



Review

Dynamics of oil-water interface demulsification using multifunctional magnetic hybrid and assembly materials



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ABSTRACT

Wastewater produced during the petroleum extraction process and the release of large volumes of hydrocarbon-contaminated wastewater by petrochemical industries are of major concern because of their potential impacts on the environments, animals, plants, and humans. Both the crude emulsions and hydrocarbon-contaminated wastewater contain an enormous amount of suspended solids, oil, and grease, organic matter, highly toxic elements, high salts, and recalcitrant chemicals. The treatment of crude oil emulsion has been one of the most important challenges due to the complex nature and generation of a substantial amount of waste to meet the increasing demand for oil and its derivatives. Engineered hybrid and assembly nano- and micro-scale materials have appealed the attention of scientists and researchers because of their elegant functional structures with unique properties and promising applications in the fields of sensing, magnetic, optical, catalysis, and demulsification. Magnetic hybrid materials exhibit some interesting properties of magnets-induced separation along with recycling properties, which may favor their widespread practical uses. The modification and coating of magnetic nanoparticles with different materials having special wettability properties will not simply isolate them from external environments but also contributes to the sustainable separation of oil-water mixtures. This review elaborates on the recent research advancement on the design, fabrication, and wettability properties of hybrid magnetic materials fabricated from polymer and inorganic nanoparticles, and their potential applications in separating oil-water mixtures. After a brief introduction to the design and fabrication of nanoscale hybrid functional magnetic materials, their properties including wettability, morphology, and self-assembly are discussed. We also highlight the current research scenarios of magnetic hybrid and assembly materials along with a key role in environmental and demulsification/separation applications. Finally, the prospects of magnetic materials, ongoing challenges, and opportunities in this arena are also directed.

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1. Introduction

The key challenge of science and chemistry is the construction and design of hybrid multicomponent nanostructures with controlled homogeneity, architecture, and tunable functions of their subunits [1]. A hybrid material is defined as advanced engineering material composed of an intimate mixture of inorganic components, organic components, or both types of components. Nanoparticles of 1–100 nm and their incorporation into polymer domain can generate a wide variety of hybrid materials with proper assemblies and properties such as electrical, optical, magnetic, mechanical, and demulsification. The functional properties of these hybrid materials are because of the presence of nanoparticles and the flexibility of polymer impart the processability [2–9]. Generally, organic and inorganic materials generate an integrated hybrid structure with some combined beneficial properties [10].

For innovative and tailored mechanical properties of the materials, the researchers are more interested in the soft organic component and hard inorganic components to design a proper morphology and structure [11,12]. The new nanoscale hybrids materials not only exhibit the actual properties of inorganic and organic components, but most probably to furnish fascinating characters because of the individual components combined effect of individual components, such as electrical, magnetic, and optical, properties [13]. The interesting characteristics of nanoscale hybridization show different characteristics that are significantly better than their corresponding materials [14].

Self-assembly seems a more suitable method to fabricate well-engineered, assembly, and hybrid materials by simple building blocks [15–18]. Self-assembly is a process in which a disordered system of pre-existing components forms an organized structure or pattern because of specific, local interactions among the components themselves, without external direction. On the other hand, the key challenge for the researcher in the field of material science and chemistry is to design efficient and applicable procedures to accurately control the design of self-assembly geometry and surface morphology [19–22], especially the arrangement of individual components and their ordered and homogeneity [23–25]. Instead of hybrid and assembly nanostructures with multi-components, some researchers are more focused on polymers [2,26–29]. In multi-component hybrid nanocomposite, each individual moiety possesses the value of every single portion and interesting properties derived from the collective components [30–32]. Hybrid nanostructures with different morphologies and precisely controlled geometries have attracted an intense interest [33–40].

Mostly, the laboratory level experimental work has been done in the engineering of nanoarchitecture multicomponent assembly and hybrid materials. Applications of stimuli-responsive hybrid nanocomposites i.e., temperature, light, pH, and magnetic field [41–47], oil-water separation [3–6], catalysis [48,49], gene-drug delivery [50–52], cancer diagnoses, and therapy [44–45] (Fig. 1). However, there is some reported stimuli-responsive polymer with excellent catalytic properties [53–58]. Some literature specially focused on stimuli-responsive nanocomposites containing self-assembly [59].

In the fast few years, the material with advanced interfacial/super wetting properties opened new research areas for scientists [60–62]. All amphiphilic materials (contain both hydrophobic and hydrophilic functional groups) with super wetting surfaces have gained attraction in anti-icing, self-cleaning, water collection, printing, and oil/water separation applications [63,64]. Materials with high wettability properties are always oriented for the separation of crude oil emulsions and are

broadly divided into two groups, i.e. super hydrophilic/superoleophobic for the separation of water from oil and superhydrophobic/superoleophilic “separation of oil from water”. Wettability is the degree at which a solid surface wetted by a liquid. Due to the high demulsification efficiency and good reusability, the separation regulated through wettability displays more advantages over conventional methods used for separation, which may have a promising perspective in the field of oil wastewater treatment including demulsification of oil/water emulsion [65–69]. Especially, the smart materials with amphiphilic properties and switchable wettability can be used for both “water removing” and “oil removing” applications.

The first-ever hybrid material for oil-water separation was reported in 2004 with smart thinking based on the gravity-driven separation of oil and water [70]. Jiang et al. inspired many researchers to develop novel magnetic Janus, raspberry, and core-shell nanoscale hybrid materials with promising demulsification applications for thick crude oil and water emulsions [3–6]. With the rapid improvement in materials inspired from fish scales of underwater superoleophobic properties (a three-phase system), i.e. oil/water/solid [71], Jiang and Feng designed and fabricated water removing filter from polyacrylamide hydrogel coated mesh, which was cited for about 606 times in the past few years [72]. As compared to the materials used for oil separation from oil and water emulsions, the water separation material acquired advantage representing the accumulation of oil on a surface of the water and hence improved the reusability.

The preparation of specific surface morphology, composition, and properties of nanoscale hybrids furnish them with some tunable and melodious properties for variable demulsification and environmental applications. During the synthesis process, when polymers part is

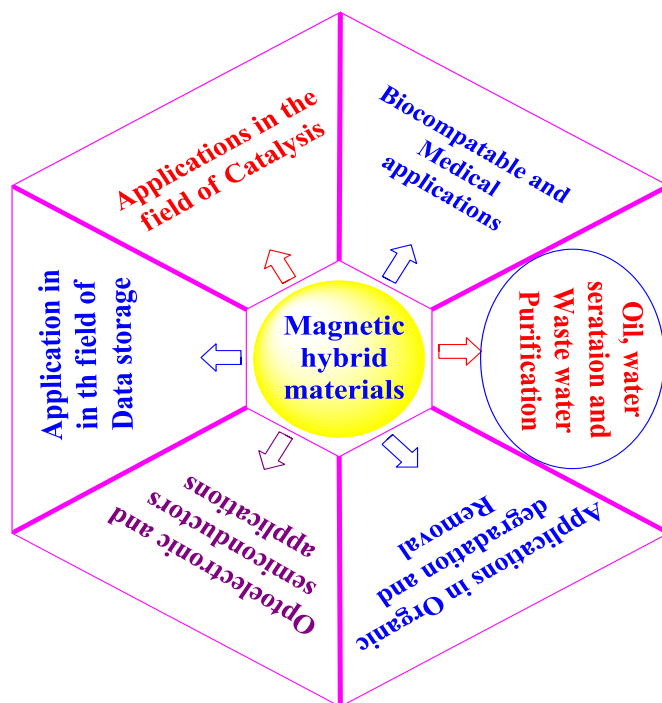


Fig. 1. Applications of magnetic composite materials.

introduced, and the development of self-assembly to fabricate nanoscale hybrid and assembly materials using “grafting from”, and “grafting onto” methods. Furthermore, the monohybrid and assembly materials with a proper structure such as Janus, raspberry, and core-shell are enlightening the combined properties and prospective applications [73].

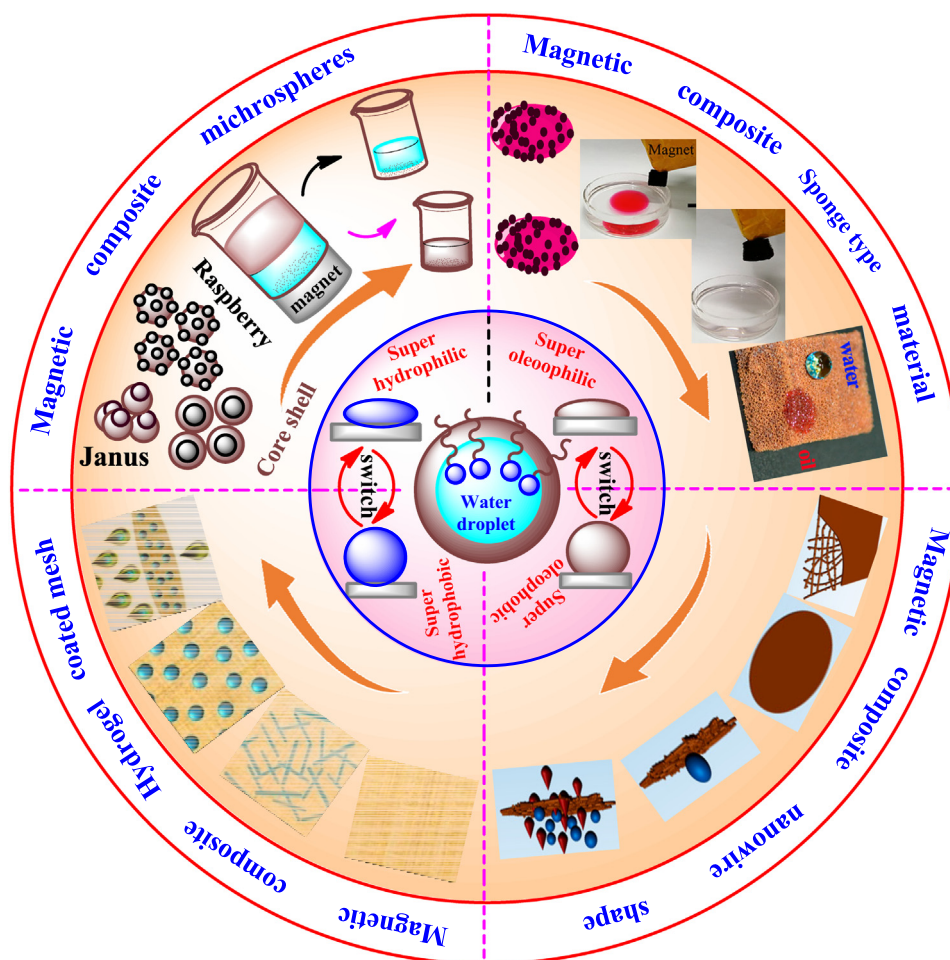
This review presents the current progress in unique kinds of polymer, and metal oxide-based (Fe_3O_4) hybrid materials for diverse oil-water separation and environmental applications (Scheme 1). In the first stage, we highlighted the emulsion system, the wettability concept of the hybrid magnetic materials, and fabrication techniques for magnetic hybrid materials. The synthetic routes are briefly discussed to provide guidance and information for the synthesis and design of nanoscale hybrid assembly materials. Finally, the demulsification and environmental application of the prepared nanoscale hybrid materials are focused on appropriate mechanisms and essential principles. At the end of the review, the discussion is also made on further challenges and the outlook of organic/inorganic nanoscale hybrid materials and applications.

