

# Parameterization of the Back-Surface Reflection for PERC Solar Cells Including Variation of Back-Contact Coverage

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**Abstract**—Simulation is essential for a comprehensive analysis of the performance of solar cells. The rear contact pitch of passivated emitter and rear cells (PERC cells) is a crucial device parameter that influences not only the electrical performance but also the optical performance of these cells. This article investigates the applicability of the analytical light trapping model by Basore to account for the optical influence of the rear contact pitch as a simpler alternative to ray tracing. First, we manufacture three different groups of cells with different rear contact pitches, where the metallization fraction  $f_{\text{met}}$  varies between 0 and 54%. Second, the reflectance of the cells is measured. Subsequently, we fit the model parameters  $R_f$  and  $R_b$  (internal reflection on the front and back surface, respectively) to the measured reflectance. While we confirm a nonlinear relation between  $f_{\text{met}}$  and the measurable spectra found in previous works, our results reveal linear relations between  $f_{\text{met}}$  and  $R_b$  with the adjusted coefficients of determination of  $R_{\text{adj}}^2 > 0.97$ , as well as between  $f_{\text{met}}$  and the charge carrier generation rates with  $R_{\text{adj}}^2 > 0.94$ . These relations allow a simple and rapid optical simulation of  $f_{\text{met}}$  variation for PERC cells. The same approach is likely applicable to any local contacts also in other cell concepts.

**Index Terms**—Light trapping, modeling, optics, photovoltaic cells, reflectance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

OPTICAL simulations are an essential part of solar cell research and development. A well-established approach to simulate solar cell optics is detailed 3-D ray tracing, which comes with considerable effort in gathering the simulation inputs, setting the model up, and with significant computation time [1]–[3]. On modern computers and using cloud computing services, the computation times have been reduced a lot over the past 30 years, but still, the computation times are in the range of minutes. Additionally, the user has to select adequate models,

e.g., for scattering effects, has to specify the detailed geometries explicitly, and has to specify or select appropriate spectral refractive indices. An alternative approach to 3-D ray tracing consists of using the analytical light-trapping model, as suggested by Basore [4]. It is a widely used optical model in photovoltaics to calculate reflectance, transmittance, and absorptance, as it is implemented in the 1-D device simulator PC1D [5], [6], as well as in the 3-D simulator Quokka3 [7]. This approach is much less computationally expensive and offers computation times significantly below a second, but more model parameters are lumped, i.e., are less physically detailed. If the level of detail is sufficient for the specific simulation task, the simplicity and speed can be a decisive advantage, e.g., when iteratively fitting experimental data.

It has been found that the reflectance, in particular the escape reflectance, depends nonlinearly on the rear metallization fraction in the case of local metallized regions with a lower internal reflection, i.e., on the rear contact pitch [8]. This hindered the application of the Basore and other empirical models such as the Phong model [9] for prediction of the optical generation rate of the passivated emitter and rear cells (PERC cells [10]) with a rear contact pitch variation. In [8], the following linear relation between the spectra of the metallized and contacted ( $R_m$ ) and passivated and uncontacted region ( $R_p$ ) of the back surface was discussed.

$$R(\lambda) = f_{\text{met}} \cdot R_m(\lambda) + (1 - f_{\text{met}}) \cdot R_p(\lambda). \quad (1)$$

Here,  $f_{\text{met}}$  denotes the metallization fraction of the silicon back surface. It was shown that (1) is not valid [8] and it is, therefore, rejected.

Our goal in this article is to extend and simplify the usage of the Basore model to predict the optical properties of cells with pitch variations.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. In Section II, we describe the manufacturing of the samples and the approach for the optical characterization and simulation. In Section III, we present and discuss the results, finally, Section IV concludes this article.

