

THE ROLE OF MARKETING ETHICS ON PRODUCT AND PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is an important component of human interaction, including marketing activities. This article discusses the role of marketing ethics on some marketing mix elements that focus on products and promotions through a systematic literature review method. Qualitative research guided by library data and news clippings is able to provide an up-to-date overview of misconduct in marketing activities in Malaysia. The results of the study show that most customers place great emphasis on how a product is effective for them. After all, this will influence the action of repeating the purchase as well as suggesting to acquaintances and family members for the next purchase. The successful actions of marketers who act honestly in promotional activities, especially on social media, greatly impact their existence in the market for a long period of time.

Keywords: *Marketing ethics, Product, Promotion, Marketer, Loyalty*

INTRODUCTION

In general, marketing ethics represent the practices and social standards as well as professional that marketing managers practice to help them develop, implement and monitor marketing strategies. Furthermore, M Saleh et al., (2021) give an impression that marketing ethics are the principles and standards that define acceptable behavior in marketing as also defined by the public, government legislators, competitors and organizations. Specifically, the author adds that marketing ethics is an application field that includes moral principles that underlie marketing operations and rules. Therefore, it is a process of a company building customer interest in products and services, stakeholder value and also strong relationships with customers.

In today's business world, managers need to evaluate appropriate ethics to be highlighted in decision making. It is not an easy task since difficulties are usually accompanied by negative decisions in making ethical choices and the desired results are sometimes good or otherwise. In addition, Ferrell & Ferrell (2021) argue that marketing ethics focuses on how consumer behavior affects ethical issues when buying. Marketing ethics are matters related to the moral principles behind the operations and laws of the advertising field such as advertising ethics, product characteristics and environmental ethics which play an important role in the development of companies. This is also in line with the guidelines to avoid false or misleading advertisements as published by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, Malaysia which insists on action against misleading and deceptive advertisements or false representations or unfair practices under the Consumer Protection Act 1999 and the Trade Description Act 2011.

Accordingly, companies or organizations should deliver brand messages and sell their products to consumers while considering social and environmental issues. Strategies that focus on shared issues are able to increase consumer interest in purchasing products or services from the company. However, maintaining relationships with consumers and building brand loyalty is a major challenge in the current marketing environment. The current highly competitive market in turn creates unethical marketing practices that turn the challenge of building customer loyalty into an even more irresponsible. This includes gimmicks and advertisements through mainstream and social media that are too aggressive such as the exploitation of religion to sell products that lead to confusion and damage the sanctity of religion. Acting on the issue, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission through the Content Forum 2022 is trying to lay down rules for the sake of universal interest to act on sellers who misuse religion to sell products (Patah, 2022).

Therefore, from the background of this study, the main focus of this study is to examine the role of marketing ethics on several elements of the marketing mix, namely products and promotions based on the systematic literature review method. Furthermore, the focus of this study is to gather the latest information on misconduct in marketing activities in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes a review on marketing ethics, marketing ethics from Islamic perspective, product marketing ethics, promotional marketing ethics and the role of marketing ethics on consumer loyalty.

Marketing Ethics

Laczniak & Murphy (2019) define marketing ethics as the systematic study of moral standards used in making marketing decisions and behavior. Concerns about ethics in marketing are growing as public distrust of modern business has been consistently reported almost since its introduction. This early approach or ethical marketing practice tends to take a normative perspective, that is to build rules and guidelines that can help marketers to behave ethically (Hunt & Laverie, A., 2004). Ethical marketing practices have the role of promoting the ethical values of organizations and individuals so that consumers are attracted to be loyal and make repeat purchases with the organization (Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2010). In this regard, marketing ethics is considered from an individual and organizational perspective.

From an individual's perspective, personal values and moral philosophy are key to ethical decisions in marketing. Honesty, justice, responsibility, and citizenship are assumed as values that can guide complex marketing decisions in the context of an organization. From an organizational perspective, values, codes, and training are needed to provide a consistent and shared approach to making ethical decisions (Ferrell and Ferrell, 2021).

