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Structures and photoelectron spectroscopy of Cu\(_n\)(BO\(_2\))\(_m\) - \((n, m = 1, 2)\) clusters: Observation of hyperhalogen behavior

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I. INTRODUCTION

Negative ions play an important role in chemistry, as they are the ingredients of all salts. While most of the atoms in the periodic table gain energy in attaching an electron, the halogen atoms, due to the ns^2 np^5 atomic configuration, possess the highest electron affinities (EA) (e.g., Fluorine: 3.40 eV and Chlorine: 3.62 eV (Refs. 1 and 2). Nearly half a century ago it was found that the EA of some polyatomic systems may exceed the 3.62 eV limit.³ Gutsiev and Boldyrev⁴ later termed these systems “superhalogens” and proposed a simple formula of MX_{n+1}^{n+} to describe them. Here M is a central metal atom and X is an electronegative atom (such as oxygen and halogens). The number of X atoms needed to yield the superhalogen behavior depends upon n, the maximum formal valence of the metal atom, as well as m, the valence of X. Boldyrev and co-workers further established this idea of superhalogens through a series of theoretical studies⁵–⁹ containing sp-metal atoms at the center. One of the current authors has reported the superhalogen behavior of BF₄ and AlF₄ clusters.⁰ On the experimental front, the smallest gas-phase superhalogens, MX₂ (M = Li and Na; X = Cl, Br, and I) were produced in 1999 by Wang et al. and analyzed using photoelectron spectroscopy and theoretical calculations.¹¹ In the same year, a transition metal based superhalogen, namely MnO₂ was reported in a combined experimental and theoretical study.¹² The past decade has witnessed a significant up-surge in the study of superhalogens and numerous anions such as CrO₄^{−} (Ref. 13), MX₃^{−} (M = Mn, Fe, Co, and Ni; X = Cl and Br),¹⁴ Ta₁F₁₆^{−} (Ref. 15), Na₃Cl₇^{−} (Ref. 16), MX₃^{−} (M = Be, Mg, and Ca; X = Halogen),¹⁷ Mg₂F₅^{−} (Ref. 18), MCl₄^{−} (M = Sc, Y, and La),¹⁹ Mg₃Cl₉^{−} (Ref. 20), and MF₆ (M = Cu, Ag, and Au; n = 1–6) (Ref. 21) have been reported.

Recently, BO₂ molecule was also shown to be a superhalogen with an EA of 4.46 eV. Furthermore, its corresponding anion is very stable as it is isoelectronic with CO₂.²² In a recent joint experimental and computational study,²³ it was reported that gold clusters (Auₙ, n = 1–5), when interacted with BO₂ molecule, not only retain their structural identity, but also some of the resulting Auₙ(BO₂)₂ clusters were found to exhibit superhalogen behavior. In addition, [Auₙ(BO₂)₂]⁻ clusters also showed unusual stability which was reflected as high intense peaks in the mass spectra. Similar work²⁴ involving Feₙ(BO₂)⁻ clusters, however, revealed very different results. Although the BO₂ moiety retained its structural integrity, in contrast to their gold-counterparts these clusters were not superhalogens. The maximum EA of these clusters was found to be only 2.14 eV for Fe₂(BO₂).

Very recently, a new class of electronegative species called hyperhalogens was proposed by two of the current authors.²⁵ Based upon density functional calculations it was proposed that a new class of electronegative species can be synthesized by surrounding a central metal atom with superhalogen moieties instead of halogen atoms, e.g., Au atom decorated with BO₂ moieties. The electron affinities of these hyperhalogens were shown to be larger than that of their superhalogen building blocks. This hypothesis was

