

# Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> bifunctional nanocomposite for sers detection of non-steroidal anti-inflammation drug diclofenac

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**Abstract.** In this work, a bifunctional nanocomposite based on silver and iron oxide nanoparticles (AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>) was prepared by combining co-precipitation of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and in-situ reduction of AgNPs and then used as SERS (Surface-Enhanced Raman Scattering) substrate for sensing diclofenac which is one of the most widely used non-steroid anti-inflammation drugs. Morphology and structural studies revealed a conjugated structure in which silver nanoparticles (80 nm in diameter) were surrounded by iron oxide nanoparticles (18 nm in diameter). There is a slight blue-shift in position of plasmon peak from 405 nm for silver nanoparticles to 375 nm for AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite. Even the saturation magnetization ( $M_s$ ) of the Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite only reached 28 emu·g<sup>-1</sup> but still good enough for immobilizing nanocomposite structures onto the substrate. The detection limit and enhancement factor of the SERS-based diclofenac sensor were found to be 10<sup>-12</sup> M and 2.6×10<sup>10</sup>, respectively. Such kind of bifunctional nanocomposite will probably help us to avoid time-consuming process to immobilize metal nanoparticles onto the surface, and also allow us to regenerate the substrate for multiple uses.

**Keywords:** AgNPs, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, bifunctional, SERS, NSAIDS.

**Classification numbers:** 2.2.1, 2.9.4, 3.2.1.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The overdose of diclofenac (DCF), a common anti-inflammatory drug, may cause serious issues such as aplastic anemia, gastrointestinal disorders, and disturb in renal function [1]. For

the detection of DCF, many analytical approaches have been developed such as spectroscopy techniques, electrochemistry, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, chromatography techniques [2]. These approaches share common drawbacks such as slow performance, difficult sample preparation, costly equipment, excessive use of organic solvents. As a result, the development of low-cost devices with high accuracy for on-site analysis of DCF in water samples is urgently needed.

Recently, SERS (Surface-Enhanced Raman Scattering) sensors are gaining more attention in food safety and drug analysis [3]. Basically, the working principle of SERS sensor is based on the coupling between Raman (inelastic scattering of photons) and plasmon effects of metallic nanostructures. At close approximation nearby surface of metal nanostructures, the Raman fingerprint signals from targeted molecules can be enhanced up to  $10^{14}$  times via resonance process. Some other advantages of SERS technique can be named as non-destructive measurement and good selectivity.

SERS sensors for DCF (also other NSAIDs) identification and detection have been developed recently by several research groups. In order to enable the regeneration of SERS substrates, one might combine plasmonic behavior of noble metallic nanoparticles and superparamagnetic behavior of iron oxide material. The two materials can be prepared either in core-shell structure (usually iron oxide core and silver shell) or in conjugated structure (one material is surrounded by the other one). In the former structure, the surface iron oxide nanoparticles are generally modified with the aid of silica ad-layer and suitable linking agents before coating with a thin shell layer of silver [4]. It must be noticed that this is a time-consuming process in which many expensive reagents are needed. In the later form, either silver nanoparticles will be grown onto the surface of iron oxide nanoparticles or the two materials can be grown together in one-pot approach. For instance, Z. Y. Bao *et al.* have reported the in-situ reduction of silver ions on the surface of iron oxide microspheres to generate Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> conjugated structure [5]. Another approach is to prepare Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite via one-pot procedure in which the two metallic precursors were added to reaction mixture so that the two materials can grow in the same time. The use of a 'sticky' reagent such as 4-mercaptobenzoic acid might improve the adsorption and order of Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> particles onto the substrate. Several biological reducing reagents (i.e, exine compounds from pollen grains) might be employed to offer a green way to prepare Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite. In some cases, the organic layer at middle region (i.e, polyacrylic acid) between silver and iron oxide materials might become an internal SERS reference to improve the reliability and enable quantification of analytes. It was reported that the conjugated structure of the hybrid nanocomposite might provide better enhancement factors compared to core-shell structures [6]. The bifunctional material Ag/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> can be also utilized in other applications such as catalytic degradation of organic pollutants, antibacterial tests, and even energy storage [7].

