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# Digital Knowledge, Epistemic Transformation, and University Autonomy in Algeria; A Socio-Epistemological Analysis of Cognitive Change in Higher Education

**Ben Ali Rabah**
Associate Professor A
Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Research Laboratory on the Behavior of Individuals, Groups, and Organizations (LRCIGO)
Algeria
E-mail: rabah.benali@univ-tiaret.dz

**Berrim Abdelkader**
Dr. Associate Professor
Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Laboratory of Philosophical Studies and Issues of Man and Society in Algeria – Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret
Algeria
E-mail: bdelkader.berrim@univ-tiaret.dz

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**Abstract**

The present study examines the ongoing cognitive and epistemic transformations within Algerian universities by employing a socio-epistemological framework that situates digitalization not merely as a technological shift but as a profound transformation of the structures, values, and methodologies that govern knowledge production. Grounded in an analytical epistemological method supported by sociological interpretation, the research explores how digital globalization reshapes pedagogical practices, research cultures, and institutional governance. The findings reveal that cognitive transformation unfolds across three interdependent levels: (1) Cognitive—shifting from memorization to critical and reflective knowledge production; (2) Technological—integrating digital platforms that restructure teaching and research; and (3) Institutional—highlighting the significance of academic autonomy and strategic alignment with national development. The study concludes that authentic transformation requires reconstructing an epistemology capable of integrating local academic traditions with global knowledge dynamics while reinforcing the university's mission in national development.

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## Introduction

In the modern era, the university represents one of the most important knowledge-producing spaces and a key laboratory for thought production and directing development across various fields. With the rise of digital glob-

alization, knowledge systems and functions have been reshaped, making the university space a field for redefining the relationship between knowledge and technology, as well as between the local and the global.

In this context, Algerian universities are undergoing a pivotal phase in their history, no longer limited to transmitting imported knowledge, but seeking to establish a culture of critical knowledge production that interacts with national realities and responds to development requirements amid rapid digital transformation (Baddari, 2025).

Understanding this transformation cannot be separated from the epistemological approach, which concerns the conditions, patterns, and standards of knowledge production and the stakes shaping its relationship with society and reality. The "cognitive transformation" in Algerian universities is not limited to updating tools and techniques but extends to renewing scientific thinking and its methodology.

Digital globalization has forced higher education systems worldwide to reconsider knowledge production and dissemination methods, enabling universities to engage in transnational research networks and integrate into scientific spaces. In Algeria, signs of this transformation are emerging through revisiting the university's role as a knowledge-producing actor contributing to economic and social development, rather than merely a transmitter.

From this perspective, there is a need for an in-depth epistemological reading of Algerian universities, reevaluating their knowledge foundations, limits of autonomy, and ability to produce locally grounded, globally open critical knowledge. This transformation raises key questions:

- How can the Algerian university move beyond knowledge consumption to become a producer and exporter of knowledge?

- Does this transformation enable epistemic and institutional autonomy that links scientific research to national development needs?

## 1. Problem Statement

Higher education in Algeria, as in other countries, is experiencing a deep cognitive transformation driven by the dynamics of digital globalization, which has changed knowledge production patterns, dissemination methods, and traditional concepts. Knowledge has become a strategic resource, an indicator of national power, and a field of simultaneous scientific and economic competition.

In this context, the university's role is no longer limited to rote teaching or transmitting ready-made knowledge but is expected to contribute to the production of creative critical knowledge capable of addressing digital age challenges and societal transformations.

The cognitive transformation in Algerian universities over the past two decades represents a significant shift in higher education, not merely a technical update of infrastructure or integration of digital tools but a deep epistemological transformation affecting knowledge production, methodologies, and functions (Baddari, 2025).

This transformation raises complex epistemological and methodological issues related to the nature of university knowledge, the relationship between digitalization and scientific research, academic field autonomy, and the stakes of knowledge globalization.

1. First, the nature of university knowledge in Algeria raises questions about the continued dominance of the traditional model based on rote learning versus emerging trends toward a research-oriented productive model relying on critique and interaction (Bourdieu, 1984). Algerian universities, as some field studies indicate, are still transitioning from education focused on memorization to knowledge production geared toward solutions and development (Simard, 1991).

