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Influence of SNS Characteristics on the Brand Image of Infant Food Products

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to examine the influence of social network service (SNS) on the brand image of infant food products; highlight the effects of brand image on the purchasing and word-of-mouth intention; and explore the effects of the purchasing intention on the word-of-mouth intention.

Research design, data, and methodology - Based on previous studies, it was found that the fundamental SNS characteristics for infant food products are reliability, interactivity, and informative. Using AMOS 22.0 and structural equation modeling (SEM), 288 questionnaires were surveyed as a statistical method for examining the proposed hypotheses.

Results - The analysis shows that reliability and informative have significant impacts on brand image, whereas interactivity does not. Again, the effect of brand image of infant food products on the purchase and word-of-mouth intention is statistically significant. However, the results differ across the “working housewife” and the “full-time housewife” groups. The connection between reliability and brand image was found to be statistically significant in this study.

Conclusions - This study analyzes the effects of SNS characteristics on the brand image of infant food products and the effect of the brand image on purchase and word-of-mouth intentions, and provides practical implications for the same.

Keywords: Features of SNS, Reliability, Interactivity, Informative, Brand Image, Word-of-Mouth.

JEL Classifications: L66, L99, M3, M31.

1. Introduction

Infancy and childhood are the phases in life when physical growth and development of all organs are active. These periods witness social, cognitive, and emotional development as well as physical development, and are also the basis of adult health in the near future (Lee, 2006). Development during infancy is more closely related to nutrition than any other period in life. The dietary habits or behaviors formed by human beings during infancy and childhood go on to have a crucial impact on their growth and development (Seo & Shin, 2009).

This is an important first step in shaping the right eating

habits and food symbols at the critical time. Therefore, it is very important to supply food suitable for infants and keep modifying and increasing the quantity of nutrition, steadily, while keeping in mind the characteristics of the weaning period. There is a need for a wide range of food products with various flavors throughout infancy and childhood. Korea recorded a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.08 in 2005, and Taiwan 0.895 in 2010. While these are astonishing figures rarely observed in other parts of the world, Japan's low record TFR of 1.26 in 2005 was around the average of Southern/Eastern European countries that had experienced lowest-low fertility in the 1990s (Suzuki, 2013). However, it is supposed that the actual size of retail shipment for infants that year must have been larger because it excluded the general processed foods market (Lee, 2018). Román and Sánchez-Siles(2018) researched the development and validation of an instrument for capturing parent's choice criteria for infant food brands. The scale dimensions suggested were significantly and positively correlated to key brand variables, namely, brand familiarity, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Housewives who are working full-time also frequently use delivery food, snacks, etc. to save time to take care of their children or do household chores. As

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parents become progressively more aware of spending greater amounts of money on their children, they also turn mindful of choosing products that have passed certain rigorous certification standards or even those that contain reliable raw materials, which are organic or non-antibiotic (Lee, 2009).

Social network service (SNS) has a far-reaching ripple effect in the society, and aside from the issue of increased levels of smart phone usage, the marketing techniques of SNS are otherwise immensely successful in drawing the attention of young mothers to the infant products in the market. Through SNS, companies actively promote new products, brand information, events, etc. SNS is also responsible for the evolution of the quality of information exchange and for promoting positive opinions about the product. In addition, companies identify the characteristics of SNS participants and explore new marketing opportunities through product preference, information research, and purchase behavior (Kyung & Kim, 2012). SNS marketing is the most effective way to distribute information about a product or service in real time, while also providing high reliability and stimulating voluntary word-of-mouth (Park, 2013). Nowadays, commercial advertising and online word-of-mouth conducted by various corporate media have dramatically affected purchases. Mothers who buy infant food online cannot see the product for themselves, but they will implicitly trust user feedback in real life or on blogs, Facebook, or Instagram for their purchase decisions (Shin, Hwang, & Min, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to examine any previous research related to the characteristics of SNS and to analyze the effects of the same on brand image. Additionally, this study also reveals the effects of brand image on purchasing and word-of-mouth intentions, while simultaneously assessing the effect of purchase intention on word-of-mouth.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Definition and Features of SNS

Social network sites (SNS) are venues for information sharing that provide a variety of communication features capable of stirring emotions, attitudes and beliefs (Cheikh-Ammar & Barki, 2016). SNS, a world-wide web-based service, is currently receiving a great deal of social and academic attention as it is growing exponentially. SNS means that you can release your personal information online, draw up a list of other users who are related to you, share your personal thoughts and experiences with them and others on a web page, etc. It can be defined as an online communication system that helps people maintain connections between friends, seniors, colleagues, etc. to build a new and broader human network (Jung & Kim,

2015).

