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THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ENSURING THE MECHANICAL STRENGTH OF PAPERS CONTAINING COLLAGEN HYDROLYSATES

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Abstract: The study explores the influence of fibrous raw materials, refining processes, and adhesive substances on the development of strength properties in paper and cardboard products. Special attention is given to the role of fiber morphology, cellulose refining, and interfiber bonding in improving paper quality. The paper highlights that refining significantly alters the surface structure of fibers, leading to increased fibrillation and enhanced bonding potential, which directly affects the structural and mechanical properties of the paper web. In particular, the study emphasizes the contribution of collagen hydrolysate, an organic additive, in forming fibrillar structures within cellulose and modified polyacrylonitrile (MPAN) fibers, thereby strengthening interfiber adhesion. The findings underline the dual role of structural-mechanical and chemical factors in advancing the physical and mechanical properties of paper.

Keywords: Paper strength; cellulose refining; fiber fibrillation; interfiber bonding; fibrous raw materials; pulp properties; collagen hydrolysate; adhesives; paper web structure; mechanical properties of paper.

Introduction. The development of the pulp and paper industry is closely linked to the processing of fibrous raw materials and improving the strength properties of paper and cardboard products. This process is referred to as enhancing the quality indicators of paper and cardboard. This term is considered one of the fundamental concepts in the science of paper production and utilization.

The papermaking properties of fibrous semi-finished materials are determined by the characteristics of the resulting pulp mass, the properties of the paper (or cardboard), and the adhesives used. These include various parameters of the fibrous semi-finished product (cellulose, fibrous pulp, fillers, adhesives, etc.). The quality indicators of most fibrous semi-finished materials are influenced by both internal and external factors during the papermaking process [1–3].

The strength of paper primarily depends on several factors: the morphology of the fibrous pulp (such as the average fiber length, linear density, etc.), the degree of cellulose refining (i.e., the extent to which the fiber suspension is processed and fibrillated), the strength properties of individual fibers, the interfiber bonding forces via fibrils, and the adhesive properties of the binding substances.

Fiber refining is considered one of the most important stages in the papermaking process, as the chemical and physical properties of paper largely depend on it. Refining

(or the degree of fiber treatment) leads to changes in the surface structure and integrity of plant-based or secondary fibers. As a result, fibers become shortened and undergo both internal and external fibrillation. During fiber treatment, numerous active hydroxyl and carboxyl groups are formed, which facilitate the creation of bonds between fibers. Thus, the higher the degree of fiber fibrillation, the greater the number of interfiber bonds formed, which directly affects the structure and properties of the paper [4].

2. Materials and Methods. During the refining process of fibrous pulp, the structure of the fibers undergoes significant changes, which in turn affect their interaction both with each other and with other components of the paper pulp. These changes influence the formation process of the paper web as well as the paper-making and mechanical strength properties of the fibrous semi-finished products.

In this study, the effect of external fibrillation of fibers, as influenced by cellulose, textile industry waste, and adhesive substances, on the strength properties of paper is emphasized multiple times. Various methods are used to quantitatively describe the external and internal surface characteristics of the fibers within the pulp. Determining the specific surface area of fibers and the interrelation between key papermaking properties such as tensile strength and durability allows for predicting the deformation characteristics of paper web formed under different intensities of refining.

There are two main factors that contribute to the improvement of the physical and mechanical properties of paper: structural-mechanical and chemical.

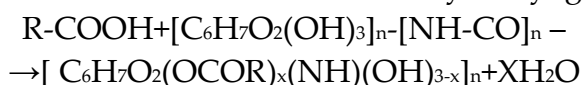
The bonding strength between fibers in the paper structure depends on the composition and microstructure of the adhesive material used. Collagen hydrolysate, an organic compound-based additive, contributes to the formation of a fibrillar structure in cellulose and MPAN (modified polyacrylonitrile) fibers and enhances adhesion.

Collagen hydrolysates may exhibit various spatial structures. As limiting structures, either a coiled macromolecular conformation or a fibrillar (i.e., linear chain-like) conformation of the macromolecule may be present. The type of spatial structure formed by the macromolecule depends on the energy of the intra- and intermolecular bonds. If the energy of intramolecular bonds is higher, the macromolecule tends to form a coiled structure. Conversely, if the energy of intermolecular bonds dominates, a fibrillar structure is more likely to be formed [5,6].

