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Antibacterial, highly hydrophobic and semi transparent Ag/plasma polymer nanocomposite coating on cotton fabric obtained by plasma based co-deposition / Irfan, M., Polonskyi, O., Hinz, A., Mollea, C., Bosco, F., Strunskus, T., Balagna, C., Perero, S., Faupel, F., Ferraris, M.. - In: CELLULOSE. - ISSN 0969-0239. - ELETTRONICO. - (2019). [10.1007/s10570-019-02685-6]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2749413 since: 2019-09-03T10:11:46Z

Publisher:

Springer

Published

DOI:10.1007/s10570-019-02685-6

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6 Muhammad Irfan^{a,1}, Oleksandr Polonskyi^b, Alexander Hinz^b, Chiara Mollea^a,
7 Francesca Bosco^a, Thomas Strunskus^b, Cristina Balagna^a, Sergio Perero^a, Franz
8 Faupel^b, Monica Ferraris^a

9

10 *^aDepartment of Applied Science and Technology, Politecnico di Torino, Corso*
11 *Duca degli Abruzzi 24, 10129 Torino, Italy*

12

13 *^bChair for Multicomponent Materials, Faculty of Engineering, Kiel University,*
14 *Kaiserstr. 2, 24143 Kiel, Germany*

15

16 *¹Department of Materials and Testing, National Textile University, Sheikhpura*
17 *Road, 37610, Faisalabad, Pakistan*

18

19

20

21 **Corresponding author: Muhammad Irfan*

22 *Tel: +92-41-9230081*

23 *Fax: +92-41-9230098*

24 *Email: see_irfan@hotmail.com*

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34 **Abstract**

35 This study aims at deposition and characterization of antibacterial, hydrophobic and
36 semitransparent metal/plasma polymer nanocomposite coating, containing Ag nanoparticles, onto
37 cotton fabrics intended to be used in medical applications. The nano composite coatings were
38 obtained via a simple, one step and ecofriendly plasma based co-deposition approach where silver
39 was magnetron sputtered simultaneously with plasma polymerization of hexamethyldisiloxane
40 (HMDSO) monomer. The nanocomposite thin films containing different concentration of silver
41 were deposited either by varying silver sputter rate or thickness of the plasma polymer matrix to
42 obtain a good balance between optical properties of the coated fabric and its long term
43 antibacterial performance. The obtained coatings were investigated in detail with respect to their
44 composition, morphology, optical properties, nanoparticle size distribution, silver ion release
45 efficiency, antibacterial performance, water contact angle and washing stability of the coating.
46 The thickness of the plasma matrix was found to be more important in controlling the release of
47 silver ions as well as affecting the optical properties of the coating. The water contact angle on the
48 coated fabric was up to 145°, close to super hydrophobicity. The coating showed effective
49 antibacterial efficacy against *Staphylococcus epidermidis* (a Gram positive bacterium) which was
50 present even when fabric was subjected to 10 repeated washing cycles indicating good washing
51 stability of the coating.

52 **Key words:** *plasma polymerization, sputtering, silver nanoparticles, plasma*
53 *polymer, optical properties, silver ion release properties*

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69 **1. Introduction**

70 Medical textiles used in the health care infrastructures are an important potential
71 source of nosocomial infections. In general, bacterial infections pose a great threat
72 worldwide not only to the public health but also to the economy as they elongate
73 the average hospitalization period along with other associated costs. Since textiles
74 are in close contact with human body, they should not be a source of transmitting
75 infectious diseases to patients or health care workers (Perelshtein et al. 2015). On
76 the other hand, because of their greater surface area as well as ability to retain
77 moisture, textiles provide a conducive environment for microorganisms to grow.
78 Being closer to the skin of the wearer, they can contribute to the cross-
79 contamination of pathogenic bacteria (Brunon et al. 2011) in different
80 environments like home, hospitals and food industry where textiles are used
81 immensely (Chadeau et al. 2010). Particularly, fabrics made of cellulosic fibers,
82 for example cotton fabric, are more susceptible to microbial growth than synthetic
83 fibers due to their ability to retain moisture. However, cotton fabrics provide
84 superior comfort properties and thus are used widely not only in traditional
85 textiles but also in medical textiles (Fei et al. 2018). This necessitates antibacterial
86 functionalization of the textile surfaces and provides an impetus for research in
87 antibacterial textiles. Consequently, research output regarding antibacterial
88 functionalization of textile surfaces has increased tremendously.

89 Various antibacterial agents have been studied for imparting antibacterial
90 functionality to textile surfaces which include organic antibacterial agents e.g
91 quaternary ammonium compounds (Lin et al. 2018), chitosan (Zemljic et al. 2017)
92 and its derivatives (Stawski et al. 2016), N halamines (Liu et al. 2015), triclosan
93 (Foksowicz-Flaczyk et al. 2016), polybiguanides (Gao and Cranston 2010),
94 inorganic antibacterial agents e.g Ag (Xu et al. 2017) and Pt and Zn (Ponomarev
95 et al. 2018) nanoparticles, CuO (El-Nahhal et al. 2018), ZnO (Ghayempour et al.
96 2017) and natural antibacterial agents e.g natural dyes (Mariselvam et al. 2017),
97 curcumin (Pisitsak et al. 2015), aloe vera (Ali et al. 2014) and other plant extracts
98 (Savoia 2012). Among these, silver nano particles are attractive because of their
99 antimicrobial performance against a wide variety of bacteria and fungi (Wu et al.
100 2018). **Although cytotoxicity of metal nanoparticles is a matter of concern,**
101 **however, silver nanoparticles are considered less toxic to humans at lower**
102 **concentrations (Jamuna-Thevi et al. 2011).** Most of the wet chemistry routes for

103 the synthesis and application of silver nano particles to textiles have
104 disadvantages of agglomeration, non-uniform dispersion, use of expansive (and
105 sometimes toxic) chemicals and complex chemical processes (Wu et al. 2018) as
106 well as have environmental concerns. Additionally, wet treatments may require
107 higher quantities of antibacterial agents for achieving maximum antibacterial
108 activity resulting in high weight add-on on the fabric. Lin J et. al. (Lin et al. 2018)
109 reported 8% weight add-on on pristine cotton fabric after coating polymeric
110 antibacterial agent to achieve 100% bacterial reduction. The treatment was also
111 reported to cause 6% reduction in the air permeability of the cotton fabric due to
112 blockage of interfiber spaces.

113 Alternatively, plasma based processes including plasma polymerization and
114 sputtering are increasingly being studied for textile surface functionalization due
115 to their environment friendly nature as well as their ability to modify only the
116 surface of the textiles while preserving their bulk properties (Irfan et al. 2017).
117 Various plasma techniques (sputtering, plasma polymerization etc) can be used
118 separately or in combination to fabricate metal nanoparticles embedded in a
119 matrix (Kratochvíl et al. 2018). Among these, nano composite films composed of
120 silver nano particles embedded in a matrix, obtained by co-sputtering or sputtering
121 and plasma polymerization, have been studied extensively because of their
122 interesting functional properties (Hlídek et al. 2009). Nano composite films
123 comprising metal nano particles embedded in an inorganic matrix are relatively
124 simpler to obtain via co-sputtering (Irfan et al. 2017) than those where metal
125 particles are embedded in a plasma polymerized matrix. Hexamethyldisiloxane
126 (HMDSO) is the most commonly used plasma polymer precursor to fabricate
127 nano composite coatings containing silver particles.

128 A variety of configurations of plasma techniques to obtain silver nanoparticles
129 embedded in a plasma polymer matrix have been reported. These include single
130 electrode deposition of both metal nanoparticles and polymer matrix (Hlídek et al.
131 2009; Despax and Raynaud 2007; Körner et al. 2010; Peter et al. 2011),
132 fabrication of metal nanoparticles separately via gas phase condensation (GPC)
133 (Schmittgens, Wolf and Schultheiss 2009) or gas phase aggregation (Kuzminova
134 et al. 2016, Kylian et al. 2017) of silver nano particles and various others
135 configurations (Brunon et al. 2011; Beyene et al. 2010; Deng et al. 2014). Each
136 technique has its own merits and demerits. In single electrode deposition, the

137 deposition rate of silver and plasma polymer needs to be balanced to obtain
138 homogeneous film due to silver target poisoning with plasma polymer (Körner et
139 al. 2010; Peter et al. 2011). While the synthesis of matrix and nanoparticles in
140 separate plasma regions necessitates the instalment of additional gas phase
141 aggregation or condensation source on the sputtering chamber (Schmittgens, Wolf
142 and Schultheiss 2009; Kuzminova et al. 2016).

143 Given the importance of aesthetic properties of textiles, transparent or
144 semitransparent antibacterial coatings with effective broad spectrum antibacterial
145 activity along with high washing stability has always been an area of interest for
146 researchers. Nonetheless, for most of the coatings, a trade off is achieved between
147 being antibacterial, transparent as well as having high washing stability. Silver
148 nano materials are well-known antimicrobial agents effective against various
149 types of microorganisms. However, whether incorporated within a polymer matrix
150 (Ramirez et al. 2018) or coated on the surface of a substrate (Brunon et al. 2011),
151 they impart color to the matrix or substrate due to surface plasmon resonance of
152 the silver nanoparticles or clusters. There are studies reporting antibacterial
153 textiles coated with silver nano particles/clusters with an acceptable level of
154 transparency. Most of these approaches include lowering the silver concentration
155 in the coating (Brunon et al. 2011; Chadeau et al. 2010) to reduce the intensity of
156 surface plasmon resonance of the silver particles. But this can limit antibacterial
157 performance or compromise long term antimicrobial activity which is associated
158 with sustained release of silver ions (Körner et al. 2010) from the coating.

159 In this study nano composite coating consisting of silver nano particles embedded
160 in plasma polymer matrix was deposited via a simple plasma based co-deposition
161 scheme on a green colored cotton fabric meant to be used in medical applications.
162 Separate power supplies to the two sputtering electrodes, along with other
163 operational parameters, ensured independent control and manipulation of the
164 matrix, silver nanoparticles amount, size and their distribution within the matrix
165 with no observation of silver target poisoning. In addition, high deposition rates
166 are possible to achieve. The matrix precursor monomer (HMDSO) was
167 introduced, polymerized and deposited from the surface of an RF electrode
168 whereas silver was simultaneously co-sputtered from DC electrode. Using this
169 scheme, five different compositions of the composite coating were obtained by
170 varying the silver concentration to have a balance between aesthetic look and

171 antibacterial performance of the fabric. The silver concentration was varied by
172 two approaches to reduce the coloration of the fabric. In first approach, silver
173 concentration was lowered to minimum in a 150 nm thick composite thin film.
174 While in the second approach, silver dispersion was increased in a relatively
175 thicker matrix while keeping the silver concentration per unit fabric area higher to
176 get the benefit of reduced coloration combined with silver concentration enough
177 for sustained silver ion release ability of the coated fabric. The obtained coatings
178 were then investigated in detail for their morphology, composition, silver nano
179 particle size and distribution, optical properties, potential of silver ion release,
180 antibacterial effect against a Gram + bacterium and washing stability of the
181 coating on the fabric.

182 **2. Experimental**

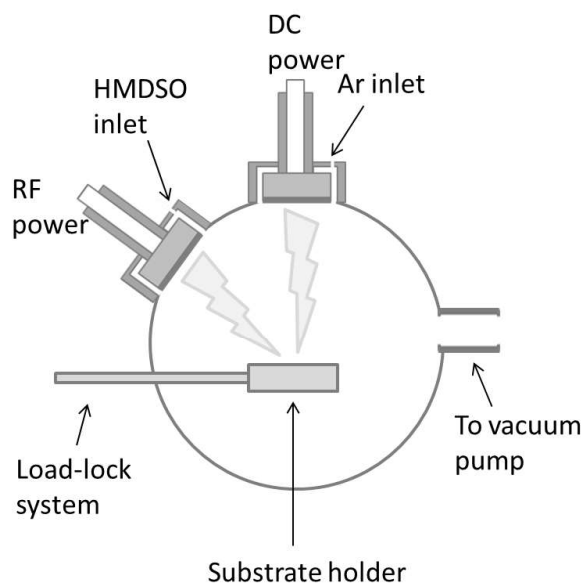
183 **2.1 Method**

184 The schematics of the deposition system used in this study is shown in Fig. 1. The
185 system was composed of a main cylindrical ultra-high vacuum (UHV) chamber
186 equipped with turbo molecular pump and rotary pump to create high vacuum.
187 Two balanced magnetrons (Thin Film Consulting, ION'X-2UHV, diameter of 2
188 inch), one connected to the RF generator (13.56 MHz) and the other one
189 connected to the DC power supply, were installed on the main chamber. RF
190 magnetron was used to deposit the plasma polymer and was equipped with a
191 carbon target in order to prevent metal sputtering from the magnetron surface. DC
192 magnetron was equipped with a silver target (2" dia, 99.99% Testbourne Ltd.) for
193 sputter deposition of silver. The simultaneous deposition of silver and plasma
194 polymer resulted in a nanocomposite thin film composed of plasma polymer
195 matrix and silver nanoparticle inclusions. Due to independent power supplies,
196 both the matrix thickness and silver concentration can be controlled separately.
197 The matrix of the composite coating was obtained via plasma polymerization of
198 the precursor hexamethyldisiloxane (HMDSO) which was introduced into the
199 vacuum chamber through an inlet in the magnetron. Ar was used as working gas
200 and was introduced in the chamber through an inlet in the DC magnetron. During
201 simultaneous deposition, silver was deposited within the growing plasma polymer
202 matrix on the surface of the substrate where nanoparticles are formed via self-

203 organization. With the adopted scheme, no evidence of silver target poisoning due
204 to plasma polymer sputtering was observed as has been reported in literature for
205 such co-depositions (Drábik et al. 2015).