2. Emulsions system and physicochemical aspects

An emulsion is the mixture of two liquids, one of which is dispersed in another. For instance, if the water is dispersed in oil, the resulting emulsion is called water in oil emulsion (Fig. 2A). On the other hand, the dispersion of oil in the water produces oil in water emulsion (Fig. 2B) [74]. The dispersed phase is also referred to as the internal phase, while the other phase (continuous) is denoted as the external phase [75–79]. According to their droplet size, emulsions are categorized into three broad

groups: microemulsions (10–100 nm) in the form of small aggregates, mini emulsions (20–1000 nm) in the form of relatively large droplets and macro emulsions (0.5–100 μm). The smaller the average size of the dispersed phase droplets, the more stable will be the emulsion [80]. The nature of emulsifying agents, interfacial tension, and presence of solids and bulk properties of both oil and water influence the droplet size distribution of the resultant emulsion. Generally, these emulsions apart from microemulsions are thermodynamically unstable [81–84]. However, they are kinetically stable for months or years due to the presence of surface-active compounds with their surfactant properties [85]. A stable emulsion is one that structure does not change with time, nor does it depend on how it was prepared and is characterized by small water droplets and a low conductivity [86]. The emulsion's stability can be influenced by the density of its phases, interfacial and oil phase viscosity, water droplet size, interfacial tension, surfactant concentration, film compressibility, and electrolyte concentration in the water phase [87]. In crude processes, considerable efforts have been devoted to destabilize these undesirable highly stable emulsions, mostly through a difficult, complex, and costly tasks [88,89].

The role by which emulsion type is determined is known as Bancroft's rule. This rule states that the continuous phase would be the phase that the surfactant is preferentially soluble. Therefore, a surfactant with a solubility tendency into the water phase will favor the development of oil-water emulsions. Likewise, a surfactant that is soluble into the oil phase prefers the formation of water-oil emulsions [90,91]. The water-oil emulsion type is the focus of this work, which is mostly encountered in the oil industry because of the high solubility of indigenous crude surfactant molecules in oil rather than in the water phase



Scheme 1. Illustration of magnetic hybrid material with special wettability properties.

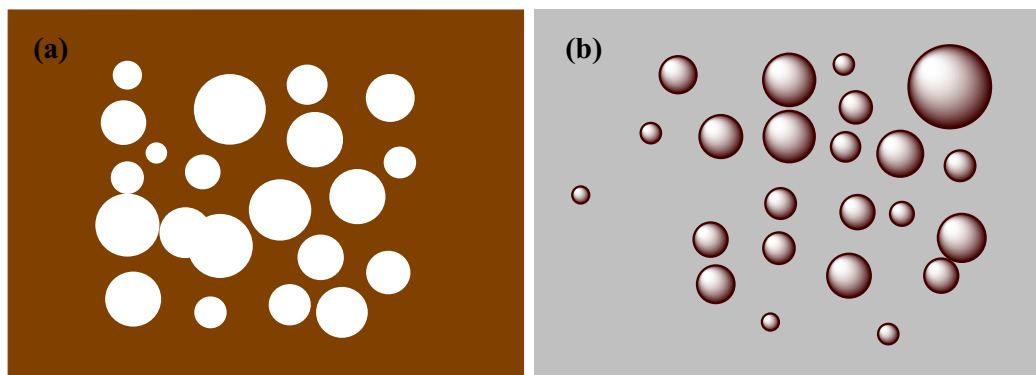


Fig. 2. Micrographs (A) water/oil emulsion and (B) oil/water emulsion.

[92–94]. These emulsions are unfortunately encountered throughout the crude oil exploitation, processing, and transportation. This widespread and occurrence of water-oil emulsions has made emulsion-based systems an important subject of investigation.

2.1. Formation of water-in-oil emulsion

The presence of emulsions is a common feature in the petroleum industry. Although the emulsions have different types, such as water in oil, oil in water, oil in water in oil, and water in oil in water, the first two are the most common [95]. There are several processes to promote emulsion formation in the petrochemical industry. The crude oil in a reservoir is naturally accompanied by gas and water formation that contains large amounts of cations such as calcium, magnesium, etc. The amount of water is constantly raised from both onshore and offshore fields where the production environment is more challenging, risky, and expensive [96]. In addition, water is also injected into depleted reservoirs for enhancing oil recovery to force the crude oil out of the reservoir. As a result, some of this water (produced water) is co-produced with oil as free water, and some of it may be in the emulsion form turbulence and pressure drop in valves at the wellhead [97]. Emulsions are also formed as the crude oil with water (formation/injected water) content is passed through choke valves and pumps due to the turbulent flow pattern developing some eddies by which a mixing effect is imposed; hence an emulsion is formed [98,99]. When the water in oil emulsion forms, the physical properties change drastically, and 60 to 80% of water leads to the establishment of stable emulsions and thus the expansion of the spillage from 2 to 5 times of the original mass. Especially, the crude oil viscosity changes from 100 mPa·s to about 100,000 mPa·s, with 500 to 1000 increasing factor. Clay is also increasing the emulsion density and kinematic viscosity and alters the liquid emulsion to the semisolid and heavy stuff, which are very difficult to remove with simple recovery instruments [100]. A schematic diagram of petroleum production and refining processes in which emulsions are encountered is given in Fig. 3.

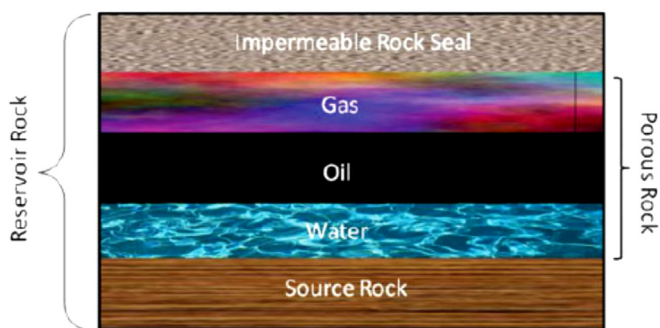


Fig. 3. Schematic diagram of petroleum production and refining processes, in which emulsions are encountered.

2.2. Stability and characterization of water-in-oil emulsion

The stability of an emulsion is mainly dependent on the stability of the interface layer between oil and water phases. Different emulsions with the same properties are stable, unstable, mesostable, and entrained water [101]. Size of emulsified phase droplets (water in case of water in oil emulsion), the viscosity of the continuous phase (oil in case of water in oil emulsion), the difference in density of the two liquids and volume percentage of water cut are also important factors that may influence the stability of an emulsion [102,103]. Asphaltene layer stabilizes the water, oil emulsion by the formation of the stable layer around water droplet, and this stability is increased by the contribution of resins, which is working as an asphaltene solvent and help in the slow migration of asphaltene. It has been found that the composition of the oil is the key factor in the formation of water in oil emulsion, including the amounts and types of saturating contents, asphaltenes, and resin [104,105]. There are some other finely divided substances such as iron, zinc and aluminum sulfates, calcium carbonate, silica, and iron sulfide, which are less soluble or dispersible in the water phase than in the oil phase, which are the responsible components for crude oil emulsions. They form a film around the surface of the dispersed water droplets. These emulsifying agents with their ability to diffuse within the interface can increase the interfacial tension between oil and water leading to broadening the interfacial layer, reduces droplet coalescence, and increases emulsion stability [106].

Higher resins to asphaltenes concentration ratio keep more of the asphaltenes aggregate dissolved in the oil phase; thereby, minimizes the number of asphaltene aggregates and reduces the stability of emulsions. In addition, asphaltenes increase the stability of water in oil emulsions through the formation of a viscous interfacial layer at the oil-water interface. This film is built up through the adsorption of asphaltenes on the finely divided solids, which are hydrophobic and naturally present in crudes such as iron and calcium carbonate. Therefore, a change in the wettability and their other characteristics occurs, allowing further adsorption of asphaltenes at the interface. However, due to the complexity, the difference in characteristics, and the chemical nature of crude oil, it is difficult to propose universal and reliable mechanisms to describe the dispersion behavior of asphaltene at the oil-water interface [107,108]. Fig. 4(a, b) shows both simple and 3D hypothetical structure of petroleum asphaltenes [109].

Studies based on the lifetime of the emulsion, visual appearance, elasticity, differences in viscosity, the stability is categorized into four classes namely, stable, unstable, mesostable emulsions, and entrained water. The last one is a black color emulsion with the water content of less than 10% entrained by viscous oil. Stable emulsions are reddish to brown in color, contain 80% water, and can exist for several weeks with higher viscosity at least three times than the original oil viscosity. This viscosity increase is attributed to the asphaltenes and resin's ability to align at the interface, creating strong viscoelastic films. In unstable emulsions, water and oil separate in a matter of a few hours with a

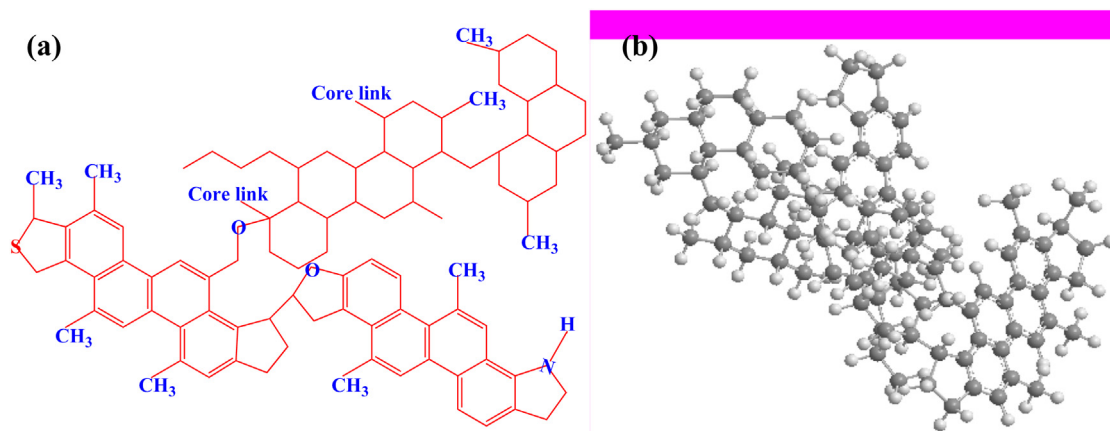


Fig. 4. (a) Proposed molecular structure asphaltene and (b) 3D constructed using Chem draw software.

water content lower than 50%. Their final viscosity is 20 times greater than the original oil viscosity. The emulsion's color is the same as the starting oil's color, which can be black or brown. Mesostable emulsions are red, black, or brown in color. This is an unstable emulsion due to their aromatic, aliphatic, and little asphaltene content, and a tendency to destabilize easily, but their high viscosity renders them stable for a period. Upon decomposition, they produce layers of oil and stable emulsions [110,111]. In addition, due to the acidic nature of the active compounds of the oil/water interface, pH also exhibits an effect on the film and emulsion stability. Increasing the pH was found to be associated with the ionization of the polar functional groups in both asphaltene and resin molecules. Due to this ionization, high surface charge densities are developed resulting in changing (destroying), the mechanical film properties through some internal repulsive interactions, which ultimately may reduce the emulsion stability [112]. The temperature is also found to influence emulsion stability. Increasing the emulsion temperature leads to a decrease in the oil phase viscosity and an increase in the collision rate between water droplets, which ultimately reduced the system (emulsion) stability [113]. Some processes including dispersed phase drop flocculation and coalescence, however, can influence the stability of this layer. For the flocculation, low repulsion forces, and fairly high adhesion character lead drops approach each other, the film around the water droplets undergoes thinning and eventually ruptures, this latter process is referred to as coalescence [114].

