

The Impact of Emotional States and Personality Traits on Online Impulse Buying

Regine Norheim

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
regginorheim@hotmail.com

Atanu Nath

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway
Atanu.k.nath@hvl.no

Abstract. Impulse buying is a pervasive aspect of consumers' lifestyles and a significant focal point of strategic marketing management. Enabled by countless online platforms creating increasingly easier access to opportunities for impulse buying, they are a significant factor for change in consumers' buying habits. While impulse buying is a well-researched topic, most research has focused on consumers' state of mind or specific personality traits, which may result in an oversimplified and one-sided perspective. Building on relevant literature, the essay aims to fill the research gap and present a comprehensive understanding of online impulse buying and the interaction between states and traits. Both positive and negative states are taken into consideration. It builds upon the five-factor personality traits model inclusive of extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness; and investigates the moderating effect of impulsive buying tendency (IBT) on online impulse buying. The additional IBT dimensions of emotions and lack of self-control are considered, which play a conciliating role between IBT and impulsive buying behavior, assuming consumers' lack of self-control influences their inability to postpone satisfaction and leads to impulse buying. The paper proposes individuals with transitory emotional states can be linked to certain personality traits; impulsive buying tendency, extroversion, and neuroticism. Based on the literature, the paper further proposes a research framework positing external stimuli of sales promotions and online influencers to have a direct influence on emotional states leading to online impulsive buying.

Keywords: Online impulse buying, external stimuli, personality traits, impulsive buying tendency, impulsive buying behavior.

1 Introduction

Impulse buying is a pervasive aspect of consumers' lifestyles, and a significant focal point of strategic marketing management (Rook 1987). The progress of digital technology has caused momentous changes as well as has become an ever-present process in consumers' buying habits, spurred on by the countless online platforms creating increasingly easy access to opportunities for impulse buying (Bellini, Cardinali, and Grandi 2017; Vohs and Faber 2007). Credit cards, payment facilitators, and a growing plethora of apps on mobile devices make online impulse buying easier than ever today.

Impulse buying is a well-researched topic and various elements of impulse buying have come under academic exploration. However, most research focuses on consumers' state of mind or specific personality traits (Rook and Fisher 1995), which may result in an over-simplified and one-sided perspective (Hertzog and Nesselroade 1987). (Parboteeah, Valacich, and Wells 2009) observed plenty of environmental cues alter consumers' state of mind positively or negatively on the urge to buy. Yet, traits are not always a proper predictor of human behavior (Mischel 1973). For example, research

confirms that front-line consumers with sales promotions and discounts increase the likelihood of impulsivity (Akram et al. 2016; Badgaiyan, Verma, and Dixit 2016; Kempa, Vebrian, and Bendjeroua 2020). Nevertheless, little research analyzes the impact of sales promotion on impulsive online buying (Akram et al. 2016). Building on extant literature, this essay aims to fill the research gap and attempts to present a more comprehensive understanding of online impulse buying and the interaction between states and traits. An extension of the Five-Factor model of personality traits is argued considering both positive and negative states, and a relational framework is suggested proposing and illustrating the links between external stimuli and emotional states on personality and online impulse buying.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the term online impulse buying is addressed before investigating online impulse buying triggers, specifically emotional states and personality traits. Followed by discussions on transitory emotional states on personality and online impulse buying, and the influence of external stimuli, namely sales promotion and online influencers. Building upon the discussion, a conceptual framework is suggested and explained with further research directions.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Online impulse buying and it's triggers

Although impulse buying behavior has been approached from different points of view in consumption, economics, and clinical psychology, it has proven difficult to define (Verplanken and Sato 2011). (Stern 1962) defined impulse buying as simply “unplanned buying” but was criticized by (Rook 1987) who suggested that consumer impulsivity is a lifestyle trait related to materialism and certain personality traits. Online purchasing is argued to be more conducive to impulse buying behavior due to the online environment freeing consumers from constraints such as limited opening hours and social pressure from staff and other consumers (LaRose and Eastin 2002). A commonality in most definitions of online impulse buying is the unplanned and spontaneous aspect that consumers do not necessarily reflect on (Chan, Cheung, and Lee 2017).