2. Second, digitalization emerges as a key factor in transforming educational and research practices, reshaping the relationship between professors, students, and knowledge through remote learning platforms, digital libraries, and virtual labs, redefining the very concept of the "university space" (Castells, 2000). However, this transformation faces challenges, particularly the lack of epistemological training

accompanying technical change, which is necessary to convert technology from a mere tool into a framework producing critical knowledge (Bachelard, 1938).

3. Third, the autonomy of the academic field is a fundamental condition for successful cognitive transformation. A university cannot produce effective knowledge if it remains dependent on bureaucratic directives or political agendas. According to Bourdieu, the independence of the scientific field ensures the objectivity of knowledge and frees it from symbolic and economic pressures (Bourdieu, 1984). In Algeria, this independence remains limited, reflected in weak independent research initiatives and the absence of a real link between scientific research and national development needs (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2022).

4. Fourth, the stakes of knowledge globalization pose a dual challenge: the need to open to global research standards while preserving local cultural and epistemic specificity. Digital globalization, despite offering opportunities for exchange and interaction, may reproduce epistemic dependency if not built on critical foundations that consider local identity and context (Drucker, 1993).

Based on these questions, the central problem of this study revolves around: How does cognitive transformation in Algerian universities, from an epistemological perspective, reshape their relationship with knowledge and guide their role toward creativity and innovation amid digital globalization?

This study aims to analyze this transformation using an epistemological approach that examines the conditions for knowledge production in the Algerian context, reveals its limits and potentials, and explores development paths ensuring its effectiveness in serving national development and active participation in the global scientific space (Kuhn, 1962).

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Toward an Epistemological Approach to Cognitive Transformation in Algerian Universities

The theoretical framework forms the conceptual foundation for understanding the cognitive transformation in Algerian universities under digital globalization, a transformation that can only be grasped from an epistemological perspective linking knowledge production to changes in social and technical conditions.

Bachelard (1938) argued that the development of scientific thought is linked to transformations in the rationality of knowledge itself, with each scientific revolution arising from overcoming epistemic obstacles limiting scientific reasoning. In this sense, digitalization can be seen as a new epistemological revolution, reshaping knowledge production in universities not only in tools but in scientific thinking methods themselves.

Thomas Kuhn (1962) noted that paradigm shifts in science represent a transition from "normal science" to "revolutionary science," partially applicable to Algerian universities, which are beginning to move from the traditional knowledge transmission model to a productive research model aiming to rebuild knowledge in a changing national context (Boukharie, 2023). Karl Popper (2002) emphasized that scientific knowledge develops through continuous criticism and falsification, aligning with calls for higher education modernization in Algeria by adopting a critical rationality open to the world without compromising cultural and epistemic specificity (Ben Issa, 2023).

From an epistemological perspective, Bourdieu (1984) views the academic field as a relatively independent social space defined by power relations, knowledge, and symbolic capital. Thus, Algerian university autonomy as a knowledge-producing institution remains constrained by political and administrative balances, limiting its ability to freely determine research priorities serving local development needs (Qureshi, 2024).

Recent studies (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2024; Ghoul, 2022) indicate that digitalization has helped transform educational and research practices by expanding open learning spaces and enhancing professor-student interaction. However, this transformation remains partial without epistemological updates in thinking and research methods. Lakatos's (1978) approach to "research programs" is useful for analyzing the Algerian case, showing how digital transformation moves universities from closed knowledge models to dynamic, renewable ones linking academic research with societal application. Drucker (1993) highlighted that in a "knowledge society," the university becomes central in transforming knowledge into productive power. The

more a university produces critical, innovative knowledge, the greater its contribution to sustainable national development.

Thus, cognitive transformation in Algerian universities is not limited to technology use but constitutes a deep epistemological shift affecting scientific reasoning, knowledge production mechanisms, and academic communication. Reports from the Ministry of Higher Education (2024–2025) stress the need to build new research policies combining digitalization and openness with autonomy and national meaning of knowledge.