3. Emulsion destabilization methods

Emulsion formation is an inevitable phenomenon in the crude oil industry due to water and oil contact during oil processing. In the previous parts of this study, it is clearly explained that surface-active compounds have an enormous problematic influence on the petroleum industry throughout production and refinery stages through emulsion stabilization. The emulsion stability is proportional to the crude oil content of these emulsifiers and their interactions. The higher content of these surface-active compounds contributes to emulsion stability [115–117]. Therefore, demulsifying these emulsions i.e. reversible flocculation followed by irreversible coalescence of the dispersed (water) phase droplets and eventually creating two distinctive layers of oil phase on top and water/aqueous phase at the bottom is important to meet pipeline and exportation specifications. However, it has been a difficult procedure in the oil industry, otherwise, severe processing problems arise such as pipes and equipment corrosion, catalyst poisoning, and difficulties in transportation [118–120].

To effectively and economically demulsify water-oil emulsions, it is important to understand their stability behavior or mechanism that requires knowledge of asphaltene and resin properties and interactions as they have been considered as the main emulsion stabilizers. Other

aforementioned stabilizers are also important due to their strong tendency to interact with asphaltene and/or resins. Currently, there has been progressing in chemical, thermal, and electrical demulsification methods. Chemical treatment through the use of chemical demulsifiers (surface active agents) is considered the main method to separate these emulsions. The heating/microwave demulsification and electro demulsification have also been in use for this purpose. The combination of these two techniques has also been attempted to enhance demulsification efficiency. Microfiltration was employed to break down water-oil emulsions. Although all these techniques have been demonstrated to be efficient, their utilization cannot fully satisfy the prerequisites of oil-water separation. It is worth observing that there is no universal method that can be applied for all emulsions, i.e., the methods are very applicable/crude specific, with the trial and error principle has been the basis to decide the applied method for a given emulsion.

3.1. The concept of surfaces wettability

Wettability of materials initially can be explained using Young's equation in 1805 [121], and the direct route to study the surface wettability is by calculating the oil-water contact angle (OCA) and water-oil (WCA) of a liquid droplet attached directly by the base in the air [122,123].

The detailed information of different kinds of special wettability surfaces and their contact angles is given in Fig. 5 [124–129]. The contact angle is the angle at which the liquid-vapor interface contacts the liquid-solid interface. Generally, it is used to estimate the surface wettability against liquids. The contact angle explains the strength of contact between solids, liquids, and air. Many experimental studies were conducted on wettability and the development of tunable hydrophobic and hydrophilic materials [130,131], especially for the separation of oil-water mixtures [132,133] and the prevention of biofouling [134]. In this part of the review, we shortly discuss the existing model of wettability as solid/liquid and air followed by solid/liquid and liquid systems.

The contact between solid and liquid (CSL) in the air is explained by Eq. (1) [135].

$$C_{SL} = \delta_L + \delta_S - \gamma_{SL} \quad (1)$$

σ_L is for liquid's surface tension i.e. aqueous (aq) phase or oil (o) phase, σ_S indicates the free energy of solid's surfaces, while γ_{SL} is the interfacial energy of solid-liquid interface.

Young measured the solid-liquid and air contact angle as mentioned in Young's equation, expressed in Eq. (2).

Wettability	Water contact angle $^{\circ}$	Wettability	Oil contact angle $^{\circ}$
Hydrophilic	< 90	Oleophilic	< 90
Super hydrophilic	~ 0	Super oleophilic	~ 0
Hydrophobic	> 90	Oleophobic	> 90
Super hydrophobic	> 150	Super oleophobic	> 150

Fig. 5. Explanation of wettability in terms of water and oil contact angles.

$$\gamma_{SL} - \gamma_{SV} = \gamma_{LV} \cos \theta_C = 0 \quad (2)$$

γ_{SL} explain the solid/liquid interfacial energy, γ_{SV} solid/vapor interfacial energy, and γ_{LV} is for liquid-vapor interfacial energy. Fig. 6(a, b) show the schematics explanation of water/oil droplet on solid surfaces into the air.

In the case of the rough surface when the contact angle is calculated the Wenzel or Cassie-Baxter models can be used [136]. On a rough surface, the relation between Young contact angle and contact angle of the liquid has been calculated according to the surface state of wettability, as explained by Wenzel [137] and Cassie-Baxter [138], where surface roughness plays a very important role to calculate the contact angle in both Wenzel and Cassie cases. Wenzel state, in a homogeneous wetting state, when the liquids contact on to the complete rough surface (Fig. 8) and explained in Eq. (3).

$$\cos \theta_C = r \cos \theta_Y \quad (3)$$

where r is the ration of the roughness, θ_Y is Young contact angle of liquid placed on a smooth surface when, and θ_C is the visible contact angle. Fig. 7(a, b, c and d) explain the wetting behavior of rough solid surface both in air and underwater.

Contrarily when the air trapped inside the rough surface in liquid Cassie-Baxter explains the condition in a heterogeneous wetting system, explained in Eq. (4).

$$\cos \theta_C = r_f f \cos \theta_Y + f - 1 \quad (4)$$

f is the solid surface fraction under the droplet fraction, r_f is for the wetted area roughness; Young's contact angle of the sold surface at equilibrium is θ_Y , and θ_C shows the apparent contact angle.

4. Fabrication of magnetic hybrid nanomaterials

In recent years, various approaches have been proposed to fabricate hybrid materials [139–144]. Reactive sites on polymer surface used for the establishment of the polymer layer by the monomer polymerization in “grafting from” method and the polymer chemical reaction through covalent bonding with the end functional groups “grafting to” method. The most common fabrication techniques of hybrid materials are γ -ray irradiation, plasma modification, and UV photo-induced graft polymerization. The most applicable method is grafting polymerization for the modification of polymer surface functional groups with more effective groups [145–148]. Firstly, the polymer should be designed, prepared, and characterized for some practical applications. In order to check the oil, water separation applications, the surface of the polymer can be modified with hydrophilic and hydrophobic groups. The “grafting polymerization” method has been applied to attach polymers to nonporous and flat surfaces, but with very limited applications [149–151] (Fig. 8).

For applications perspective, the core-shell microspheres have major advantages over simple microspheres leading to the enhancement of properties such as (i) less cytotoxicity, (ii) increase indispensability, (iii) increased thermal and chemical stability and so on [152,153]. Various well developed polymerization methods such as atomic transfer radical, soap-free emulsion, inverse, and mini emulsion are, in practice to effectively fabricate magnetic composite materials for numerous applications [154–156]. Isotropic microspheres having self-assembly properties are well known to the researchers but do not show many ways to achieve proper structures [157].

Recently, microfluidics has been used to develop microspheres and some interesting results have been achieved [158]. In the case of crystals, the shape of nanoparticles through artistic management is more

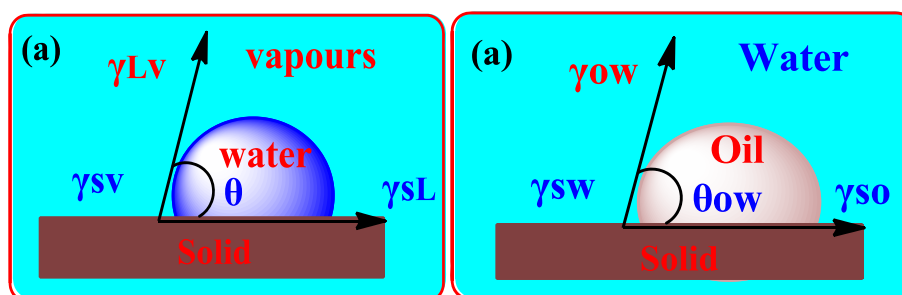


Fig. 6. Young wetting states of liquid droplet on solid smooth surfaces in the air: (a) and underwater (b).

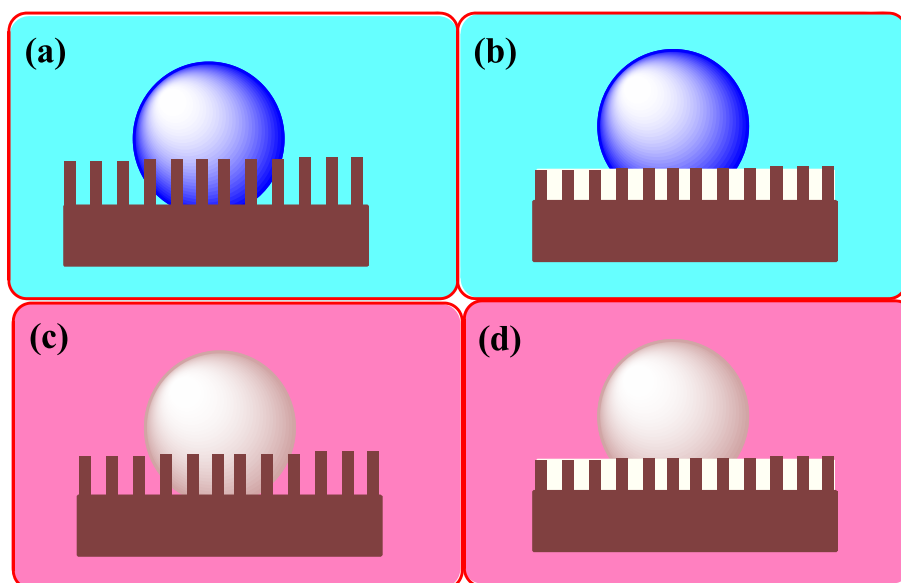


Fig. 7. Wetting states of oil droplet on various underwater solid surfaces: in the air Wenzel state (a) and Cassie state (b) and underwater and Wenzel state (c) and Cassie states (d).