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The electronic structures of CuBO₂⁻, Cu(BO₂)₂⁻, Cu₂(BO₂)⁻, and Cu₂(BO₂)₂⁻ clusters were investigated using photoelectron spectroscopy. The measured vertical and adiabatic detachment energies of these clusters revealed unusual properties of Cu(BO₂)₂ cluster. With an electron affinity of 5.07 eV which is larger than that of its BO₂ superhalogen (4.46 eV) building-block, Cu(BO₂)₂ can be classified as a hyperhalogen. Density functional theory based calculations were carried out to identify the ground state geometries and study the electronic structures of these clusters. Cu(BO₂) and Cu(BO₂)₂ clusters were found to form chainlike structures in both neutral and anionic forms. Cu₂(BO₂) and Cu₂(BO₂)₂ clusters, on the other hand, preferred a chainlike structure in the anionic form but a closed ringlike structure in the neutral form. Equally important, substantial differences between adiabatic detachment energies and electron affinities were found, demonstrating that correct interpretation of the experimental photoelectron spectroscopy data requires theoretical support not only in determining the ground state geometry of neutral and anionic clusters, but also in identifying their low lying isomers. © 2011 American Institute of Physics. [doi:10.1063/1.3556818]
verified by carrying out simultaneous experiments using photoelectron spectroscopy. For example, it was shown\textsuperscript{25} that Au(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{3} cluster has an EA of 5.7 eV, which is larger than that of BO\textsubscript{2}. The fact that hyperhalogens are ternary species provides a greater degree of freedom to design and synthesize new electronegative species than superhalogens, which are composed mostly of binary elements.

A recent systematic study of coinage metal atoms (Cu, Ag, and Au) interacting with F atoms has shown that Cu and Ag atoms can also be used to form superhalogens.\textsuperscript{21} We, therefore, wondered if Cu atoms can also form the seed for hyperhalogens. In this article, we report a combined experimental and theoretical study of Cu\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n}\textsuperscript{−} (n, m = 1, 2) clusters. Based on anion photoelectron spectroscopy and density functional theory (DFT) calculations, we show that Cu(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2} cluster, similar to that of its gold-counterpart, is indeed a hyperhalogen with an adiabatic detachment energy (ADE) of 5.07 eV. However, the Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2} cluster, unlike Au\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2} cluster, is not a superhalogen. In addition, the ADE and vertical electron detachment energy (VDE) values of Cu\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n} clusters are consistently lower than that of their corresponding Au\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n} counterparts.

II. METHODOLOGIES

A. Experimental method

Experiments were conducted on a home-built apparatus consisting of a time-of-flight mass spectrometer and a magnetic-bottle photoelectron spectrometer, which have been described elsewhere.\textsuperscript{26} Briefly, the CuBO\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, and Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{3}\textsuperscript{−} cluster anions were produced in a laser vaporization source by ablating a rotating, translating Cu/B alloy target (13 mm diameter, Cu/B mole ratio 50:1) with the second harmonic (532 nm) light pulses of a Nd:YAG laser, while helium gas with 4 atm backing pressure was allowed to expand through a pulsed valve over the alloy target. The typical laser power used in this work was \(\sim 10\) mJ/pulse. The residual oxygen on the target surface was sufficient to produce abundant CuBO\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, and Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{3}\textsuperscript{−} clusters, so no additional oxygen was introduced into the source. The cluster anions were mass-analyzed by the time-of-flight mass spectrometer. The CuBO\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{2}\textsuperscript{−}, and Cu\textsubscript{2}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{3}\textsuperscript{−} clusters were each mass-selected and decelerated before being photodetached. The photodetachment of these anions was performed with 266(4.661 eV) and 193 nm (6.424 eV) photons (0.1–0.2 mJ/pulse). The resulting electrons were energy-analyzed by the magnetic-bottle photoelectron spectrometer. The PES spectra were calibrated using the known spectrum of Cu\textsuperscript{+}. The instrumental resolution was \(\sim 40\) meV for electrons with 1 eV kinetic energy.