Herein, we employ a conjugated structure with silver nanoparticles (NPs) surrounded by iron oxide nanoparticles (AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>). The introduction of magnetic particles will surely facilitate the concentration of metal nanoparticles onto the substrate, and then easily removed them when needed. The iron oxide nanoparticles were first prepared via a co-precipitation process from iron salts in ammonia solution, and then silver nanoparticles were grown in an aqueous solution containing magnetic particles via a reduction process with the aid of hydroxylamine. The APTMS linker (3-aminopropyltrimethoxysilane) was additionally introduced to provide linkage between metal and oxide particles. The morphological and structural behaviors of the as-prepared nanocomposite will be carefully evaluated using scanning electron microscopy (SEM), Transmission electron microscopy (TEM), UV-vis spectrometry

(UV-vis), X-ray diffraction (XRD), X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) techniques. The saturation magnetization of the material will be estimated from Vibrating Sample Magnetometer (VSM). The enhancement factor of Raman signals coming from targeted drug molecules will be calculated to evaluate the efficiency of the use of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> composite as a substrate material.

## **2. EXPERIMENTS**

### **2.1. Synthesis of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles**

By co-precipitating ferric and ferrous salts (from Beijing Chemicals Corporation, China) in the presence of argon gas, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> magnetic nanoparticles were synthesized. 100 mL of deionized water was dissolved with 16.25 g FeCl<sub>3</sub> and 6.35 g FeCl<sub>2</sub>. Chemical precipitation was obtained at 25 °C under vigorous stirring using magnetic stirrer by adding NH<sub>4</sub>OH solution (29.6 %). The pH was maintained at around 10 throughout the procedure and the black precipitate was obtained. The color of the iron solution changes during the synthesis process from yellow to brown-black. The mixture solution was continuously stirred by a magnetic stirrer during this process. The precipitates were heated at 80 °C for 30 min, washed several times in water and ethanol after the synthesis, and then, dried in a vacuum oven at 70 °C.

### **2.2. Preparation of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite structures**

First, 0.05 g of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs was added to 100 mL of ethanol and sonicated for 30 min to facilitate binding with APTMS (3-aminopropyltrimethoxysilane 97 %), Sigma Aldrich). Then, 0.2 mL of APTMS was added, then vigorously agitated for 6 h. The particles were repeatedly washed in absolute ethanol after being removed from the solution by a magnetic field, and dried for 1.5 h in a vacuum oven at 70 °C. After that, AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were formed by reducing AgNO<sub>3</sub> (> 99.8 %, Beijing Chemicals), with hydroxylamine hydrochloride while having Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs that had been coated with APTMS. Briefly, 100 mL of a 0.15 wt.% AgNO<sub>3</sub> solution received 0.05 g of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> before being sonicated for 30 min. 100 mL of freshly made reductant, which was a combination of 45 mL of 0.06 M hydroxylamine hydrochloride and 50 mL of 0.1 M NaOH solution, was added and stirred for an additional 45 min. The last particles were acquired by applying a magnetic field and washing them in water until the supernatant became transparent and obtained.

### **2.3. SERS detection of diclofenac**

For the SERS measurement, 25 µL of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs in water were put on a glass slide placed on top of the magnet, then DCF 10<sup>-8</sup> M solution was added on top of NPs droplets. After the substrates were dried under ambient conditions, five spectra were collected at different positions of the substrates and the average of these spectra was used as the final spectrum for the sample. To optimize the testing conditions, the SERS substrates were prepared with different concentrations but same volume of nanocomposite structures deposited on to the same substrate area. The concentrations of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were varied from 0.2 to 0.4 mg·mL<sup>-1</sup>. The optimal concentration was then used to detect DCF with different concentrations to evaluate the sensitivity of nanocomposite AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-based SERS substrate. These measurements were carried out in HR Evolution Raman system at 1 % power of 532 nm laser.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1. Morphology studies

