

Enhanced photocatalytic CO₂ reduction performance in Ni-doped perovskite nanocrystals controlled by magnetic fields

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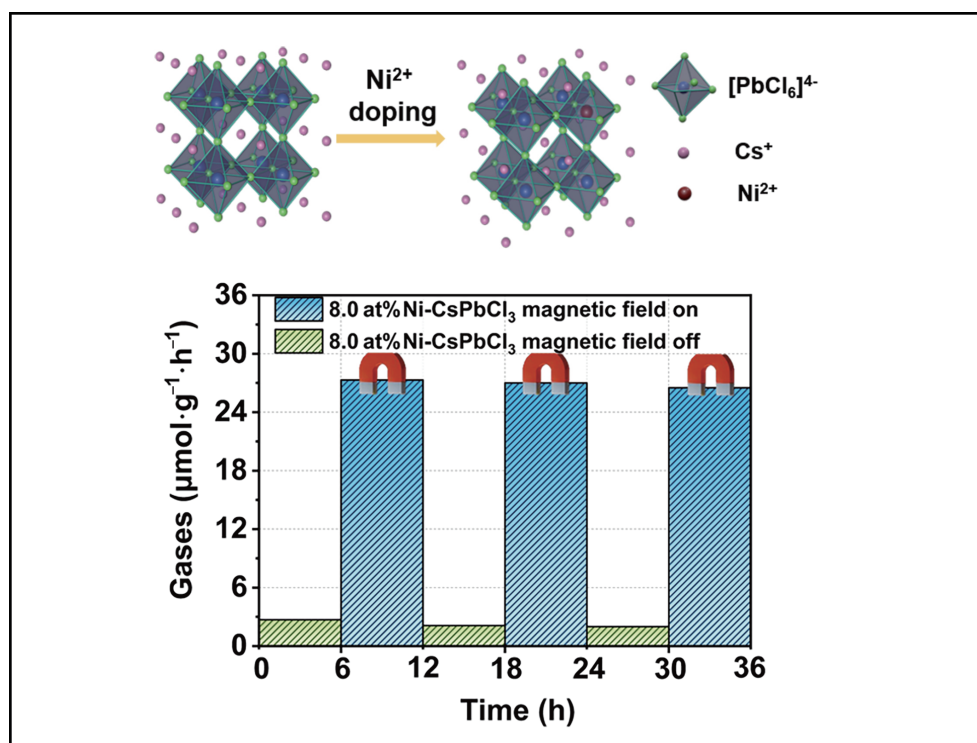
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Graphical abstract



Applying an external magnetic field enhances the photocatalytic CO₂RR efficiency of Ni-doped CsPbCl₃.

Public summary

- This study provides an effective strategy for enhancing the efficiency of the photocatalytic carbon dioxide reduction reaction (CO₂RR) by manipulating spin-polarized electrons in photocatalytic semiconductors via a noncontact external magnetic field.
- Compared with its counterpart, Ni-doped CsPbCl₃ exhibits a sixfold increase in CO₂RR efficiency under a 500 mT magnetic field.
- The significant enhancement of the catalytic performance by the magnetic field is attributed to the synergistic effects of magnetic element doping and the external magnetic field, leading to reduced electron–hole recombination and extended carrier lifetimes.

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Supporting Information

Abstract: In recent years, magnetic fields have been widely applied in catalysis to increase the performance of electrocatalysis, photocatalysis, and thermocatalysis through an important noncontact way. This work demonstrated that doping CsPbCl₃ halide perovskite nanocrystals with nickel ions (Ni²⁺) and applying an external magnetic field can significantly enhance the performance of the photocatalytic carbon dioxide reduction reaction (CO₂RR). Compared with its counterpart, Ni-doped CsPbCl₃ exhibits a sixfold increase in CO₂RR efficiency under a 500 mT magnetic field. Insights into the mechanism of this enhancement effect were obtained through photogenerated current density measurements and X-ray magnetic circular dichroism. The results illustrate that the significant enhancement in catalytic performance by the magnetic field is attributed to the synergistic effects of magnetic element doping and the external magnetic field, leading to reduced electron–hole recombination and extended carrier lifetimes. This study provides an effective strategy for enhancing the efficiency of the photocatalytic CO₂RR by manipulating spin-polarized electrons in photocatalytic semiconductors via a noncontact external magnetic field.

Keywords: photocatalysis; carbon dioxide reduction reaction (CO₂RR); perovskite; spin polarization; magnetic field

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1 Introduction

Over the past three centuries, the extensive use of fossil fuels has led to direct CO₂ emissions exceeding 33 billion tons annually, posing significant risks to climate and environmental stability^[1–4]. Photocatalytic CO₂ conversion into fuels and chemicals is a promising solution for reducing atmospheric CO₂ levels and potentially initiating an artificial carbon cycle^[5]. Despite progress, challenges in terms of reaction activity and selectivity persist in practical applications. This is due mainly to complex processes involving photon absorption, electron–hole pair dynamics, and CO₂ activation on catalyst surfaces. Ongoing studies aim to optimize these steps to increase the photocatalytic CO₂ reduction efficiency^[6–8].