B. Computational method

DFT based calculations were carried out on neutral and negatively charged Cu\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n} clusters using GAUSSIAN 03 (Ref. 27) program. We employed Becke’s three parameter hybrid exchange functional\textsuperscript{28} with Lee, Yang, and Parr correlation functional\textsuperscript{29} (B3LYP) form. An all electron 6–311++G(3df) basis sets for B and O atoms, and Lanl2dz basis set for Cu atoms were used during the optimization calculations. The ground state geometries of the anionic and neutral species were determined by optimizing various structural configurations and spin-multiplicities without any symmetry constraints. In the geometry optimization procedure, the convergence criterion was set to \(10^{-6}\) hartree for energy and \(10^{-4}\) hartree/Å for the gradient. The stability of these clusters was confirmed by analyzing their normal mode frequencies. The reliability and accuracy of the functional form and the all electron basis set used in this study has been established by our previous works on Au\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n} clusters.\textsuperscript{23, 25}

The VDE was calculated as the energy difference between the neutral and anion clusters, both calculated at the ground state geometry of the anion. The EA is defined as the energy difference between the ground state of the anion and the ground state of the neutral clusters. In cases where the geometry of the ground states of the anion and neutral are very different, it may be difficult for the anion to return to the neutral ground state geometry following electron detachment. In this scenario, one has to calculate the ADE. The ADE is obtained by optimizing the geometry of the neutral with the ground state geometry of the anion as a starting point. While it is not possible to identify the geometries of the clusters from the photoelectron spectroscopy studies alone, a comparison of the calculated VDE, ADE, and EA with the experimental photoelectron spectra provides a wealth of information on cluster structure and dynamics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Experimental results

A typical mass spectrum obtained in our experiments is shown in Fig. 1. The dominant mass peaks correspond to those of [Cu\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n}]\textsuperscript{−} cluster anions. Due to the isotopic distributions of copper and boron, these peaks are relatively complex. The assignments of the mass peaks were confirmed by analyzing the isotope abundances of copper–boron dioxide cluster anions. In addition to the Cu\textsubscript{m}(BO\textsubscript{2})\textsubscript{n}\textsuperscript{−} series, we also
observed Cu$_n$BO$_2$(OH)$^-$ cluster anions, which are probably due to the residual water in the source.

Interestingly, in the Cu$_n$(BO$_2$)$_m^-$ series, the [CuBO$_2$]$^-$ ion intensity is significantly strong. The intensities of larger clusters drop to a low level and the large cluster anions with mass number higher than 250 amu were not observed in our experiment. These observations may be understood in terms of valence electronic structures. BO$_2$ is one electron short of electronic shell-closing, so the neutral CuBO$_2$ cluster is a closed-shell species. Thus, other atoms do not add easily to CuBO$_2$. Consequently, the intensities of the larger cluster anions are too low to be detected.

The measured PES spectra of CuBO$_2^-$, Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$^-$, Cu(BO$_2$)$_2^-$, and Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2^-$ are shown in Fig. 2. Each of

![Photoelectron spectra of CuBO$_2^-$, Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2^-$, Cu(BO$_2$)$_2^-$, and Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2^-$ clusters recorded with 266 and 193 nm photons.](image)

FIG. 2. Photoelectron spectra of [CuBO$_2$]$^-$, [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)]$^-$, [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$, and [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ clusters recorded with 266 and 193 nm photons.
these PES spectra represents the transitions from the ground state of the anion to the ground or excited states of their corresponding neutral. The VDEs and the ADEs of the cluster anions are estimated from their photoelectron spectra. These values along with their corresponding calculated values are listed in Table I. To account for the broadening of the PES spectrum due to instrumental resolution, the ADE was calculated by adding the half value of instrumental resolution to the onset of the first peak in the spectrum. The onset of the first peak was found by drawing a straight line along the leading edge of that peak towards the baseline of the spectrum. It is normally assumed that the ADE of the cluster anion is equal to the EA of the corresponding neutral. However, we will show later that for some of these clusters ADE and EA are indeed very different.

The PES spectrum of [CuBO2]⁻ taken with 193 nm photons [Fig. 2(a), 193 nm] displays a strong peak centered at 2.12 eV, followed by two more features centered at about 4.21 and 4.79 eV. The ADE and VDE of CuBO2⁻ are estimated to be 1.90 and 2.12 eV, respectively. Considering the generalizations of Koopmans’ theorem, the first and second peak in the spectrum corresponds to the HOMO and LUMO of neutral CuBO2, respectively. Thus, the HOMO–LUMO gap is the energy gap between the first two peaks in the photoelectron spectrum. We estimate the HOMO–LUMO gap of neutral CuBO2 to be ~2.1 eV.

