

# Gold-capped Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles with a magnetic field by damaging their DNA and generating more oxygen radicals, colon cancer cells can be made to die

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## Original Research

### Abstract:

Published online:  
15 June 2024

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Using a hydrothermal technique, the gold (Au)-capped magnetite nanoparticles (Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>) in the current work were created. TEM, SEM and FTIR were used to analyze the characteristics of the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au MNPs and confirm the accuracy of the synthesized Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au. The size range of (5 – 15) nm was observed for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au. By using the MTT assay, the impact of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au on the proliferation of colon cancer (HT-29) cells was evaluated. Additionally, the cytotoxicity effects of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au on (HT-29) cells were evaluated in both the absence and presence of alternating magnetic field (AMF) and laser photothermal therapy. According to the findings, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au caused (HT-29) cells' proliferation to be inhibited, which led to their planned demise. Cytotoxic activity against (HT-29) cells increased when exposed to NIR laser irradiation, however greatly elevated cytotoxic activity was seen after being exposed to induction heating with AMF. With regard to photothermal therapy for cancer cells, the current studies indicate that Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au with NIR laser and AMF may be promising.

**Keywords:** Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au MNPs; (HT-29) cells'; Hydrothermal technique; Photothermal therapy

## 1. Introduction

A significant issue for human society has always been cancer. Cancer continues to be one of the major causes of mortality worldwide, despite extensive research and progress over the past ten years. Recent data [1–3] indicate that cancer is the second leading cause of mortality worldwide, trailing only cardiovascular disease. Radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery are currently used as cancer treatments. These techniques, however, aren't just employed to treat cancer. Numerous studies have found that the results of two or three therapies combined are better and more successful than those of a single therapy. Nevertheless, healthy cells typically die as well, and the patient could have adverse effects. Researching innovative therapies is crucial for the management of cancer because of this [4, 5]. The use of nanotechnology in cancer treatment has grown significantly in recent years. Enhanced tumor cell killing, protection

against radiation side effects, and increased treatment sensitivity are some of its advantages in medication development. In the interim, there has been a great deal of interest in the application of metal oxide nanoparticles in the treatment of cancer. Natural metal oxides can be produced inexpensively and are rather prevalent in nature. As a result, research in this field is concentrated on creating affordable pharmaceutical goods, and the production of these nanoparticles may be one of the easiest methods [6, 7]. Due to their biocompatibility, physicality, low toxicity, durability, ability to stop the cell cycle, and magnetic properties, One of the most significant metal nanoparticles is magnetic iron oxide [8, 9]. The ability of magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles to kill cancer cells has also been established [10, 11]. Many malignancies, including blood, lung, pancreatic, and prostate cancer cells, have been treated with magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles found in chemotherapeutic substances [12]. Previous studies have shown that oxidative stress and

the generation of oxygen-free radicals caused by magnetic nanoparticles might cause cells to undergo apoptosis [13–15]. The mechanism by which nanomaterials operate on different body locations is still unknown, despite substantial research on the impacts of nanomaterials on mitochondrial damage, oxidative stress, genomic damage, altered cell cycle settings, and denaturation of proteins [16, 17]. Reactive oxygen species (ROS) production and subsequent oxidative stress are two potential mechanisms for nanoparticles. ROS and oxidative stress alter calcium levels in cells, trigger inflammatory cell responses, activate transcription factors (p53 is one of these transcription factors), and increase the production of cytokines, which ultimately results in apoptosis [18, 19]. Nanomaterials also significantly contribute to oxidative stress, lipid peroxidation, DNA degradation, membrane deterioration, and ultimately cell death [20]. Thus, by lowering side effects, they can produce treatments that are efficient and eradicate the tumor [21]. Our understanding of how Superparamagnetic Iron Oxide Nanoparticles trigger Apoptosis in HT-29 cells will be improved as a result of this study's utilization of this information. Because of their distinctive magnetic features, extremely low toxicity, high biocompatibility, outstanding biodegradability, and reactive surface that is easily modified with biocompatible coatings like gold (Au) metal, targeted drug and gene delivery systems are particularly advantageous. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs are chosen over other magnetic materials due to the presence of the Fe<sup>2+</sup> state, which may function as an electron donor.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Chemicals

From Beijing Chemicals in China, the following substances were purchased: (EG) glycol, (NaOAc) anhydrous sodium acetate, sodium citrate, ethanol, ETA, HAuCl<sub>4</sub>, and ferric chloride hexahydrate (FeCl<sub>3</sub>•6H<sub>2</sub>O). Sigma-Aldrich in Shanghai, China, provided Calcine AM for purchase, all the materials have pure 99%.