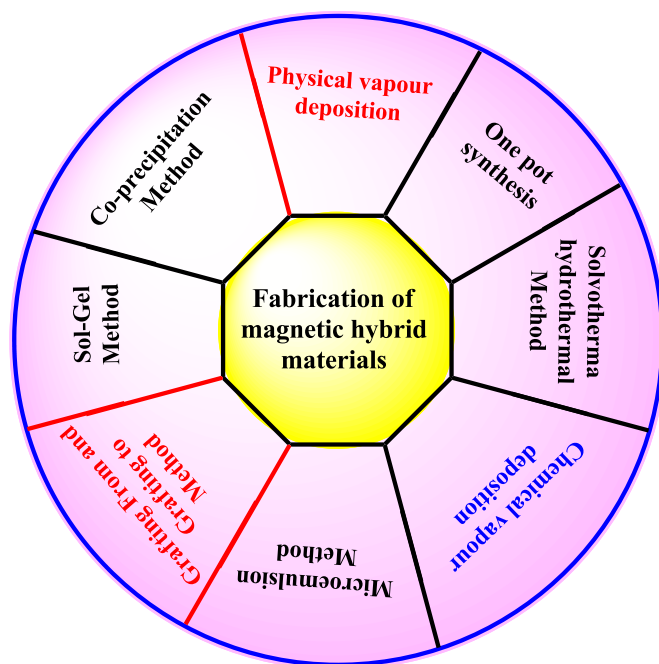


Fig. 8. Fabrication techniques of magnetic composite materials.

challenging and has been achieved successfully [159]. Some other prepared hybrid materials in anisotropic shape or taking in an anisotropic distribution of different functional groups, in which the material particles can be split into two sections and each component formed from dissimilar materials or having different functional groups [160]. They mimic the behavior of such anisotropic or Janus type materials i.e. surfactants, which showed different functionalities like hydrophilic, hydrophobic with a remarkable self-assembly behavior. Therefore, an enormous interest has been noted in Janus type hybrid materials, which is confirmed by the publication of research articles on this topic [161,162].

Janus microspheres can be prepared by three distinct methods, one of which is the self-assembly of components i.e. mixture ligands and block copolymers (polymeric micelles) [163–167]. The second

method to prepare Janus type hybrid material is called masking step in which the functionalization or polymerization chemical reaction takes place on one portion of the nanoparticle because the other side of the nanoparticles is made to be inaccessible to some reagents [168–171]. The third method is either simple phase separation of different polymers using the phase segregation of the inorganic part outside or interior of the polymer [172–177], or phase separation of two similar inorganic components, especially to make nanocrystalline dimers [178–182]. Additionally, experimental work shows, close to the very exceptional computational design of Janus type materials published, which support the existing results [183–187]. Moreover, there is much-focused research work on the self-assembly of Janus type hybrid materials and their surface activity [188–190]. Fig. 9 summarize different shapes and morphologies of magnetic composite materials.

Chemistry of hybrid materials can be improved, which let the properties of different to be lent to the nanoscale material [191]. The past theoretical and experimental research elucidates the microsphere's adsorption liquid/liquid interfaces and the stability of emulsion [192,193]. In addition, the stimuli-responsive polymer is one of the promising set of materials in this context [194]. The combination of stimuli-responsive polymers with some suitable inorganic components to successfully produce a composite fabric with some promising properties such as their application to employ them in the oil, water interface [195–200]. To fabricate multilayered hybrid material self-assembly of the inorganic component in the oil-water interface can be used [201].

The most essential part of hybrid material is its organic part, which imports a diverse range of fabrication and construction design to the assembly material. It is very much important that the surface of inorganic nanoparticle should be functioned with an organic component to balance or regulate the interaction of nanoparticles and other organisms [202–204]. The surface of the nanoparticle should be paved with organic component or ligand with low toxicity and varied range of applications [205]. The organic component possesses stability, high dispersibility, flexibility, and creative functionality. For example, the modification and functionalization of the surface of nanoparticles with suitable organic components can import promising properties and site-specificity. This mostly depends on the organic components attached to the nanoparticle surface and also the properties and nature of the nanoparticles in the end [206]. An

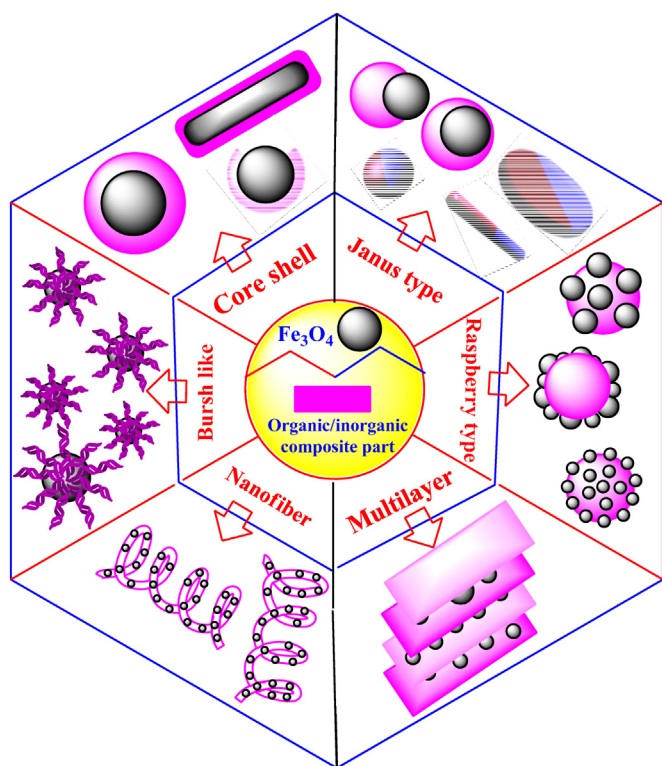


Fig. 9. Different shapes of magnetic composite microspheres.

example, the surface of gold-nanoparticles may be functionalized with the ligands of the thiol group and the silica surface is better to functionalized with silane component. The double hydroxide layer possesses some unique features while making the exchange of anions within the inner layers and utilized for the organic anions carriage.

5. Magnetic hybrid materials at the oil-water interface

Bearing in mind the chemical, thermal, electrical and filtration processes for demulsification of water-oil emulsions with their limitations, herein, we elucidate a new family of amphiphilic, superoleophilic/superhydrophobic and hydrophobic/superoleophilic hybrid and assembly materials with different shape, morphology, and architecture as emulsion destabilizer. The primary advantage of this hybrid material is to separate oil, water emulsion in a very short time, low temperature, reduced sludge formation and oil loss. Many of these materials may be magnetic in nature with a strong magnetic domain and can be reused several times, also do not contaminate the separated emulsion. The intention is to review general hybrid and assembly materials, separation processes from the varieties of other processes available, historical aspects and mechanistic points of view. The effect of different operating conditions for the performance of hybrid and assembly materials is also summarized.

Magnetic polymer microspheres constitute an advanced macromolecule material, composed of a polymer and an inorganic magnetic material exhibiting the dual characteristic features. The magnetic material endures the microspheres with superparamagnetic properties enabling the particles to be conveniently separated from a solution under the external magnetic field and can be reused without any high-energy operation and cost such as filtration and centrifugation [207]. Magnetic hybrid materials, particularly the encapsulated magnetite (Fe_3O_4), exhibits a broad range of applications including target drug delivery, hyperthermia therapy, purification/separation, catalysis and so on [208–210]. The transition of the Fe_3O_4 functionalities by encapsulating

Fe_3O_4 through polymers to make a versatile core-shell magnetic hybrid material [211]. Xu et al. used seed emulsion polymerization having seeds of magnetic nanoparticles to prepare magnetic polymer hybrid material in control shape, size and desirable interfacial functionalities [212].

Magnetic materials exhibit special magnetic properties that can be recovered for reuse from the multiphase complex systems. In the past few years, these materials have attracted a significant research interest [213–215]. Magnetic hybrid materials are carriers for their diverse applications because of strong magnetic responses and easy separation of a complex multiphase system by an external magnetic field. Magnetic nanomaterials have been extensively applied in a variety of fields, such as separation and purification [216], catalysis [217]. Among these, Fe_3O_4 is considered an ideal candidate because of its good compatibility and low cytotoxicity [218]. Table 1 explains the summary of magnetic hybrid material with application in the separation of oil and water emulsion. The grafting of magnetic nanoparticles with brushes charged polymer in order to study the advantages of combine charged polymer brushes on the magnetic nanoparticles hydration effect, having a large surface area, maybe promising material for oil-water separation [245–247]. The grafting poly(3-sulfopropyl methacrylate potassium salt) (PSPMA) brushes-grafted $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SiO}_2$ magnetic composite nanoparticles having negatively charged and strong hydration capacity in aqueous solution because of the presence of PSPMA brushes [248] that can pick up the present water droplets in an oil-water emulsion. Silica coating can be used to cover the Fe_3O_4 nanoparticle cores from further aggregation and damage and produces proper supporting media to combine active functional groups like Si-OH groups [250]. When the prepared magnetic composite nanoparticles were applied for separation of an oil-water mixture, the dispersed water droplets gathered to form a big hydrate, which was easily separated by an external magnetic field [220] (Fig. 10).

More recently, the fabrication of polyurethane with iron oxide and polystyrene in a two-step method generated $\text{PU}/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{PS}$ magnetic sponge with superhydrophobic properties [222]. Photopolymerization and grafting with ultrasonic dip coating was used to effectively attach the polystyrene and iron oxide Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles on the surface of polyurethane sponge and thus prepared a well-engineered, hydrophobic nano-sized surface as explained in Fig. 11(a). As the photopolymerization is one of the facile methods for the surface modification of polymers [251,252]. The prepared superhydrophobic $\text{PU}/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{PS}$ sponge exhibits the excellent capacity of adsorption and reusability. Therefore, $\text{PU}/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{PS}$ sponge was applied to selective adsorption of different organic solvents and oil fractions from water. It was concluded that $\text{PU}/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{PS}$ sponge shows the efficient separation of oil, water mixtures if used in combination (Fig. 11(b, c, and d)). Furthermore, the strong magnetic property made the superhydrophobic $\text{PU}/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{PS}$ sponge more convenient for multiple time reusability after magnetic separation.

$\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SiO}_2$ magnetic hybrid core-shell porous microspheres were prepared through a very simple template fabrication approach, while the superhydrophobicity of the prepared $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SiO}_2$ was improved by using vinyl tri ethoxy silane (Fig. 12). The modified $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SiO}_2$ magnetic hybrid core-shell microspheres with porous characters showed an excellent absorption capacity of floating oil content from the surface of the water. They exhibited a slight decrease in the absorption and contact angle after 20 times successive reuse cycles [223]. Ali et al. [6] designed novel amphiphilic hybrid polymer magnetic microspheres with a core-shell structure (Fig. 13). The copolymerization of monomers MMA, GMA, and DVB on the Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles surface followed by surface modification with epoxy groups on the shell of the prepared polymer by an amino group created intelligent hybrid polymeric hybrid core-shell material with magnetic core, good interfacial properties, and separation

Table 1

Nano-scale magnetic hybrid materials at oil-water interface.