The morphological behaviors of the samples were examined by capturing the scanning electronic microscopy (SEM, Hitachi -4800) and transmission electronic microscopy (TEM, Zeiss Libra 120 Plus, Stuttgart, Germany, operating at 120 kV) images (as shown in Figure 1). SEM image of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles shows the formation of conjugated structure made of silver nanoparticles (80 nm) surrounding by iron oxide nanoparticles (15-20 nm). Due to the difference in electron scattering ability between the two materials, the AgNPs are found in darker region with higher contrast whereas Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs are found in lighter region with lower contrast [6]. The spherical shape is commonly found in metal and magnetic particles prepared in similar conditions [8]. Meanwhile, it was also shown that iron oxide particles (particle size below 20 nm) were aggregated forming large clusters if silver is not incorporated into the particles. From TEM images, the average size of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were also estimated to be 80 nm and 18 nm, respectively. It is doubtless that the APTMS linker with one amine end and one silane end is the main contributor to the strong attachment between metal and oxide particles. Otherwise, the use of hydroxylamine as reducing agent during the growth of silver nanoparticles might have also helped to improve the adhesion between the two counterparts of this metal-oxide conjugation [4].

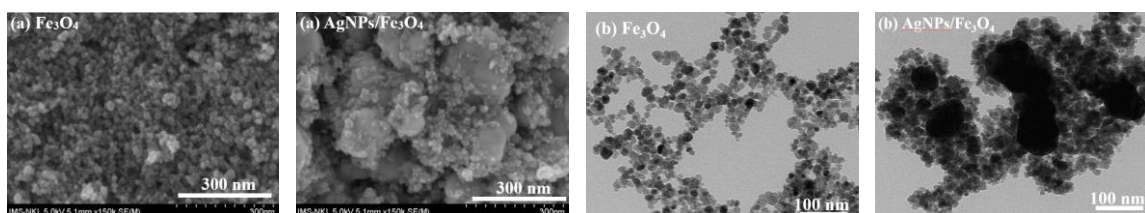


Figure 1. (a) SEM and (b) TEM images of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>.

Compared to core-shell structure as observed in other works, the proposed morphology of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> composite shows several advantages as follows. First, since the magnetic particles are not fully covered by non-magnetic AgNPs, the magnetization of the composite is still sufficient to ensure an easy deposition/ removal of the complex onto/from the substrate using an external magnetic field. J. Ma *et al.* have reported that the AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> core-shell structure exhibits ferromagnetic behavior with the saturation magnetization less than 30 emu·g<sup>-1</sup> even at the thickness of oxide coating up to 76 nm [4]. Second, the intrinsic aggregation of metal nanoparticles will surely be limited due to the presence of iron magnetic particles on their surface [9]. Lastly, the inter-particle distance between metal particles will also be kept close enough to ensure high efficiency of localized surface plasmon resonance due to the attraction between magnetic particles. These kinds of magnetic-plasmonic composite material are very suitable to be employed in microfluidic SERS systems (SERS sensors integrated onto microfluidic devices) whereas interfacial process are actually restricted.

#### 3.2. Structural behaviors

##### 3.2.1. XRD and EDX patterns

The X-ray diffraction (XRD, Bruker AXS D8 Advance) patterns of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite structures were recorded from  $2\theta = 10^\circ$  to  $70^\circ$  to confirm the

composition and crystalline structure of synthesized materials. XRD pattern of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> sample (Figure 2a) shows six characteristic peaks for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> including  $2\theta = 30.1^\circ$ ,  $35.5^\circ$ ,  $43.0^\circ$ ,  $53.4^\circ$ ,  $56.9^\circ$  and  $62.7^\circ$ . These sharp diffraction peaks are attributed to the (220), (311), (400), (422), (511), and (440) planes and reveal to the face-centered cubic phase of synthesized Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (JCPDS card 3-0863, magnetite) [10].

