

# Social Media Strategies for Personal Branding– A Case Study of Malaysian Celebrities on Facebook

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**Abstract** Social media has transformed the world in many ways, changing the way we communicate, the frequency we communicate and even the time of communication. It has taken the world by storm and the world today is so much different from the world a decade ago. People from across the globe can now talk to each other at any time and business is simply a click away. We can now buy and sell things on-line and even education has been transformed, with knowledge being disseminated very easily across the globe. Social media has greatly influenced the way people to brand themselves, and the power of technology has resulted in many advances through the years. With all this affecting our lives, the effect that social media has had on the Malaysian entertainment industry has yet to be studied. This paper explores how social media strategies have been used as a personal branding and marketing tool, with special reference to the celebrities in the Malaysian entertainment industry. In the initial pilot study presented, it was found that Facebook had helped all the celebrities in building up their personal brand name. The findings also signified the importance of social media strategy, content strategy and communication with fans to gain constant following. The success of the celebrities was attributed to their authenticity via personally managed pages and efficiency via mobile management and platform maximisations.

**Keywords** Social media strategy, Personal branding, Facebook

## 1. Introduction

Social media has transformed the world in many ways, changing the way we communicate, the frequency we communicate and even the time of communication. It has taken the world by storm and the world today is so much different from the world a decade ago. Social media is a breakthrough for the traditional marketing platform due to its viral growth and technology advancement. The power of technology breaks down traditional obstacles to human interaction and this enhances the growth of a new wave of human creativity (11). Mass adoption of the Internet is driving the most exciting social and cultural transformations in history.

The proliferation of communication technologies has advanced at an unprecedented speed. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of people connected to the Internet worldwide increased from 350 million to more than 2 billion. It is now over 2.4 billion. The invention of smart phones speeds up the growth of Internet and social media platforms. It is forecasted in the near future the whole world of 8 billion people on earth will be online (9).

## 2. Literature Review

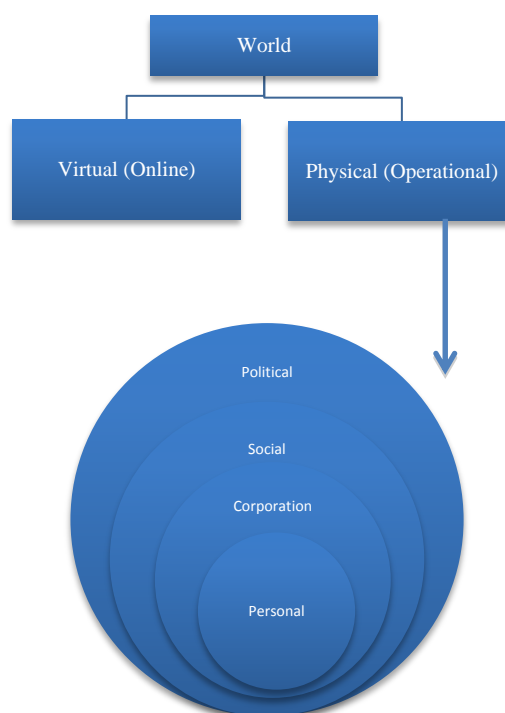


Figure 1. Online World

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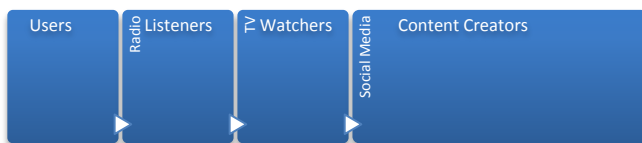
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The global connectivity will keep growing and breaking down old institutions and traditional hierarchies. This advancement of technologies will lead us to two worlds, that is virtual (online) and physical world (operational) (6). In many ways, individual's virtual identities on their social media platforms will supersede as the trails individuals leave will remain engraved online in perpetuity. Meaning, what one post or share online shapes one's virtual identities. As pointed by (1) social media will become a necessity. In the future, social media will be divided into four major scopes; they are Political, Social, Corporate and Personal (9) This is indicated in Figure 1. Hence, new forms of collective responsibility and strategic strategies need to be evaluated from time to time.