### 2.2 Preparation of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs

By employing Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> particles as the starting point for the reduction of Au<sup>3+</sup>, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs were created using a hydrothermal technique. continually stirring, prepared and heated at 90 °C was 100 mL of sodium citrate (2.29 g/mL). Then, immediately, 40 mg of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs were added to the mixture. After being heated for 15 minutes, 5 mL of the HAuCl<sub>4</sub> solution (0.01 mol/L) was added. It was then cooled to room temperature while being vigorously stirred for 15 - 20 minutes. The resulting colloidal solution was separated by using a magnetic field. After rinsing and suspending the magnetically separated Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs in 20 mL of doubly deionized water, they were then dried. The nanoparticles were subsequently put through a series of alternate washing cycles using either deionized water or ethanol, and they were then allowed to dry in a vacuum (overnight at 60 °C).

### 2.3 Characterization of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au MNPs

TEM (Philips) and scanning electron microscopy (TESCAN, Vega III, Czech Republic) were used to analyze the

size and morphological properties of the MNPs. One drop of the MNPs solution was applied to a (Cu grid) that was covered in gold and had a mesh size of approximately 200 to prepare the sample for TEM analysis. 8000 Series Shimadzu Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) apparatus was used to examine the molecular vibrations in produced samples.

### 2.4 Maintaining cell cultures

10% fetal bovine serum, 100 units/mL penicillin, and 100 g/mL streptomycin were added to RPMI-1640 to support HT-29 cells. The cells were passaged with trypsin-EDTA, reseeded at 80% confluence twice weekly, and incubated at 37 °C [22].

### 2.5 Cytotoxicity assays

To examine the cytotoxic effects of X-SUBSTANCES, 96-well plates were employed for the MTT test [23]. We seeded the cell lines with 104 cells per well. After 24 hours or after the formation of a confluent monolayer, cells were exposed to X-SUBSTANCES at varied concentrations in both the presence and absence of a magnetic field and a laser. By removing the medium, and adding 28 L of an MTT solution with 2 mg/mL, 72 hours after treatment, cell viability was assessed by treating the cells for 2.5 hours at 37 °C. After the MTT solution was withdrawn from the wells, the remaining crystals were solubilized by adding 130 L of DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide), and they were then incubated at 37 °C for 15 min while being shaken. The experiment was done in triplicate, and the absorbency at 492 nm was measured using a microplate reader. The rate at which cell growth was inhibited, or the percentage of cytotoxicity, was determined using the equation shown below:

$$\text{Inhibition rate} = \frac{A - B}{A * 100} \quad (1)$$

where the optical density of the control is denoted by *A*, and that of the samples is denoted by *B*.

To examine the morphology of the cells using an inverted microscope, the cells were seeded at a density of 1105 cells/mL into 24-well micro-titration plates and incubated for 24 h at 37 °C. Then, for 24 hours, cells were exposed to X-substances while also being exposed to a magnetic field and laser light. After the exposure period, the plates were dyed with a crystal violet stain and kept at 37 °C for an additional 10 - 15 minutes. Once all traces of the color were gone, the stain was gently washed with tap water. A digital camera mounted on the inverted microscope was used to take photographs as the cells were being seen at 100x magnification [24].

### 2.6 Statistical analysis

An unpaired t-test was utilized to statistically evaluate the gathered data using GraphPad Prism 9. The average SD of three separate measurements was used to display the results [25].