206 The silver concentration within the composite coating was varied by two different
207 approaches: (1) by varying the deposition power of silver while keeping the
208 coating thickness (or more accurately the matrix thickness) same or (2) by
209 increasing the matrix thickness and keeping the silver deposition power constant.
210 The objective of the two approaches was to obtain a balance between an
211 acceptable level of transparency by reducing the silver concentration or particle
212 size while maintaining long-term antibacterial effect. The second approach was
213 adopted to get higher silver concentration on a unit fabric area with its expected
214 properties of controlled release of silver ions from relatively thicker coating
215 matrix that can prove beneficial for extended life of the coated fabric in repeated
216 use or when subjected to multiple washing cycles.

217 In order to obtain the coatings with above two approaches, a composite coating
218 with 150 nm thickness with maximum silver concentration obtained at silver
219 sputtering power of 50 W was selected as starting point for this study. This
220 starting point was selected after initial investigations keeping in view that even
221 this maximum silver concentration did not completely overshadow the green color
222 of the cotton fabric in visual inspection thus preserving the original aesthetic look
223 of the fabric to reasonable extent. The coating was obtained by applying a DC
224 power of 50W to silver and RF power of 25W for HMDSO at 0.2 sccm monomer
225 flow and 10 sccm Argon flow. Next, silver concentration in the coating was
226 reduced either (1) by reducing silver sputtering power to 30W and 15W and
227 keeping HMDSO deposition parameters the same or (2) by keeping the silver
228 sputtering power at 50W and increasing HMDSO flow (up to 0.5 sccm) to obtain
229 greater dispersion of silver in a thicker matrix. The system was evacuated to a
230 base pressure of about 3.0×10^{-4} Pa and deposition pressure was about 0.4 Pa.
231 Table 1 summarizes the obtained coatings along with respective process which
232 were deposited after preliminary investigations to find stable RF plasma
233 discharge. The deposition time was kept constant for each deposition (10 min)
234 with constant Ar flow (10 sccm). The samples are labelled by following the
235 scheme (CF-coating thickness-silver sputtering power) where CF represents
236 cotton fabric.



237

238 **Fig. 1** Schematic of the deposition system

239

240 Table 1 List of samples together with corresponding deposition conditions

Sample	RF Power (W)	DC Power (W)	Ar flow (sccm)	HMDSO flow (sccm)	Coating Thickness (nm)	Silver filling factor (%)
CF-150nm-50W	25 W	50 W	10	0.2	150 ± 7	13
CF-150nm-30W	25 W	30 W	10	0.2	150 ± 5	8
CF-150nm-15W	25 W	15 W	10	0.2	150 ± 8	5
CF-300nm-50W	25 W	50 W	10	0.4	300 ± 10	8
CF-400nm-50W	25 W	50 W	10	0.5	400 ± 12	6

241

242 **2.2 Characterization**

243 Chemical composition of the deposited polymer matrix was analyzed using
244 Fourier transform infrared reflection absorption spectroscopy (FTIR-RAS, Bruker
245 Equinox 55). FTIR spectra were obtained for plasma polymer coatings deposited
246 at 10, 25 and 50 W RF. Results were analyzed (discussed in the result section) and
247 25 W was selected to deposit plasma polymer throughout the study. In addition,
248 FTIR spectra were also obtained for thicker polymer matrix obtained by
249 increasing HMDSO flow while keeping RF power constant at 25W. The spectra
250 were obtained in the wave length range 500-4000 cm^{-1} and resolution of 4 cm^{-1} .
251 For FTIR analysis, polymer coatings were deposited on gold coated silicon
252 wafers.

253 Analysis of the surface chemistry of the cotton fabrics coated with nanocomposite
254 films was performed using X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS, Omicron
255 Nanotechnology GmbH) operating with Al anode at a power of 240 W. In order to
256 detect the elements present on the surface the survey spectra were recorded (with
257 pass energies of 100 eV). High-resolution spectra were obtained for the elements
258 detected during survey scans using pass energy of 30 eV. The morphology of the
259 composite coating was analyzed using scanning electron microscope (SEM, Zeiss
260 Ultra Plus). Silver nano particle's shape and size distribution were determined
261 using transmission electron microscopy (TEM, JEM-2100, JEOL, 200 kV, LaB6).
262 TEM samples were prepared by depositing 25-30 nm of composite coating on
263 carbon coated copper grids. The obtained images were processed by an image
264 processing software ImageJ (ImageJ) and size histograms for silver nanoparticles
265 were obtained.

266 Optical properties of the composite coating were assessed using UV-Vis
267 spectroscopy (Ellipsometer Woollam M2000 UI). Coatings were deposited on
268 quartz glass to obtain UV-Vis transmittance spectra in the wavelength range 250-
269 1000 nm. The total concentration of the silver deposited under three silver
270 sputtering powers (15W, 30W and 50W) was determined through Inductively
271 Coupled Plasma Mass Spectroscopy (ICP-MS, Thermo Scientific iCAPTM Q
272 ICP-MS). For this purpose, coated cotton samples (1x1 cm^2) were dissolved in a
273 mixture of nitric acid (65%) and H_2O_2 (30%). The liquor was then filtered. The
274 instrument (ICP-MS) was calibrated using solution containing 125, 250, 500 and
275 1000 ppb of silver. The potential of the composite coatings to release silver ions

276 in aqueous media was determined through silver ion release test. In silver ion
277 release test, fabric samples (1x1 cm²) were immersed in 10 ml water (milliQ) in
278 small plastic bottles at room temperature. 1 ml water sample was drawn from the
279 bottles after 3, 24 and 72 hours and quantity of ionic silver leached from the fabric
280 was determined through ICP–MS (Thermo Scientific iCAPTM Q ICP–MS).
281 Three samples for each coating were tested and average concentration was
282 reported.

283 Antibacterial performance of the cotton fabric coated by nanocomposite thin film
284 was assessed via “Inhibition halo test” performed against *Staphylococcus*
285 *epidermidis* LMG 10474, a Gram positive bacterium. For the test, a bacterial
286 inoculum was prepared by means of a water suspension of the colonies grown
287 over night on Nutrient agar plate at 37°C, the suspension was diluted to obtain a
288 value of optical density at 620 nm (O.D.₆₂₀) between 0.8 and 1. The suspension
289 was spread on the surface of Mueller Hinton agar plate by means of an inoculating
290 loop. Coated and uncoated cotton fabric samples (1x1 cm²) were placed in
291 contact with the inoculated agar plates and incubated at 37 °C for 24 hours. At the
292 end of the incubation period the microbial growth was observed to identify the
293 presence of the inhibition halo around the fabric samples and/or the lack of the
294 growth under them.

295 In order to analyze the washing stability of the coating, the “Inhibition halo test”
296 was also performed on coated fabric samples subjected to 10 washing cycles.
297 Coated fabric samples of size 2x2 cm² were washed in 100 ml water in a beaker.
298 Washing was performed in a thermostat bath at 60 °C for 30 minutes with
299 oscillations set at 150 per minute. Soap solution was composed of AATCC
300 standard detergent without optical brightener (WOB) at a concentration of 2 g/l.
301 Energy Dispersive X ray spectroscopy (EDX) was also performed on washed
302 samples to assess the presence of the coating on fabric surface by detecting the
303 elements of coating.

304 Finally, the water wettability of the coated fabric surface was determined with
305 water contact angle method. A water droplet of 5 µl was dropped on the surface of
306 the coated and uncoated fabric samples and image was captured after 10 seconds
307 to measure contact angle. Five measurements were taken for each coating and
308 average value of contact angle was reported.

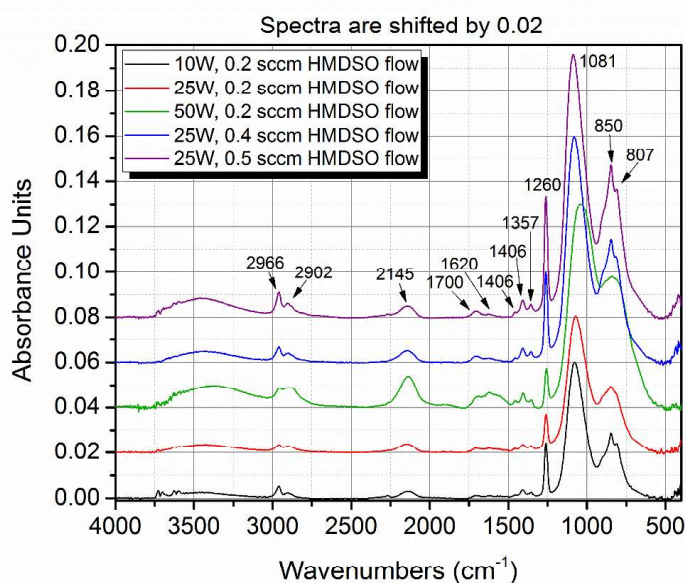
309 **3. Results and Discussion**

310 **3.1 Compositional and Morphological Characterization**

311 Infrared spectroscopy was employed to investigate the structure of the plasma
312 polymer at different applied RF power for a given flow rate of HMDSO and at
313 different flow rates of HMDSO at fixed applied power. Fig. 2 shows FTIR spectra
314 to identify different kinds of bonding in plasma polymerized HMDSO films
315 according to literature (Despax and Raynaud 2010). The absorption band with the
316 highest intensity is present at 1081 cm^{-1} which represents Si-O-Si asymmetric
317 stretching vibration and may also be overlapped with CH_2 wagging band in the
318 range $1040\text{-}1060\text{ cm}^{-1}$. This strong wagging band due to CH_2 is usually
319 accompanied with CH_2 scissor vibrations which are represented by a small peak at
320 1357 cm^{-1} associated with Si- CH_2 -Si. This small peak originating due to Si- CH_2 -
321 Si suggests that Si- CH_2 -Si bridge building can be one of the mechanisms of
322 plasma polymerization in the adopted deposition scheme (Rau and Kulisch 1994).
323 The peak at 1460 cm^{-1} and at 1406 cm^{-1} are representative of CH_3 asymmetrical
324 and symmetrical bending respectively and also points to the polymeric structure
325 of the thin film. The absorption band present at 1700 cm^{-1} indicates presence of
326 oxygen in C=O whereas a small peak at 1620 cm^{-1} represents contribution from
327 C=C (Hanus et al. 2008). The absorption band at 2145 cm^{-1} represents Si-H bond
328 (Rau and Kulisch 1994). The peak at 1260 cm^{-1} is due to Si- CH_3 derived from Si-
329 $(\text{CH}_3)_2$ groups (Radeva et al. 2014). The peaks at 2966 cm^{-1} and 2902 cm^{-1} are
330 representative of asymmetric and symmetric stretching vibrations of CH_2 in the
331 Si- CH_2 -Si fragments. The absorption peak at 850 cm^{-1} can be associated with Si-
332 CH_3 stretching vibration originating from Si- $(\text{CH}_3)_3$ end groups whereas a small
333 shoulder peak in its vicinity appearing at 807 cm^{-1} can be assigned to stretching
334 vibrations of the Si- CH_3 bond derived from Si- $(\text{CH}_3)_2$ and Si- CH_3 groups
335 (Radeva et al. 2014). When power is increased from 10 to 25 and 50 W for a
336 fixed monomer (HMDSO) flow of 0.2 sccm and constant Ar flow of 10 sccm, the
337 intensity of the peak at 850 cm^{-1} reduced suggesting the removal of CH_3 groups,
338 during plasma polymerization (Radeva et al. 2014). Since RF plasma at 25 W was
339 found to be more stable than at 50 W, therefore, 25 W was selected for deposition
340 of plasma polymerized HMDSO films along with co-sputtering of silver for the
341 rest of the experiments. These results indicate successful plasma polymerization

342 and deposition of $\text{SiC}_x\text{O}_y\text{H}$ films on the substrates. Moreover, the structure of the
343 plasma polymer can be varied by the applied RF power.

