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Published in:
Modern Physics Letters A

DOI:
10.1142/S0217732316501558

Publication date:
2016

Document version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):

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Minimal Composite Dynamics versus Axion Origin of the Diphoton excess

Emiliano Molinaro, Francesco Sammio, and Natascia Vignaroli

ATLAS and CMS observe deviations from the expected background in the diphoton invariant mass searches of new resonances around 750 GeV. We show that a simple realization in terms of a new pseudoscalar state can accommodate the observations. The model leads to further footprints that can be soon observed. The new state can be interpreted both as an axion or as a highly natural composite state arising from minimal models of dynamical electroweak symmetry breaking. We further show how to disentangle the two scenarios. Beyond the possible explanation of the diphoton excess the results show that it is possible to directly test and constrain composite dynamics via processes stemming from its distinctive topological sector.

The ATLAS and CMS [1, 2] find local excesses respectively of 3.6σ and 2.6σ for a resonance in diphoton searches with invariant mass spectrum around 750 GeV. This leads to a global significance of 2σ in ATLAS and 1.2σ in CMS.

The ATLAS and CMS results in the a → 2γ channel suggest a reconstructed mass of around 750 GeV and a cross-section σ(pp → a → 2γ) of the order of 6 fb. Here a denotes a new intermediate massive state.

We assume a to be a neutral spin zero particle and employ a minimal description in terms of an effective field theory, and study the resulting phenomenology in the narrow width approximation. After introducing the relevant effective operators we show how they can emerge within two calculable extensions of the Standard Model (SM) featuring either a new elementary axion-like or a composite η′-like state. We further assume both states to couple to a new colored vectorlike fermion T. The underlying realisations allow us to make further predictions and relate some of the effective couplings. The models encompass all the needed ingredients to describe the signal channels and relevant constraints. We will also provide distinctive signatures aimed at disentangling the composite nature from the elementary one.

We then make contact with time-honoured models of minimal composite dynamics [3, 4]. Weinberg and Susskind’s minimal models of dynamical electroweak (EW) symmetry breaking [3, 4] are based on QCD-like dynamics and are at odds with experiments. Within this early model realisations one finds the pioneering work of Di Vecchia and Veneziano [7] that long ago envisioned a scenario similar to the one presented here. Modern incarnations that are still minimal but employ non-QCD like dynamics are phenomenologically viable [5–10]. Complementary signal channels for spin-one resonances have been investigated in more complete model implementations, e.g. in [11], that can even explain the 2-TeV diboson excess [12]. The general features, regarding resonance mass, cross-section and decay patterns are very much in line with models of weak scale compositeness [8, 11].

Therefore the minimal weak-scale composite paradigm, besides solving the hierarchy problem:

- explains the diphoton excess,
- naturally accommodates the 750 GeV mass,
- predicts and relates new processes,
- can be disentangled from other less natural models.

Amusingly, the best fit value for the decay constant of the new state is highly compatible with the one needed to break the EW symmetry dynamically.

Assuming the existence of a new pseudoscalar state a the CP conserving effective operators linking the spin-zero resonance with the SM fermions are

\[ L^a_{\eta q} = -\sum_{i,j} g_{\eta ij} q_i Y^*_{ij} q_j , \]  

where i,j runs over all flavors. The effective operators linking our states to SM gauge bosons are

\[ L^a_{V V} = -\sum_{V_1 V_2} \frac{g_{V_1 V_2}}{8} a V_1 V_2 , \]

with

\[ \sum_{V_1 V_2} g_{V_1 V_2} V_1 V_2 = g_{G G} \text{Tr}[G_{\mu \nu} \tilde{G}^{\mu \nu}] + g_{A A} A_{\mu \nu} \tilde{A}^{\mu \nu} + g_{Z Z} Z_{\mu \nu} \tilde{Z}^{\mu \nu} + 2g_{W W} W_{\mu \nu} W^{\mu \nu} + 2g_{\tilde{W} \tilde{W}} \tilde{W}_{\mu \nu} \tilde{W}^{\mu \nu} \]

and \( \tilde{V}_{\mu \nu} = \epsilon_{\mu \nu \rho} V_{\rho} \). Depending on the underlying realisation some of these couplings might either vanish, develop hierarchies and/or be related to each other. In the following we will consider the case in which the effective couplings in (1) are negligible.

