# Analysis of Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-SnO<sub>2</sub> and Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanosystems by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy

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In this work, X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was employed to characterize the surface composition and elemental chemical states of supported  $Co_3O_4$ -SnO<sub>2</sub> and  $Co_3O_4$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanocomposites. The present materials were prepared on Si(100) substrates by the chemical vapor deposition (CVD) of cobalt oxide under O<sub>2</sub>+H<sub>2</sub>O atmospheres, followed by the tailored introduction of SnO<sub>2</sub> or Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> by means of radio frequency (RF)-sputtering. Material structural and morphological characterization revealed the formation of nanocomposite heterostructures involving a conformal Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> coverage by SnO<sub>2</sub> or Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> overlayers. Survey spectra, as well as detailed scans of C1s, O1s, Co2p, Sn3d and Fe2p regions are presented and critically discussed. The results provide evidence for the formation of pure and oxygen-deficient nanocomposites, and the occurrence of an electronic interplay between the single oxide constituents.

Keywords: Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>; SnO<sub>2</sub>; Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>; CVD; RF-sputtering; X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy

Accession#:Enter Accession Number.

Technique: XPS

Host Material: Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-SnO<sub>2</sub>; Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>

**Instrument:** Perkin-Elmer Physical Electronics, Inc. 5600ci

Major Elements in Spectra: C, O, Co, Sn, Fe

Minor Elements in Spectra: none

Published Spectra: 10

Spectra in Record: 10	Electronic
Spectral	Category:
comparison	

#### INTRODUCTION

Among metal oxides, cobalt oxide ( $Co_3O_4$ ), a versatile *p*-type semiconductor endowed with a band gap enabling to efficiently harvest visible light, has received attention as an attractive material for different (photo)catalytic applications (Refs. 1-9). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, no works focusing on Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-based materials as photocatalysts for the removal of atmospheric nitrogen oxides (De-NOx) are available in the literature up to date. Indeed, this kind of technological application has been the focus of an ever growing interest for the protection of both environment and human health, since nitrogen monoxide (NO) can yield various problems including photochemical smog, acid rains, and ozone depletion, detrimentally affecting people health even at low concentrations (Refs. 3, 10-14). These issues, along with the high toxicity even of nitrogen dioxide (NO2), have stimulated research efforts aimed at the fabrication of efficient and stable solar-active photocatalysts for air purification, especially in urban/industrialized areas (Refs. 15-17). In this regard, a key requirement is the obtainment of an enhanced selectivity towards the formation of harmless nitrate species as the main products (Refs. 15, 16, 18).

In our research group, the attention has been dedicated to the design and preparation of supported oxide nanosystems as De-NO<sub>x</sub> photocatalysts, which are more promising than the conventionally studied powdered homologues thanks to their higher stability upon prolonged operation and easier recovery after use (Refs. 12, 19, 20). In this context, recent research activities have been focused on De-NO<sub>x</sub> photocatalysts based on Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanomaterials obtained by chemical vapor deposition (CVD), an attractive route for the preparation of supported materials with tailored properties (Ref. 14). Furthermore, we have explored the influence of Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> functionalization with SnO<sub>2</sub> or Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> for a possible tailoring of the ultimate system photocatalyst in

combination with Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (Refs. 7, 21), possesses matched band potentials with Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> ones to yield an improved separation of photogenerated charge carriers (Ref. 22), Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> yields a promising photocatalytic activity in various processes (Refs. 14, 20, 23, 24). Following our previous studies on the fabrication of metal oxide composites (Refs. 1, 19, 20, 25), SnO<sub>2</sub> or Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> deposition on Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> was carried out by radio frequency (RF)sputtering under mild conditions. In this context, the present contribution is dedicated to the room temperature X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) analysis, performed using a standard Mg Ka X-ray source, of Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-SnO<sub>2</sub> and Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanomaterials on Si substrates. The attention was devoted to the analysis of C1s, O1s, Co2p, Sn3d and Fe2p core levels, with particular regard to the chemical states of the different elements and to the interplay between the components of the developed nanocomposites. The latter, with specific reference to electronic interactions, directly influences the ultimate material activity in photocatalytic De-NOx applications. The results of this investigation can pave the way to future research developments on the tailored engineering of oxide-oxide interfaces for the production of improved environmental photocatalysts.

