A REVIEW ON INVESTIGATION AND NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF A HOUSEHOLD REFRIGERATOR INCORPORATED WITH A PCM BASED CONDENSER

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ABSTRACT

In this study, a phase transition material (PCM) was adopted for constructing heat storage-PCM device with a setup supported a standard single-door refrigerator. The experimental investigation of the characteristics of the novel refrigerator and a standard refrigerator was administered. For the novel refrigerator, the PCM device at the evaporator ,has replaced the warmth transfer mechanism with the upper rate heat transfer mechanism of a mixture of conduction and convection process during on-time. and therefore the heat gain to the system was absorbed by PCM during the off-time. Thus, the general heat-transfer performance of the evaporator with PCM heat storage exchanger might be significantly improved. This has resulted during a lower condensation temperature, a greater stability of temperature inside cabinet. Compared to the standard refrigerator, the ratio of on-time to the entire cycle time of novel refrigerator was much smaller, which led to lower energy consumption. Experiments demonstrated that the novel refrigerator

Keywords: *Energy consumption, heat exchanger, household refrigerator, latent heat storage, phase change material*

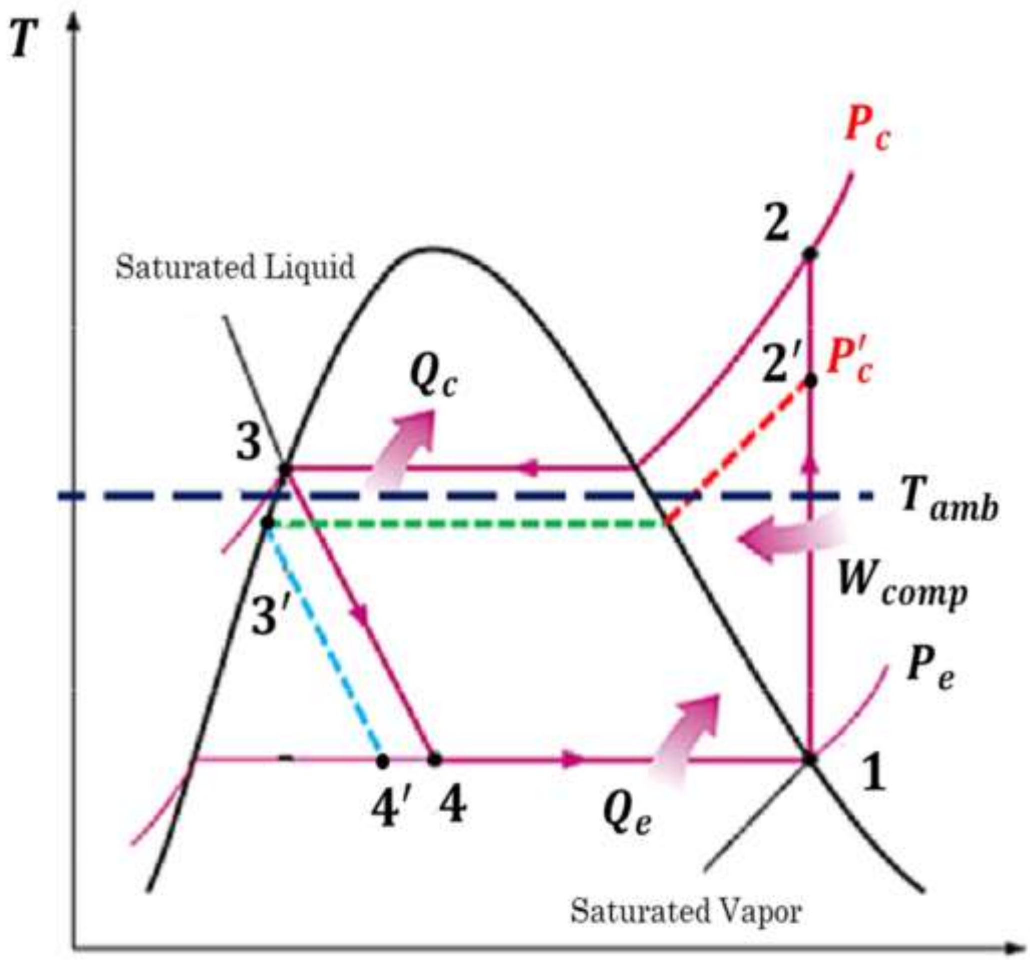
INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, due to exponential growth of population and urbanization, the consumption rate of electricity increased significantly. Especially, with ever-increasing population, residential sector is considered one of the major consumers for the electricity usage. Reported that nearly 24% of world's total energy consumption is by the residential sector, in which the household refrigerator plays a major role in terms of energy consumption among all other domestic appliances. As per the studies conducted refrigerator is the second household appliance after television, which families prefer to procure in their houses. Additionally, There is at least one household refrigerator for every six people on Earth. With such a huge number of refrigerators, it is automatically qualifying as the prime energy consumer.