## 3. Methodology

This study used an analytical epistemological approach supported by an interpretive sociological reading of the Algerian university's reality amid digital transformation and knowledge globalization. The epistemological approach examined the theoretical and methodological conditions for knowledge production within the university field, analyzing foundations, methods, and scientific standards. The sociological reading allowed understanding the social and cultural dynamics surrounding educational and research processes in Algerian universities (Simard, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984).

The study employed documentary and textual analysis as the primary tool for examining academic texts and official policies on higher education and scientific research in Algeria. Documents analyzed included the National Charter for Scientific Research (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research) and prior studies and international reports on digital transformation and university knowledge production (UNESCO, 2021). This analysis enabled evaluation of institutional discourse on university transformation and digitalization, assessing its consistency with actual practices in Algerian universities regarding curricula, infrastructure, and research policies.

Research tools included analysis of educational and research texts and policies to identify official discourse on digital transformation and major trends adopted by Algerian universities in higher education. Reports from university research laboratories and academic articles in national and international journals were also analyzed to uncover academic actors' perceptions of ongoing cognitive transformation.

The central question of this study was:

How can the Algerian university transform from a knowledge consumer to a knowledge producer amid digital globalization?

From this, several sub-questions guided the research:

- What are the features of the epistemological transformation in Algerian university knowledge structures?
- How has digitalization affected teaching and scientific research methods in universities?
- What challenges confront academic field autonomy amid digital globalization?
- What are the stakes of Algerian knowledge effectiveness in the face of global transformations?

## 4. Results and Discussion

The study's results, based on an epistemological analysis of Algerian university reality, reveal that current cognitive transformation extends beyond the technical aspect of digitalization to a deeper shift in scientific thinking structures, knowledge production processes, and societal positioning.

### 4.1 Transformation in Knowledge Production Patterns: From Knowledge Transmission or Consumption to Production

Algerian universities have undergone a gradual shift in knowledge production patterns, moving from a "knowledge transmission and consumption" model to one aiming at "production and localization." Data from

official documents, particularly the National Charter for Scientific Research (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2022), indicate a clear direction toward making universities active spaces for research and innovation. However, this transformation remains in its early stages, as many universities face weak research infrastructure and a lack of methodological and epistemological training for researchers (Baddari, 2025).

Recent field studies (Ben Issa, 2023; Qureshi, 2024) show that an increasing number of Algerian universities have started adopting applied research projects linked to local realities, especially in energy, environment, and artificial intelligence, reflecting the emergence of a new productive consciousness connecting scientific research with national development needs. A 2024 Ministry of Higher Education statement noted that universities have "become spaces for producing and transmitting knowledge" through project incubation centers, AI labs, and university manufacturing.

Despite these positive indicators, the transformation remains partial and incomplete. A 2025 study (Ben Mezouz & Kermani) found that knowledge production in technological hubs like Sidi Abdallah relies mainly on technical partnerships and institutional support rather than a deeply rooted critical research culture. Epistemologically, Algerian universities are currently in a phase of "knowledge accumulation" rather than a "transformation in knowledge production models," consistent with Gaston Bachelard's (1938) concept of the "epistemological break" preceding the emergence of a new scientific model.

Thus, the trend toward knowledge production is beginning to take shape in Algerian universities, but conditions such as research freedom, adequate funding, and the consolidation of critical thinking still need development to ensure true and sustainable cognitive transformation.

### 4.2 Digitalization as a Tool for Reshaping Academic Action

The study's results indicate that digitalization has become one of the main drivers reshaping academic activity in Algerian universities, making them part of an international network for knowledge production and exchange. However, this openness has been accompanied by increasing dependence on foreign sources in references and educational models, raising a deep epistemological issue regarding the independence of university knowledge in Algeria. Reports from the Directorate General for Scientific Research and Technological Development (DGRSDT, 2023) show that more than 80% of the references used in theses and academic articles are derived from foreign sources, especially French and English, compared to the limited presence of national or Arab production. This reflects the continued dominance of the Western model in shaping the theoretical frameworks of Algerian researchers, positioning the university more as a consumer of knowledge than as a producer of critical local knowledge. Moreover, higher education reforms, particularly after adopting the LMD system in 2004, were primarily based on the European model (Bologna Process) without sufficient adaptation to the specificities of the Algerian university environment, leading to the cloning of curricula and pedagogical approaches rather than the development of a local model arising from national development needs.

