Excitons in the One-Dimensional Hubbard Model: a Real-Time Study

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We study the real-time dynamics of a pair hole/doubly-occupied-site, namely a holon and a doublon, in a 1D Hubbard insulator with on-site and nearest-neighbor Coulomb repulsion. Our analysis shows that the pair is long-lived and the expected decay mechanism to underlying spin excitations is actually inefficient. For a nonzero inter-site Coulomb repulsion, we observe that part of the wave-function remains in a bound state. Our study also provides insight on the holon-doublon propagation in real space. Due to the one-dimensional nature of the problem, these particles move in opposite directions even in the absence of an applied electric field. The potential relevance of our results to solar cell applications is discussed.

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Introduction. In most band insulators and semiconductors, a single particle picture is sufficient for a qualitative grasp of transport and optical properties. This simplicity was crucial for an early understanding of their electronic structure and for discoveries, such as the transistor and semiconductor solar cells. An equivalent progress for strongly correlated electronic materials (SCEM), such as Mott-Insulators, has reached a slower pace since complicated many-body interactions govern their behavior, and the one-electron picture breaks down [1]. Nevertheless, gigantic optical nonlinear properties, potentially useful for applications, have been reported in 1D Mott-Hubbard materials, such as Sr$_2$CuO$_3$[2]. However, the majority of SCEM research has focused on fundamental science issues. While interesting technologies might emerge as a result of the exotic transport properties and complex phase diagrams of SCEM [3], their optical properties have been largely regarded only as a probe of the ground state. Whether SCEM can be of use for applications in solar cells, photo-catalysis or solid-state-lighting devices will depend on our basic understanding of their optical properties and specifically on the dynamics of the optical excitations.

The market of light-to-energy conversion is currently dominated by semiconductor materials, silicon in particular. Composite tandem solar cells have been fabricated to take maximum advantage of the solar spectra [4]. However, semiconductor solar cells are very sensitive to defects in the crystal lattice, which implies that cost remains a major limiting factor [5]. Current efforts to reduce the cost of solar cells include the exploration of other alternatives such as composites of polymers, quantum dots, and their combinations [6]. In these novel devices, excitons dissociate into electrons and holes at the interface of two materials with different band offsets.

It is frequently claimed that to date “all photo voltaic technologies use semiconductor materials” [7]. While ideal solar cell materials have to fulfill a number of properties [8], note that having a gap between 1.1 and 1.7 eV, of any origin, is the basic requirement. The fact that photo-catalytic processes are not quenched in composites involving manganites [9] raises hope for many highly correlated oxides to be technologically useful for light-to-energy conversion. To control the values of their potentially useful intrinsic gaps, transition metal oxides can be grown in complex layered super-lattices [10][11].

However, one can argue against these highly correlated oxides as candidates for solar energy harvesting materials since the optical gap arises only as a result of electronic correlations: they would be metallic otherwise. As a result, the ground state is magnetic with low-energy excitations, which in principle can provide a path for the exciton decay. Excitons in SCEM have received much theoretical attention [12][13], but most of the efforts have focused on the exciton formation and its properties. They have also been observed experimentally in 1D Mott insulators [14]. A real-time study of the excitation propagation in real-space, accounting for its decay in addition to the bound state formation, has not been presented before to our knowledge.

In this Letter, we study the dynamics of holon-doublon excitations in the 1D extended Hubbard model using the recently developed time-dependent density-matrix renormalization group (TDDMRG). We find that: (i) The mechanism for exciton decay into magnetic excitations is very inefficient and the pair holon/doublon is long-lived. This suggests that 1D SCEM can in principle be used to generate power or promote chemical reactions at the surface, adding to its previously discussed potential role as optical switches [2]; (ii) at least in quasi-1D systems, despite the absence of an electric field, the holon and doublon move in opposite directions even in the presence of a finite attraction; (iii) in agreement with previous calculations, a fraction of the pair forms a bound state.