Vapor compression refrigeration cycle

The domestic refrigerator works on vapor compression refrigeration cycle (VCRC) as shown in Figure 1.1. At point 1, a refrigerant enters a compressor and compression takes place (1-2). During the isobaric process 2-3 in condenser, heat rejection occurs from refrigerant to the ambient. Here the refrigerant phase changes at higher pressure (condenser pressure) from super-heated vapor to the saturated liquid form. In process 3-4, the refrigerant expands in the expansion device, capillary tube, which is an isenthalpic process. In the last process of the cycle (3-4), refrigerant absorbs heat from the space to be cooled and converts from two-phase region (liquid-vapor) to the superheated vapor state in the evaporator. The performance of the refrigerator is measured using a coefficient of performance (COP), defined as the ratio of heat absorbed in the evaporator to the work provided to the compressor. It is explicable from the Figure 1.1 that by decreasing the condensing temperature, the work of

compression can be reduced and the heat absorption amount can be increased, in turn, the COP would enhance. In this presented work, a novel method of decreasing condensing temperature is implemented to the household refrigerator and tested through experiments.



Vapor compression refrigeration system

Literature Survey

Nethaji and Mohideen (2017) increased the heat removal rate from the compressor shell by employing the drip cooling. It reduced the compressor shell temperature by 4.2°C. Reduction in compressor shell temperature improved the COP of refrigerator by 10.3%. The average energy consumption per month observed to be 45.33 kWhr without drip cooling system, while that of 40.9 kWhr using drip cooling of compressor shell.

Hermes et al. (2009) developed a mathematical model to access the energy performance of vapor compression system by analyzing the sensitivity of the compressor stroke. They have reported that by decreasing the compressor piston displacement from 5.96 to 3.77 cm^3, the energy consumption drops by 13%.

Waltrich et al. (2011) analyzed the impact of the components (compressor, condenser and evaporator) on both overall system cost and COP using a genetic optimization algorithm and showed an optimized model having a COP/cost ratio approximately 50% higher than the conventional model.

Afonso and Matos (2006) reported that the ambient air near the compressor has slightly higher temperature due to the heat rejection of the compressor, which is generated during the compression process. This higher temperature air has negative effect on refrigerator performance as there are chances of air infiltration to the refrigeration compartment while having the door opening and heat transfer through the wall of refrigerator to the cabinet air. To address this issue, Afonso (2013) proposed a plenum with a fan near to the compressor and conducted experiments. This modification leads to decrease in air temperature by 11°C near the compressor and reduced the overall energy consumption up to 9% per year.

Chang et al. (2008) performed experiments with variable speed reciprocating compressor with a brushless DC motor inside. Based on their experimental analysis, they observed energy saving of 35% for the 560 liters capacity refrigerator as compared to the same capacity refrigerator having a fixed speed compressor.

Kumara (2011) modified condenser of domestic refrigerator by adopting proper design procedures. The optimum combination was achieved for different values of copper tube pitch, number of copper tubes and the number of steel wires. The selection of the optimum combination was done based on total heat transfer, mass flux and the material cost. In modified condenser, the heat transfer increased by 32.9% while the material cost reduced by 19% from base model. This modification improved the COP by 17%.

Bassiouny (2009) analyzed the effect of space surrounding the condenser numerically and experimentally. By changing the space between wall and refrigerator from 30 to 300 mm, the temperature around the condenser reduces by 70%. It enhanced the driving force of heat transfer, which improves the heat transfer from 20 W to 60 W. Blocking the space around the condenser will resist the up flow of buoyant air.