## II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

We manufacture and investigate three groups of samples (group A1, A2, and B, see Fig. 1) in which the rear metallization fraction  $f_{\text{met}}$  is varied between 0 and 54%. All groups have

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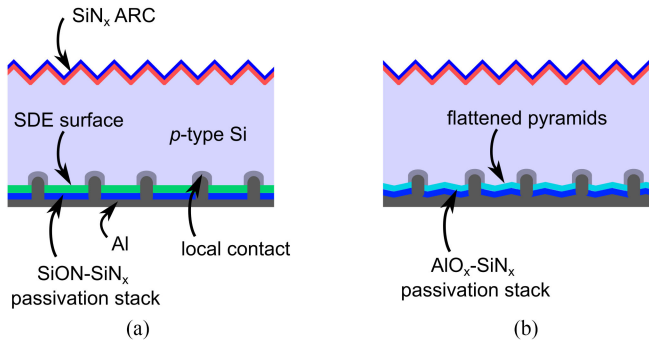


Fig. 1. Schematic cross section of the samples of (a) group A with Centaurus approach and SDE rear surface, and (b) group B with AlO<sub>x</sub> approach with flattened pyramids at the rear surface.

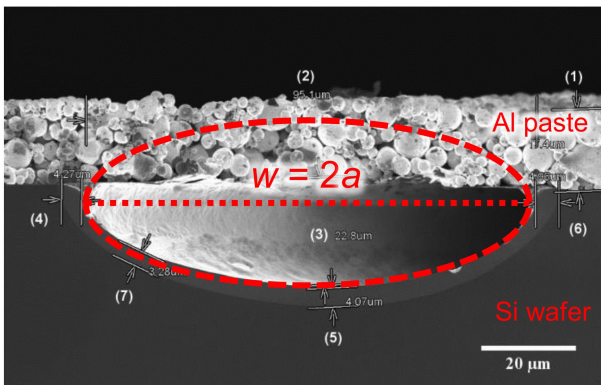


Fig. 2. Example of an SEM measurement of a cross section of a PERC rear contact, with semielliptical cross section and semimajor axis  $a$  corresponding to a contact width  $w = 2a$ . Adapted from [12].

full-area dielectric passivation with line-shaped laser contact openings (LCO). The rear metal is full-area screen-printed aluminum, which forms a local aluminum back-surface field during contact formation in a high-temperature step. The three groups differ in the wafer thickness, the rear side roughness, and the dielectric rear side coatings.

Groups A1 and A2 are two boron-doped Czochralski (Cz) Si wafers ( $2.2 \Omega\cdot\text{cm}$  resistivity,  $158 \mu\text{m}$  thickness after cell process,  $156 \text{ mm}$  edge length) processed identically according to the Centaurus approach [11] with a textured phosphorous-diffused front side covered with an SiN<sub>x</sub> antireflection coating and a saw-damage-edged (SDE) rear side covered with a stack of SiON/SiN<sub>x</sub>. Rear side contacting is done by line-patterned laser ablation (LCO) with a pitch variation on every single wafer, the usage of a commercial Al paste for only rear side Al paste screen-printing and standard peak firing in a furnace. The LCO pitch is chosen to 100, 200, 400, 800, 1600  $\mu\text{m}$ , and no ablation. An average contact width is estimated by evaluating scanning electron microscopy (SEM) cross-sectional images. The line contact has a semielliptical cross section, as exemplarily shown in Fig. 2. The semimajor axis  $a$  of the ellipse is used to define the contact width  $w = 2a$  relevant for optical considerations. With this procedure, a contact width for groups A1 and A2 of  $54 \mu\text{m}$  is determined on parallel processed samples with  $1000 \mu\text{m}$  pitch.

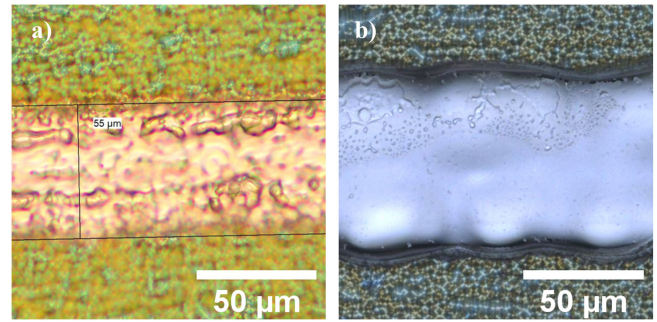


Fig. 3. (a) Exemplary line-shaped LCO of group B. (b) Resulting final contact geometry after aluminum etch back as seen by optical microscopy in top view.