The essence of the chemical factor lies in the formation of new hydrogen and covalent bonds. A hydrogen bond with an energy of approximately 25–35 kJ/mol is considered most characteristic for cellulose molecules. This type of bond typically occurs in compounds where hydrogen is directly bonded to oxygen or nitrogen atoms. Due to the high molecular activity of macromolecules, hydrogen bonds in high-molecular-weight compounds contribute significantly to the total bonding energy and valence forces.

Under otherwise equal conditions, hydrogen bonds are most likely to form between the most polarized atoms — that is, between the strongest proton donors and acceptors.

During the drying process of paper pulp, there is also a possibility for the formation of covalent bonds through esterification between carboxyl groups of collagen hydrolysates derived from chrome leather waste and hydroxyl groups of cellulose.



In papermaking, the adhesive component serves two main functions: it strengthens the bonding between fibers and enhances the water-retention capacity of the paper pulp. It should also be noted that an increase in crystallinity and uniformity improves the physical and mechanical properties of paper. Papers containing rosin exhibit lower mechanical strength, whereas replacing it with collagen hydrolysate and textile industry waste results in an increase in the breaking length of the samples.

The degree of fibrillation of the fibers, along with their bonding characteristics, affects the structural integrity, strength, and surface uniformity of the paper. The strength of individual fibers also significantly influences the overall physical and mechanical properties of the paper.

3. Methods. There are two alternative approaches to improving the mechanical strength of paper produced from various types of fibers: (1) the use of adhesive substances, and (2) pre-treatment (modification) of MPAN-based synthetic fiber waste. The theory of fiber interaction and numerous experimental studies confirm that both the incorporation of modified synthetic fiber waste and the use of collagen hydrolysate products as adhesive components in paper composition contribute to enhancing mechanical strength.

The paper and cardboard composition's suitability for papermaking is largely determined by the surface structure of the material, the size and uniformity of fibrous raw materials, and the distribution and composition of chemical components in the cell wall. The structure of paper refers not only to the arrangement and interaction of its components, but also to the geometry of the printed material's surface [7].

Assessment of the reliability of measurement results. The strength of paper material depends not only on the morphological and physicochemical factors associated with the composition of the main components of the cell wall, but also on the fibers' absorption capacity and the strength of the mass composition itself. Strongly polarized functional groups form hydrogen bonds both among themselves and with cellulose macromolecules (see Figure 1). This, in turn, increases the strength of the paper sheet.

PS (cotton cellulose), MPAN fibers, and collagen hydrolysates contain polar functional groups – such as hydroxyl, carboxyl, amino groups, and others – in their composition. The macromolecules of collagen hydrolysates and modified PAN fibers form hydrogen and covalent bonds with cellulose. Collagen protein macromolecules also form molecular interactions with modified PAN fibers [8,9].

In composite papermaking, intermolecular bonding can influence not only the bonding within layers but also between layers. This enhances the interlayer adhesion energy. Since the strength of these chemically cross-linked bonds is significantly higher than that of hydrogen bonds, the introduction of collagen molecules into or between

cellulose structures can increase the stability of the molecular architecture, forming an interlinked mesh-like network.

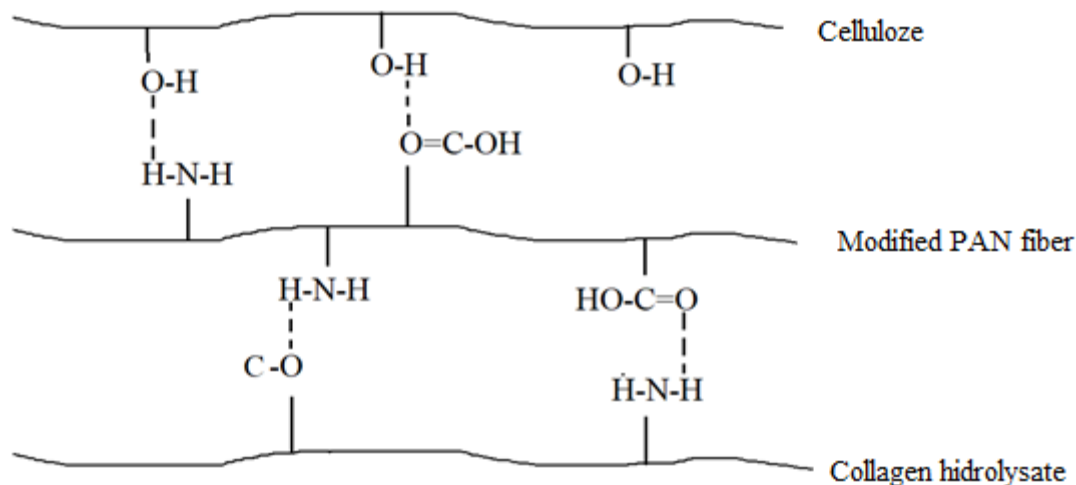


Figure 1. Interaction between Cotton Cellulose, Modified PAN Fiber, and Collagen Hydrolysate