Emotional states usually change depending on the environment, while personality traits are considered long-lasting (Hertzog and Nesselroade 1987). Impulse buying is usually stimulus-driven, meaning exposing consumers to certain stimuli such as sales promotions can increase impulse buying (Youn and Faber 2000). To understand online impulse buying, one should consider consumers' inherent traits and states of mind (Wells, Parboteeah, and Valacich 2011). Thus, this essay postulates links between consumers' personality traits and emotional states on online impulse buying and posits certain individuals may be more prone to be influenced by external stimuli such as sales promotions and online influencers.

2.2 Positive and negative emotions

Impulse buying is linked to both positive and negative emotions, followed by solid emotional responses such as strong urges to buy, and feelings of excitement and pleasure (Verplanken and Sato 2011). Emotions are held transitory and easily influenced by stimuli.

Negative emotions relate to feelings of anxiety, sadness, and depression and can appear as negative reactions to experiences (Rook, Gardner, and others 1993). (Verplanken et al. 2005) suggest impulse buying as a tool for consumers to escape or ease negative emotions. Moreover, research shows evidence of impulse buying reducing what consumers perceive as unpleasant emotional states (Iyer et al. 2020).

In an online context, platforms provide a large range of available options and easy access for consumers, which can increase the likelihood of impulse buying. Various research verifies emotions as a mediator between impulsive buying behavior and other marketing stimuli (Ahn and Kwon 2022; Verhagen and Van Dolen 2011). Thus, it is suggested that negative states influence online impulsive buying.

Positive emotions can be influenced by various external and internal factors, with research showing positive emotions in turn can influence impulse buying in online shopping. (Setiawan and Ardani 2022) found that when positivity in consumers increased, impulse buying increased. Furthermore, (Larasati and Yasa 2021) found consumers' emotional states to have an essential part in decision-making on impulsive purchases. Similarly, (Amiri et al. 2012) found that more positive emotions at the time of purchase leads to increasing impulse buying. Thus, it is suggested that positive emotions influence online impulsive buying.

2.3 Personality traits and the five factor model

Personality is a certain composition of long-lasting traits and mechanisms within individuals that are influenced along several aspects of their lives, such as how they interact and adapt to different environments (Larsen et al. 2005). Personality is closely linked to decision-making and is used to predict consumer behavior (Jie et al. 2022). Thus, it is expected that personality influences online impulse buying. The Five-Factor model is one of the primary benchmarks in the trait theory of personality and includes the following behavioral traits; extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (McCrae and Costa 1990; 2008). Individuals can show all dimensions but usually score higher on one of several dimensions and lower on others (Mulyanegara, Tsarenko, and Anderson 2009). We discuss them briefly below.

Openness signifies being open to feelings and new ideas, which further reflects curiosity and adventurousness (Costa and McCrae 2008). (Bosnjak, Galesic, and Tuten 2007) and (McElroy et al. 2007) state that online impulse buying and openness to experience are closely linked. (Huang and Yang 2010) find openness to experience to relate to online shopping in two ways. First, individuals tend to find online buying adventurous with the purpose of stimulation and excitement to meet something interesting. Secondly, online shopping is a way to discover current trends. This is further supported by (Iqbal et al. 2021) who found a direct positive link between openness and online shopping. When considering the curiosity connected to this trait, such individuals are expected to be more impulsive, and the large number of options from online platforms increases the possibility of making impulsive online purchases (McCrae and Costa 2008).

Agreeableness deals with motives for keeping positive relations with other people and refers to trust, sympathy, and selflessness (Jensen-Campbell and Graziano 2001; McCrae and Costa 1990). Agreeable individuals are usually caring, friendly, and tolerant of social behavior (Chamorro-Premuzic 2015). Research supports both positive and negative associations between agreeableness and online impulse purchasing. (Bosnjak, Galesic, and Tuten 2007) found a negative association between online shopping and agreeableness. (Wolfenbarger and Gilly 2001) argue that agreeable people have a stronger need to uphold interpersonal relationships, which motivates them to visit brick-and-mortar stores. On the other hand, Iqbal et al. (2021) found agreeable individuals to have more confidence in online transactions.