It is also observed that most research partnerships and scientific funding come from European institutions through programs such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, which directs research priorities toward issues serving foreign funding agendas rather than Algerian societal concerns. For example, research in the energy sector focuses on technologies imported from Europe, while simple, low-cost local solutions derived from the desert environment are marginalized. In addition, the requirement to publish in journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science has led many researchers to align their work with Western academic interests, weakening the connection of university research to national social realities. In the digital domain, Algerian educational platforms still heavily rely on translated or imported content from foreign open courses, with almost no local academic digital content.

Epistemologically, this situation exemplifies what Bourdieu (1984) called the "loss of symbolic autonomy" in the academic field, where university knowledge becomes subject to external standards not derived from its own social and cultural conditions. Despite the importance of digitalization and scientific openness, true epistemic independence has not yet been achieved, unless accompanied by the rebuilding of a national critical mindset capable of transforming external benefits into an equitable knowledge dialogue rather than a new intellectual dependency.

Through an epistemological analysis of digital transformation plans in Algerian universities (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2024), it is clear that digital technology has reshaped the teacher-student relationship with knowledge. Students have become more active through distance learning, interactive platforms, and open resources, creating a new model that can be called the "networked university," transcending spatial and temporal boundaries (Goodyear & Carvalho, 2022). A study (Imane et al., 2024) confirmed that the transition to e-learning was relatively fast but faced obstacles such as students' weak digital skills and inadequate infrastructure. Another study (Dallaâ & Belhwas, 2024) showed that opportunities for digitalization remain limited in many universities due to poor internet connectivity and insufficient faculty training.

In response, the ministry launched a national digital library containing more than 110,000 electronic documents, as a step toward enabling researchers' free access to knowledge (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2025). However, this technical progress poses an epistemological paradox: despite its potential to liberate knowledge, digitalization may deepen dependency if not employed within a critical national framework that redefines the relationship between knowledge and technology. As Simard (1991) noted, scientific knowledge is not produced merely by the availability of technological means but through a critical intellectual structure capable of questioning its methods and tools.

From this analysis, it can be said that digitalization in Algerian universities remains a formal rather than an epistemological transformation, unless accompanied by reform in the rationality of scientific thinking itself—that is, moving from "using digital tools" to "producing critical digital knowledge." Habermas (2001) warns of the danger of "cognitive laziness" resulting from over-reliance on artificial intelligence without developing critical thinking skills. Thus, the Algerian university is currently experiencing a phase of epistemic labor toward a new model based on research, interaction, and responsible digitalization, consistent with Thomas Kuhn's (1962) view that every true scientific transformation passes through a "paradigm crisis" that reshapes the foundations of knowledge and its tools.

### 4.3. Autonomy of the Academic Field and Directing Research Toward Local Development

The study's findings reveal that the autonomy of the Algerian university, despite being enshrined in the Higher Education Framework Law (2019), remains limited due to the overlap between administrative decisions and scientific policy, weakening its ability to direct scientific research according to independent epistemic and developmental priorities. Bourdieu (1984) highlights that the absence of symbolic autonomy in academic institutions subjects them to the logic of authority and funding, hindering the production of free critical knowledge.

In the Algerian context, this issue is evident in the submission of some research priorities to administrative and bureaucratic considerations rather than societal needs. Therefore, any genuine epistemic transformation requires institutional and intellectual independence, enabling the university to formulate its own vision and define research trajectories free from external pressures.

Modern literature emphasizes that building a sustainable knowledge economy requires linking digital transformation with an epistemological shift in scientific thinking patterns (OECD, 2023; Ministry of Higher Education, 2025). Ghezali & Benyahia (2025), in their study on investment in human capital in Algerian universities, indicate that such investment remains below the required level to achieve a qualitative leap in knowledge production. Nevertheless, reports from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (2024) show tangible progress in innovation, with over 5,000 research projects and 1,700 patent applications recorded in less than two years, reflecting a national will to enhance the university's contribution to development (Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2024).