SNS is recently emerging as a topic of interest, but its list of services is so diverse that it is difficult to define SNS as one singular service, considering that each person uses a different facet. Even if it is the same service, the actual form of SNS may be implemented differently based on social and cultural contexts, making it difficult to define SNS.

2.2. Reliability

By utilizing the Internet as an effective medium, SNS has voluntarily participated and stimulated communication amongst several individual or groups of consumers (Son & Rhee, 2007). The information available on SNS is often professionally unverified, and we found that the reliability of this information is very important to consumers who are uncertain about their purchases (Gefen & Straub, 2000).

Consumers have a personal perception regarding whether a particular product or service is profitable or harmful, irrespective sometimes of what the product or service provider's ability or expertise is, and whether information about the product or service is provided by the media (Kim, Cha, & Hu, 2006). The reliability of SNS is a particularly important factor in the online space where subjective communication occurs and is a key factor in determining the purchase intention of consumers (Smith, 2002). The results show that both information quality and system quality significantly affect users' trust and flow experiences, which further determine their loyalty. The results indicate that flow experience is the strongest determinant of users' loyalty (Zhou, Li, & Liu, 2010).

2.3. Interactivity

Interactivity refers to the process of collecting, remembering, and collating individual responses and characteristics; and then integrating them into the communication process by sending out messages that correspond to each individual's personality using the memorized information (Deighton & Sorrell, 1996). It is also called the process of exchanging information and messages that respond to users' personalities by using data gathered from the process of communication with other users (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997).

Ghose and Dou (1998) argue that interaction on the SNS can be defined as the efforts of online companies to establish a friendly relationship with consumers, and the attractiveness of SNS increases as that level of interaction rises. Holland and Baker (2001) found that the interaction amongst the Internet community was a fundamental factor that increased the participation of customers. Muniz and O'guinn (2001) point out that a dynamic interaction between users on the Internet increases empathy. This article finds overall that interactivity within online environments is becoming one aspect of the branding of parties, though this

is in limited forms and linked more to a marketing communication strategy than seeking to involve or understand site visitors. Members of Parliament who use social networking sites or weblogs, in contrast, have a developed i-branding strategy that enables them to present a strongly interactive brand personality to visitors to their online presences, offering impressions of them as accessible and effective representatives (Lilleker, 2015).

2.4. Informative

The informative of SNS can be defined as the ability to satisfy the user by informing him/her about the product or service (Gao & Koufaris, 2006). Basically, it can be said that it is a fundamental attribute of an advertisement to convey information about the goods or services. The transmission of information regarding a product's functions or characteristics is a basic factor that determines the acceptability of a product to a consumer, and accuracy of the information provided is an important factor in enhancing the value of advertising (Andrews, 1989). Ha, Park, and Lee (2014) identified the salient attributes of mobile SNS advertising as social, mobile convenience, and active control; the main sub-values of mobile SNS advertising as informative, entertainment, and irritation.

2.5. Brand image

As a company with a good brand image gains a competitive advantage, this means that consumers who select their products make their choice by comparing them with products of other companies. Brand image is defined as an overall impression that consumers have of a particular brand (Kotler & Kotler, 2000). In general, consumers tend to prefer branded products with a favorable image and are known to spend more on them while also attaining higher satisfaction (Clotey, Collier, & Stodnick, 2008). If consumers are satisfied with particular brands, they develop a preference for them and make substantial purchases accordingly (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Low & Lamb, 2000; Cha & Seo, 2019). Sasmita, and Mohd Suki(2015) found that young consumers got input and awareness of the particular product or brand from the social media. They could clearly recognize the particular product or brand in comparison to competing products or brands and knew how it looks and its characteristics from the social media.

