Rheological characterization of acid pectin samples in the absence and presence of monovalent ions

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\textbf{A R T I C L E   I N F O}

\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Pectins are traditionally divided into two groups, high methoxy and low methoxy. The groupings determine the charge of the pectin and the gelation mechanism. However, not as yet extensively studied is the impact on gelation of the distribution of the charges as characterized by an absolute degree of blockiness (DB\textsubscript{abs}). The aim of this study was to characterize rheologically the acid gelation of a pectin with a high DB\textsubscript{abs} and a degree of methyl esterification of ~37%, in the absence and presence of monovalent ions. The results obtained suggest that a pectin with a blocky charge distribution at pH conditions close to or below the pKa exhibits weak gel-like properties at intermediate frequencies, despite the absence of a permanent network structure. The addition of monovalent ions changed the rheological behavior to resemble that of a strong gel whose properties depended on the type and concentration of the ions.

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1. Introduction

Pectin is a biopolymer mainly used in both the food and pharmaceutical industries, mainly for its gelling and thickening abilities (Thakur, Sing, Handa, & Rao, 1997; Rinaudo, 2008). Pectin describes a family of oligosaccharides and polysaccharides that have common features but are diverse in their fine structures (Willats, Knox, & Mikkelson, 2006). Commercial pectin contains a high degree of homogalactururonan and a minor amount of neutral sugars (Kravtchenko, Voragen, & Pilnik, 1992). The homogalacturonan is a negatively charged polymer and consists of α-(1,4)-linked D-galacturionate units. The galacturonate units can carry a methyl ester group on the C-6, and the degree of methylation (DM) of the pectin influences its network formation capabilities. Pectins are traditionally divided into two groups, high methoxy (HM) (>50% methyl esters) and low methoxy (LM) (<50% methyl esters). The former forms gels under acid conditions in combination with a high sugar concentration, while the latter forms gels in the presence of most multivalent ions according to the egg-box model (Grant, Morris, Rees, Smith, & Thom, 1973), under acid conditions (Grant et al., 1973; Gilsenan, Richardson, & Morris, 2000) and in the presence of 0.2 M monovalent cations (Yoo, Fishman, Savary, & Hotchkiss, 2003).

Pectins extracted from their sources typically have a high degree of methyl esters in their natural form, and therefore de-esterification is used to produce pectins with lower degrees of methyl esters (May, 1997). De-esterification can be performed using acids, alkalis or enzymes, where the ester groups on the pectin are removed in a random manner. Through the use of certain enzymes, pectin can be de-esterified in a “blockwise” manner, resulting in a blockwise distribution of the galacturonate residues (Garnier, Axelos, & Thibault, 1993; Christensen, Nielson, Kreiberg, Rasmussen, & Mikkelson, 1998; Hotchkiss et al., 2002).

The distribution pattern of the ester groups and galacturonate residues has been shown to affect the calcium sensitivity of pectin (Hotchkiss et al., 2002) and thus also its gelation behavior (Willats et al., 2006; Ström et al., 2007). The distribution of the methyl esters can be expressed as the degree of blockiness (DB) or the absolute degree of blockiness (DB\textsubscript{abs}). The DB is calculated from the amount of monomer (1\textsuperscript{st}), dimer (2\textsuperscript{nd}), and trimer (3\textsuperscript{rd}) of galacturonate residues produced when pectin is incubated with endopolygalacturonase, divided by the amount of free galacturonate residues.

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present in the pectin sample (Daas, Voragen, & Schols, 2000).

\[
DB = \frac{\left(1 \times 10^2 + 2 \times 10^2 + 3 \times 10^3\right)^2}{\left(1 - DM/100\right) \times m_{pectin} \times (m_{uronicacid}/m_{pectin})} \times 100
\]  

(1)

The \(DB_{abs}\) is based on the same idea, but instead of the amount of mono-, di- and trimer liberated by enzymatic digestion being related to the total amount of free galacturonic residues in the pectin, it is related to the total amount of galacturonic (including methyl-esterified residues) as defined by Guillotin et al. (2005).

\[
DB_{abs} = \frac{\left(1 \times 10^2 + 2 \times 10^2 + 3 \times 10^3\right)^2}{m_{pectin} \times (m_{uronicacid}/m_{pectin})} \times 100
\]  

(2)

Ström et al. (2007) showed that the DB or the \(DB_{abs}\), has a large impact on the capability of the pectin to form gels.

