Microwave Drying Behaviour of Tomato Slices

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Abstract

ÇELEN S., KAHVECI K. (2013): Microwave drying behaviour of tomato slices. Czech J. Food Sci., 31: 132–138.

The microwave drying behaviour of tomato slices was investigated experimentally to determine the effects of microwave power on the drying rate, energy consumption, and dried product quality in terms of colour, and a theoretical model was proposed to define the drying curves of tomato slices. The experiments performed with the microwave power of 90, 180, 360, and 600 W indicate that the drying time and the energy consumption decreased considerably with an increase in microwave power. The experiments also revealed that the drying rate shows first an increase and then a decrease during drying, and that the colour quality of the product deteriorates significantly with the increase of the microwave power. A theoretical model was developed using the solution of energy equation considering the microwave power as an internal heat source. The electric field strength inside the material was assumed to be dependent on the moisture content and the constants emerging from this assumption were obtained by minimising the sum of squared differences between the theoretical results and experimental data obtained for various drying conditions. The results show that the values proposed for the constants provide a good agreement between the theoretical and experimental drying behaviour.

Keywords: drying rate; diffusion; moisture content; colour analysis

Tomato is a popular food for its culinary properties and their health benefits. It is a natural source of lycopene, a carotenoid that reduces the risk of cancer and coronary heart disease (Brooks et al. 2008). It is also the most commercially produced vegetable in the world. Major producers are China, the United States of America, India, Egypt, Turkey, and Italy and the yearly production was estimated as 145 751 507 Mt in 2010 (FAO 2012). Much of the total tomato production is consumed fresh or used to produce tomato paste. A certain percentage is dried to reduce the moisture content to a level that allows the product to be stored safely for an extended period of time. Drying also reduces the weight and volume of the product, thereby reducing packing, storage, and transportation costs. Dried tomato is generally used for making pizza and various culinary dishes (Brooks et al. 2008).

Until recently, one of the most commonly used drying techniques was the convective hot air drying. However, in this drying technique, food materials are exposed to elevated temperatures, which leads to an increase in shrinkage and toughness, reduction of both the bulk density and rehydration capacity of the dried product, and it also causes serious damage to flavour, colour, and nutrient content (MASKAN 2000). The other major disadvantages of convective hot air drying method are the increased drying time and higher energy consumption due to the higher drying temperature. The desire to reduce the above problems led to the use of microwave and dielectric heating methods for food drying (Bondaruk et al. 2007). Microwave energy is rapidly absorbed by water molecules which, consequently, results in rapid evaporation of water and thus higher drying rates, therefore microwave drying offers significant energy savings, with a potential reduction in drying times in

Support by the Trakya University Research Fund, Grant No. 901/2011.

addition to the inhibition of the surface temperature of the treated material (McLoughlin *et al.* 2003).

Many studies have been done on microwave drying or microwave assisted drying for a great variety of food products. The references and the subjects for some of these studies are: AL-DURI and McIntyre (1992) – skimmed milk, whole milk, casein powders, butter and fresh pasta drying, Soysal (2004) – parsley drying, Soysal (2005) and OZBEK and DADALI (2007) - mint drying, ERDEM (2006) - red pepper drying, SARIMESELI (2011) - coriander leaves drying, Tulasidas (1997) and Kassem et al. (2011) – grape drying, Liamkaew et al. (2008) and ALIBAS (2007a) - pumpkin drying, Workneh et al. (2011) – tomato drying, Miller and Braddock (1982) – citrus peel drying, Evin (2011) - roseships drying, DADALI and OZBEK (2008) – leek drying, Ozkan et al. (2007) – spinach drying, Dadali et al. (2007) – okra drying, Işik et al. (2011) – lentil drying, Albanese et al. (2006) - potatoes drying, INCHUEN et al. (2008) - thai red curry paste drying, and ELHANA (2008) and WANG et al. (2007) – apple drying.

In most of the aforementioned studies, empirical or semi-empirical models were used to simulate drying. However, more realistic models are needed for a better understanding of the physical phenomena behind the microwave drying and for an appropriate simulation of drying. In this study, microwave drying behaviour of tomato slices was investigated experimentally for various values of the microwave power and a theoretical drying model was proposed for the simulation of drying. Furthermore, colour analysis was conducted to investigate the effects of microwave drying on the product quality in terms of colour.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The tomato cultivar Rio de Grande, which is used in the production of tomato paste, was used

to specify the microwave drying behaviour. To-matoes obtained from a local supplier (Tekirdağ/Turkey) were at harvest maturity. The experiments were carried out in a microwave oven (Arçelik MD 554; Arçelik A.Ş, İstanbul, Turkey) of 2450 MHz frequency, 800 W capacity, and 19 l inner volume. The weight of the tomato slices during the drying process was specified with a digital scale (Presica XB 620 M; Precisa Instruments AG, Dietikon, Switzerland) of \pm 0.001 g precision and a capacity of 620 g. The energy consumption during drying was measured by an energy meter (Enda, Turkey). The colour analysis of the product was conducted by a Hunter Lab D25LT (Hunter Associates Laboratory, Inc., Virginia, USA) colorimeter.