Model and Technique. We investigate an open Hubbard chain of $L$ sites with on-site and nearest-neighbor (NN) Coulomb repulsion. The number of electrons is set to $L$, i.e. the system is at half-filling. The Hamiltonian is given by

$$
\hat{H} = -\frac{t_h}{\sigma,i=1} \sum_{i=1}^{L-1} (c_{i\sigma}^\dagger c_{i+1\sigma} + H.c.) + U \sum_{i=1}^{L} \hat{n}_{i\uparrow} \hat{n}_{i\downarrow} - \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{L} (\hat{n}_{i\uparrow} - \frac{1}{2})(\hat{n}_{i\downarrow} - \frac{1}{2})
$$
where \( t_p \) is the hopping integral, and \( U \) and \( V \) are the on-site and NN Coulomb repulsion, respectively. The rest of the notation is standard. The ground state \( |\Psi_0\rangle \) of \( \hat{H} \) is calculated using static DMRG \[13\,16\]. This state has a charge gap at \( U \neq 0 \), and spin antiferromagnetic quasi-long-range order.

Light excitation of solids is a complex process in which an energetic electron-hole pair is created by absorbing a photon. In general, the first pair created involves wave-functions not included in the Hubbard model which only takes into account a narrow window around the Fermi level. In most solids, these “hot” electrons and holes quickly dissipate energy into phonons until they reach the quasiparticle energy minimum. Having opposite charge, they find each other because of the long-range part of the Coulomb interaction. We are not modelling the evolution of the state that results from the initial absorption of light. Instead, our goal is to investigate whether the electron and hole will recombine non-radiatively when they find each other. We model this situation by creating an electron and hole will recombine non-radiatively when they find each other. We model this situation by creating an

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\Psi(t) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_{\sigma} c_{\sigma} n_{i\sigma} + \frac{1}{\sqrt{N}} \sum_{\sigma} c_{\sigma}^\dagger n_{i\bar{\sigma}}
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Figure 3 shows the doublon propagation in real space. For

transition from the small to the large V behavior occurs at V = 2t_h.

The holon motion, shown in the lowest two panels, is the reflection

of the doublon motion, around the chain center.

correlation function \( C_{dh} = \sum_i (\hat{n}_i^h \hat{n}_{i+1}^d + \hat{n}_i^d \hat{n}_{i+1}^h). \) Although this correlation function beyond NN can be finite (i.e. the average holon-doublon distance can be larger than 1.0), a finite \( C_{dh} \) indicates the formation of a bound state. In the strong-coupling limit, the Hamiltonian reduces to an effective strong-coupling limit, the Hamiltonian reduces to an effective

\( V = 3t_h, \) the major portion forms a excitonic wave-packet. The

\( K/k_d + k_h \) is the total wave-vector of the holon-doublon pair. The exciton has the dispersion

\( E(K) = U - V - (4t_h^2/V) \cos^2(K/2). \) Our results agree

with the above analysis. However, since the two wave-packets contain all possible wave-vectors, the holon-doublon wave-function is expected to split into bound and continuum states depending on \( V/t_h. \) Figure 2 shows the time-evolution of \( C_{dh} \) in the strong coupling limit for different values of \( V/t_h. \) As expected for \( V/t_h = 0, \) \( C_{dh} \) decays to zero at long times i.e. no bound state is formed. For nonzero \( V/t_h's, \) \( C_{dh} \) shows a clear saturation. For large \( V/t_h, \) the saturation value approaches 1.0, i.e. the holon and doublon remain bound at NN sites. For comparison, an effective model of two spinless fermions on a tight-binding chain with NN attraction \( V \) was also studied. The initial state, with the two particles at NN sites, is time-evolved exactly under the simplified Hamiltonian, and the NN charge-charge correlation function is calculated. The exact results of the simplified model (shown in Fig. 2) are in very good agreement with the full model TD-DMRG results.

Figure 3 shows the doublon propagation in real space. For a small \( V, \) such as \( V = 0.5t_h, \) most of the wave-packet propagates to the right [24], suggesting that a major fraction of the initial holon-doublon wave-function was in continuum states.