A strong peak centered at 3.70 eV is evident in the PES spectrum of [Cu2BO2]⁻ [Fig. 2(b), 266 nm]. Two more broad features centered at ~4.3 and 5.2 eV are observed with 193 nm photons. The ADE and VDE of [Cu2BO2]⁻ were estimated to be 3.53 and 3.70 eV, respectively.

The [Cu2BO2]⁺⁻ cluster cannot be photodetached with a 266 nm photon because it has a high ADE. In the PES spectrum of [Cu2BO2]⁺⁻ [Fig. 2(c), 193 nm], the first peak is observed at 5.28 eV. No other feature is observed because the excited states of neutral Cu2BO2 is beyond 193 nm photon energy. Based on the spectrum, we estimate the ADE and VDE of [Cu2BO2]⁺⁻ to be 5.07 and 5.28 eV.

For the [Cu2(BO2)2]⁻ cluster, a dominating sharp peak has been detected at 2.92 eV [Fig. 2(d)]. The VDE and ADE of [Cu2(BO2)2]⁻ were determined to be 2.74 and 2.92 eV, respectively. The onset of its second feature is observed at around 5.2 eV. This indicates that the HOMO–LUMO gap of neutral Cu2(BO2)2 is larger than 2.3 eV.

The large energy difference between the highest occupied (HOMO) and the lowest unoccupied (LUMO) molecular orbital is a good measure of the chemical inertness of a species. In our experiment, the measured HOMO–LUMO gaps of CuBO2 and Cu2(BO2)2 are 2.1 and 2.3 eV, respectively (shown in Fig. 2). The large HOMO–LUMO gaps suggest that CuBO2 and Cu2(BO2)2 are nonmetallic and should be chemically stable.

### B. Theoretical results and discussion

To analyze the experimental data and to understand how the structure and electronic properties are related we describe in the following the equilibrium geometries of neutral and anionic clusters and their computed electron affinity, adiabatic detachment energies in cases they are different from the electron affinities, and vertical detachment energies. The equilibrium geometries of neutral and anionic Cuₙ(BO₂)ₘ (ₙ, ₘ = 1, 2) clusters are shown in Figs. 3–5, while the frontier MOs of the most stable isomers of the negative species are given in Fig. 6.

#### 1. Cu(BO₂) and Cu₂(BO₂) clusters

We begin with the ground state geometries of anionic and neutral CuBO2 in Figs. 3(a) and 3(b), respectively. For these clusters no higher energy isomers were found. We see that the ground state structures of neutral and anionic CuBO2 clusters are the same except for small differences in the bond lengths. In both the structures, the BO2 moiety maintains its structural integrity, namely it remains linear. These results are similar to those reported earlier²³, ²⁴ for neutral and charged Auₙ(BO₂) and Feₙ(BO₂) clusters. While the neutral Cu(BO₂) cluster is a singlet, the negatively charged Cu(BO₂) prefers doublet spin state. In order to understand the nature of bonding, we have carried out natural bond orbital (NBO) charge analysis of these clusters. The calculated NBO charges show that in the neutral Cu(BO₂) cluster, the Cu atom has a charge of +0.87e, indicating a significant charge transfer from Cu to the BO₂ superhalogen unit. Thus, the bonding in Cu(BO₂) cluster is ionic in nature. In case of the [Cu(BO₂)]⁻ cluster, the majority of the extra electron’s charge (89%) was found to be localized over the positively charged Cu atom, leaving it nearly neutral. The HOMO of the [CuBO2]⁻ cluster anion, shown in Fig. 6 indicates that the extra electron mainly localizes on the Cu atom. This is consistent with the NBO analysis. On a comparative note, the charge transfer (−0.87e) from Cu to BO₂ in the neutral CuBO2 cluster is larger than the charge transfer (−0.68e) from Au atom to BO2 in our previously reported²³ Au(BO₂) study. This can be understood from the fact that Au is more electronegative than Cu. In fact, the bonding in CuBO2 can be considered as primarily ionic in nature, while in the case of Au(BO₂) cluster the bonding is partially covalent. The calculated VDE of [Cu(BO₂)]⁻ and the EA of Cu(BO₂) cluster is found to be 2.17 and 2.04 eV, respectively (see Table I). Our calculated values are in good agreement with the measured VDE of 2.12 eV and ADE of 1.90 eV. The identical geometries of neutral and anionic clusters indicate that the measured ADE is indeed the EA of the neutral CuBO2 cluster.