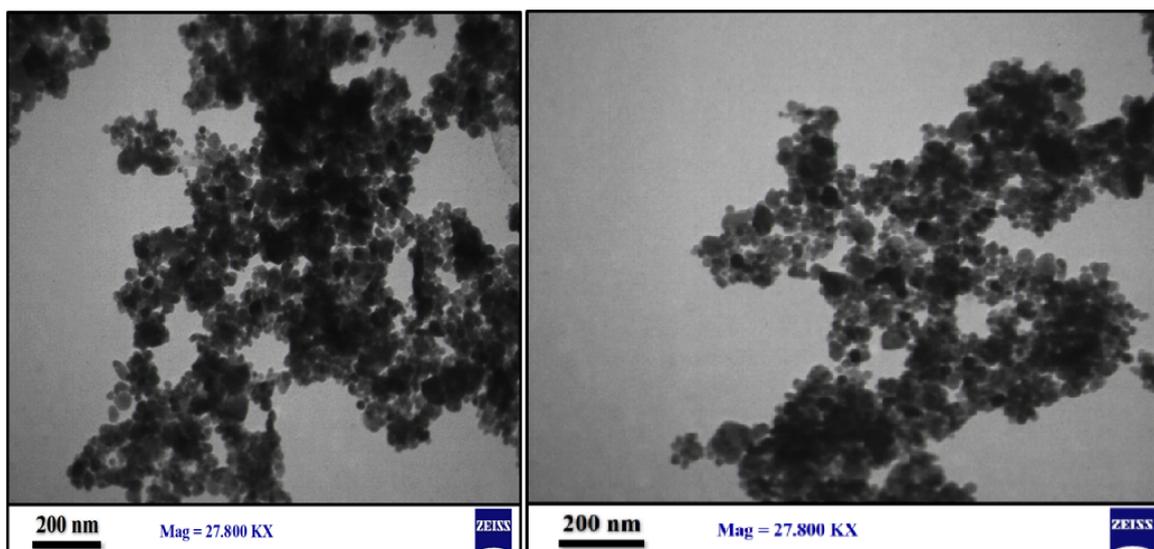


Figure 1. TEM images of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au magnetic nanoparticles.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1.2 Scanning electron microscopy

#### 3.1 $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au morphological characteristics

##### 3.1.1 Transmission electron microscopy (TEM)

Using the TEM test, the morphological and size characteristics of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au were investigated, see Fig. 1. The particles were roughly 5 – 12 nm in size and spherical in form. They were seen to have a well-dispersed state in relation to the  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au nanoparticles. It may therefore be inferred that covering the nanoparticles with Au caused a decrease in the size and agglomeration of the  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles while increasing their dispersion [26, 27].

In order to further examine the shape and size of the created NPs, scanning electron microscopy was used. A scanning microscopy image of the same batch of samples, with a mean size of about 8 – 17 nm for  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au, is shown in Fig. 2. This graph demonstrates the high production of uniform NPs ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au). These results suggested a potential selective absorption of the Au surfactant onto the beneficial properties of the particles, as the generated NPs were well within the required size for the effective delivery of the drugs included. potentially inhibiting the free growth of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  [27, 28].

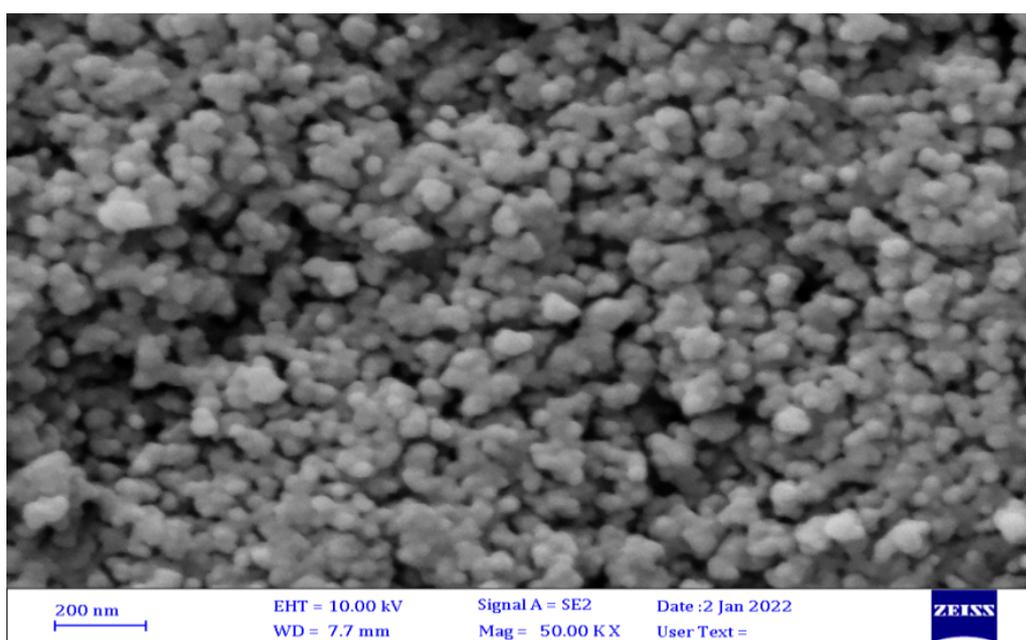


Figure 2. SEM image of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au magnetic nanoparticles.