344 The structure of the plasma polymer films can be varied either by changing the
345 power (as discussed above) or by changing the monomer (HMDSO) flow rate.
346 This can be seen from FTIR spectra of plasma polymer films obtained at
347 increased HMDSO flow rate (0.4 and 0.5 sccm) at 25 W. Films obtained at
348 increased HMDSO flow again exhibit an increased intensity at 850 cm^{-1}
349 suggesting higher number of CH_3 groups due to increased monomer flow rate.



350

351 **Fig. 2** FTIR spectra of plasma polymer thin films deposited onto gold-coated silicon wafers at
352 different RF power and HMDSO flow rates. Ar flow was fixed at 10 sccm

353

354 Further chemical characterization of the composite thin film coatings comprising
355 silver nanoparticles embedded in the plasma polymer matrix and deposited onto
356 cotton fabric was performed using XPS. Survey spectrum (not shown here) of the
357 uncoated fabric surface indicated the presence of carbon and oxygen as these are
358 the main constituents elements of cellulosic fibers. Additionally, silver and silicon
359 peaks appeared in the survey spectrum of the cotton fabric coated by
360 nanocomposite thin film (Fig. 3a). For the detailed interpretation of XPS results
361 only three samples with constant film thickness and different Ag content were
362 selected. High resolution XPS spectra of O-1s, Si-2p and Ag-3d are shown in Fig.
363 3 b, c and d, respectively. Their detailed analysis with respect to chemical shifts
364 yields an important information about the bonding between different elements
365 present on the surface and, thus give the information about the chemical structure

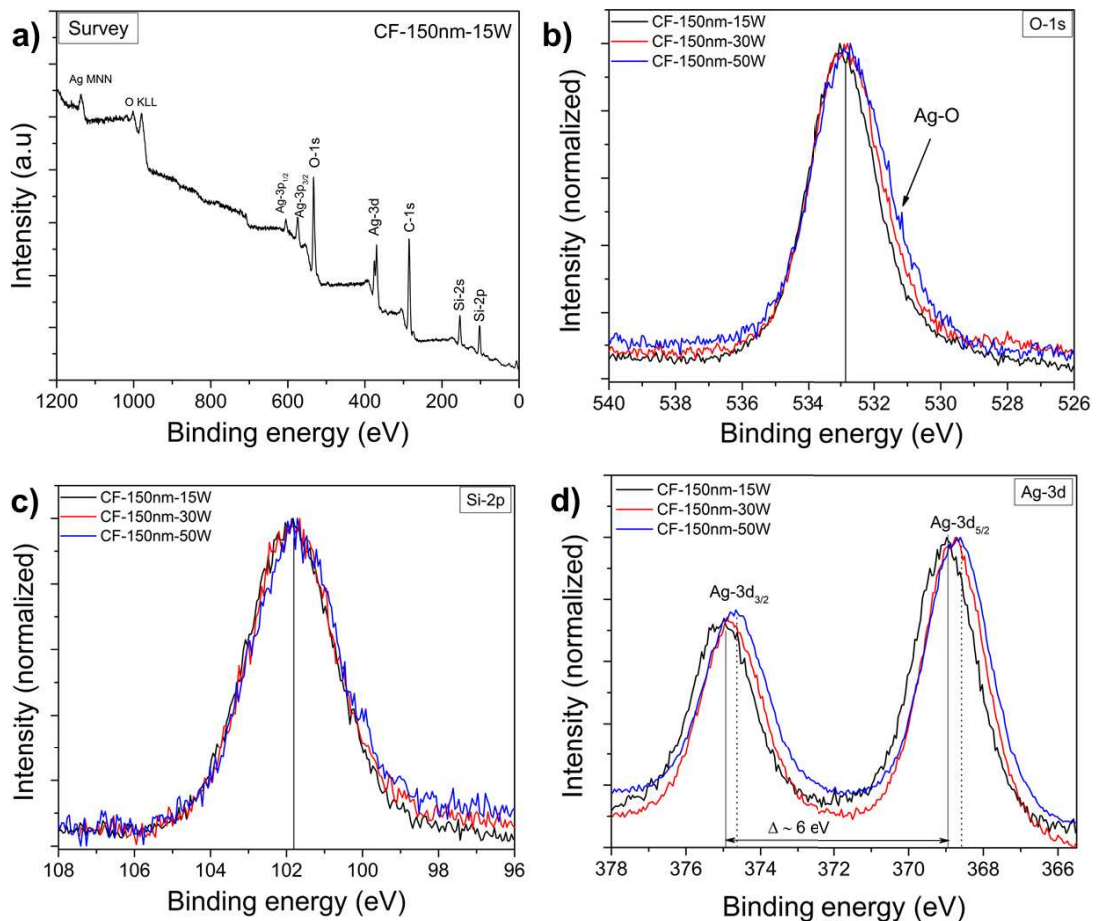
366 of nanocomposite thin films. All XPS spectra were charge referenced for aliphatic
367 carbon at 285.0 eV. The O-1s peak located at around 532.8 eV represents O-Si
368 bonds (Brunon et al. 2011) originating from organosilicon like structure
369 (Alexander et al. 1996). Generally, high resolution O-1s XPS peaks for the three
370 selected samples are almost identical, except only a small shift of the peak
371 shoulder located at lower binding energy (~531.0 eV). More specific, this
372 component of the peak is increasing with the increasing silver concentration in the
373 nanocomposite films. Such peak can be attributed to Ag-oxide groups which are
374 formed either due to formation of Ag-O bonds in the polymeric films or due to
375 surface oxidation after the exposure to the atmosphere.

376 High-resolution Si-2p peak, located at 101.8 eV can be assigned to Si atoms
377 bonded to oxygen (correlation with O-1s interpretation, see above) as well as
378 different hydrocarbons (FTIR spectra confirm similar observations). According to
379 the literature, components of Si-2p peak located at 101.5, 102.1 and 102.8 eV
380 have been reported to be originating from R_3SiO , R_2SiO_2 and $RSiO_3$ respectively
381 (R being hydrocarbon) (Saulou et al. 2012). As one can notice from Figure 3c all
382 three Si-2p spectra for different samples are identical, suggesting that there is no
383 influence of silver concentration on the chemical structure of the plasma
384 polymerized HMDSO matrix.

385 Fig. 3d shows a comparison of high resolution of Ag-3d for nanocomposite thin
386 films containing different amount of Ag inclusions. For the sample with the
387 lowest Ag concentration (CF-150nm-15W) Ag-3d_{5/2} peak positioned at 368.8 eV
388 and Ag-3d_{3/2} peak at 374.8 eV with spin orbit separation of 6 eV suggest silver in
389 a metallic form (Ag^0) (Deng et al. 2014). However, the comparison of Ag-3d
390 peaks for samples with higher Ag amount shows a shift of the Ag peaks to lower
391 binding energy by roughly 0.25-0.35 eV that might be an indication of a slight
392 silver oxidation caused, most likely, by the exposure to the ambient atmosphere
393 (Moulder and Chastain 1992).

394 Elemental atomic concentrations obtained from XPS measurements are also
395 shown in the Table 2. The key information from the table is to confirm the
396 presence and show variation of silver concentration on the surface of samples
397 depending upon the deposition conditions. The surface silver concentration
398 increases with increase in silver sputtering power for a given coating thickness
399 and decreases with increase in coating thickness at a given silver sputtering

400 power. The surface atomic percent of silver is 2.7, 4.9 and 8.7 % when sputtered
 401 at 15 W, 30 W and 50 W respectively. When coating thickness was increased to
 402 300 and 400 nm by increasing the HMDSO flow while maintaining the silver
 403 sputtering power at 50 W, the silver atomic percent on the surface decreases and
 404 comes closer to what was observed at 30 W (for 150 nm) and 15 W (for 150 nm).
 405 This is also in agreement of decreasing silver particle size (TEM micrographs)
 406 due to greater dispersion of the silver within the bulk of the thicker matrix.
 407 Thus it can be concluded that plasma polymerization of HMDSO monomer
 408 resulted in an organosilicon like coating containing silver nanoparticles with
 409 surface silver concentration that increased or decreased depending upon the
 410 deposition conditions hence affecting the distribution of silver within the polymer
 411 matrix.



412
 413 **Fig. 3** XPS spectra for selected cotton fabric coated by nanocomposite thin films: a) Survey
 414 spectrum for CF-150nm-15W; b), c) and d) high resolution XPS spectra of O-1s, Si-2p and Ag-3d
 415 peaks, respectively, for three selected samples with constant film thickness and various silver
 416 amount. All the high resolution spectra are normalized
 417

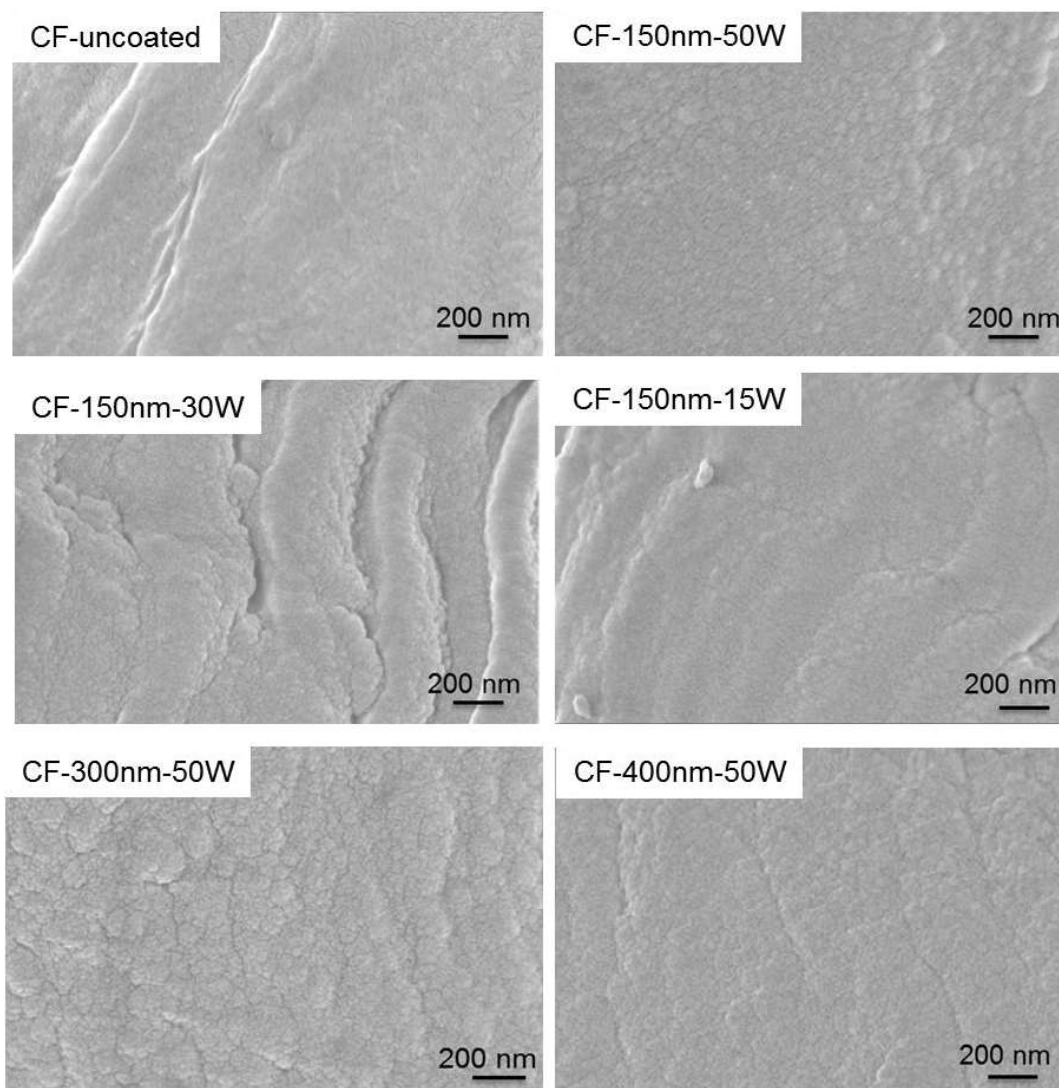
418 **Table 2** Elemental atomic percent from XPS for uncoated and coated cotton fabric