The spectral hemispherical reflectance is measured in 5 nm steps between 300 and 1200 nm using a LOANA system by PVtools GmbH on an area of  $20 \times 20 \text{ mm}$  for each metallization fraction (0%, 3.3%, 6.7%, 13.5%, 27%, 54%). A1 and A2 are basically duplicates of each other, with slight unintended differences in front reflectance. A1 and A2 are intended to show the stability of the sample preparation, measurements, and data analysis.

Group B is also based on boron-doped Cz-Si wafers ( $1.8 \Omega\cdot\text{cm}$  resistivity,  $180 \mu\text{m}$  final thickness, and  $156 \text{ mm}$  edge length) and then processed according to the AlO<sub>x</sub> route, i.e., with KOH textured front side, POCl<sub>3</sub> diffused emitter and passivated with an SiN<sub>x</sub> antireflection coating, the textured rear side featuring the same textured morphology as the front, slightly planarized by the chemical emitter etch back and then coated with a stack of AlO<sub>x</sub> and SiN<sub>x</sub>. The LCO geometry is line-shaped with an ablation width of approximately  $55 \mu\text{m} \pm 4 \mu\text{m}$  depending on the optical definition of the opening, see Fig. 3(a). In order to maximize the statistical robustness, each wafer contains  $25 \times 30 \times 30 \text{ mm}^2$  wide LCO fields in a 5 by 5 array with the different line pitches distributed in a Latin hypercube design [13], preventing a direct correlation of local wafer properties. The line pitches are 247, 386, 540, 690, 1080, 1500, and 2500  $\mu\text{m}$ . There are also fields without LCO. The rear side is then fully coated with a commercial aluminum screen printing paste designed for line-shaped LCO at a thickness of roughly  $20 \mu\text{m}$ . No front-side metallization is applied to the wafers. The firing furnace is set in such a way that the peak wafer temperature reaches  $800 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , which is confirmed via thermocouple measurements. Then, the reflectance spectra are measured between 300 and 1200 nm in 10 nm steps, again with a LOANA system from PVtools GmbH, for each metallization fraction (0%, 3.9%, 6.5%, 7.8%, 9.8%, 13%, 20%, 33%). The wafers are then exposed to an HCl etching solution to etch away the aluminum screen printing. An additional ultrasonic cleaning step removes visible residuals, allowing an unobstructed view of the contact size for optical microscopy, as seen in Fig. 3(b), from which  $f_{\text{met}}$  is determined for group B.

In order to separate escape reflectance  $R_{\text{esc}}$  and front external reflectance  $R_{\text{f,ext}}$ , whose sum is the measured reflectance  $R$ , we extrapolate  $R_{\text{f,ext}}$  for  $\lambda > 950 \text{ nm}$  by fitting a second-degree polynomial to  $R$  in the wavelength region  $800 \text{ nm} < \lambda < 950 \text{ nm}$  for all reflectance data, as

