THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Application of Social Media for Personal Branding: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract:
The present context of digitalized era promotes the need of branding in an online context. The use of social media for personal branding has been a fast-growing trend and such tools are being competitive in the contemporary business environment. Empirical studies are found clarifying how personal branding carried out through social media whilst claiming further investigations in line with the challenges and issues attributed in different markets, generations and countries. Social media platforms are promptly growing resulting empirical studies to investigate effectiveness of different social media tools and strategies. Alongside, this study attempts to investigate how social media has been utilized for personal branding applications. Paper followed an extensive literature review to build a discussion on theoretical and empirical contents related to social media use in personal branding whilst a rationale is made on the relevance of the theory of social capital. Paper attempts to appreciate the application of social capital theory to explain the theoretical foundation in the use of social media for personal branding whilst trust is highlighted as an additional notion within. The literature review was executed addressing to key sub contents related to personal branding and social media. It reviewed journal articles as the main source of information to organize the contents with empirical justifications. Finally, paper discusses the concepts of brand image, brand identity and brand positioning in personal branding and how active involvement of social media results online personal branding.

Keywords: *Brand Identity, Brand Image, Brand Positioning, Personal Branding, Social Capital Theory, Social Media.*

1. Introduction

The enormous embracing of social media has turned the Web into a social space and has provided unique ways of supporting social processes along with the management of data, information, and knowledge (Razmerita, Kirchner, & Nabeth, 2014; Siriwardane & Dissanayake, 2018). In the past decades it has witnessed a harsh increase in the use and popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter which are increasingly embedded into the structures, forms and processes of everyday communication (Herold, 2018).

Alongside, social media comprises a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, internet discussion boards and forums, and social networking websites, to name a few (Dahlhoff, 2016). The 21st century is observing an explosion of internet-based messages transmitted through these media. They have become a major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behavior including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The usage of social media is increasing sharply in the past few decades and the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram increasingly rooted into the forms of day today communication (Cara Brems, 201 7; Siriwardane et al., 2018).

The digital era demands industries to transform their business models specially emerging economies (Rassool & Dissanayake, 2019). Supportively, role of social media has been a pivotal matter for marketing communication that results competitiveness. Thus, the development of information and communication technology has made branding easier resulting more relationships with consumers (Siriwardane et al., 2018). With the rapid embracement of social media, the boundaries between private life and professional life has been darkened. In the late 1990s, the term "Personal Branding" was developed and tend to digitalize with the user-friendly nature of social media environment like Blog, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Kleppinger, Cain, & Pharm, 2015). It denotes that social media has made communication on different levels convenient and affordable and it provides a good platform for branding at a cheaper price. Everyone has a personal brand, whether they knew it or not. It's how a person is viewed by others. The most important thing is that the person is the one that creates the perception others have on himself (Cleveland, Jodi, Philbrick, & Ana, 2015). Personal branding is personal perception or emotion for a person which is considered as a unique personal identity. Same as product branding, personal branding requires capturing and promoting a person's uniqueness and strengths to a target market (Labrecque, Markos, & George, 2011).

Within the personal branding movement, people and their careers are marketed as brands complete with promises of performance, specialized designs, and tag lines for success (Kinsky & Bruce 2016; Prestridge, 2014). Traditionally, branding literature portrays brand identity as the uniqueness and essential idea of the brand. The business world is beginning to recognize the importance of controlling personal brands and offering strategic advice about how to project a desired personal brand identity through the use of different social media (Karaduman, 2013). Even though the importance of personal branding and the high adoption rate of social media, very few specific, empirical studies have dealt with these issues. So, there is an important need in the literature to explore the effects of branding on marketing variables related to social media (Karaduman, 2013). None of these studies are about personal branding efforts on social media, even though social media provides a good platform to manage personal brands easily then manage a product or service brand. Not only celebrities' use social media for branding, but also there are more than hundreds of social media phenomenon in general lifestyle. Everyone has a personal brand, but having it is not just enough. A good promotional campaign and a proactive brand management is necessary to make it well known among others (Karaduman, 2013). Further explains research on the personal branding on social media is still very limited and confines itself mainly to the western countries (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2017). In this study it is decided discuss the purpose of the study and methodology, literature review and the discussion with conclusion and future directions.