Extroversion is used to categorize light-minded, social people with strong adaptability. They tend to be more impulsive, explore new ideas, and possess less self-control, which is further linked to being motivated by external stimuli such as environments and people (McCrae and Costa 2008). Impulse buying has been found positively related to both low self-control (Sneath, Lacey, and Kennett-Hensel 2009) and impulsiveness (Christenson et al. 1994). Thus, it is suggested that impulsive buyers score

higher on extroversion. Similarly, extroverted individuals are often socially motivated to engage in online shopping activities, such as sharing ads and shopping information on social media (Huang and Yang 2010). Thus, it is posited that extroverted individuals are more involved in online impulse buying.

Conscientious individuals are usually emotionally stable, responsible, and not as influenced by external stimuli (McCrae and Costa 1990). (Wolfenbarger and Gilly 2001) suggest that conscientious individuals are likely to make online purchases as the comfort and convenience of online purchasing appeal to their self-controlled and well-organized nature, finding online purchasing less stressful. Thus, conscientiousness is linked to online buying, however, they may be less likely to make impulsive online purchases.

Neuroticism relates to experiencing negative emotions such as anxiety, moodiness, guilt, and depression; individuals possessing such traits tend to have lower self-esteem (Costa Jr. and McCrae 1995). In an online context, neurotic consumers are more likely to engage in impulsive buying behavior because of their emotional distress as impulse buying is used as a tool to deal with and escape negative emotions (LaRose and Eastin 2002). Consistent with previous research, (Silvera, Lavack, and Kropp 2008) and (Sneath, Lacey, and Kennett-Hensel 2009) find neuroticism to be linked to online impulsive buying through negative emotions.

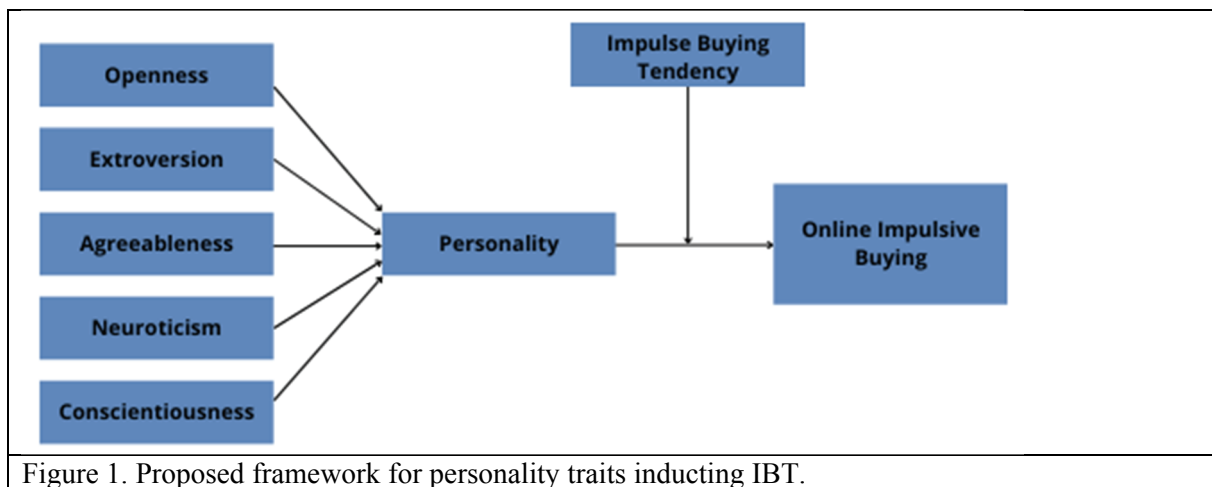
2.4 Impulse Buying Tendency

Impulsive buying tendency (IBT) represents the inclination towards unplanned and reflexive purchases (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001). Consumers with high levels of IBT express more urges to buy, stimulating impulse buying tendencies (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Rook and Fisher 1995), which can lead further to negative emotions (Ahn and Kwon 2022). However, IBT is not inherently linked directly to impulse buying behavior but needs to be stimulated or motivated (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Rook and Fisher 1995). For example, consumers might engage in impulse buying behavior seeking to relieve negative moods and it can be assumed that temporary motives of different kinds might encourage impulse buying, such as rating to reward or comfort oneself (Verplanken and Herabadi 2001). Such motives might be extracted from positive or negative events.

