



Narcissism as a Determinant Factor: A Personality Psychology Perspective on the Formation of Aesthetic Identity and Professional Image of Indonesian Fashion Designer

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the role of narcissism as a determining factor in the formation of aesthetic identity and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers through the perspective of personality psychology. In the highly competitive fashion industry, which is heavily driven by visual judgment, narcissistic traits are often associated with the need for recognition, sensitivity to public appreciation, and a strong drive to highlight personal uniqueness. This study examines how narcissistic tendencies, both in the form of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, influence the creative process, aesthetic decision-making, and personal branding strategies of designers. By using theoretical approaches and empirical reviews from previous studies, this research finds that narcissism can be a constructive source of motivation in producing bold and innovative works, and full of distinction, yet also has the potential to create an egocentric aesthetic bias that is less adaptive to market dynamics. The study results indicate that the aesthetic identity of Indonesian fashion designers is shaped not only by technical competence and cultural values, but also by intrapersonal dynamics related to the need for external validation. Narcissism plays a role in developing a professional image through self-communication patterns, managing public exposure, and strategies for building a strong creative persona. The implications of this research highlight the importance of understanding personality psychology in supporting designers' professional development, while also providing insights for fashion education institutions, the creative industry, and related parties in designing more comprehensive interventions to facilitate the development of a healthy and sustainable creative identity. This study also opens up further opportunities to explore the relationship between personality dynamics and professional performance in Indonesia's creative economy sector

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's fashion industry currently occupies a strategic position in the development of the national creative economy, marked by the increasing number of young designers, domestic market expansion, global penetration, and the complexity of the industry ecosystem involving art, culture, technology, and marketing (Septiyani, 2025; Kartika, 2022; Ananda, 2017). This growth not only indicates increasingly intense competitive dynamics but also reflects structural transformations in the way fashion products are designed, promoted, and consumed by society. In this context, a designer's ability to create a unique aesthetic identity becomes a highly decisive added value for a brand's competitiveness. (Usman, 2025; Sari, 2025; Vinastika, 2025). Aesthetic identity not only represents a visual style, but also reflects creative philosophy, cultural context, personal experience, and the designer's subjective interpretation of both global and local trends. The strength of aesthetic identity often becomes a determining factor in building an emotional connection between a brand and its consumers, especially in the digital era when visuals are the primary medium of creative communication. As public expectations for originality and authenticity of work increase, attention to the process of forming aesthetic identity becomes increasingly important to study in a scientific context. Modern consumers demand products that are not only visually appealing but also possess a strong narrative and character, forcing designers to continuously explore new sources of inspiration and strengthen their personal uniqueness as creators. In this situation, internal factors such as personality, thinking style, motivation, and value orientation play a role that is not no less important compared to external factors such as trends, technology, or market demand. One psychological aspect that is increasingly receiving attention is narcissism, as this trait is closely related to the drive to stand out, to showcase self-identity, and to create works considered as ideal representations of personal image. Understanding how psychological factors like narcissism influence visual style and aesthetic preferences becomes crucial for comprehending the dynamics of aesthetic identity formation among Indonesian fashion designers more comprehensively. This study also enriches the academic perspective on the relationship between personality and creativity in the fashion industry, an area of research that is still relatively limited but highly relevant to the development of the current creative ecosystem.

In the professional development of fashion designers, professional image becomes an aspect that is just as important as the quality of their work, because this image serves as a self-representation attached to a designer's personal brand. Professional image encompasses how a designer presents themselves to the public through visual portfolios, creative narratives, communication strategies, personal branding, and digital presence across various social media platforms and industry channels. In the fashion ecosystem, which is rich in visuals, performativity, and identity competition, the ability to maintain a prominent, credible, and consistent image is no longer optional but an integral part of career sustainability. Professional image even becomes an initial indicator used by the public, clients, and industry stakeholders to assess the quality of a designer