Kılıçaslan (2002) performed experimental study on a commercial refrigerator by implementing different sized chimneys fitted on the condenser and achieved performance improvement of 54%. Similar concept was tested by

Gedik et al. (2016) on a household refrigerator, with which they have attained increase in COP by 5% and 10% with loaded and unloaded conditions of the refrigerator, respectively

Zhang et al. (2017) improved the performance of refrigerator by installing outer foam ring and central foam in spiral wire and tube condenser. They found increase in compressor off time by 4.1% with no change in the compressor on time and reduction of power input by 2.37%. Another type of condenser used in vapor compression refrigeration system is plate heat exchangers (PHE) because it has higher heat transfer co-efficient and it can provide the most compact design in terms of surface area with low initial cost.

Raveendran and Sekhar (2017) improved the performance of 190-liter capacity domestic refrigerator by installing water cooled brazed plate heat exchanger. It requires 84% less heat transfer area than conventional wire and tube condenser. The COP or refrigerator increased by 57-75% and energy consumption per day was also reduced by 21-27% as compared to wire and tube condenser. However, the management of cooling water is a challenging task in the domestic refrigeration system.

Ablanque et al. (2010) had carried out parametric study on capillary tubes used in household refrigerators having isobutene as refrigerant. They studied the influence of double tube heat exchanger length, tube total length, tube diameter and tube roughness on the COP of refrigerator and concluded that the COP increases as the heat exchanger length increases, whereas other parametric variation does not affect the COP of the system.

One of the methods used to improve the performance of small refrigerator is to increase heat transfer between the refrigerant in capillary tube and suction line. Jeong et al. (2012) carried out a theoretical study on the suction line heat exchanger and showed that both the location and the length of heat transfer section influence the COP as well as the cooling capacity. The COP and cooling capacity were increased by more than 2.7% and 12.6%, respectively, by increasing the heat transfer sections to a simple refrigeration cycle.

Pisano et al. (2015) provided a practical tool for deciding the best combination of refrigerant charge and capillary tube diameter for a commercial refrigerator. They reported that the decision should be based not only on maximization of COP, but also on the limitations imposed by other parameters such as the evaporator superheat, condenser sub cooling, run time ratio, suction line temperature.

Rasti et al. (2012) had performed experimental investigation substituting R134a with R436A in a domestic refrigerator of 238 liters. They found that the ON time ratio and the energy consumption per day reduce by 13% and 5.3%, respectively with R436A as compared to the R134a and the optimum refrigerant charge also reduced by 48% with R436A. R436A raised the energy efficiency index of the refrigerator from label ‘‘E’’ to label ‘‘D’’ according to Iranian National Standard No. 4853-2.

Ghadiri and Rasti (2014) carried out experiments for a domestic refrigerator of 318 liters capacity with R134a as a refrigerant. The experiments were conducted at 32°C ambient temperature and 50% relative humidity. They have achieved 23.6% reduction in energy consumption by removing hot-wall condenser, increasing condenser air-cooling and reducing compressor-cooling capacity.

Jia et al. (2014) had investigated the performance of refrigerator using different kind of nano-oils in compressor for two different refrigerants, R134a and R600a. It was concluded that the performance did not improve for R134a, while it improved by 5% for R600a.