Another essential part of IBT is emotions and lack of self-control, which play a conciliatory role between IBT and impulsive buying behavior. It refers to how consumers' lack of self-control implies their inability to postpone satisfaction and can lead to impulse buying (Youn and Faber 2000). (Rook, Gardner, and others 1993) suggested that certain mood states, such as the combination of pleasure, excitement, and power might motivate impulse buying behavior more automatically by activating themes and associations related to impulse buying.

2.5 The moderating effect of IBT on personality and online impulse buying

Based on the review of trait theory and deduced relationships, we propose a moderating effect of IBT within the established Five-Factor model and the relationship to online impulse buying. Several researchers have highlighted impulse buying tendency as a significant aspect of consumers' traits, particularly in the context of online impulse buying (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Verplanken and Herabadi 2001). Thus, the following framework is proposed, which can increase the understanding of personality traits on online impulse buying, and the moderating effect of impulse buying tendency. The suggested model is the foundation of the general discussion of this essay.



3 The role of external stimuli on emotional states and personality traits

Based upon the literature discussed, it follows that individuals with transitory emotional states can be linked to certain personality traits, impulsive buying tendency, extroversion, and neuroticism. The following sections discuss two (of the multiple) components with the power to influence online impulse buying to find whether such individuals are more prone to the influence of sales promotions and online influencers.

3.1 Sales promotions and price discount

Sales promotion and price discounts are among the most effective tools to influence consumers' purchase decisions and are commonly used in marketing strategies (Lee and Chen-Yu 2018). While price discounts are designed to encourage buying behavior, sales promotions present an incentive to buy (Kempa, Vebrian, and Bendjeroua 2020). Research has confirmed that the likelihood of making impulse purchases increases when consumers are faced with sales promotions (Akram et al. 2016; Badgaiyan, Verma, and Dixit 2016). Furthermore, the price discount is suggested to influence positive emotions, which is consistent with the findings of (Setiawan and Ardani 2022). Sales promotions can trigger the feeling of making a good deal and getting a better value, which further stimulates impulsiveness. Thus, it is postulated that sales promotions influence online impulse buying through positive emotions.

3.2 The role of price discounts on emotional states and personality

Although individuals who score high on impulsive buying tendency express more urges to buy, it does not directly lead to impulse buying, instead it needs some additional motivating factors. External cues such as sales promotions and discounts are stimulators of IBT which can lead to impulsive online buying (Kempa, Vebrian, and Bendjeroua 2020). Emotions also play an essential role in the relationship between IBT and impulsive buying behavior. Impulse buying can act as a self-regulatory mechanism that alleviates negative emotions, which is seen when individuals with an elevated level of IBT sacrifice their self-control to feel better (Baumeister 2002). Specifically, such a mechanism applies when emotions have a structural basis, such as when people feel they fail to live up to valued standards or have low self-esteem (Verplanken et al. 2005). Thus, it's suggested that individuals with high IBT are more likely to be influenced by external stimuli such as price discounts and sales promotions, and online impulse buying as a tool to escape negative emotions.

Neuroticism can be characterized as emotional instability and relates to negative emotions and impulse buying behavior. Neuroticism can affect online impulse buying through negative emotions such as when

individuals try to escape negative states or overcome low self-esteem (Silvera, Lavack, and Kropp 2008). Negative emotions are essential triggers as they make consumers want to release negative emotions through online impulsive buying. As neurotic individuals tend to experience negative emotions, they are more likely to be influenced by external stimuli such as sales promotions and discounts, trying to increase positive emotions (Verplanken and Sato 2011).

Extroverted individuals are usually more impulsive with less self-control, which is further linked to being motivated by external stimuli (Costa and McCrae 2008; McCrae and Costa 2008). (Mowen and Spears 1999) link this personality trait to online impulse buying as they are frequent users of social media, making them prone to online influence. Consistent with (Mowen and Spears 1999) findings, several researchers have linked extroversion to impulsive buying (McCrae and Costa 2008; Sneath, Lacey, and Kennett-Hensel 2009). Price discounts can stimulate positive emotions when giving a feeling of making good deals, which can trigger IBT. Also, as extroverted individuals seek stimulation and enjoyment, they are more likely to be influenced by sales promotions and price discounts to escape boredom and achieve positive emotions. Thus, extroverted individuals are more prone to the influence of sales promotions and discounts.