Due to the higher atomic number of Ag compared to Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> [11], the scattering ability of Ag is much stronger and resulting in the dominant of relative reflection intensity of Ag in AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> sample. The typical peaks for Ag are  $2\theta = 38.1^\circ$ ,  $44.6^\circ$ ,  $67.4^\circ$  which can be assigned to the (111), (200), and (220) Bragg's reflections (JCPDS card no.04-0783). The average crystal size can be estimated from the peak width using Debye-Scherrer equation,  $D = \frac{k\lambda}{\beta \cos\theta}$ , where  $k = 0.95$  is Scherrer's constant,  $\lambda$  is the X-ray wavelength ( $1.54178\text{\AA}$ ),  $\beta$  is the full width at half maximum (FWHM), and  $\theta$  is the Bragg diffraction angle. The crystal sizes of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite NPs were calculated to be 18 nm and 92 nm, respectively. These results are in a quite good agreement with those obtained from SEM and TEM images.

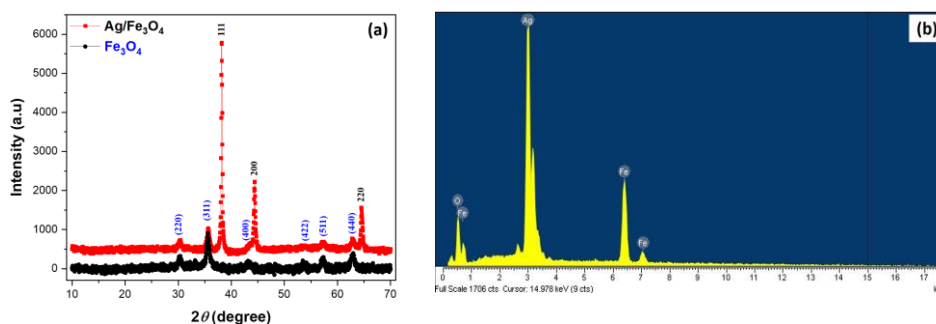


Figure 2. XRD patterns of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (a); EDX spectrum of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite nanoparticles (b).

The elemental composition on the surface of the synthesized AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> sample was determined with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX) measurement. EDX spectrum (Figure 2b) shown that the AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite is mainly composed of silver (Ag), iron (Fe) and oxygen (O) elements. The atomic percentages of silver, iron and oxygen were estimated to be 18.37 %, 15.30 % and 66.33 %, respectively. The Ag/Fe ratio was found to be 1.2 which is close to the expected ratio of precursors.

### 3.2.3. XPS spectra

XPS (PHI 5000 VersaProbe) survey spectra of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> samples (Figure 3a) confirm the presence of Ag, Fe, O elements. Typical Cl and N impurities from the synthesis of the investigated materials are also visible. The high-resolution XPS spectra of both samples was also provided to determine the binding states of the detected elements. The results have clearly confirmed the conjugation between Ag<sup>0</sup> and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles in the AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite (see Figure 3b, c, d). First, the high-resolution Ag3d spectrum of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite exhibits the two energy binding levels with a gap of 6.0 eV at 368.3 eV (Ag 3d<sub>5/2</sub>) and 374.3 eV (Ag 3d<sub>3/2</sub>) which are featured for Ag<sup>0</sup> state but not Ag<sup>+</sup> ions [9]. Second, the Fe2p deconvoluted XPS spectrum of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> sample shows the two main peaks at 710.6 eV (spin 3/2) and 724.2 eV (spin 1/2) are assigned to Fe<sup>2+/3+</sup> [12]. The next peaks above the energy of 712.5 eV may refer to Fe-organic metal compounds, including Fe-Cl bonds, which



plasmon peak in Au@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> core-shell structure (by 20 nm) due to the change in dielectric environment. Contrastly, R. Chhokra *et al.* have reported that the position of plasmon peak in Ag@Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> core-shell nanocluster was blue-shifted by 23 nm (compared to bare AgNPs). The absorption peak of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> heterodimer was found to remain at the same position with that in AgNPs [6].