Traditionally, television turned a nation of people who listened to radio into watchers of media content; the emergence of social media has turned watchers and listeners to media content creators (Napoli, 2011). This is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The Transformation of Media

Social media differs from the traditional or industrial media in many ways, including quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence (20). There are many effects that stem from the use of the internet. According to Nielsen, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. For content contributors (30), the benefits of participating in social media have gone beyond simply social sharing to building reputation and bringing in career opportunities and monetary income (28). Media making is now a participant work (23), the center of power is being shifted from only the media as the gatekeeper to all social media content creators which may include government, organizations and individuals (24). Recent studies and research also indicated that in the new social media environment, the nature of comments and posting of users on social media platforms would affect people's information processing even if the message is from a trustworthy source (2).

The exposure and reputation are the major incentives for contributors. The most powerful and well-versed individuals on these social media platforms are celebrities (8). Companies or firms often study celebrities who gain phenomenon success on their social media platforms in order to improve their performance in the virtual world. Celebrities had nurtured their phenomenon social media platform into a business platform by strategies. (E.g. Celebrities like Kim Kardashian are being paid 5 figures in USD for every single tweet promoting a product or brand (5), whereas in Malaysia top celebrities are being paid up to RM5k per tweet or post.)

Celebrities are the most influential group of users in the social media world. There are so many phenomenon cases such as Justin Bieber, K Pop fandom and for the local scenes are Yuna, Lisa Surihani, Aznil and many more by just using social media to gain their popularity and this directly mapped the name of each country in the eyes of the world (16). Elite Email, a world leader in digital marketing tools for small to medium-sized businesses, has ranked celebrities with the most social media power in 2013.

Social media is a key aspect of the art organisations' outreach platforms. With the increase in the volume of content and the number of channels through which it's posted, there's a better understanding of the role that social media can play in helping various organisations accomplishing their goals without going through a "middle person" (22).

According to the Vice President for Digital Marketing & Social Media at Los Angeles TAG Strategic, these entire social media phenomenon must be studied and analyzed and managed strategically to achieve continuous success. Otherwise it is just a normal tool.

Social media had shifted Malaysia's entertainment industry and other sectors onto another paradigm, branding the name of Malaysia in the international platform effectively and with a lower cost and more effectively (29)

Due to the increasing usage of social media, various sectors have switched their focus to integrate their social media platforms to lead the new generation, gain traffic and fans, and transform it to value (15). Hence, investment in the social media will become a necessity and not just a luxury (1). However, some local companies or firms are spending money on ineffective traditional media investment and are facing problems in gaining fans on their social media platforms as compared to celebrities who do not spend much but are gaining fans effectively on social media platforms.

Social media is a user content generated and organic platform, therefore by just mere usage is insufficient. Social media is a very unique sphere, which not only requires the marketer to understand users but also to interact and provide a sense of personal engagement with them. Moreover, social media is divided into many themes in order to care for different functionality and application (26).

The Top 3 Most Popular Social Networking Sites in the World and Malaysia that reviewed based on the Malaysia and Global Traffic Ranking from Alexa.com (2013) and eBiz MBA (2014) is indicated in Table 1 & Table 2.

**Table 1.** Top 3 Most Popular Social Networking Sites In The World (eBIZ MBA, 2014)

Rank	Social Media Sites	Estimated Unique Monthly Users
1	Facebook	900 Million
2	Twitter	310 Million
3	LinkedIn	255 Million

**Table 2.** Top 3 Most Popular Social Networking Sites In Malaysia (2013)

Rank	Social Media Sites	Monthly Users
1	Facebook	12.5 Million
2	YouTube	6 Million
3	Twitter	1.6 Million

As indicated in the statistics, Facebook is the social media site with the most month users both in the World and Malaysia. Also, in accordance to Neilson's statistic, Facebook is the most visited Social Media Site in Malaysia, 87.9% of Malaysians on the Internet access Facebook (Neilson, 2013). There are currently 13.3 Million Facebook users in Malaysia (Neilson, 2013). There are more than 3.5 billion pieces of content, which includes web links; news stories and blog posts shared each week on Facebook (27).