Polygalacturionate in dilute solutions is thought to change from an extended two-fold (2\(1\)) rotational symmetry to a more compact three-fold (3\(1\)) rotational symmetry in response to pH reduction at a fixed temperature (Cesàro, Ciana, Delben, Manzini, & Paolotti, 1982; Gilsenan et al., 2000). The three-fold rotational symmetry is stabilized by intramolecular hydrogen bonding (Walkinshaw & Arnott, 1981). Intermolecular hydrogen bonds are formed between protonated and unprotonated carboxyl groups and between carboxyl groups and O(3) on a neighboring anti-parallel pectin helix (Walkinshaw & Arnott, 1981).

Acidification of more concentrated LM pectin with a random charge distribution gives strong thermally reversible gels, and it was suggested that the (3\(1\)) rotational symmetry obtained due to pH reduction will reform into a (2\(1\)) rotational symmetry at higher temperature for a fixed low pH (Gilsenan et al., 2000). However, nuclear magnetic resonance and circular dichroism (CD) studies suggest that both (2\(1\)) and (3\(1\)) helices are present in calcium pectate solids and gels (Jarvis & Apperley, 1995). Lootens et al. (2003) reported on the acid gelation of amidated LM pectin and compared it to random charge distribution pectin, and it was observed that the amidated pectin formed a considerably stronger acid gel. It was thought that for the amidated pectins the amide groups reinforce the gel structure via hydrogen bonding (Lootens et al., 2003).

We intended, in this study, to investigate the rheological properties of blocky charge distribution pectin samples, as compared to random charge distribution pectin samples, at pH conditions close to the pK\(a\), in the absence and presence of monovalent ions.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Materials

The pectin used in this study was kindly provided by CP Kelco (Lille Skensved, Denmark) with the following analytical information: DM of \(-37\%\) and a galacturonic acid content of \(-89\%\). The pectin had been de-esterified at 45 °C using a PME extracted from papaya, at a pH of 4.5 and an NaCl concentration of 0.4 M. A conventional pectin (LM12 not standardized with sugar) of DM \(35\%\) obtained from CP Kelco was also used.

2.2. Methods

The determination of DB and \(DB_{abs}\) was performed by incubating the pectin with endopolygalacturonase [EC3.1.2.15] (Bussink, Kester, & Visser, 1990). The oligomers were analyzed using capillary electrophoresis according to a method previously described (Ström & Williams, 2004; Ström et al., 2007), giving a DB of \(-57\%\) and \(DB_{abs}\) of \(-36\%\). The DB and \(DB_{abs}\) of the conventional pectin were 40% and 26%, respectively. The starting pectin solutions were prepared at concentrations of 2–3 wt% and were diluted to the desired end concentrations using either deionized water or salt (NaCl, KCl, LiCl) solutions. Both pectin and dilution solutions were heated to 45 °C prior to being mixed together. The solutions were then acidified using hydrochloric acid (0.1 N or 1 N) at 45 °C. To achieve higher pH values, 1 M sodium hydroxide (NaOH) was used. Dilution and addition of acid or base was done at elevated temperature (45 °C), as most samples behaved as solutions at this temperature. This minimized the effect of shear or inhomogeneities forming upon acidification or salt addition.

2.2.1. Rotational viscometry

The viscosity of the pectin was measured using an AR 1000 from TA Instruments (Eschborn, Germany). The geometry used was a cone \((\phi = 40 \text{ mm}, \text{truncation} = 71 \text{ \mu m}, \text{angle} = 1.59^\circ)\) and plate. The viscosity was recorded at \(T = 20^\circ \text{C}\) and between shear rates of 0.03 s\(^{-1}\) and 1000 s\(^{-1}\).

2.2.2. Oscillatory rheology

Tests of the viscoelastic properties of the samples were performed using the same cone–plate geometry on the same rheometer. The sample loading area was pre-heated to 50 °C prior to loading the pectin sample, which itself had been preheated to 45 °C. After loading, the sample was quickly quenched to 5 °C and equilibrated at 5 °C for 30 min before measurement started. Oscillatory measurements were conducted at 5 °C to measure the storage and loss moduli \((G'\) and \(G'\)) over the entire frequency range. In addition, the response to temperature sweeps (5–40 °C and 40–5 °C) at a rate of 2 °C/min was measured, from which setting and melting temperatures were established. The setting temperature was defined as the temperature at which \(G'\) rose above \(G'\) on cooling or dropped below \(G'\) on heating. In these measurements, a constant strain of 0.5% and a constant frequency of 6.28 rad/s were used. Samples were measured in triplicate and variations of the moduli during time sweep and melt and setting temperature were within 10%. A further frequency sweep at \(T = 5^\circ \text{C}\) was conducted on selected samples. The pH meter used was a Schott CG-825 and was calibrated between pH 7 and pH 4 before each experiment.

