

Microwave Absorption Performance of One-dimensional Mixed Metal Oxide Nanocomposite

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Abstract: Microwave-absorbing materials have received numerous attentions in terms of their key roles in the fields of stealth technology and controlling electromagnetic radiation pollution. In this paper, we aim to develop one-dimensional CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ mixed metal oxide nanocomposite via combination of sol-gel method and electrospinning technique. and investigate its microwave absorbing capability. The phase evolution from precursor fiber to final product and corresponding micromorphology are characterized, and microwave absorption performance for different CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ composite fibers are investigated with a vector network analyzer in 2-18 GHz. The prepared CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ mixed metal oxide composite fibers exhibit excellent microwave absorbing ability. The low reflection loss can reach -32.8 dB, and the maximum effective bandwidth is up to 6 GHz (12-18 GHz) at the thickness of 4 mm. The results further reveal that the lightweight mixed metal oxide composite fiber is promising for applications in electromagnetic attenuation and other related research fields.

Keywords: Microwave absorption, Mixed metal oxide, Composite fiber.

1. INTRODUCTION

With rapid development of electronic science and technology, electromagnetic irradiation has resulted in serious environmental pollution and harmful effects on human health. The exploration of efficient microwave absorbers to attenuate electromagnetic energy and convert it into thermal energy has been receiving increasing attention. Researchers are focusing on seeking and designing microwave absorbing materials to satisfy the high-performance requirements of "thin thickness, low density, strong absorption and wide bandwidth" [1-7]. Consequently, tremendous efforts have been devoted to develop unique one-dimensional nanomaterials to enhance the microwave absorption performance.

One-dimensional nanofibers, nanowires and nanotubes, have attracted intensive interest because of their exceptional properties and wide applications in many research fields. Among the various methods to prepare such one-dimensional materials, electrospinning technique provides a simple, direct and relatively inexpensive route to produce one dimensional product with diameters ranging from a few nanometers to several micrometers [8-16]. The combination of sol-gel process and electrospinning has been employed to prepare one dimensional microwave absorbers, which can have intrinsic structure with the

length in micrometer and the diameter of only a few nanometers, and possesses the features of low density and anisotropic behavior [17-24]. The Fe₃O₄ and Fe nanowires via partial and full reduction of α-Fe₂O₃ have successfully synthesized by electrospinning method and the Fe₃O₄ nanowires exhibit a minimum RL -17.2 dB at 6.2 GHz [25]. Iron-nickel alloy electrospun fibers have been synthesized through citric acid organic gel thermal reduction process and induced interfaces between alloy and oxide brings about more stable microwave absorption performance of product [26]. Also, nanofibrous absorber composed of flexible carbon nanofibers and magnetic oxide nanoparticles shows enhanced microwave absorption performance in a broad frequency range with smaller absorber layer thickness [27].

Interface coupling is one of the factors that play important contribution to the strong microwave absorption. In heterogeneous structures of composites, the components on the interface have different polarity or conductivity and can give rise to increase in dielectric loss. Thus, increased interfacial polarization relaxation can lead to the enhancement of microwave absorption properties. Broadband microwave absorption of Fe₃O₄ single bond BaTiO₃ composites enhanced by interfacial polarization and impedance matching has been investigated. And the results reveal that the composites remain as two distinct phases and two phases can form special interface [28]. Titanium dioxide (TiO₂) is not an ideal candidate for absorption of electromagnetic energy, but amorphous TiO₂ synthesized with partially crystallized displays strong

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microwave absorption ability [29]. Dielectric properties of $\text{TiO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ceramics are fabricated by APS technique and their microwave absorption properties are improved [30]. In this manuscript, lightweight $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fibers were prepared by a combination of the sol-gel and electrospinning techniques. Citric acid-based iron-cobalt precursor can be mixed with titanium dioxide sol homogeneously at the molecular level. Finally, in situ synthesized microwave absorption performance and mechanism of $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ composite fiber are investigated. In this composite system, the magnetic CoFe_2O_4 contributes to the active magnetic loss, while the TiO_2 may support the dielectric loss. Compositions and the corresponding interface coupling are optimized to enhance its microwave absorption characters. The prepared $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ composite fibers showcase remarkable performance in microwave absorbing. Achieving a low reflection loss of -32.8 dB and a maximum effective bandwidth of up to 6 GHz (within the 12-18 GHz range) with a thickness of 4 mm, this lightweight mixed metal oxides holds considerable potential for applications in electromagnetic attenuation and associated research.

2. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

$\text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (98.5%), $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (99.0%) and citric acid (99.5%) are provided from Tianjin Chemical Company. Polyethylene oxide (PEO, $M_n=900,000$) from Changchun Jinghua Company was used as electrospinning carrier. Tetrabutyl titanate

(TBT, 99%) is supplied by Aladdin Industrial Corporation. All chemicals reagents are used as received without further purification. In a typical synthesis of CoFe_2O_4 sol, 1.455g $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 4.04g $\text{Fe}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 5g citric acid, 15 ml ethanol and 7 ml distilled water are mixed and stirred to be homogeneous. TiO_2 sols for electrospinning were prepared by hydrolyzing Tetrabutyl titanate precursor. For the preparation of the TiO_2 sol, a 12 mL mixture containing ethanol, water and nitric acid is slowly added into a 65 mL solution of tetrabutyl titanate and ethanol (with a molar ratio of tetrabutyl titanate:ethanol = 1:9.2). Thus, electrospun precursor fibers with different molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to TiO_2 can be produced by electrospinning. In Sample M1, the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 2:1, while in Sample M2, the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 8:1. Lightweight $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fibers are prepared by heat-treatment of the electrospun precursor fibers.

In this experiment, a needle electrospinning apparatus, procured from Beijing Future Material Sci-tech Company, was utilized for the preparation of fibers. The electrospinning process involved setting the flow rate of mixtures at 0.03 mL/min, maintaining a needle-to-collector distance of 15 cm, and applying a voltage of 18 kV. Thermo-gravimetric and differential thermal analyses (TGA-DTA) were conducted using a Netzsch/STA499F3 thermo-gravimetric analyzer under both air and argon atmospheres. The powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were acquired using a

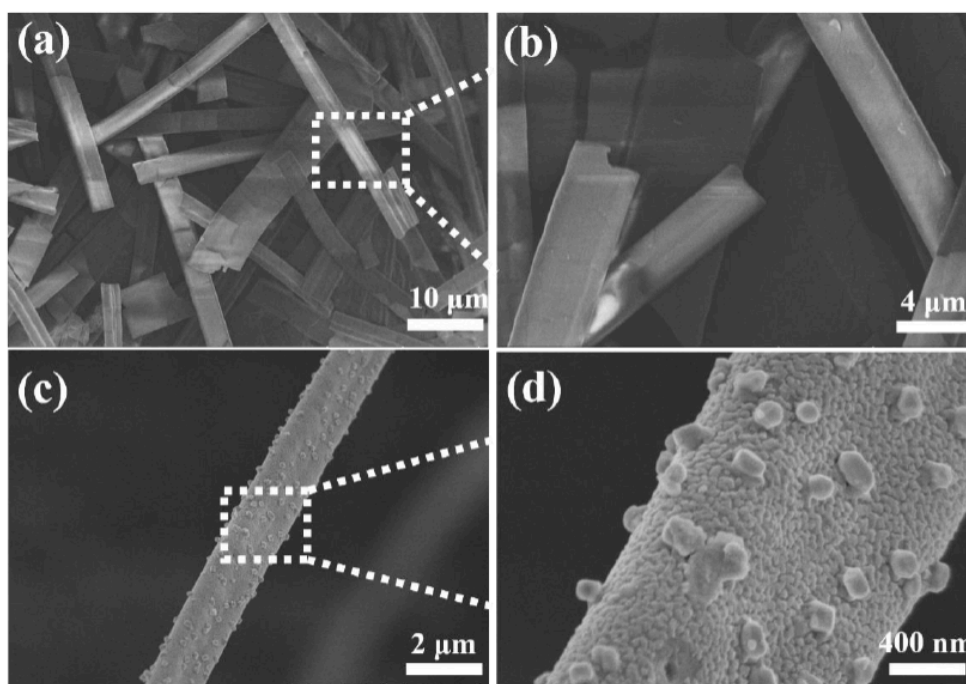


Figure 1: SEM images of $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fibers (a), (b) before and (c), (d) after processing in Sample M1 (the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 2:1).