Type of magnetic material	Wettability	Synthetic route	Emulsion type	Separation (%)	References
Polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP)-coated iron oxide	Hydrophilic	Solvothermal/coating	Storage oil/water	100	[219]
Poly(3-sulfopropyl methacrylate potassium salt) (PSPMA) brushes-grafted Fe ₃ O ₄ @SiO ₂		Solvothermal/hydration effect	n-Hexane/water		[220]
Carbon nanotube-poly(vinyl alcohol) (CNT-PVA)	Underwater superoleophobic	Self-initiated photografting and photopolymerization (SIPGP)	Crude oil/water	70–80	[221]
PU@Fe ₃ O ₄ @PS sponge			Diesel/water	99.4	[222]
Vinyltriethoxysilane/Fe ₃ O ₄ /SiO ₂	Hydrophobic/Oleophilic	Fabrication Layer by layer fabrication	Diesel/water		[223]
Fe ₃ O ₄ /graphene oxide/MgAl-layer double hydroxide			Gasoline/water	98.5	[224]
			Diesel/water	99.0	
			Crude oil/water	99.2	
Fe ₃ O ₄ @SiO ₂ —NH ₂ /cyclodextrins (CDs)	Hydrophilic exterior/hydrophobic interior	Fabrication	Crude oil/water	99.8	[225]
Poly(styrene-divinylbenzene) (Poly (St-DVB))	Hydrophobic	Polymerization/fabrication	Gasoline/water	100	[226]
Fe ₃ O ₄			Diesel/water	92	[226]
Fe ₃ O ₄ /PS	Hydrophobic/superoleophilic	Solvothermal/precipitation polymerization	Diesel/water		[227]
Polystyrene/Fe ₃ O ₄ /graphene aerogel			Crude oil/water	99.7	[228]
Polyurethane@Fe ₃ O ₄ @SiO ₂ @Fluoropolymer sponges	Superhydrophobic	Solvothermal/dispersion polymerization/ Copolymerization/chemical vapor deposition (CVD)	Petrol/water		[229]
Ethyl cellulose (EC)/carboxymethyl cellulose (CMC)/magnetite (Fe ₃ O ₄)	Hydrophobic	Solvothermal/fabrication	Toluene/water	96.76	[230]
Polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS)/ZnFe ₂ O ₄	Superhydrophilic	Solvothermal/coating	n-Hexane/water	98	[231]
Poly{3-[dimethyl(2-methacryloyl oxyethyl) amino]propanesulfonate} (PDMAAPS)/Fe ₃ O ₄		Solvothermal/RAFT polymerization	Crude oil/water		[232]
Polyvinyl pyrrolidone coated magnetite nanoparticles		Hydrothermal/coating	Hexadecane/water	100	[233]
Ethyl cellulose (EC)/Fe ₃ O ₄	Amphiphilic	Grafting	Dodecane/water		[234]
Poly(vinylidene fluoride-hexa fluoro propylene) (PVDF-HFP)/Fe ₃ O ₄	Hydrophobic	Solvothermal/single-step dipping fabrication method	Water/diluted bitumen	90	[235]
Triethoxy (1H, 1H, 2H, 2H heptadeca fluorodecyl) silane (TEHDFS)/Fe ₃ O ₄ /melamine sponge	Superhydrophobic	One-pot solvothermal	Petroleum ether/water	92.32	[236]
Cellulose sponge (CE)/hexa decyl trimethoxysilane/Fe ₃ O ₄	Superhydrophobic	Solvothermal/sol—gel method and freeze drying	Chloroform/water	85.3	[236]
			n-Hexane/water	95	[239]
			Toluene/water	97	
			Cyclohexane/water,	98	
			Paraffin oil/water	96	
Steel mesh/ferric stearate (Fe[CH ₃ (CH ₂) ₁₆ COO] ₂)	Superhydrophobic/superoleophilic	Fabrication	Crude oil/water		[240]
Melamine-formaldehyde sponges/Fe ₃ O ₄	Hydrophobic/oleophilic	Fabrication	Tetrachloromethane/water		[241]
			n-Hexane/water		
(3-glycidoxypentyl) tri methoxy silane (GPTMS)	Hydrophobic	Solvothermal/fabrication	Gasoline/water	70.4	[242]
Epoxy group functionalized Fe ₃ O ₄ @SiO ₂			Crude oil/water		
Quartz fiber (QF)/polydimethyl siloxane (PDMS)/Fe ₃ O ₄	Hydrophobic	Fabrication	n-Hexane/water	99	[243]
			Toluene/water		
Fe ₂ O ₃ /Carbon, Cobalt/C, and Ni/C foams, polyurethane sponge/poly (acrylic acid)	Hydrophobic	Polymerization	Gasoline/water		
			Crude oil/water	95	[244]
	Amphiphilic	Solvothermal/emulsion polymerization	n-Hexane/water	86	
			Diesel/water	80	
	Amphiphilic	Solvothermal/distillation precipitation polymerization	Octane/water	84	
			Gasoline/water	90	
Poly(methylmethacrylate-acrylic acid –divinyl benzene)/iron oxideP(MMA-AA-DVB)/Fe ₃ O ₄	Amphiphilic	Solvothermal/emulsion polymerization	Crude oil/water	99	[3–5]
Iron oxide @poly (methyl methacrylate –acrylic acid-divinylbenzene) (Fe ₃ O ₄ @P(MMA-AA-DVB))	Amphiphilic	Solvothermal/distillation precipitation polymerization	Crude oil/water	96	[6]

capacities. The designed amino-modified Fe₃O₄@P(GMA-MMA-DVB) magnetic composite microspheres have the ability to properly migrate to the oil-water interface and disturb the structure of natural emulsifying surfactants (asphaltenes) and thus separate water from crude oil [6]. In another study, the same group investigated the demulsification properties of magnetic composite microspheres to improve the demulsifying efficiency with respect to time, temperature and concentration of demulsifiers and prepared a new core-shell magnetic composite microspheres, iron oxide@poly(methyl

methacrylate-acrylic acid-divinylbenzene) (Fe₃O₄@P(MMA-AA-DVB) magnetic composite microspheres. The hydrophilic amino group of amino-modified P(GMA-MMA-DVB) was replaced with the carboxylic group and prepared Fe₃O₄@P(MMA-AA-DVB) magnetic hybrid materials with proper core-shell morphology (Fig. 14). In the prepared Fe₃O₄@P(MMA-AA-DVB) microsphere, there is a hydrophobic alkyl and hydrophilic carboxylic group, and the P(MMA-AA-DVB) co-polymer shows good amphiphilic and interfacial properties. The as-prepared magnetic hybrid microspheres leading to

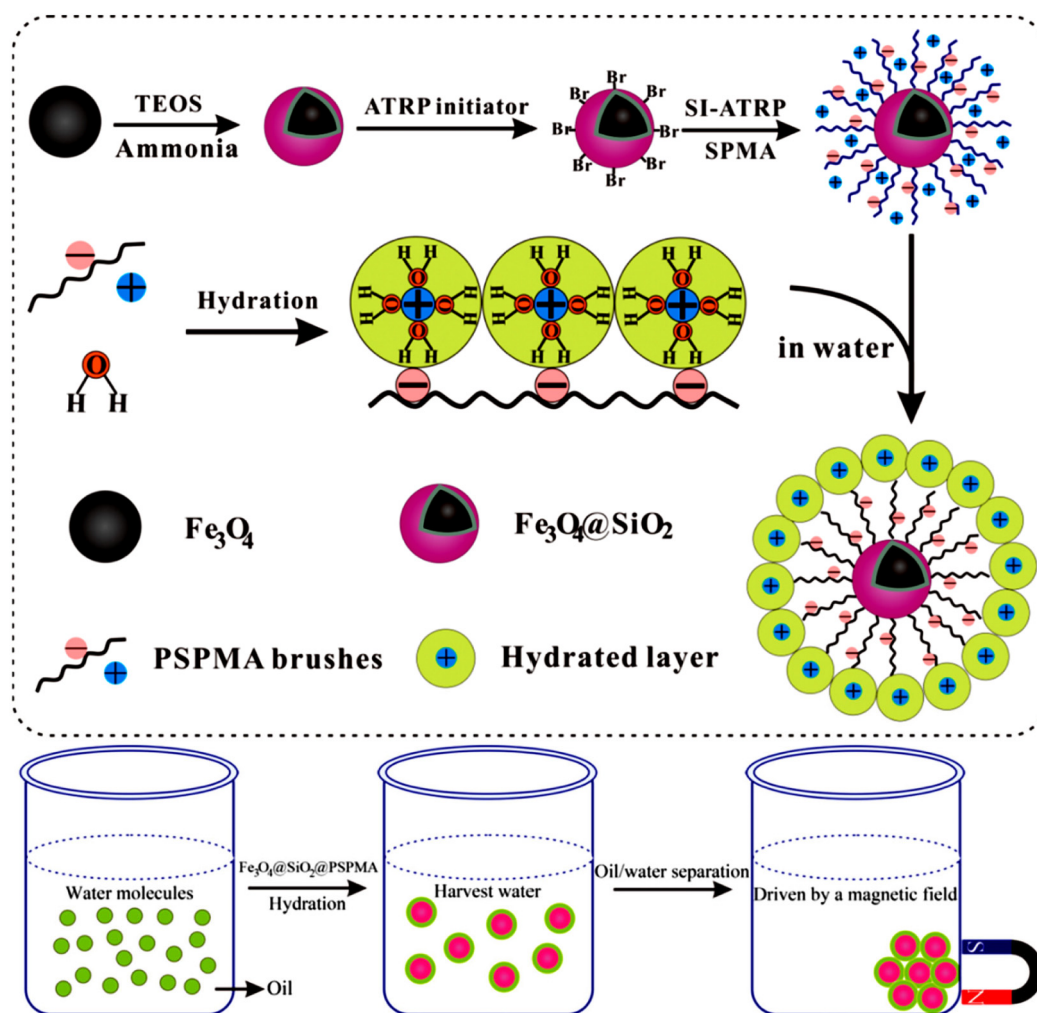


Fig. 10. Possible explanation of the e charged polymer brushes-grafted magnetic composite core-shell nanoparticles ($\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{SiO}_2@\text{PSPMA}$), PSPMA brushes hydration mechanism, and oil/water separation.

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quick separation under the magnetic response. Therefore, $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{P}$ (MMA-AA-DVB) magnetic hybrid material can give a rapid phase separation for demulsification by an external magnetic field because of enhanced coalescence and controlled movement of stable water droplets [5]. Ali et al. [3] further improved the demulsification efficiency of $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{P}(\text{MMA-AA-DVB})$ magnetic hybrid material by the modification of the structure from core-shell to Janus type. They designed Janus type $\text{P}(\text{MMA-AA-DVB})/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ magnetic hybrid material with enhanced surface properties, tunable structural anisotropy, the higher domain of magnetite, and high amphiphilic and wettability properties. In an oil-water emulsion, Janus magnetic hybrid material exhibits interfacial properties, enhanced the coalescence of water droplets and rapid separation of the water phase from oil in emulsion by an external magnetic field (Fig. 15).

Further, the $\text{P}(\text{MMA-AA-DVB})/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ magnetic hybrid Janus material revealed excellent demulsification of crude oil-water emulsion with inspiration that the morphology of magnetic particles may be an important factor affecting its demulsification properties. Therefore, a completely new and more effective demulsifier comparing with $\text{P}(\text{MMA-AA-DVB})/\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ magnetic composite microspheres with the raspberry-like structure were prepared (Fig. 16) [4], which can destabilize oil and water emulsion quickly, at low temperature, and can be reused many times.