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**Table I.** Experimental and theoretical ADE and VDE values of [Cuₙ(BO₂)ₘ]⁻ clusters. The experimental uncertainty is ±0.08 eV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>ADE (eV)</th>
<th>VDE (eV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[CuBO2]⁻</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Cu₂(BO₂)₃]⁻</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Cu₂(BO₂)₂]⁻</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Cu₂(BO₂)₂]⁺⁻</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most stable isomer of $[\text{Cu}_2(\text{BO}_2)]^-$ cluster is in singlet state and has a $C_3_v$ symmetric bent structure [Fig. 3(c)] with the second Cu atom bind to the first Cu atom. This bent structure is similar to the ground state structure of the previously reported $[\text{Au}_2(\text{BO}_2)]^-$ and $[\text{Fe}_2(\text{BO}_2)]^-$ clusters.\textsuperscript{23, 24} A rectangular ring structure where a Cu$_2$ unit is interacting with both the oxygen atoms of the BO$_2$ moiety [Fig. 3(d)] was found to be 0.87 eV higher in energy. A linear isomer ($D_{\infty h}$), in which the Cu atoms occupy the terminal positions (not shown in the figure) was found to be 1.58 eV higher in energy and had a triplet spin multiplicity. The ground state geometry of the neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$) cluster [see Fig. 3(e)], unlike the anionic Cu$_2$(BO$_2$), is not a bent structure, but is identical to the higher energy isomer [Fig. 3(d)] of the anion cluster. On the other hand, the higher energy isomer of the neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$) cluster [Fig. 3(f)], is similar to the ground state of the anion and lies 0.49 eV higher in energy. Both the neutral isomers prefer a doublet spin state. The geometries where Cu
atoms do not form a dimer were found to be very high in energy indicating the preference for formation of Cu$_2$ unit when interacting with a single BO$_2$ molecule.

A comparison of the NBO charges of Cu$_2$ unit in negatively charged and neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$) cluster shows that the Cu$_2$ unit loses 87% of the charge during the photodetachment process. The HOMO of [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)]$^-$ cluster (shown in Fig. 6) corresponds to the non-bonding orbital on the two Cu atoms and is consistent with the NBO analysis that the VDE is due to the electron detachment from the Cu$_2$ unit. The calculated
VDE of [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster is 3.68 eV and is in excellent agreement with the measured VDE of 3.70 eV. On the other hand, our calculated EA of 2.95 eV does not match with the experimental ADE value of 3.53 eV. This is to be expected since the anionic ground state and neutral ground state geometries of Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters are different. As the electron is photodetached from the anion, it will first relax to its nearest local minimum with geometry close to the anion. Our computed ADE, which is the energy difference between the ground state anion [Fig. 3(c)] and the higher energy neutral isomer [Fig. 3(f)], is found to be 3.44 eV. This is in good agreement with the experimental threshold/onset energy of 3.53 eV. In addition, the energy barrier between the ground state neutral [Fig. 3(e)] and the higher energy [Fig. 3(f)] isomer was calculated to be 0.503 eV, thus avoiding the conversion into neutral ground state isomer. This shows unambiguously that the measured ADE of [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ is not equal to the EA of neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster.