2. Purpose of the Study

Together with the brief including the empirical highlights on knowledge requirements in the field of social media, this paper attempts to review personal branding with regards to social media. The significance of social media has been referred in relation to many branding contexts though, enough empirical examinations are yet to be found limited even within personal branding (Karaduman, 2013). While much researches have been tended to focus on the particular area of branding on social media, it is only a few that branding from a personal perspective has flickered an interest among academics (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Most of the studies on personal branding argue that the personal branding is similar to branding of products and services, where an individual should identify his or her unique features and promote it to the target audience (Labrecque et al., 2011). Despite this interest, yet some studies on personal branding reflects established theories within marketing and branding (Shepherd, 2005). However, there is still a need for, academic literature on personal branding in a marketing perspective (Nolan, 2015). Thus, this paper seeks to address a contribution to the literature on personal branding and, in particular, the phenomenon of personal branding on social media.

In addition to that, the researcher argues personal branding needs to be empirically tested in different social media contexts to unveil its influence. Therefore, this paper attempts to investigate how social media has been found in empirical studies connected to personal branding. Additionally, this paper contributes to existing knowledge as a conceptual review to synthesize how the social medial effects personal branding.

3. Methodology

This paper follows a deductive approach in which arguments and explanations are mainly supported by empirical evidences and associated theoretical contents. It is attempted to review empirical thoughts as an organized content on how social media links to personal branding efforts in different contexts and literature review was employed as the main research tool. Finally concluded the main remarks through suggesting key insights for the future research directions.

4. Literature Review

This paper presents the literature review by mainly focusing on empirical overview on social media and personal branding whilst explicit consideration is made towards the convergence on social media and its impact on personal branding. Additionally, content describes how social media appeared as denoted in empirical studies.

4.1. Social Media & Social Capital Theory

Social Media is the ideological and the technological platforms of Web 2.0, and it permits the generation and exchange of user- generated content and the content is not consumed by people passively, but it is created, shared and consumed by users' actively generated content (Karaduman, 2013; Siriwardane et al., 2018). Examples for today top social media platforms are: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google +, Tumblr (eBizMBA Guide, 2019). In his article, Personal Branding through Social Media, Petruca (2016) highlights about the origin of social media which goes back to 1997, the first social media site was the "Six Degrees" which allowed users to create profiles and become friends with other users. Then came the Chat rooms which created people to make friends around the world and chat. LinkedIn which is considered as a professional social network was also there since beginning and then came Facebook in to the world being number one social media network today. Hence, new sites appearing cyberspace every day, it is very difficult to categorize them systematically. So, it is vital that any classification scheme takes into account applications which may be forthcoming (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Any person with networking facility can interact on social media and create new personal or business relationships. Through social media people can share his or her own thoughts, pictures, videos to millions and millions of people in just one second. According to Kirtis & Karahan (2011), brand promotions and other marketing activities is more innovative, effective and as well as very cost effective through social media. Moreover, delivering the content to the target market is much easy through social media platforms. Therefore, firms are turning towards social media rather than using traditional marketing and promotional campaigns (Kirtis et al., 2011). Social media makes an easy platform for marketers to capture the attention of consumers to create brand awareness and brand engagement at present (Dissanayake, Siriwardana, & Ismail, 2019). According to Odhiambo (2012), from the point of marketing research social media benefits people and organizations by giving an opportunity to

create a brand through a group of customers whose behavior and comments benefits to construct a value. In addition, with the findings of Shearman (2011), the firms with more network gain more success in the long run due to the benefits gained from multiplicative effect which implies firms learn more and more and they perform better by being highly networked.