The mean diameter and weight of the tomatoes used in the experiments were 6 ± 0.3 cm and 50 ± 1 g, respectively. The moisture content of the tomatoes with respect to the wet basis was 96%. In order to specify the moisture content, the tomatoes were initially dried in an oven at 105°C for 24 h and the dry mass was measured. Prior to the drying experiment, the tomatoes were cut into the slices of 5 mm. After that, the tomato slices were placed on a glass plate. The glass plate was connected to the scale on the microwave oven. Then, the drying experiments were conducted at various values of the microwave power. During the drying, the weight values of the tomato slices were transferred to a computer at regular intervals of time by Balint software. The drying was continued until the moisture content reached around 12% with respect to the wet basis. This moisture content was selected as the final moisture content because a lot of dark spots develop due to burning on the surfaces of the tomato slices at the moisture levels below this value. After each test, the energy consumption during drying and the colour parameters of the dried product were measured and recorded. Also, the first and the final volumes of the tomato slices were determined by measuring the volume

Table 1. Density of the tomato slices at the beginning and at the end of the drying

Power (W)	V_o (cm ³)	V (cm ³)	$M_{o}(g)$	M (g)	$\rho_{o}(g/cm^{3})$	ρ (g/cm ³)
90	80	16	5.1	0.5	6.3×10^{-02}	$3.13.10^{-02}$
180	80	11	5.1	0.3	6.3×10^{-02}	$2.73.10^{-02}$
360	80	6	5.1	0.3	6.3×10^{-02}	$5.00.10^{-02}$
600	80	5	5.1	0.4	6.3×10^{-02}	$8.00.10^{-02}$

V – volume of the tomato slices; M – weight of tomato slices; ρ – density of tomato slices

changes after the samples were added to a scaled glass tube filled with water (Table 1).

The microwave power absorbed in the unit volume of the material can be taken as internal heat source in the energy equation. Therefore, energy equation subjected to the microwave heating can be written as follows (Markov & Yulenets 2002): equation

$$\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = \alpha \nabla 2T + \frac{h_{\text{fg}}}{c} \frac{\partial m}{\partial t} + \frac{q_{\text{v}}}{c\rho}$$
 (1)

where:

t - time (s)

T - temperature (°C)

 $h_{\rm fg}$ – specific heat of the phase transition (J/kg)

c – specific heat (J/kg·°C)

 ρ – density (kg/m³)

m – moisture content (kg water/kg wet matter)

 α – thermal diffusivity (m²/s)

 q_{y} – internal heat source (W/m³)

Usually, the preheating of the body to the point of phase transition ($T=T_{\rm p}$) is carried out at the highest possible rate. There is almost no evaporation under such conditions until the system reaches the transition point $T_{\rm p}$ (°C) (Zhmakin 1960; Yulenets et~al. 1992). Therefore, it can be assumed that the evaporation and drying begin after the system has reached the transition point. The temperature remains constant during drying at $T=T_{\rm p}$. The experiments also prove negligible magnitude of the moisture-content gradients as well as the temperature in high-frequency heating and drying (Lyons et~al. 1972). In this case, mathematical description of drying can be written as follows (Markov & Yulenets 2002):

$$\frac{\mathrm{d}\overline{m}}{\mathrm{d}t} = \frac{q_{\nu}}{h_{\rm fg}\rho} \tag{2}$$

where:

 \overline{m} – average moisture content (kg water/kg wet matter) $q_{_{V}}$ – can be defined as follows (Houšová & Hoke 2002; Markov & Yulenets 2002) (W/m³) :

$$q_{\nu} = 2\pi f \varepsilon_{0} \varepsilon^{"} E^{2} \tag{3}$$

where:

 f – electromagnetic field frequency of the microwave oven (Hz)

 $\epsilon_{_{0}}$ – absolute dielectric constant (F/m)

 ϵ " – dielectric loss factor of the material

E – electric field strength inside the material (V/m)