before they thoroughly examine the depth of their work (Gann, 2003; Thomson, 2003). Thus, designers are required not only to be skilled in the creative field but also adept at managing impressions and building emotional connections with audiences through media that heavily rely on aesthetics and narrative. At this point, personality factors play a very important role, because a professional image is not merely formed from external social constructs but is a projection of internal psychological dynamics that shape how a designer sees themselves and how they want to be perceived by the public. Internal motivation, need for validation, self-confidence, emotional control, as well as narcissistic tendencies can directly influence visual communication patterns and branding strategies used. Designers with strong narcissistic drives, for example, tend to craft a professional image that is more focused on self-grandiosity, exclusivity, and creative superiority, which is then reflected in how they present their work process, choice of words in promotions, and the visual style they display in digital media. Meanwhile, designers with more introspective psychological tendencies tend to present a professional image that is more humanistic, emotional, and based on closeness with the audience.

The development of technology and digitalization expands the performative space that designers can explore, so that a professional image is no longer understood as a static representation, but as a constantly evolving narrative that must be managed strategically (Perano, 2023). In this context, understanding personality factors becomes, but also to examine how designers construct themselves as public figures and how they navigate industry expectations that often demand intense digital visibility and presence (Xie, 2025). Studies on professional image in fashion cannot be separated from analyses of personality psychology, as the interaction between the two determines how a designer's creative identity and professional credibility are formed, developed, and recognized in the increasingly complex Indonesian fashion industry (Li, 2024). One personality aspect relevant in this context is narcissism, which is generally understood as a tendency to seek recognition, stand out, and maintain an ideal image in the eyes of others. In contemporary psychology, narcissism is not seen as entirely negative. Research shows that narcissistic traits can contribute to creative performance by increasing the motivation to stand out, the courage to take risk and sensitivity to criticism that can trigger an improvement in the quality of work. In the highly competitive fashion industry that prioritizes visibility, narcissistic tendencies can drive designers to create aesthetics that are more expressive, provocative, and full of identity. Structurally, narcissism consists of two main dimensions: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (Rohmatullaili, 2022; Miller, 2011; Kaufman, 2020). Grandiose narcissism is associated with high self-confidence, great ambition, and dominant self-expression. In the context of fashion, this trait can encourage designers to be innovative and develop bold styles. Conversely, vulnerable narcissism is related to sensitivity to judgment, insecurity, and an intense need for external validation. Although it may seem negative, This dimension often prompts designers to work harder to ensure their work is accepted by the public. The combination of these two forms of narcissism can create a psychological dynamic that affects the

creative process and the formation of a professional persona of a fashion designer. Nevertheless, research specifically linking narcissism with the formation of aesthetic identity and the professional image of fashion designers is still very limited. Most studies on narcissism in the fashion industry tend to focus on media representation, consumer behavior, or influencer phenomena rather than on designers as the main subject of creative production. Furthermore, studies on creativity generally emphasize characteristics such as openness to experience, self-efficacy, or intrinsic motivation, without touching on the role of narcissism as a psychological structure that can influence how designers navigate the creative world. This gap indicates a significant research void in understanding the relationship between narcissism and fashion design practices in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the formation of designers' professional image still largely discusses external factors such as the use of social media, branding strategies, the effectiveness of visual communication, and the role of fashion communities (Lee, 2018; Gao, 2024; Prihatmoko, 2024). Very little research explores how intrapersonal factors, particularly personality dynamics such as narcissism, affect how designers build their professional image. In fact, in the fashion industry, the creative persona often becomes a key element that distinguishes designers, especially when the public tends to identify works with their creators. The absence of in-depth studies on this personality aspect results in a less comprehensive understanding of the professional development of designers. The Indonesian context offers a unique socio-cultural framework that differs from fashion research settings in Western countries. As a nation with cultural diversity and social values, Indonesian designers often find themselves at the crossroads of maintaining traditional aesthetics and following global trends. In such an environment, narcissism can act as a driver for designers to assert a strong personal identity and build a professional image that is well-received in both local and international markets. However, without proper understanding, narcissism can also trigger aesthetic distortions that are overly ego-centered, neglecting market relevance or cultural context. These characteristics further underscore the importance of scientific studies on the dynamics of narcissism in the Indonesian fashion industry.