2.6. Purchase Intention

Engels, Blackwell, and Miniard (1993) did not treat "purchase intention" as a separate behavioral variable in the traditional consumer behavior model. However, after introducing the Behavioral Intention Model, it began to be emphasized as a decision variable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Purchase intention implies the consumers' future behavior,

and this attitude can be conceived by direct action (Aaker, 1997). Cha and Lee (2018) empirically demonstrate that consumers are more likely to purchase again after they purchase HMR products once and feel satisfied.

In studies involving digital transactions, the reliability of a product or company on an Internet website has proven to be a variable affecting purchase intention. The reliability of a website has proven to have a good influence on the attitude of the consumers and their purchase intention (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002; Tsiotsou, 2006). Bian and Forsythe(2012) found that U.S. and Chinese consumers' self-monitoring positively influenced social-function attitudes toward luxury brands. Social-function attitudes toward luxury brands positively influenced consumers' purchase intention through affective attitude. Attitude played an important mediating role between social-function attitudes toward luxury brands and purchase intentions.

2.7. Word-of-mouth

This is an activity in which the users directly share their experiences of a product or service, and in case they favor the product, their attitude online is considered as an effective tool for communication to others. Online word-of-mouth refers to any word or phrase existing in the virtual space of the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) about the product or service from the user. Word-of-mouth is a non-commercial, informal, and personal communication between the sender and receiver of the brand image, product, company, or service. Word-of-mouth information has an unofficial nature and therefore delivers a strong impact upon the recipient.

Chu and Kim(2011) confirmed in their study that tie strength, trust, normative and informational influence are positively associated with users' overall eWOM behaviour, whereas a negative relationship was found with regard to homophily. This study suggests that product-focused eWOM in SNSs is a unique phenomenon with important social implications. Online and offline verbal communications have similar characteristics in that they are informal interactions, which facilitate an exchange of direct and indirect experiences and information among consumers about goods and services (Abdullah & Yu, 2019). The following hypotheses and research models have been set up based on preceding studies:

- H1:** The reliability of SNS will have a positive effect on the brand image of infant food products.
- H2:** The interactivity of SNS will have a positive effect on the brand image.
- H3:** The informative of SNS will have a positive effect on the brand image.
- H4:** The brand image of an infant food product/service established through these SNS characteristics will have a positive effect on the intention of word-of-mouth.

- H5:** The brand image established through SNS will have a positive effect on the purchase intention.
- H6:** Word-of-mouth will have a positive effect on the purchase intention.
- H7:** The influence of these SNS characteristics on the brand image of an infant food product/service will be different for a full-time housewife and a working housewife.

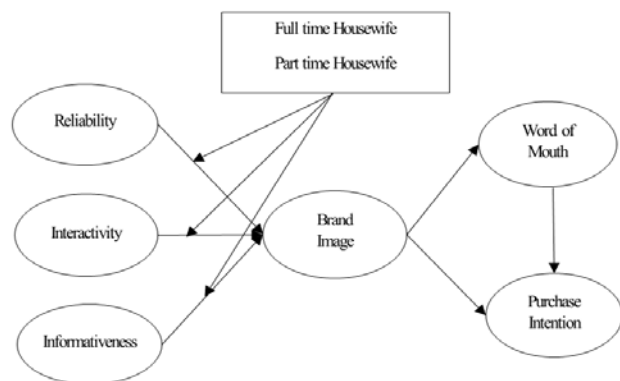


Figure 1: Study Model

3. Research method

The questionnaire items for this study were modified and supplemented to fit the purpose of this study. In order to realize the selection and refinement of the survey items, the literature of the previous research was examined and corrected. The survey was conducted online from April 14, 2019 to April 30, 2019, using an Internet survey. A total of 305 questionnaires were collected, and 288 questionnaires were used for empirical analysis after excluding 17 unfaithful or incomplete questionnaires.