#### SPECIMEN DESCRIPTION (ACCESSION # 00000

#### Host Material: Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-SnO<sub>2</sub>

#### CAS Registry #: unknown

**Host Material Characteristics:** homogeneous; solid; polycrystalline; semiconductor; composite; Thin Film

Chemical Name: Cobalt (II,III) oxide - tin (IV) oxide

**Source:** specimen deposited on Si(100) by CVD of  $Co_3O_4$  and subsequently functionalized with  $SnO_2$  by RF-sputtering

Host Composition: Co, O, Sn

#### Form: Supported nanocomposite thin film

**Structure:** The system structure was preliminarily investigated by X-ray diffraction (XRD) analyses, which provided evidence for the presence of a single peak at  $2\theta = 36.9^{\circ}$ , corresponding to (311) crystallographic planes of cubic Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (Ref. 26). The lack of appreciable peaks related to crystalline SnO<sub>2</sub> or mixed Co-Sn-O phases was related to the low SnO<sub>2</sub> loading (Refs. 25). Field emission-scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM) analyses (see inset in figure # NFigA01) highlighted the occurrence of uniformly distributed columnar nanostructures (mean width = 50 nm; mean length = 930 nm), grown perpendicularly to the substrate surface. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) data revealed a conformal coverage of Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> aggregates by a partially continuous, amorphous SnO<sub>2</sub> overlayer, whose very low thickness (a few nm) prevented its clear observation by FE-SEM analyses.

History & Significance: The used cobalt molecular precursor,  $Co(tfa)_2$ •TMEDA (htfa = 1,1,1-trifluoro-2,4-pentanedione; TMEDA = N, N, N', N'-tetramethylethylenediamine), prepared by reacting the ligands with Co(II) chloride in alkaline aqueous solution. Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> deposition was performed by CVD using a home-made, cold-wall horizontal CVD apparatus. Si(100) substrates (MEMC®, Merano, Italy) were pre-cleaned by sonication in i-PrOH and CH<sub>2</sub>Cl<sub>2</sub>, and subsequently etched in a 2% HF solution in order to remove the native SiO<sub>2</sub> film. Growth processes were performed at 400°C for 2 h, using a total pressure of 10.0 mbar. The precursor was heated at 70°C in an external reservoir located in an oil bath, and its vapors were transported into the reaction chamber through heated gas lines by means of an electronic grade  $O_2$  flow [rate = 100 standard cubic centimeters per minute (sccm)]. An additional  $O_2$  flow (rate = 100 sccm) was delivered into the reactor through a separate inlet, after passing through a H<sub>2</sub>O reservoir maintained at 35°C. Functionalization with SnO<sub>2</sub> was accomplished by RF-sputtering from Ar plasmas using a home-made two-electrode plasmochemical reactor (v =13.56 MHz). A tin target (Neyco<sup>®</sup>; purity = 99.99%; diameter = 5 cm; thickness = 2.0 mm) was fixed on the RF electrode, whereas Si-supported Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> was mounted on the grounded one. Depositions were performed at 60°C for 90 min, using a RFpower of 10 W, an electronic grade Ar flow rate of 10 sccm, and a total pressure of 1.0 mbar.

As Received Condition: as grown

Analyzed Region: same as host material

**Ex Situ Preparation/Mounting:** Sample fixed on a grounded sample holder and introduced into the analysis chamber through a fast entry lock system.

In Situ Preparation: none

Charge Control: No flood gun was used during analysis.

Temp. During Analysis: 298 K

Pressure During Analysis: <10<sup>-8</sup> Pa

Pre-analysis Beam Exposure: 180 s.