3. Results

3.1. Rheological characterization of pectin samples in the absence of monovalent ions

The apparent viscosity as a function of pectin concentration and pH of two pectins that are close in value of DM, ~35%, but differ in
their absolute degree of blockiness (36% and 26%, respectively), is shown in Fig. 1. It can be observed that the slope of the apparent increase in viscosity is higher for the blocky pectin compared to the less blocky pectin at pH 3. Similar behavior of the two pectins was observed at pH 5, which indicates that the behavior at this pH was independent of their absolute blockiness. The estimated overlap concentration c* obtained for the blocky pectin at pH 5 is 0.4%, close to the value obtained for the random charge density pectin at the pH and temperature. At pH 3, however, the value of c* of the blocky pectin was close to 0.25%.

Oscillatory measurements show that the moduli of the sample prepared using the blocky pectin increased as the pectin concentration increased from 1.0% to 3.0% at a fixed pH value of 3.0 (Fig. 2a). At the same time, tan δ (tan δ = G''/G') decreased from 0.63 to 0.35, showing an increased importance of the elastic component with increasing polymer concentration. On the other hand, loss moduli were always higher than storage moduli for the non-blocky pectin at the pH and temperature tested (data not shown).

The mechanical spectrum at the lowest pectin concentration tested (1%) is typical of a gelling sample where the degree of crosslinks is just sufficient to form a continuous network. Log G' and log G'' varied linearly with log ω over the frequency range studied and with the same slope (Fig. 2b). Upon increase in pectin concentration, the value of G' was higher than G'' at frequencies between 0.02 and 80 rads⁻¹. It appears that the slopes of log G' were slightly higher than the slopes of log G''. The mechanical spectra further suggest a crossover of G' and G'' at low frequency. Pre-shearing the samples at different shear rates prior to oscillatory measurements showed a fast recovery independent of pre-shear speed (1 s⁻¹, 10 s⁻¹, 100 s⁻¹), and the moduli recovered to the same absolute values regardless of the pre-shear rate (data not shown).
3.2. Rheological characterization of acid pectin samples in the presence of monovalent ions

The addition of NaCl to the acid pectin gels at pH 3 increased $G'$, while $\tan \delta (G'/G'')$ was reduced from 0.65, 0.47 and 0.14 to 0.07 upon addition of 0, 0.05, 0.1 and 0.2 M NaCl, respectively (Fig. 5a). The mechanical spectra of the pectin sample with increasing amount of salt (Fig. 5b) showed high absolute values of moduli, and more importantly, a larger difference between $G'$ and $G''$ and a lower frequency dependence. In addition to the increase in $G'$ and $G''$, the gelation and melting temperatures also increased (Fig. 5c), as did the thermal hysteresis of the sample where NaCl was present. In some cases, such as that corresponding to pH 2.45 with 0.05 M NaCl, the melting temperature of the gel was above the preparation and testing temperature of 45°C. These gels could be visually observed to be syneretic and inhomogeneous. Rheological tests on these conditions were not done, since the high temperature required to melt the gel could cause evaporation (cone and plate geometry used) and lead to unreliable data. The use of concentric cylinder geometry would reduce the effect of evaporation; however, this would have required quantities of pectin sample larger than those available in this study.

The effect of the addition of 0.05 M of LiCl, NaCl and KCl on $G'$ as a function of time is shown in Fig. 6. The sample is loaded on the rheometer at a temperature above gel formation for the different systems (40°C) and subsequently quenched to 5°C with a rate of 8°C/min. KCl is shown to be most effective in promoting network formation where the strength of the network measured in $G'$ is higher and the difference between $G'$ and $G''$ is larger ($\tan \delta = 0.27$) than observed for the addition of NaCl and LiCl ($\tan \delta = 0.40$ and $\tan \delta = 0.44$, respectively). LiCl had the least impact on the absolute value of $G'$ and is also the system where $G'$ and $G''$ are the closest. Furthermore, there is a continuous increase in $G'$ over time in the presence of KCl. Fig. 7 shows the effect of pH on the values of $G'$ measured for 1% blocky pectin after holding for 2400 s at 5°C in the presence of 0.05 M LiCl, NaCl or KCl. There is a progressive increase in $G'$ with decreasing pH, which is particularly evident for the mixtures of pectin with KCl. At all pH values studied, KCl gave the highest moduli and LiCl the lowest (i.e. the same order as in the time curves shown in Fig. 6 for a fixed pH of 3.0). With the exception of LiCl at pH 2.5, the mixtures had higher $G'$ than pectin alone at the same values of pH (by a factor of ~5 for KCl).

