

Accepted Manuscript

Full Length Article

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Thiago Scremin Bonelli, Inés Pereyra

PII: S0169-4332(18)30502-6
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apsusc.2018.02.153>
Reference: APSUSC 38611

To appear in: *Applied Surface Science*

Received Date: 13 September 2017
Revised Date: 12 February 2018
Accepted Date: 15 February 2018

Please cite this article as: T.S. Bonelli, I. Pereyra, Low Temperature RF Plasma Nitriding of Self-Organized TiO₂ Nanotubes for Effective Bandgap Reduction, *Applied Surface Science* (2018), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apsusc.2018.02.153>

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Low Temperature RF Plasma Nitriding of Self-Organized TiO₂ Nanotubes for Effective Bandgap Reduction

Authors

Thiago Scremin Bonelli*, Inés Pereyra

University of São Paulo – LME/PSI/EPUSP, CEP 05508-900 São Paulo, SP, Brazil

E-mail addresses: thiagobonelli@usp.br, ipereyra@lme.usp.br

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +55 1130915523

Abstract

Titanium dioxide is a widely studied semiconductor material found in many nanostructured forms, presenting very interesting properties for several applications, particularly photocatalysis. TiO₂ nanotubes have a high surface-to-volume ratio and functional electronic properties for light harvesting. Despite these manifold advantages, TiO₂ photocatalytic activity is limited to UV radiation due to its large band gap. In this work, TiO₂ nanotubes produced by electrochemical anodization were submitted to plasma nitriding processes in a PECVD reactor. The plasma parameters were evaluated to find the best conditions for gap reduction, in order to increase their photocatalytic activity. The pressure and RF power density were varied from 0.66 to 2.66 mbar and 0.22 to 3.51 W/cm² respectively. The best gap reduction, to 2.80 eV, was achieved using a pressure of 1.33 mbar and 1.75 W/cm² RF power at 320 °C, during a 2-h process. This leads to a 14% reduction in the band gap value and an increase of 25.3% in methylene blue reduction, doubling the range of solar photons absorption from 5 to 10% of the solar spectrum.

Keywords: Nitriding; TiO₂; Nanotubes; Bandgap reduction; Photocatalysis

1 Introduction

The efficient use of solar energy in engineering is a challenge the scientific community has been on in recent years. In this context, the semiconductor characteristics of titanium

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