	Sample	C	O	Si	Ag
Fixed coating thickness and increasing silver sputtering power	CF-uncoated	76.5	23.4	-	-
	CF-150nm-15W	53.3	24.0	20.0	2.7
	CF-150nm-30W	56.7	21.8	16.6	4.9
	CF-150nm-50W	55.8	20.6	14.9	8.7
Increasing coating thickness and fixed silver sputtering power	CF-150nm-50W	55.8	20.5	14.9	8.7
	CF-300nm-50W	50.4	23.9	21.1	4.6
	CF-400nm-50W	51.2	24.0	21.6	3.2

419

420 The morphology of the composite coatings deposited onto cotton fabric can be
 421 seen in SEM images shown in Fig. 4. The surface of the uncoated cotton fiber was
 422 relatively smooth showing original features of the fiber surface. After deposition
 423 of nanocomposite thin films, dense granular topography, typical for sputter
 424 deposited coatings (Irfan et al. 2017), can be seen on the surface of the fibers
 425 indicating presence of the coating. However, silver nanoparticles are not visible
 426 on the fiber surface. This is expected as silver nanoparticles are supposed to be
 427 embedded within the plasma polymer matrix according to the adopted deposition
 428 scheme. The SEM images show uniform and conformal coverage even on uneven
 429 fiber surfaces. Further, EDX analysis (not shown here) revealed the presence of
 430 the elements Ag, Si along with C and O. This confirms the presence of silver
 431 nanoparticles and organosilicon like polymer on coated cotton fibers.

432



433

434 **Fig. 4** High magnification SEM images of cotton fibers coated with nanocomposite thin films
 435 comprising silver nanoparticles embedded in plasma polymer matrix

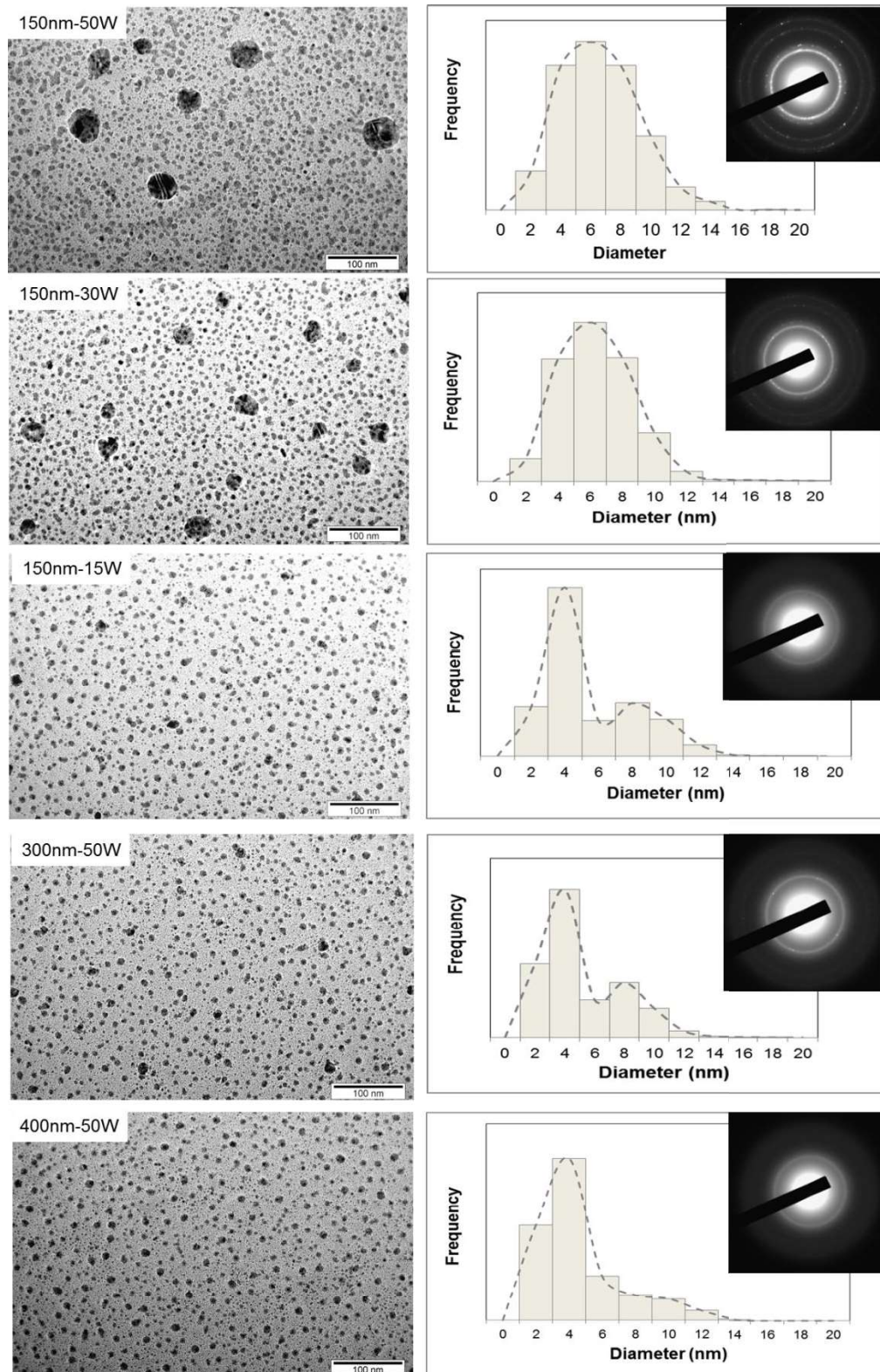
436 TEM was performed to analyze the size of the silver nanoparticles and their
 437 distribution in the polymer matrix obtained under different deposition conditions
 438 and results are shown in Fig. 5. The size distribution of the silver nanoparticles
 439 was determined using image processing software ImageJ. The figure shows that
 440 spherical silver nanoparticles were homogeneously distributed within the
 441 amorphous plasma polymer matrix. However, some non spherical particles can
 442 also be seen at increased deposition power of silver (150nm-50W and 150nm-
 443 30W) which were formed due to coalescence of smaller particles within the
 444 growing polymer matrix as result of higher deposition rate of silver. In addition,
 445 under higher deposition powers of silver, few particles as large in diameter as 34
 446 or 44 nm can also be observed in TEM micrograph shown in Fig. 5. At lower
 447 deposition power (150nm-15W), a bimodal size distribution was observed with

448 majority of the silver particles of 4 nm followed by 8 nm in size. With increase in
449 silver sputtering power (150nm-30W and 150nm-50W) while keeping the
450 deposition of the plasma polymer the same, an increase in the diameter of the
451 nanoparticles can be observed from the size distribution histograms in Fig. 5. This
452 results in normal distribution with maximum in size distribution at around ~6 nm
453 with increase in silver sputtering power (150nm-50W).

454 When thickness of the plasma polymer matrix was increased by increasing the
455 flow rate of the HMDSO monomer while keeping the silver sputtering power
456 fixed at 50 W (300nm-50W), bimodal size distribution for silver nanoparticles
457 was observed again. Since the nucleation of the metal nanoparticles and their
458 growth is controlled by their surface diffusion coefficients in the plasma matrix
459 (Drábik et al 2015), the thicker plasma matrix may limit the diffusion of silver
460 atoms reducing the size of the silver nanoparticles leading again to bimodal size
461 distribution even at higher silver sputtering power. Thus, at thickness of 300 nm,
462 the average diameter of the majority of the silver nanoparticles was around 4 nm
463 followed by 8 nm in diameter. With further increase in matrix thickness to 400 nm
464 (400nm-50W), a further increase in the number of silver particles of ~4 nm
465 diameter occurred followed by an increase in number of even smaller
466 nanoparticles of ~2 nm. An equivalent decrease in the number of nanoparticles
467 with higher diameter of about 8 nm is also evident. Because of this reason, the
468 average diameter of silver nano particles, reported in Fig. 5, decreased with
469 decrease in silver sputtering power while it also decreased even to greater extent
470 with increase in coating matrix thickness. In all the cases, the size of the majority
471 silver nanoparticles varied between 2 to 14 nm which is similar to what has been
472 reported earlier for the nano composite coating obtained under a different plasma
473 configuration (Peter et al 2011). The inset images in Fig. 5 show the selected area
474 electron diffraction (SAED) pattern of the composite films. Well ordered
475 diffraction rings visible as bright dots indicate the presence of crystalline silver
476 nanoparticles (Drábik et al. 2015). These diffraction rings are more visible for the
477 composite coating containing higher silver concentration and larger nanoparticles
478 (150nm-50W, 150nm-30W) than those with lower silver concentration and
479 smaller particles (150nm-15W, 300nm-50W, 400nm-50W). The variation in the
480 size of the silver nanoparticles and their distribution was also reflected in the

481 corresponding UV-Vis spectra of the composite coating obtained under different
482 conditions as discussed below.

483



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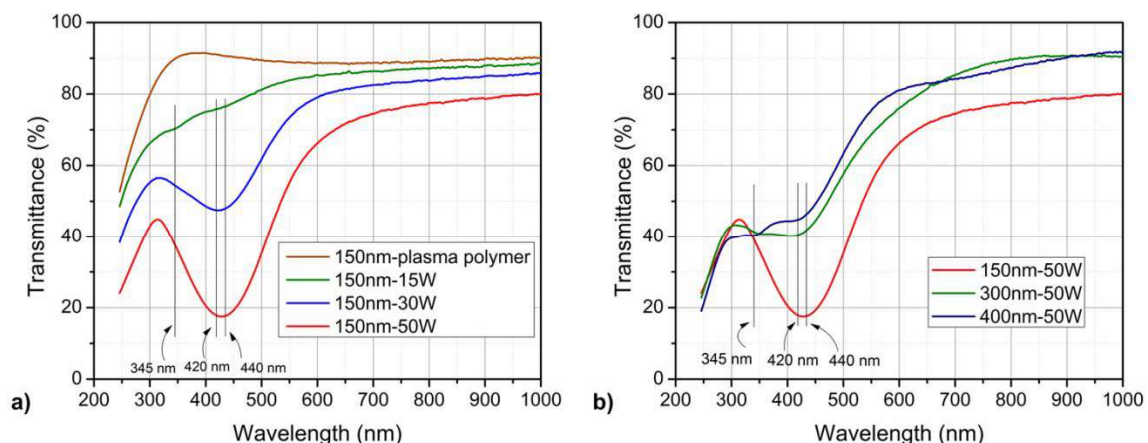
485 **Fig. 5** TEM images of composite coating deposited on TEM grids showing silver nanoparticles
486 embedded within the plasma polymer matrix under different deposition conditions. Images were
487 processed using ImageJ to produce size histograms

488 **3.2 Optical Properties**

489 Optical properties of the composite coatings were evaluated with UV-Vis
490 spectroscopy and results are shown in Fig. 6 a,b. The transmittance spectra were
491 acquired for different nanocomposite thin films deposited onto quartz glass
492 substrates. UV-Vis spectra are combined into two groups: 1) fixed total thickness
493 of nanocomposite thin films with different Ag filling factor (Fig. 6a) and 2)
494 constant Ag amount and varied thin film thickness (Fig. 6b). In both cases
495 absorbance peaks with different intensities can be seen depending upon the total
496 silver concentration as well as silver nanoparticle size distribution in accordance
497 with TEM results. The spectrum of the quartz glass substrate coated with 150 nm
498 thick plasma polymer only is shown for comparison purposes. The coating with
499 minimum silver concentration resulted in maximum transmission. At lower
500 deposition power (150nm-15W), silver nanoparticles have bimodal size
501 distribution as discussed in the TEM analysis and hence exhibit two absorption
502 peaks at around 345 and 420 nm. Traditionally, the optical absorption of metal
503 nanoparticles is ascribed to be due to Localized Surface Plasmon Resonance
504 (LSPR) (Wiley et al. 2006). However, due to intraband excitation of the
505 conduction electrons by incident photons, it can also be described quantum
506 mechanically. The maximum absorbance wavelength, according to quantum
507 theory of nanoparticles, is linked with the conduction band energy (Gharibshahi et
508 al. 2017). Contrary to the bulk metals, conduction electrons are not completely
509 free in metal nanoparticles rather some of them are linked with individual atoms
510 while others are free to move. When photon of light hit the metal nanoparticles,
511 these conduction electron get intra band excitations. Smaller sized particles are
512 composed of fewer metal atoms which reduces the potential attraction between
513 metal ions and conduction electrons in the nanoparticle. This leads to increased
514 conduction band energy for smaller sized nanoparticles. On the other hand, larger
515 particles are composed of greater number of metal atoms leading to increased
516 attraction between conduction electrons and metal ions. Thus conduction band
517 energy of larger sized particles is reduced (Gharibshahi et al. 2017). It has been
518 reported that smaller sized silver particles (up to 2nm) can exhibit more than one
519 absorption peaks due to molecule-like optical transitions. As their size grows
520 (>2nm), the absorption band is influenced by surface plasmon resonance of free
521 electrons in the particles (Bakr et al. 2009).