Ethical marketing practices by organizations influence the daily routine and consumption activities of consumers. All ethical marketing practices by companies are closely related to the purchase of products or services, regardless of whether the company is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of consumer purchasing power. An ethical or unethical organizational business practices are indeed equated with its overall reputation and evaluation where it also emphasizes the factor of remaining competitive in the market. In this context, consumer and brand relationship quality is a comprehensive concept that reflects the intensity, depth, continuity and impact of the relationship between consumers and brands. Brand quality can be identified from brand effect, identification, trust, interdependence, satisfaction, and commitment. These processes are involved in creating and maintaining a relationship between the consumer and the brand. The main factors that affect consumer relationships are buying experience, emotional experience, action experience, cognitive trust, and brand commitment. Furthermore, ethics is also closely related to social responsibility because it is related to ethics that includes social relationships in society, especially in the workplace.

In short, the quality of the consumer-brand relationship is the association that is built through the process in which the consumer and the brand, as two equal parties, contribute and interact with each other in the marketplace. For that, a marketing strategy that consists of marketing mix elements namely product, price, place and promotion is suitable to be used as a backup. Ethical marketing practices play an important role for managers and marketers as a guide when they face ethical problems (Gaski, 1999).

Marketing Ethics from Islamic Perspective

Marketing ethics from an Islamic perspective can guide organizations and individuals to act more ethically. Satar et al. (2022) stated that ethics can shape attitudes and help people to act correctly in life. Additionally, the authors define ethics as the harvest of faith, Islam, and piety based on a strong belief in the truth of Allah SWT. It can be summarized that ethics is a theory about the behavior of human actions that are viewed from the value of good or bad as can be determined by reason. Thus, marketing ethics from an Islamic perspective is widely discussed in the Quran, such as in surah An-Nahl verse 92 regarding justice and honesty. It is emphasized in this verse that the few Muslims had made an agreement with the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W when they saw the Quraysh who were numerous and quite experienced, and then their desire arose to cancel the agreement with the Prophet Muhammad and their actions were forbidden by Allah.

Satar et al. (2022) have also categorized the impact of marketing ethics in terms of product, price, distribution and promotion. In terms of products, if marketing is done ethically, the products offered are guaranteed to be halal and *tayyib*, useful, beneficial, high value and beneficial to the community. In addition, through ethical marketing, products can be offered at reasonable prices comparable to the purchasing power of the community. From the context of distribution, ethical marketing is able to distribute products on time and the existence of goods is guaranteed. Next, ethical promotion helps to introduce the product by providing information that is suitable for the quality and honest.

Furthermore, Yudityawati & Fitriyah (2022) added that products must be marketed transparently and not make excessive promises; set appropriate prices, do not take excessive profits and do not monopolize the market. The counter to the practice of monopolizing the market is the attitude of *ta'awun* (the practice of helping each other) and patience as was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad SAW in the city of Mecca where the Messenger of Allah maintained reasonable prices when the Quraysh traders monopolized the market. This is a smart marketing strategy because customers end up buying the products that Rasulullah sells in large quantities and they can be bought by all types of customers. This will directly make loyal customers at the same time they could share their experiences wherever the medium feels appropriate to share.

A group of researchers namely Aravik et al. (2022); Yudityawati & Fitriyah (2022); Satar et al. (2022) are more likely to make the **character of the Prophet** as a guide to marketing ethics. The first, **Siddiq** is honest and truthful. In short, honesty means stating facts and views as they are so that others can believe them. Truthful is the noble character that adorns the character of those who believe in Allah and the unseen (Syauqi et al., 2019). Therefore, honesty and truth are characteristics that people need to have in order to communicate and act as intelligently and honestly as possible. This is because honesty is closely related to truth as a sense of value. This is the foundation of all actions including listening, thinking, speaking and acting such as keeping on time and promises, acknowledging the weaknesses and strengths of the product and not exaggerating the product being sold simply to achieve sales goals. If the marketer practices the character of *siddiq*, consumers will be able to feel the sincerity in the buying and selling involved and will directly become loyal customers due to the satisfaction that comes from ethical marketing.