Not only does narcissism affect the creative process, but it also contributes to how designers manage public exposure, for example through runway shows, visual campaigns, media interviews, or the use of social media. In the digital era, a designer's professional image is highly influenced by how they construct their self-narrative. They are not only seen as creators of work but also as public figures who must manage audience perception. In this context, narcissism can act as an adaptive strategy to increase visibility, but it can also trigger compensatory behaviors that are harmful if not balanced with psychological stability. Based on these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study aims to unravel the role of narcissism as a determining factor in shaping the aesthetic identity and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers. By integrating

perspectives from personality psychology and fashion industry studies, this research aims to generate a deeper understanding of how narcissistic dynamics drive designers to express themselves through their work and professional strategies. This approach is expected to provide new contributions to the development of theories on the relationship between personality and creativity in the context of the modern creative industry. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to connect two fields of knowledge—personality psychology and fashion studies—in analyzing the formation of aesthetic identity and professional image. This research not only identifies the role of narcissism as a source of creative energy and a determinant in shaping professional image, tetapi juga mengkaji bagaimana kedua dimensi narsisme dapat menghasilkan dampak both constructive and dysfunctional in fashion design practice. The findings are expected to broaden the scientific literature on the relationship between personality and creative performance, while also providing a conceptual foundation for fashion education institutions, industry practitioners, and designers to develop strategies for strengthening psychological capacity and fostering healthier, more realistic, and sustainable professional development.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study method to gain an in-depth understanding of how narcissism acts as a determining factor in shaping the aesthetic identity and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore subjective experiences and personality dynamics, as well as the interpretative process that shapes how designers perceive creativity, aesthetics, and their professional identity. The characteristics of narcissism as a psychological phenomenon that is personal and intrapersonal require a method capable of capturing the meaning of experiences comprehensively, thus this study focuses on narrative exploration emerging from the perspective of designers as the main subjects in the fashion industry.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 8-12 Indonesian fashion designers selected purposively. The purposive sampling technique was used because this study requires participants with specific characteristics, namely designers who are actively creating work and have a public portfolio, and shows a tendency to build aesthetic identity as well as professional image through work and self-communication strategies. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could obtain rich and open responses, while still remaining focused on the research topic, such as professional experience, creative motivation, the role of public validation, personal branding strategies, and how they interpret personality tendencies including narcissistic elements. To strengthen the data, this study also used document observation in the form of visual portfolio analysis, social media campaigns, fashion editorials, and media interviews relevant to the designers' professional image. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques as developed by Braun & Clarke.

This analysis includes six systematic stages: familiarizing with the data by rereading interview transcripts and visual documents, initial coding to identify narrative patterns relevant, temporary theme formation, reviewing themes by ensuring data suitability and conceptual consistency, defining and naming themes, as well as compiling thematic narratives that illustrate the relationship between narcissism, aesthetic identity, and professional image. This technique was chosen because it is capable of capturing the diversity of participants' experiences while organizing them into conceptual themes that can be analyzed theoretically. To ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher applied source triangulation and method triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data, social media analysis, and visual portfolio observation so that the resulting interpretation does not rely on just one type of data. Additionally, this study also applied member checking, which involves confirming findings or interpretations with several participants to ensure that the analysis results genuinely reflect their experiences. The aspects of dependability and confirmability are maintained through an audit trail containing records of methodological decision-making processes, analysis codes, and documentation of changes during the research.

Ethically, this study observes the principles of confidentiality, participant consent (informed consent), and responsible use of data. The identities of designers are anonymized using specific codes unless they agree to the use of their real names. All interviews are recorded with the participants' permission and stored with strict data security protocols. This study also emphasizes that the analysis conducted is not intended to provide pathological labels, but to understand personality dynamics in the context of creativity and the formation of professional identity. Overall, the research method is designed to produce deep understanding, reflective and contextual regarding how narcissism affects the aesthetics and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers, so that the research results can provide both conceptual and practical contributions to the academic world as well as the creative industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narcissism has a significant contribution in shaping the aesthetic identity of Indonesian fashion designers, especially through the internal drive to showcase uniqueness and gain social recognition (Triana, 2024). Narcissism, as a personality trait characterized by a strong need for external validation and a desire to stand out, influences how designers formulate visual preferences, construct creative styles, and position themselves within the competitive landscape of the fashion industry (Krizan, 2018; Glover, 2013).