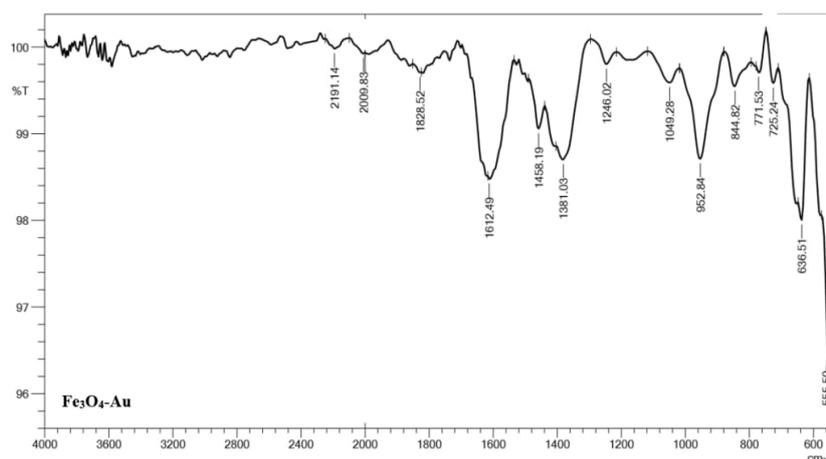


Figure 3. FTIR spectra of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au magnetic nanoparticles.

### 3.2 Fourier transforms infrared spectra (FTIR)

The structural groups in the wavenumber range of 600 – 4000 cm<sup>-1</sup> of the Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy are useful indicators of the chemical composition of gases, liquids, powders, and films. The compound's functional groups and chemical bonds are both identified. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/Au NPs' FTIR spectrum, which has a wide peak in the middle, is depicted in Fig. 3. Fe-O vibrations also have two peaks at 1381.03 and 555.50 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which are vibrational peaks of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs [145]. The peaks that appeared at 1381.03 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 555.50 cm<sup>-1</sup>, are indicative of stretching, and the various modes of Fe-O confirm the presence of crystalline Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>. In addition, the C-H groups stretch at 725.24, 844.84, 1458.19, and 1828.52 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The FTIR spectrum of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/Au reveals that it contains all of the peaks from both the Au spectrum and the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> spectrum. Thus, gold was successfully coated onto the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs. These variations in absorption peaks show that the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> surface is coated with Au NPs, demonstrating the success of the fabrication of the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/Au nanocomposite and the placement of Au there [27].

### 3.3 Anticancer activity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au MNPs

Fig. 4 demonstrates that after being incubated with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au at all employed doses, the viability of HT-29 cells was decreased; however, the latter concentration was more effective in this regard. In this study, utilizing the crystal violet dye, which is depicted in Fig. 5 (upper panel), We also looked at how the treatments affected the morphology of HT-29 cells. Cell imaging after Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au incubation showed significant morphological alterations in the cells, as well as clumping and blockage of cell communication. With the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au being more potent in this regard. However, in the control group, these changes were not seen. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au had a 50% inhibitory concentration (IC<sub>50</sub>) of 22.68 gmL<sup>-1</sup> Fig. 6. By introducing various beneficial alterations over the non-Au nanoparticles, Au enhances the therapeutic efficiency of the medications. By making Au more hydrophilic and slowing down glomerular filtration, Au increases the duration that conjugated therapeutic nanoparticles stay in the bloodstream [29, 30]. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au was dissolved in water at various concentrations (6.25, 12.5, 50, and 100 gmL<sup>-1</sup>) to increase cell death against HT-29