522 With the increase in silver deposition power (150nm-30W and 150nm-50W),
523 silver nanoparticle size and concentration increased, therefore, the absorption
524 intensity increased significantly and shifted from 420 nm to 440 nm whereas the
525 absorption peak at 345 nm vanished giving rise to a broad single peak (Fig.
526 6a). Increased absorption intensity and red shift suggests that at higher silver
527 sputtering power we have larger silver nanoparticles with decreased nanoparticle
528 to nanoparticle distance due higher density of silver nanoparticles in agreement
529 with TEM observations. However, when matrix thickness of the coating was
530 increased while keeping silver sputtering power constant at 50 W, the silver
531 nanoparticles again showed bimodal size distribution due to decrease in silver
532 nanoparticles size. The increase in matrix thickness from 150 nm to 300 and 400
533 nm for silver sputtering power of 50 W (300nm-50W and 400nm-50W) brought
534 the overall silver filling factor approximately to the same level as that obtained for
535 30 W (for 300nm-50W) and 15 W (for 400nm-50W) although the total silver
536 concentration within the thin films was higher at higher power (at 50W).
537 Therefore, the absorption peaks both at 345 nm and 420 nm appeared again
538 (300nm-50W and 400nm-50W in Fig. 6b). However, the transmittance level of
539 the coatings with similar silver filling factors but different total silver amount in
540 the nanocomposite (for example 150nm-15W and 400nm-50 W) was different.
541 The coating with higher silver concentration can absorb more than that with lower
542 silver concentration (Brunon et al. 2011). This implies that the transparency of the
543 nanocomposite film can be increased to certain extent by increasing the matrix
544 thickness while maintaining higher silver concentration within the thin film.
545 However, it cannot be brought to the level of the thin film having lower silver
546 concentration although both thin films may have same silver filling factor with
547 respect to total volume of the thin film. The images of cotton fabric coated with
548 nanocomposite thin films are shown in Fig. 7 which demonstrate variation in the
549 color of the fabric under different deposition conditions. Maximum preservation
550 of the original look of the fabric can be seen for fabric sample CF-150nm-15W
551 which is deposited with minimum silver concentration. Whereas maximum color
552 variation occurred for fabric sample CF-150nm-50W that contains maximum
553 silver concentration deposited at 50W. However, this variation in color with
554 maximum silver concentration was restored to reasonable extent for samples CF-

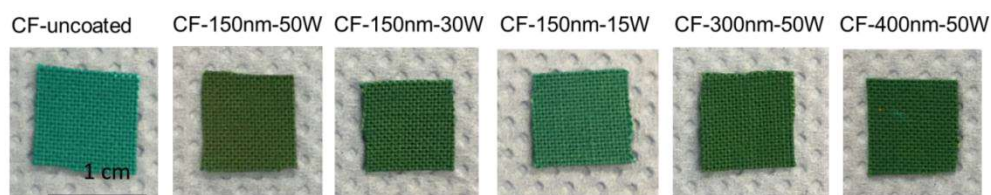
555 300nm-50W and CF-400nm-50W which contain same silver concentration
556 dispersed in a thicker matrix.



557

558 **Fig. 6** Transmittance UV-Vis spectra of the Ag/ppHMDSO nanocomposite coatings deposited
559 onto quartz glass: a) Constant thickness of nanocomposite thin film with different silver amount;
560 b) Varied thickness of the films (150 nm, 300 nm and 400nm) with constant deposition rate of
561 silver

562



563

564 **Fig. 7** Photographs of fabric samples coated with nanocomposite thin films prepared under various
565 deposition conditions

566

567 **3.3 Silver Concentration and Silver Ions Release**

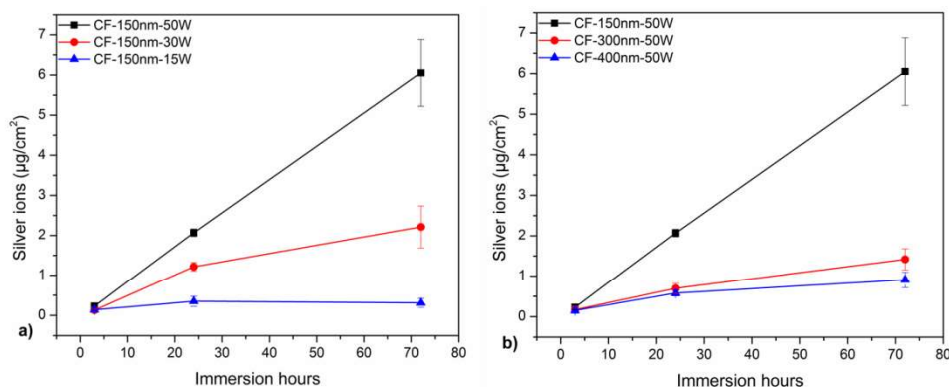
568 The total amount of silver deposited onto cotton fabric under three silver
569 sputtering powers, namely 15 W, 30 W and 50 W (CF-150nm-15W, CF-150nm-
570 15W and CF-150nm-15W), was determined via ICP-MS to be 55, 129 and 286
571 ppm (mg of silver per kg of fabric) respectively. For other two samples (CF-
572 300nm-50W and CF-400nm-50W), the silver sputtering power was maintained at
573 50 W similar to CF-150nm-50W, therefore, these samples are also expected to
574 contain same amount of silver (286 ppm) as that of sample CF-150nm-50W.
575 However, in samples CF-300nm-50W and CF-400nm-50W, this silver amount is
576 dispersed in a thicker matrix. It is of interest to evaluate the potential of these
577 nanocomposite coatings to release silver ions in wet environment.

578 In aqueous environments, silver nanoparticles are oxidized and release silver
579 cations (Ag^+). Antibacterial activity of silver nanoparticles is considered to be
580 associated with release of silver ions from the coating (Körner et al. 2010). Thus,
581 a controlled and sustained release of silver ions from the coating may contribute
582 to sustained and prolonged antibacterial activity. Therefore, silver ion release
583 behaviour of the deposited antibacterial coatings was evaluated by immersing the
584 coated fabric samples in water and results are shown in Fig. 8. The Figure shows
585 silver ion release profiles from the coated fabric dependent on immersion time,
586 silver concentration as well as coating thickness. It is worth mentioning that no
587 abrupt release was observed in any case after immersing the sample in water. This
588 is the benefit of embedding silver nanoparticles in the matrix which controls the
589 release of silver ions into the aqueous environment. Direct exposure of the silver
590 nanoparticles to the water may cause an abrupt release of silver ions in water
591 (Kuzminova et al. 2016).

592 The graph shows that higher the silver concentration in a given coating thickness
593 (Fig. 8a) (obtained at higher silver sputtering power), higher is the release of
594 silver ions. On the other hand, increasing the coating thickness while keeping the
595 silver concentration per unit fabric area the same (Fig. 8b, samples CF-150nm-
596 50W, CF-300nm-50W and CF-400nm-50W) results in decrease in the release of
597 silver ions. This implies that increased thickness of the matrix reduced the kinetics
598 of silver ions release. It should be noted that all the samples in Fig. 8b were
599 deposited at same silver sputtering power (50W) thus containing approximately
600 same concentration of silver on unit fabric surface area but dispersed in the
601 coating matrix of varying thickness. This concentration was measured to be 286
602 ppm i.e mg of silver per kg of cotton fabric via ICP-MS.

603 The cumulative release of Ag^+ both from CF-150nm-50W and CF-150nm-30W
604 was more than 90% of the total deposited silver within three days of immersion in
605 water. Whereas, it was 30, 23 and 15% from CF-150nm-15W, CF-300nm-50W
606 and CF-400nm-50W respectively. The release of silver ions from (CF-150nm-
607 30W) is higher than that from CF-300nm-50W and CF-400nm-50W despite the
608 fact that concentration of silver deposited at 30 W is less than that deposited at 50
609 W. This indicates that higher thickness of the coating (matrix) suppressed the
610 release of silver ions even if the concentration of silver per unit fabric area was
611 higher than that in relatively thinner coating. This justifies the hypothesis that

612 dispersing relatively higher silver concentration in thicker coating will provide
 613 more sustained supply of silver ions extending the life of the coated fabric in
 614 repeated use along with benefit of reduced coloration (due to smaller particle size)
 615 as mentioned earlier. This is of particular importance keeping in view that the
 616 controlled release of metal ions is considered very difficult to achieve as it is not
 617 only dependent on the concentration of metal particles. **Hydrophobic nature of the**
 618 **matrix (discussed later in the article) is also responsible in suppressing the release**
 619 **of silver ions from the thicker matrices as has also been reported by Kylian et al.**
 620 **(Kylian et al. 2017).** Other factors like surface roughness, surface oxidation
 621 kinetics and particle agglomeration state are also key factors to control the release
 622 rate of metal ions (Ponomarev et al 2018).



623

624 **Fig. 8** Silver ion release profiles for cotton fabric coated with nanocomposite thin films. The
 625 measurements were carried via ICP-MS on water samples drawn after 3, 24 and 72 hours of
 626 immersion in water

627 3.4 Antibacterial performance

628 Silver nano particles are well known antimicrobial agents which demonstrate
 629 biocidal action against a wide variety of bacteria, both Gram positive and Gram
 630 negative, as well as fungi (Balagna et al. 2012) along with low cytotoxicity and
 631 absence of drug resistance (Wu et al. 2018). The exact mechanism for biocidal
 632 action of silver nano particles, as well as other metal nano particles, is not yet
 633 completely understood. However, experimental evidence suggests that
 634 antimicrobial activity of silver nano particles is associated with silver ions and
 635 hence on the kinetic of silver ions release from the silver nano particles
 636 (Ponomarev et al. 2018). In this study, antibacterial activity of the prepared
 637 coatings was evaluated against *Staphylococcus epidermidis* and results are shown
 638 in Fig. 9. The Figure shows that, compared with the untreated control sample (CF-
 639 uncoated), where bacterial growth is well visible under fabric surface, all the

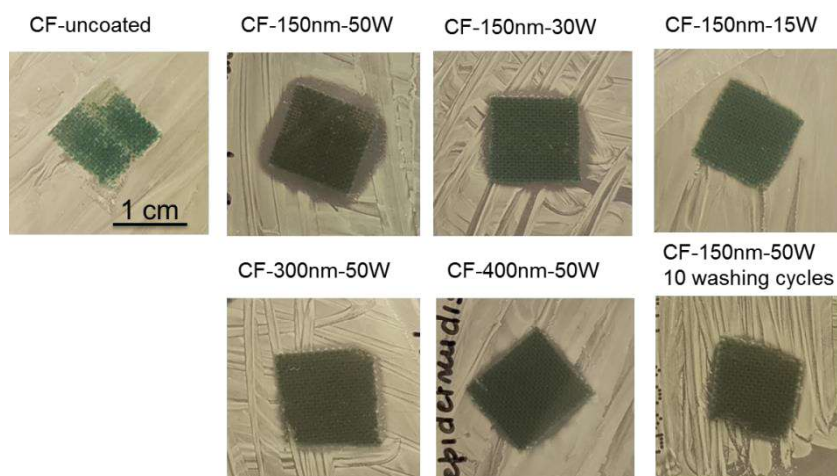
640 coated samples showed antibacterial activity against *S. epidermidis*. However, the
641 size of the inhibition halo is different for different samples.