It is important to emphasize that the optimal structure of fibrous and adhesive components within the paper pulp ensures favorable papermaking properties. As a result, a dense network is formed, promoting the generation of internal hydrogen bonds between the fibers. Along with microfibril formation, numerous fibrillar bonds develop both between and within the fibers. The adhesion mechanism of collagen hydrolysate to natural fibers is likely expressed through the formation of a dense chaotic mesh of macro- and microfibrils enriched with numerous interfiber bonds.

The introduction of textile industry waste and collagen-based adhesives into the paper composition positively influences the nanoscale structure of the interlayer surface in the paper composition. Consequently, the physical-mechanical properties and structural integrity of the paper are significantly improved.

1. Conclusions. A paper and cardboard production technology has been improved using a pulp composition consisting of 80% cotton cellulose and 20% modified PAN (MPAN) fiber waste, along with collagen hydrolysates as adhesives in various concentrations (1.5–2.5%).

2. It was established that collagen hydrolysate macromolecules and modified PAN fibers form hydrogen and covalent bonds with cellulose, and molecular interactions between collagen protein macromolecules and modified PAN fibers occur as well. It was theoretically substantiated that these intermolecular bonds can influence not only within-layer but also interlayer interactions in composite paper structures.

This study demonstrated that the use of collagen hydrolysates derived from chrome leather waste in cellulose-paper composite manufacturing, particularly for printing and

packaging enterprises, enables cross-sector integration and supports the implementation of environmentally friendly green chemistry practices.

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CONTENTS

TECHNICAL SCIENCES: COTTON, TEXTILE AND LIGHT INDUSTRY

Dustkobilov U.	
Circular economy practices in the textile industry: Current status, indicators, and development opportunities	3
Kuldashov G., Oripov J.	
Forecasting the temperature gradient of cotton revolt	10
Kuldashov G., Oripov J.	
Optoelectronic three-wave moisture meter of raw cotton	16
Umarov A.	
Research on the optimization of the saw gin's roll box	26
Tursunov A., Sharibaev N.	
Techniques and devices for mitigating environmental pollution in cotton processing industries	36
Ganikhanov Kh., Mavlyanov A., Abdusamatov A., Mirzaumidov A.	
Effect of the forces on the separation of fiber flow from the saw in an improved lower fiber removal device	43
Nurulloyeva Kh., Abdusamatov A., Mirzaumidov A.	
Experimental determination of the load on the multifaceted columns on the elastic supports of the cotton ginner	49
Muradov A.	
Study of the dynamics of the drive mechanism of moving needles	54
Ismatullayev N., Shamsiyeva M.	
Development of technology for producing leather from african catfish skins	59
Rahmatova S.	
Theoretical study of the quality indicators of newly structured knitted fabrics based on a mathematical model	65
Parpieva N., Kayumov J., Parpiyev D., Lastochkin P.	
Theory of torsional vibrations of grooved cylinders	71
Komilov Sh., Mamadaliyev N., Jurayeva G.	
Quality indicators of cotton fiber analyzed	83

TECHNICAL SCIENCES: AGRICULTURE AND FOOD TECHNOLOGIES

Sobirova M., Mohamed R., Farmonov J., Samadiy M.	
Impact of calcium chloride on the cheese yield during swiss cheese manufacturing process	91

Kurayazov Z., Ravshanov S., Kanoatov X.	
Analysis of the influence of the whitening process during preparation for flouring on the quality of bakery flour made from a mixture of wheat and rye grains	96
Xusanxodjayeva F., Meliboyev M., Ergashev O.	
Development of technology for complex processing of garlic onions	105
Meliboyev M.	
Development of complex processing technology for the secondary mass of watermelons and zucchini	112
Nishonov U., Mominov U.	
Evaluation of organoleptic properties of soft drinks prepared from plant materials	118
Khurmamatov A., Yusupova N., Sarsenbayev N., Mallabayev O.	
Results of determination of bitumen movement modes at different temperatures	124
Yusupova N., Sarsenbayev N., Mallabayev O.	
Results of improving the construction of the plate heat exchange	130