According to (Dawot & Ibrahim, 2014), the functionalities of Social media is classified based on how people make use of it. The authors have outlined seven functionalities of social media building blocks which explains how the different component make sense of identifying social media for seven basic functions. Namely the first component is to identify where, people use social media to share their information like name, gender, age, job and hometown with others and stories that encourages users to "share their story". The second component is for conversations where people use social media to communicate with others which encourages users to "Comment", "Tweet", and "Email". The third component is for sharing, where social media is used to pass digital contents such as photos, videos, texts, pictures with others which encourages users to "share". In addition, presence is the fourth component that allows users to share their online status, location or availability with others which enhances users with "checkin". Dawot et al. (2014), further explains in his paper, relationship as the fifth component where people use social media to relate and connect with others encouraging users to "Invite a friend". The sixth element is reputation which allows users to identify others standings and share their own that enhances users to sharing results, scores. The last or the seventh functionality is groups where people use social media to form communities online based on their similar characteristics which enhances users to invite to join a larger community (Dawot et al., 2014). In present, people have the ability to select their social media content matching to the functional blocks. Irrespective of the site, all social media platforms boil down to a few basic functional building blocks (Fracchia, 2014). Additionally, it explains people use Facebook for Identity, Conversations, Sharing, Presence, Relationship and Groups functionalities while Twitter is used for all the functionalities except for Relationships. As mentioned by Fracchia (2014), people use YouTube for sharing, Conversations, Reputation and for groups and also LinkedIn is used for Identity, Sharing, Relationship and for Reputation functionalities as well as for Conversations, sharing and groups functionalities peoples use Pinterest.

We also agree that social media is in the use of creating social capital. In brief, social capital theory associates with sociology (Portes, 1998). As per the theory of social capital, social capital creation includes how a persona builds social networks connected with trust, social exchange, social supports and relational contracts as some highlighted contents (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Accordingly, it is said that social capital is the goodwill formed via the social relations. And social capital is generated with the base of trust as a crucial matter (Putnam, 2000). Building personal brand largely connects with the notion of trust. As per some empirical thoughts, people should make efforts to establish network relations and trust to obtain productive results (Adler et al., 2002). Social capital includes both internal and external views whereas social identity is more into internal perspective whilst social networks connect with external point of view (Adler et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000). Thus, social capital creation is a matter of how individual develops self-identity and one to one relation. We denote social media as one of the communication options for a person to build self-brand identity whilst creating favorable personal relationships with the relevant parties. This implies the theory of social capital as one of the key theories explains the mechanism of personal branding via social capital. This explanation is in line with the personal branding insights stated by Cleveland et al. (2015), meaning personal branding requires personal identity and it has to be developed through the informational bridge. But the notion of trust plays significant influence within. Conclusively, we highlight the fact that social capital as a base to build personal brand since it explains the significance of social identity that one should create within and the social network that one should build with others. Social media is a strategic source to build social identity and social networks for someone to articulate the overall personal brand equity at the end.

4.2. Personal Branding

A brand is a symbolic presentation of all the information associated to a product or service or a company (Harris & Rae, 2011). Apart from product service branding, the concept of branding has spread its wings to whole countries, events, and sporting giants and now to individual personalities considered as an emerging trend now which is the focus of this paper. The Concept of self-marketing and personal branding have become gradually popular as subjects of self-improvement books, Web sites and consultancy services, especially in the USA since the late 1990s (Shepherd, 2005). In 1997 Tom Peters laid the foundation for the concept of personal branding at first in his article "The Brand Called You" (Cleveland et al., 2015). "Personal brands begin at birth; when the parents give a name to the child, they unconsciously launch a new brand, and from that day forward, the person keeps building it." (Petruca, 2016). Creating a personal brand is a natural extension of consumer branding, it's about creating a self-package of what is unique. Personal branding is not only limited to celebrities or entrepreneurs, but also for anyone who wants to be known by others for what they do the best (Petruca, 2016). A personal brand is created automatically for anyone on how they are viewed by others. But the most significant thing about personal branding is that we should be the one who creates the perception of others on you. Therefore, managing the personal brand is a responsibility of one's own in their style (Cleveland et al., 2015).