642 In case of higher silver ion release from the coating (CF-150nm-50W and CF-
643 150nm-30W), a well-defined inhibition halo can be seen around the samples. This
644 indicates higher concentration of the active agent leached from the sample into the
645 surrounding medium. As shown in Fig. 8, the minimum concentration of silver
646 ions was released from CF-150nm-15W which also contains minimum silver
647 concentration as compared with other samples. It can be observed that there
648 wasn't bacterial growth under the fabric sample despite the absence of a well-
649 defined inhibition halo. For the samples CF-300nm-50W and CF-400-50W, which
650 contain the same concentration of silver as that of CF-150nm-50W, but dispersed
651 in thicker matrices, a very small inhibition halo can be observed. This is due to a
652 more controlled release of silver ions from the thicker coating, CF-300nm-50W
653 and CF-400-50W, than from the thinner CF-150nm-50W. The formation of the
654 inhibition halo depends on the leaching of the antimicrobial agent in the
655 surrounding medium (Tomšič et al. 2008). This fact decreases the antibacterial
656 agent concentration on the fabric surface and, consequently, diminishes the
657 subsequent antimicrobial performances. Therefore, controlled release of silver
658 ions will be more sustainable to maintain antibacterial activity for longer times. In
659 addition, compared with other metal ions, silver gives bactericidal action at very
660 low concentrations (Ponomarev et al. 2018). This property of silver nanoparticles
661 combined further with controlled release can be useful for many other
662 applications where cytotoxicity can be a concern while obtaining antibacterial
663 activity for example in wound dressings or where the silver nanoparticle
664 containing coating is in direct contact with human skin.

665 In order to assess the washing stability of the coating, antibacterial performance
666 was also evaluated on samples subjected to multiple washing cycles. For this
667 purpose, fabric samples CF-150nm-50W were washed 10 times and subjected to
668 the "Inhibition halo test". Fig. 9 shows that, although the size of the inhibition
669 halo decreased after the washing treatment, the antibacterial activity was still
670 present, in fact no microbial growth, under the sample surface, was observed. **The**
671 **washing stability of the thin films sputtered on textile surfaces has been found to**
672 **be poor as reported by Wang et al. (Wang et al. 2008). The results of this study**

673 show that reasonable washing stability for textiles deposited with sputtered thin
674 films can be obtained.

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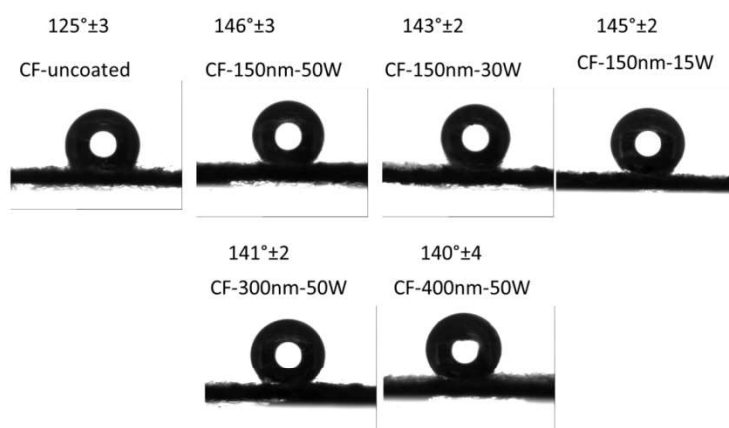


676

677 **Fig. 9** Inhibition halo test on cotton samples deposited with nanocomposite thin films with varying
678 silver concentration and coating thickness. Antibacterial activity was present even after 10
679 washing cycles

680 **3.5 Water wettability**

681 Cotton fibers are hydrophilic due to abundance of hydroxyl groups in its structure
682 that make cotton fabrics stain easily when in contact with liquids. Polysiloxanes
683 are low surface energy polymers and thus make the surfaces hydrophobic on
684 which they are applied. Fabric surfaces treated with polysiloxanes may result in
685 high hydrophobicity to super hydrophobicity (Hao et al. 2016). Hydrophobicity of
686 the cotton fabric coated by silver nanoparticles-plasma polymer thin film was
687 assessed through water contact angle test and results are shown in Fig. 10.
688 Uncoated cotton fabric showed a water contact angle of 125°. High water contact
689 angle on uncoated cotton fabric was due to dense weave structure of the fabric
690 which may lead to higher water contact angle due to surface patterning and
691 roughness. After deposition, the water contact angle increased from 125° up to
692 146° making the fabric surface highly hydrophobic, closer to super
693 hydrophobicity.



694

695 **Fig. 10** Water contact angle on cotton fabric coated with nanocomposite thin films showing highly
 696 hydrophobic surface after coating

697 **Conclusion**

698 In summary, an antibacterial, highly hydrophobic and semi transparent
 699 nanocomposite thin film was deposited on green colored cotton fabric intended to
 700 be used in medical wear. The nanocomposite thin film, composed of silver nano
 701 particles embedded in the plasma polymer matrix, was obtained via ecofriendly
 702 plasma based co-deposition scheme. Polymer matrix was obtained by
 703 polymerizing HMDSO monomer and its subsequent deposition on the substrate.
 704 The coating was deposited under five different deposition conditions mainly to
 705 vary the silver concentration and its size distribution within the polymer matrix to
 706 influence optical properties as well controlling the leaching of silver ions. Silver
 707 concentration was varied either by decreasing silver deposition power without
 708 changing plasma polymer matrix thickness or by increasing plasma polymer
 709 matrix thickness without changing silver deposition power. Thickness of the
 710 plasma polymer was found to be more important in controlling the release of ionic
 711 silver in aqueous medium along with reduction in optical absorbance. While
 712 decreasing silver deposition power without changing polymer matrix resulted in
 713 more transparent coating due to lower silver concentration and smaller sized
 714 particles. Thus variation in the silver concentration or matrix thickness led to the
 715 variation in the silver nano particle size and their distribution within the coating
 716 matrix which consequently influenced the optical properties as well as silver ions
 717 release from the coating. The deposition resulted in bimodal distribution of silver
 718 nano particles where silver concentration was lower or matrix thickness was
 719 higher. The thin films deposited under all the five conditions demonstrated
 720 effective antibacterial activity against *S. epidermidis* LMG 10474 in the

721 “Inhibition halo test”. with size of the halo depending upon silver ion release
722 profiles from the respective coatings. The coating showed a certain degree of
723 washing stability as it was able to retain antibacterial activity when subjected to
724 10 washing cycles. The coating rendered the surface of the cotton fabric high
725 hydrophobicity reaching water contact angle as high as 146°. This work shows
726 that independent manipulation of the process parameters for silver and plasma
727 polymer in the co-deposition scheme can yield nano composite coatings
728 comprising silver nano particles with acceptable transparency and long term
729 antibacterial properties for practical applications.