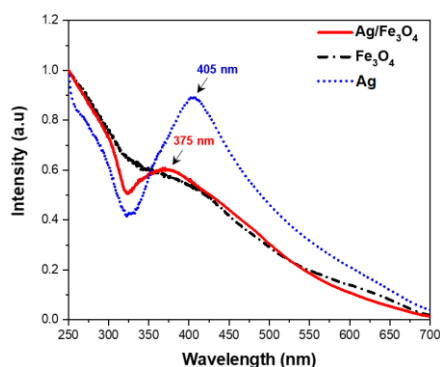


Figure 4. UV-vis spectra of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> samples.

### 3.4. Magnetic analysis

Vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM) measurement was performed to evaluate magnetic behavior of the as-prepared samples. As seen in Figure 5, the magnetization curves of the samples show superparamagnetic properties of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, i.e without hysteresis and remanence. The saturation magnetization ( $M_s$ ) for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> samples reaches values of 64 and 28 emu·g<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. The silver nanoparticles with diamagnetic behavior and the non-magnetic linker APTMS may be responsible for this decrease in  $M_s$  value (43.75 %). It must be noted that only metal particles with the size less than 2 nm might exhibit paramagnetic or ferromagnetic behavior whereas metallic structures are generally diamagnetic. Since the size of silver nanoparticles is around 80 nm (as evidenced by SEM and TEM images), it is understandable that the saturation magnetization  $M_s$  of the composite material was significantly smaller compared with pure magnetic particles. In previous works, it was shown that the magnetization in AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> samples can be decreased by 40 % - 70 % [5, 6]. However, a moderate value of saturation magnetization is still sufficient for further immobilization of metal nanostructures onto substrates in SERS sensing applications.

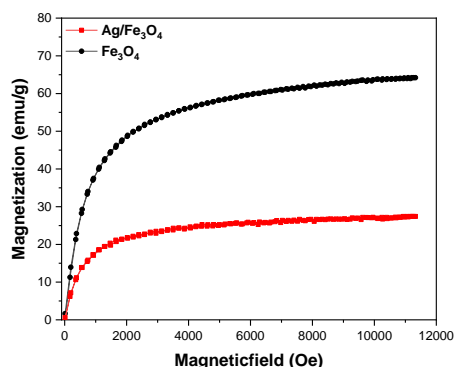


Figure 5. Magnetization curves of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> samples.

### 3.5. SERS substrate based on AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoscomposite for detection of diclofenac

It is essential to define the fingerprints of the samples in SERS sensors. In fact, the most characteristic band in the Raman spectrum of DCF which measured by Horiba LabRAM HR Evolution is triplet around  $1600\text{ cm}^{-1}$  [15]. The bands at  $1640$  and  $1610\text{ cm}^{-1}$  are given by the phenylacetate and dichlorophenyl ring stretching vibrations whereas the asymmetric carboxylate stretching vibration is located around  $1560\text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Herein, the Raman shift relevant to asymmetric stretching vibration of the carboxylate ( $1560\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) was chosen as fingerprint of DCF on Raman spectra.

Firstly, we tested the amount of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite to be deposited onto the substrate. A  $25\text{ }\mu\text{L}$  drop of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> suspension with concentration ranging from  $0.2$  to  $0.4\text{ mg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$  was dropped on to the substrate, then left to be dried. A magnet was previously fixed under the substrate. The concentration of DCF was fixed to be  $10^{-8}\text{ M}$ . As seen in Figure 6, the Raman signals were decreased with increasing amount of nanocomposite and the highest signals were obtained at AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite concentration of  $0.2\text{ mg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$  (Figure 6). Probably, the large amount of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite has led to the formation of agglomerated clusters and then reduce the active plasmon surface area.