It is to be further noted here that the VDE and ADE values of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ and [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ clusters are significantly smaller than those of the corresponding values of [Au(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ and [Au$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ clusters. For example, the calculated ADE values of [Au(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ and [Au$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ were 4.66 and 4.80 eV, respectively. Thus, while Au$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster is a superhalogen, Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster is not. This demonstrates the uniqueness of gold among the coinage-metal atoms. The significant difference in the ADE and VDE values of Au$_n$(BO$_2$)$_2$ and Cu$_n$(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters is due to the enhanced ability of Au atoms to accommodate the extra electron as compared to the Cu atoms.

2. Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ and Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters

We now turn to the structures and energetics of neutral and anionic Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ and Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters. The most stable and higher energy isomers of neutral and negatively charged Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster are given in Fig. 4. The ground state geometry of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster is a cis structure (C$_2$ symmetry) with a central Cu atom bound to two BO$_2$ superhalogen moieties on either side [Fig. 4(a)]. The corresponding trans configuration [Fig. 4(b)] is energetically degenerate ($\Delta$E = 0.002 eV) with the ground state geometry. On the other hand, the structural configurations containing B$_2$O$_3$ units [Figs. 4(c) and 4(d)] were found to be higher in energy ($\Delta$E > 2.0 eV). The energy barrier between the cis and trans configurations is calculated to be less than 0.024 eV, which is smaller than the uncertainty of our computational procedure. The [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster is a closed-shell system with singlet spin. The ground state geometry of the neutral Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster [Fig. 4(e)] has a doublet spin multiplicity and is nearly identical to its anionic counterpart [Fig. 4(a)]. Interestingly, the structure containing B$_2$O$_3$ unit [Fig. 4(f)] is found to be energetically degenerate ($\Delta$E = 0.03 eV) with the neutral ground state structure. It is noteworthy here that the ground state geometries of anionic and neutral Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters are identical to the corresponding Au(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster.

In addition, the stabilization of B$_2$O$_3$ unit-containing structure in the neutral species was also observed in the Au(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster.

The most interesting feature of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster, however, is its electron affinity. The calculated VDE and ADE of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster are 5.41 and 5.31 eV, respectively and are in good agreement with the experiment values. Since, the ground state geometries of neutral and anionic Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters are nearly identical, our calculated ADE of the anion corresponds to the EA of the neutral cluster. Thus, the calculated EA of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ is 5.31 eV, which is the largest EA of any of the Cu$_n$(BO$_2$)$_m$ clusters in the present study. Since Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ consists of a central metal atom bonded to BO$_2$ superhalogen moieties and its EA is larger than that of its superhalogen building units (EA of BO$_2$ = 4.46 eV), we term Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster as a hyperhalogen. This has been described in our previous publication.

The origin of the unusually large EA value of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ and the large VDE of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster can be understood from the NBO charge analysis. In the case of neutral Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster, the Cu atom has charge of +1.38e, while each of the BO$_2$ units have a charge of −0.69e, indicating the ionic nature of bonding between the Cu atom and the BO$_2$ moieties. On the other hand, the NBO charge analysis of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster showed that the extra electron is delocalized over the entire cluster, with 58% on the Cu atom and 42% on the two BO$_2$ units. The delocalization of the extra electron over the entire cluster rather than localizing on just the Cu atom is responsible for the unusually large EA value of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster. The delocalization of the extra-electron’s charge over the entire cluster can also be seen in the HOMO of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster (Fig. 6). We now compare the EA values of CuX$_2$ (X = F, Cl, Br, and I) molecules with that of the Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster. The EA of CuF$_2$ molecule was reported to be 3.79 eV, while our calculations of CuX$_2$ (X = Cl, Br, and I) molecules show that they are superhalogens with EA values of 4.41, 4.35, and 4.22 eV, corresponding to CuCl$_2$, CuBr$_2$, and CuI$_2$, respectively. Our calculated EA values are in good agreement with the previously reported photoelectron spectroscopy and theoretical investigation of Cl$_2$ and Br$_2$ clusters. We are not aware of any measured EA values of Cu$_2$ cluster. Thus, the EAs of CuX$_2$ species are consistently smaller, by a significant amount, than the EA of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster. Thus, the concept of hyperhalogen-where the halogen atoms around a central metal atom are replaced with superhalogen moieties to enhance the EA of the resulting species is valid for Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ as it was for Au(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster.