diffractometer with Cu K α radiation. Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) images were captured using the HITACHI SU8000 equipment. Additionally, the energy-dispersive x-ray spectrometer (EDS, Bruker) was carried out, in order to assess the distribution patterns of elements in the nanocomposites. Relative permittivity and permeability were determined employing an HP-5783E vector network analyzer within the frequency range of 2-18 GHz for the precise calculation of reflection loss. The CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ fibers/paraffin composites were meticulously prepared by uniformly mixing the nanofibers in a paraffin matrix. Subsequently, paraffin-based composite samples, comprising 15 wt% and 33 wt% of the prepared CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ composite fibers, were compressed into a ring with an outer diameter of 7 mm, an inner diameter of 3 mm, and a thickness of 2 mm for the measurement of electromagnetic parameters.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 displays SEM images of oxide fibers in Sample M1 with an average major-axis diameter of 1.58 μm . And the SEM images elucidate the in-situ assembly process of oxide nanoparticles into a fibrous structure. The oxidation of Co-Fe particles on the nanofiber surface initiates the process. Subsequently, the carbon-based fiber undergoes gradual combustion, leading to the exposure and continuous oxidation of the metal particles until the reaction reaches completion. Ultimately, the fiber undergoes a transition from a

smooth surface to rough one with nanoparticle. Figure 2 displays SEM images of oxide fibers in Sample M2. Similar to Sample M1, nanoparticles exhibit uniform growth on the fiber surface. An increased addition of titanium dioxide resulted in a reduction in the diameter of nanoparticles on the fiber surface. Specifically, an excessively high dosage of titanium dioxide adversely affected the nucleation of metal oxides. Examination of the samples through SEM confirms the presence of high-roughness surfaces adorned with nanoparticles (Figure 1, 2). The integration of high roughness surfaces and nanoparticles introduces multiple reflection points, thereby enhancing microwave dissipation.

To investigate the presence and distribution of Co, Fe, and Ti elements, EDS elemental mapping is employed to record the data in Sample M1. The mapping analysis depicted in Figure 3 confirm the homogeneous distribution of Co, Fe, and Ti elements. Co, Fe, and Ti elements are represented by purple (Figure 4b), red (Figure 4c), and green spots (Figure 4d), respectively, evenly distributed throughout the scanned area.

For further confirmation, XRD patterns of the CoFe₂O₄/TiO₂(Sample M1) and CoFe₂O₄/TiO₂(Sample M2) are recorded and shown in Figure 4. The noticeable diffraction peaks correspond to the (200), (311), (400), (511) and (440) Miller indices of CoFe₂O₄, which could be observed in all samples. It is clear that Sample M1 and Sample M2 have different dominant