The second characteristic, **Fathanah** is intellectual and beauty. From this characteristic, the marketers need to wisely identify responsibilities and be able to create uniqueness that contributes and benefits the organization or consumer. However, the increase in knowledge also needs to be self-supported or through training so that marketers are proficient in the products and services being promoted. The wisdom of marketers is able to encourage ethical marketing practices when all consumer concerns can be answered and handled with confidence and wisdom because there are also marketers who give false information due to lack of knowledge about products or services. This is similar to the case of spreading fake news without knowing the validity of the information. According to MCMC's Network Security and Enforcement Sector Chief Officer, Zulkarnain Mohd Yasin, said more than 40 individuals were investigated in accordance with the relevant act throughout the past year, while four more were charged. In this regard, MCMC is able to detect any individual who spreads fake news within less than 24 hours after the offense is committed through social media (Jaafar, Alias & Shamsuddin, 2018).

The third characteristic, **Trust**, which is trustworthy or reliable. Prophet Muhammad SAW insisted that trust is the most valuable capital in business, and he started his business with merely trust capital, without physical money. In addition, Prophet Muhammad's trustworthiness was apparent before receiving the apostolic message that eventually made Islam spread widely throughout the world. Surah al-Anfal verse 27 emphasizes not to betray trust because trust is not a trivial matter but rather a responsibility that must be fulfilled. By practicing the attribute of trust in marketing products, it is able to encourage consumers to evaluate the sincerity of the marketer and subsequently be loyal to the products offered.

The fourth characteristic, **Tabligh** means conveying, communicating, and being transparent. Through this nature, marketers must communicate transparently, openly and convey true information. The excellence of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W's *tabligh* characteristic can be proven through secret preaching and writing, the events at Bukit Safa and the events at Tha'if. Each phase tests his professional characteristics which ultimately results in an ethical action. For example, when he ascended Mount Safa to call the people of Mecca to believe in Allah, the polytheists were angry and ostracized him. However, he remained patient and calm in planning a more extensive *da'wah* strategy. Therefore, by cultivating the character of *tabligh*, honest and true information can be conveyed through an appropriate medium.

Product Marketing Ethics

Product marketing ethics refers to the final product and it includes aspects of the product that is safe to use, the effectiveness of the product and the product that is imitated (Mogan, 1993). Marketers need to pay attention to various aspects of safety when producing products and it must include matters related to the product development process that is subject to regulations and laws in order to gain competitive advantage in the market later. For example, starting from raw materials until the completion of product development into a final product, hazardous materials are not allowed to be contained in any process because they may threaten the safety of customers or users. As consumers, they deserve complete information about the ingredients used and marketers should not arbitrarily hide any issue or information of the final product to be marketed, especially if it will bring harm to third parties (users/customers).

Imperfect product production must be disclosed to avoid misunderstandings and customer dissatisfaction as well as gaining trust from them.

In Malaysia, Regulation 18(6), Food Regulations 1985 states that food labels cannot contain health claims such as preventing, reducing, treating and curing a disease and failure to comply, if convicted can be fined not more than RM100,000 and jail not over two years. The issue of excessive claims on food and beverages as well as cosmetic and health products is a major problem in marketing activities in particular and business in general. Consumers are more exposed to exaggerated claims that are increasingly cascading in social media platforms, causing several issues such as the reckless act of buying products because they are heavily influenced by advertisements that make excessive claims and end up losing because of receiving side effects or being cheated. Consumers should be wise to research and conduct surveys before deciding to make a purchase (Jobstore Team, 2019).

According to Sinar Harian sources by Ismail (2022), in Malaysia a total of 651 cases have been recorded with a total value of seized counterfeit goods amounting to RM 8.65 million in operations across the country by Ministry of Domestic Trade and Cost of Living (KPDNHEP) in 2018. Then increased to 663 cases involving confiscation amounting to 18.10 million in 2019 and subsequently, 1015 cases with a total confiscation value of RM 32.85 million in 2020. Meanwhile, statistics from January 1 to June 30 reported a total of 137 cases with a total confiscation worth RM 2.47 million. In summary, a total of 2056 notices have been issued to premises or building owners across the country for offenses related to counterfeit goods.