Since Miyasaka's 2009 research on halogenated perovskites for solar cells^[9], these materials have attracted widespread interest in optoelectronics and energy conversion^[10,11]. Perovskite materials are widely used in photocatalytic CO₂ reduction^[12–14], which can be attributed to their high light absorption coefficients, tunable bandgaps, and long carrier transport distances^[15,16]. However, owing to the high quantum efficiency of perovskite materials, the recombination of photogenerated carriers is increased, which is an undesirable outcome of the photocatalytic process^[17,18]. To address this, strategies such as the construction of heterojunctions have been employed to facilitate the spatial separation of charge carriers and reduce recombination, thereby increasing

photocatalytic efficiency^[19–25]. However, heterojunction materials may encounter challenges, including complex synthesis^[26], interface defects^[27,28], and lattice mismatch^[29], which may complicate the manufacturing process and harm the ability to achieve stable catalytic performance.

Compared with enhancing catalytic performance through material fabrication, magnetic fields offer advantages such as being noncontact, easy to apply, and capable of stably boosting catalytic efficiency. For this reason, magnetic fields have attracted increasing attention in catalysis. For example, Pan et al. reported that the yield of the electrocatalytic carbon dioxide reduction reaction (CO₂RR) to formic acid doubled after a magnetic field was applied, which was attributed to the modulation of the radical-to-spin state^[30]. Extensive research efforts have been devoted to uncovering the underlying reaction mechanisms facilitated by magnetic fields, with a focus on theories of spin polarization and electromagnetism^[31–34]. During electron transport, interactions between electrons and the lattice structure lead to energy losses of photogenerated carriers, thus reducing transport efficiency. To address this issue, modulating electron spin polarization has been identified as an effective method to mitigate energy loss^[35]. After doping with magnetic elements, the application of an external magnetic field can reverse the direction of electron spin through orbital coupling interactions, thereby reducing electron collisions and subsequent energy loss. Such adjustments

in electron spin polarization are crucial for improving catalytic efficiency^[36,37].

The enhancement of the photocatalytic CO₂ reduction efficiency in halide perovskite nanocrystals through the manipulation of spin-polarized electrons via a magnetic field was explored in this study. By doping Ni ions into the material, spin polarization bands were created. Under a 500 mT magnetic field, the photocatalytic efficiency increases sixfold. The underlying mechanism was investigated through photocurrent measurements and X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) analysis. This significant improvement is attributed to the extended lifespan of spin-polarized photogenerated carriers and reduced charge recombination. These findings underscore the effectiveness of using external magnetic fields to control spin-polarized electrons in magnetically doped semiconductors, presenting a noncontact and environmentally friendly strategy to optimize photocatalytic CO₂ reduction. This work not only advances the understanding of the effects of magnetic fields on photocatalysis but also opens new avenues for developing high-efficiency, eco-friendly catalysts for mitigating climate change.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Chemicals

All chemicals were used as received without further purification. The materials used included cesium carbonate (Cs₂CO₃, 99%, Innochem), lead(II) chloride (PbCl₂, AR, SCRC), anhydrous nickel chloride (NiCl₂, 98%, Aladdin), 1-octadecene (ODE, 90%, Sigma–Aldrich), oleic acid (OA, AR, SCRC), oleylamine (OAm, 70%, Sigma–Aldrich), and hexane (AR, SCRC).

2.2 Synthesis of catalysts

Cs₂CO₃ (407 mg) was combined with ODE (18 mL) and OA (1.75 mL) in a 50 mL 3-neck round-bottom flask and heated to 120 °C for 1 h under vacuum. The mixture was then purged with nitrogen and heated to 150 °C until all Cs₂CO₃ reacted with OA, forming Cs-oleate. The Cs-oleate was obtained and kept for further use. PbCl₂ (69.0 mg) and NiCl₂ (128.6 mg) were mixed with ODE (10 mL), OA (3 mL), OAm (3 mL), and HCl (20 μL) in a 50 mL 3-neck flask and dried under vacuum at 120 °C for 1 h. This mixture was then heated to 200 °C under an argon atmosphere. Then, the Cs-oleate (4 mL) was swiftly injected into the heated solution, and after 5 s, the solution was cooled via an ice bath (Fig. S1). After centrifugation, the catalyst was washed three times with acetone and absolute ethanol. The synthesis methods of catalysts with other Ni doping ratios are similar, and the dosages of PbCl₂ and NiCl₂ need to be adjusted.

