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FACEBOOK AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: SHAPING POLITICAL SUPPORT IN MALAYSIA AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

This study extends a previous review of Facebook and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political communication in Malay language, placing both in the larger digital political information ecosystem, and offering a more holistic synthesis of political narratives, algorithmic communication, platform governance and AI-assisted verification. The study is centered mostly on Malaysia, and is compared to the United States, India and the Philippines. This paper reviews the recent academic literature on the use of Facebook by governments, political parties and other political actors to shape political perception, mobilize voters and gain political support particularly in the setting of Malaysia's 14th and 15th General Elections (GE14 and GE15). This study explores the role of Facebook in the generation, amplification and circulation of political narratives in contemporary digital political communication based on Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and

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Spiral of Silence Theory. It also addresses the big issues of misinformation, political polarization, algorithmic screening and the integrity of democratic processes. The findings imply that Facebook is not just a campaigning arena, but a key element of the broader political information ecosystem where political narratives are built, contested and circulated. The paper also underlines the importance of transparency of political advertising, increased digital media literacy, responsible management of digital platforms and the verification of material through AI to make digital political communication in electoral processes more accountable and trustworthy.

Keywords:

Agenda-Setting Theory; Artificial Intelligence (AI); Elections; Facebook; Malaysia; Media Representation; Misinformation; Political Communication; Political Support; Social Media.



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Introduction

The rapid growth of digital communication technologies has revolutionized the contemporary political information environment by transforming the ways political information is produced, communicated, analyzed, and consumed. Social media has become an important site of political communication, where political players may interact directly with individuals and tell their political stories to large audiences. Among them, Facebook has become a key political communication platform where governments, political parties, candidates, media organizations and citizens exchange political information and engage in public discourse on an ongoing basis (Aichner et al., 2021; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

Facebook's political relevance is more than just a social networking site. It increasingly functions within a broader digital political information ecology in which political narratives are generated, magnified, challenged and redistributed via interconnected communication networks. This environment is produced by direct engagement between political players and citizens, algorithmic content curation, targeted advertising and personalized communication, and new Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted technologies. These mechanisms affect the visibility and circulation of political information and help structure the broader communication environment in which political topics are understood, discussed, and represented across society (Chadwick, 2017; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

Facebook is playing a vital role in the electoral campaigning in Malaysia, especially since the 14th General Election (GE14). Political parties have leveraged the platform to connect with

voters, spread campaign themes, and shape political attitudes via targeted digital communication methods (Baharin et al., 2020; Tiung et al., 2018). These developments have helped move from mostly one-way campaign communication to more interactive, personalized and algorithmically managed political engagement. Previous research has investigated Facebook use, political campaigning, personalization, voter engagement and misinformation in Malaysian and worldwide election contexts but these areas have often been investigated individually. Relatively few studies have investigated the interrelations of Facebook and AI-related mechanisms within wider digital political information ecosystems, especially regarding political narratives, algorithmic communication, platform governance, and information verification. A fragmented study of political communication restricts the ability to understand the relationship between technological, communicative and governance processes in contemporary political communication. This study fills this vacuum, based on a previous review in Malay by the authors, by re-situating Facebook and AI in a more integrated conceptual framework and expanding the investigation to these interrelated dimensions.

In this context, the present study reviews recent scholarly literature on the role of Facebook and AI in the construction of political support, with particular focus on Malaysia's 14th and 15th General Elections (GE14 and GE15) and comparative perspectives from the United States, India and the Philippines. The study is guided by the agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Spiral of Silence Theory. The research explores voter mobilization, political communication, the spread of political narratives and the formation of political opinions. It also addresses misinformation, political polarization, algorithmic filtering, platform accountability, digital media literacy, transparency in political advertising, responsible administration of platforms, and AI-assisted content verification. This integrated approach tries to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Facebook and AI as connected phenomena of current digital political communication.