Promotional Marketing Ethics

Promotional activities are carried out by using various promotional tools such as advertising, publicity, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling and others. Consumers are the most susceptible to persuasion by marketers. Attractive advertising, real testimonials, tutorials and other great promotional activities can give a perspective of excitement among potential customers to buy the product displayed in any social media platform. Communication should be done openly and honestly and it must be given direct feedback by the user. Promotional ethics involves morality in an advertisement, sales promotion, and public relations. According to Williams, Kaylene & Caroline (2011), the ethical issue of promotion can be analyzed with advertising and personal selling. Advertising is a communication tool in that it conveys the organization's offer to the market and is available for sale naturally able to influence consumers. In general, advertisers should adhere to morality and be professional when performing their duties.

Marketers are absolutely not justified in manipulating any form of content that advertises their products from any aspect including design, color, texture and others because it is feared that it is not the same as the real product. Next, this will cause users to be confused with the offer from the organization. Most marketers claim that their products are the most effective and provide the most value to customers when this is an extreme claim for their products. Most customers strongly prioritize the quality of the product that is equivalent to the price offered. It becomes a factor that influences repeated purchases and then recommending to friends and family members including evaluating the effectiveness of the product purchased. Marketers must be honest about any testimonials when promoting on social media so that they can last long in the market. The aspect of honesty meant here is the method of disclosure and notification of the content or material of the product being sold. Marketers should not hide any form of identification of a product to potential customers (Aziz, 2021).

A survey conducted by Omar (2020) showed that 81% of Malaysians have spent up to 8 hours a day on online activities including online shopping. Most audiences access product or service information through internet access. Audiences will be more impressed by promotions that use viral marketing videos, further increasing the audience's level of awareness of products or brands. Usually, the content of an advertisement needs to be persuasive for a better effect. In addition, audiences now like to determine the pattern of advertisements they want to see and are less focused on commercial advertising. On average, they are more likely to get information about a product faster. For example, sewing tutorial videos, drawing, storytelling, trending videos and others. In the first 5 seconds of a video will determine whether

the audience will continue to watch or ignore it. The appearance of influencers in advertisements is also a driving factor for marketers to be creative in order to make the content of their product advertisements successful. Based on this trend, the average seller or marketer is willing to do unethical things just to get the attention of many audiences and then cause them to be influenced by the effectiveness of the product or service displayed even though the validity of the effectiveness of the product that is not yet guaranteed.

The Role of Marketing Ethics on Consumer Loyalty

Consumer loyalty refers to several conditions. Therefore, the meaning of loyalty is different according to the situation and the activity performed. According to the current loyalty issue research using "a behavioral index, an attitudinal index, or a combined index that combines all three aspects of the nature of the study". From the behavioral aspect, loyalty can be determined by the buyer's behavior with regard to the consequences of that behavior. Building a good relationship with customers and establishing branding is seen as more likely for customers to make repeat purchases of a particular product or service or to do word-of-mouth promotion. Further, customer loyalty will instill continued purchase behavior" (Aaker, & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Referring to some researchers, brand loyalty is "a critical belief and consumer's ability to face surrounding influences and marketing activities that have the potential to cause consumers to switch brands". While brand loyalty has been categorized as effective loyalty and behavioral loyalty (Lee & Jin, 2019). The best way to measure the level of brand loyalty is to measure effective loyalty. Effective loyalty refers to the consumer's interest and relationship with a particular brand and the actual purchase behavior has not yet begun. The action of loyalty is displayed through actual purchasing behavior carried out by consumers for a particular brand. According to Oliver (2019), he proved that brand loyalty is referred to as a critical element in maximizing and consistently delivering company profits.