The motion of the holon is simply the reflection of the doublon motion around the center of the chain. Note that, in principle, the holon and doublon should move symmetrically in both di-

rections. However, the movement to the left is prevented by energy conservation which forbids these particles from crossing each other via a virtual recombined state. In other words, the holon acts as a hard-wall potential causing the doublon to move in one direction (similar arguments hold for the holon motion). Note that, in addition to the dominant fraction that moves in one direction, there is a long tail of small weight that moves in the other direction. This tail contains a mixture of continuum and bound states of finite \( K, \) and this behavior is observed for \( 0 \leq V < 2t_h. \) For larger \( V, \) such as \( V = 3t_h, \) a smaller fraction of the doublon propagates to the right. The dominant part forms a symmetric wave-packet that remains centered at the same site. Results for other values of \( V/t_h \) show that the transition from the small to the large \( V \) regimes occurs at \( V = 2t_h \) [25]. Note that for \( V > 2t_h, \) a bound state can be formed for any \( K. \) Thus, the symmetric wave-packet observed is a mixture of bound states, with all values of \( K. \) The bound and continuum states are clearly separated in space for \( V > 2t_h. \) Even though \( C_{dh} \) increases monotonically as \( V/t_h \) is increased, note that the doublon propagation in real space falls into two distinct regimes of small and large \( V/t_h. \) From the practical point of view, the amount of charge that can be collected at the ends of the chain is not affected by the bound state formation as long as \( V < 2t_h. \)

The results shown above remain valid as couplings are reduced. Figure 4 shows \( N_d \) and \( C_{dh} \) for \( U/t_h=12 \) and several \( V/t_h's. \) The values of \( V \) are chosen such that the system is in the Hubbard insulator regime and far from the charge-density-wave (CDW) instability: the transition between the two regimes occurs at \( V=U/2, \) i.e. \( V=0t_h \) in this case [26]. The final value of \( N_d \) shows a non-monotonic behavior as a function of \( V/t_h. \) This can be understood as the result of the competition between two tendencies. On one hand, for a finite \( V \) the energy added to the system upon creating the holon-doublon pair is \( U-V, \) to zeroth order in \( t_h. \) That is, at large \( V \) less energy is supplied to the system, thus \( N_d \) can relax to smaller values. On the other hand, \( V \) increases the CDW ten-
dency in the ground state. And as energy is supplied to the system (by creating the holon-doublon pair), the weight of the higher energy states (the CDW states in this case) increases, thus increasing $N_d$. Note, however, that the effect of $V$ on $N_d$ is small as long as the system is in the Hubbard insulator regime. $C_{\text{dd}}$, on the other hand, exhibits the same behavior as in the strong coupling limit: a bound state is formed for any $V > 0$. The holon and doublon propagation in space is qualitatively the same as in the strong coupling case (Fig. 3).

Conclusion. We studied the time-evolution of a holon-doublon pair in a 1D extended Hubbard model. The naively expected decay mechanism of the holon-doublon pair to spin excitations is shown to be inefficient, particularly at large $U/t_h$, and the pair survives for long times \cite{27}. Depending on the value of the NN Coulomb repulsion, the holon-doublon wave-function splits into bound and continuum states. Although a bound state can be formed for any finite NN repulsion, there is a qualitative difference in the real-space propagation between the weak and strong $V$ regimes. It is very important to remark that much of the above results arise from the 1D nature of the problem. The spin background affects much less the holon and doublon propagation in 1D than in higher dimensions \cite{28}, where antiferromagnetic links are broken in the direction perpendicular to their movement creating “strings” \cite{23}. Thus, the decay by spin excitations of the holon-doublon pair in 1D is expected to be less likely than in higher dimensions. For these reasons, the main conclusion of our present theoretical effort is that 1D Mott-Hubbard insulators could potentially join semiconductors and polymers as gapped materials of potential relevance for solar cell devices.

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