experimental procedure for preparation of the proposed combination, one can dedicate this structure for optoelectronic application in many areas.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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