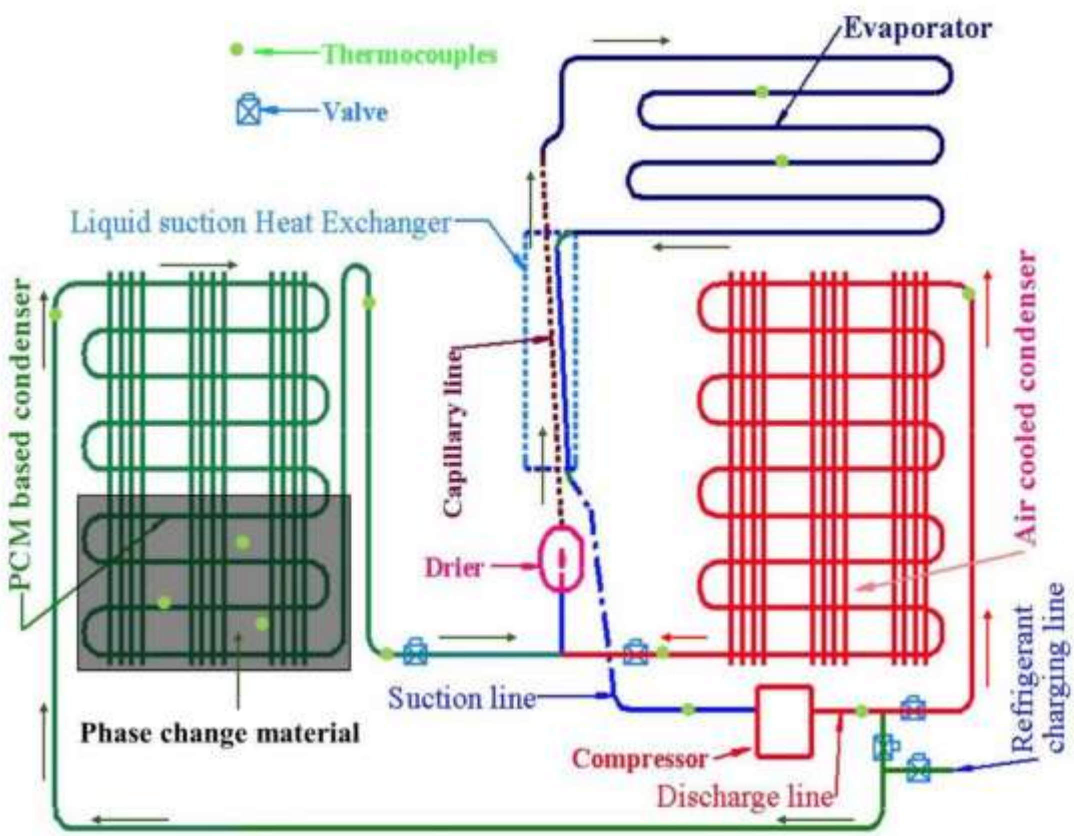
Thiessen et al. (2016) conducted experimental analysis on a household refrigerator by varying the VIP coverage area and positioning of it around the cabinet. They observed that the energy consumption is dependent upon the positioning and coverage area of insulation panel. The installation of VIP near the doors and the rear wall reduces the energy consumption by 6% and 11%, respectively and by covering the insulation area of about 56%; the VIP reduces the energy consumption by 21%.

EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

Working principle

Conventionally, an air-cooled wire and tube type condenser is attached to the backside of household refrigerator. The refrigerant flowing inside tubes rejects heat to the ambient via the natural convection heat transfer. It is a known fact at the higher ambient temperature, the condenser temperature and consequently condenser pressure settles on higher side, due to which the power consumption of refrigerator would be the highest at noontime.

In order to minimize the energy consumption at the peak ambient duration, a PCM based condenser (heat exchanger) parallel to the wire and tube condenser is incorporated to the household refrigerator. Figure 3.1 shows a schematic diagram of the proposed modified refrigerator. At the noontime, the refrigerant is made to flow through the PCM condenser instead of a conventional condenser. The selection of the PCM would be such that the melting temperature would be lower than the ambient temperature at noontime. This makes refrigerant heat rejection at a lower temperature, which reflects reduction in the compressor energy consumption. Once the PCM is converted into a liquid, it requires the lower ambient temperature to reject its own heat and convert back into solid. Such scenario would be possible in the nighttime when the ambient temperature



compares change in the condenser exit temperature for the air-cooled condenser and PCM based condenser having a PCM initial temperature of 17.5°C. The plot indicates that the exit temperature of condenser varies in the range of 26-48°C for an air-cooled condenser, while 18-27°C in case of PCM based condenser for the first 60 min. It is clearly visible that the PCM based condenser shows a lower temperature range. This is due to the utilization of latent heat of PCM in the temperature range of 18-23°C.

Once the PCM changes its state from solid to liquid, it follows sensible heating and due to which the condenser exit temperature range shifts upward with the time, whereas for the air-cooled condenser it remains in the range of 26-48°C. However, the condenser exit temperature with PCM based condenser shows lower value as compared to the air-cooled one until 210 minutes.

Variation of PCM temperature with time

Figure 4.3 shows the variation of average PCM temperature with time as the heat transfer takes place from refrigerant to the PCM. At four different locations in PCM based heat exchanger, the PCM temperature were measured and its arithmetic average is reported here. Initially, the PCM temperature was 17°C. As the time progresses the melting of PCM starts. The plot illustrates that in the first 75 minutes of experimentation, the PCM temperature increase observed to be just 3°C and in the later 75 minutes, it changes drastically about 9°C. This due to the fact that the PCM (FS21) has large latent heat storage capacity of 143 kJ kg^{-1} for the temperature range of 18-23°C, delaying temperature rise of PCM in the initial period.