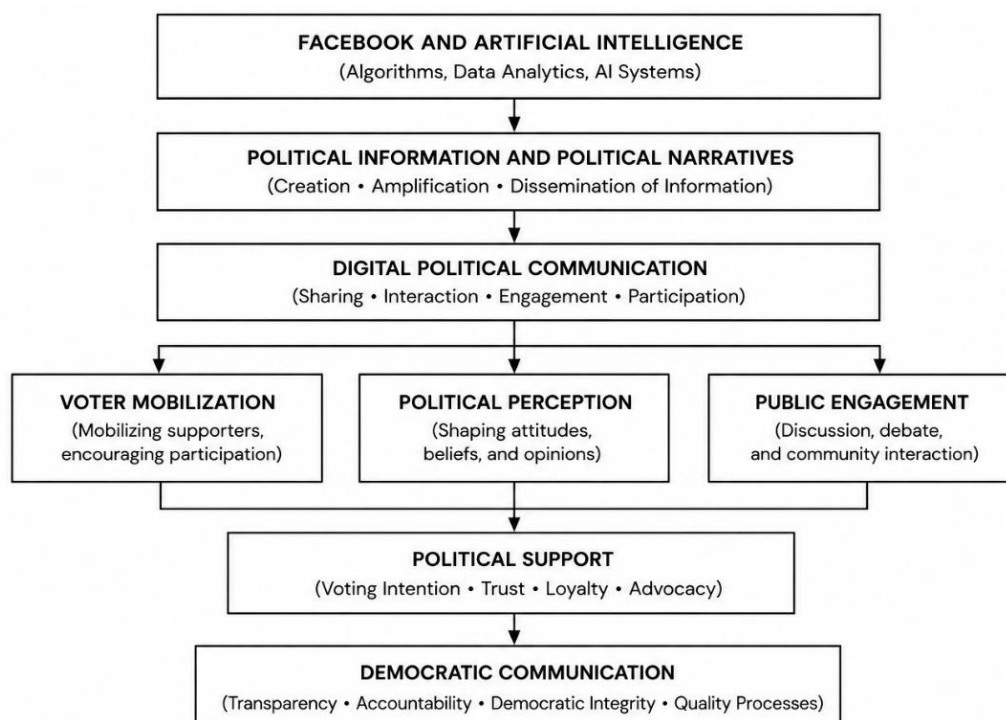


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Facebook and AI in Shaping Political Support

Literature Review

The creation, distribution, reception, and discussion of political content have all been revolutionized by the rise of social media as a medium for political discourse. Facebook and other social media sites are more than just places for political messages to be disseminated; they are interactive nodes in a larger web of digital political information ecosystem that includes citizens, media organizations, political actors, and computational algorithms. According to Klinger and Svensson (2015), who propose the idea of network media logic to describe this development, social media adhere to communication dynamics that are distinct from, but are progressively merging with, those of conventional mass media. Personalized content distribution, participatory interaction, information flows through networks, and the quick dissemination of political narratives are all examples of such dynamics.

Given Facebook's ability to integrate personal connections, campaign messaging, algorithmic distribution, and audience targeting into a single platform, it has emerged as a significant venue for political discourse. This creates an opportunity for political players to engage with the public on a personal level while simultaneously influencing the dissemination of political content. These trends line up with what Chadwick (2017) says about the evolution of political communication, which is that digital and conventional forms of communication are becoming more interdependent. The larger communication infrastructures that shape, amplify, and fight political narratives are just as important as Facebook's direct influence on voters when trying to explain the platform's political impact.

Politics, Political Approval and Facebook

Since its inception, Facebook has grown into a powerful instrument in modern political discourse, allowing for the transmission of political information by governments, political parties, candidates, advocacy groups, and individual individuals with fewer institutional hurdles than traditional mass communication. Politicians can reach out to specific audiences through its tailored communication features and interactive affordances, and it also encourages citizens to comment, discuss, and engage in political talk.

In the wake of the 14th General Election (GE14), Facebook's influence in Malaysian electoral communication has been growing. According to the available literature, political players utilized the platform to reach out to voters with internet access, spread campaign messages, and expand political communication outside conventional campaign channels (Fadillah et al., 2019; Mohamed et al., 2019). Rather than supplanting more conventional forms of political discourse, Facebook has entered a more nuanced information ecosystem in which campaign messaging, citizen comments, political analysis, and media content circulate across several channels.

Since it is highly unlikely that exposure to a particular message or location can mobilize political support, this is crucial. Political narratives, campaign messaging, peer discussion, and selective exposure all contribute to an informational climate that fosters support. Here, Facebook's value comes from its ability to facilitate and magnify political discourse via networked and algorithmically managed engagement, rather than just its reach.

Concerning the correlation between social media use and political engagement, we must exercise caution. The type of political speech and interaction that can take place on digital platforms depends on the users' motivations, social situations, and how they perceive the site. Take Facebook as an example. A study conducted by Lee, Lane, and Kwak (2020) discovered a positive correlation between relational use and political speech on the platform. The researchers also found that the intensity of this association varied depending on users' perceptions of platform openness. Because of this, the political influence of Facebook should be considered as relative, rather than fixed.

Mobilization of Voters, Targeted Communication and Political Narratives

In the realm of voter mobilization, social media has revolutionized modern politics. Political figures can use Facebook to spread campaign materials, communicate with supporters directly, and target specific audiences with their content. By lowering the barrier to entry for candidates and citizens and guaranteeing ongoing chances for political engagement, these elements can boost political engagement.

According to Abdullah et al. (2021), young people in Malaysia who use social media are more likely to be politically active and to interact with election-related content. For individuals who rely heavily on digital platforms to learn about campaigns and participate in political discussions, Facebook takes on added political significance. Research disproves the hypothesis that Facebook exposure is a consistent and direct driver of voter participation. We can better understand its consequences when we consider how exposure, involvement, political interest, and campaign communication interact with one another.