**Axion Realisation**

We add to the SM the terms:

\[ \Delta \mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \left( \partial_{\mu} a \partial^{\mu} a - m_a^2 a^2 \right) + i T \gamma_5 D_{\mu} T - i g Y T m_T a \tilde{T} Y T - m_T T T + \Delta_{\text{mix}}^{\text{mix}} T \]

where T is an SU(2) weak singlet vectorlike quark in a given representation of color interactions. The new Yukawa interaction strength is controlled by \( y_T \) and the a
decay constant $f_a$. The mixing mass-term operator $\Delta^{\text{mix}}_{f/T}$ between the top and the new colored state vanishes unless the representation of $T$ is the fundamental of color and/or the hypercharge matches. The action above can represent that of an axion-like state. We will see later that a more natural interpretation emerges when this state is viewed as a composite one, provided new operators are added stemming from its topological sector.

$T$ loops, in the fundamental representation of color, generate the following effective couplings

$$
\sigma_{pp \rightarrow a} = \frac{m_a^2}{4m_T^2} \Gamma_{AA}^T, \quad \sigma_{aA} = \frac{4\alpha_{\text{em}}}{3\pi f_a} \Gamma_{A\tilde{A}}^T,
$$

where $\theta_W$ is the weak mixing angle and, in the approximation $m_a < 2m_T$, we have $F(x) = \arcsin(\sqrt{x}) / x \approx 1 + x/3 + 8x^2/45 + 4x^3/35$. From the model we arrive at the following relevant partial decay rates

$$
\Gamma(a \rightarrow \gamma\gamma) = \frac{m_a^3}{64\pi} (g_{A\tilde{A}}^T)^2 , \quad \Gamma(a \rightarrow ZZ) = \frac{m_a^3}{64\pi} \left(\frac{8}{T_f^2}\right)^2 (1 - \frac{m_Z^2}{m_a^2})^{3/2},
$$

and branching ratios

$$
B(a \rightarrow \gamma\gamma) \approx 0.0063 , \quad B(a \rightarrow ZZ) \approx 0.00055 .
$$

From the above it is clear that the branching ratio into two photons dominates with respect to the other EW channels. Furthermore, while the partial widths depend directly on $f_a/\sqrt{\sigma}$ and $m_a$ the branching ratios depend only on $\alpha_T$ and weak coupling constants.

We implement our model in MadGraph5_aMC@NLO \cite{MG5} with the effective couplings in (5) and we calculate the $a$ production cross-section at leading order. The QCD next-to-leading order (NLO) corrections are calculated using the model provided in \cite{Mangano:2006rw}. For $m_a \approx 750$ GeV we obtain a NLO $K$-factor: $K^{NLO} \approx 2.6$.

Fig. 1 shows the production cross-section of the pseudoscalar $a$ at the LHC with $\sqrt{s} = 13$ TeV as function of $m_a$ for the specific $f_a/\sqrt{\sigma}$ value which reproduces the ATLAS excess, and for a 1 TeV vectorlike quark $T$.

A fit to the ATLAS excess, in the narrow-width-approximation, gives the value $\sigma(pp \rightarrow a \rightarrow 2\gamma) = (6 \pm 3) \text{ fb}$. Remarkably this value is reproduced by our model for an $f_a$ scale

$$
f_a/\sqrt{\sigma} = 245 \pm 100 \text{ GeV},
$$

with $m_T = 1$ TeV. We find a very mild dependence of our results on the $T$ mass. A lower limit on $m_T$ of the order of 800 GeV is placed by the run-1 LHC results \cite{ATLAS:2014oda}. The vectorlike quark coupling to $a$, $y_T m_T f_a$, reaches the non-perturbative regime for $m_T \gtrsim 1/y_T$ TeV.