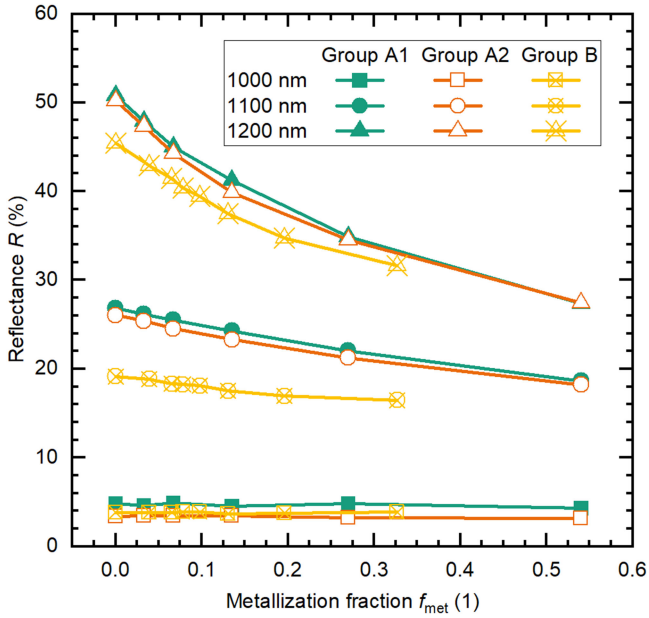


Fig. 4. Measured reflectance  $R$  with varying metallization fraction  $f_{\text{met}}$  of three cell groups, shown here for selected wavelengths (1000, 1100, 1200 nm).

suggested in [15]. We find using a second-degree polynomial instead of a linear extrapolation to more accurately describe simulated  $R_{f,\text{ext}}$  spectra.

The optical simulations are performed using the Basore model. As implemented in PC1Dmod, it requires, amongst others, the following six input parameters: internal reflectance on the front surface for first bounce  $R_{f1}$  and successive bounces  $R_{fn}$ , internal reflectance on the back surface for first bounce  $R_{b1}$  and successive bounces  $R_{bn}$ , and type of reflection on the front and back (specular or diffuse). In this article, we use the simplified Basore model explained in [14], where only one reflectance per side is used, i.e.,  $R_{f1} = R_{fn} = R_f$ , for the internal reflection at the front side and  $R_{b1} = R_{bn} = R_b$  for the internal reflection at the back side. Free-carrier absorption (FCA) [16], [17] is not explicitly taken into account and is thereby lumped into the internal reflection parameters. The reader is referred to the literature for the analysis of FCA for solar cells, e.g., [8]. The model parameters are adjusted until the difference between the simulated and measured escape reflectances is minimized in the least square fit using an in-house implementation of the Basore model. Further optical simulations of the reflectance and generation rate are done with PC1Dmod.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 4 shows the relation between measured reflectance and metallization fraction for selected wavelengths, especially in the long-wavelength region ( $\lambda > 1100$  nm), which confirms the nonlinearity of the reflectance and the invalidity of (1), as also found in [8].

Using the escape reflectance determined from the measured reflectance spectra as an input parameter in our simulation program, we determine the fit parameters  $R_f$  and  $R_b$ . Fig. 5

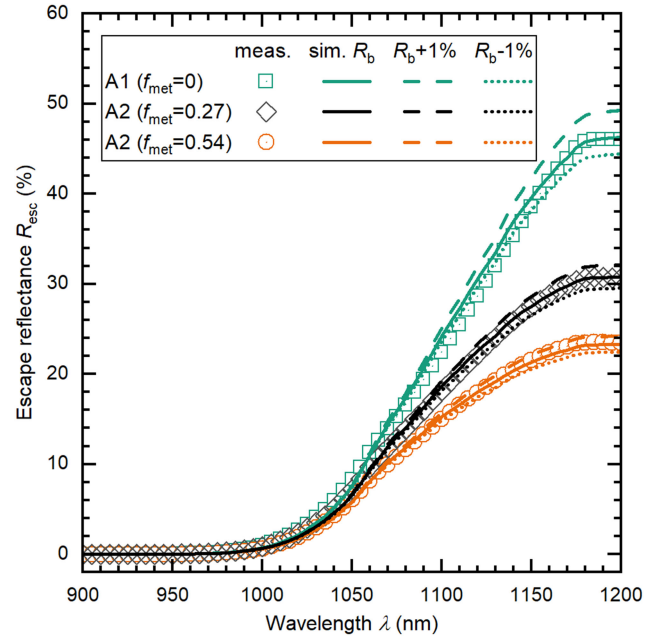


Fig. 5. Simulated and measured escape reflectance  $R_{\text{esc}}$  for three samples (dashed line:  $R_{\text{esc}}^{\text{sim}}$  for  $R_b + 1\%$ ; dotted line:  $R_{\text{esc}}^{\text{sim}}$  for  $R_b - 1\%$ ).