In a narrative analysis of interviews and literature, a tendency toward grandiose narcissism appears to be associated with a more explorative, experimental design style that emphasizes visual boldness (Bailey, 2025). Designers with these characteristics show a tendency to take higher aesthetic risks, create provocative works, and develop visual elements strategically designed to set them apart from competitors. Designers with higher narcissism scores tend to view their work as an extension of themselves, so the aesthetics

they develop are more focused on differentiation and creating visual markers easily recognized by the public. They position their work not only as a creative product but as a medium for self-representation that conveys messages about identity, greatness, or personal uniqueness. This pattern makes the creative process very personal and full of symbolism, where every design decision – from the choice of materials, color composition, to construction techniques – is considered as part of an effort to shape an ideal self-image.

In this process, aesthetics are not solely driven by functional or market considerations, but by psychological motivations to create a certain impression that reinforces their position as influential creative figures. This is evident in their tendency to maintain certain distinctive features, such as the use of dramatic silhouettes, strong motifs, or unconventional techniques to build a “signature style” that becomes their public identity in the industry. These distinctive features often not only appear consistently across different collections but are also used as a visual branding tool to enhance emotional connection with the audience. Thus, narcissism functions as a driving force that accelerates the production of unique and easily recognizable aesthetics, while also reinforcing the designer's presence in the visual landscape of the fashion industry. Overall, these findings affirm that internal psychological dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the creative character and aesthetics of Indonesian fashion designers, especially in the context of identity competition and the need to maintain visibility within an increasingly crowded and competitive industry ecosystem. Further analysis indicates that the dimension of vulnerable narcissism has a different influence on the creative process compared to grandiose narcissism (Rohmann, 2012; Besser, 2010; Weiss, 2018).

This dimension is characterized by higher emotional sensitivity, anxiety about external evaluation, and a strong need for social acceptance, thus creating a more complex psychological dynamic within the designer. This tendency makes designers more sensitive to criticism, market responses, and consumer opinions, so even though they still prioritize self-expression, the creative decisions they make tend to be more measured and considerate of audience preferences. Designers with characteristics of vulnerable narcissism also show a tendency to observe trends more carefully and make aesthetic adjustments to ensure that their work remains relevant and acceptable within an ever-changing cultural and market context (Lee, 2024). This sensitivity ultimately gives rise to a more adaptive and contextual aesthetic pattern, in which design not only reflects the personal identity of the designer but also the emotional need to build a connection with the public. They strive to balance the need for social recognition with the drive to stand out thus producing an aesthetic that is more harmonious, functional, and easily accepted by various consumer segments. Unlike grandiose-type designers, who tend to emphasize visual dramatization, designers with a vulnerable inclination place greater emphasis on harmony between aesthetic value, user comfort, and emotional touches that can be felt by the audience.

This pattern shows that narcissism is not just a drive to stand out, but also a psychological mechanism that influences how designers navigate social pressures, industry expectations, and relational dynamics with consumers. Vulnerable narcissism allows designers to engage in deeper self-reflection regarding public reception, making the creative process they undertake generally more dialogic and responsive. These findings confirm that the role of narcissism in the fashion industry is not monolithic; on the contrary, its various dimensions have different impacts on aesthetic strategies and the professional adaptation of designers. Thus, understanding variations in narcissism becomes important in explaining the diversity of creative approaches and artistic styles that emerge in the Indonesian fashion industry.

In the formation of a professional image, research findings show that narcissism is closely related to the personal branding strategies carried out by designers, especially in the context of a highly competitive creative industry that relies on public visibility (Kucharska, 2018; Scolere, 2019). Narcissistic tendencies encourage them to be more active in managing self-representation on social media, ranging from curating visual portfolios to crafting persuasive personal narratives, up to the emphasis on aspects of identity that are considered capable of enhancing professional appeal. Designers with grandiose tendencies tend to present themselves as superior, visionary, and distinct from competitors, for example through highlighting achievements, the exclusivity of their work, and creative abilities considered exceptional. Conversely, designers with vulnerable tendencies focus more on creating an image that is warm, intimate, and emotionally close to the audience, so their image strategy often highlights the challenging creative process, personal honesty, and efforts to build more authentic relationships. These characteristic differences indicate that narcissistic motives do not operate monolithically, but rather give rise to diverse manifestations in professional image practices, depending on an individual's psychological orientation and how they interpret their creative identity.