On top of the presence of the vectorlike $T$, possibly within the reach of the current LHC run \cite{ATLAS:2018uph}, the model predicts a significant $a$ decay branching ratio to $Z\gamma$. The corresponding signal with $Z$ decaying to leptons could be observed when the experiments will have collected roughly 100 fb$^{-1}$. This would correspond to a number of expected signal events comparable with those in the $\gamma\gamma$ excess. The narrow $a$ resonance can also be detected via di-jets. However, the sensitivity of the 8 TeV searches \cite{ATLAS:2014oda} in this channel is low, due to the overwhelming QCD background at the relatively low di-jet mass spectrum near 750 GeV. In fact, the CMS search \cite{CMS:2018xer} places an upper limit on the di-jet cross-section times acceptance of about 1.8 pb for a resonance at 750 GeV, which is an order of magnitude above the value we obtain for the $a$ pseudoscalar, that is $\sim 70$ fb, assuming an acceptance of 0.6. The run-1 LHC searches in the $\gamma\gamma$ channel at $\sqrt{s} = 8$ TeV \cite{ATLAS:2015dik,CMS:2015hza} are also compatible with our explanation of the diphoton excess at 13 TeV. The 95\% C.L. upper limit on the $\gamma\gamma$ cross-section at the invariant mass $m_{\gamma\gamma} \sim 750$ GeV is of about 1.5 fb, while the axion model predicts about 0.7 fb. The present explanation of the ATLAS and CMS diphoton excesses, therefore, passes all of the current experimental tests.

**Minimal Composite Dynamics**

We move now to the interpretation of the new state within minimal (near-conformal) models of dynamical EW symmetry breaking \cite{Eichten:1980td,Eichten:1981ms,Murayama:1993gn}. In particular the new heavy resonance can be identified, in composite models at the EW scale, with the singlet $a$ state that we rename here $a$. This requires a new strongly coupled sector featuring $N_F^2$ Dirac flavors
transforming under the representation \( R \) of a new gauge sector \( SU(N_T) \) with \( N_T \) the new color.

Assuming that the number of flavors is barely outside the conformal window \([20]\), the new gauge sector will generate chiral symmetry breaking with confining scale \( \Lambda_T \) and technipion decay constant \( F_T \). At energies below \( \Lambda_T \) the relevant degrees of freedom, needed for the present analysis, are encoded in the unitary matrix

\[
U = e^{i \tilde{F}/F_T} = \exp \left[ \frac{i}{F_T} (a + \tilde{\tau} \cdot \vec{\pi}) \right],
\]

where \( \tilde{\tau} \equiv (\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3) \) are the standard Pauli matrices, whereas \( a \) and \( \tilde{\pi} \equiv (\pi^1, \pi^2, \pi^3) \) are, respectively, the singlet and isotriplet pseudoscalar resonances. For simplicity we assume \( N^S_T = 2 \), but it is straightforward to generalise this to a different number of flavors. The associated quantum global symmetry is \( SU(2)_L \times SU(2)_R \). Although a larger symmetry group can be considered for a possible realisation within composite Goldstone Higgs dynamics we focus here on minimal composite realisations\([11]\). Of course, we should also include a Higgs-like state. Depending on the explicit underlying dynamics, it might emerge either as the lightest dilaton-like state stemming from a near conformal theory \([9, 28]\) or, if the symmetry is opportunistically enhanced, as pseudo Goldstone Boson \([5, 8]\). Furthermore near-conformality\([8\) alleviates tension with EW precision measurements \([22]\) and flavor changing neutral currents constraints \([10]\).

The effective action generating the relevant \( a \) interaction is:

\[
\Gamma = \int d^4 x (\mathcal{L}_0 + \mathcal{L}_{m_a} + \mathcal{L}_{WZW}).
\] (13)

Each term in \([13]\) can be expressed in terms of \( U \), the Maurer-Cartan one-forms

\[
\alpha = (\partial_m U) U^{-1} \, dx^m \equiv (dU) U^{-1}, \quad \beta = U^{-1} \alpha U \quad (14)
\]

and additional “left” and “right” one-forms, \( A_L = A^L_{\mu} dx^\mu \) and \( A_R = A^R_{\mu} dx^\mu \), with

\[
A^L_{\mu} = g_Y \left( Q - \frac{1}{2} \tau_3 \right) B^\mu + \frac{1}{2} g_V \tilde{\pi} \cdot \vec{W}^\mu, \quad A^R_{\mu} = g_Y Q B^\mu,
\]

where \( Q \) denotes the electric charge matrix of the fundamental technifermions.