#### SPECIMEN DESCRIPTION (ACCESSION # 00000

Host Material: Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>

CAS Registry #: unknown

**Host Material Characteristics:** homogeneous; solid; polycrystalline; semiconductor; composite; Thin Film

Chemical Name: Cobalt (II,III) oxide - iron (III) oxide

**Source:** specimen deposited on Si(100) by CVD of  $Co_3O_4$  and subsequently functionalized with  $Fe_2O_3$  by RF-sputtering

#### Host Composition: Co, O, Fe

Form: Supported nanocomposite thin film

**Structure:** The sample XRD pattern was very similar to that of Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-SnO<sub>2</sub> (see the previous accession). In line with these observations, FE-SEM analyses (see inset in figure # NFigB01) showed no appreciable morphological variations with respect to the previous specimen, and TEM results evidenced a uniform and very thin ( $\approx$ 1 nm) Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> layer over the Co<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> deposit, whose structure corresponded to that of  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (Ref. 27).

**History & Significance:** CVD of  $Co_3O_4$  was performed using the same pre-cleaned Si(100) substrate and experimental conditions reported for the previous accession. Functionalization with Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> was performed by RF-sputtering starting from an iron target (Alfa Aesar<sup>®</sup>; purity = 99.995%; 5×5 cm<sup>2</sup>; thickness = 0.25 mm), using the same plasmochemical apparatus and operating conditions reported from the previous specimen. The only exceptions were the RF-power and sputtering time values, which were set at 20 W and 180 min, respectively.

As Received Condition: as grown

Analyzed Region: same as host material

**Ex Situ Preparation/Mounting:** Sample fixed on a grounded sample holder and introduced into the analysis chamber through a fast entry lock system.

In Situ Preparation: none

Charge Control: No flood gun was used during analysis.

Temp. During Analysis: 298 K

Pressure During Analysis: <10<sup>-8</sup> Pa

Pre-analysis Beam Exposure: 180 s.

#### **INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTION**

Manufacturer and Model: Perkin-Elmer Physical Electronics, Inc. 5600ci

Analyzer Type: spherical sector

Detector: Channeltron

Number of Detector Elements: 16

# INSTRUMENT PARAMETERS COMMON TO ALL SPECTRA

Spectrometer

Analyzer Mode: constant pass energy

Throughput (T=E<sup>N</sup>): N=0

Excitation Source Window: 1.5 micron Al window

**Excitation Source:** Mg Ka

Source Energy: 1253.6 eV

Source Strength: 250 W

**Source Beam Size:** > 25000 μm x > 25000 μm

Signal Mode: multichannel direct

■Geometry

Incident Angle: 9°

Source-to-Analyzer Angle: 53.8°

Emission Angle: 45°

Specimen Azimuthal Angle: 0°

Acceptance Angle from Analyzer Axis: 0°

Analyzer Angular Acceptance Width:  $14^{\circ} \times 14^{\circ}$ 

■Ion Gun

Manufacturer and Model: PHI 04-303 A

Energy: 4000 eV

Current: 0.4 mA/cm2

Current Measurement Method: Faraday cup

Sputtering Species: Ar<sup>+</sup>

Spot Size (unrastered): 250 µm

Raster Size: 2000 µm x 2000 µm

Incident Angle: 40 °

Polar Angle: 45°

Azimuthal Angle: 111°

Comment: differentially pumped ion gun

#### DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

**Energy Scale Correction: -**

Recommended Energy Scale Shift: 0 eV for both specimens

Peak Shape and Background Method: After performing a Shirley-type background subtraction (Ref. 28), BE and full width at half maximum (FWHM) values were determined by leastsquares fitting adopting Gaussian/Lorentzian functions.

Quantitation Method: Atomic concentrations were calculated by peak area integration, using sensitivity factors provided by PHI V5.4A software.