Facebook not only caters for personal usage on normal Facebook account, but also one can open up a Facebook Fan page to brand themselves or their products (Newman, 2009). Also, it has its own markup language, which called the Facebook Markup Language (FBML), which allows users to customize the look and feel of one's Facebook Fan page, Facebook provides statistics and insights of the activities on their Facebook Fan page to provide more indication to users in building their brands and also a nice method to manage and organize photos or other applications tools on Facebook. All these social media platforms increase one's sphere of influence, and help to define and describe a person or a brand. Due to the strategic usability and numbers of the users statistics, this study will be focusing on Facebook. There are several 8 different categories of Pages on Facebook; they are Brands, Media Entertainment, Sport, Celebrities, Society, Community and Places.

Celebrities with millions of followers on their social media platforms had the tremendous influence towards the mass (3). Media or followers always keep track of celebrity posting, sharing their posting on their social media accounts and even making it into news (14). Celebrities are a personal brand, they are individuals with phenomenon success and recognition by the mass. In the virtual online world, their success in brand identity is rewarded with huge numbers of followers or fans on their fan page. One of the toughest obstacles that most firms encounter in the social media world is the issue of managing activities across different countries and cultures (25) as the social media strategy varies among different countries. This means that the strategies applicable in the USA, for example, will be different from those applicable in Malaysia.

Many studies were conducted to study the strategies adopted by international celebrities, but minimal research has been being carried out to study the strategies utilized by local Malaysian celebrities. We need to acknowledge that the strategies adopted by international celebrities are different from our local celebrities due to culture, geographical, religion, preferences and law jurisdiction (21).

The lack of studies in social media strategies implemented by local celebrities provides poor guidance for local Malaysian personal social media marketing strategies, which remains a phenomenon and virgin scope of study. Social media marketing success does not occur overnight. It is a cumulative process that produces success with persistent and consistent execution (12). The need for more successful cases to build up the huge sensational continuous success on the social media platform as it is a fast changing platform.

Many studies focus on firms' social media strategies, however the biggest difference between firms' approach and celebrities' approach to building communities and facilitating social dialogue, is that firms are looking for new customers, whereas celebrities are searching for fan loyalty as they understand the ultimate truth and the art of social media strategies.

## 2.1. K Pop Globalization Social Media Strategy

Many authorities still do not see the benefit and the effect of social media strategies, which could affect the nation revenue effectively. One of the most successful strategic examples in Asia is The Globalization Strategy of K-Pop (13), utilizing branding strategies and social media strategies K-pop export the music made in Korea to the global market via the YouTube social media platform and using differentiation strategy to attract global audience and subsequently increased the nation's revenue. They utilized the cultural technology to train and manufacture celebrities on three fundamental steps (19):

- (a) Exporting cultural products by placing Korean singers in different countries.
- (b) Creating International Collaborations.
- (c) Globalizing the product by cooperating with musicians from different countries to create a global brand.

After the training system, they brand their celebrities with the three fundamental strategies: (i) Numbers of members in a group, (ii) Physique and (iii) Voice-dance coordination (13). Lastly, the South Korean music industry is comparatively small, songs are released onto national television and simultaneously uploaded onto YouTube to reach out to distribute and export all their music and celebrities via social media platform (YouTube). The K-Pop Globalization Drive is shown in Table 3.

As indicated in Table 3 K-pop's Globalization Drive, The strategy developed from Political SMS (The discovery of a new way to market Korean Product in the international market with lower cost and effective results using the power of celebrity and social media), to Social SMS (The Formation of few major Entertainment Companies to create an organizational ecology), to Corporate SMS (The manufacturing of celebrities and musical inputs) to Personal SMS (The individual branding of celebrities themselves). All these strategies were united in one social media platform, which is YouTube to create the whole K-Pop Globalization Social Media Strategies. However, in this syphoning type of

strategies, the corporate and companies will take the largest cut in the form of profits, whereas the celebrities gross relatively smaller share (13).