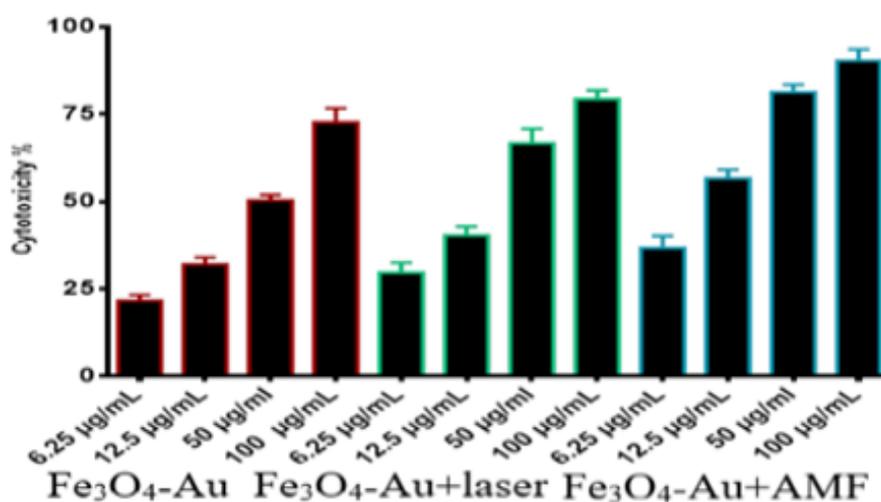
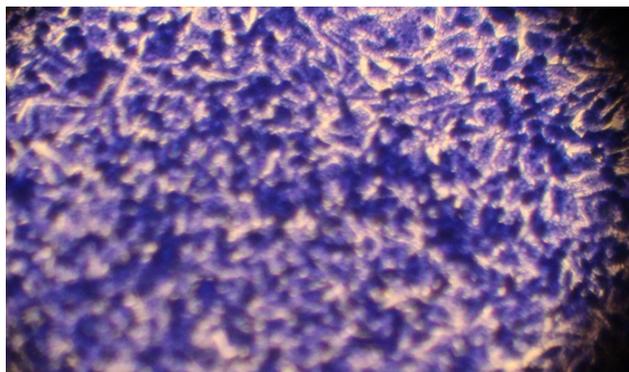
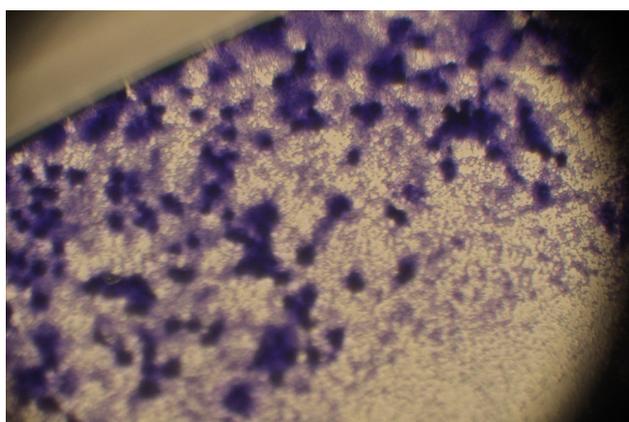


Figure 4. Cytotoxicity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au nanoparticles in HT-29 Cells.



**Figure 5.** Control untreated HT-29 cells.

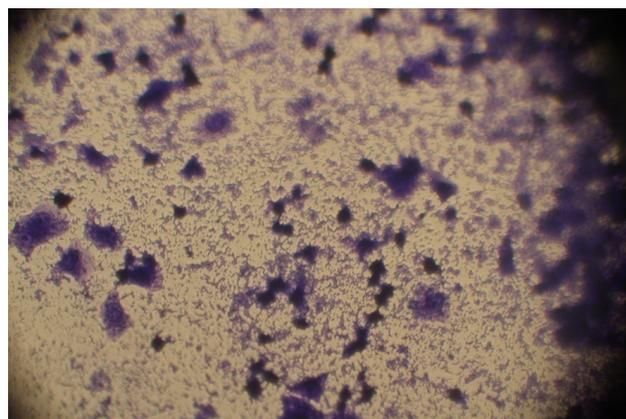


**Figure 6.** Morphological changes in HT-29 cells after treated with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs.