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Surf. Sci. Spectra, 28(2) Dec 2021; doi: 10spectralUtelationes of the AVS							
Spectrum ID #	Element/ Transition	Peak Energy (eV)	Peak Width FWHM	Peak Area (eV x cts/s)	Sensitivity Factor	Concentration (at. %)	Peak Assignment
			(eV)				
NFigA02 <sup>a</sup>	C1s	284.8	1.7	9546.4	0.296	20.7	Adventitious surface contamination
NFigA02 <sup>a</sup>	C1s	286.3	2.0	2365.1	0.296	5.1	C-O species from precursor residuals
NFigA02 <sup>a</sup>	C1s	288.5	2.3	1044.5	0.296	2.3	Adsorbed carbonates
NFigA03 <sup>b</sup>	O1s	530.1	1.9	33452.4	0.711	29.6	Lattice oxygen in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> and SnO <sub>2</sub>
NFigA03 <sup>b</sup>	O1s	531.4	2.1	20329.0	0.711	18.1	Surface adsorbed –OH/ carbonate groups
NFigA04 <sup>c</sup>	Co2p			45294	3.590	8.6	Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFigA04	Co2p <sub>3/2</sub>	780.9	1.8				Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFigA04	Co2p <sub>1/2</sub>	796.6	1.8				Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFIGA05	Sn3d			178484		15.6	Sn in SnO <sub>2</sub>
NFIGA05	Sn305/2 Sn3d-19	480.7	1.4	70260	4.725		Sn in SnO2 Sn in SnO2
NI IGAUS	011003/2	495.2	1.4	10209	•••		
NFigB02ª	C1s	284.8	1.8	8834.6	0.296	21.7	Adventitious surface contamination
NFigB02 <sup>a</sup>	C1s	286.5	1.9	1125.3	0.296	2.8	C-O species from precursor residuals
NFigB02 <sup>a</sup>	C1s	288.5	2.1	1039.0	0.296	2.6	Adsorbed carbonates
NFigB03 <sup>b</sup>	O1s	530.0	1.7	28863.1	0.711	29.5	Lattice oxygen in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> and Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>
NFigB03 <sup>b</sup>	O1s	531.4	2.2	18065.9	0.711	18.5	Surface adsorbed –OH/ carbonate groups
NFigB04 <sup>c</sup>	Co2p			31137	3.590	6.4	Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFigB04	Co2p <sub>3/2</sub>	780.7	2.1				Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFigB04	Co2p <sub>1/2</sub>	796.3	2.1				Co in Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>
NFigB05 <sup>e</sup>	Fe2p			73708	2.957	18.5	Fe in Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>
NFigB05	Fe2p <sub>3/2</sub>	711.0	3.5				Fe in Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>
NFigB05	Fe2p <sub>1/2</sub>	724.4	3.7		•••		Fe in Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>

<sup>a</sup> The sensitivity factor is referred to the whole C1s signal.

<sup>b</sup> The sensitivity factor is referred to the whole O1s signal.

<sup>c</sup> The sensitivity factor, peak area, and concentration are referred to the whole Co2p signal.

<sup>d</sup> Tin atomic percentage was evaluated basing on the area and sensitivity factor for the Sn3d<sub>5/2</sub> component reported in the next line.

<sup>e</sup> The sensitivity factor, peak area, and concentration are referred to the whole Fe2p signal.

Footnote to Spectra NFigA01 and NFigB01: Wide-scan spectra confirmed the functionalization of  $Co_3O_4$  with  $SnO_2$  and  $Fe_2O_3$ , with adventitious carbon as the only impurity. The surface presence of cobalt even after tin and iron oxide deposition was traced back to  $Co_3O_4$  coverage by very thin  $SnO_2$  and  $Fe_2O_3$  overlayers.

**Footnote to Spectra NFigA02 and NFigB02**: For both specimens, the C1s peak could be fitted by means of three components, evidencing the presence of C species in different chemical environments. The most intense band, centered at 284.8 eV, was ascribed to adventitious contamination due to atmospheric exposure. A second component located at a mean BE of 286.4 was related to surface C-O moieties from precursor residuals, whereas the contribution at 288.5 eV was ascribed to adsorbed carbonates (Refs. 29-31). The C1s signal could be reduced to noise level after 5 min Ar<sup>+</sup> erosion, revealing a good purity of the target samples.

**Footnote to Spectra NFigA03 and NFigB03**: Two bands contributed to the O1s signal. The main component at BE  $\approx$  530.0 eV was attributed to lattice O, whereas the second one at BE = 531.4 eV was due to surface carbonates (Refs. 30, 31) and to -OH groups chemisorbed on oxygen defects (Refs. 5, 6, 8, 25, 32-34), which are reported to have a beneficial impact on material (photo)catalytic performances (Refs. 3, 6, 10, 11, 13, 18).