This study was conducted through the following analysis method. The collected data were analyzed by demographic analysis, frequency analysis and exploratory factor analysis using SPSS 20.0 statistical package. In addition, to verify the validity of discrimination between measurement variables, exploratory factor analysis was performed using AMOS 22.0, then nonconformity factors were removed, and then confirm factor analysis was performed using AMOS 22.0. Next, for the hypothesis testing of the study as a statistical method, the covariance structure model analysis was conducted.

Of the total 288 respondents, 288(100%) were females. The age distribution of the respondents was 7 (2%) in 20~25, 61 (19%) in 26~30, 49 (15%) in 31~35 and 52 (16%) over 36. The final education level was 170 students (59%) at university, 23 students (8%) at graduate school, 44 students at college (15.3%) and 51 students at middle or high school. Of the respondents, 175 (60.8%) have a job and 113 (39.2%) were full time housewife. Most of them has only 1 child (60.4), 2 children (33.3%) and more than 3

children was 18 (6.3%).

4. Results

4.1. Evaluate Metrics

First, reliability and validity analysis were conducted on the items of concept measured in multiple items (Churchill, 1979). Exploratory factor analysis was used to evaluate validity and reliability, and then Cronbach's alpha was examined. Principal Component Analysis was conducted for factor extraction. Based on Eigenvalue 1, factors were extracted. VARIMAX method was applied to the factor rotation. Table 1, Table 2 shows the results of the analysis.

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis

	Variables		
	Reliability	Informative	Interactivity
Reliability 1	.859	-	-
Reliability 2	.856	-	-
Reliability 3	.863	-	-
Reliability 4	.837	-	-
Informative 1	-	.761	-
Informative 2	-	.805	-
Informative 3	-	.825	-
Informative 4	-	.708	-
Interactivity 1	-	-	.790
Interactivity 2	-	-	.764
Interactivity 3	-	-	.720
Interactivity 4	-	-	.584
Variance (%):			
Total 69.5%	26.4	23.2	19.8
Cronbach's Alpha	0.911	0.828	0.787

Table 2: Exploratory factor analysis

	Variables		
	Brand Image	Purchase Intention	Word of Mouth
Brand Image 1	.843	-	-
Brand Image 2	.845	-	-
Brand Image 3	.769	-	-
Brand Image 4	.783	-	-
Purchase Intention 1	-	.768	-
Purchase Intention 2	-	.759	-
Purchase Intention 3	-	.817	-
Purchase Intention 4	-	.751	-
Word of Mouth 1	-	-	.706
Word of Mouth 2	-	-	.805
Word of Mouth 3	-	-	.817
Word of Mouth 4	-	-	.755
Variance (%):			
Total 72.2%	24.98	24.3	22.9
Cronbach's Alpha	0.877	0.868	0.789

Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis result

Variables	Measure	Standardized Regression Coefficient	CR (Composite Reliability)	AVE (Average Variance Extracted)
Reliability	Reliability 1	0.859	0.906	0.707
	Reliability 2	0.847		
	Reliability 3	0.829		
	Reliability 4	0.828		
Interactivity	Interactivity 1	0.736	0.802	0.504
	Interactivity 2	0.736		
	Interactivity 3	0.639		
	Interactivity 4	0.724		
Informative	Informative 1	0.724	0.827	0.546
	Informative 2	0.815		
	Informative 3	0.747		
	Informative 4	0.663		
Brand Image	Brand Image 1	0.774	0.877	0.640
	Brand Image 2	0.765		
	Brand Image 3	0.833		
	Brand Image 4	0.826		
Word of Mouth	Word of Mouth 1	0.799	0.860	0.606
	Word of Mouth 2	0.802		
	Word of Mouth 3	0.715		
	Word of Mouth 4	0.795		
Purchase Intention	Purchase Intention 1	0.808	0.860	0.608
	Purchase Intention 2	0.823		
	Purchase Intention 3	0.807		
	Purchase Intention 4	0.670		

Chi-square= 502.119 (p=0.00, df=237), NFI= 0.882, RFI=0.863, IFI=0.934, TLI=0.923, CFI=0.934, RMSEA=0.062 (p <0.001)