As pH was reduced from 3 to 2.5, $\tan \delta$ varied from 0.26 to 0.22 for the samples containing KCl, 0.45 to 0.47 for the samples containing NaCl, 0.44 to 0.45 for the samples containing LiCl and 0.77 to 0.5 for the pectin samples at 1% with no added salt. It is further worthwhile to note that upon addition of urea, $G'$ was reduced from 16 to 3 Pa and the $\tan \delta$ was increased from 0.47 to 1 for the 1% pectin samples containing 0.05 M NaCl (data not shown).

4. Discussion

The term “weak gel” was introduced (Ross-Murphy, 1984) to describe systems that give a gel-like response to small deformations but show a solution-like response to higher stress. These gels are distinguish from conventional (“true”) gels that are weak only in the sense of having low moduli. Usually, weak gels give mechanical spectra with greater frequency-dependence of $G'$ and $G''$ and smaller separation between the two moduli (i.e. higher $\tan \delta$) than true gels. Additional distinction of true and weak gels is that true gels fracture under stress, with little, if any, subsequent recovery of a continuous network, whereas weak gels yield and flow, with rapid recovery of their gel-like character when the stress is removed. Another characteristic feature of weak gels is that, unlike solutions of entangled polymer coils, they violate the Cox–Merz
Fig. 5. Influence of NaCl concentration on acid pectin samples where the pectin concentration is 1%. (a) $G'$ (triangles) and $G''$ (squares) at pH 3 at a strain of 0.5% and $f=6.28 \text{rad/s}$ at $T=5 \degree C$. (b) Frequency dependency of samples containing different amount of NaCl from 0 M (open symbols), 0.05 M (gray symbols) to 0.1 M (black symbols) at $T=5 \degree C$. (c) Gelation (triangle) and melting (circle) temperatures in the absence of NaCl (open symbols) and in the presence of 0.05 M NaCl (solid symbols) at various pH.

Fig. 6. Storage moduli as a function of time for 1% pectin samples at pH 3 with the addition of 0 M salt (open symbol) and 0.05 M of LiCl (light gray), 0.05 M NaCl (dark gray) and 0.05 M KCl (black). The temperature to the left of the vertical dotted line in the symbol is decreasing from 40 $\degree C$ to 5 $\degree C$ over time, while the temperature is kept constant at $T=5 \degree C$ to the right of the dotted line. Measurements were done at a strain=0.5% and $f=6.28 \text{rad/s}$.

Fig. 7. The influence of type of ions added at a concentration of 0.05 M to a 1% pectin sample as a function of pH and at $t=2400 \text{s}$, where the line between the symbols is added to aid the eye; addition of KCl (black), NaCl (dark gray), LiCl (light gray) and no added salt (open symbol). Measurements were done at $T=5 \degree C$, strain=0.5% and $f=6.28 \text{rad/s}$.

**Rule (Cox & Merz, 1958),** giving complex dynamic viscosity ($\eta^*$) greater than steady-shear viscosity ($\eta'$) at equivalent numerical values of frequency (rad/s) and shear rate (1/s). By these criteria, the blocky pectin studied in the present investigation show weak gel-like properties.

One interpretation of the properties of weak gels, proposed initially for ordered xanthan, is that they have a network structure similar to that of true gels but that the junctions are weaker and more dynamic (e.g. Ross-Murphy, 1984; Morris, Nishinari, & Rinaudo, 2012). However, in an investigation of ordered kappa carrageenan in the presence of NaI, which inhibits the helix-helix aggregation required to give true gels, Ikeda and Nishinari (2001) observed weak gel-type properties of the sample (that is violation of the Cox–Merz rule, frequency-dependence of $G'$ and $G''$ and rapid recovery of the mechanical spectra even after shearing at 1000 s$^{-1}$ for 30 s). They conclude that even nonaggregated
helical conformers of carrageenan are rigid enough for their entanglements to exhibit gel-like visco-elasticity without the formation of a permanent network structure (Ikeda & Nishinari, 2001). Similar behavior is indeed observed for the pectin sample at pH 3, albeit at lower shear rates than the suggested 1000 s⁻¹. It cannot be concluded from this study alone whether the weak gel like rheological properties of the current blocky pectin sample arise from weak side-by-side associations arising from e.g. co-operative attraction, or via entanglement of rigid structures as proposed in the case of kappa carrageenan in the presence of NaI (Ikeda & Nishinari, 2001). The common feature for the two proposals is that the polymer must be conformationally ordered.