**Footnote to Spectra NFigA04 and NFigB04**: The Co2p peak shape and the absence of intense *shake-up* satellites, indicated the occurrence of  $Co_3O_4$  as predominant phase (Refs. 2, 9, 25, 29, 33-35), in agreement with XRD results. The  $Co2p_{3/2}$  BE was 780.9 and 780.7 eV for  $Co_3O_4$ -SnO<sub>2</sub> (NFigA04) and  $Co_3O_4$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (NFigB04) respectively, slightly higher values than those reported in the literature for bare  $Co_3O_4$  (Refs. 1, 2, 30, 32, 36). This phenomenon was related to electronic interactions between the single oxides (Ref. 37), considering that, at the  $Co_3O_4$ /SnO<sub>2</sub> (Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) interface, an electron transfer occurs from  $Co_3O_4$  to SnO<sub>2</sub> (Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) (see also comments to spectra NFigA05 and NFigB05). The presence of weak Co2p shake-up satellites for  $Co_3O_4$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (NFigB04) may suggest the possible presence of CoO as a minority system component (Refs. 29, 35, 38), which may be undetectable by XRD analyses.

**Footnote to Spectra NFigA05 and NFigB05**: The Sn3d [BE(Sn3d<sub>5/2</sub>) = 486.7 eV] and Fe2p [BE(Fe2p<sub>3/2</sub>) = 711.0] peak position were slightly lower than previous literature data for SnO<sub>2</sub> (Refs. 9, 11, 29, 39) and Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (Refs. 4, 14, 17, 23, 24, 36), respectively, supporting the above indicated electron transfer process (see comments to spectra **NFigA04** and **NFigB04**).

The average Sn/Co and Fe/Co atomic ratios were 1.8 and 2.9, respectively.

ANALYZER CALIBRATION TABLE							
Spectrum ID	Element/	Peak Energy	Peak Width	Peak Area	Sensitivity	Concentration	Peak
#	Transition	(eV)	FWHM (eV)	(eV x cts/s)	Factor	(at. %)	Assignment
figCalib01 <sup>a</sup>	Au4f <sub>7/2</sub>	84.0	1.4	186403			Au(0)
figCalib02 <sup>a</sup>	Cu2p <sub>3/2</sub>	932.7	1.6	86973			Cu(0)

<sup>a</sup> The peak was acquired after Ar<sup>+</sup> erosion.

GUIDE TO FIGURES					
Spectrum (Accession) #	Spectral Region	Voltage Shift*	Multiplier	Baseline	Comment #
NFigA01	Survey	0	1	0	
NFigA02	C 1s	0	1	0	
NFigA03	O 1s	0	1	0	
NFigA04	Co2p	0	1	0	
NFigA05	Sn3d	0	1	0	
NFigB01	Survey	0	1	0	
NFigB02	C 1s	0	1	0	
NFigB03	O 1s	0	1	0	
NFigB04	Co2p	0	1	0	
NFiaB05	Fe2p	0		0	

 $^{*}$  Voltage shift of the archived (as measured) spectrum relative to the printed figure. The figure reflects the recommended energy scale correction due to a calibration correction, sample charging, flood gun, or other phenomenon.



Publish in Surface Science Spectra: Yes X No □

Accession #	NFigA01
Host Material	Co <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> -SnO <sub>2</sub>
Technique	XPS
Spectral Region	survey
Instrument	Perkin-Elmer Physical Electronics, Inc. 5600ci
Excitation Source	Mg Ka
Source Energy	1253.6 eV
Source Strength	250 W
Source Size	>25 mm x >25 mm
Analyzer Type	spherical sector analyzer
Incident Angle	9°
Emission Angle	45°
Analyzer Pass Energy	187.85 eV
Analyzer Resolution	1.9 eV
Total Signal Accumulation Time	385.2 s
Total Elapsed Time	423.7 s
Number of Scans	14
Effective Detector Width	1.9 eV



