Brand loyalty is considered an important corporate tool to achieve business survival and growth. Acquiring loyal customers is an achievement of the main marketing activity and is essential in showing a competitive advantage (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011). This can be linked to the argument in the study that has been observed in addition to the exemplary example shown by His Majesty the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W that ethical marketers such as being honest in buying and selling matters, then customers will always make repeated purchases and support the marketer.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to gather relevant information on the role of marketing ethics on product and promotion. The search strategy involved using a combination of keywords, including "marketing ethics," "product," "promotion," "consumer behavior," and "ethical decision-making." Databases such as MENDELEY, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest were utilized to identify academic journals, books, and other scholarly sources. Additionally, Google Scholar was employed to uncover relevant grey literature, such as conference proceedings, white papers, and industry reports. A total of 24 articles were selected for review based on their relevance to the research topic and their methodological rigor. The articles were published in a variety of academic journals, including the Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Advertising, and the Journal of Business Ethics. The authors focused on the following components in each article:

- Definition of marketing ethics: The authors examined how different scholars define marketing ethics and the key principles that underlie it.
- Impact of marketing ethics on product decisions: The authors explored how marketing ethics can influence product development, pricing, and distribution strategies.
- Impact of marketing ethics on promotional activities: The authors investigated how marketing ethics can shape advertising campaigns, social media marketing, and other promotional efforts.
- Consumer perceptions of ethical marketing: The authors analysed how consumers perceive ethical and unethical marketing practices and how these perceptions affect their purchasing decisions.

- Role of marketing ethics in building trust and loyalty: The authors examined how ethical marketing can contribute to building strong relationships with consumers and fostering brand loyalty.

FINDING

Based on the review, it was found that although the importance of ethical marketing practices is closely related to relationship building, product evaluation, and strong brand loyalty, scientifically through a Google Scholars search found that there are only a few studies that have examined marketing mix strategies such as, product, price, place and promotion from the point of view ethical issues as having a critical influence on the formation of consumer attitudes.

Table 1: Number of Previous Studies Related to Marketing Ethics from 2019 to 2022

Year	Number of previous studies
2022	15
2021	11
2020	14
2019	8

Source: <https://scholar.google.com/>

Besides, practically Harian Metro (2022) reports the statistics of fraud cases involving online buying and selling activities and non-existent loans amounting to 18857 and 15546 cases have caused losses of up to RM1.61 billion which is 51631 cases between 2019 and 2021. The effectiveness of advertisements and promotions is an element that will affect the audience's interest in a product. However, lately most of the marketing tactics used through social media platforms are seen as having less ethical value and seem to give a negative impression of the culture and eastern lifestyle towards the Malaysian community in particular and it gives a rather worrying picture. The behavior of a few marketers who often show an unethical attitude is to practice the concept of "doing anything as long as you can reach and persuade the audience and buyers". The audacity of marketers to display pictures that look obscene, display market language including the use of abusive words, dress code during indecent live broadcasts and when appearing on various social media platforms such as Instagram or Tik Tok are negative behaviors that can be seen nowadays.

Table 2: Online Fraud Case Statistics for the Year 2019 to 2021

Year	Num. of case
2019	3516
2020	5845
2021	4364

Source: <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/146494/berita/semasa/penipuan-jualan-dalam-talian-meningkat>

If observed, this is a misdemeanor when doing product and service promotion activities because it violates ethics and misuses the online buying and selling platform so that it affects third parties such as the audience or online buyers and entrepreneurs or other marketers who are so careful when dealing with ethics. The e-commerce platform today has become one of the most important and useful platforms for

entrepreneurs to promote their products. This matter is very inappropriate and should be dealt with as soon as possible so that the interests of all parties are protected. Using mixed language, extreme obscenity and the use of harsh words and touching on certain sensitive issues has caused the pollution of the Malaysian language, and has shown a bad example to the community, especially the young generation who are able to reach advertisements through their respective social media accounts. This matter has become very worrying because many social symptoms are linked to promotional advertisements from the internet such as rampant adultery because the influence of advertisements for intimate products of conjugal relations can also be achieved by the young generation who are still single due to the desire to try and then lead to out-of-wedlock births.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The challenge of a borderless world has made society more vulnerable to online fraud as has been proven in the reviews above. As the main focus of this study is to examine the role of marketing ethics on several elements of the marketing mix namely products and promotions, it can even bring together the latest information on misconduct in marketing activities in Malaysia. The following is a research framework based on the conclusions of the qualitative research conducted;