From an epistemological perspective, the autonomy of the academic field is essential to activate national cognitive effectiveness, allowing freedom of critical thinking and the development of "collective intelligence" capable of redirecting knowledge to serve humans and society. Accordingly, the National Committee for Higher Education Evaluation (2024) recommended integrating training in the philosophy of science and critical research methodology into university programs for both faculty and students.

Today, the Algerian university faces a dual task: achieving true epistemic independence that enables it to influence scientific policy while linking this production to local and societal development needs. This effort succeeds only by creating an epistemological balance between openness to global knowledge and rooting in local specificity, consistent with Drucker's (1993) view that building a "knowledge economy" depends on institutions' ability to localize knowledge and connect it to their national context.

### 4-4. Stakes of National Cognitive Effectiveness

The results also indicate that engagement in digital globalization carries dual stakes: on one hand, it offers unprecedented opportunities for scientific collaboration and knowledge circulation; on the other hand, it imposes a dominant Western knowledge model that may marginalize local production.

In this context, Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri (1996) and Abdallah Laroui (2005) called for the establishment of an independent Arab knowledge project that stems from local thought specificities and benefits from modern achievements without being subordinated to them. This applies directly to the Algerian university, which today faces the challenge of building an "open local epistemology," a knowledge model combining national rootedness and global communication.

Epistemologically, true knowledge transformation occurs when the Algerian university regains its ability to frame national scientific research and produce critical knowledge that addresses societal and developmental needs. Modern policies also point to a clear orientation toward fourth-generation universities, integrating research, innovation, and entrepreneurship (La Sentinelle, 2024). Innovation support programs that provide funding to student researchers (Algerie360, 2025) indicate increasing institutional awareness of the importance of utilizing knowledge to serve the national economy.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study show that epistemic transformation in Algerian universities is not limited to technical or pedagogical modernization but represents an epistemological, institutional, and cultural shift affecting the core of scientific thinking and reshaping the university's relationship with knowledge, society, and the state. True transformation is not achieved merely by integrating technology into education; it requires rebuilding the mental and value frameworks that guide knowledge production and use.

Data indicate that the Algerian university is in a transitional phase from a knowledge-transmitting model to a knowledge-producing model, yet this transformation still requires a clear epistemological vision that defines its objectives and theoretical and methodological inputs. Digitalization has created important opportunities for research and education development, but their benefits remain limited unless accompanied by renewal in scientific and pedagogical thinking guiding academic work. The results also confirmed that academic field autonomy is a crucial condition enabling the university to direct scientific research toward national development needs and free it from administrative and bureaucratic pressures (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2022).

Based on the study's findings, it can be stated that the desired epistemic transformation in Algerian universities requires a set of practical measures to ensure its realization. Foremost among these is integrating epistemological training into university programs, particularly at the master's and doctoral levels, through teaching the philosophy of science and critical research methodology, contributing to the consolidation of scientific awareness and the development of analytical thinking among students and researchers. This type of training not only enriches research skills but also deepens understanding of the nature of knowledge and its production mechanisms within the university context.

It is also important to enhance university autonomy through reforming research policies, reducing administrative constraints, and granting academic actors greater latitude in selecting research projects relevant to local communities. Achieving institutional and intellectual independence is a fundamental condition for unleashing creativity and knowledge production within the university.

In the same vein, digitalization must be transformed into an epistemological tool that contributes to renewing methods of thinking and teaching, rather than remaining merely a technical means to facilitate knowledge transfer. The real challenge lies in employing technology with critical and methodological awareness, making it part of the research and educational process that produces meaning and knowledge. The study also recommends encouraging interdisciplinary research and enhancing collaboration across scientific disciplines, enabling the university to address major contemporary issues such as energy transition, climate change, and artificial intelligence (Morin, 2005).

Among the practical proposals advocated by researchers in the epistemology of scientific knowledge is the establishment of a national observatory for university knowledge transformation, tasked with monitoring and evaluating knowledge production patterns within Algerian universities and assessing their alignment with sustainable development goals and international scientific standards, thereby ensuring research policies are directed toward tangible societal and economic impact.