Zhang et al. fabricated magnetically recoverable interfacial hybrid material modified with cyclodextrin (MCDs). Though MCDs modified nanoparticles demonstrate more hydrophilic properties, the intelligent M-CDs can be easily switched from hydrophilic to hydrophobic characters spontaneously because of the inclusion complexes (ICs) formation between cyclodextrin/oil at the oil-water interface. Physicochemical characterization and the amphiphilic properties of modified cyclodextrin revealed that the material can adsorb at the oil, water interface and can be observed on the surface of the droplet like a Pickering emulsifier. With the application of external hand-magnet, the modified cyclodextrin can be recovered from the surface of the droplet and leads to the effective separation of oil-water emulsion [229]. The encapsulation of iron oxide with hydrophilic carboxymethyl cellulose (CMC) through the process of adsorption in aqueous solution by hydrogen bonding and electrostatic force of attraction produced interfacially active and dispersed M-CMC nanoparticles with Janus like structure (Fig. 17) [230]. The prepared material displayed exceptional interfacial properties, which were investigated by interfacial pressure-area isotherms (π -A), and coalescence time (using induction time). Magnetic composite Janus nanoparticles were successfully applied to the oil, water emulsion leading to effective phase separation of the emulsions and the oil-contaminated wastewaters [253].

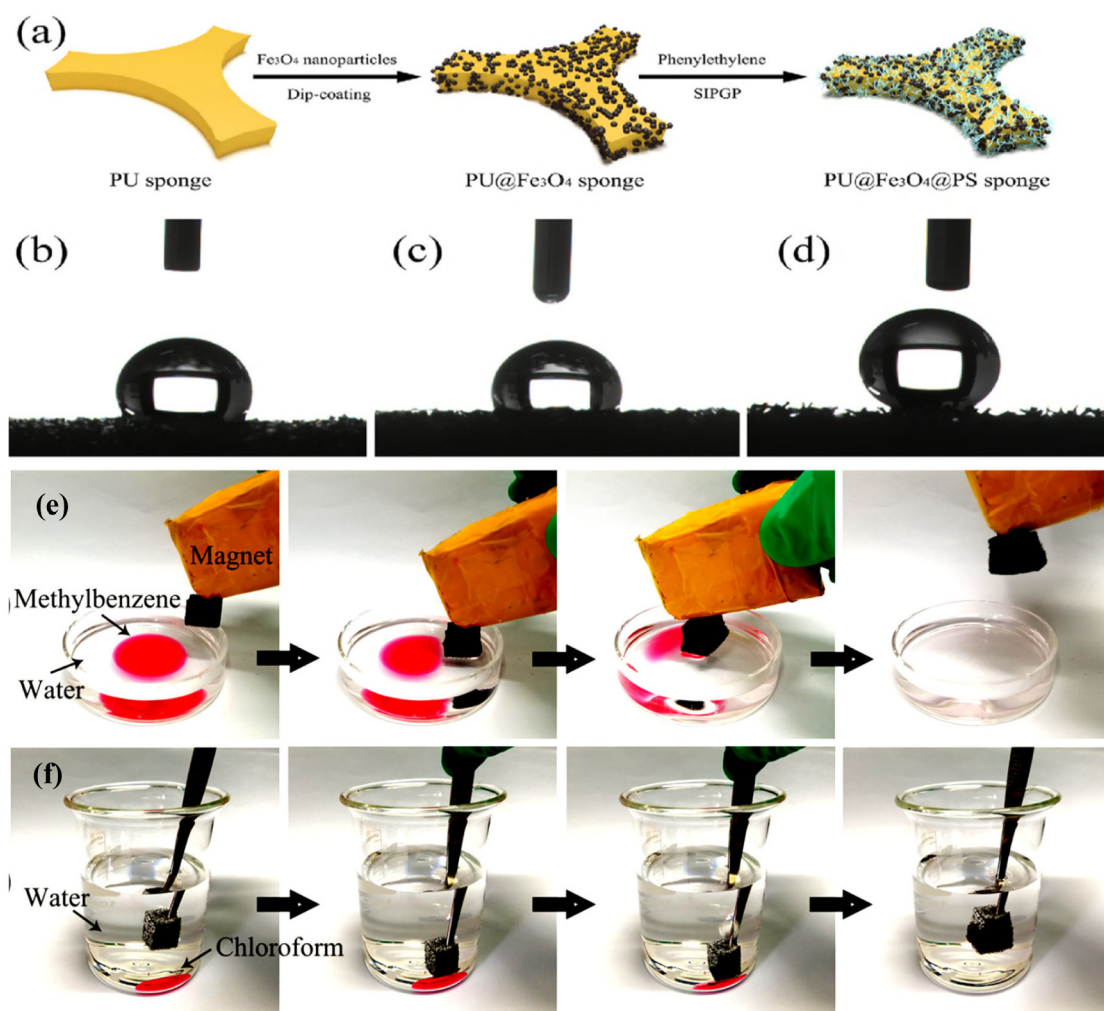


Fig. 11. (a) Explanation for preparation of PU@Fe₃O₄@PS sponge; The WCA of (b) PU sponge, (c) PU@Fe₃O₄ sponge and (d) PU@Fe₃O₄@PS sponge and adsorption processes of (e) methylbenzene in water surface and (f) chloroform underwater. Reprinted from Ref. [223] with permission from the American Chemical Society. Copyright (2019) American Chemical Society.

6. Up-gradation to a commercial level and challenges

Though there are many advantages of magnetic hybrid materials with distinct wettability properties having applications for the sustainable separation of oil, water mixtures, the approaches of their fabrication and applications are still experienced at laboratory scale and required to upgrade at the pilot and commercial level. Their large scale processing faces several challenges such as (1) on-site bulk or large volume processing (2) high accuracy with the standard operation, effective and suitable working conditions, (3) health, safety and environmental perspective for the large and commercial level production need to be addressed in a more effective manner. The progression in the modern key technologies suggests the up-gradation strategies to sustain the large scale processing and production on-site. Variation and accuracy in the production process are also one of the major concerns to supply magnetic hybrid material having special and switchable wettability properties according to the market needs. Consequently, more state of the art and sophisticated strategies undoubtedly will improve the existing fabrication procedures at commercial level.

7. Conclusions and future perspectives

In this review, we summarized the recent advancements in the fabrication of magnetic hybrid material with smart surfaces,

tunable wetting properties and their potential applications in a controlled separation of oil-water mixtures. The separation behavior, vital theories and principles for the design and preparation of smart materials for effective separation are discussed in detail. This effort may provide a useful guide to research candidates in the future in this field of science and engineering. Additionally, the external stimuli-responsive magnetic materials have also been comprehensively explored to govern the process of separation. Other separations based on smart magnetic hybrid materials and polymers were also addressed because these materials have a noteworthy contribution to the oil-water separation field. For example, electric and light-responsive polymers may be helpful for the transfer of wettability and quick separation. Magnetically responsive smart materials definitely facilitate the process of separation and the collection of absorbents using a simple magnetic process. Generally, the development of emulsion breaking and separating the use of hybrid magnetic polymeric materials separation materials provide excellent results, which import potential applications. Most of the smart magnetic materials exhibit the separation efficiency of extremely high levels reaching beyond 99.99%. In addition, most of the reusable materials showed excellent separation performance even after the use of many times. After studying and completion of this review, it is clear that some smart magnetic materials develop extra high separating materials with

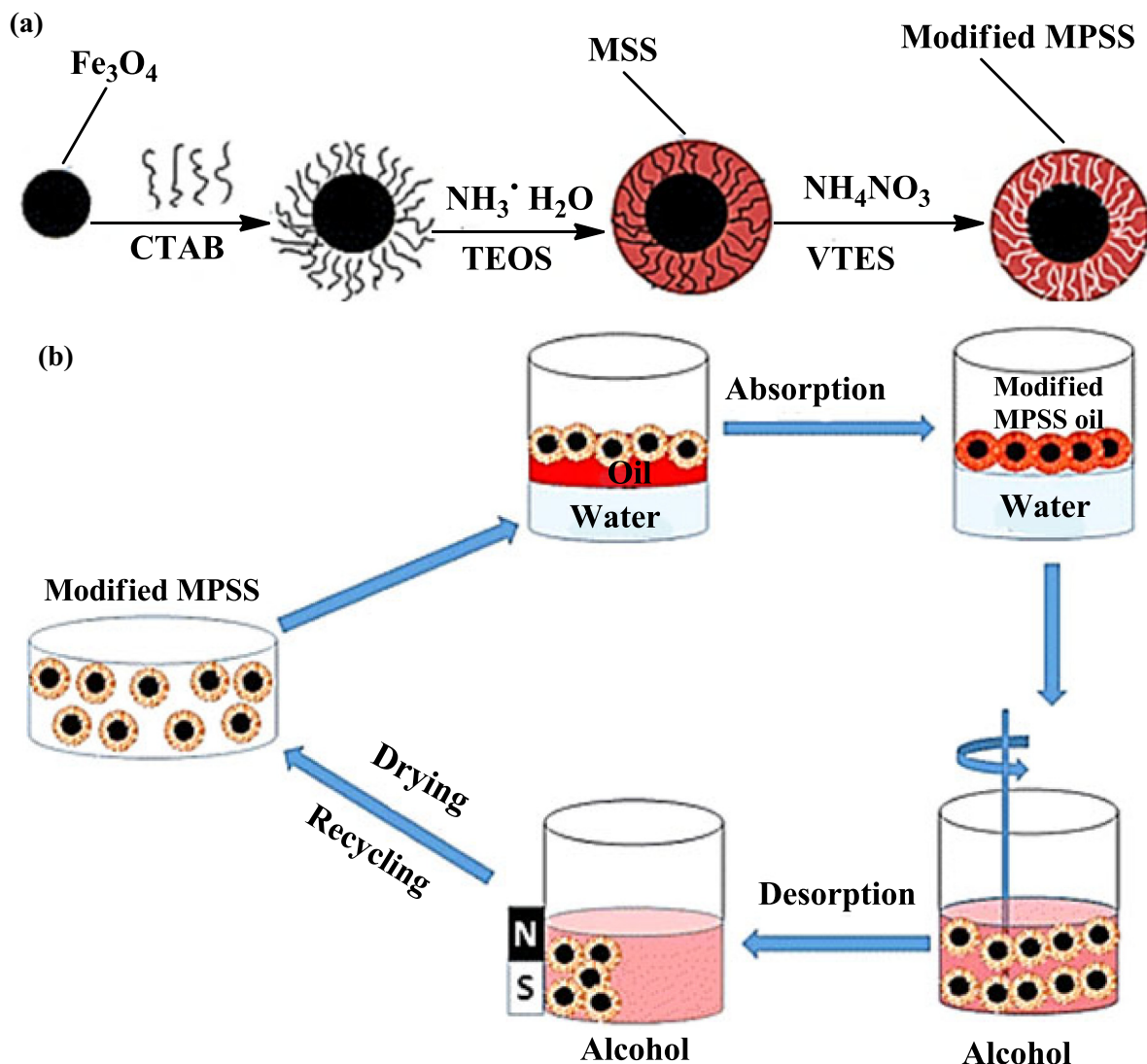


Fig. 12. (a) shows the fabrication mechanism of the $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SiO}_2$ magnetic composite core-shell microspheres and (b) explain the water separation and reusability of the modified MPSS. Reprinted from Ref. [224] with permission from the American Chemical Society. Copyright (2015) American Chemical Society.

responsive surfaces, which open new directions in the field of polymers and environmental science and engineering. Although a promising advancement has been achieved in the design and preparation of hybrid magnetic materials for effective oil-water separation, there are some problems to be properly handled related to the theories of surface super wetting and applications.

