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1 **AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> granular photocatalysts optical properties: material composition**  
2 **effect on the radiative transfer in a photoreactor**

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12

13 **Abstract:**

14 The radiative transfer analysis in photoreactor with heterogeneous media is still a challenge for  
15 reasons relative to solid particles structural complexity or materials complex optical properties.  
16 This article aims to study the radiative transfer in a photoreactor containing Activated-  
17 Carbon/Titanium Dioxide (AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>) composite particulate media. A focus was made on the  
18 analysis of the photon rate absorbed by these media, which is a key value for the further study  
19 of chemical photo-reaction for which they are intended into the system. The radiative properties  
20 of these media were first consistently defined using different mixing laws for refractive index  
21 calculation, coupled to Mie theory. A validation of the radiative properties was achieved by  
22 solving the radiative transfer equation using a Monte Carlo algorithm and by comparing the  
23 results of transmittance modelling of each media with transmittance experiments. The second  
24 part of the work consisted in the use of a second Monte Carlo algorithm for modelling local  
25 radiant energy repartition in the studied photoreactor and access the rate of energy absorbed.  
26 These parameters are some key tools for the description and the assessment of reactions in a  
27 defined photoreactor. An originality of the study comes from the wide range of AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
28 composition studied through the work which allows to analyze the evolution of the radiative  
29 properties, radiant energy repartition and rate of energy absorbed as a function of the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
30 material composition.

31 **Keywords :** *Photoreactor ; Radiative transfer analysis ; suspended media ; composites ;*  
32 *mixing laws ; optical bench*

# 1 Nomenclature

## 2 *Acronyms :*

3		
4	AC	Activated Carbon
5	BM	Bruggeman Mixing
6	MC	Calculated through Monte-Carlo algorithm
7	MG	Maxwell Garnett
8	PMMA	PolyMethylMethAcrylate
9	TiO <sub>2</sub>	Titanium Dioxide
10	RTE	Radiative Transfer Equation
11	VA	Volume Averaging method
12	x_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	Composite sample at x volume fraction of Activated Carbon

## 14 *Symbols :*

15		
16	$\langle A_\lambda \rangle$	Total Rate of Radiant Energy Absorbed ( $\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{nm}^{-1}$ )
17	$C_{\text{susp}}$	Suspension concentration ( $\text{kg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ )
18	D	Particle diameter ( $\mu\text{m}$ )
19	$E_{\text{abs}}, E_{\text{sca}}, E_{\text{ext}}$	Specific absorption, scattering and extinction coefficients ( $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{kg}^{-1}$ )
20	$f_v$	Volume ratio of particles in the water media ( $\text{m}^3/\text{m}^3$ )
21	$G_\lambda$	Local available radiant energy ( $\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-2} \cdot \text{nm}^{-1}$ )
22	$k_{\text{abs}}, k_{\text{sca}}, k_{\text{ext}}$	Absorption, scattering and extinction coefficients ( $\text{m}^{-1}$ )
23	L	Medium total thickness (m)
24	$n(D)$	Volumetric particle size distribution ( $\mu\text{m}^{-1} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ )
25	$N_T$	Total number of particles per unit volume ( $\text{m}^{-3}$ )
26	$p_\lambda(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}')$	Phase function depend on the direction $\vec{\Omega}$
27	$Q_{\text{ext}}, Q_{\text{sca}}, Q_{\text{abs}}, Q_{\text{back}}$	Extinction, scattering, absorption and backscattering efficiencies (-)
28	r	Volumetric reaction rate ( $\text{kg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ )
29	$V_p$	Particle volume ( $\text{m}^3$ )
30		
31	$\hat{\epsilon}_\lambda$	Effective complex permittivity (-)
32		
33	$\alpha$	ratio of the specific absorption coefficient on specific extinction coefficient (-)
34	$\theta$	Polar angle (rad)
35	$\kappa$	Imaginary part of the refractive index (-)
36	$\mu$	Mean size distribution value ( $\mu\text{m}$ )
37	$\rho$	Density material ( $\text{kg} \cdot \text{m}^{-3}$ )
38	$\sigma$	Standard deviation ( $\mu\text{m}$ )
39	$\tau$	Length variable used in Monte-Carlo algorithm (m)
40	$\varphi$	Azimuthal angle (rad)
41	$\Phi$	Radiant energy flux ( $\text{W} \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$ )
42	$\Omega$	Solid angle (sr)

## 44 *Indices :*

45		
46	0	Relative to incident/initial
47	Exp	Relative to experimental data
48	Mix	Relative to the effective mixture of components
49	T	Relative to the transmitted flux
50	$\lambda$	Relative to the wavelength $\lambda$

# 1 **Introduction**

2           Photoreactors have received increasing attention due to their potential uses in  
3 environmental applications such as water treatment [1-5], but more recently for fuel production  
4 such as water photoelectrochemistry [6-7] and CO<sub>2</sub> photoreduction [8,9]. Photoreactors are  
5 devices that allow the efficient contacting of photons and reactants with the photocatalyst. They  
6 differ significantly from other chemical reactors, not only in their geometries, but also in the  
7 importance given to the collection and efficient distribution of light. The absorption of radiation  
8 allows the generation of charges (electron/hole pairs) to produce radicals via an interface that  
9 is the photo-catalyst. These radicals can be used for the photodegradation of species or for the  
10 photo-conversion of molecules (H<sub>2</sub>O or CO<sub>2</sub>) [10,11]. Among the various configurations and  
11 options available, there is increasing interest in using suspended solids capable of catalyzing  
12 photoreactions in the gas or liquid phase, thus avoiding the need to add reagents [12,13]. These  
13 heterogeneous photocatalytic processes are of increasing interest to industry, but there are still  
14 impasses to be addressed [14] regarding how phase heterogeneities make it more difficult to  
15 predict and control light harvesting in heterogeneous photoreactors compared to homogeneous  
16 photoreactors.

17 To address this challenge, which involves the description of the local radiant energy available  
18 in heterogeneous photoreactors [14-18], the rich literature proposes studies on different reactor  
19 configurations and types of photocatalysts depending on the targeted applications. Among the  
20 different approaches and models studied, the Monte Carlo model emerges as a descriptive and  
21 perfectly adapted approach to predict the local radiant energy in different photoreactor  
22 geometries [19]. It consists in solving the radiative transfer equation (RTE) via a stochastic  
23 approach, following a statistically suitable number of photons from the radiant energy source  
24 to the absorption in the medium or the loss in the reactor walls. This approach is relevant for  
25 the description of RTE in scattering reaction media such as monodisperse suspensions of  
26 commonly studied photocatalysts like TiO<sub>2</sub>, ZnO and CuO in water [20-21]. Subsequently, this  
27 method was consolidated and applied to the prediction of the radiative properties of  
28 polydisperse spherical particle suspensions [22,23]. In general, the studies remain numerous  
29 and concern the large panel of catalysts available for environmental applications (TiO<sub>2</sub>, ZnO)  
30 or fuel production such as Cds. TiO<sub>2</sub> is the most widely studied candidate as it presents  
31 characteristics (inert, non-soluble and non-toxic) that facilitate its use and handling, in particular  
32 for water treatment applications. It should be noted that very few studies have been carried out  
33 on complex photocatalytic media such as composite powders made of several elements or

1 supported photocatalytic materials such as cellular foams. Their peculiarities regarding both  
2 their shaping and their optical properties turn complex their radiative properties calculation.  
3 The literature ranks oxidation processes as a promising technology for solar applications [2].  
4 Use of the solar resource entails careful management of its specific resource characteristics,  
5 such as its distribution of spectral density and disparity in its geographical distribution but above  
6 all its fluctuating nature due alternating daily and seasonal cycles but also to intermittent  
7 weather conditions (cloud, rain, strong sunshine) [24-26]. Solar-based systems therefore need  
8 a storage solution that works during night-time or low-sunlight periods or during pollution  
9 peaks in order to be able to concentrate the pollution on smaller volumes. In this context, recent  
10 advances in photocatalysis have highlighted the value of associating several materials in the  
11 form of particulate composites with the aim of optimizing photocatalytic performances [27-29]  
12 or coupling synergistic properties such as adsorption with photo-oxidation for water treatment  
13 applications [30]. Adsorbent materials offer a solution for managing intermittency by making  
14 it possible to store a wide range of molecules [31-33]. Specifically, coupling activated carbon  
15 (AC) with  $\text{TiO}_2$  in various forms has emerged as a promising solution for water treatment  
16 applications [30], as the coupled composite systems can enhance pollutant removal from water  
17 by using the complementary functions of adsorption and photo-oxidation [33,34]. These  
18 composites therefore combine a catalyst capable of using solar radiation to produce radicals,  
19 and an adsorbent material capable of filtering and concentrating the pollution during periods of  
20 no sunlight. Many forms of AC/ $\text{TiO}_2$  composites have been studied [35,36] and used in  
21 laboratory photoreactors for chemical engineering investigations [30]. However, despite the  
22 promise of these materials for photoreactor-based water treatment applications, no study yet  
23 has focused on their optical properties and their effects on radiative transfer when they are used  
24 in photoreactors. This information is a vital input to establish the reaction rate law that depends  
25 on the number of locally available photons [17], which is a bottleneck for efforts to describe  
26 the local volumetric rate of radiant energy absorbed (LVREA) at each point of the photoreactor.  
27 LVREA needs to be known in order to rigorously study the photochemical reactions occurring  
28 in the system [14].