According to Arruda (2003), creating a personal brand should go through a process with three broad stages: extract, express, and exude. First the individuals should look in to themselves and identify their own key attributes and then they should create a statement covering all the identified attributes. Finally, they should decide their own strategy to make their brand visible to the outside world. Simply, a personal brand identifies, clarifies and communicates who you are to the rest of the world. Further clarifying, according to Cleveland et al. (2015), a personal brand consists of personal attributes, values, drives, strengths and passions a person have in order to differentiate his unique promise from his peers in a business environment, academic field or an entrepreneurial setting which indicates the value of he can contribute to any organization he hires. The personal brand does not mean the job title. If we depend on our job title as our personal brand, we`ll just end coming up under the people who do the exact same thing, not being the game changer (Arruda, 2013).

Deckers and Lacy (2013), specified five universal objectives of personal branding. The First objective is to discover one's passion which is the fundamental in achieving the goals established and the second objective is to talk about yourself which is considered as the personal branding strategy. It discusses about the accomplishments a person has achieved in order to create positive emotions among the others. Deckers et al. (2013) further explains telling the story about you is the third objective where a person's story is revealed based on the vision about life, on personal values and on people who made contributions for the development of a person and about all experiences that helped the development of self-whereas the forth objective is to create relationships which leads for better opportunities for career and personal life. The fifth or the last objective of personal branding is to take actions which is about planning and acting each day for enriching experience and defining positive emotional responses about one`s image (Deckers et al., 2013). Whilst highlighting the use of social media creating and building a personal brand via content on YouTube, Urbanova & Slind (2016) argued that brand identity, brand positioning and the brand image are the three main elements in personal branding and social media can be identified as the primary mechanism that enables a wide spread of personal branding. Thus, it denotes that use of social medial tools is widely practiced in personal branding and research works should further examine how it is being effectively executed by different categories of individuals. For instance, we suggest that application of social media in personal branding has to be investigated with reference to professionals, expertise characters, opinion leaders, social activists, politicians and celebrities since their stakeholder connections may be varied.

5. Discussion

The knowledge of branding is not only focused to a product or corporate, but also many researchers have expanded the theory of branding into amateur personal branding through the consumption of social media which is also interest to marketing practitioners (Chen & Li, 2015). Social media marketing influences brand engagement behaviors extendedly (Dissanayake et al., 2019). This paper tries to extend the explanation on how personal branding is done through social media whereas previous literature is used as supportive contents for clarifications.

5.1. Personal Branding in Social Media

Personal branding on social media has become a very significant business concept as it reveals a sense of individuality and self-performance which helps individuals to differentiate their personal brand from competitors (Chen et al., 2015). The best way to establish personal identity and a good reputation visibly social media is the best and the easiest in a particular industry or niche. Everybody is now online and social media is where anyone can find out anything about anyone (Petruca, 2016). For individuals in social media, personal branding has become a key concept because it shows off self-performances and individuality which helps them to differentiate a personal brand from its competitors (Holt, 2016). It echoes the need for an essential personality, since each personal brand has its own personality and uniqueness.

At the very beginning, the concept of personal branding was limited mainly to celebrities, politicians, business leaders or even non-profit organizations' leaders (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2007; Shepherd, 2005).Over time, all managers, scientists, higher education teachers, and knowledge workers in general, students who are about to enter the labor market and all social media users irrespective their profession were added to the list who concerned about their personal brand (Gander, 2014). Dutta (2010), suggests that since all marketing professionals involved with own self-branding, need a personal social media strategy today. Social media has facilitated people to interact virtually by creating personal profiles on various sites through which people can present themselves to a broad audience. (Holt, 2016). Urbanova et al. (2016), highlighted that, social media has made it easier for personalities to engage in personal branding as they can present themselves to a wide audience through their personalized profiles. However, it is significant to identify that just having a profile on social media does not result to create a recognized personal brand (Papacharissi, 2002). More recent evidences on recruitments have found that use of social media is more effective and efficient to hire new employees (Jobvite, 2010). Recruiters use social media websites like LinkedIn to find precisely the type of candidates they seek. In his article, The Effect of Social Media on Personal Branding Efforts of Top-Level Executives, Karaduman (2013), claimed that social media existence and active involvement has a positive effect on personal branding. Further with the findings of Karaduman (2013), we can support the argument that social media existence and active involvement has an impact on building personal brand through social media.