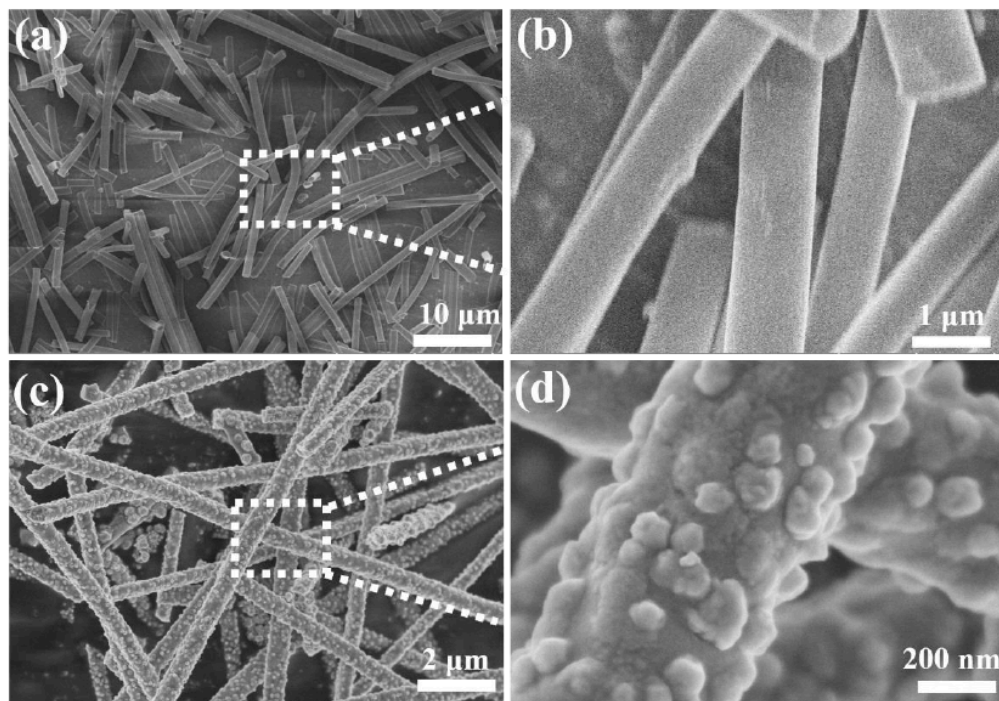


Figure 2: SEM images of CoFe₂O₄-TiO₂ mixed metal oxide composite fibers (a), (b) before and (c), (d) after processing in Sample M2 (the molar ratio of CoFe₂O₄ to titanium dioxide is 8:1).

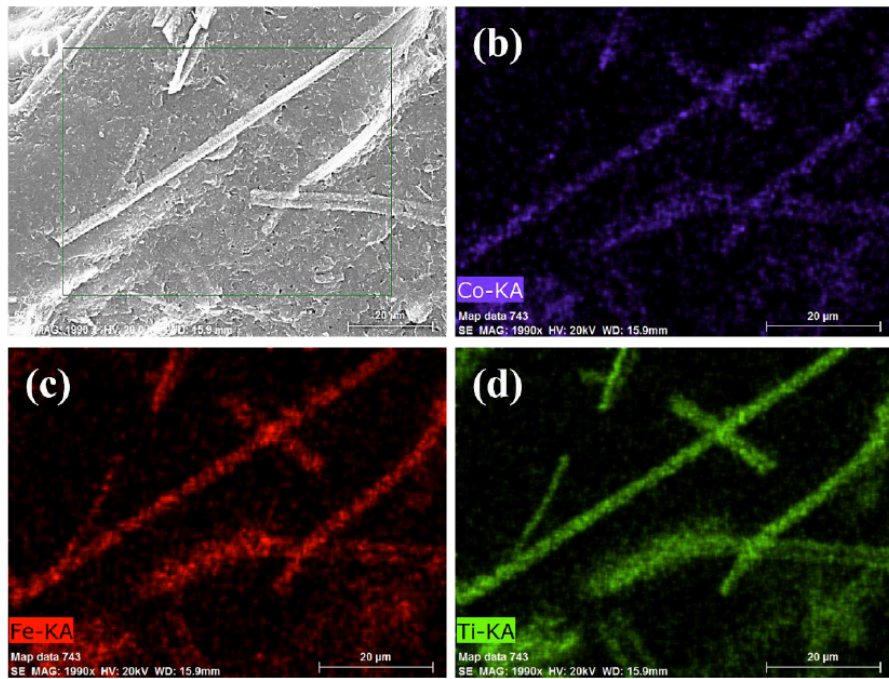


Figure 3: Elemental mapping analysis of Sample M1 (the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 2:1).

peaks. This phenomenon could be caused by the existence of TiO_2 .