29 For this study, the goal is to establish the photon density profiles available locally in the  
30 photoreactor to describe and optimize the photoreaction rates governing the transformation  
31 process. Here, the originality is to work with granular composites presenting optical  
32 specificities and characteristics relevant for a solar application. These are AC/ $\text{TiO}_2$  granular  
33 composites prepared through a mechano-synthesis process based on a simple and robust one-  
34 step protocol [32]. In contrast to the literature, this method allows the design of composites

1 covering a wide range of composition, with all other characteristics preserved. To meet the  
2 challenge, the paper proceeds in four steps. A first section is dedicated to the presentation of  
3 the materials and their characteristics, as well as the description of the experimental optical  
4 bench used. Then, the approach and the theoretical considerations necessary for the RTE are  
5 developed, which is followed by the validation of a mixing law allowing the closest theoretical  
6 prediction of the radiative properties. Finally, the last part details the main results. First, the  
7 study of the local available radiant energy in suspensions of AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites of varying  
8 composition is presented. The interest of such a composite in a photoreactor for an optimal use  
9 of the radiation in relation with the problem of the management of the solar resource is  
10 discussed. To this end, absorbed radiant energy profiles are established to understand and  
11 describe the photo-oxidation capabilities in a photoreactor.

12

## 13 **1. Experimental part**

### 14 **1.1 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> materials characteristics**

15 A compositionally-varied set of AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite powders that we had previously  
16 successfully prepared [32] from commercial Aeroperl® P25/20 TiO<sub>2</sub> and Picahydro S23 AC  
17 was used here for the purposes of this work. These powders were shown to be composed of  
18 spherical AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> aggregates, which thus meet the particle shape assumption of the Mie  
19 solution for predicting radiative properties. Five compositionally-distinct AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites  
20 were selected, named 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, 26\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, 54\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and 95\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
21 in reference to their percent volume of AC. These AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> powder aggregates were all  
22 prepared from the same one-step one-pot mechanosynthesis protocol with well-characterized  
23 composition and size distribution, and all were homogeneous on both these characteristics [32].  
24 Indeed, the particle-size distributions of these materials were well fitted by a Gaussian function  
25 defined as (Equation 1):

$$26 \quad n(D) = \frac{\frac{1}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} e^{-\frac{1}{2}\left(\frac{D-\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2}}{\frac{1}{6}\pi D^3} \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

27 where D is particle diameter (m),  $\mu$  is mean size distribution value (m), and  $\sigma$  is the standard  
28 deviation (m). For each composite, Table 1 reports the characteristics required for Mie-based

1 prediction of their radiative properties, i.e. (i) the two Gaussian parameters that serve to describe  
 2 their previously characterized Gaussian particle-size distributions and (ii) their respective  
 3 densities. Table 1 gives the mean particle diameter of both the AC particles and the TiO<sub>2</sub>  
 4 particles that make up the above-mentioned AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites.

Materials	Gaussian granulometry parameters			
	Distribution mean $\mu$ ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	Standard deviation ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	Determination coefficient $R^2$	Material density $\rho$ ( $\text{g}\cdot\text{cm}^{-3}$ )
Raw TiO <sub>2</sub>	41.00	17.24	0.98	3.95
6_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	3.16	1.05	0.99	3.70
26_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.79	1.00	0.97	2.94
54_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	3.25	1.06	0.99	1.94
74_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	3.47	0.85	0.97	1.29
95_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.90	1.04	0.99	0.64
Raw AC	496.54	55.12	0.98	0.60

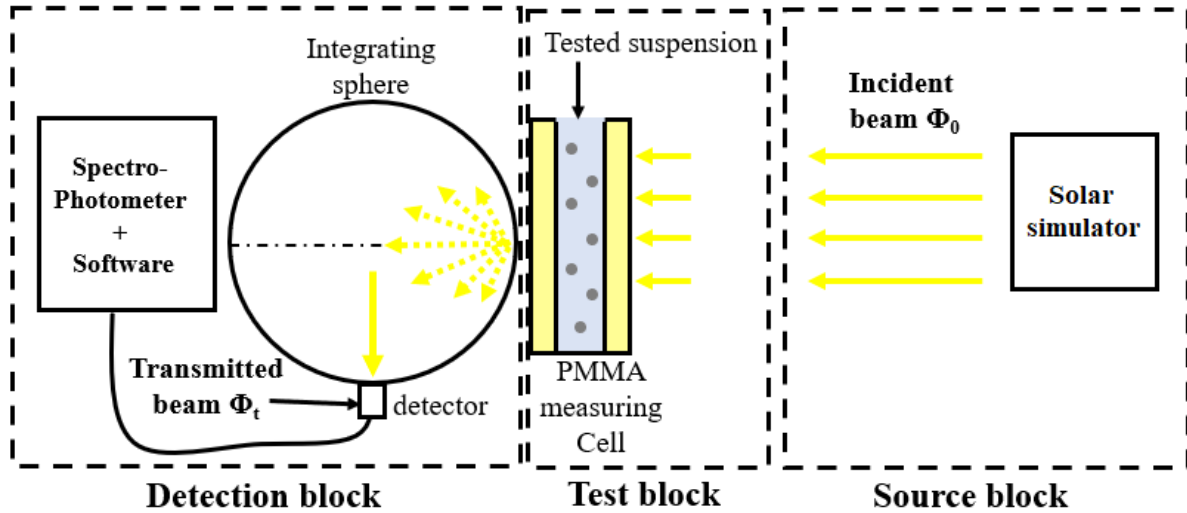
*Table 1. Granulometry Gaussian function parameters of each composite and raw materials powders and their respective density [35].*

A digital image processing protocol for optical granulometry developed in previous work [35] uses SEM images to enable size-based discrimination of the powder samples under study. This approach was applied for characterizing the particle-size distribution of the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite powders.

## 5 1.2. Optical bench characteristics and protocol

6 An optical bench successfully set up in our previous work was used here to  
 7 experimentally assess the transmittance of particulate media in suspension form [23].

8



1 **Figure 1.** Schematic of the optical bench set up blocks for particle suspension experimental  
 2 assessment of the transmittance  
 3

4 As shown by the simple scheme given in Figure 1, the set-up used to measure  
 5 transmittance is composed of three blocks: (i) the source block, which comprises a solar  
 6 spectrum-like collimated source (1000 W) uniformly irradiating the whole surface of the  
 7 measuring cell; (ii) the test block, composed of the tested suspension container, which is a 0.02  
 8 m-thick parallelepiped-shape measuring cell featuring a UV-transparent polymethyl  
 9 methacrylate (90% UV transmission) plate and a magnetic stirrer used to keep the tested  
 10 suspension constantly homogeneous; (iii) the detection block, composed of a 7 cm<sup>2</sup>-aperture  
 11 integrating sphere coupled to a high-res Ocean Optics HR4000 spectrophotometer (detector  
 12 range: 250–1100 nm).

13 The role of the detection block was to collect and integrate both direct and diffuse  
 14 radiant energy transmitted through the test block where multiple scattering events can occur  
 15 depending on the optical properties of the tested suspension. The software-controlled  
 16 acquisition settings were fixed at a detection range of 350–500 nm and a total acquisition time  
 17 set at 5 seconds comprising 25 analyses of 200 ms each to ensure representativity and  
 18 repeatability of the measurement. The latter requires two preliminary steps: (i) registration of  
 19 the ambient radiant noise, which can then be removed from the measure, and (ii) registration of  
 20 the reference incident signal  $\Phi_{0,exp}$ , which is acquired placing the measuring cell containing  
 21 only water between the source and the detection block. The water is then immediately replaced  
 22 by the tested suspension and a transmittance measurement is done. Note that here, the  
 23 transmittance measurement, called  $\Phi_{t,exp}$ , is a relative one, and is normalized between 0 and 1  
 24 by ratioing the absolute transmittance value given by the detection block to the  $\Phi_{0,exp}$  reference.