5.2. Creating Brand Identity through Social Media

As stated in literature review several studies have mentioned that, brand identity, brand positioning and the brand image are the three main elements in personal branding. Brand identity denotes, what the brand stands for and what it delivers, commonly explained as the brand's promise, values, and personality (Roper & Fill, 2012). In order to build an effective brand identity, the brand should be differentiated from competitors, and represent the unique features company can offer over time (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000).

According to Labrecque et al. (2011), it has made easier for consumers to find a product or a place before they commit with the development of new technology where most of the companies use online presence for interactions. So, it is important to build brand online and strength brand identity through online which allows anyone to build presence and distinguish you from competitors. Thus, it implies that, to be effective, a brand identity needs to resonate with customers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and represent what the organization can and will do over time.

Personal brand identity in online context relies on self-presentation where identities are created using social media network profiles, blogs and personal web pages over computer mediated environment (Aaker, et al., 2000; Labrecque et al., 2011). In order to create a strong online personal brand it is important to have a great online brand identity which should be clearly communicated to the target audience. It is also explicated that brand identity is usually

considered to be encompassed with the brand's skills, values, personality and promise (Roper el at., 2012). Furthermore, it is argued that according to Labrecque et al. (2011), the effort of building a personal brand identity on social media, relies much on the act of self-presentation. Adding more to the point, loyalty to a brand profile is import when building a personal brand identity on social media. As suggested by Arruda (2013), to create a personal brand on social media, it is indispensable to have a clear brand profile that captures the personal brand identity and to stay loyal to it. This should be done by publishing content that goes in line with the brand profile and which allows the brand to be communicated clearly and consistently to the audience. Consequently, this permits the personally branded persons to clearly show their personality and what they stand for, and to become identifiable to their audience.

5.3. Social Media and Brand Positioning

Brand Positioning mentions how customers think about proposed or present brands in a market and through a brand positioning, a company attempts to build a sustainable competitive advantage on tangible or intangible product attribute offered in the mind of the customer (Gwin & Gwin, 2015; Labrecque et al., 2011). There are numerous ways for brand positioning through online namely a few social media, blogging, and websites and in which a person choose, depends largely on the number of followers and where they are connected.

Further, Labrecque et.al. (2011) said brand positioning as the active communication of one's brand to a specified target market in order to highlight their positive attributes to the selected target market and to differentiate themselves from competitors. Brand positioning has a great impact on personal branding in an online context. As product branding, personal branding also starts with defining the brand identity and then it is actively communicated to the target audience through brand positioning. However personal branding goes through some unique challenges rather than product branding as it mainly comprises from complexities inherited to online environment (Kaputa, 2005). According to Labrecque et al. (2011), Brand Positioning is done through impression management in online personal branding context, by maintaining a consistent image through choices to reveal pieces of information through Blogs and disclosures on Social networks.

5.4. Crafting Brand Image on Social Media

The brand image is what and how a group of consumers subjectively perceive the brand to be (Parameswaran, 2006; Riezebos, Kist, & Kootstra, 2003). Further clarified by the authors, brand image is ordinarily described as the perceptions and associations of the brand in the minds of the consumers. The brand image is linked to reputation, since that's what consumers think and say about a brand. Brand image in online context depends on the information posted by a person, information posted by others and the reactions to the posts which is generally based on visible behavior, non-verbal behavior and other observable cues (Ambadi, Hallanhan, & Rosenthel, 1996).Creating a good brand image has become much easy and convenient with social media depending on the creativity level selected to reach the audience. The person needs to bring up a clever strategy to implement where they can stand out and convey your brand image distinctively.

More recent evidence from Ahmad (2019), proposes five ways to convey brand image through social media which can be listed as choosing the right network, using visual branding effects, developing the personal voice, maintaining strong communication with the followers and sharing useful content. Elaborating each point, choosing the right network refers to the inducement of selecting the strongest media which aligns to the personal brand image and using visual branding effects suggests using of images, audios and videos to convey messages which hits viral. Ahmad (2019), further explained each and every social media post should reflect the identity of the person which is considered as developing the personal voice. Maintaining strong communication with the followers means having direct interactions with the followers which leads to boost the present in the online community. So that it helps anyone to convey the image of his or her personal brand finely yet effectively if there is continuous communication with followers. As the last method to convey brand image through social media Ahamad (2019) reveals sharing useful content where the brand image basically depends on the content anyone shares. Hence, the presentation of content has the potential to enhance the overall brand image and personal brand you must make sure that it is useful to the audience of your personal brand.