We now turn to the largest cluster in the present study, namely, Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster. The ground state geometry and the higher energy isomers of neutral and negatively charged Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster are given in Fig. 5. The ground state geometry of [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ is a long chainlike structure [Fig. 5(a)] which can be obtained by adding a Cu atom to the trans-form of [Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ cluster [Fig. 4(b)]. One can also visualize this structure as two units of Cu(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters bonded together with Cu–O bonds in the center. Interestingly, the chain isomer containing a central Cu$_2$ unit with the two BO$_2$ moieties bonded on either side of the metal dimer [Fig. 5(c)] was found to be 0.38 eV higher in energy. The isomer in Fig. 5(b) with each Cu atom forming bonds with O was found to be 0.24 eV higher in energy than the ground state structure.
An eight membered ring structure, with two O–Cu–O bonds [Fig. 5(d)] was found to be 0.58 eV higher in energy. Thus, in the case of negatively charged Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$PES, unlike in the Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$, the Cu–Cu bonding is not preferred. The calculated VDE and ADE of the ground state structure are 3.17 and 2.97 eV, which are consistent with the experimental values of 2.92 and 2.74 eV, respectively. The calculated VDEs for the higher energy isomers [Figs. 5(b) and 5(c)] are 3.4 and 5.06 eV, which do not match with the measured values. Therefore, only the ground state structure is present in the cluster beam and is contributing to the PES spectrum.

The ground state geometry of neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster, unlike its anionic counterpart, is not chainlike, but an eight membered ring structure [Fig. 5(e)]—in analogy with a similar geometry of the higher energy isomer of the anion [Fig. 5(d)]. The geometry similar to that of the anion ground state yielded a higher energy isomer shown in Fig. 5(g). This chainlike structure is 1.66 eV higher in energy than the neutral ground state geometry. Since, the ground state geometries of anion and neutral Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ clusters are vastly different from each other, the measured ADE value of the [Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$]$^-$ does not correspond to the EA of Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ cluster. In fact, the electron affinity of the Cu$_2$(BO$_2$)$_2$ is calculated to be only 1.31 eV.

Based on these results, one can visualize long chainlike structures for larger [Cu(BO$_2$)$_n$]$^-$ ($n > 2$) clusters, while a closed-ringlike structure for the corresponding neutral [Cu(BO$_2$)$_n$]$_n$ clusters. Computational investigations in this direction are currently underway.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, a synergistic study involving photoelectron spectroscopy and density functional theory calculations have yielded interesting results for the geometries, electronic structure, vertical and adiabatic detachment energies, and electron affinities of Cu$_n$(BO$_2$)$_m$ clusters. Based on MO analysis, we found that the extra electron is localized on the Cu$_n$ units for [Cu$_n$(BO$_2$)$_z$]$^-$ ($n = 1, 2$, 3) clusters, while in [Cu(BO$_2$)$_z$]$^-$ cluster, the excess electron is delocalized over the entire cluster. For [Cu(BO$_2$)$_z$]$^-$ cluster, the excess electron is localized on the Cu atom between the two BO$_2$ units. We note that while some of the Cu-based clusters show similarity with Au-based clusters, significant differences in structures and electron affinities are found. Thus, all coinage metals cannot be assumed to show similar behavior. However, both Cu and Au-based clusters show that the hyperhalogen behavior may be a general occurrence and even higher electron affinities can be achieved by changing the building blocks from halogens to superhalogens. Since hyperhalogens contain three different elements, one has much more freedom in designing a large number of highly electronegative species than superhalogens. Note that the latter only contains two different elements. The possibility of creating new highly electronegative species can give rise to the synthesis of salts with unusual properties.

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