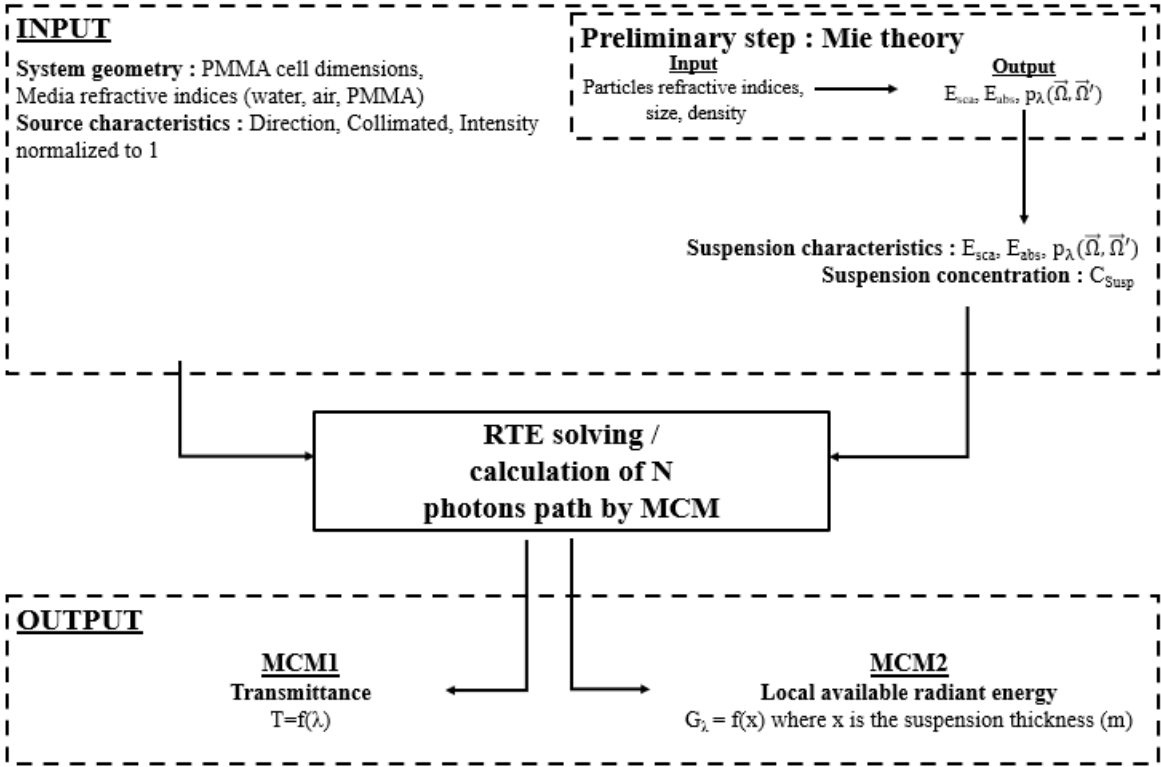


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**2. Theoretical approach**

**2.1. RTE formulation and Monte Carlo modeling**

Two previously-established one-dimensional Monte Carlo method (MCM) algorithms [23] were used in this work with the aim of determining the transmitted photon fluxes (transmittances,  $T_\lambda$ ) and locally available photon fluxes within the photoreactor. The first algorithm, named MCM1, aims to predict the amount of light transmitted through the polymethyl methacrylate measuring cell containing a tested suspension whose radiative properties need to be defined. These results are then compared against measurements made on an optical bench in order to validate our approach. The second algorithm, named MCM2, aims to assess, for a chosen wavelength  $\lambda$ , the one-dimensional variation in local available radiant energy  $G_\lambda$  ( $\text{W}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}\cdot\text{nm}^{-1}$ ) along the medium travelled thickness  $x$  of the tested suspension, which needs to be known in order to investigate the radiative transfer in this kind of particulate system. This quantity can then be used to describe the light attenuation profile in a photoreactor, and its value is discussed in the last section of the paper. Here we provide a brief description of the MCMs employed in Figure 2. An exhaustive description of these algorithms can be found in our previous work [23].



**Figure 2.** Description of the input necessary for two previously established MCM allowing the RTE solvation for transmittance (MCM1) or Local available radiant energy (MCM2) predictions.

## 2.2. Mie-based prediction of radiative properties

As shown in Figure 2, the resolution of the radiative transfer equation using MCM requires defined radiative properties of the tested particulate media, i.e. its angle-dependent scattering function  $p_\lambda(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}')$ , and the specific extinction, scattering and absorption coefficients, which are noted  $E_{ext}$ ,  $E_{sca}$  and  $E_{abs.}$ , respectively. For particulate media, if the particles in suspension can be assimilated to spheres, then the media's radiative properties can be calculated thanks to the work of Lorenz-Mie, who solved Maxwell's equations for the scattering of a plane wave by a single sphere [21]. The Mie solution takes the form of an infinite series that requires a computation of the spherical Riccati–Bessel functions. This theoretical approach was done by Bohren & Huffman [37] who demonstrated rigorous calculation of the intrinsic radiative properties of a single particle ( $p_\lambda(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}')$   $Q_{ext}$ ,  $Q_{sca}$ , and  $Q_{abs}$ ) thanks to their well-known BHMIE program. As shown in many works, the BHMIE program can compute the radiative properties of a polydispersion by implementing the following integrals (Equations 2-4) [22] :

$$N_T = \frac{f_v}{V_p} = \int_0^\infty n(D) dD \quad (\text{Equation 2})$$

$$E_{abs/sca/ext,\lambda} = \frac{\pi \int_0^\infty D^2 Q_{abs/sca/ext,\lambda} n(D) dD}{C_{susp}} \quad (\text{Equation 3})$$

$$p_\lambda(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}') = \frac{\int_0^\infty D^2 Q_{sca,\lambda} p(D, \vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}') n(D) dD}{\int_0^\infty D^2 Q_{sca,\lambda} n(D) dD} \quad (\text{Equation 4})$$

where  $N_T$  is total number of particles per unit volume ( $m^{-3}$ ),  $f_v$  is volume ratio of particles in the water media ( $m_{sol}^3/m_{liq}^3$ ),  $V_p$  is the mean particles volume ( $m^3$ ) and  $n(D)$  is the volumetric particle size distribution function,  $C_{susp}$  is concentration of suspension ( $kg \cdot m^{-3}$ ),  $Q_{ext}$ ,  $Q_{sca}$ ,  $Q_{abs}$ ,  $Q_{back}$  are the extinction, scattering, absorption and backscattering efficiencies and  $E_{abs,\lambda}$ ,  $E_{sca,\lambda}$ ,  $E_{ext,\lambda}$  are the specific absorption, scattering, and extinction coefficients ( $m^2 \cdot kg^{-1}$ ), respectively. The phase function  $p_\lambda(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}')$  depends on direction  $\vec{\Omega}$  which is defined by the solid angle  $\Omega$  composed of the polar angle  $\theta$  and the azimuthal angle  $\phi$ . Note that for spherical particles, the phase function presents a symmetry that means its normalization can be expressed independently of the azimuthal angle (Equation 5):

26

$$\begin{aligned}
1 \quad \frac{1}{4\pi} \iint_{4\pi} p_{\lambda}(\vec{\Omega}, \vec{\Omega}') d\Omega &= \frac{1}{4\pi} \int_0^{2\pi} \int_0^{\pi} p_{\lambda}(\theta, \phi, \theta', \phi') \sin \theta d\theta d\phi \\
2 \quad &= \frac{1}{2} \int_0^{\pi} p_{\lambda}(\theta, \theta') \sin \theta d\theta = 1 \quad (\text{Equation 5})
\end{aligned}$$

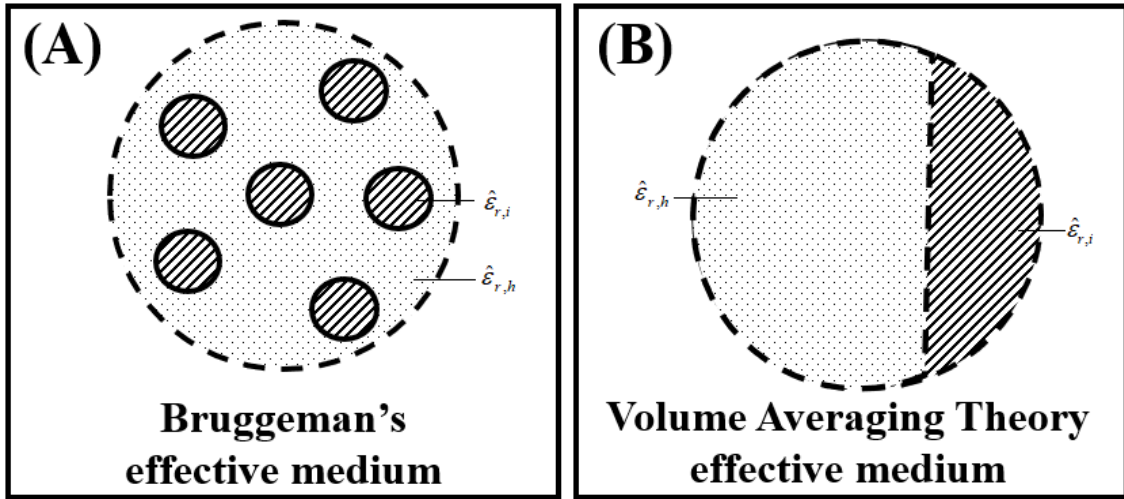
3 The scattering function of the studied particles will thus be presented in the form  $p_{\lambda}(\theta, \theta')$   
4 normalized to  $4\pi$  steradians in this work, as it is usual in radiative transfer studies.