The prediction of the electric field strength inside the material is extremely difficult because of the complexity of the interaction between the material parameters and the oven characteristics (Houšová & Hoke 2002). Therefore, it was assumed in this study that it is uniform inside the material and can be defined by the following relation:

$$E = k_1 \overline{m}^2 + k_2 \overline{m} + k_3 \tag{4}$$

where:

 k_1, k_2, k_3 – constant

The colour analysis was also conducted in this study to obtain some knowledge about the quality of the dried product. Three parameters, L^* (lightness), a^* (redness), and b^* (yellowness), were used to study the colour changes. The L^* refers to the lightness of the samples and ranges from black = 0 to white = 100. The negative value of a^* indicates green, while the positive a^* indicates red colours. The positive b^* indicates yellow and the negative b* indicates blue colours (Вавацк 1996; Ацвая 2007b). The total colour difference (Δe^*) was also calculated. In addition to the parameters a^* , b^* , and L^* , the colour density C^* and the hue angle H^* were also determined. These parameters depend on the colour space coordinates and are defined as follows (ABONYI et al. 2002; KARABULUT et al. 2007):

$$C^* = \sqrt{a^{*2} + b^{*2}} \tag{5}$$

$$H^* = \arctan \frac{b^*}{a^*} \tag{6}$$

The following equations were used in the specification of the change in the colour parameters with respect to the fresh product:

$$\Delta a^* = a_{\text{fresh}}^* - a^* \tag{7}$$

$$\Delta b^* = b_{\text{fresh}}^* - b^* \tag{8}$$

$$\Delta L^* = L_{\text{fresh}}^* - L^* \tag{9}$$

$$\Delta e^* = \sqrt{\Delta L^{*2} + \Delta a^{*2} + \Delta b^{*2}} \tag{10}$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Equation (2) governs the moisture removal from the material and depends on the specific heat of the phase transition ($h_{\rm fg}=2258.10^3\,{\rm J/kg}$), the density of the material, and the heat source. The density of food materials varies during the drying depending on the moisture content and this variation can be

Table 2.	Constants	for	electrical	field	strength
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Power (W)	k_1	k_2	k_3	r	Err
90	-128	209	30	0.999	3.037×10^{-3}
180	-402	664	-40	0.997	7.791×10^{-3}
360	-1141	1300	60	0.999	4.449×10^{-3}
600	-1968	2192	13	0.998	4.633×10^{-3}

 k_1, k_2, k_3 – constant; r – correlation coefficient; err – sum of the squared differences

assumed to be linear (Kahveci & Cihan 2008). Therefore, the linear variation for the density of the tomato slices was assumed in this study. The heat source depends on the electromagnetic field frequency of the microwave oven, the absolute dielectric constant ε , the dielectric loss factor of the material ε ", and the electric field strength inside the material ε . The electromagnetic field frequency of the microwave oven used in the experimental study is f=2450 MHz and the absolute dielectric constant is $\varepsilon_{\rm o}=8.854\times 10^{-12}\,{\rm F/m}$. Using the data available in the literature, Sipahioglu and Barringer (2003) proposed the following equation for the dielectric loss factor of vegetables and fruits as a function of temperature, ash content and moisture content:

$$\varepsilon'' = 33.41 - 0.4415T + 0.001400T^2 - 0.1746m + 1.438A + 0.001578mT + 0.2289AT$$
 (11)

where:

T – temperature (°C)

m – wet basis moisture content (%)

A – wet basis ash content (%)

This equation was adapted to this study. Using the method defined in the literature (Ahaye 2010; Buntaran et al. 2010; Purkayastha & Mahanta 2011), the wet basis ash content for the tomatoes used in this study was obtained as 0.40% after 41 ± 0.5 g samples were burned in a muffle furnace (Nüve MF120; Nüve, Ankara, Turkey) at 550°C during 4 h until it became charcoal. Therefore, the constants $(k_1, k_2, \text{ and } k_3)$ of the electrical field strength are the only unknowns in the governing equation. These constants were obtained by minimising the sum of squared differences between the experimental and theoretical moisture contents. Theoretical moisture contents were determined by solving the first order first degree linear ordinary differential equation given in Eq. (2). The solution of this equation was obtained numerically using the forth order Runge Kutta method by a code

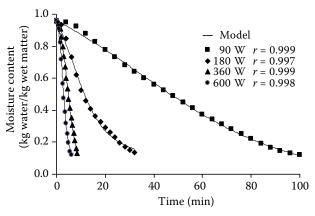


Figure 1. Drying curves at different microwave power levels

developed by the Fortran programming language. The values of the constants obtained for various values of microwave power are given in Table 2. The acceptability of the drying model has been based on the value of the correlation coefficient, which has values close to one for a good fit with the experimental data. According to this evaluation, the proposed model simulates the drying behaviour of the tomato slices in a microwave drier very well with a minimum r of 0.997.

The predicted drying curves for the tomato slices are shown along with the experimental data in Figure 1. It can be concluded from this figure that the microwave power is an effective factor in reducing the drying time. The drying time decreases from 100 min to 6 min with the increase of the microwave power from 90 W to 360 W.