TABLE I  
FIT AND SIMULATION RESULTS OF THE SIMPLIFIED BASORE MODEL

Group	$f_{\text{met}}$ (1)	$R_f$ (%)	$R_b$ (%)	$j_{\text{ph}}$ ( $\text{mA}/\text{cm}^2$ )
A1	0	88	89	41.31
A1	0.033	88	87	41.18
A1	0.067	88	86	41.13
A1	0.135	88	84	41.02
A1	0.27	88	80	40.81
A1	0.54	88	72	40.45
A2	0	88	89	41.52
A2	0.033	88	88	41.47
A2	0.067	88	86	41.34
A2	0.135	88	83	41.18
A2	0.27	88	80	41.02
A2	0.54	88	73	40.70
B	0	93	92	41.90
B	0.0392	93	91	41.84
B	0.06533	93	90	41.76
B	0.0784	93	90	41.76
B	0.098	93	89	41.70
B	0.13067	93	88	41.62
B	0.196	93	87	41.55
B	0.32667	93	85	41.42

exemplarily shows three measured escape spectra and the corresponding fit. An excellent agreement is found. A constant value of  $R_f$  for all the cells within a group is obtained, i.e., 88% for groups A1 and A2, and 93% for group B (see Table I). This confirms the consistency of the measurement data and the applicability of the simplified Basore model.

It must be noted that in PC1Dmod, the parameters  $R_f$  and  $R_b$  can be varied in steps of 1%. In order to check the accuracy and to see the effect of this difference on the escape reflectance as

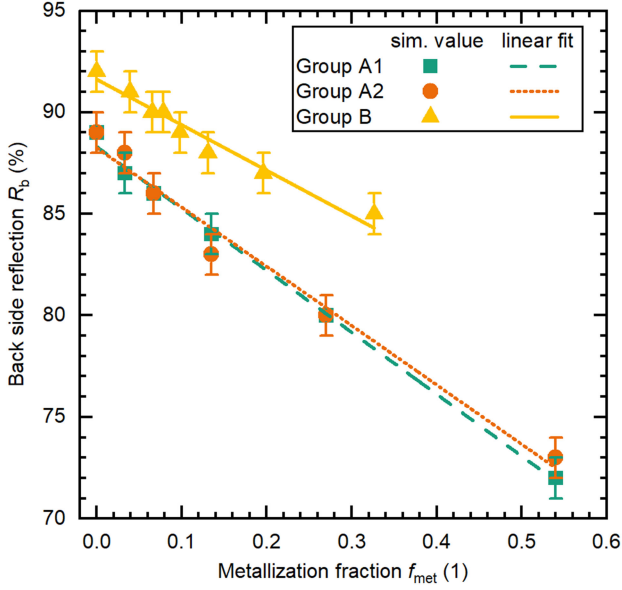


Fig. 6. Back-side reflectance  $R_b$  with varying metallization fraction  $f_{met}$  of three cell groups.

well as on the charge carrier generation rate, here expressed as photogenerated current density  $j_{ph}$ , we perform a small variation of  $R_b$  in our simulations. The results, depicted in Fig. 5, show the simulated escape reflectance  $R_{esc}$  for the three scenarios of  $R_b$  (best fit  $R_b$ ,  $R_b + 1\%$ , and  $R_b - 1\%$ ) for each of the three samples. As can be seen, the variation of  $R_b$  by  $1\%_{abs}$  induces a noticeable change in the reflectance, in particular for smaller metallization fractions  $f_{met} < 20\%$ , which is the relevant range for typical PERC cells. This means that a  $1\%$  error of the fit parameters can be considered as an upper bound for the  $R_b$  uncertainty. For the same model parameters, we calculate  $j_{ph}$ . When  $R_b$  is varied by  $\pm 1\%_{abs}$ ,  $j_{ph}$  is changed by up to  $\pm 0.08 \text{ mA/cm}^2$ , i.e.,  $\pm 0.19\%_{rel}$ . These values are upper bounds of the uncertainty of the  $j_{ph}$  simulation. We consider the values negligible for a  $f_{met}$  optimization, and thus, judge the simulations to be sufficiently accurate for  $f_{met} < 20\%$ .