5 From a practicality point of view, this BHMIE program requires few input parameters:  
6 particle diameter  $D$  or particle size distribution  $n(D)$  in a polydispersion setting, plus the  
7 material density  $\rho$  and its complex refractive index  $m_{\lambda} = n_{\lambda} - i\kappa_{\lambda}$  in which the real part  
8 corresponds to the refractive index  $n_{\lambda}$  and the imaginary part to the attenuation index  $\kappa_{\lambda}$ .

### 9 **2.3 Formulation of the complex refractive index mixing laws**

10 An approximation of the effective complex refractive index is needed in order to define  
11 refractive indices for multicomponent particles like composite aggregates [38]. In the literature,  
12 there are various different laws for defining the effective complex permittivity  $\hat{\epsilon}_{\lambda}$  of a media,  
13 which is directly linked to the complex refractive index  $m_{\lambda}$  through the simple relation  
14  $m_{\lambda} = \sqrt{\hat{\epsilon}_{\lambda}}$ . These laws cover different theoretical arrangements of binary composite materials  
15 in a simple way and have been successfully employed to compute effective medium complex  
16 permittivity in particular cases [39]. However, these laws have shown limitations for describing  
17 complex mixtures, where it has not always led to correct results [38].

18 The particles studied in this paper are composed of several components with distinct  
19 optical properties. The constituents (AC and  $\text{TiO}_2$ ) form aggregates whose entities are  
20 homogeneously distributed in the volume of the particle. Therefore, two mixing laws proposed  
21 and studied in the literature to describe such mixtures were used; *i.e.* Bruggeman Mixing (BM)  
22 and a simple Volume Averaging (VA) one, which really differ each other from their approach  
23 of the effective medium mixing rule problem. Indeed, BM formula considers the mixture as  
24 spherical inclusions in a homogeneous background medium (Figure 3.A), while VA is an ideal  
25 binary mixture approach for which both components are unmixed in the effective medium  
26 volume (Figure 3.B). They were compared in order to evaluate the most relevant one to  
27 represent the CA/ $\text{TiO}_2$  composite particles.



**Figure 3.** Schematic effective medium binary spatial structuration from BM (A) and VA (B) laws points of views. The effective medium is represented by the dashed circles, the inclusion is represented by hatched circles and the matrix by dotted-filled circles.

### 1 2.3.1. Bruggeman mixing law

2 In 1904, Maxwell Garnett (MG) proposed a theory for the approximation of the effective  
 3 complex permittivity of a medium composed of two different compounds [40]. The MG  
 4 formula computes the complex permittivity of an effective medium using the volume fractions  
 5 of its two individual components, i.e. the host and the inclusion. However, it frequently proved  
 6 inapplicable in cases where medium and inclusion share comparable volume fractions [38]. In  
 7 1935, Bruggeman (BM) [41] proposed a law derived from the original MG formula that is  
 8 symmetrical with respect to each medium component and thus does not treat them differently.  
 9 Bruggeman's law thus brings a correction to the MG formula under conditions when the volume  
 10 fraction of inclusions is not very small. BM's law can thus serve to compute the complex  
 11 permittivity of an effective medium using the volume fraction of the individual component,  
 12 following Equation 6:

$$13 \quad f_i \frac{\hat{\epsilon}_{r,i} - \bar{\hat{\epsilon}}_{r,mix}}{\hat{\epsilon}_{r,i} + 2\bar{\hat{\epsilon}}_{r,mix}} + (1 - f_i) \frac{\hat{\epsilon}_{r,h} - \bar{\hat{\epsilon}}_{r,mix}}{\hat{\epsilon}_{r,h} + 2\bar{\hat{\epsilon}}_{r,mix}} = 0 \quad \text{(Equation 6)}$$

14 where  $\bar{\hat{\epsilon}}_{r,mix}$  is the effective complex permittivity of the mixed material,  $\hat{\epsilon}_{r,i}$  is complex  
 15 permittivity of the inclusion,  $\hat{\epsilon}_{r,h}$  is complex permittivity of the host medium, and  $f_i$  is volume  
 16 fraction of the inclusion.

### 17 2.3.2. Volume averaging method

1 Several empirical simple mixing laws have been established, mainly for predicting the  
2 effective complex permittivity of liquid binary mixtures [42]. One of the simplest and most  
3 effective of these laws is a volume averaging one (VA) [39], which derived from the application  
4 of the volume averaging method to the Maxwell equations and can be expressed through the  
5 relation (Equation 7) :

$$\hat{\epsilon}_{r,mix} = f_i \hat{\epsilon}_{r,i} + (1 - f_i) \hat{\epsilon}_{r,h} \quad (\text{Equation 7})$$

### 12 **3. Results and discussion**

13 First, we checked the validity of the radiative properties found for AC and TiO<sub>2</sub> using a  
14 comparative method presented in Text S1. This step provided confidence on the calculated  
15 radiative properties of the raw materials before integrating them in the mixing laws.

#### 16 **3.1. Comparison and validation of the mixing laws**

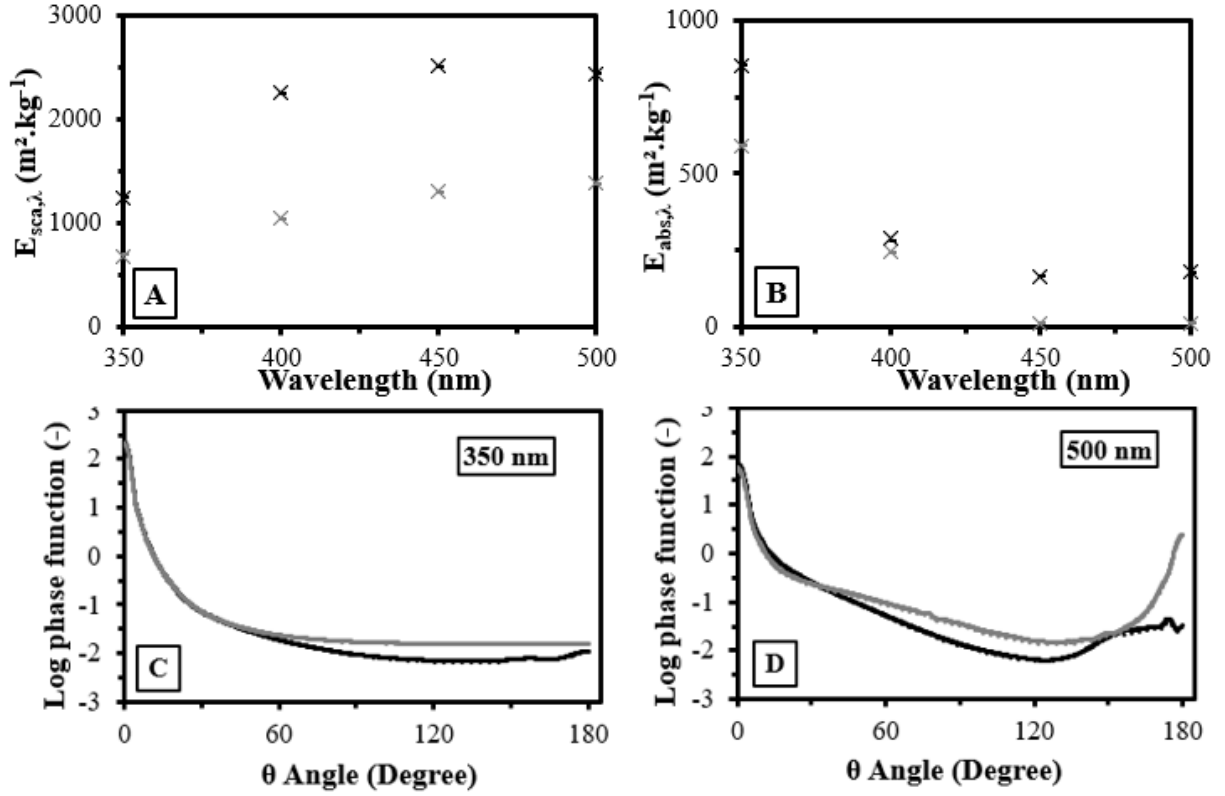
17 The VA and BM laws were used to calculate the effective complex refractive index of  
18 each composite under study. There was less than 5% difference between results from the two  
19 mixing laws, as seen in the complex refractive index values for the composite reported in Table  
20 2.