2.3 Characterizations

X-ray diffraction patterns of the samples were recorded on a Rigaku Miniflex-600 with Cu K α radiation ($\lambda = 0.15406$ nm). Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) was performed with a Hitachi-7700. High-resolution TEM and high-angle annular dark-field scanning TEM images were recorded via a Talos F200X. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was performed via Al K α radiation on a scanning X-ray

microprobe (PHI 5000 Versa, ULAC-PHI, Inc.). X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) analysis was performed at the BL12B beamline of the National Synchrotron Radiation Laboratory (NSRL, Hefei).

2.4 Photocatalytic CO₂ reduction reaction

Thin films of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ were prepared on quartz substrates for the photocatalytic CO₂RR. The substrates were first cleaned with acetone twice and heated to 70 °C. The catalyst was dispersed in hexane and spray-coated on heated quartz substrates; subsequently, the coated substrates were heated to 80 °C in a vacuum drying oven for 1 h to remove the surface ligands. The weight of the thin films of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-doped CsPbCl₃ on quartz was approximately 5.0 mg. After drying, the thin films were placed into a photocatalytic reactor (Perfect Light PQ256) to conduct the photocatalytic CO₂RR. Before the photocatalytic CO₂ reduction reaction, the reactor was degassed to remove air, and H₂O-saturated CO₂ was purged into the reactor for 1 h. AM 1.5G 150 mW/cm² (Perfect Light PLS-SXE 300) was placed on the top of the reactor as a light source. After the photocatalytic CO₂RR, the products were collected and analyzed via GC (Panna A91). For the experiments under an external magnetic field, permanent magnets were placed under the reactor (Fig. S2).

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Characterizations of the catalyst

To introduce spin-polarized electrons in halide perovskites, magnetic Ni ions were doped into the all-inorganic perovskite CsPbCl₃, effectively substituting for Pb sites (Fig. 1a). Both CsPbCl₃ and Ni-doped CsPbCl₃ (denoted as Ni-CsPbCl₃) were synthesized via the conventional thermal injection method^[38,39]. The nickel doping concentration was determined to be 8.0 atomic percent (at%) through inductively coupled plasma spectroscopy (ICP) (Table S1). The structural and morphological characteristics of Ni-CsPbCl₃ were analyzed via transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HR-TEM). The TEM image reveals the cubic morphology of Ni-CsPbCl₃, which is approximately 100 nm in size (Fig. 1b). The HR-TEM image shows that the crystal structure corresponds to the cubic phase (002) Miller plane of the perovskite, with a plane spacing of 0.28 nm (Fig. 1c). Additionally, high-angle annular dark-field scanning transmission electron microscopy (HAADF-STEM) with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS) element mapping confirmed the uniform distribution of Ni ions within the structure (Fig. 1d, e).

The crystal structures of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ were analyzed via X-ray diffraction (XRD) (Fig. 2a). Both materials exhibit the cubic phase of three-dimensional perovskites, which is consistent with earlier HR-TEM results. Notably, Ni-CsPbCl₃ shows lattice contraction due to the substitution of larger lead ions (Pb²⁺ with an ionic radius of 1.19 Å) for smaller nickel ions (Ni²⁺ with an ionic radius of 0.69 Å), resulting in a peak shift toward higher angles by approximately 0.1°^[40]. The shift in the peak position demonstrates a change in the lattice constant, indicating that nickel ions have entered the