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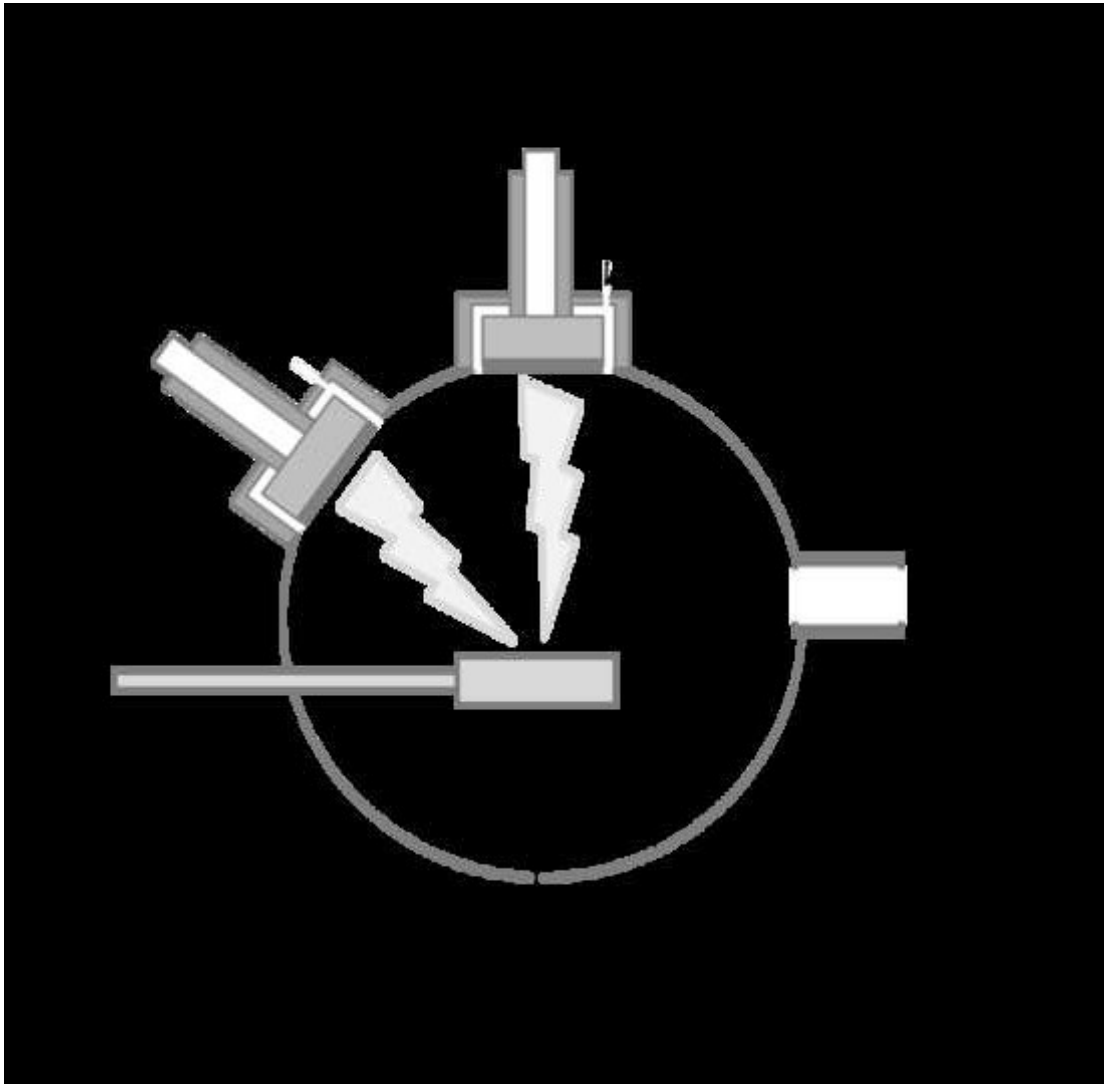
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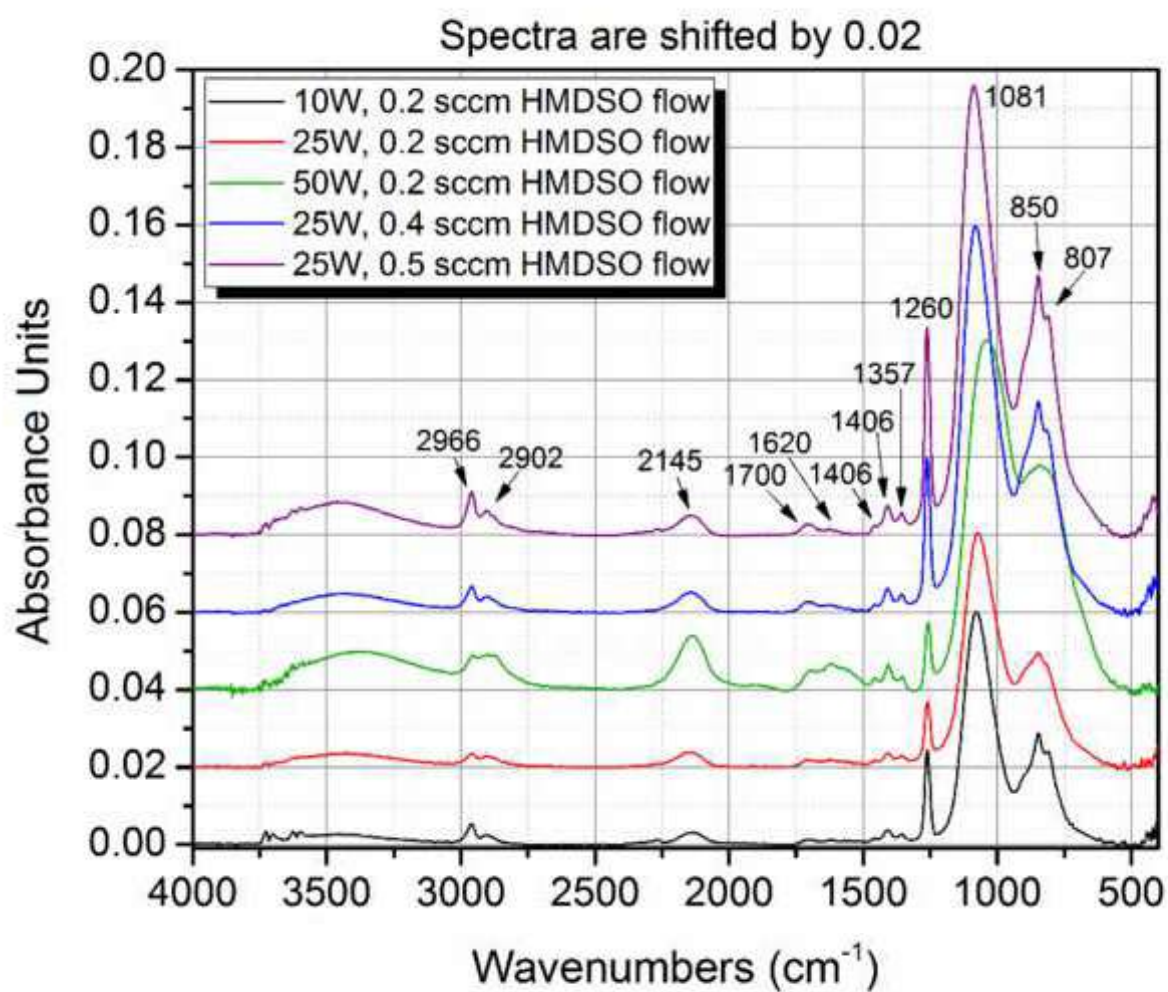
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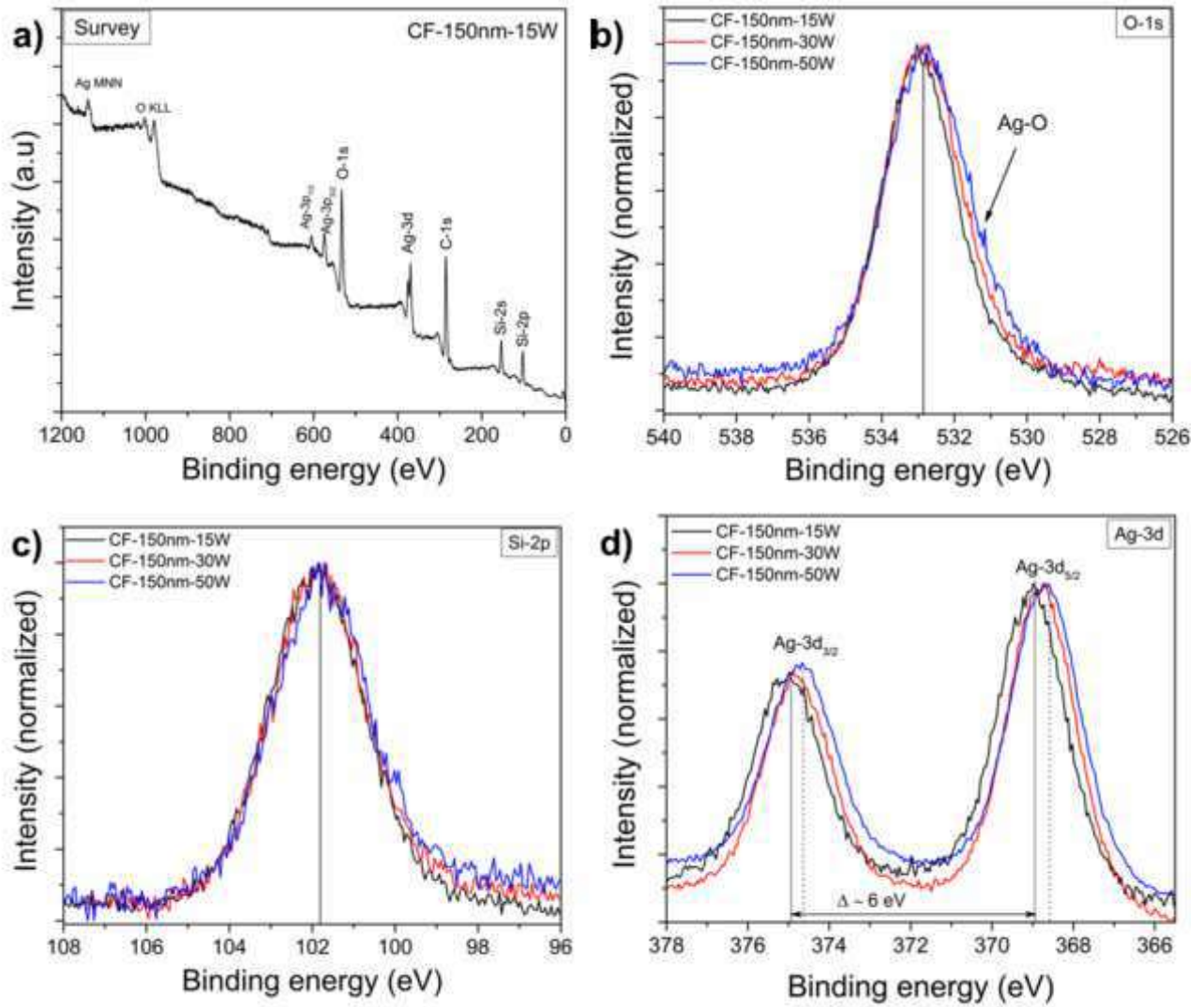
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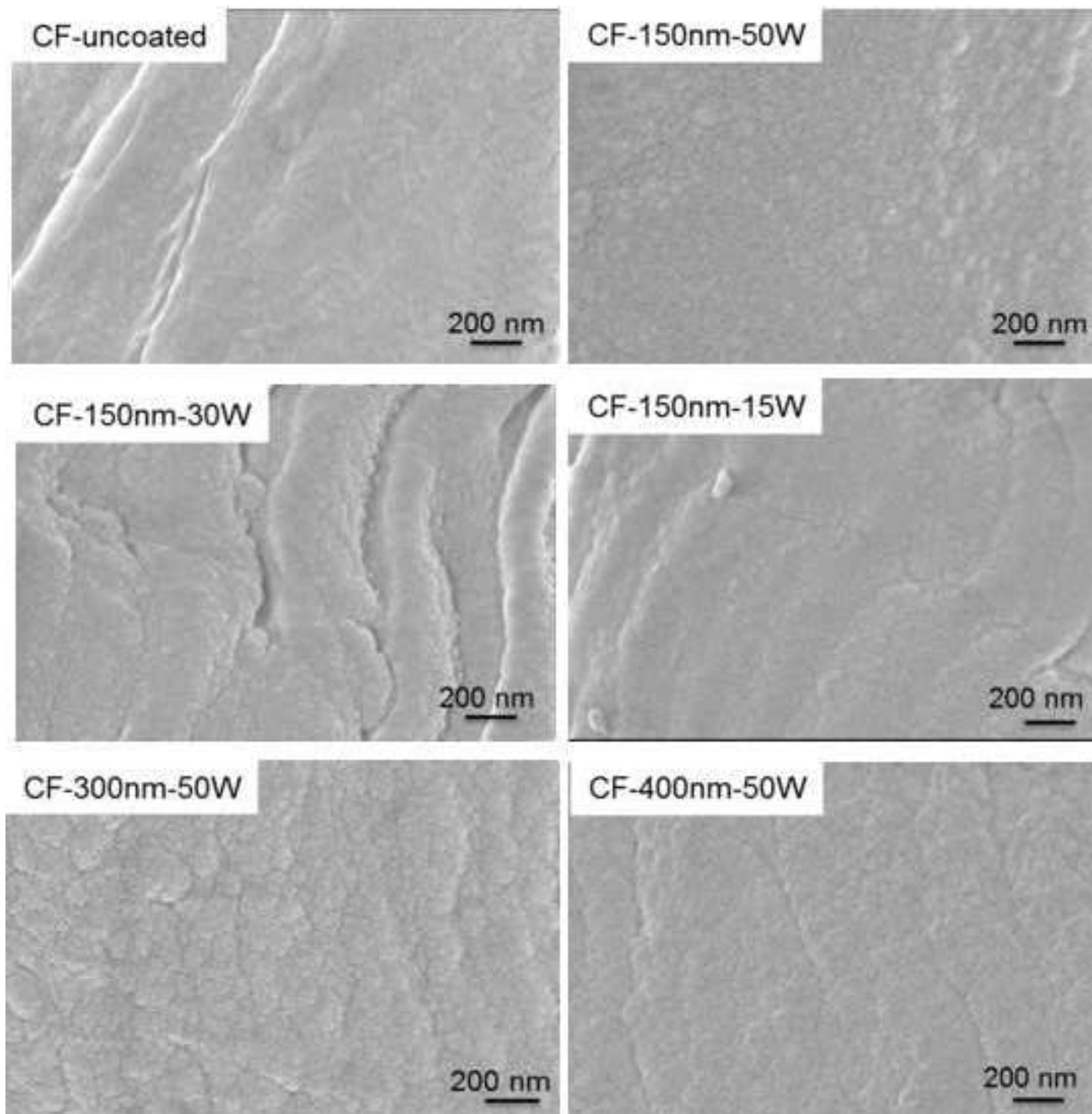
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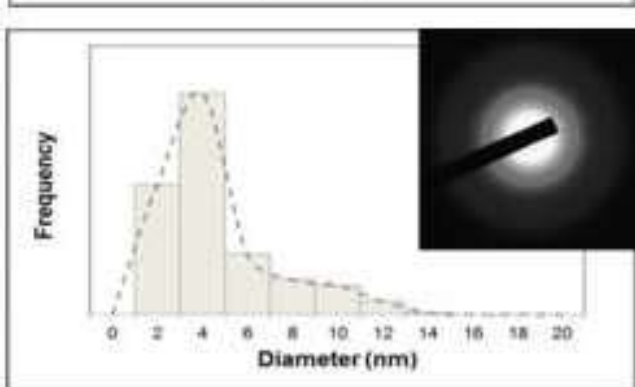
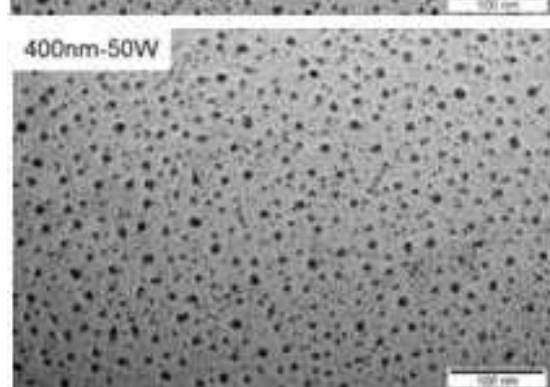
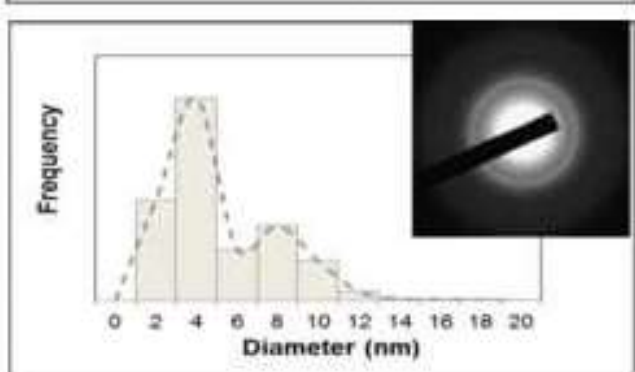
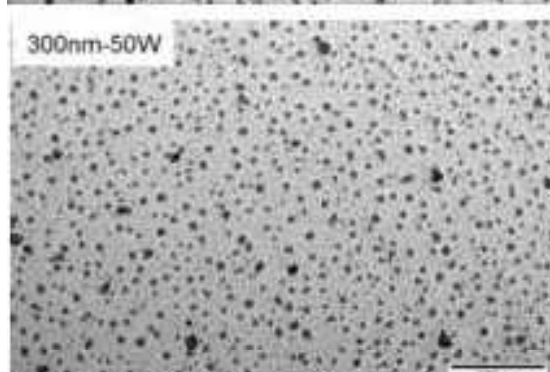
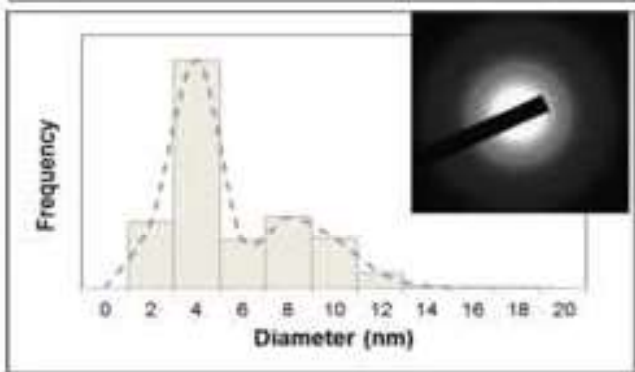
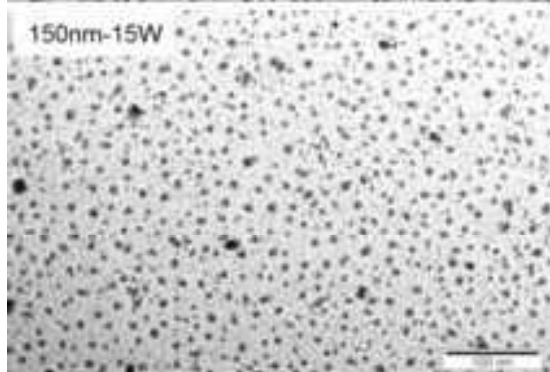
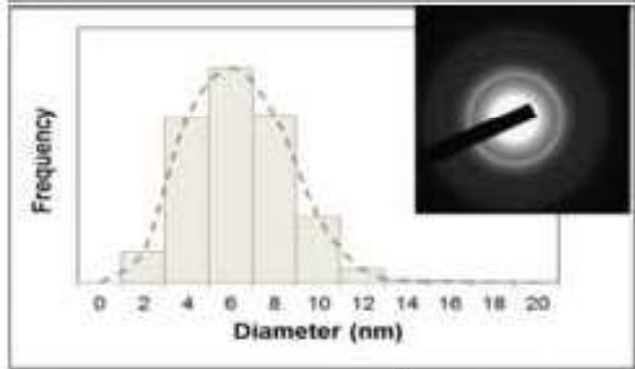
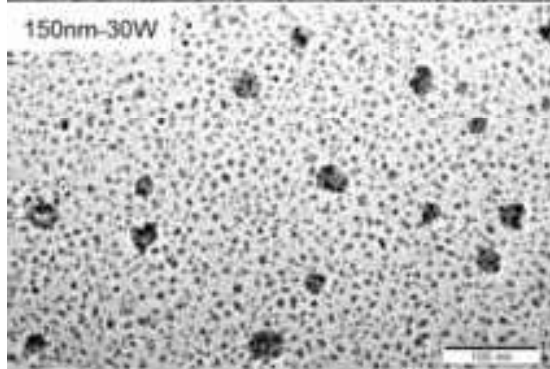
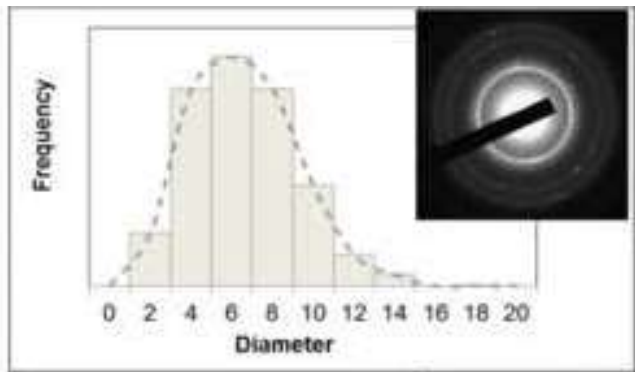
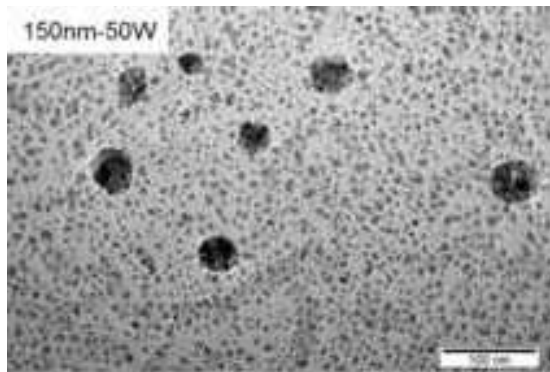
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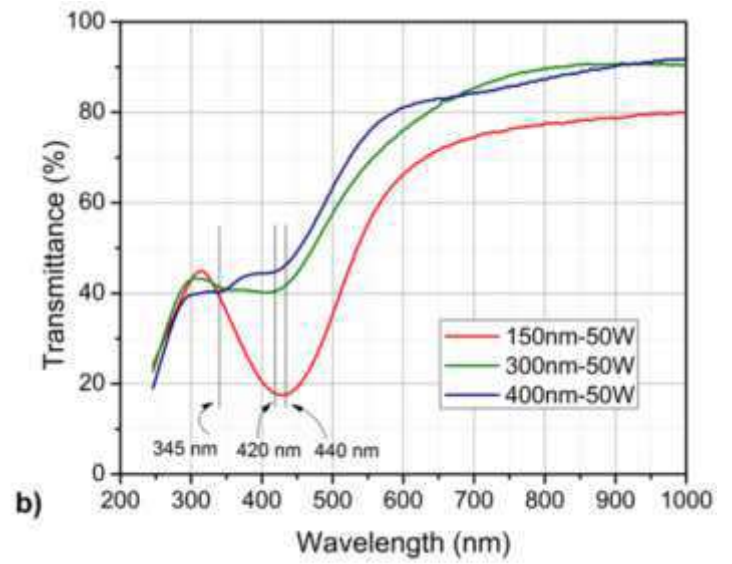
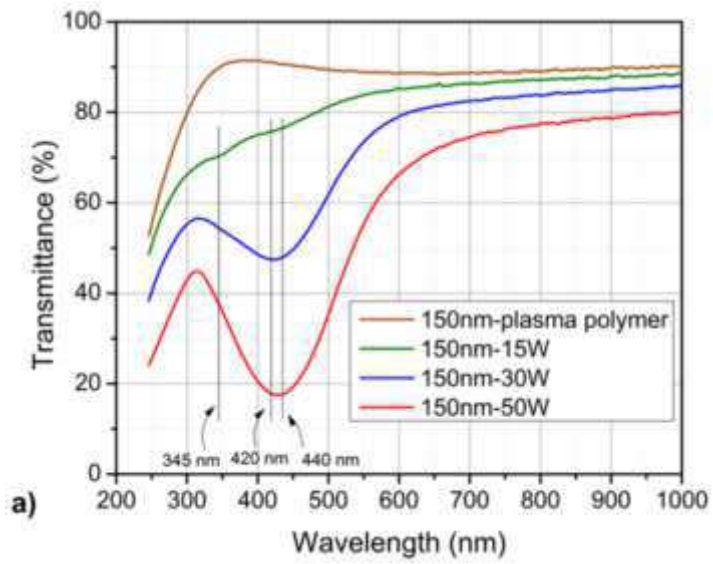