Materials	Complex refractive index $m = n - ik$ at different wavelengths $\lambda$ (nm)			
	$\lambda = 350$ nm	$\lambda = 400$ nm	$\lambda = 450$ nm	$\lambda = 500$ nm
AC	1.503 – 0.011 i	1.497 – 0.014 i	1.487 – 0.017 i	1.478 – 0.020 i
TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.930 – 0.175 i	2.589 – 0.018 i	2.509	2.429
1_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.887 – 0.170 i (BM) 2.887 – 0.170 i (VAT)	2.556 – 0.018 i (BM) 2.556 – 0.018 i (VAT)	2.478 – 0.001 i (BM) 2.479 – 0.001 i (VAT)	2.400 – 0.001 i (BM) 2.400 – 0.001 i (VAT)
5_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.767 – 0.156 i (BM) 2.733 – 0.152 i (VAT)	2.465 – 0.017 i (BM) 2.438 – 0.017 i (VAT)	2.392 – 0.002 i (BM) 2.368 – 0.002 i (VAT)	2.321 – 0.002 i (BM) 2.298 – 0.003 i (VAT)
15_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.409 – 0.144 i (BM) 2.431 – 0.118 i (VAT)	2.192 – 0.016 i (BM) 2.207 – 0.017 i (VAT)	2.137 – 0.006 i (BM) 2.151 – 0.006 i (VAT)	2.084 – 0.007 i (BM) 2.096 – 0.007 i (VAT)
30_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	2.079 – 0.073 i (BM) 2.122 – 0.082 i (VAT)	1.944 – 0.015 i (BM) 1.971 – 0.016 i (VAT)	1.907 – 0.010 i (BM) 1.931 – 0.010 i (VAT)	1.870 – 0.012 i (BM) 1.891 – 0.011 i (VAT)
75_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	1.615 – 0.021 i (BM) 1.644 – 0.027 i (VAT)	1.589 – 0.013 i (BM) 1.605 – 0.014 i (VAT)	1.574 – 0.015 i (BM) 1.588 – 0.015 i (VAT)	1.560 – 0.019 i (BM) 1.572 – 0.018 i (VAT)

**Table 2.** AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites complex refractive indices calculated from BM and VA laws, using component (AC and TiO<sub>2</sub>) complex refractive index extracted from [23] for TiO<sub>2</sub> particles and from Hota & Diaz [43] for carbon part of AC.

1           The refractive index of AC, which is a porous component, were obtained using  
2 Bruggeman’s mixing law for an effective medium composed of an AC skeleton with water-  
3 filled pores. The pore volume ratio of AC was fixed at 0.7, considering the effect of preparation  
4 by mechanosynthesis on pore degradation determined from previous micro-texture  
5 characterizations of the AC [35,44]. Based on equation 6, the refractive index of AC considers  
6 the refractive indices of the two components (water and carbon) as well as their respective  
7 volume fractions. Note that the complex refractive index of TiO<sub>2</sub> does not have an imaginary  
8 term in the visible-wavelength range (400–500 nm), indicating that the material does not absorb  
9 visible light. However, it does absorb in the UV-wavelength region, which is consistent with  
10 the semiconductor band-gap energy of ~3.0 eV for the rutile phase and 3.23 eV for anatase.

11           The radiative properties were defined for each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite using the modified  
12 BHMIE program: input parameters were the complex refractive indices calculated from the VA  
13 or BM formulae (Table 2), the Gaussian parameters of the particle size distribution, and  
14 composite density (Table 1). The theoretical predictions were run for four wavelengths, i.e. 350,  
15 400, 450, and 500 nm. Figure 4 reports the radiative properties obtained here for 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
16 and 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites, to compare the effect of choice of mixing law on the values of  
17 these properties.

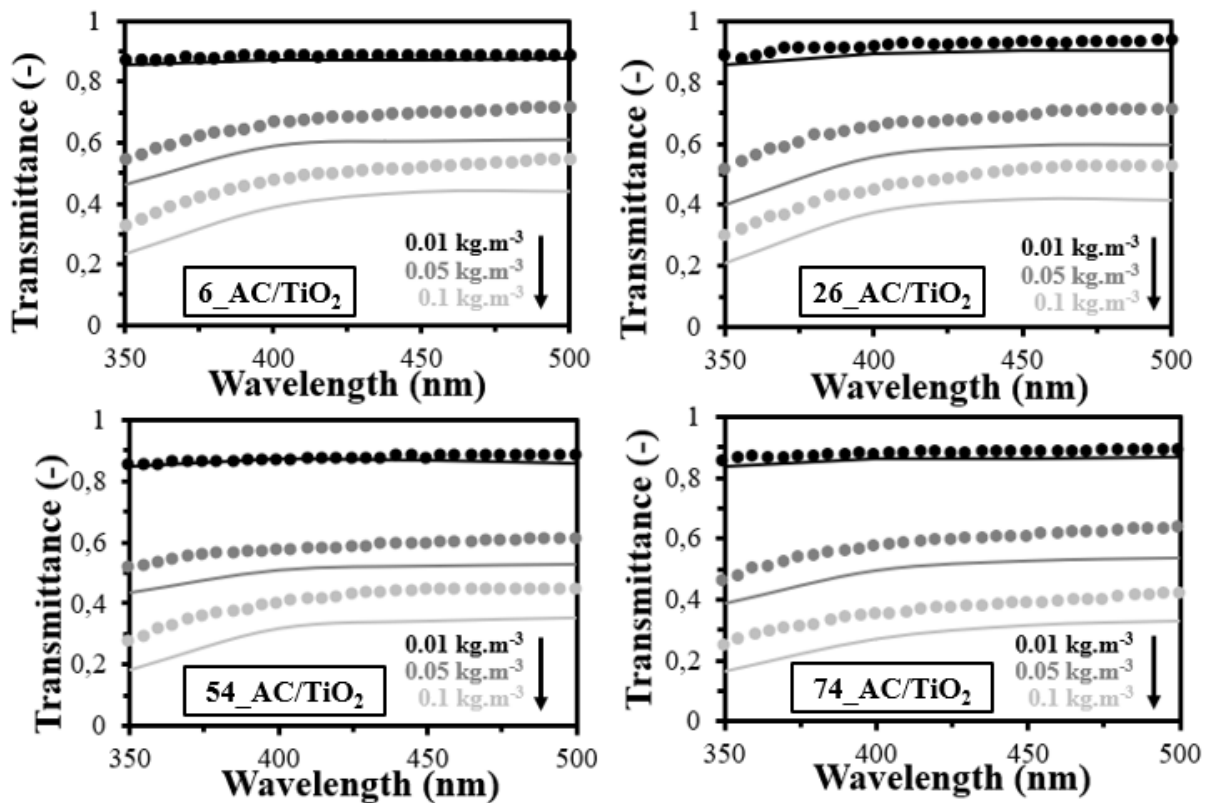


**Figure 4.** Radiative properties of 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> (grey curves and marks) 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites (black curves and marks) calculated using effective AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> complex refractive index predicted through BM (continuous line and minus mark) and VA (dotted line and cross mark):  $E_{sca,\lambda}$  (A) ;  $E_{abs,\lambda}$  (B) ; and  $p(\theta,\theta')$  angle-dependent scattering function at 350 nm (C) and 500 nm (D). Relative errors were lower than 10% of the indicated values for all the properties.