The relevant Lagrangian terms are

\[
\mathcal{L}_0 = \mathcal{L}_{\text{kin}} + \frac{F^2}{2} \text{Tr} \left[ \partial_\mu \xi^\dagger \partial^\mu \xi \right] - \frac{F^2}{2} \text{Tr} \left[ \xi^\dagger \partial_\mu \xi^\dagger \partial^\mu \xi \right] + \frac{F^2}{4} \text{Tr} \left[ A^L_{\mu} A_{L\mu} + A^R_{\mu} A_{R\mu} \right] - \frac{F^2}{2} \text{Tr} \left[ A^L_{\mu} U A_{R\mu} U^\dagger \right] - i \frac{F^2}{2} \text{Tr} \left[ \xi^\dagger \partial_\mu \xi \partial_\mu \xi \right] \xi^\dagger A^L_{\mu} - \partial_\mu \xi \xi^\dagger A^R_{\mu} U^\dagger \right],
\] (15)

where \( \xi \equiv U^{1/2} \) and \( \mathcal{L}_{\text{kin}} \) is the standard kinetic term for the vector fields. The second term in \([13]\) comes from a quantum anomaly and it provides a mass term for the singlet \( a \). It reads

\[
\mathcal{L}_{m_a} = \frac{\kappa F^2}{8 \sqrt{3} \tau_3} \text{Tr} \left[ \ln U - \ln U^\dagger \right]^2, \quad (16)
\]

and \( \kappa \) is connected to the mass of \( \eta_0 \) \((m_{\eta_0} = 849 \text{ MeV})\).[1]

\[
\kappa = \frac{1}{9} \frac{F^2}{6} \frac{g^2}{\sqrt{3}} \frac{m^2_{\eta_0}}{N_T}. \quad (18)
\]

Then, the mass of \( a \) (taking \( f_a = 92 \text{ MeV} \), for technifermions in the fundamental representation, is

\[
m_\mu = \sqrt{\frac{2}{3} F_T \frac{3}{\sqrt{2} \tau_3} m_{\eta_0} \approx \frac{6}{N_T} \text{ TeV}}. \quad (19)
\]

Thus, we have that a 750 GeV \( a \)-state naturally emerges in this scenario for \( N_T = 6 \) and 8. Similar values of \( m_a \) could emerge from near conformal field theories with smaller \( N_T \).[8, 12]

As for the relevant terms arising from the gauged Wess-Zumino-Witten operator \([7, 11, 13, 44]\) we have:

\[
\Gamma_{WZW}[U, A_L, A_R] = \Gamma_{WZW}[U] - 5C \int_{M^4} \text{Tr} \left[ (dA_L A_L + A_L dA_L) \alpha + (dA_R A_R + A_R dA_R) \beta \right] + 5C \int_{M^4} \text{Tr} \left[ dA_L dA_R U^{-1} - A_R dU^{-1} A_L U \right] + \cdots, \quad (20)
\]

where \( C = -i d(R)/(240 \pi^2) \), \( d(R) \) is the dimension of the technifermion representation. For the fundamental representation \( d(\text{Fund}) = N_T \). Here \( F_L \) and \( F_R \) are two-forms defined as \( F_L = dA_L - i A^L_{\mu} A^L_\mu \) and \( F_R = dA_R - i A^R_{\mu} A^R_\mu \). The Wess-Zumino effective action is \( \Gamma_{WZW}[U] = C \int_{M^4} \text{Tr} [\alpha^5] \). From \([20]\) we have extra contributions to the effective couplings to the gauge bosons given in

\[ 3 \]

\[ \text{Here } \eta_0 \text{ indicates the QCD SU(3) flavor singlet state in the chiral limit, with } \theta_0 = (m_{\eta_0}^2 = m_q^2 + m_u^2 - 2 m_K^2). \quad (17) \]
that alter the predictions with respect to the axion-like scenario. These extra contributions are:

\[ g_{AA}^{\text{comp}} = (1 + y^2) \frac{e^2}{F_T} \frac{d(R)}{\pi^2}, \]

\[ g_{A\bar{A}}^{\text{comp}} = 1 - \frac{2(1 + y^2)s_W^2}{2 c_W s_W} \frac{e^2}{F_T} \frac{d(R)}{\pi^2}, \]

\[ g_{ZZ}^{\text{comp}} = \frac{e^2}{F_T} \frac{1 - 3s_W^2 + 3(1 + y^2)s_W^4}{3 c_W s_W^2} \frac{d(R)}{\pi^2}, \]

\[ g_{WW}^{\text{comp}} = \frac{e^2}{F_T} \frac{1}{s_W^2} \frac{d(R)}{24 \pi^2}. \]