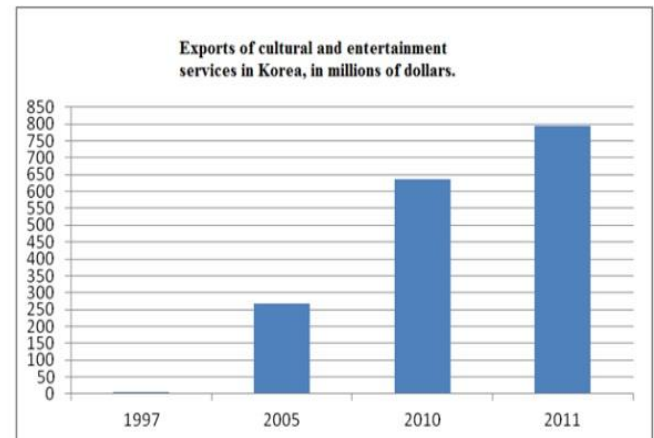
**Table 3.** K-pop's Globalization Drive

MNEs	Producers	Composers	Choreographers	Distributor
	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	
SM Entertainment	Teddy Riley / Girls Generation Pdow da Dn / Girls Generation	Busbee / Girls Generation Alex James / Girls Generation Kalle Engstrom / Girls Generation Oslo Recordings / Super Junior Jef Høppner / f(x) Thomas Troelsen / f(x) Wellem Laseroms / f(x) Nao Kanata / BoA Ryoji Sonoda / BoA, TVXQ Thomas Troelsen / SHINee	Nick Bass / Super Junior, SHINee Misha Gabriel / BoA, SHINee	Youtube
YG Entertainment	William / 2NE1 Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins / SE7EN	Daishi Dance / Big Bang Nagao Dai / SE7EN		
JYP Entertainment	Nick Cannon / Wonder Girls	Claude Kelly / Wonder Girls	Jonte / Wonder Girls	

The export of K Pop and influence of the Korean celebrities had helped the country's export sector (Jennifer, 2013). According to the South Korean Government estimation, a US\$100 increase in the export of cultural products results in a US\$412 increase in the export of other consumer goods (4). The initiatives to expand the popularity of K-pop are mostly undertaken by the Korean Government, namely the Ministry of Culture and Tourism which establish dozens of Korean Cultural Centers, embassies and consulates also join in to plan and organize more K-pop concerts outside the country (10) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs often invites overseas K-pop fans to attend the annual K-Pop World Festival in South Korea increasing more tourism activities to Korea which boost Korean tourism sector (Ryan, 2012). The Bank of Korea has attributed the rapid surge in cultural exports since 1997 to the increased worldwide popularity of K-pop (2012) as indicated in Table 4.

Whereas in Hollywood, there are many personal phenomenon cases on social media sites such as Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, Katty Perry, Selena Gomez (7) by just using social media to gain their popularity and this directly contributed towards the Corporate SMS, Social SMS and Political SMS (16). Elite Email, a world leader in digital marketing tools for small to medium-sized businesses, has ranked celebrities with the most social media power in 2013.

**Table 4.** Exports of Cultural and Entertainment Services in Korea (Bank of Korea, 2012)



## 2.2. Effect of Hollywood Stardom on Social Media

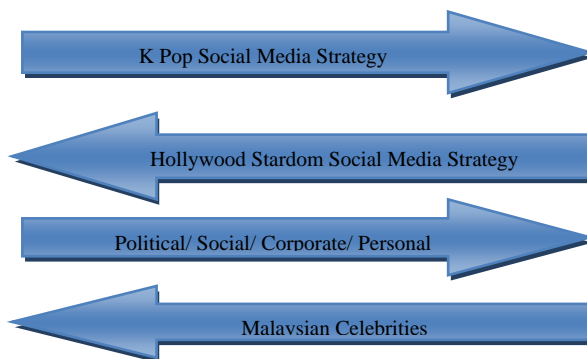
Hollywood celebrities like Kim Kardashian are being paid 5 figures in USD for every single tweet promoting a product or brand (Delo, 2013). This is because celebrities are being referred as a group of people who are in the limelight and attention of public via mass media (18). Celebrities cover a wide variety of public figures ranging from singers, actress, hosts, businessman or even politicians. The number of fans following celebrities on social media platforms signifies their success in utilising all social media tools. A recent research was conducted by the Elite Email (2013) in order to indicate the world's top 10 celebrities on popular social media platforms (7), and this is illustrated in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Top 10 World Celebrities on Social Media by Elite Email Research 2013