The analysis of micro rheological data on acid gels at pH 2 reported by Vincent, Mansel, Kramer, Kroy, and Williams (2013) indicate further the presence of transient structures or junctions (although measured using a DM 42 blocky apple pectin). Micro rheology enabled the authors to measure the mean square displacement (MSD) of 50 nm—sized polystyrene beads over a time scale of more than 8 orders of magnitude. The MSD data obtained were converted into the mechanical spectra $G'$ and $G''$, using the generalized Stokes–Einstein equation (Mason, 2000) (Fig. 8). The data show systems which were slightly weaker but still of an order of magnitude similar to that found in the current work; furthermore, a cross-over of $G'$ and $G''$ at low frequencies was observed. Finally, the slopes of $G'$ and $G''$ were found to be similar to the pH 2.5 gels investigated in this paper. In addition to measuring the mechanical spectrum, the high frequency regime of the micro rheological data yielded information about the relaxation and dynamics of the constituent polymer chains in the gel. Vincent et al. (2013) found that MSD for pectin chains at pH 2 follows at short times a power law of 3/4, which is characteristic for semiflexible polymers. In other words, the observed pectin at pH 2 is in a stiff conformation, responding faster than flexible chains, which would follow a power law close to 1/2, as described by the Rouse model (Rubinstein & Colby, 2003). The authors concluded that the networked strands of an acid gel are not permanently cross-linked; rather, they described the observed mechanical response by the sliding of crosslinks at intermediate time scales.

The lower $\eta^*$ obtained for the blocky pectin at pH 3 and the higher increase in viscosity as a function of polymer concentration once above $\eta^*$ (Fig. 1) would support the hypothesis of a stiffer chain, that is a higher degree of conformational order, in the case of the blocky pectin. However this is only true at low pH, as the two pectins behave similarly at pH 5. It is further noteworthy that while the DM of pectins influences its $\eta^*$, a random or blocky charge distribution appears to not influence $\eta^*$ (Ralet, Dronnet, Buchcott, & Thibault, 2001); thus, the protonation degree of the pectin cannot explain the behavior observed in this study. Instead, the bulk rheology behavior of the pectin with blocky charge distribution could be explained in similar terms, exhibiting transient or sliding crosslinks at intermediate time scales, as observed using microrheology for an acid apple pectin sample (Vincent et al., 2013).

HM pectin, in dilute solutions, is prone to forming aggregations of different kinds, for example, microparticles consisting of microgels, rods and kinked rods. Such structures have been visualized using electron microscopy for pectins extracted from peaches (Fishman, Cooke, Hotchkiss, & Damert, 1993) and later confirmed via AFM studies for pectins extracted from oranges, which further gave evidence to the presence of lateral aggregations of pectin chains (Fishman, Cooke, Chau, Coffin, & Hotchkiss, 2007). Fishman and co-workers suggested that the various aggregations are governed by hydrophobic interactions and hydrogen bonding. While LM pectin has a higher charge than the HM pectin at neutral pH, which reduces the tendency of self-aggregation of pectin chains at neutral pH, the self-aggregation may again be favored at pH under $pK_a$ of the pectin where the overall charge is reduced due to protonization of the carboxyl groups. Indeed, the formation of lateral aggregations of pectin chains, as reported in the work performed by Fishman et al. (2007), could explain the proposed stiffened structure, or the higher degree of conformational order, of pectin with blocky charge distribution at low DM and low pH. It would be interesting to further shed light on the potential difference in aggregation behavior between an LM pectin of a blocky charge distribution with one of a random charge distribution at low pH and dilute solutions, following the study performed by Fishman and co-workers using AFM (Fishman et al., 2007).