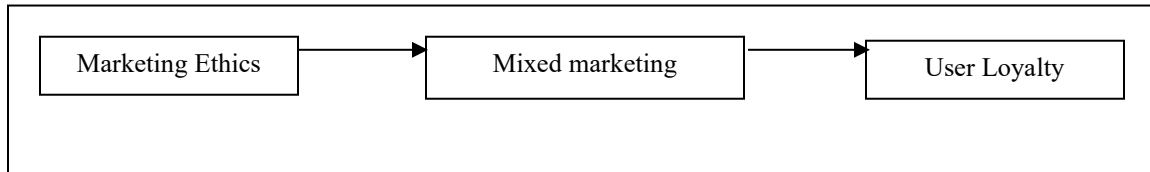


Figure 1: Framework for the Study of the Role of Marketing Ethics on Marketing Mix Elements (Products and Promotions)

As responsible marketers, it is appropriate for them to display a professional attitude and conduct promotional and sales activities in an ethical manner. Maintaining ethics when carrying out direct promotion operations using social media mediums that are viewed by various layers of society must be emphasized because the audience has the right to know the true information of the product and marketers should not give false information or hide the information. Marketers cannot focus solely on obtaining maximum profit, but should emphasize social and moral responsibility in society. This study will later evaluate the credibility and ensure that marketers know that ethical behavior in marketing activities will be a benchmark for the factors that become the audience's choice to watch or ignore their advertisements on social media.

It can be understood that marketing ethics from a conventional and Islamic perspective has emphasized a core that has universal value and can be emulated by all levels of society. Marketing ethics that begin with the attitude and nature applied by organizations and individuals can play a large role in consumer loyalty to the products and services offered. With ethical issues highlighted in the marketing mix such as products and promotions, it is hoped to be able to provide a starting point for the next study so that it can be developed into a complete marketing mix element (product, price, place and promotion). Thus, through the literature review that has been done, the writer can draw up a research framework that can be used as a guide for the next researcher.

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Limitations of the literature review, the literature search was limited to a few specific databases and may not have captured all relevant sources. The focus on academic journals may have overlooked important insights from industry reports, consumer surveys, and other grey literature. The review of the literature may have been biased by the author's own perspective on marketing ethics. In the other hand, limitations of the study methodology include the study did not employ a primary research methodology, such as surveys or experiments, to collect data from consumers or marketing professionals. In addition, the study relied on a secondary review of existing literature, which may not accurately reflect the current state of marketing

practices or consumer attitudes. Moreover, the study did not consider the impact of cultural and regulatory differences on marketing ethics practices.

To address the limitations of this study and further explore the role of marketing ethics on product and promotion, future research could consider the following directions:

- i. Conduct primary research to gather data from consumers and marketing professionals:
 - Survey consumers to assess their perceptions of ethical and unethical marketing practices and how these perceptions influence their purchasing decisions.
 - Interview marketing professionals to understand their perspectives on the importance of marketing ethics and how they integrate ethical principles into their decision-making processes.
 - Conduct experiments to test the impact of ethical marketing practices on consumer behaviour.
- ii. Expand the scope of the literature review:
 - Include a broader range of sources, such as industry reports, consumer surveys, and grey literature, to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.
 - Consider the impact of cultural and regulatory differences on marketing ethics practices and how these factors influence ethical decision-making.
 - Analyse the role of social media and digital marketing technologies in shaping consumer perceptions of ethical marketing.
- iii. Explore the role of marketing ethics in specific product categories or industries:
 - Conduct in-depth studies of specific product categories or industries, such as food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, or cosmetics, to examine the unique ethical challenges and best practices in each sector.
 - Investigate the impact of ethical marketing practices on consumer trust and loyalty in specific product categories or industries.
 - Analyse how ethical marketing strategies can be used to address social and environmental issues in specific product categories or industries.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Z. Jais: drafted this manuscript, involved in planning, collected the data and supervised this research.
S.N.S Azmi: drafted this manuscript, involved collected the data and interpreting in Islamic view.
S.N.A.M Nazim: contributing input regarding the theory and concepts of marketing ethics. N.I Izhar: drafted this manuscript, involved in translating the writing into English.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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