Accordingly, epistemic transformation can be considered a comprehensive civilizational project in which epistemology intersects with sociology and public policy, aiming to redefine the university's role as a driver of development and a field for producing the national future in the context of digital globalization. The future of the Algerian university will be determined by its ability to convert knowledge into productive and societal power and by its success in building an academic model rooted in its local reality while open to global scientific spaces. Despite the challenges posed by digital globalization, it provides a unique opportunity to establish an independent and creative critical university capable of transitioning from a logic of dependency to one of scientific effectiveness, from consumption to production, becoming a fundamental lever for national development and an active contributor to building the Arab, African, and global knowledge society.

## Conclusion

In light of our epistemological analysis of knowledge transformation in Algerian universities, it is clear that we are facing a profound transitional phase that goes beyond technical modernization toward a comprehensive redefinition of the relationship between knowledge and society. The university is no longer merely a space for delivering imported knowledge but is required to produce critical knowledge rooted in the national context and open to the global scientific sphere. Digital globalization has imposed a new reality characterized by rapid knowledge circulation, integration of disciplines, and transformation of teaching and research patterns, making the Algerian university a dynamic space for rethinking the foundations and purposes of knowledge production.

The study's findings reveal that this transformation manifests at three interconnected levels: First, at the cognitive level, the university has gradually shifted from a traditional teaching model based on rote learning to a research model based on participation, critical thinking, and scientific production.

Second, at the technical level, digitalization has contributed to reshaping pedagogical and research practices by opening new spaces for interaction between students and faculty and expanding opportunities for scientific collaboration and innovation.

Third, at the institutional level, the need for genuine academic autonomy has emerged, enabling the university to set research priorities according to national development needs, free from administrative or external directives.

However, this transformation still faces structural and cognitive challenges, including weak epistemological training among academic actors, disparities in digital capacities between universities, and persistent bureaucratic obstacles that hinder creativity and research initiative. Therefore, the real challenge lies not merely in expanding technology use but in renewing the scientific mind itself and establishing a critical culture that makes knowledge a tool for liberation and development, rather than mere consumption of digital data.

Based on this, it can be said that epistemic transformation in Algerian universities is an open path toward rebuilding the university's function on clear epistemological foundations that redefine the meaning of science and the researcher's role in the knowledge society. The success of this path depends on the university's ability to balance engagement with digital globalization and the preservation of national cognitive sovereignty. The future of Algerian universities will not be measured solely by their technological capacity but by their ability to produce critical, responsible, and creative knowledge that serves national development and promotes social justice.

This conclusion also highlights the need to expand epistemological studies on Algerian universities through approaches combining philosophical, sociological, and technological analysis. On one hand, digital transformation requires in-depth field studies on faculty and student perceptions of digital knowledge and how pedagogical relationships are reshaped in light of artificial intelligence and distance learning. On the other hand, this transformation opens the door to broader research on cognitive sovereignty, i.e., the Algerian university's ability to produce original knowledge reflecting its reality and contributing to the development of its own analytical tools.

In this context, future studies should focus on analyzing educational and research policies in light of contemporary knowledge theories, such as the paradigm theory (Kuhn, 1962) and research program theory (Lakatos, 1978), to build a comprehensive national research model. Comparative studies with other Arab and African universities are also recommended to understand shared dynamics of transformation under digital globalization and explore ways to enhance knowledge independence.

In conclusion, the greatest challenge facing Algerian universities is training a generation of researchers equipped with epistemological thinking tools, able to combine critical awareness with conscious engagement in global digital systems, ensuring the production of knowledge that is locally rooted and globally effective, contributing to building a productive university, an independent knowledge society, and sustainable development in a rapidly changing world.

## Methodology

The study employs an analytical epistemological methodology combined with a sociological interpretive approach. This framework enables examination of epistemic foundations, institutional structures, and the influence of digital tools on teaching and research practices. Data sources include policy documents, academic reports, and scientific literature.

## Ethical Considerations

This research does not involve human or animal subjects. All data were obtained from public or institutional sources. The study complies with international research ethics, ensuring transparency and academic integrity.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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