Although the external reflectance does not depend linearly on the metallization fraction, the simulations using the Basore model yield a linear relation

$$R_b = (1 - f_{met}) \cdot R_{pass} + f_{met} \cdot R_{met} \quad (2)$$

between the internal reflectance  $R_b$  and the metallization fraction  $f_{met}$ , as can be seen in Fig. 6. The fit parameters  $R_{pass}$  and  $R_{met}$  correspond to the internal reflection parameters in the passivated and metallized regions, respectively. The adjusted coefficient of determination  $R_{adj}^2$  varies between 0.977 and 1.000 (see Table II), evidencing a highly linear relation. For groups A1 and A2, the fit parameters are the same, within the standard errors. This is expected since A1 and A2 are processed identically, further increasing the confidence in the results.

The  $R_b$  at  $f_{met} = 0$ , i.e., the internal reflection coefficients for the passivated areas  $R_{pass}$ , differ between A1 and A2 ( $\sim 88.3\%$ ) and group B ( $91.62\%$ ). We attribute this to differences of the two rear-side properties (surface morphology, passivation layers, Al

TABLE II  
RESULTS OF THE LINEAR FITS OF (2)

Group	$R_{pass}$ (%)	Std. err. ( $R_{pass}$ ) (%)	$R_{met}$ (%)	Std. err. ( $R_{met}$ ) (%)	$R_{adj}^2$
A1- $R_b$	88.30	0.24	57.85	0.78	0.995
A2- $R_b$	88.25	0.51	59.1	1.7	0.977
B- $R_b$	91.62	0.28	69.2	1.6	1.000

The standard errors are calculated from the square root of the diagonal elements of the covariance matrix multiplied with the mean residual variance.

TABLE III  
RESULTS OF THE LINEAR FITS OF (3)

Group	$j_{pass}$ ( $\text{mA/m}^2$ )	Std. err. ( $j_{pass}$ ) ( $\text{mA/cm}^2$ )	$j_{met}$ ( $\text{mA/cm}^2$ )	Std. err. ( $j_{met}$ ) ( $\text{mA/cm}^2$ )	$R_{adj}^2$
A1- $j_{ph}$	41.252	0.021	39.721	0.070	0.986
A2- $j_{ph}$	41.466	0.036	39.98	0.12	0.957
B- $j_{ph}$	41.867	0.021	40.38	0.12	0.941

paste properties) and different amounts of FCA that are lumped with the internal reflectance parameters.

Also, the extrapolated  $R_b$  at  $f_{met} = 1$ , i.e., the reflection coefficients for the metallized areas  $R_{met}$ , differ between A1 and A2 ( $\sim 58\%$ ) and group B ( $\sim 69\%$ ). We speculate that this difference might be induced primarily by different rear surface roughness and different optical properties of the Al back-surface field and the eutectic layer and different amounts of void formation [18] of the two datasets and, hence, might have a physical origin in the silicon rear surface preparation, the Al pastes, and/or firing conditions, which were different for groups A and B. Comparable differences of the resulting reflection spectra are also apparent from the literature, e.g., comparing Fig. 4 in [19] and Fig. 3 in [20]. We judge possible differences of the methods for measuring the metallization fraction to have only a small impact on  $R_{met}$ : For explaining the full difference, an error of the  $f_{met}$  determination of  $30\%_{rel}$  to  $40\%_{rel}$  for groups A1 and A2 would have occurred. However, we expect a maximum error of  $10\%_{rel}$  and hence can attribute only up to a third or a fourth part of the  $R_{met}$  difference to an error in determining  $f_{met}$ .