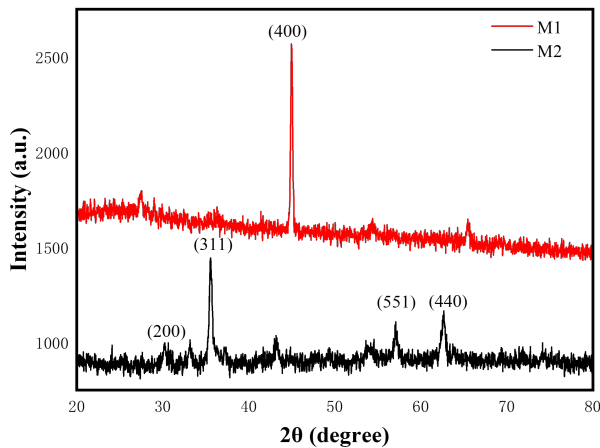


Figure 4: XRD diffraction patterns of the prepared samples: Sample M1 (the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 2:1) and Sample M2 (the molar ratio of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide is 8:1).

In order to further investigate the changes during sample preparation, Thermogravimetric Analysis (TG) and Differential Thermal Analysis (DTA) are introduced. Figure 5 show the TG-DTA curves of the $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2$ samples. The samples in different ratios exhibits a similar mass loss trend and two major quality losses occurred at 35-80 °C and 150-310 °C, respectively. Similarly, exothermal peaks are observed at corresponding positions in the DTA curve. The first step can be attributed to solvent volatilization, while the second is due to the decomposition of organic matter in the solvent. After 310 °C, only a small amount of quality loss occurs. It is worth noting that the remaining mass of Samples M1 and M2, is 27% and 12% respectively which is due to the different degrees of organic matter decomposition decomposed caused by the different amounts of citric acid.

The complex permittivity ($\epsilon_r = \epsilon' - j\epsilon''$) and complex permeability ($\mu_r = \mu' - j\mu''$) are introduced to

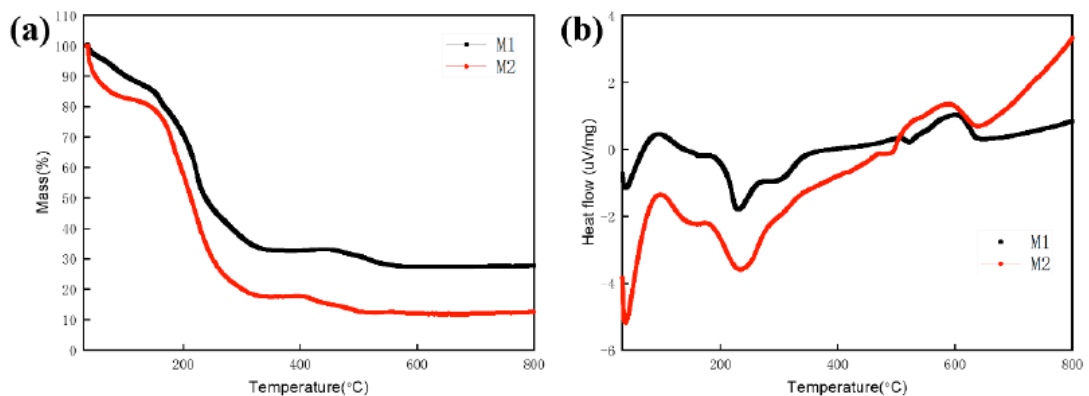


Figure 5: (a) TG and (b) DTA curves of $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fiber samples.

determine the attenuation of the electric and magnetic fields. Figure 6 (a), (b) show ϵ' and ϵ'' for paraffin-based samples in the 2-18 GHz and both ϵ' and ϵ'' of Sample M1 are higher than those of Sample M2. At $f=2$ GHz, ϵ' ($=7.78$) and ϵ'' ($=4.78$) of Sample M1 are much higher than that of Sample M2 ($\epsilon'=3.00$, $\epsilon''=0.008$). Subsequently, ϵ' and ϵ'' of Sample M1 are slightly increased with the increase in frequency. While ϵ' and ϵ'' of Sample M2 remain constant. The attenuation of the electric field is evaluated through the dielectric loss tangents by using the expression as $\tan\delta_\epsilon = \epsilon''/\epsilon'$. The dielectric loss tangent ($\tan\delta_\epsilon$) curve is shown in Figure 6(c). It is worth noticing that the $\tan\delta_\epsilon$ values of Sample M1 are all higher than those of Sample M2, which would play a critical role in microwave absorbing.