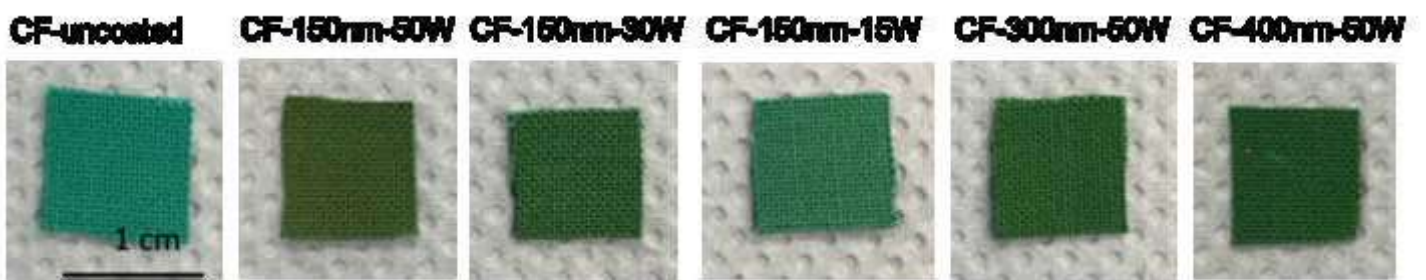


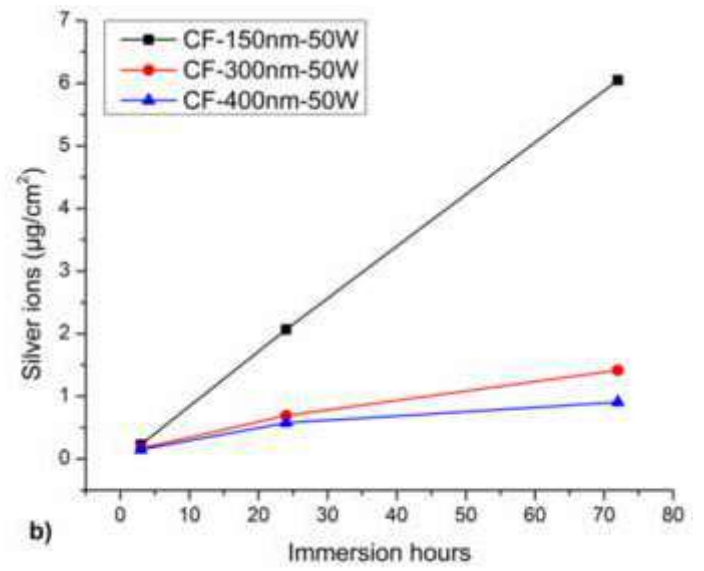
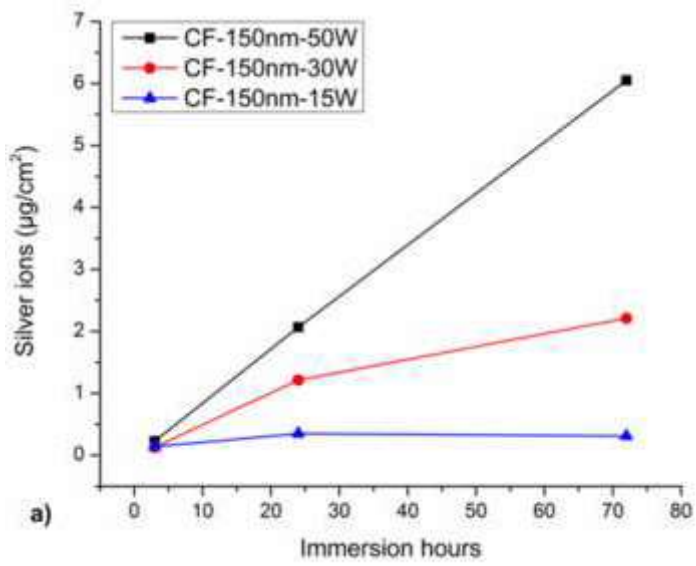






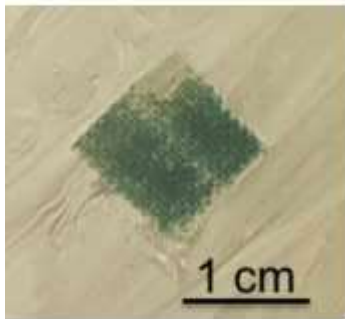
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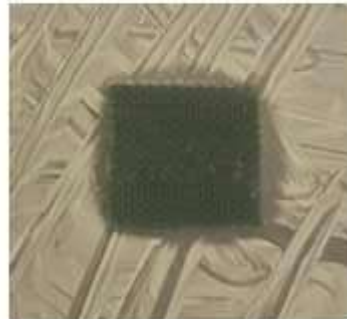
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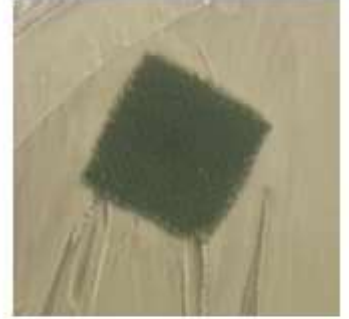
CF-150nm-50W



CF-150nm-30W



CF-150nm-15W



CF-300nm-50W



CF-400nm-50W



**CF-150nm-50W
10 washing cycles**



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