Table 4: Discriminant validity through correlation analysis

	Purchase Intention	Reliability	Brand Image	Interactivity	Informative	Word of Mouth
Purchase Intention	0.779					
Reliability	0.424 (0.180)	0.841				
Brand Image	0.598 (0.358)	0.683 (0.466)	0.800			
Interactivity	0.471 (0.222)	0.582 (0.339)	0.484 (0.234)	0.710		
Informative	0.603 (0.364)	0.362 (0.131)	0.503 (0.253)	0.683 (0.466)	0.739	
Word of Mouth	0.708 (0.501)	0.441 (0.194)	0.574 (0.329)	0.446 (0.199)	0.667 (0.445)	0.779

Note : () = r²

As shown in Table 1, Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficients are all over 0.78, which confirms reliability (Nunnally, 1967). Exploratory factor analysis(EFA) proved that discriminant validity and convergence validity was confirmed and the validity factor was analyzed by AMOS 22.0.

As shown in Table 3, the chi-square of the measurement model is significant (p < 0.00), however, it is sensitive to the sample size and model complexity. Therefore, it seems to be appropriate to evaluate the model fit concerning of the Comparative Fit Index and the Normed Fit Index(Bagozzi &

Yi, 1988; Bearden, Sharma, & Teel, 1982). The model fit was rated satisfactory by NFI= 0.882, RFI=0.863, IFI=0.934, TLI=0.923, CFI=0.934, RMSEA=0.062. The Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted satisfied the criteria proposed (above 0.6 for CR, above 0.5 for AVE) by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and the loadings were significant statistically (p<0.01). The convergent validity also was confirmed. Table 3 shows the results of confirmatory factor analysis. The square root of Average Variance Extracted was used to verify discriminant validity among each factor with single dimensionality. As a result, as shown in Table 4,

the value of the square root of AVE is greater than 0.5, which is larger than the correlation value outside the diagonal line in the related row and column. Therefore, it could be said that the validity of the discrimination has been verified between the different constitutional concepts, in which corresponding differences are to be shown in the measurement results.

4.2. Research Hypothesis Verification

The hypotheses were tested using AMOS 22.0. For the study model, the fitness index was satisfactory with chi-square=567.722 (df=243, p=0.000), NFI=0.867, RFI=0.849, IFI=0.919, TLI=0.908, CFI=0.919 and RMSEA=0.068. Table 5 shows the results of hypotheses testing for the main effects from Hypothesis 1 to Hypothesis 6. As a result of the hypothesis test on the main effect, the taste, price, brand and environment showed a significant influence on the satisfaction, and the path coefficient from the satisfaction to revisit was also significant. The results of the above verification are shown in Figure 2.

Table 5: Results of research hypothesis

Hypothesis	Paths	Path Coefficient	t value	Results
H1	Reliability → Brand Image	0.416	8.146***	Support
H2	Interactivity → Brand Image	-0.15	-1.378	Reject
H3	Informative → Brand Image	0.475	4.814***	Support
H4	Brand Image → Word of Mouth	0.589	8.734***	Support
H5	Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.314	4.379***	Support
H6	Word of Mouth → Purchase Intention	0.543	6.834***	Support

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

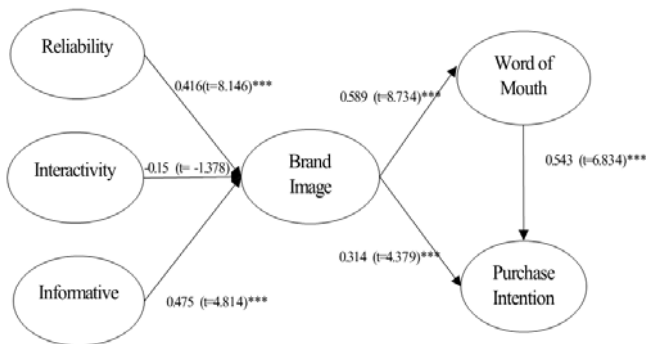


Figure 2: Results of research hypothesis

4.3. Verification of the Moderating Effect between Housewives

The analysis of the effects of SNS on brand image meant that it was necessary to investigate the additional controlling effect of the housewives' groups. In order to verify the moderating effect of the separate groups upon the characteristics of SNS and brand image of infant food products, the total sample (n=288) was divided into the "Working Housewife group" and the "Full-time Housewife group." In the group classification, the women who were married and those who had just given birth to children were classified into "working housewife" and "full-time housewife," respectively, the items in the questionnaire addressing the adjustment effect was phrased in this manner, "Do you currently go to work?" The women were allocated to "working housewife" or "full-time housewife" groups on the basis of the dichotomy in the answers given to this question. Table 6 shows the comparison of working housewives and full-time housewives.