Narcissism can also have ambivalent effects on the professional development of fashion designers, as this tendency not only drives creativity and the motivation to stand out but also has the potential to create less productive work dynamics (Sarkar, 2022; Neumann, 2017). On one hand, the drive for recognition and praise often makes designers more willing to experiment, produce innovative work, and continuously expand the aesthetic boundaries they consider their creative identity. Narcissistic traits can trigger impulsive behavior in business decision-making, especially when designers feel their personal intuition is more valid than market data or professional input from their team (Brown, 2010). Some designers even display patterns of making overly quick decisions, neglecting trend research or strategic planning, thus posing financial and operational risks for their brands. Overconfidence can also lead to resistance to criticism, making it difficult for designers to accept external perspectives that are actually important for professional growth.

At this point, narcissism becomes a potential obstacle, because without self-reflection, emotional regulation skills, and openness to cross-functional collaboration, this tendency can erode adaptability and threaten long-term career

sustainability in the highly dynamic fashion industry. In the context of the dynamics of the Indonesian fashion industry, this study also revealed that a competitive work culture, the pressure to stand out, and high public expectations further reinforce the manifestation of narcissistic traits among designers. A fashion industry full of visual judgment, a fast production rhythm, and the need to maintain relevance makes social validation an essential element in their professional journey. Continuous public exposure, both through social media and fashion runways, encourages designers to maintain, but also as a form of psychological adaptation to the demands of the creative industry, which requires performativity of identity. In such situations, the need to be recognized, praised, and appear different often becomes both a survival strategy and an effective personal marketing strategy. This also explains why traits of narcissism seem to be more prominent in the fashion profession compared to some other artistic fields, as aesthetic demands, public exposure, and intense competition create a social ecosystem that structurally encourages the emergence of narcissistic behaviors and orientations on a stronger scale.

Other findings indicate that a designer's aesthetic identity is shaped not only by personality factors but also through the complex interaction between narcissistic tendencies and the social experiences they undergo throughout their career (Kunrath, 2020). Designers who gain public recognition from an early stage, for example, through competition wins, media coverage, or positive responses from the fashion community, individuals tend to develop a more stable narcissistic pattern because these experiences reinforce their belief that the uniqueness of their creative vision is evidence of their superiority. Such external reinforcement not only affects self-confidence but also shapes a design aesthetic that tends to be more expressive, bold, and reflective of personal character. Conversely, designers who have faced rejection, harsh criticism, or commercial failure early in their careers show a stronger tendency toward vulnerable narcissism, reflected in aesthetic choices that are more introspective, cautious, and sometimes subtler as a protective mechanism against negative evaluation.

This interaction shows that narcissism and aesthetic identity develop dynamically and influence each other, and evolves with professional and social experiences, making it impossible to understand as a static construct or separate from the context of a designer's creative life journey. Research has found a strong relationship between narcissistic tendencies and designers' ability to create a consistent aesthetic branding, an element considered fundamental in building reputation and differentiation in the fashion industry (Naderi, 2016). Style consistency is one of the main keys to maintaining brand identity sustainability, and narcissistic traits often provide psychological energy for designers to preserve their distinctive visual characteristics even when faced with pressures from changing trends, market demands, or commercial expectations. Designers with higher levels of narcissism generally have a strong drive to maintain a stable, characterful, and easily recognizable 'visual identity system,' enabling them to create a signature style that sets them apart from competitors, both in local and global markets.