Similar to (2), a linear relationship

$$j_{ph} = (1 - f_{met}) \cdot j_{pass} + f_{met} \cdot j_{met} \quad (3)$$

between the photogenerated current density  $j_{ph}$  and metallization fraction  $f_{met}$  can be established with adjusted coefficients of determination  $R_{adj}^2$  between 0.941 and 0.989, as shown in Fig. 7 and detailed in Table III. The fit parameters  $j_{pass}$  and  $j_{met}$  correspond to the photogeneration in the passivated and metallized regions, respectively. However, the  $R_{adj}^2$  is somewhat lower compared with  $R_b$ , indicating that the area-averaging of  $R_b$  provides a physically more accurate representation of the cell optics. Keep in mind that we round the values of  $R_b$  with a precision of  $1\%_{abs}$ .

As an addition to  $j_{ph}$  determined with the values according to Table I (best fit of escape reflectance) and the linear fit of  $j_{ph}(f_{met})$  according to (3), we added the  $j_{ph}$  as simulated with the values of  $R_b$  according to (2) and Table II. These data show a slight nonlinearity, which is visible in Fig. 7. Such a nonlinearity

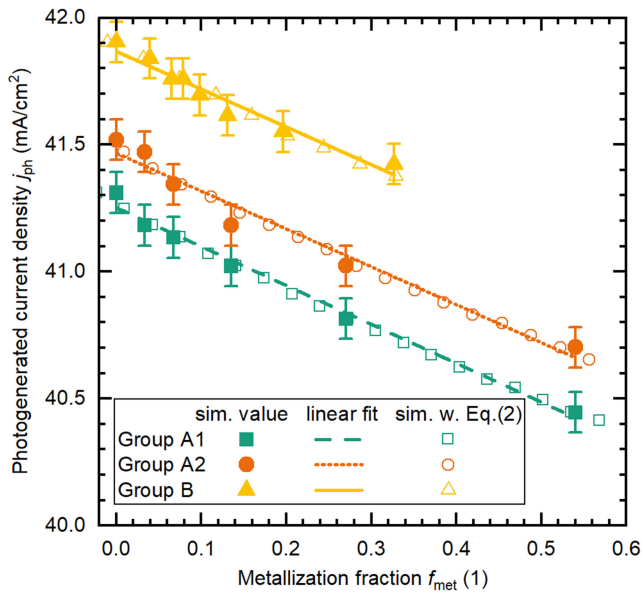


Fig. 7. Photogenerated current density  $j_{ph}$  with varying metallization fraction  $f_{met}$  of three cell groups.

is expected due to the fact that a part of the light is internally reflected not only once, but several times before being absorbed, in particular in the case of a highly reflective back surface. On an absolute level, the deviations of the values from the linear fit are below 0.1 mA/cm<sup>2</sup>, which we judge acceptable for many applications.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Our investigations using the analytical light trapping model by Basore revealed a linear relationship between the rear metallization fraction  $f_{met}$  and the internal reflectance on the back side  $R_b$ , as well as with the photogenerated current density  $j_{ph}$  of PERC cells with adjusted coefficients of determination  $R_{adj}^2$  above 0.97 and 0.94, respectively. The reflectance spectra of only two samples with significantly different rear contact fractions are required to determine  $R_{met}$  and  $R_{pass}$  by fitting the Basore model and, hence, to determine the linear relation for the specific device properties. Alternatively, the data given in the present work can be applied to partly or fully replace the experiments for the determination of  $R_{met}$  and  $R_{pass}$ . The linearity, thus, enables the application of the Basore model to describe the influence of varying rear contact fraction, providing a simpler and rapid optical modeling alternative to ray tracing for this task.

Because of the optical equivalency of the local rear contacts of PERC cells investigated in this work with other local contacts, we expect the area-averaging of the reflection coefficients to be valid also, e.g., at the front side of PERC, TOPCon or silicon heterojunction solar cells, and at the rear side of back-contact back-junction solar cells.

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