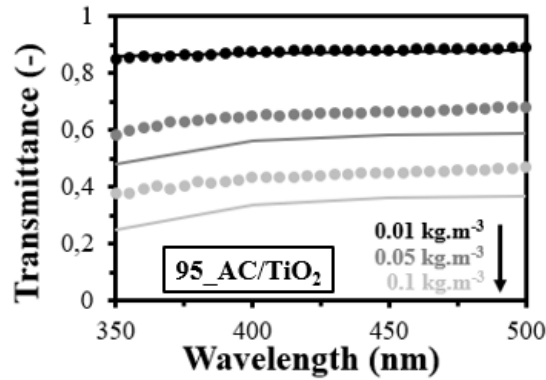
1           The composite preparation processing conditions have been previously studied and  
2 optimized [35], showing a variability of less than 5% in the composite compositions. The errors  
3 induced by this content variability of the composites, shown in Figure 4, are derived from  
4 Equation 7 in which the composition fraction is involved twice. The results obtained were  
5 almost perfectly matched between the two mixing laws for all radiative properties. Note that  
6 this observation holds true for both the 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite materials,  
7 despite their extremely different compositional profiles. This result is consistent with previous  
8 studies that have already highlighted the closeness of predictions between VA and BM formulae  
9 for low- $\kappa$  dielectric composites [39]. Moreover, Figure 4.C and 4.D allow us to assert that is  
10 strongly scattered forward by the composite particles whatever the composition. Indeed, note  
11 that there is a four order of magnitude difference between light scattered forward and through  
12 other directions.

1 The closeness between the two predictions highlights that the effective complex  
 2 refractive index for the coupled AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> media studied here is almost independent of the spatial  
 3 arrangement of its AC and TiO<sub>2</sub> subcomponents (see Figure 3). Given these results, it was  
 4 decided to keep only the radiative properties predicted from BM law for the rest of the study.

5 The theoretically-predicted radiative properties of each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite were  
 6 validated by comparing theoretically-predicted using MCM1 against the experimentally-  
 7 measured reference transmittance. For this purpose, experimental transmittance measurements  
 8 were done on each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition for different suspension concentrations using the  
 9 optical bench described. Three suspension concentrations, i.e. 0.01 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>, 0.05 kg.m<sup>-3</sup> and 0.1  
 10 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>, were selected to cover a wide range of optical behaviors. The radiative properties  
 11 predicted by the BM model at each of these concentrations were introduced as input parameters  
 12 into MCM1 to simulate transmittance measurement through the experimental system. Figure 5  
 13 plots both the theoretical and experimental transmittance spectra.







**Figure 5.** Transmittance predicted (-) from BM-computed radiative properties introduced into MCM1 for three AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>-composite suspension concentrations and for each composition (as annotated on the graphs). Comparison with experimentally-measured transmittance (O). Relative errors were lower than 4% of the displayed value for experimental transmittances and on the order of 5% for the modelled ones.

1 First, it should be noted that besides the experimental uncertainties, the uncertainty  
 2 related to modelled transmittance results is mainly induced by the composition variability of  
 3 the prepared materials [35] and is on the order of  $\pm 5\%$ . Note too that, as expected, the  
 4 transmittance values obtained for every composition and all wavelengths position themselves  
 5 between the transmittance obtained for pure AC and pure TiO<sub>2</sub> (Figure S1). The experimentally-  
 6 measured transmittance (Figure 5) tends to decrease as a function of particle concentration  
 7 whatever the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition studied. An increase of particle concentration corresponds  
 8 to an increase in number of particles per unit volume, which leads to an increase in particle-  
 9 photon interactions due to the coupled phenomena of absorption and scattering. The  
 10 transmittances value were very high at low concentration ( $0.01 \text{ kg.m}^{-3}$ ) for which the obtained  
 11 value was about 83%. Note that for higher concentrations, the variation in transmittance differs  
 12 as a function of wavelength range. In the 400–500 nm wavelength range, transmittance is found  
 13 to be 40%, whereas in the 350–400 nm wavelength range, there was a much stronger decrease  
 14 in transmittance, reaching a value close to 30% for some compositions. This difference between  
 15 these two wavelength ranges is linked to the phenomena involved. In the visible range,  
 16 absorption by AC is dominant, whereas in the UV range, absorption is strongly directed by  
 17 TiO<sub>2</sub> behavior. These results, in agreement with the literature for suspensions of simple  
 18 catalysts [23], can be explained by the effective radiative properties of the particles (Figure 4)  
 19 which differ strongly between the two domains considered. For each composition, the only  
 20 factor that differs between wavelengths is the complex refractive index of the AC and TiO<sub>2</sub>

1 components. Thus, the highest variations in transmittance with wavelength can be attributed to  
2 the differences in complex refractive index of both AC and TiO<sub>2</sub> from 350 to 500 nm (Table  
3 2).

4 Analysis of the influence of composition finds that transmittance varied with AC-  
5 content in the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites. The increase in suspension concentration led to an increase  
6 in variation of transmittance as a function of composition at all wavelength ranges studied. For  
7 suspension concentrations of 0.1 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>, the largest variations in transmittance were observed  
8 at 350 nm. Transmittance variations of 15 points were observed for the 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
9 composition and about 5 points for the 95\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition. The largest variation was  
10 observed for the 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition for which transmittance increased from 30% at 350  
11 nm to 55% at 500 nm. These disparities in transmittance variation as a function of wavelength  
12 and composition can also be explained by the radiative properties of the particles and their  
13 dependence on the refractive indices of the two components that make up the particles. As  
14 described in Table 2, AC and TiO<sub>2</sub> have very different optical properties. The variation in the  
15 effective coefficients reported in Figure 4 highlights the strong absorbing nature of AC over the  
16 whole spectral range considered, whereas TiO<sub>2</sub> presents two distinct behaviors—one in the  
17 visible range and another in the UV range. However, the variation in transmittance with  
18 composition for a given spectral range is linked not only to the refractive indices of the  
19 composite components but also to composite density. Note that the density of the composite  
20 (see Table 1) changes significantly between compositions, from 0.64 up to 3.7 g.cm<sup>-3</sup>, which  
21 leads to an increase in the volume fraction of particles in the suspension and therefore in their  
22 specific extinction coefficients. It is likely that a decrease in complex refractive index leads to  
23 a decrease in transmittance while a decrease in density leads to an increase in transmittance.

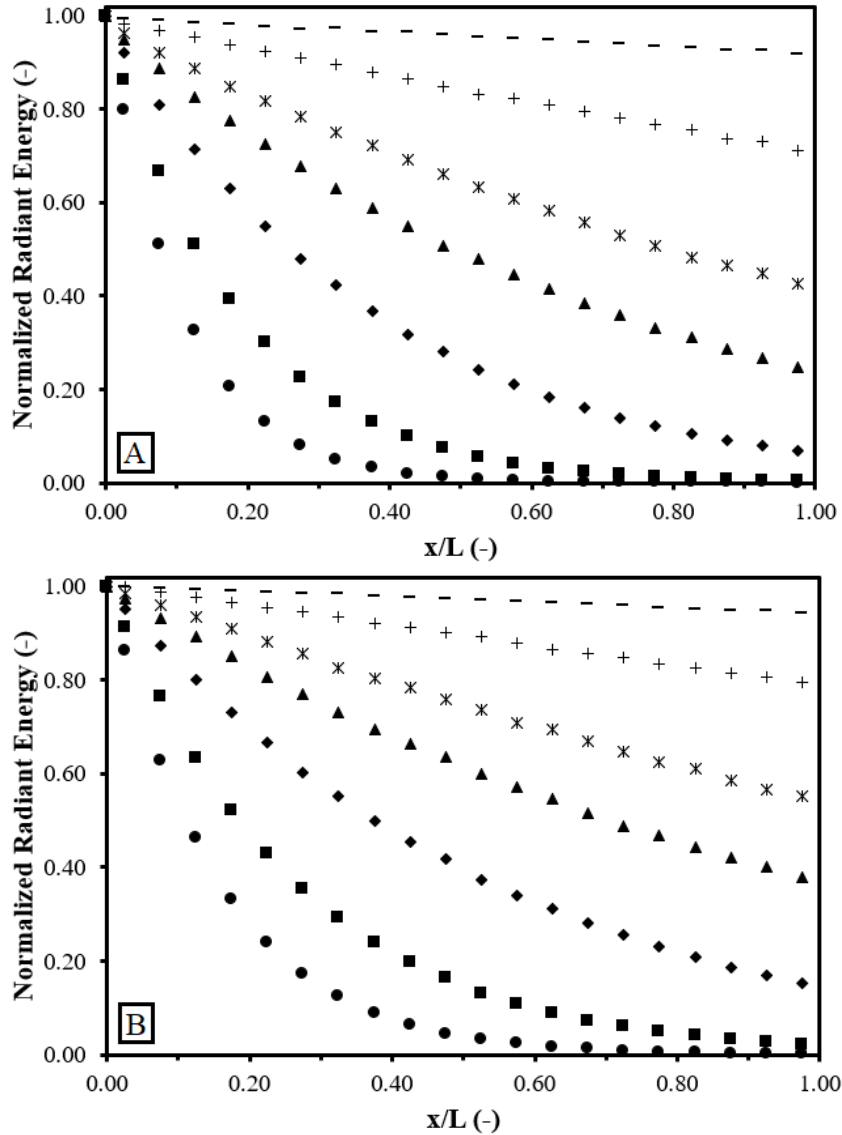
24 Analysis of the theoretically-predicted transmittances in Figure 5 finds that the  
25 variations in experimental transmittance with composition and wavelength described above  
26 were correctly fitted by the theoretical curves. However, across the whole range of  
27 compositions and wavelengths, the theoretical curves are all positioned below the experimental  
28 curves. The difference between theoretical and experimental transmittance increases with  
29 concentration. Indeed, the difference between theoretical and experimental curves was about  
30 1–3 points of transmittance value for the lowest suspension concentration, i.e. 0.01 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>, but  
31 in the 8–11 points range for suspension concentrations of 0.05 and 0.1 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>. For the high  
32 particle concentrations, the effective scattering coefficient  $k_{sca,\lambda} = E_{sca,\lambda} \cdot C_{susp}$  (m<sup>-1</sup>) of  
33 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites was at least 100 m<sup>-1</sup> or higher. Therefore, the difference between the