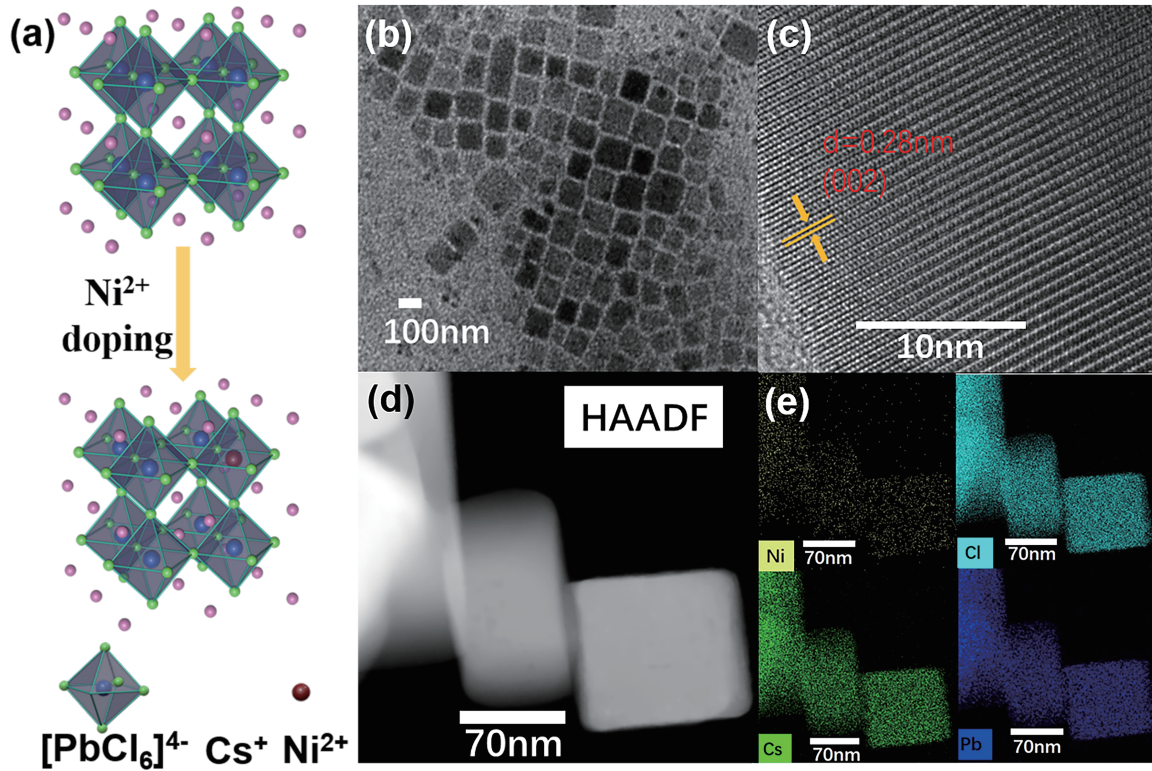


Fig. 1. (a) Schematic representation of the crystal lattice structures of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃, (b) TEM image, (c) HR-TEM image, (d) HAADF image, and (e) EDS elemental scans of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%.

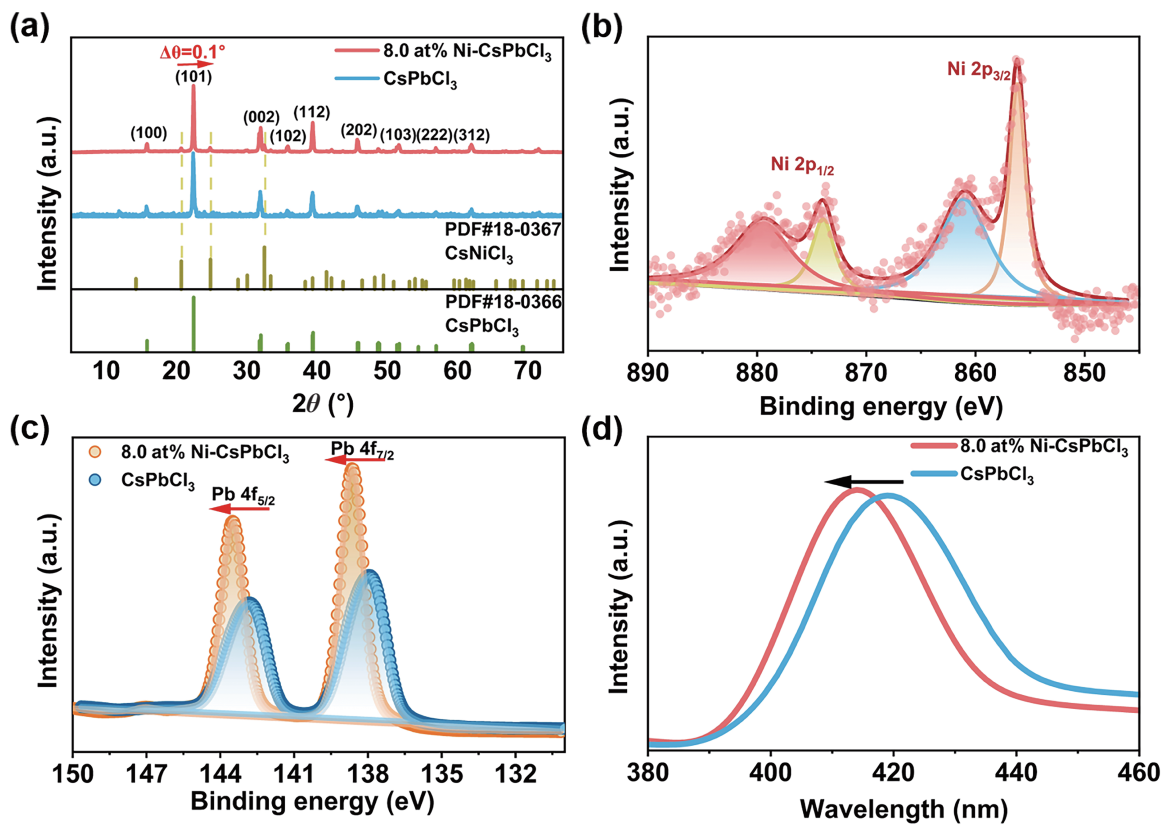


Fig. 2. (a) XRD patterns of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (b) XPS spectrum of Ni 2p for Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (c) XPS spectra of Pb 4f. (d) PL spectra of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%.