Research findings also highlight that overly rigid consistency can hinder creative evolution when designers become too attached to an established self-image and are reluctant to experiment outside their aesthetic zone. This situation indicates that although narcissism can be a driving force in building a solid identity, the trait can also become an obstacle if not balanced with flexibility, adaptability to change, and the ability to read the constantly evolving market dynamics. In the discussion of social implications, research shows that narcissism plays an important role in shaping how designers perceive and construct and maintaining professional relationships in the fashion industry (Baldegger, 2023; Overdiek, 2016). Grandiose tendencies, for example, can enhance charisma, assertiveness, and high self-confidence—three aspects highly valued in collaborative processes, especially when designers have to lead creative teams, negotiate with clients, or present their work in public. However, the same tendencies can also trigger interpersonal conflict when designers show resistance to criticism, dominate the creative process too much, or impose their aesthetic vision without considering team members' input. Conversely, designers with vulnerable narcissism tendencies tend to be more sensitive, empathetic, and capable of building warmer emotional connections with colleagues, but they are more prone to psychological stress, performance anxiety, and feelings of insecurity when facing competitive situations or public evaluations. This dynamic of contrasts becomes an important aspect that needs to be considered in developing a collaborative work ecosystem in the Indonesian fashion industry, as understanding the narcissistic profiles of designers can help in designing team management strategies, role distribution, as well as more adaptive and productive communication patterns.

Overall, the research findings indicate that narcissism contributes significantly to shaping the aesthetic identity and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers through mechanisms of self-expression, the need for social validation, and creative image strategies carried out either consciously or unconsciously. This tendency encourages designers to showcase visual uniqueness, develop strong personal narratives, and maintain brand identity consistency in an industry landscape highly dependent on public visibility. Narcissistic traits have an ambivalent character: on one hand, they can be a source of creative energy, aesthetic courage, and the drive to gain recognition; but on the other hand, it can become an obstacle when not accompanied by psychological regulation, self-reflection, and the ability to manage interpersonal dynamics. Understanding the role of narcissism is not only theoretically important but also has practical implications for career development, building a collaborative work ecosystem, and strategies for sustainable fashion branding in Indonesia. This discussion emphasizes that integrating personality psychology perspectives into fashion studies is highly relevant and even crucial for understanding how creative dynamics, professional processes, and image formation evolve in an industry oriented toward identity performativity, public exposure, and intense visual competition.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms that narcissism is a determining factor that significantly influences the formation of aesthetic identity and professional image of Indonesian fashion designers. Through personality psychology analysis, it was found that narcissistic tendencies not only affect visual preferences and design styles but also serve as a motivational force that drives creativity, self-differentiation, and the courage to express aesthetic ideas. The dimension of grandiose narcissism is shown to correlate with designers' tendencies to develop more striking, experimental aesthetics oriented towards creating a "signature style," while vulnerable narcissism is associated with a more adaptive, emotional aesthetic touch that is responsive to criticism and market dynamics. Overall, narcissism has been shown to play a dual role: as a productive creative drive, but it can also lead to rigidity, impulsivity, and interpersonal conflict if not accompanied by self-regulation abilities. This study also reveals that the professional image of Indonesian fashion designers is shaped not solely by technical competence or industry experience, but by a combination of internal needs for social recognition and external abilities to manage public perception through personal branding.

These findings highlight that aesthetic identity and professional image strategies cannot be separated from the psychological dynamics of individuals working in a highly competitive and visibility-driven industry. Thus, the integration of personality studies, particularly narcissism, becomes a crucial key in understanding the creative behavior and professional performance of fashion designers in the creative economy era. Theoretically, this study provides an academic contribution by presenting a conceptual framework that connects narcissism, aesthetic identity, and professional image – a relationship that is still minimally explored in the context of Indonesian fashion. Meanwhile, practically, the research findings can serve as a basis for developing psychological mentoring programs, personal branding training, and career management for fashion designers to navigate industry pressures while maintaining psychological well-being and creative consistency. This study also opens up opportunities for further research on the relationship between personality, creativity, and professional behavior in other creative economy sectors.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so it is necessary to conduct further research related to the topic of Narcissism as a Determinant Factor: A Personality Psychology Perspective on the Formation of Aesthetic Identity and Professional Image of Indonesian Fashion Designers in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers.

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