The drying rates during drying are seen in Figure 2 for different microwave power levels. The

Table 3. Energy consumptions

Power (W)	Energy consumption (Wh)				
90	350				
180	79.5				
360	12.04				
600	8.4				

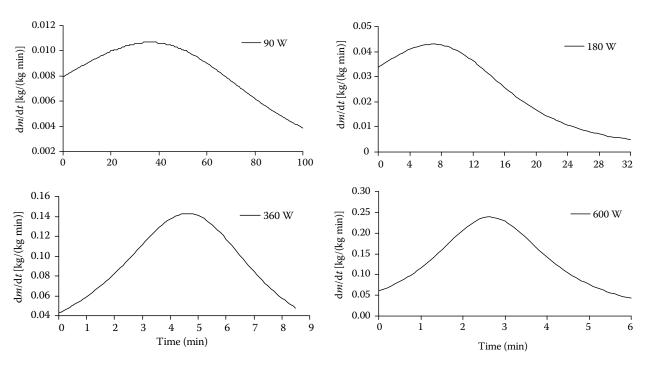


Figure 2. Variations of drying rate at different microwave power levels

drying rate increases in the early stage of drying and then begins to decrease. The decrease in the moisture content has a negative effect on the electric field strength and therefore the drying rate. This is the most important reason for the fallingrate drying period in the later stage of drying.

The energy consumptions during drying are shown in Table 3 for various microwave power levels. The energy consumption decreases considerably with an increase in the microwave power level depending on the decrease in the drying time. Increasing microwave power from 90 W to 360 W decreases energy consumption from 350 Wh to 8.4 Wh.

The colour analysis results for the dried tomato slices are shown in Table 4 for various values of the microwave power. The colour characteristics were considered as the most important quality parameters in this study. In terms of the desired

tomato colour properties, higher L^* (lightness) and higher a^* (redness) and lower H^* (hue angle) are preferred (SACILIK 2007). It can be seen from Table 4 that the lightness decreases and the hue angle and the changes in the colour including redness increase significantly as the microwave power increases. The assessment of the colour quality can be made according to the closeness of the values of the colour parameters of the dried product to those of the fresh one. The colour characteristics of the dried tomato with 90 W microwave power are relatively much closer to those of the fresh one. Therefore, it can be concluded that the most preferable microwave power level is 90 W. Moreover, dark spots develop in the product due to burning at the microwave powers of 360 W and 600 W. Therefore, the microwave power below 360W has to be preferred to prevent the product from burning.

Table 4. Color parameters for tomato slices

	a*	b^*	L^*	<i>C</i> *	H^*	Δa^*	Δb^*	ΔL^*	Δe^*
Fresh	23.50 ± 0.4	23.90 ± 0.4	42.80 ± 0.4	33.60	0.72	_	_	_	_
90 W	18.90 ± 0.7	17.50 ± 0.3	33.30 ± 0.1	25.80	0.74	4.50	6.40	9.50	12.30
180 W	12.50 ± 0.7	17.10 ± 0.4	29.60 ± 0.1	21.20	0.93	11.00	6.80	13.20	18.50
360 W	11.80 ± 0.7	13.70 ± 0.4	26.70 ± 0.3	18.10	0.86	11.70	10.20	16.10	22.30
600 W	10.40 ± 1.0	13.40 ± 0.2	25.90 ± 0.2	16.90	0.90	13.10	10.50	16.90	23.80

[±] represents the standard deviation

In the design of a drier, it is aimed at the product drying as quickly as possible, energy consumption during the drying being low, and the product quality after the drying being high. Drying temperature should be kept high for a quick drying process. But, as a general rule, high drying temperatures tend to spoil the quality of food products (Bonazzi & Dumoulin 2011). On the other hand, both drying time and energy consumption acquire higher values at low drying temperatures. Considering all these facts and the results of this study, we propose that the microwave drying of tomato slices conducted at microwave power levels higher than 90 W and lower than 360 W.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, microwave drying behaviour of tomato slices was investigated experimentally and a theoretical model was proposed to simulate the drying. The experiments were performed at the microwave power of 90 W, 180 W, 360 W, 600 W. The theoretical model was developed using the solution of energy equation considering the microwave power as an internal heat source. The electric field strength inside the material was assumed to be dependent on the moisture content and the constants emerging from this assumption were obtained by minimising the sum of squared differences between the theoretical results and experimental data. The concluding remarks are as follows: (1) The drying time and energy consumption decrease considerably with an increase in the microwave power. (2) The drying rate shows first an increase and then a decrease during drying. (3) The colour quality of the product decreases significantly with the increase of the microwave power. (4) The values proposed for the constants of the electric field strength provide a good agreement between the theoretical and experimental drying behaviour.

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Received for publication January 26, 2012 Accepted after corrections August 3, 2012

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