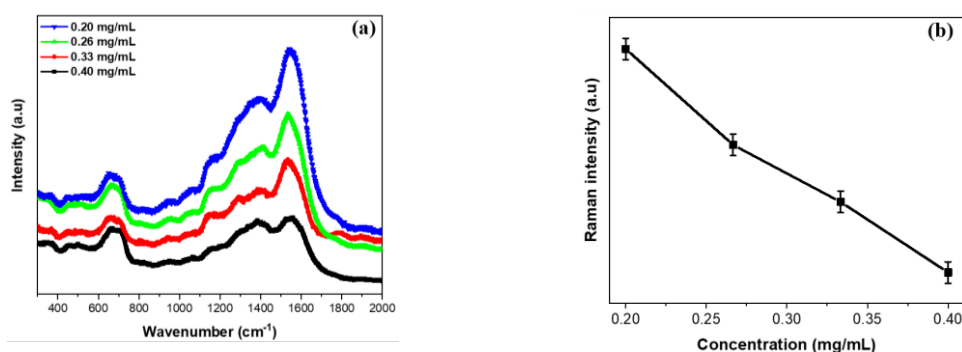


Figure 6. (a) The Raman spectra of DCF  $10^{-8}\text{ M}$  at different concentrations of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite structures ( $0.2\text{ mg mL}^{-1}$ ,  $0.26\text{ mg mL}^{-1}$ ,  $0.33\text{ mg mL}^{-1}$ ,  $0.4\text{ mg mL}^{-1}$ ), (b) A graph of Raman peak intensity at  $1560\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite concentration.

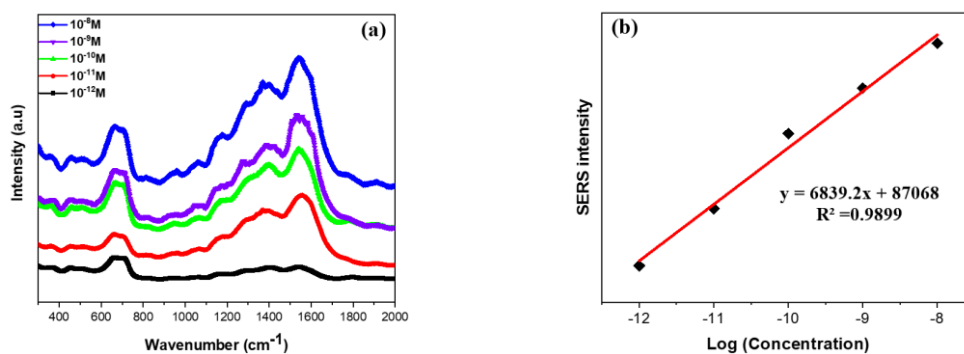


Figure 7. (a) SERS spectra of DCF with the concentrations ranging from  $10^{-8}$  to  $10^{-12}\text{ M}$  and (b) intensity of DCF at  $1560\text{ cm}^{-1}$  peak as a function of different concentrations in a logarithmic scale.

A calibration curve was then built with different DCF concentration ranging from  $10^{-8}\text{ M}$  to  $10^{-12}\text{ M}$ . The SERS substrate were prepared by drop-casting  $25\text{ }\mu\text{L}$  of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs suspension ( $0.2\text{ mg}\cdot\text{mL}^{-1}$ ) and dried naturally at room temperature. The DCF solutions with



known concentrations were then dropped onto SERS substrates. The substrates were washed thoroughly with water to remove unbound DCF molecules. Of course, a magnet was always fixed under the substrate. As shown in Figure 7a, the Raman intensity at 1560 cm<sup>-1</sup> increased with increasing sample concentration with the linear regression equation as follows:

$$I_{1560} = 6839.2 * \log(C_{DCF}) + 87068 (R^2 = 0.989).$$

The limit of detection (LOD) is defined as the concentration of analyte at three standard deviations of the blank signal by the following:

$$LOD = 3.3 * \sigma/S$$

where 3.3 is the signal/noise ratio,  $\sigma$  is the standard deviation, and  $S$  is the slope of the calibration curve shown in Figure 7b, respectively. Herein, the LOD was determined to be 10<sup>-12</sup> M. This value is quite low with those obtained in previous works [5, 16]. The enhancement factor ( $EF$ ) is an essential parameter to evaluate the magnification of the Raman signal of targeted molecules interacting with the plasmonic nanostructures in SERS sensors. Under the same preparation conditions and identical experimental conditions (such as normalized of laser power, acquisition time, etc.), the SERS  $EF$  can be defined as:

$$EF = \left( \frac{I_{SERS}}{I_{NR}} \right) \left( \frac{C_{NR}}{C_{SERS}} \right)$$

where  $I_{SERS}$  stands for the SERS intensity in which DCF was counted at the peak 1560 cm<sup>-1</sup> using AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> substrate.  $I_{NR}$  implies the normal Raman intensity of DCF at the same peak and without substrate.  $C_{NR}$  and  $C_{SERS}$  are the concentrations of DCF in the normal Raman experiment without substrate, and SERS experiment with substrate, respectively. In this study, the  $I_{SERS}$  was counted at 1560 cm<sup>-1</sup> peak at the concentration of 10<sup>-12</sup> M, and the  $I_{NR}$  was 1704.23 (1560 cm<sup>-1</sup> peak) at the concentration of 10<sup>-2</sup> M. The obtained enhancement factor is  $EF = 2.6 \times 10^{10}$  which is superior compared to those obtained in previous works [16].

The great enhancement factor in sensing performance of SERS sensor based on AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanocomposite can be explained as follows. Since the silver nanoparticles are surrounded by iron oxide nanoparticles, they should have been gathered in a well-ordered manner at closer intra-particle distance on the substrate [5]. On the other hand, it may increase the density of hot spots which intensified the localized surface plasmon resonances [6]. Besides, the pure metallic nanoparticles can easily aggregate to form big clusters which generally narrowed the resonance band or weakened the measured signals [5].

The good reproducibility is vital for the practical applications of SERS sensors. To evaluate this parameter, the SERS intensities for the band vibration of DCF at 1560 cm<sup>-1</sup> were collected from ten random spots. The relative standard deviation (RSD) value of SERS signals was 6.1%, suggesting the highly reproducible of SERS signals.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This work reported here combines the advantages of the highly enhanced SERS effect from AgNPs and the magnetic property offered by Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs. The results showed a successful formation of AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> conjugates with the size of metal particle around 80 nm and the interparticle distance less than 20 nm. The intensity of the plasmon peak resulted from silver nanoparticles is relatively strong even though the position of the peak is slightly blue-shifted. The saturation magnetization is reasonable so that the conjugated nanostructure could be immediately and firmly assembled onto glass slides by an external magnet. The SERS substrate

based on AgNPs/Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> bifunctional nanocomposite is able to detect diclofenac with detection limit of 10<sup>-12</sup> M and enhancement factor up to 10<sup>10</sup>. In our future work, this bifunctional nanocomposite will be further employed to enable a facile and reversible immobilization of metallic nanostructures inside microfluidic devices onto which SERS detector is integrated and coupled with capillary electrophoresis separation.

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**CRedit authorship contribution statement.** Duy Hai Bui, Do Chung Pham, Magdalena Osial, Marcin Pisarek, Thi Nam Pham, Thi Thanh Huong Nguyen: Data curation, Formal analysis. Anna Tycova: Methodology, Visualization. Thi Thu Vu: Writing review and editing. Thi Thanh Ngan Nguyen: Writing original draft, Writing review and editing.

**Competing Interest declaration.** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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