CHEMICAL SCIENCES

Jumayeva D., Zaripbaev K., Oxunjonov Z., Nomonova Z.	
Compositional analysis of raw materials in sorbent production	135
Abdumalikov A., Ummatov O., Mamajonov B., Esonkulova N., Ochilov G.	
Thermal treatment of various samples of low-molecular-weight polyethylene – a by-product of polyethylene production	145
Mamajonova M., Salixanova D., Abduraxmonov E., Ismailova M.	
Energetics of water molecule adsorption on modified bentonite surfaces	153
Abdurahimov A., Abdullayeva F., Usmonova Z.	
Infrared spectroscopic analysis of the purification of sunflower oil from waxy substances using perlite and vermiculite	160
Eshbaeva U., Gökhan Z., Bahri B.	
Theoretical foundations for ensuring the mechanical strength of papers containing collagen hydrolysates	167
Eshbaeva U.	
Research on the printing and technical properties of kraft paper incorporating "cotton cellulose-industrial waste-paculate"	172
Makhkamova D.	
Research on the separation of zinc from metallurgy waste with a mixture of ammonia and ammonium salts	181
Yuldasheva M., Makhkamova D., Turayev Z	188

Study of interaction of components in the H_3BO_3 – KNO_3 – H_2O system	
Juraev M., Siddikov D., Askarova O.	
Aboveground components of salvia sarawschanica	194
Davlatova O.	
Zeolite-based bimetallic composite catalysts for pyrolysis and gasification: chemical technologies for deep biofuel upgrading and conversion intensification	202
Davlatova O.	
Use of BaNaY faujasite zeolite–based bimetallic composite catalysts for deep biofuel purification and selective xylene separation	208
Shamuratova M., Giyasidinov A., Eshmetov I., Nurjanova G.	
On the study of physicochemical properties of soils in the regions of the republic	214
Hoshimov F., Lutpillayeva M.	
Optimized chemical synthesis of stable silver nanoparticles using various reducing and stabilizing agents	220
Sarimsakova N.	
Investigation of the adsorption properties of the sorbent obtained in the process of modification of clinoptilothite in the purification of natural gas from sulfur compounds	227
Kokharov M., Bakhronov Kh., Sultonov A., Jumaeva D., Jumaboeva Z., Gaybullayeva D., Abdumutalova G.	
Adsorption isotherm of hydrogen sulfide on an activated adsorbent derived from hybrid paulownia tomentosa wood	234
Ikramov M., Zakirov B.	
Optimization of the aqueous solubility of monoammonium phosphate, potassium nitrate, and magnesium nitrate via thermodynamic analysis and selective crystallization	243
Nazhimova N., Seitnazarova O.	
Study of the chemical and mineralogical composition of thermal power plant wastes	249

TECHNICAL SCIENCES: MECHANICS AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

Berdiev U., Hasanov F., Avazov B., Ostanayev., Viktor M.	
Study of the nature and prospects of practical application of the magnetocaloric effect in energy-efficient cooling systems	256

Sodikov T.	
Research of mechanical part of solar photovoltaic power station	263
Otamirzayev D.	
Calculation of absorption coefficient of organic dye N719 for dye-sensitive solar cell (DSSC)	270
Abdovakhidov M.	
Study on determining the bending and torsional stiffness of packaged working bodies	276
Abdovakhidov M.	
The study torsion fluctuations packet worker organ with provision for influences of the correlation longitudinal acerbity their element	280
Shodmonov J.	
Energy-integrated smart textiles: international trends and prospects for uzbekistan's research ecosystem	285
Djurayev Sh.	
Integrated genetic-differential evolution approach for simultaneous pressure-drop reduction and efficiency enhancement in multi-cyclone dust collectors	292
Mamaxanova Z.	
Technological principles for creating a suit that ensures high reliability and safety in aquatic environments	297
Pirnazarov U.	
Theoretic observation of the cotton movement in the operating camera of the new separator	306
Pirnazarov U.	
Investigation of the interaction between the moving separator screen surface and the cotton mass	315
Yusupov D., Abduraximov D., Muxammadjonov M.	
Determination of energy loss in the magnetic core of oil power transformers under long-term operation conditions	319

ADVANCED PEDAGOGICAL TECHNOLOGIES IN EDUCATION

Abdullayev X.	
Transition function of second-order element	326

ECONOMICAL SCIENCES

Isroilov R.	
Criteria, indicators and laws of small business development	331

Isroilov R.

Concept of assessment of the economic development potential of small business and its evaluation **340**

Bustonov M.

Econometric analysis of the activities of multi-sectoral farms **348**

Bustonov M.

Global digitalization: paths and problems **356**

Kadirova Kh.

Prospects for development and improvement of the mechanism of functioning of the stock market **366**