lattice. In addition, peaks corresponding to the CsNiCl₃ phase appear after doping. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was used to analyze the valence state of nickel. The consistency between the normalized XPS spectra of Ni 2p for Ni-CsPbCl₃ and NiO indicates that the Ni ions are divalent (Fig. 2b and Fig. S3)^[41,42]. In addition, the binding energy peaks of Pb 4f_{5/2} and 4f_{7/2} shift toward higher energies after doping (Fig. 2c)^[43–45]. The XRD and XPS results confirmed the successful doping of Ni²⁺. Photoluminescence (PL) analysis revealed a shift in the exciton emission peak from 420 nm in CsPbCl₃ to 416 nm in Ni-CsPbCl₃, indicating that nickel doping also affects the optical properties, resulting in a slight increase in the bandgap (Fig. 2d)^[46,47].

3.2 Photocatalytic carbon dioxide reduction performance

To explore the influence of various Ni doping concentrations on the yield of the photocatalytic CO₂RR, Ni-CsPbCl₃ samples with Ni doping ratios of 0, 0.9 at%, 4.8 at%, 5.8 at%, 8.0 at%, and 9.1 at% were synthesized by adjusting the feed ratios of NiCl₂ to PbCl₂ (Table S1). In these experiments, the product of the photocatalytic CO₂RR is carbon monoxide (CO). There is no product when argon gas is injected without carbon dioxide, which confirms that the carbon source of the product is indeed carbon dioxide (Fig. S4). Without a magnetic

field, increasing the Ni doping ratio results in a slight increase in the CO yield, from 2 to 4.0 μmol·g⁻¹·h⁻¹ for 0 and 9.1 at% Ni (Fig. 3a), which is consistent with previously reported studies (Table S2). However, when a 500 mT magnetic field is applied, the photocatalytic performance of Ni-CsPbCl₃ is markedly enhanced, whereas the CO yield of CsPbCl₃ remains unchanged. This suggests that the catalytic enhancement induced by the magnetic field is related to Ni doping. Under the influence of the magnetic field, the CO yields for Ni doping ratios of 0.9 at%, 4.8 at%, 5.8 at%, 8.0 at%, and 9.1 at% increase by 2.8, 4.9, 5.5, 7.2, and 5.7 times, respectively. The highest observed yield was 27.3 μmol·g⁻¹·h⁻¹, with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%. However, at a nickel doping ratio of 9.1 at%, the yield decreases. The above results suggest that increasing Ni doping contributes to improving the magnetic field enhancement of the photocatalytic reaction yield; however, excessive Ni doping leads to a decrease in this enhancement effect. Furthermore, the UV–visible absorption spectra show a blueshift in the absorption peak of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with increasing Ni content, indicating a corresponding increase in the bandgap width (Fig. 3b). The bandgap of CsPbCl₃ was estimated to be 2.80 eV via the Tauc plot method, whereas for Ni doping ratios of 9.1 at%, the bandgap increased to 3.05 eV (Fig. S5)^[48]. A wider bandgap width may hamper the excitation of photogenerated