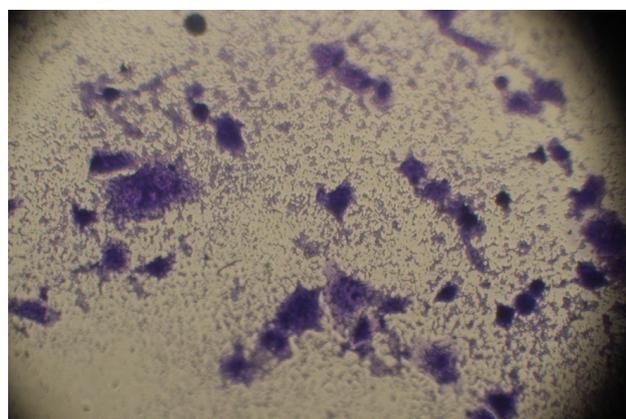
cells. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au was then subjected to 0.5 w.cm<sup>-2</sup> of (laser radiation) at an 808 nm wavelength for 20 minutes. After the exposure period, the photothermal action of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au was seen to significantly impede cell development, which resulted in a successful tumor decrease [31]. In this respect, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au was also more effective (see Fig. 6). These results suggest that Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au nanoparticles can be taken up by cancerous cells, while laser-treated particles severely damaged cells, laser-untreated particles had a less toxic effect. This is likely due to the photothermal characteristics of the NPs [32]. 17.48 gmL<sup>-1</sup> is the inhibitory concentration value (IC<sub>50</sub>) for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au, Fig. 7. If NIR laser or AMF exposure combined, the cells, more HT-29 cells were killed. After being incubated with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au that had been triggered with an NIR laser, the cells' viability was significantly reduced and there was obvious damage to their organelles. The upper and lower panels of Fig. 6 show that Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au was also more effective in this regard. The IC<sub>50</sub> values for the inhibitory concentrations were Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au has a mL<sup>-1</sup> of 11.63 Fig. 8. The current study's considerable in vitro viability inhibition results show the photothermal impact with an alternating magnetic field's amazing anti-cancer effectiveness [33]. The NPs were given more time and focus, with the latter having the fastest effect, and both samples that were exposed to Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au had an increase in temperature as a result. These results show that the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs were suspended in aqueous solution with a high-speed,

high-energy conversion efficiency. Previously, this was justified by the hypothesis that after being exposed to 42 °C for 30 minutes, cancer cells may be eliminated. When using temperatures up to 50 °C, this time frame can easily be shortened to 5 minutes. Approximately 36 to 37 °C is the usual body temperature. This approach efficiently heats the cancer cells to 50 °C for 5 minutes by combining the incubation of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au [34]. The long-term toxicity of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au nanoparticles and the ability of HT-29 cells to survive were investigated in the presence and absence of (NIR lasers and AMF) using a clonogenic experiment. These outcomes are consistent with those produced by MTT and crystal violet staining. In contrast to the colonies of the untreated cells, Fig. 6 shows minor toxicity and a decrease in the number of HT-29 cell colonies in the nanoparticle-treated group. AMF and NIR lasers were used to induce, and strong cell-killing abilities were shown in Figs. (7, 8). However, the rapidly decreased clonogenic potential would support the theory that cancer cells that were gradually exposed to Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au nanoparticles were killed in a short period of time, which abruptly ended the loss of clonogenic potential. It has been demonstrated in the past that magnetic NPs may limit cell viability by inducing it through processes like apoptosis or necrosis [35].

Figs. 6, 7, and 8 display the findings of this investigation.



**Figure 7.** Morphological changes in HT-29 cells after treated with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs + Laser.



**Figure 8.** Morphological changes in HT-29 cells after treated with Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au NPs + AMF.

The outcomes revealed the generated Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au magnetic nanoparticles' capacity to kill colon cancer cells. The effectiveness of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>-Au against cancer cells depends on its concentration, and it is enhanced by the presence of magnetic and laser fields.

#### 4. Conclusion

By using a hydrothermal approach to manufacture the magnetite nanoparticles, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> with an Au cap, it was possible to see that the agglomeration had been reduced. Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were coated with Au as a protective coating. Au unregulated the therapeutic efficiency of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles since it had numerous advantageous differences from non-Au Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles. Au lengthens the period that conjugated nanoparticles circulate in the body by enhancing their hydrophilicity and lowering their rate of glomerular filtration. Results of the current study showed that photothermal effects are highly effective in the treatment of cancer, with in vitro data showing a considerable reduction in cancer cell viability. The spherical Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> NPs were subjected to NIR-induced hyperthermia, which likewise effectively slowed the proliferation of cells. When Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> was covered in Au and subjected to the heating caused by AMF, In HT-29 cells, the morphological alterations were more pronounced. The photothermal effects of magnetic iron oxide can also help cancer therapy methods.

##### Ethical approval

This manuscript does not report on or involve the use of any animal or human data or tissue. So the ethical approval is not applicable.

##### Authors Contributions

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

##### Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

##### Conflict of Interests

The author 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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