μ' and μ'' of the samples are displayed in Figure 6(d), (e), respectively. When the μ' and μ'' curves of $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2$ samples are compared, these values are mostly the same in the range of 2-18 GHz. However, $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2$ samples have relatively higher μ' and lower μ'' which could be attributed to the introduction of TiO_2 bringing additional interfaces. The magnetic loss tangent ($\tan\delta_\mu$) ($\tan\delta_\mu = \mu''/\mu'$) indicating the attenuation of

magnetic field is shown in Figure 6 (f). The $\tan\delta_\mu$ curves of $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2$ samples are similar, with less differences compared with $\tan\delta_\epsilon$ curves. Therefore, the microwave dissipation characteristics of the material are mainly determined by $\tan\delta_\epsilon$.

The reflection loss reflects the absorbance ability of the samples. According to transmission line theory, the reflection loss in decibels (dB) of electromagnetic radiation when it is normally incident upon the surface of a single-layer material backed by a perfect conductor can be expressed as follows:

$$RL(dB) = 20 \lg \left| \frac{Z_{in} - Z_0}{Z_{in} + Z_0} \right| \tag{1}$$

where Z_0 is the characteristic impedance of free space,

$$Z_0 = \sqrt{\frac{\mu_0}{\epsilon_0}} \tag{2}$$

Z_{in} is the input impedance at the interface of free space and material,

$$Z_{in} = Z_0 \sqrt{\frac{\mu_r}{\epsilon_r}} \tanh \left[j \frac{2\pi f d}{c} \sqrt{\mu_r \epsilon_r} \right] \tag{3}$$