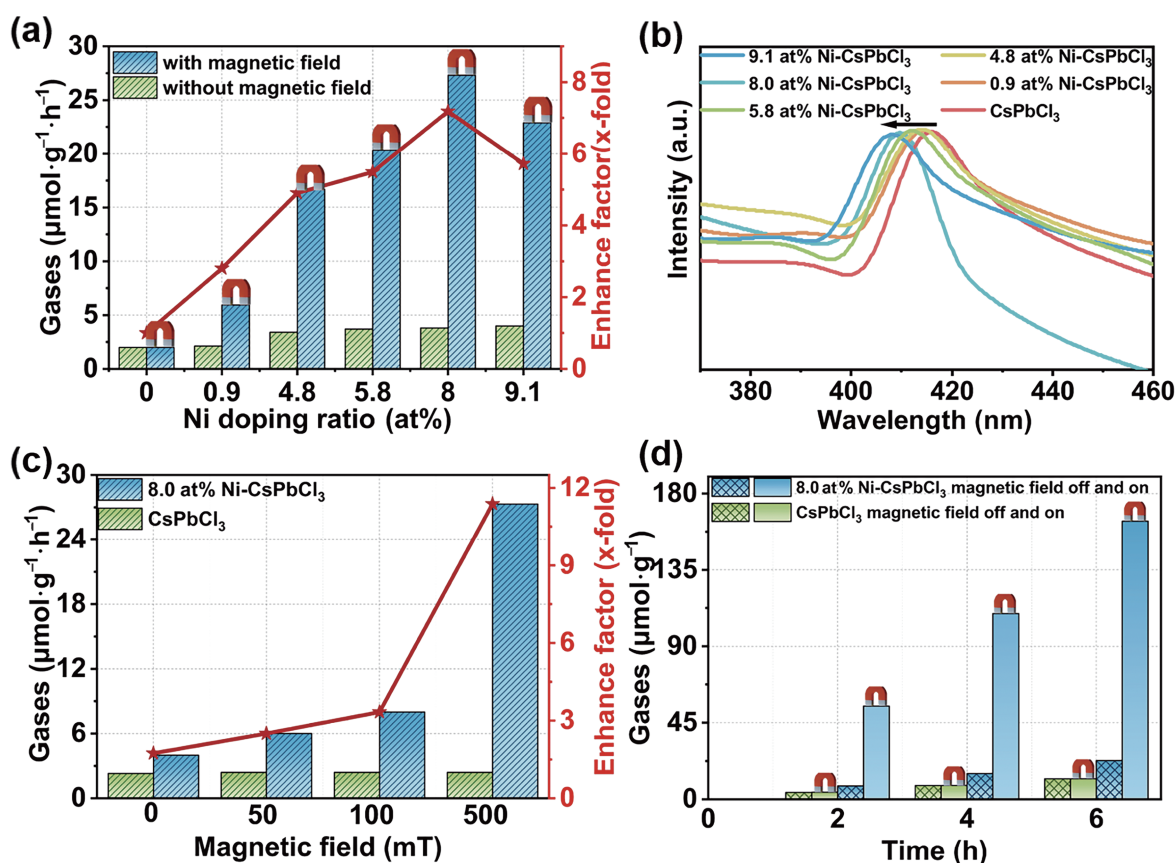


Fig. 3. (a) Photocatalytic CO₂RR product yields of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with various Ni doping ratios under conditions without or with an external magnetic field. (b) UV–visible absorption spectra of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with different Ni doping ratios. (c) Relationships between the photocatalytic CO yield and magnetic field intensity for CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (d) Changes in the photocatalytic CO yield over time for CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%.

electrons, resulting in a lower catalytic performance for Ni-CsPbCl₃ at 9.1 at% doping ratio. When the Ni doping level increased to 9.0 at%, the presence of a more obvious CsNiCl₃ phase in the catalyst leads to phase separation of the catalyst (Fig. S6), whereas CsNiCl₃ has no catalytic activity or diamagnetism, which may weaken the enhancement effect of the magnetic field. Therefore, 8.0 at% was selected as the optimal doping ratio of Ni-CsPbCl₃ for the following experiments. Fig. 3c shows a positive correlation between the photocatalytic CO yield and the intensity of the magnetic field for Ni-CsPbCl₃, whereas no such trend is observed for CsPbCl₃. This further illustrates that the significant enhancement in the photocatalytic CO₂RR performance is attributed to the application of the magnetic field. Fig. 3d shows the linear accumulation of the photocatalytic products over time. This result confirms the stability and ongoing effectiveness of the magnetic enhancement on the photocatalytic performance.

To evaluate the stability of the magnetic field enhancement effect, magnetic field switch cycles were applied in the photocatalytic CO₂RR process. The efficiency of the photocatalytic CO₂RR changes rapidly and consistently with repeated switching of the magnetic field over 36 h cycles, demonstrating the repeatability of the magnetic field enhancement effect (Fig. 4a). These results confirm the stability and repeatability of the magnetic field in increasing the

photocatalytic efficiency. The hysteresis loop for Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at% shows minimal hysteresis (Fig. 4b), demonstrating a rapid response and high sensitivity to the magnetic field switch. The results of the electron paramagnetic resonance (EPR) characteristics and XRD patterns before and after the 36 h reaction show that the magnetic responsiveness and crystal structure of the material remain almost unchanged from those before the reaction (Fig. 4c, d and Fig. S7), indicating the catalytic stability of the material during the prolonged reaction. The above results confirm the stability of the magnetic field enhancement effect.