- 1) Surface wettability is the first scientific and complex problem. Recently, most of the synthetic procedures (e.g., in situ polymerization) are laboratory-based and are not applicable for the production at a high level. Indeed, some new principles were used for the fabrication of extremely promising magnetic materials for the separation of oil and water emulsions. Also, the problem of deterioration of responsiveness and reduction in separation ability needs to be properly addressed.
- 2) For materials with pH-responsive ability, the pre-wetting treatment is required for the separation devices with specific pH aqueous solution, but it is important that the pH of the surrounding medium would change during the separation. Although this problem may be more dangerous if the device is used for multiple attempts of separation. At this stage, other

separation assisting methods like physical stimuli (e.g. light, temperature, electric field, etc.) may add more advantages. Therefore, the development and synthesis of these hybrid and smart materials are of high value and more encouraging for future research. Furthermore, the water contaminated with oil or oil and water emulsion also contains heavy metal ions and microorganisms.

- 3) Though most of the materials are excellent in oil-water separation but do not account for the problem of heavy metal ions. Therefore, some stimuli-responsive and multifunctional material having the ability to separate both oil and water mixtures and remove heavy metal ions from the contaminated media with antimicrobial properties are the need of the day. For example, the incorporation of some functional groups, which have the ability of complexation with a metal ion (e.g. Carboxyl group) into the polymer for the removal of heavy metal ions. Photocatalytic degradation is mostly possible with the irradiation of UV light toward microorganisms and organic compounds. Therefore, the addition of UV light-sensitive nanoparticles like TiO_2 and ZnO into the polymer to prepare materials may show broad applications both antifouling in the switching wettability.

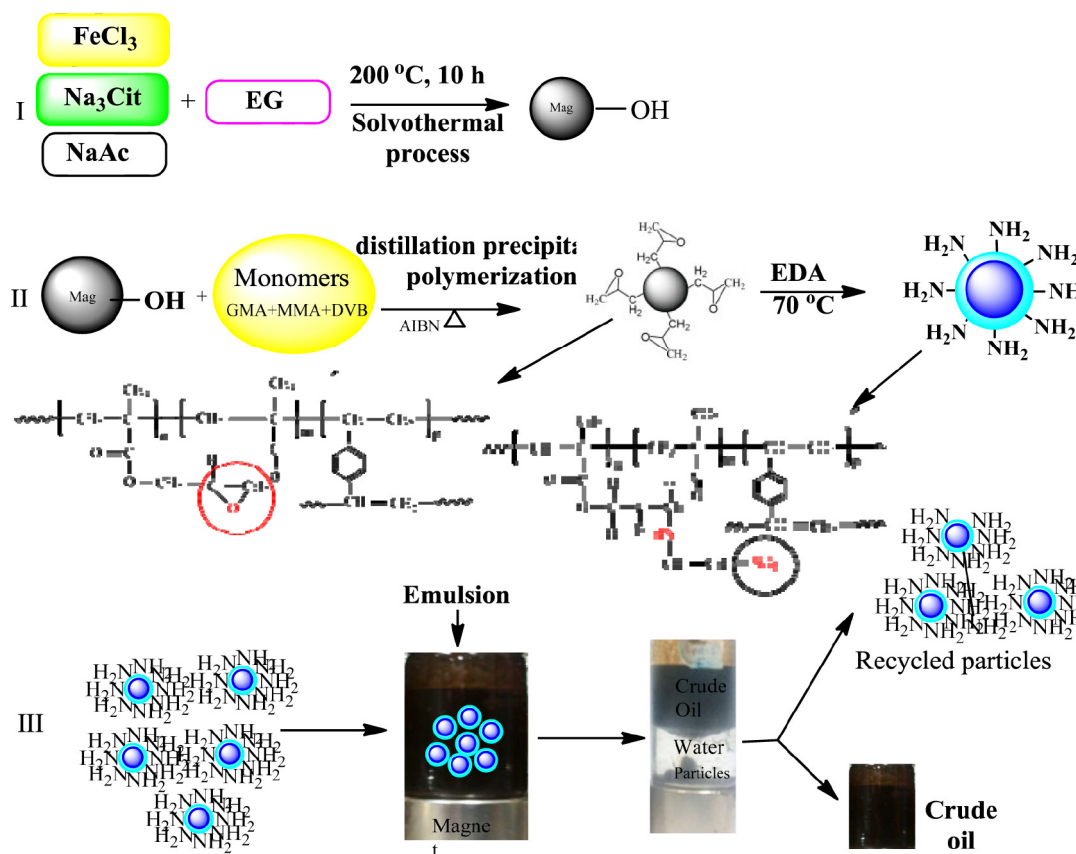


Fig. 13. Formation and demulsification mechanism of amino-modified $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@P(\text{GMA-MMA-DVB})$ magnetic core-shell microspheres. Modified from Ref. [6] with permission from John Wiley and Sons. Copyright (2015) The Chemical Society Located in Taipei & Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH & Co. KGaA, Weinheim, Germany.

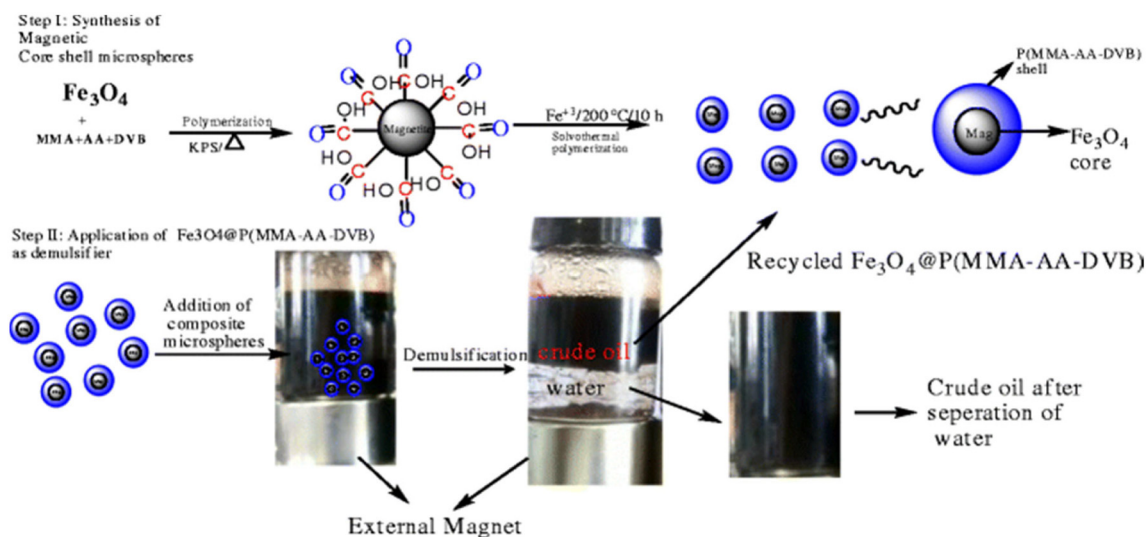


Fig. 14. Structure and formation mechanism of $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@P(\text{MMA-AA-DVB})$ core-shell magnetic microspheres. Reprinted from Ref. [5] with permission from Springer Nature. Copyright (2015) Springer Nature.

4) The contamination of aqueous media with oil is the most prominent issue to be faced with hostility with the “oil removing” tag. This issue is more serious in the oil fields where more thick and viscous oil-water emulsions destabilization is the daily task. For effective remediation of this issue, it is required to develop a technology for the preparation of more engineered and porous magnetic hybrid

materials with high water affinity, super oleophobicity, low surface energy and air superoleophobicity for the separation of thick emulsions.

5) The design and synthesis of magnetic hybrid materials with effective oil-water separation efficiency and reusability has been achieved, but the improvement in the speed of separation is still

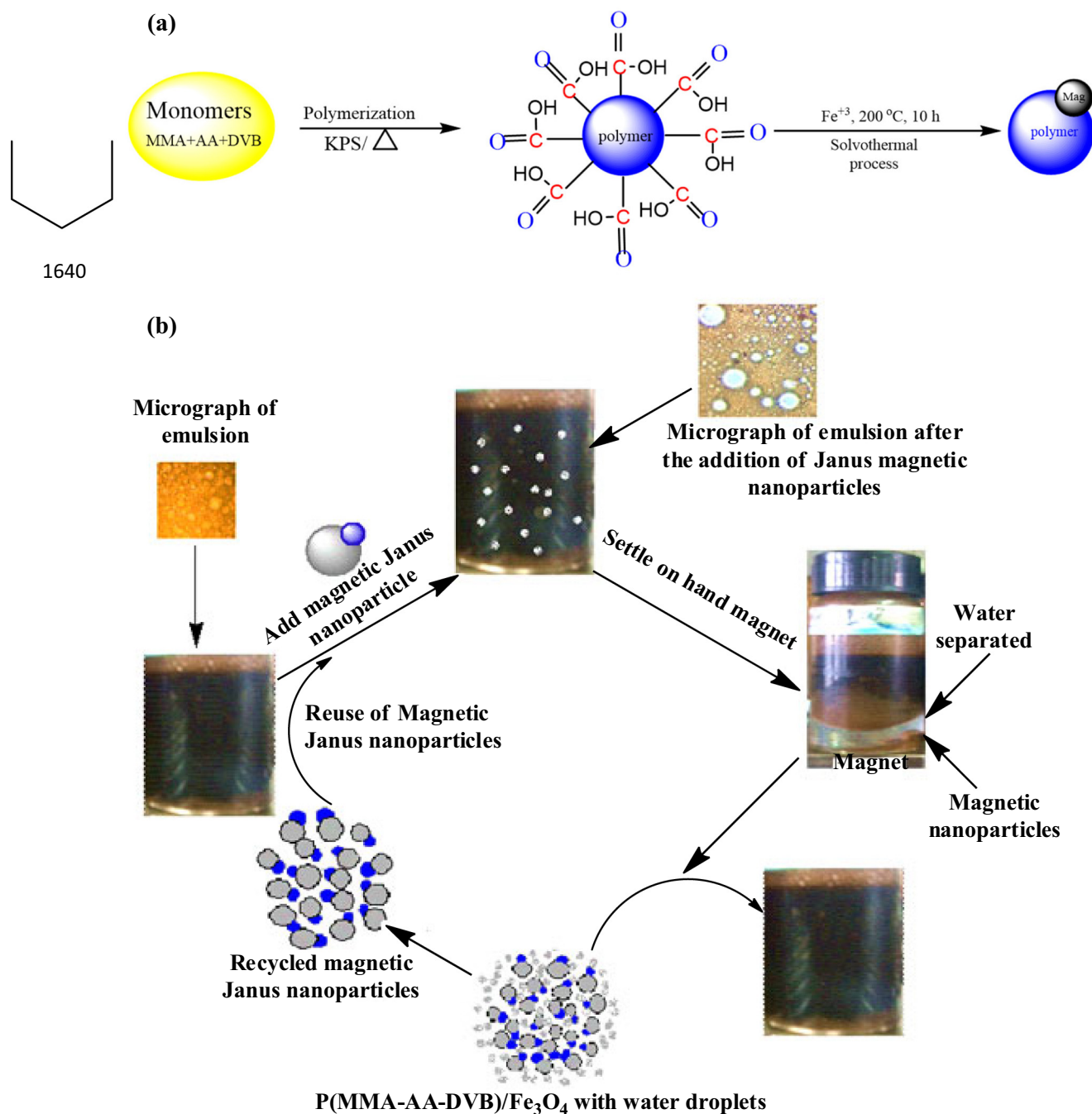


Fig. 15. (a) Synthetic procedures of Janus magnetic composite microspheres and (b) demulsification and recycling of P(MMA-AA-DVB)/Fe₃O₄ Janus magnetic composite microspheres. Reprinted from Ref. [3] with permission from Elsevier. Copyright (2014) Elsevier Ltd.