1 theoretical and experimental transmittance curves is mainly attributed to the experimental  
2 conditions. As previously shown, for suspensions with high diffusion coefficients ( $k_{sca,\lambda} =$   
3  $E_{sca,\lambda} \cdot C_{susp} \approx 200 \text{ m}^{-1}$ ), theoretical transmittance values are underestimated by 15–20 points  
4 compared to measured values [23]. In light of these considerations, we conclude that the  
5 experimental transmittance profiles are satisfactorily fitted by the proposed theoretical  
6 approach. The transmittance variations are modelled as a function of wavelength and  
7 composition taking into account the theoretically-predicted complex refractive index of the  
8 effective medium AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>.

### 9 **3.2. Radiative transfer analysis in compositionally-varied AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>** 10 **suspensions**

11 Recall that to describe the photo-oxidative capacities of a photo-reactor, it is necessary  
12 to establish the reaction kinetics governing the process that transforms the matter [32]. These  
13 photo-reaction kinetics will depend on the application envisaged (photo-reduction of CO<sub>2</sub>,  
14 hydrogenation, photocatalytic oxidation of pollutants) and consequently on the coupled  
15 catalyst–indicator pairings selected [17]. However, the literature has clearly established [45,46]  
16 that they are a function of two main local quantities, i.e. the quantity of matter (concentration)  
17 and the quantity of available photons. Let us focus on this second key quantity, which is an  
18 important preliminary step towards optimizing the photo-reactor configuration, by rigorously  
19 defining the locally available radiant energy. For this purpose, simulations were carried out on  
20 a parallel-plate photoreactor in which no photoreaction takes place. In order to generalize this  
21 study, the irradiation conditions (radiant flux density) and the reactor thickness are  
22 dimensionless.

23 Solving the RTE, based on the MCM2 algorithm presented above, affords a one-dimensional  
24 description of the local available radiant energy,  $G_\lambda$ , at any wavelength in the polymethyl  
25 methacrylate measuring cell, which can be assimilated to a parallel-plate photoreactor [23]. The  
26 UV range is particularly relevant here, as it corresponds to photons with the minimum energy  
27 required to activate the TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst. The model was then used to investigate the local  
28 available radiant energy at 350 nm, normalized from 0 to 1 considering the incident collimated  
29 density flux  $\Phi_0 = 1 \text{ W.m}^{-2}$ . We ran 7 simulations for two compositions, i.e. 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and  
30 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, and varying the suspension concentration as follows: 0.005, 0.020, 0.050, 0.080,  
31 0.150, 0.300, and 0.500 kg.m<sup>-3</sup> (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Normalized local available radiant energy  $G(x/L)$  predicted at 350 nm through MCM2 using BM radiative properties predicted for several 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> (A) and 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> (B) composite suspension concentrations in kg.m<sup>-3</sup>: 0.005 (-); 0.02 (+); 0.05 (\*); 0.08 (▲); 0.15 (◆); 0.3 (■); 0.5 (●). The medium thickness was represented through its dimensionless  $x/L$  ratio, where  $L$  is the medium total thickness, i.e. 0.02 m. Relative errors were lower than 3% of the displayed value.

1 Note that at very low suspension concentrations (0.005–0.02 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>) and for both  
 2 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> compositions, the radiant energy was still very high at the exit of the photoreactor.  
 3 Indeed, 80%–90% of the incident radiant energy was still available for  $x/L \approx 1$ . The  
 4 concentration of AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> particles in the system was not high enough to absorb all the incident  
 5 radiant energy along the thickness of the media. Obviously, then, AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> suspension  
 6 concentration in this case should be increased to optimize the quantity of radiant energy

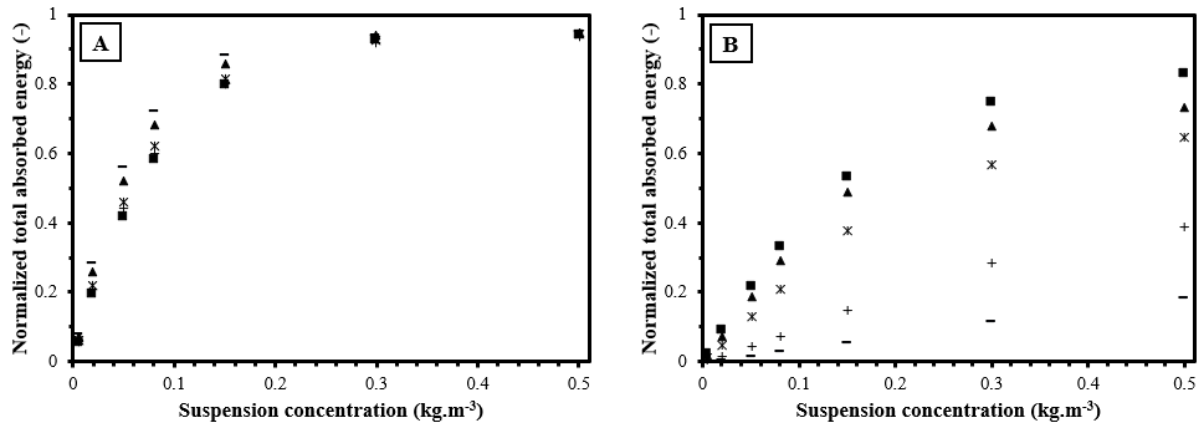
1 extinguished and thus used in the photoreactor. Conversely, when a high concentration is  
 2 chosen, i.e.  $0.5 \text{ kg.m}^{-3}$ , then the extinction of light is so high that for both 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and  
 3 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, there was no more radiant energy available in the photoreactor for a normalized  
 4 thickness of 0.6 and 0.8, respectively. Consequently, this creates a dark zone corresponding  
 5 respectively to 40% and 20% of the photoreactor volume for 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
 6 composites. In this dark zone, the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> photocatalyst particles are not photo-excited. The  
 7 expression of the local radiant energy available at each point of the reactor then allows – for a  
 8 given parallel-plate reactor thickness – to approximate the optimal composite concentration  
 9 leading to the extinction of all incident photons while avoiding the creation of dark zones.  
 10 Plotting the two profiles, i.e. 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> and 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>, is sufficient to reach the  
 11 approximation that the optimal concentration is around  $0.15 \text{ kg.m}^{-3}$  for 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> (Figure  
 12 6.A) and  $0.3 \text{ kg.m}^{-3}$  for 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> (Figure 6.B).

13 In order to move further forward in the photoreaction study, we need to evaluate the  
 14 total rate of energy absorbed, which can be used to compute the number of photons available  
 15 to initiate the photoexcitation. The total absorbed energy inside the photoreactor  $\langle A_\lambda \rangle$  is  
 16 introduced. This quantity necessarily intervenes in all formalisms of photoreaction kinetics to  
 17 establish the capacities of the photoreactor, which are generally established for or as a function  
 18 of the suspension concentration. This quantity results from integrating the local available  
 19 radiant energy along the normalized photoreactor thickness [15] through Equation 8:

20

$$21 \quad \langle A_\lambda \rangle = E_{abs,\lambda} C_{susp} \int_0^L G_\lambda dx \quad (\text{Equation 8})$$

22 The total energy absorbed,  $A_\lambda$ , was calculated from the local available radiant energy profiles  
 23 obtained for each studied AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition. The normalized total absorbed energy  
 24 ( $\langle A_\lambda \rangle / A_{0,\lambda}$  where  $A_{0,\lambda} = \Phi_{0,\lambda} / L$ ) which correspond to the total rate of energy absorbed, can then  
 25 be plotted as a function of the suspension concentration.