\( y \) being the hypercharge of the (left-handed) fundamental technifermions \([7]\) with the normalisation \( Y(Q_L) = y/2 \) and \( Y(U_R/D_R) = (y \pm 1)/2 \) and \( Q = Y + \tau_3/2 \). Here \( Q_L \) is the techniquark \( SU(2)_L \) transforming doublet and \( Q_R = (U_R, D_R) \) the singlet.\( ^4 \)

To compare with the elementary scenario, we added the same coupling in \([3]\) between the composite \( a \) and the new fermion \( T \). It could be generated via instantons from the techniquark \( SU(2)_L \) transforming doublet and \( Q_R = (U_R, D_R) \) the singlet.\( ^4 \)

We now calculate the region of the parameter space which allows to reproduce the diphoton excess passes all of the current constraints from the LHC searches for diboson resonances. At \( \sqrt{s} = 13 \) TeV, for a resonance of \( \sim 750 \) GeV, the strongest constraint on the ZZ (WW) channel is placed by the ATLAS search in \([49]\) which gives an upper limit of about 250 (250) fb on \( \sigma(pp \rightarrow a \rightarrow ZZ \ (WW)) \), while for our \( \eta' \) we have at most \( \sim 4 \) fb. The run-1 searches at \( \sqrt{s} = 8 \) TeV give an upper limit on the resonance cross-section of about 10 fb in the ZZ channel \([51]\), to be compared with at most \( \sim 4 \) fb for our \( \eta' \), and of about 40 fb in the WW channel \([23]\), where we have at most \( \sim 4 \) fb. Finally, the ATLAS search on the \( Z\gamma \) channel \([53]\) gives an upper limit \( \sigma(pp \rightarrow a \rightarrow Z\gamma) \lesssim 4 \) fb, which is fulfilled in our scenario, predicting a cross-section of at most \( \sim 1 \) fb.

The di-jet channel from the \( a \rightarrow gg \) decay, which is the dominant decay mode for the axion-like scenario discussed in the first part of this work is instead suppressed for the \( \eta' \)-like state. The WW channel, which is absent for the axion-like particle may have a relevant branching ratio which is enhanced compared to \( \gamma\gamma \) for \( y \lesssim 1 \). The ZZ channel is also enhanced compared to the axion-like scenario, especially for smaller \( y \) values. Finally, the \( \gamma Z \) channel is enhanced compared to the axion-like case for \( y \lesssim 0.5 \), whereas it is suppressed for larger \( y \) values.

In the present study we have not included the potential effects of a direct SM top coupling to either the elementary or composite particle. In the elementary case we have checked that, when one includes the coupling to the top \( m_t/\alpha_s \sim 0.7 \), the branching ratio in diphoton is too small to explain the excess because the total width of \( a \) is dominated by the tree-level decay into SM tops. In the composite case the actual strength of the coupling to the SM top depends on the underlying scenario for the SM fermion mass generation. To provide a direct comparison with the axion case we have considered above scenarios in which the coupling to the SM top is suppressed. However, we have also investigated the case in which this coupling is as big as \( m_t/F_T \). We find that the excess can be reproduced, unlike the axion case, because of the topological terms, with and without the inclusion of the extra \( T \) fermion. We also checked that this scenario is consistent with the run-1 LHC experimental bounds on \( H \) resonances \([54, 55]\).

Our results show that a highly natural and minimal composite nature of the new potential particle, in terms
of an $\eta'$-like state, decaying into two photons can explain the excess. We have also demonstrated that the underlying axion or minimal composite nature of this state can be disentangled upon discovery and careful analysis of the related decay channels. Furthermore, our analysis is immediately applicable to set relevant constraints on EW scale composite dynamics at run-2 LHC.

Acknowledgments and note added: The CP$^3$-Origins center is partially funded by the Danish National Research Foundation, grant number DNRF90. While this paper was being completed a number of papers appeared [56, 57] that partially overlapped with the present one.

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