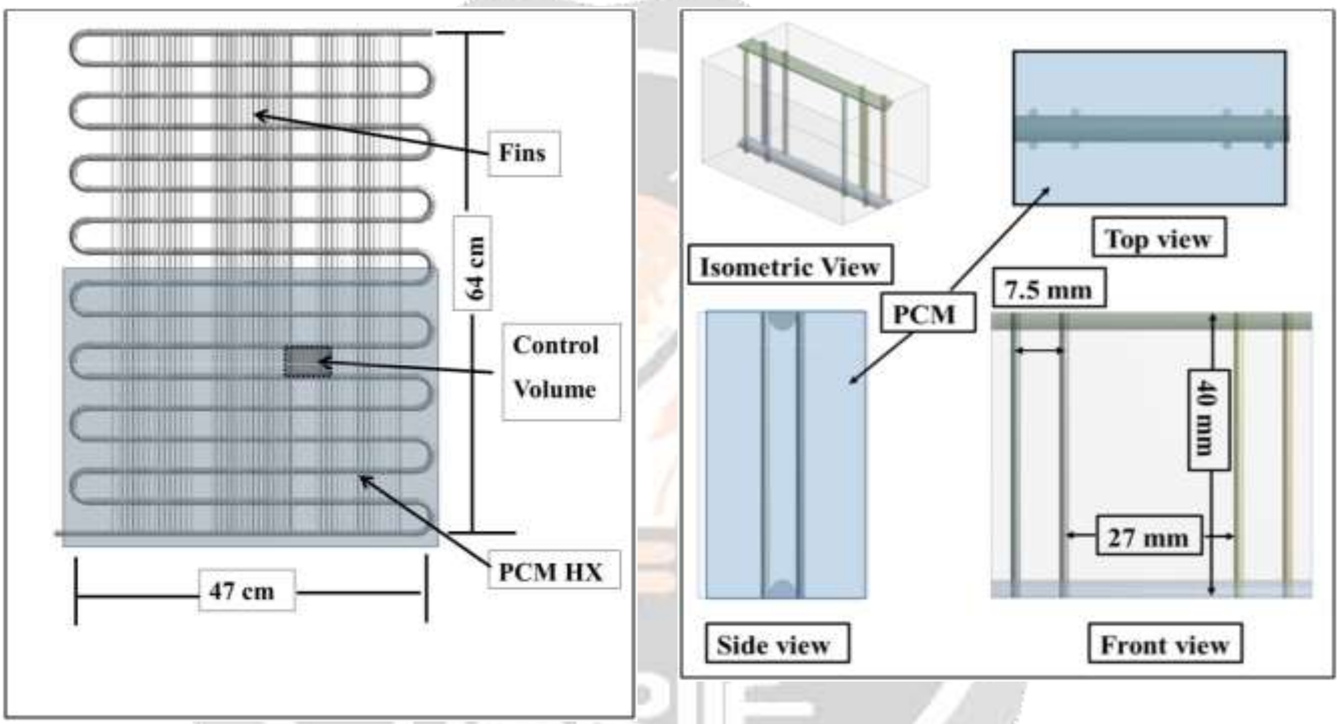
Variation of compressor exit temperature with time

The variation of compressor outlet temperature with time is shown in Figure 4.4. It demonstrates that the peak compressor exit temperature drops down to 42°C with PCM based condenser from 52°C, which was for the air-cooled condenser. The decrease in the peak was observed in the first two hrs of experimentation. Afterwards, the temperature shifts towards upper side with every next cycle, yet the performance of the refrigerator is better with

PCM condenser until 3½ hrs of experimentation. Even though the peak temperature reduction is for a shorter duration of the day, it will have marginally positive impact on the compressor life.