3.3 Role of online influencers on emotional states and personality

As social media usage increases, brands use the voices of online influencers to create brand awareness. Influencers create meaningful and trusting relationships with their audience by sharing their opinions and experiences, and online influencers are seen as opinion leaders and trendsetters, which can stimulate consumers' purchase intentions. Online consumers are viewed as more impulsive due to the ease of transactions as online purchasing and online marketing stimuli make impulsive buying easier, allowing online buyers to be less risk-averse (Verhagen and Van Dolen 2011).

Online influencers tend to create wonderful, yet unrealistic images of their lives. Their audience might find it hard to keep up with such a “picture-perfect” life, which can lead to negative emotions. As influencers tend to be opinion leaders, their suggestions are likely to influence their audience, which can lead to more impulsive purchases. Consumers high in impulse buying tendencies are usually more influenced when seeking to escape negative states, wishing to achieve such a “perfect” life promoted by online influencers. This is supported by (Baumeister 2002) who found that individuals with a high IBT sacrifice their self-control to make themselves feel better. Thus, it is suggested that individuals high on IBT are more prone to be influenced by online influencers through negative emotions.

Extroverted individuals are found to be more impulsive and to possess lesser self-control, which is linked to being motivated by external stimuli. When evaluating products, extroverts interact with others due to their sociability as members of a social group and solicit their opinions (Jie et al. 2022), which makes them more prone to the influence of others. Their focus on the outside world makes them more easily tempted towards new things and can quickly integrate themselves into a group and be influenced by the group's opinion, referring to both positive and negative emotions (Gu et al. 2018; Wang et al. 2022). They are also more likely to engage in online shopping activities due to their social motivation (Huang and Yang 2010). Simultaneously, they are more concerned about belonging to certain groups or individuals and tend to be more sensitive about what other people think. Thus, it is suggested that extroverts are more prone to be influenced by online influencers through both negative and positive emotions.

The link between neurotic individuals and negative emotions makes them more likely to engage in online impulsive buying. Moreover, neurotic individuals are likely to be negatively influenced by online influencers considering the “perfect” image influencers have created for themselves. (Verplanken and Herabadi 2001) found impulse buying regularly associated with individuals wanting to escape negative

emotions. This is further supported by the research of (Sneath, Lacey, and Kennett-Hensel 2009) and (Silvera, Lavack, and Kropp 2008) who found impulse buying to effectively reduce depression and improve emotions towards a positive state. It is posited that neurotic individuals are more likely to be influenced by online influencers through negative emotions.

4 Proposed Research Framework

Based on the inclusion of impulse buying tendency as a moderating variable within the Five-Factor model and the discussion in the prior section (3), a framework is suggested that illustrates the links between external stimuli and emotional states on personality and online impulse buying. Individuals who frequently engage in impulse purchases often share common personality traits and characteristics (Youn and Faber 2000), such as extroversion, neuroticism, and impulsive buying tendency. The framework suggests an inclusion of these personality constructs that are linked to individuals with more volatile emotional states. Furthermore, the framework proposes how certain personality traits and emotional states can be influenced by the external stimuli of sales promotions and online influencers, which stimulate online impulsive buying. Consistent with past studies on impulse buying, impulse buying has been used as a dependent variable and includes both actual buying of the product and gratification of the urge. When a shopper experiences more urges, it spurs the possibility of an impulse purchase (Beatty and Ferrell 1998).