Rank	Names	Facebook Fans	Twitter Fans	Instagram Fans
1	Justin Bieber	56,344,922	43,736,865	10,604,951
2	Lady Gaga	58,810,694	41,632,293	1,669,135
3	Katy Perry	69,398,564	40,813,961	1,361,829
4	Shakira	68,379,470	21,889,107	712,386
5	Eminem	74,842,689	15,481,870	498,360
6	Taylor Swift	46,419,711	33,124,253	6,380,848
7	Cristiano Ronaldo	59,880,003	20,797,404	1,957,093
8	Selena Gomez	45,235,698	16,368,289	4,304,074
9	Britney Spears	29,166,761	31,098,057	1,370,672
10	Avril Lavigne	44,503,000	12,832,515	244,811

### 2.3. Comparison K Pop vs. Hollywood Stardom

Both K Pop and Hollywood Stardom achieve the same results but Hollywood Stardom strategy will be healthier for individuals and this suits Malaysia's current situation where there are a lot of local phenomenon success celebrities on social media platform like Yuna, Lisa Surihani, Zizan Razak and more (Social Bakers, 2014). Figure 3 shows that whichever way the strategies progress, they would ultimately globalize each country on the global online world. In short, social media strategies must combine with personal branding strategies in order to create a successful personal branding on the social media sphere.



**Figure 3.** Globalization of K Pop vs. Hollywood Star Systems vs. Malaysian Celebrities

All these personal social media strategies aim to grow army of fans and connect to them effectively to gain success on personal branding on social media platforms.

### 3. Research Objectives

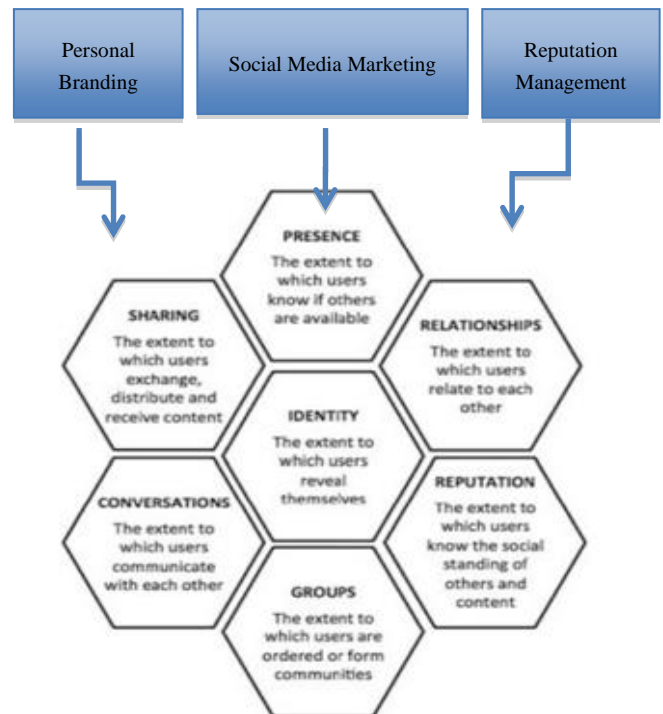
This study presents the findings of a pilot study done to examine the personal social media strategies adopted by celebrities on the top social media platform in Malaysia (Facebook) in building their personal branding. More specifically, it allows the examination of various approaches and new insights adopted by successful celebrities in gaining continuous success on social media platforms and methods to promote fans loyalty rather than examine firms in engaging customers.

### 4. Significance of Study

Findings from the research could be used to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in local social media strategies and bridge the gap to other users or firms while providing creative and personal insights on how local celebrities utilise social media tools for branding.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

The framework used in this study is shown below:



**Figure 4.** Conceptual Framework: Analysis of Malaysian Celebrities' Personal Branding via Social Media Strategy on Facebook

Using this framework, the fundamental personal strategies used by Malaysian celebrities to focus and unite strategically to form a bigger phenomenon success, can lead to more successful Malaysian celebrities on the social media ground. This will provide insights on some fundamental strategic personal social media strategies utilized by celebrities in the Malaysian entertainment industry.