a desire. One of the possible solutions is the separation under high pressure. Therefore, rapid and efficient materials with pressure resistance and super-wettability properties should be developed. Finally yet importantly, the shape and surface morphology of the separation smart magnetic material is more important, which should be prevented from damage caused by the external environment, i.e. impact of liquid flow, mechanical stress, high pressure, etc. This condition is more important in the case of structured materials like porous adsorbent and fibrous membranes. In this case, materials of polymers or composites of magnetic-polymer exhibit excellent mechanical strength and hopefully will solve this problem. The synthesis and fabrication

of polymer or inorganic-polymer (magnetic composite) separation materials are combined with the mass production problem at a large scale, so the development of cost-effective and simple methods are urgently required. Challenges are always at the front desk phenomenon, which motivates future achievements and us to fight. Advancement in polymer and material science holds the responsibility of composition, morphology and tunable design of smart materials targeted to meet the demand in the field of separation. The previous research work specifically focused on the synthesis of magnetic materials with smart surfaces through the functionalization of the targeted substrate with some smart polymers. If we can fabricate some new magnetic materials

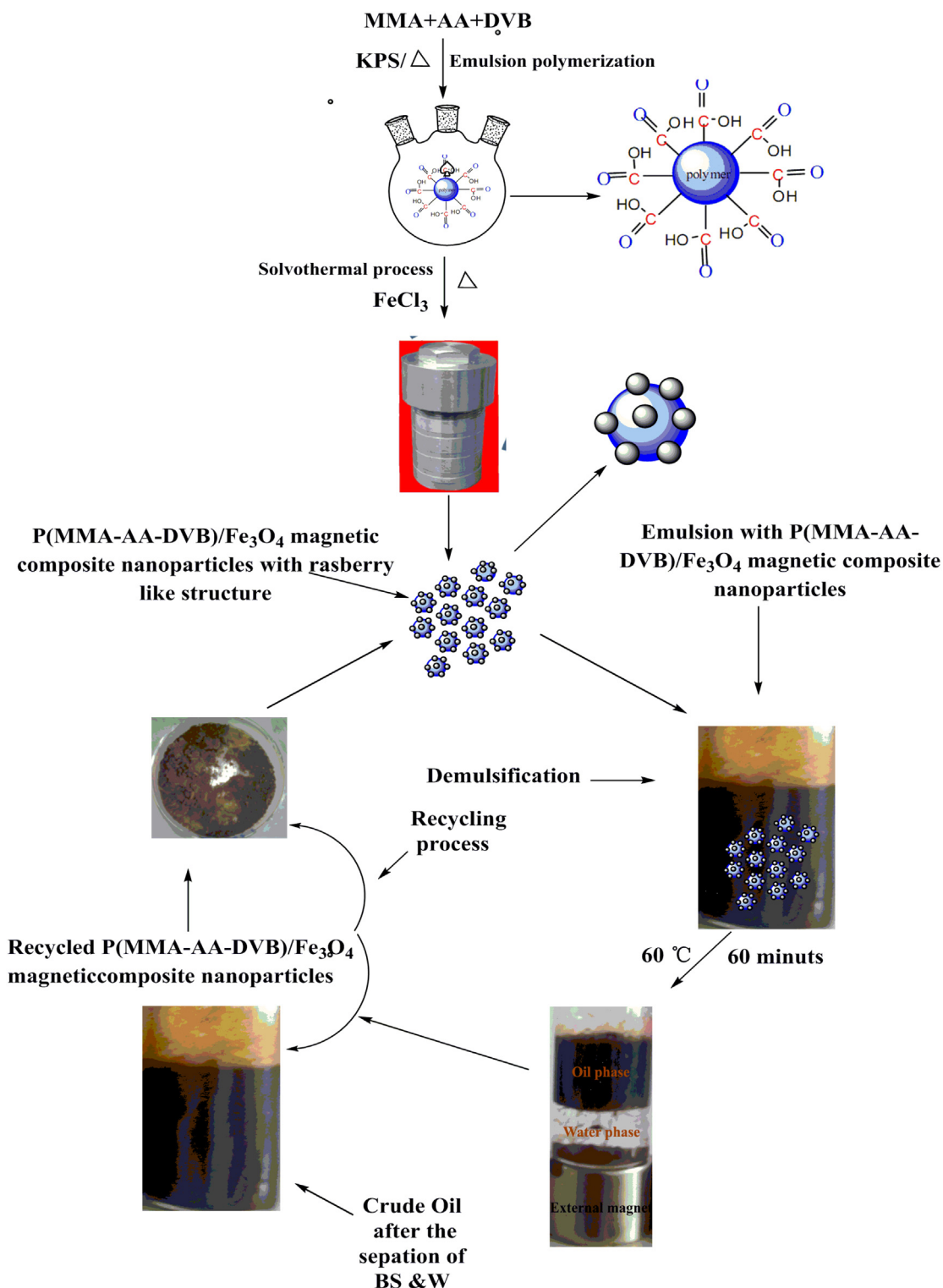


Fig. 16. Procedures are explained the process of synthesis, demulsification and recycling of raspberry like P(MMA-AA-DVB)/ Fe_3O_4 magnetic composite nanoparticles. Reprinted from Ref. [4] with permission from Elsevier. Copyright (2015) Elsevier B.V.

with both smart polymer and smart surface, this may create a super-smart material with the super-smart application. In the present era, some new and facile materials with tunable and smart surfaces and chemistry have been developed. Due to the high demulsification efficiency and good reusability, the separation regulated through wettability shows more applications and advantages over the conventional methods used for separation, which may have a promising perspective in the field

of oil wastewater treatment including demulsification of oil-water emulsion.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors report no conflict of interest in any capacity, i.e., competing or financial.

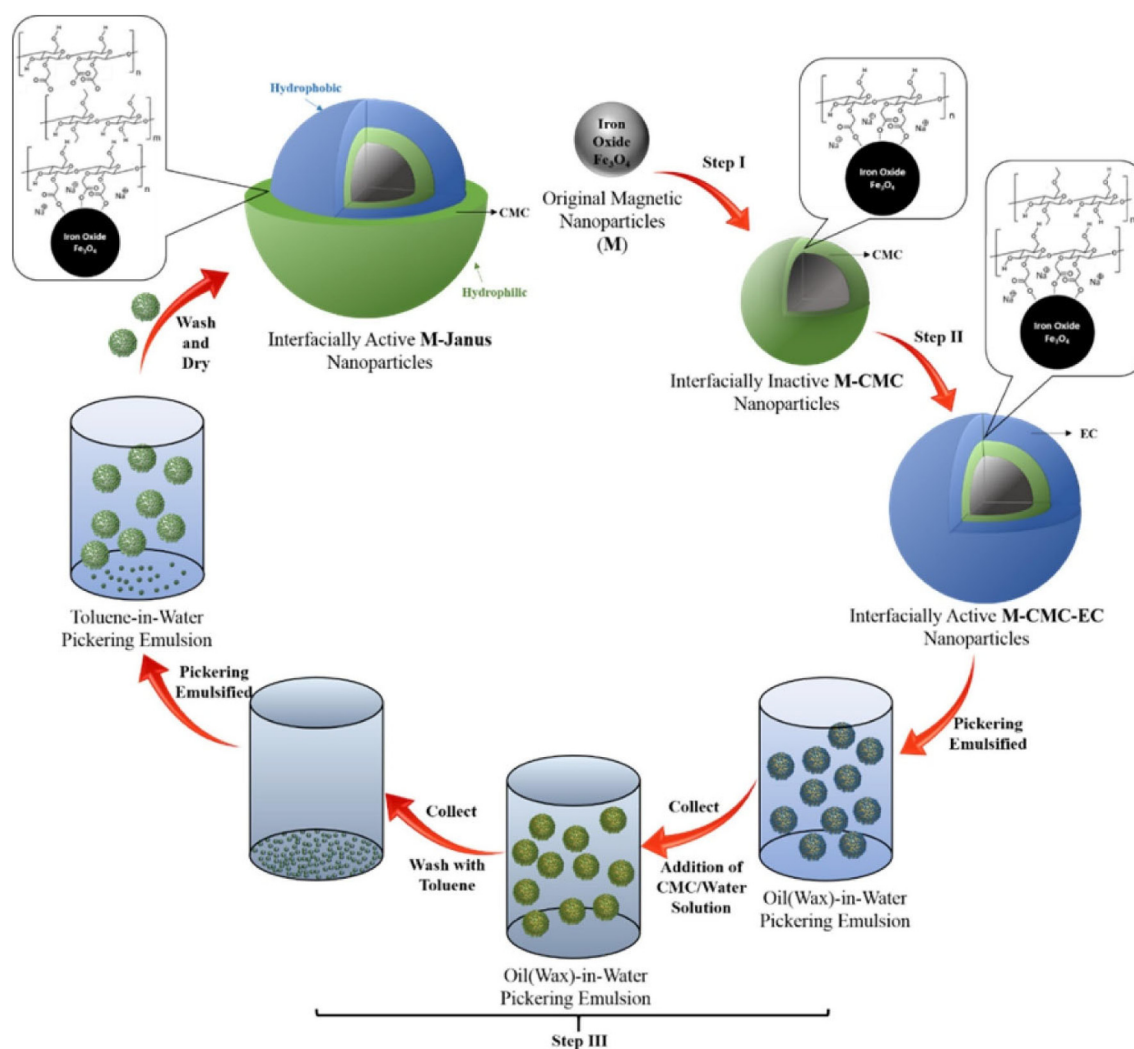


Fig. 17. Synthesis and demulsification procedures of M-Janus nanoparticles. Reprinted from Ref. [231] with permission from Elsevier. Copyright (2019) Elsevier B.V.

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