**Figure 7.** Normalized absorbed energy at 350 (A) and 500 nm (B) within the measuring cell assimilated to parallel-plate-photoreactor (thickness = 0.02 m) as a function of the suspension concentration for each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> studied compositions : 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> ( - ) ; 26\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> ( + ) ; 54\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> ( \* ) ; 74 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> ( ▲ ) and 95\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> ( ■ ).

1 Note that the rate of energy absorbed at 350 nm plotted as a function the optical  
 2 thickness (Figure 7.A) reached a plateau of absorbed energy for each studied AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
 3 composition. The rate of energy absorbed at 350 nm in the photoreactor was found to increase  
 4 with increasing suspension concentration. However, note that the curve shape is similar  
 5 whatever the TiO<sub>2</sub> content in the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite. To illustrate, the rate of energy absorbed  
 6 at the plateau for all the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition is 0.95. The plateau value results from two  
 7 phenomena: (i) photon absorption contribute positively to the plateau value while (ii) photon  
 8 scattering out from the medium contributes negatively [15].

9 On the other hand, at 500 nm, the rate of energy absorbed (Figure 7.B) decreases with  
 10 increasing TiO<sub>2</sub> content in the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> medium. Noted that at 500 nm and highest suspension  
 11 concentration, the highest rate of energy absorbed, i.e. 0.83, was observed in the 95\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
 12 whereas the lowest rate of energy absorbed, at 0.18, was observed in the 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> medium.  
 13 Note that even at high suspension concentrations, no plateau is observed for any composition.  
 14 It means that the number of particles in the medium is still to low to absorb all the entering  
 15 photons or scatter them backwards to the outside of the reactor.

16 As stated earlier, to optimize a defined parallel-plate photoreactor (here L = 0.02 m)  
 17 containing suspended medium, we first have to assess the minimum concentration required to  
 18 reach the highest rate of absorbed energy. At the wavelength of interest, i.e. 350 nm (Figure  
 19 7.A), the rate of energy absorbed reach a plateau for suspension concentrations between 0.15

1 and 0.3 kg.m<sup>-3</sup>. For each composition, it was chosen to interpolate the concentration value for  
 2 which the rate of total absorbed energy reach 0.9. The optimal concentration values are reported  
 3 in Table 3. The optimal concentration value varies weakly with an increase of TiO<sub>2</sub>-content in  
 4 the composites.

	Units	95_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	74_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	54_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	26_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>	6_AC/TiO <sub>2</sub>
C <sub>optimal</sub>	×10 <sup>-1</sup> kg.m <sup>-3</sup>	2.74	2.31	2.69	2.82	2.00
r <sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub>	-	0.19	0.31	0.37	0.63	0.83

**Table 3.** Summary of each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite optimal concentration for maximizing radiant energy use in the studied photoreactor. Total absorbed energy rate at 350 nm by the TiO<sub>2</sub> component estimated for each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition.

5 The rate of energy absorbed at 500 nm (Figure 7.B) can be attributed to the behavior of  
 6 AC, which is the only component driving absorption, while TiO<sub>2</sub> absorption is null at this  
 7 wavelength. The AC component also exhibits an almost invariant complex refractive index  
 8 across wavelengths (Table 2). We thus assumed that the rate of energy absorbed by AC at 350  
 9 nm for each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition and suspension concentration is the same as total rate of  
 10 energy absorbed at the same composition and concentration in Figure 7.B, that was attributed  
 11 to AC only. Working to this assumption made it possible to evaluate, at 350 nm, the rate of  
 12 energy absorbed by TiO<sub>2</sub>, which is the component of interest driving the photocatalytic reaction.  
 13 We evaluated this rate, called r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub>, by subtracting the total energy rate observed at 500 nm and  
 14 optimal concentration from the total energy rate obtained at 350 nm and optimal concentration  
 15 for each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition. The results are summarized in Table 3.

16 r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub> vary considerably with TiO<sub>2</sub>-content in AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites. Indeed, r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub> was  
 17 highest for the 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composite (r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub>=0.83) but fell by 46%, i.e. r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub>=0.37, when TiO<sub>2</sub>  
 18 content was almost halved (54\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>). When TiO<sub>2</sub> content was reduced to under 25%, r<sub>TiO<sub>2</sub></sub>  
 19 values fell from 0.31 for 74\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> to 0.19 for 95\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>. As expected, photocatalytic  
 20 applications would gain from using high-TiO<sub>2</sub>-content suspensions, i.e. the 6\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>-  
 21 54\_AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites here, to maximize the quantity of photons effectively used by the  
 22 photoreactor medium for photo-oxidation.

1 Finally, two key information emerge from this approach. First, the optimal  
2 concentrations of composite suspensions are very close and are almost independent of the  
3 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition of the composite. This suggests that the amount of radiation consumed  
4 is identical regardless of the composition. The second point concerns the use of absorbed  
5 radiation. The results reported in Table 3 clearly show that the number of photons effectively  
6 absorbed by the catalyst is dependent on the proportion of TiO<sub>2</sub> in the composite. These results  
7 are consistent with expectations, but have now been demonstrated, and emphasize the problem  
8 of solar radiation management. There is the need to design a composite with an adsorbent to  
9 ensure a storage function and TiO<sub>2</sub> at a high rate to initiate the photo-excitation process. These  
10 components have antagonistic characteristics to optimize both the use of radiation and the  
11 storage function.

12

### 13 **Conclusion**

14 The purpose of this work as to evaluate photon availability for photo-oxidation in a  
15 parallel-plate photoreactor containing a broad range of compositionally-varied AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
16 composite particulate media. We employed a theoretical approach coupled to experimental  
17 validation to define the radiative properties of the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites, as these properties are  
18 key for analyzing how photons get scattered and absorbed from the time they enter the  
19 photoreactor. A classical theoretical approach validated by experimental results has been  
20 applied to original composite materials whose properties seem relevant to ensure an optimal  
21 management of the solar resource by ensuring a double functionality of storage and  
22 photoexcitation.

23 The key point is the use of the Monte Carlo algorithm to predict the local radiant energy  
24 available through a parallel plate photoreactor as a function of suspension concentration for  
25 each AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composition. Simulations were conducted for all composite compositions  
26 developed at different particle concentrations. A first result, in agreement with studies  
27 conducted in the literature, confirms that the locally available radiant energy varies strongly  
28 with the particle concentration. The attention was then focused on the effect of the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
29 composition. For this purpose, the locally absorbed radiant energy was determined in order to  
30 evaluate the amount of photons effectively available for photo-excitation with respect to the  
31 amount absorbed by the adsorbent material. On the one hand, it is found that the volume fraction  
32 of particles leading to the total absorption of radiation varies very little from one composition



1 to another. Thus, the composites, whatever their composition, absorb almost the same quantity  
2 of photons whether they are intended to be absorbed by the catalyst to initiate the photo-  
3 excitation process or lost due to their absorption by the adsorbent material. The attention was  
4 then focused on the amount of photons absorbed as an efficient manner by the catalyst which  
5 increases directly with the catalyst content in the composite. We show that it is possible to  
6 assess the radiant energy effectively absorbed by the TiO<sub>2</sub> component, which is the component  
7 that drives photocatalytic oxidation in water treatment applications. This novel result  
8 highlighted the benefit of working with medium-to-high TiO<sub>2</sub>-content (50%–90% v) AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
9 compositions in order to maximize the number of photons effectively used for photo-excitation.  
10 Note that in these compositions, the suspensions are photocatalytically ‘operational’ but are still  
11 not efficient. It also highlighted that for low-TiO<sub>2</sub>-content materials, the number of photons  
12 available for photo-oxidation is very low due to the stochastic structure of the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub>  
13 composite.

14 This key result also reveals a need to structurally arrange the AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites. As  
15 a matter of fact, this study clearly emphasizes the problem of elaboration of composite able to  
16 manage the use of the solar resource by proposing a functionality of storage by adsorbing  
17 materials while preserving an optimal use of the radiation by the catalyst. It is shown that, due  
18 to the antagonistic optical properties of the two components, the presence of the AC affects  
19 very significantly the amount of photons available to initiate the photo-excitation. In order to  
20 optimize the performance of the composites for a solar application, a first solution consists in  
21 selecting the composite with a composition allowing the best compromise between the two  
22 functionalities sought. But more recently, research is being carried out on the synthesis of  
23 AC/TiO<sub>2</sub> composites with a core-shell structure in order to spatially organize the material within  
24 the composite in a way that is beneficial for photon absorption. The aim is to control the  
25 distribution of the components by favoring the presence of the catalyst on the surface and the  
26 adsorbent material in the volume while preserving its adsorption capacity.

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