### 6. Pilot Interview

In order to test the reliability and validity of the framework and interview questions, a pilot test was carried out. Face to face interviews were conducted with three celebrities;

C1: A Famous Vietnamese Blogger (1.9 million Facebook Fans)

C2: Famous Malaysian Actor, Beto (72,212 Facebook Fans)

C3: Malaysian Indian Host & singer, Alvin Anthons (15,477 Facebook Fans).

18 questions were asked of them, which were all recorded. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed and then the answers were recorded into Table 6 form for thematic analysis to be done.

**Table 6.** Pilot Interview Results

Questions	C1	C2	C3
Q1	Jvevermind, Vlogger	Beto Kusyairy, Actor	Alvin Anthons, Host & Singer
Q2	Not just Facebook, You Tube & Instagram	Not Just Facebook, Instagram & Twitter	Not Just Facebook, Instagram & Twitter
Q3	Yes. Profile updated once in a while	Yes. Profile updated once in a while	Yes. Profile seldom updated
Q4	Social Media had helped in his personal branding	Social Media had helped in his personal branding	Social Media had helped in his personal branding
Q5	Personally Manage	Personally Manage	Personally Manage
Q6	Direct Posting and Auto Post from Instagram	Auto Post from Instagram	Auto Post from Instagram
Q7	Other Social Sites are linked or shared on Facebook, mainly YouTube& Instagram	Other Social Sites are linked or shared on Facebook, Mainly Instagram	Other Social Sites are linked or shared on Facebook, Mainly Instagram
Q8	Vietnamese (Mainly) & English	Malay (Mainly) & English	English (Mainly) & Malay
Q9	Self produced videos from own YouTube Channel, Pictures	Pictures, Videos from other's YouTube Channel	Pictures
Q10	Self Produced Videos & Working Pictures	Acting Pictures	Personal Pictures
Q11	Posting Partially Dependent on Fans Likes or Comment	Posting not Dependent on Fans Likes or Comment	Posting Dependent on Fans Likes or Comment
Q12	Specific time of posting for video every Saturday	No specific time of posting	No specific time of posting
Q13	One Posting Each Day	More than one Posting Each Day, at times none	More than one posting Each Day
Q14	Once a while reply or chat with fans	Seldom reply or chat	Always reply or chat
Q15	Create more current social content	Post Recent Work Project	Post Recent Work Project
Q16	Remain silent in combatting negative comments	Ignore negative comments	Comment in explaining
Q17	Main Group of Fans: Age: 15-45 Gender: Male & Female Nationality: Vietnamese	Main Group of Fans: Age: 13-50 Gender: Female Nationality: Malaysian	Main Group of Fans: Age: 25-45 Gender: Female & Male Nationality: Malaysian
Q18	The stagnant of numbers of fans, the growth is getting slower in numbers	None	The difficult of growth in numbers of fans

## 7. Analysis and Conclusions

All 3 celebrities utilized their Facebook Fan Page to manage their different personal branding in the entertainment line. The name used on Facebook is the same across other social media platforms to enhance consistency in brand name. The frequency of updating their profile is important to keep their profile online fresh for the fans. All the three celebrities managed their Facebook Fan Page personally without a team. Facebook had helped all three celebrities in building up their personal brand name. However, Facebook is not the only tool which all celebrities utilized. They maximized their branding platform on other social media sites like Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, due to the different social media platform's different functionalities. All three celebrities' shared and linked their other social media platforms to their Facebook Fan Page. All

three celebrities utilize their own national language as the main language when posting on their Facebook Fan Page. All three celebrities shared different contents like pictures and videos on their Facebook Fan Page.

In conclusion, the celebrities' success has a relationship to the social media strategy which they used. These data signified the importance of social media strategy, content strategy, and communication with fans, and authenticity via personally managed, efficiency via mobile management and platform maximisations. However, all celebrities faced the limitation in gaining numbers of fans when they hit the top in their line or society, the only solution they thought of was to collaborate with other celebrities from other countries or post content which might suit other countries. Their huge fans base on their social media platform had generated income and traditional media news which in turn led to an increase in their popularity.



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