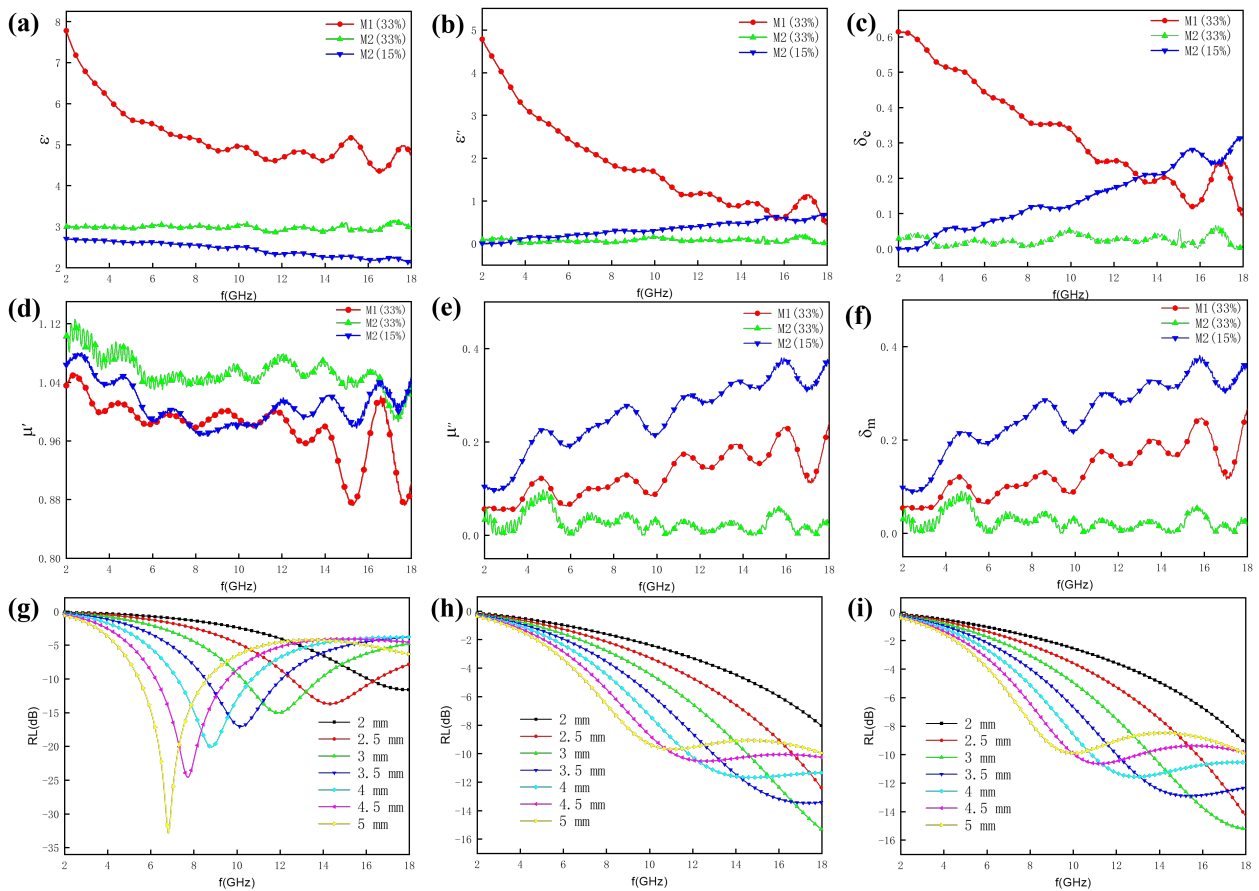


Figure 6: (a) Real, (b) imaginary permittivity, (c) dielectric loss tangent ($\tan\delta_\epsilon$), (d) real and (e) imaginary permeability, (f) magnetic loss tangent ($\tan\delta_\mu$), RL curves of different absorbers : (g) Sample M1(33%), (h) Sample M2(15%), (i) Sample M2(33%) of paraffin-based samples in the frequency range of 2–18 GHz.

where f is the frequency of the EM wave, d is the thickness of the material, ϵ is the relative permittivity and μ is relative permeability.

Figure 6(g), (h), (i) depict the RL curves of single-layer paraffin based $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2$ absorbers with $t=2-5$ mm (increments of 0.5 mm). Sample M1 demonstrates the most effective electromagnetic wave absorption capability when compared to other samples. The low reflection loss can reach -32.8 dB, and the maximum effective bandwidth is up to 6 GHz (12-18 GHz) at the thickness of 4 mm. Sample M2 with different absorber content exhibits similar electromagnetic wave absorption capability with a RL_{max} of -15 dB at 18GHz with the thickness of 3 mm. Primarily, the advantageous interfacial polarization for microwave attenuation arises from the presence of multi-interfaces. Secondly, the considerable specific surface areas and high porosities are facilitated by TiO_2 and the void space between CoFe_2O_4 and TiO_2 providing ample active sites for microwave reflection and scattering. Lastly, the interruption of electromagnetic wave propagation is achieved with the addition of TiO_2 , effectively generating dissipation due to impedance differences.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fibers were successfully prepared with different molar ratios of CoFe_2O_4 to titanium dioxide. The physicochemical characteristics of composite fibers were investigated through SEM, EDS, XRD, TG/DTA. The XRD patterns indicate main diffraction peaks of CoFe_2O_4 could be observed in all samples. TG and DTA curves reveal that the samples in different ratios exhibits similar mass loss trend. The electromagnetic properties of the paraffin-based Samples M1 and M2 were studied in the 2–18 GHz frequency range, which showed that the prepared $\text{CoFe}_2\text{O}_4\text{-TiO}_2$ mixed metal oxide composite fibers exhibit excellent microwave absorbing ability. The low reflection loss can reach -32.8 dB, and the maximum effective bandwidth is up to 6 GHz (12-18 GHz) at the thickness of 4 mm. The composite fiber composed of lightweight mixed metal oxides shows great promise for utilization in electromagnetic attenuation and various related research domains.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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