It was shown, on calcium induced commercial LM pectin gels, that a reduction in pH led to a reduction in CD ellipticity characteristic of formation of egg-box junctions decreased (Gidley, Morris, Murray, Powell, & Rees 1980). The CD ellipticity characteristic of formation of egg-box junctions was replaced progressively by the increase in ellipticity seen for acid-induced gelation of HM pectin, where junctions are formed by sequences in the three-fold conformation. At pH values around the $pK_a$ (e.g. pH 3.5) the gels were weakened or abolished by incorporation of either (i) 8 M urea, which inhibits acid-induced gelation but not cation–mediated (egg-box) association, or (ii) polygalacturonate blocks, which inhibit cation-induced gelation by occupying binding sites on intact pectin chains, but have no effect on the junctions induced by acidification. The authors concluded that the dominant mechanism of inter-molecular association shifts progressively from cation-mediated association of two-fold chain sequences to acid-induced association with decreasing pH, and that contributions from both types of association are necessary for gelation at pH values close to the $pK_a$.

As illustrated in Fig. 5, true gels (those with low-frequency dependence of $G'$ and $G''$ and increased temperature hysteresis) were formed on incorporation of monovalent salt at pH 3. As the pH was increased, gelation was suppressed, and at pH 5, neither of the pectin samples studied formed a gel in the presence of monovalent ions, indicating a requirement for some acid-induced association in addition to cation-meditated junctions, in line with the results outlined above.

At pH 3, the influence of the ions was found to increase in the following order: $\text{Li}^+ < \text{Na}^+ < \text{K}^+$. This trend is also observed for the
effectiveness of the same ions in promoting gellation of carrageenan (Morris, Rees, & Robinson, 1980) and gellan (Morris et al., 2012), and in the magnitude of CD change observed (Seale, Morris, & Rees, 1982) on addition of monovalent cations to solutions of alginic poly-L-guluronic sequences, which are closely similar in structure to the poly-D-galacturonic sequences of pectin. In the investigation by Yoo et al. (2003), a similar trend was observed, but at pH 5, where KCl gave the strongest gels; those formed with NaCl were substantially (−3.3 ×) weaker, and LiCl gave negligible gel strength, similarly as shown in this study at pH 3 (Figs. 6 and 7). Differences in effectiveness of the monovalent ions to promote load bearing junctions have been explained (Morris et al., 2012) by the efficiency with which cations can occupy specific binding sites on the polymer chains, which will depend on ionic radius or by the alternative explanation based on degree of hydration of the cations (Yoo et al., 2003).

It is clear from this study and others that the mechanism behind gellation of different pectins at slightly different conditions is still not totally explained. The results presented in this particular study show different rheological behavior for LM pectin with a blocky charge distribution at pH below pKa compared to previously known behavior of conventional LM pectin at pH below pKa (Gilsenan et al., 2000; Lootens et al., 2003). Furthermore, the pectin studied here did not form gel in the presence of monovalent ions at pH 5, which has been reported for other blocky pectins of low DM (Yoo et al., 2003, 2009). Instead, the presence of both hydrogen bonds and monovalent ions is required to form a gel exhibiting strong gel characteristics, that is, with no frequency dependence. The differences in rheological properties may originate from differences in length and distribution patterns of free carboxyl groups (Yoo et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2013) as well as variation in tertiary distribution of de-esterified pectin blocks (Fishman et al., 2007).

5. Conclusions

The rheological behavior of a blocky low-methoxy pectin was studied at low pH (2–4) and in the absence and presence of monovalent ions. This study suggests that the pectin at low pH (pH <3.5) does not form strong gels in the sense that the gel consists of disordered flexible polymer chains linking in ordered junction zones. Instead, the rheological characterization of the acid pectin samples shows the characteristics of a weak gel (G′ > G″ coupled with frequency dependence) at intermediate frequencies. However, at low frequencies, a shift in rheological properties appears to happen, where G′ becomes larger than G″, thus indicating a system without a permanent network structure but with characteristics of a weak gel at intermediate frequencies.

Upon addition of monovalent ions the pectin sample turned into a typical true gel. Little influence of frequency on the moduli and larger hysteresis during temperature sweeps suggests larger aggregates are formed (also observed visually by the sample turning turbid instead of clear and the occurrence of syneresis as the salt concentration increased). It is suggested that the presence of monovalent ions reduces the repulsive charges between pectin chains but the monovalent ions do not induce sufficient salt bridges as the presence of urea reduced the gel strength, indicating that the presence of hydrogen bonds is still required for gelation to occur.

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