Table 6: Comparison of working housewives and full-time housewives

	Path Coefficient		Comparison Results	Chi-square increment	p-value
	Working Housewife	Full time Housewife			
Reliability → Brand Image	0.330	0.678	Working < Full-time	8.726 (d.f=1)	0.003**
Interactivity → Brand Image	0.109	-0.343	Working > Full-time	3.512 (d.f=1)	0.061
Informativeness → Brand Image	0.375	0.535	Working < Full-time	0.573 (d.f=1)	0.449

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

It was found that reliability and informative have a greater influence on the brand image of infant food products in the "full-time housewife" group while interactivity had a greater influence on the brand image of infant food products in the "working housewife" group.

However, after analyzing the chi-square and p values, only the relationship between "Reliability" and "Brand Image" remains significant. Consumers who are full-time housewives have proven to be more effective in moderating the reliability of SNS characteristics. It is interesting to note that the relationship between Reliability and Brand Image is much more significant in the "full-time housewife" group.

As a result of the hypothesis test, it was found that the moderating effect was highly affected by the "full-time housewife" group when the brand image was known for its reliability, whereas the factors of interactivity and informative were not found to be very significant.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the characteristics of SNS affect brand image, and also how brand image affects the purchase intention and word-of-mouth. In addition, we have examined whether the characteristics of SNS are significantly different between the two groups and which of the characteristics are more important for each group. As the study shows, particular characteristics of SNS, such as reliability and information have a significant impact on brand image, while interactivity is not so crucial. It was the similar result of Arya, Sethi, and Verma(2018)'s found that brand communication mediated the relationship between consumer engagement on SNSs and brand attachment significantly.

This suggests that reliability and information can be major factors in establishing the brand image of food products for infants. Therefore, infant and toddler food brands should focus more on their marketing activities so that the consumers can learn various facts about the products, thereby raising the reliability of their products by manufacturing only desirable products to establish a good brand image for the company.

6. Implication

On the other hand, it is shown that brand image has a positive effect upon the purchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been recognized as one of the most influential resources of information transmission. Advances in information technology and the emergence of online social network sites have changed the way information is transmitted. This phenomenon impacts consumers as this easily accessible information could greatly affect the consumption decision. Reza Jalilvand and Samiei(2012) found that e-WOM is one of the most effective factors influencing brand image and purchase intention of brands in consumer markets. Chae, Ko, and Han(2015) showed how customers' SNS participation activities had powerful effects on drivers of customer equity drivers and customer loyalty in the SNS services of a global SPA brand.

This suggests that infant and toddler food brands should work harder towards establishing a positive brand image in order to elicit word-of-mouth intentions and purchase intentions in their consumer base. Therefore, it is important to effectively utilize SNS to encourage verbal communication among the consumers and to provide detailed information about the products. In addition, the moderating effect was verified by the fact that full-time housewives are more important to the reliability of infant food products than working housewives when purchasing infant food products.

7. limitation and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the variables of SNS characteristics may seem very diverse, but really are limited to reliability, interactivity, and information. Second, the data obtained in this study only reflected the correlations and cause and effect among the variables studied during a specific period of time; this paper only focused on consumers who used predominantly women with some experience in raising their own children were selected. Therefore, the samples might involve some bias.

The direction of future research can be suggested as follows: it would be helpful to not limit the subjects to their own children, but to enlarge the sample to include other types such as women raising their nephews/nieces or any younger siblings; and further on, the sample may even grow to include the men participating in childcare so that our demographic can be diversified.

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