3D numerical modeling

The height of the heat exchanger is 64 cm in which 17 horizontal tubes of 5 mm outer diameter are present. The width of the heat exchanger is 47 cm in which 48 fins having 1.5 mm diameter are attached on both the sides of horizontal tubes. Moreover, this condenser is immersed in the PCM filled container. Such a complex geometry and having PCM inside it requires huge computational resources. In this context, the geometry is simplified and only a small portion of the PCM based heat exchanger is considered for the numerical analysis as shown in Figure 5.2. However, simplified geometry and the boundary conditions are chosen such that it will represent the characteristic of the complete heat exchanger



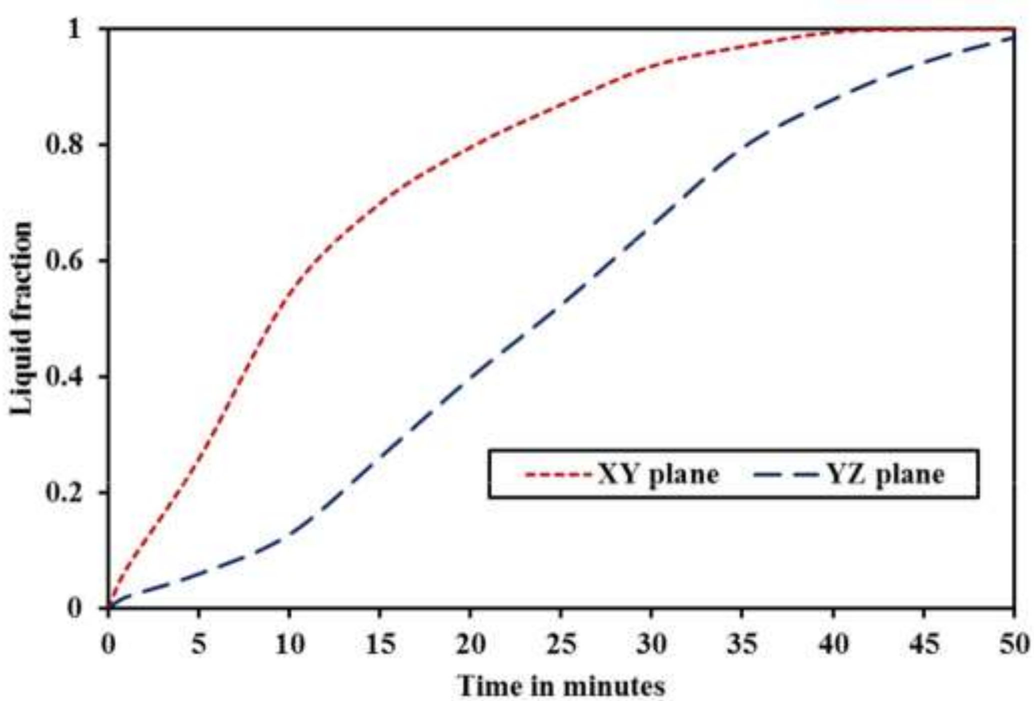
One of the reasons for the difference is an assumption of constant temperature boundary condition of heat exchanger wall in the simulation, while in the experiment tests the wall temperature varies according to the refrigerant temperature flowing inside the condenser tube. Secondly, numerical simulation is carried out with a small portion of the heat exchanger instead

of the whole heat exchanger as explained in section 6.2.1. In experimental plot, the PCM temperature is plotted against total cycle (compressor on-off cycle) time. However, here in numerical study, compressor off time is not modeled and shows PCM temperature variation with respect to compressor on time only.

The plots indicate that larger regions of melted PCM are seen in XY plane as compared to YZ plane because the location of the XY plane is near to the eight vertical fins and it has refrigerant walls on the top and bottom. It is also observed that the regions of XY plane, little away from the fins are not well melted.

Moreover, the upper half of the XY plane has a higher liquid fraction as compared to lower half because with the melting, the liquid region expands and thus the buoyancy effects increases leading to less dense PCM in the upper half.

As expected on the YZ plane the amount of liquid fraction is less as compared to XY plane. It is due to the reason that there is no heat transfer surface available in the nearby region except top and bottom walls. Figure 5.6 (c) and (d) showing that with increases in time, the liquid fraction is increasing in both the planes.



It covered the insight of heat transfer process occurring in the PCM heat exchanger. It also discussed performance comparison of household refrigerator with three different PCMs, FS21, RT25 and RT25HC based on the numerical analysis.

Conclusion:

The research work presented in this thesis is an experimental and numerical investigation of a household refrigerator integrated with a PCM based condenser in parallel to the conventional air-cooled condenser aiming to reduce the energy consumption of the refrigerator. The work contains majorly two sections. The first one is development of experimental set up incorporating the proposed concept and its performance analysis and the second one is development of the numerical model for the PCM based heat exchanger and performance prediction of refrigerator with different PCMs.

Based on experimental analysis of the modified refrigerator, following conclusions are derived,

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