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Photoemission spectroscopy studies of buried complex oxide interfaces

CLAUDIA CANCELLIERI, Paul Scherrer Institute, Swiss Light Source, CH5232 Villigen, Switzerland

At the interface between complex oxides, unexpected electronic properties different from those of the constituent bulk materials can arise. A particularly interesting example is the appearance of 2-dimensional conductivity at the interface of the band insulators $LaAlO_3$ (LAO) and $SrTiO_3$ (STO) above a critical LAO thickness of 4 unit cells. Photoemission spectroscopy is a powerful technique which directly probes the electronic structure of materials and can thus provide important information for a better understanding of their properties. The interface of LAO/STO has been investigated by soft x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy for different layer thicknesses across the insulator-to-metal interface transition. We measured clear spectroscopic signatures of Ti^{3+} signal at the Fermi level in fully oxygenated sample. Our results show that Ti^{3+}-related charge carriers are present only for conducting samples, and are confined to a few monolayers from the interface. No Fermi-edge signal could be detected for insulating samples below the critical thickness. Polarization-controlled synchrotron radiation was subsequently used to map the electronic structure of conducting interfaces in a resonant angle-resolved photoemission experiment. A strong dependence on the light polarization of the Fermi surface and band dispersions is demonstrated, highlighting the distinct Ti $3d$ orbitals involved in 2D conduction. Samples with different doping levels were prepared and measured by photoemission, revealing different band occupancies and Fermi-surface shapes. A direct comparison between the photoemission measurements and advanced first-principle calculations carried out for different $3d$-band fillings is presented in conjunction with the 2D carrier concentration obtained from transport measurements.