3.3 Mechanistic study

The photogenerated currents for Ni-CsPbCl₃ were measured both with and without an applied magnetic field to elucidate the underlying mechanisms of the magnetic field-enhanced photocatalytic CO₂RR in Ni-CsPbCl₃. The application of a magnetic field significantly increases the photogenerated current density of Ni-CsPbCl₃, with this enhancement persisting over ten cycles (Fig. 5a). This suggests that the improvement in the photocatalytic CO₂RR efficiency can be attributed to the enhanced current photogenerated by the magnetic field, which may be due to the reduction in charge carrier recombination. The EPR spectrum of Ni-CsPbCl₃ shows a distinct signal at approximately 330 mT, corresponding to a g factor

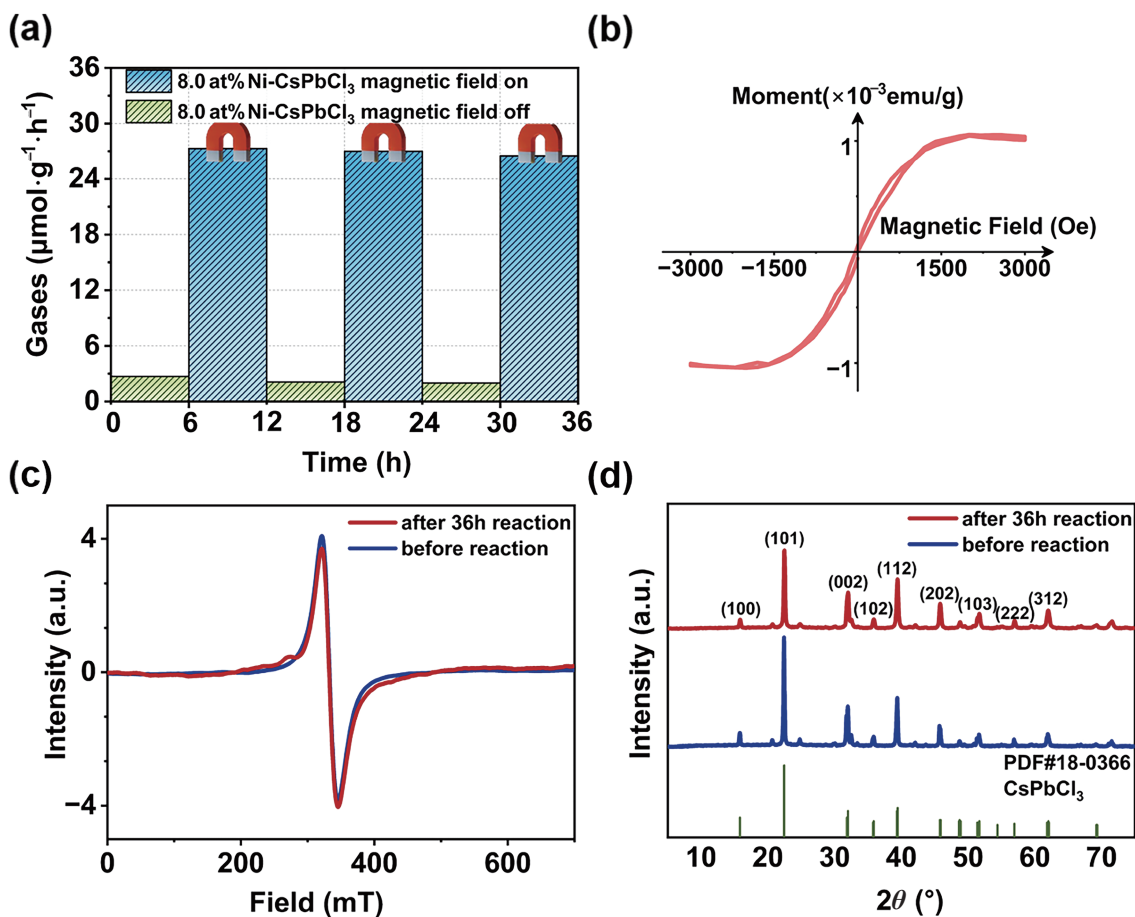


Fig. 4. (a) Changes in the photocatalytic yield with switching the magnetic field on or off. (b) Hysteresis loop of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (c) EPR spectra and (d) XRD patterns of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a nickel doping ratio of 8.0 at% before and after photocatalysis.