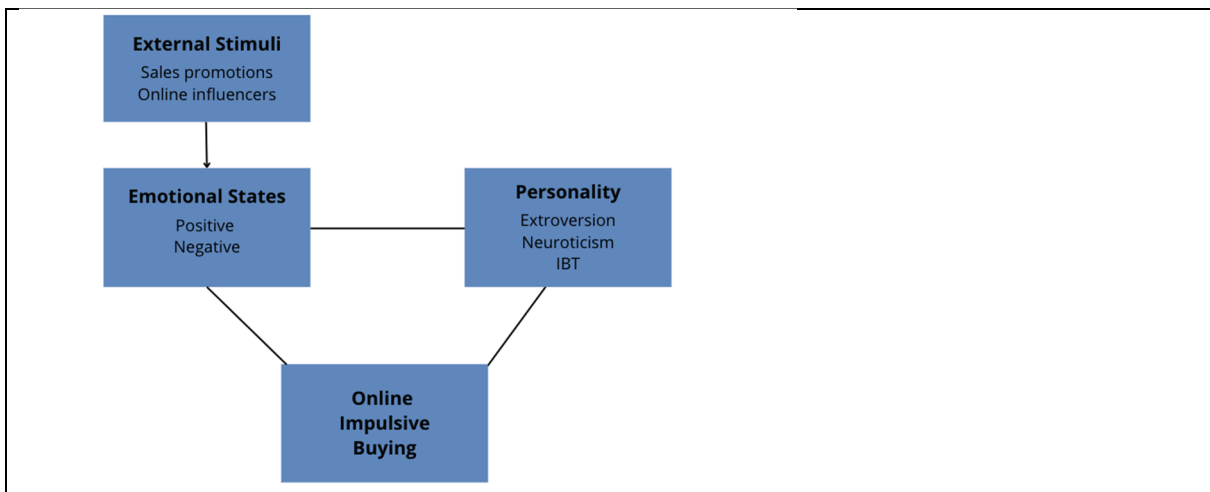


Figure 2. Proposed framework of emotional states, personality traits, and external stimuli

When meeting cues such as sales promotions, consumers can experience urges to impulsively buy (Rook 1987). The framework illustrates how such external stimuli, and in this case sales promotions and online influencers have a significant impact and links to consumers' emotional states, including positive and negative states. Online impulsive buying can be influenced by marketing stimulus that incites cognitive evaluation, leading to a need for purchasing (Beatty and Ferrell 1998). For example, sales promotions and online influencers are stimuli that call for consumers' attention. (LaRose and Eastin 2002) found several features in online stores that encourage online impulsive buying such as sales promotions and discounts. Similarly, impulsive consumers are more likely to be sensitive to their emotions and feelings, which can act as triggers for online impulse buying (Youn and Faber 2000).

Other studies have proposed that impulse buying is partially motivated by the desire to change or manage emotions (Rook, Gardner, and others 1993). According to (Coley and Burgess 2003), consumers make purchases for all kinds of reasons other than just for necessity and include aiming to relieve a depressed mood or for entertainment. The framework proposes a link between emotional states and personality

traits, which further links to online impulse buying. External stimuli such as price discounts can also stimulate positive emotions such as expressing an identity just for fun (Coley and Burgess 2003) or the feeling of getting a good deal. Thus, it is expected a clear link between emotional states and personality traits to be present.

6 Conclusion

Particularly due to a lack of a comprehensive understanding of both traits and states, the essay looks to investigate the interplay between consumers' emotional states and personality traits on online impulsive buying, and whether such individuals tend to be more prone to the influence of external stimuli, specifically sales promotions and online influencers. Through an exploration of relevant research and literature, this essay confirms that there are a range of factors that influence online impulse purchases. Consumers tend to make impulsive purchases online due to factors that are linked to individual differences in personality traits and emotional states. Moreover, consumers with extroverted, impulse-buying tendencies and neurotic traits tend to have more transitory emotional traits and are more likely to make impulse purchases. It is also proposed as likely that individuals with such personality traits are more prone to the influence of external stimuli such as sales promotions and online influencers. The paper posited that impulse buying can be explained by individual differences in personality traits using the Five Factors Model. However, the findings revealed a need for expanding the model. As several researchers have confirmed impulse buying tendency as an essential part of consumers' traits regarding online impulse buying (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Verplanken and Herabadi 2001), impulse buying tendency is introduced as a moderator in the relationship between personality traits and online impulsive buying.

6.1 Further research directions

The essay proposes a framework illustrating the relationship between emotional states (positive and negative emotions) and the personality traits linked to more volatile emotional states, and how such individuals are more influenced by external stimuli. However, each of the mentioned elements has a different impact on consumers due to individual differences. Further research is proposed using a mixed method approach, through exploratory studies confirming the presence of the factors, followed by empirical testing to ascertain the veracity of the proposed relationships between the constructs.

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