This substantiates previous findings in the literature, promoting a personal brand on social media using explicit approaches can help to craft a well-known personal brand image in an online environment.

5.5. Active Involvement in Social Media for Personal Branding

In his study on "The Effect of Social Media on Personal Branding Efforts of Top-Level Executives" Karaduman (2013) reveals that active involvement in social media has a significant effect on personal branding. Involvement is about an individual's perceived significance of objective based on inherent needs, values and interests. Many studies related to the role of involvement in product marketing and advertising has been investigated by many researches (Leung & Bai, 2013). Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann (1983), highlighted that the level of involvement has a great impact on the communication message of the recipient. Furthermore, Celsi & Olson (1988), claimed higher the level of involvement greater the attention and positive involvement towards advertising and branding.
Active involvement in social media will influence the popularity of individuals where which helps them to develop personal brands. And also, the active involvement will open the more information to followers which opens the possibility of discovering individuals in social networks (Daniel, Galuba, Asur, & Huberman, 2011). Karaduman (2016), shows that actively engaging in social media has a significant effect on personal branding efforts.

6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The rate of increasing the popularity of social media platforms is increasingly going up which creates opportunities for individuals to become unique online personal brands rather than just names whereas building one's personal brand is also an ongoing process (Brems et al., 2017). In order to promote a personal brand, today social media platforms are very handy, easy to use, and even cheap. With the advancement of the technology any person can brand themselves online just with their finger tip. Therefore, it reflects that personal branding as a process where the individuals mature into being a brand where brand becomes stronger with the increase of the number of audiences. Social media presence in itself generates online personalities however, this is not the same as being personally branded.

Social media has facilitated people to interact virtually by creating personal profiles on various sites through which people can present themselves to a broad audience (Holt, 2016). Urbanova et al. (2016), highlighted that social media has made it easier for personalities to engage in personal branding as they can present themselves to a wide audience through their personalized profiles. However, it is significant to identify that just having a profile on social media does not result to create a recognized personal brand. In his article on successful personal branding on social media creating and building a personal brand via content on YouTube, Urbanova et al. (2016), argued that brand identity, brand positioning and the brand image are the three main elements in personal branding and social media can be identified as the primary mechanism that enables a wide spread of personal branding.

Personal brand identity in online context relies on self-presentation where identities are created using social media network profiles, blogs and person web pages over computed mediated environment (Aaker, el at., 2000; Labrecque et al., 2011). Brooks and Anumudu (2016), suggested that in a social context of reciprocal human relationships of recognition and responsibility, a personal brand identity can be developed and sustained. Although brand identity is one of the most important elements for personal branding, only a limited study has conducted on this concept. According to Labrecque et al. (2011), brand positioning is done through impression management in online personal branding context, by maintaining a consistent image through choices to reveal pieces of information through blogs and disclosures on social networks. Further studies need to be conducted on identifying the relationship between brand positioning and personal branding for in depth studies. Creating a good brand image has become much easy and convenient with Social media depending on the creativity level selected to reach the audience. The person needs to bring up a clever strategy to implement where they can stand out and convey your brand image distinctively. As explained by Karaduman (2013), active involvement in social media has a significant effect on personal branding but there's still a research gap to identify the relationship in between the two concepts.

There is only a limited number of studies carried out on "Personal Branding in Social Media" and therefore to fill the literature gap more research studies, conceptual frameworks, articles need to be carried out on this regard. Researchers may conduct further research to dig more into the effects of different types of social media platforms on both personal branding and its effects on the company. In addition, social media platforms are promptly growing, dynamically changing and progressively developing platforms. Conclusively, we emphasis the knowledge required on examining effectiveness of social media as a strategy in developing personal branding with reference to different categories of uses.

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