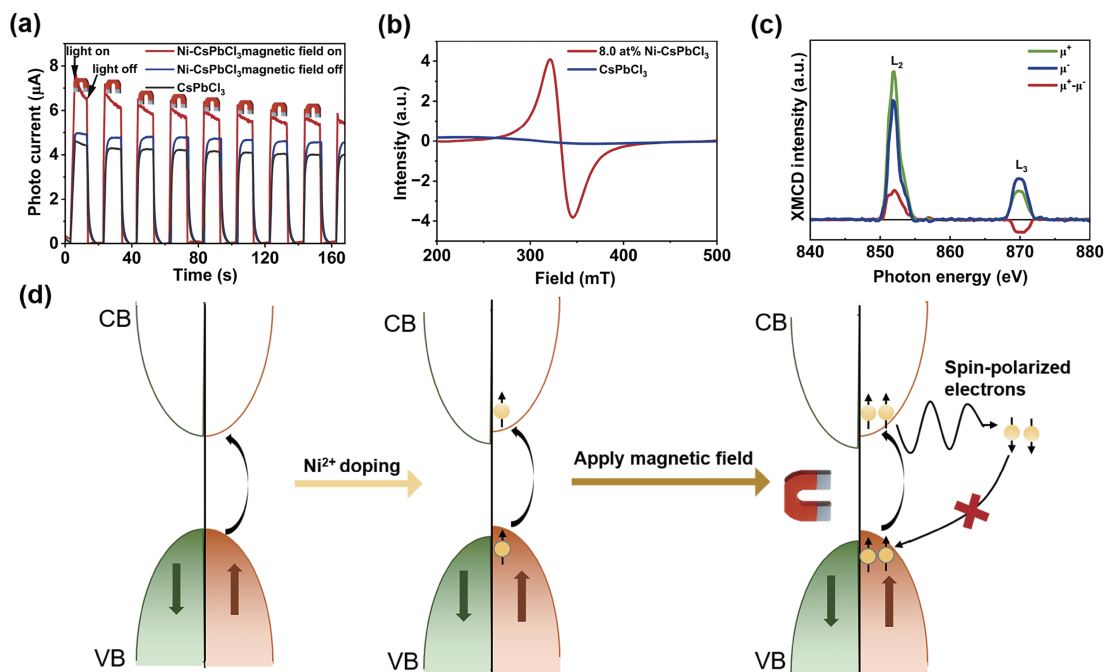


Fig. 5. (a) Photogenerated currents for CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a Ni doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (b) EPR spectra of CsPbCl₃ and Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a Ni doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (c) XMCD spectra of Ni-CsPbCl₃ with a Ni doping ratio of 8.0 at%. (d) Schematic diagram illustrating the mechanism of magnetic field-induced CO₂RR performance enhancement.

of approximately 2, whereas CsPbCl₃ presents no detectable EPR signal (Fig. 5b). This finding suggests that doping CsPbCl₃ with magnetic Ni²⁺ will make the catalyst paramagnetic and respond quickly to the magnetic field, thereby influencing the CO₂RR process^[49]. Further investigations were conducted via X-ray magnetic circular dichroism (XMCD) spectroscopy under a magnetic field. The XMCD spectrum of Ni-CsPbCl₃ demonstrates the inherent spin-polarized band structure of the catalyst after Ni²⁺ doping and the enhanced splitting of the spin-polarized bands after the application of a magnetic field (Fig. 5c)^[50]. These results confirm that an external magnetic field significantly enhances spin polarization in photoexcited carriers of Ni-CsPbCl₃, improving photocatalytic performance^[51,52]. Through the above studies, the magnetic field-induced CO₂RR performance enhancement mechanisms are summarized in Fig. 5d. In semiconductor photocatalysis, illumination drives electrons from the valence band (VB) to the conduction band (CB), producing photogenerated electrons and corresponding holes. Typically, the random orientation of these electron spins leads to high recombination rates among electrons and holes with matching spins. After introducing Ni²⁺ into CsPbCl₃, the new electronic states from Ni²⁺ interact with the perovskite's existing electronic states, modifying its band structure. This interaction causes energy level splitting and the formation of spin-polarized bands, reducing recombination rates and potentially increasing carrier density, thereby increasing CO₂RR efficiency^[49]. Applying an external magnetic field strengthens the splitting of the spin-polarized bands, leading to a further increase in spin-polarized electrons and holes^[32,33], therefore decreasing the likelihood of recombination between photogenerated electrons and holes^[53–56]. This reduction in recombination enhances the redox reactions essential for the CO₂RR in

photocatalysts, thereby increasing the photocatalytic efficiency. This mechanism demonstrates that applying a magnetic field to Ni-CsPbCl₃ is an effective method for enhancing the photocatalytic CO₂ reduction efficiency.

4 Conclusions

In summary, a Ni-doped spin-polarized halide perovskite, Ni-CsPbCl₃, was synthesized in this work. The application of a magnetic field substantially enhances the photocatalytic CO₂RR efficiency of Ni-CsPbCl₃, primarily because increased spin polarization significantly reduces carrier recombination rates. Notably, this magnetic field is noncontact and easy to implement. This strategy capitalizes on the synergistic effects of magnetic fields and Ni doping to improve photocatalytic performance, opening new possibilities for the development of efficient and versatile photocatalysts. The design and application of magnetic fields and magnetic photocatalysts have broad prospects in the field of solar energy conversion.

Supporting information

The supporting information for this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.52396/JUSTC-2024-0078>. The supporting information includes seven figures and two tables.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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