As more and more political narratives are presented to specific groups in digital campaigns, targeted communication becomes even more vital. Facebook political messaging can highlight some accomplishments, issues, identities, or policy stances while downplaying other perspectives. These narratives have the potential to shape how the public views politicians and political events, particularly when they are shared among peers and given more importance by algorithms.

Research from around the world indicates that internet campaigning is now an integral part of electoral strategy, albeit the specific platforms used could vary depending on the political climate. According to Arugay (2022), the use of social media in Philippine political campaigns has grown in recent years, but this trend has also brought forth new regulatory challenges and opportunities for misinformation. Based on their findings, political campaigns in India's 2019 election relied heavily from a larger information ecology wherein digitally transmitted narratives, traditional media, rallies, and social media all interacted. Varughese and Semetko (2022) highlight the growing significance of social media in the various electoral contexts of India, while Jaffrelot and Verniers (2020) characterize the BJP's campaign as a combination of traditional and online platforms, employing a highly personalized strategy.

In conclusion, these findings argue that Facebook's impact on political support is more effectively explained by the coordination of political narratives across digital platforms rather than just being a result of exposure to campaign messages.

Artificial Intelligence in Digital Political Communication

The use of algorithmic recommendation systems, audience targeting, automated content moderation, synthetic media synthesis, and information verification is on the rise in digital political communication, all of which are forms of artificial intelligence (AI). As AI integrates further into social media platforms, it will have an impact on the disclosure of political messaging, the personalization of content, and the dissemination of political information to users. Platforms like Facebook will now play a larger role in political communication mediated by algorithms, rather than just distributing messages.

The use of AI in content curation and political targeting is a significant area of application. Automatic methods are used by social media sites to rank and suggest content according to how relevant and engaging it is projected to be. Another use of data-driven technology in political campaigns is the ability to target and personalize political adverts to certain audiences. According to recent studies, political ads are getting smarter at targeting specific audiences with personalized messages, all with the help of algorithmic delivery systems (Kruschinski & Bene, 2026). Facebook cares about these procedures because political discourse on the site is heavily influenced by the actions of political actors and the way the platform's algorithms rank and distribute posts.

Additionally, AI has an impact on political division and disinformation. If interaction-based recommendation algorithms can captivate consumers, they may push deceptive or emotionally charged content. Algorithmic amplification may worsen preexisting patterns of selective involvement and exacerbate exposure bias, according to recent studies (Jurado Rosas et al., 2026), but it is not a standalone cause of political sentiments. This lines up with a more moderate interpretation of AI's impact on politics: automated systems may influence the visibility and repetition of political material, but this influence may not be constant. Synthetic political content, including altered photos, films, text, and other persuasive materials, can be quickly and cheaply produced with the help of generative AI. Research on political discourse in Southeast Asia has revealed an uptick in the production and dissemination of politically charged and perhaps false material, particularly in Malaysia and the neighboring countries. Such developments have prompted citizens to question the veracity of political information and their capacity to differentiate between real political discourse and stuff that has been altered or artificially produced.

Artificial intelligence may also help make data more secure. Automated technologies can aid in the detection of altered media, the facilitation of factchecking, the delivery of contextual notifications to consumers, and the detection of suspect spread of material. A dual function of AI in political discourse is demonstrated by the aforementioned uses. Among its potential uses are verification and platform control, as well as the creation and dissemination of false information. That is why, rather than seeing AI as just a tool for automating campaigns, we should see it as an increasingly vital part of the digital political information ecology.

Political Communication: Malaysia and International Comparative Perspectives

Data from several nations shows that social media's impact on politics differs greatly from one country to another. The usage of social media and the dissemination of political information are influenced by a variety of factors, including but not limited to regulatory frameworks, campaign tactics, internet penetration rates, and media and political institutions.

Political message, online campaigning, and reaching out to young people are three areas where Facebook is increasingly contributing to election communication in Malaysia. In a hybrid information ecology, political narratives travel across digital and conventional communication channels, and the platform does not operate independently; it works in tandem with mainstream media.

Social media does influence election communication, according to previous US research, but the consequences vary by platform and by region. For instance, in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, exposure to the platform changed voting habits (Fujiwara, Müller, and Schwarz, 2021). However, they investigated Twitter rather than Facebook. Since results obtained on one platform cannot be applied to another, this distinction is crucial.

Social media has become an essential part of Philippine election strategies as candidates rely more and more on digital communication and online mobilization. But the Philippines shows how hard it is to control platforms, respond to rapid technological change, and cope with disinformation.

The political communication landscape in India is distinct from others. Studies of the 2019 election show that in a complicated and competitive information ecology, social media, along with rallies, coverage by major news channels, political ads, and party-organized communication, had a significant influence. Results from these comparisons reveal that political systems, media environments, and platform usage patterns vary from nation to country, making social media's impact on digital campaigns impossible to generalize.

According to most studies, Facebook is not effective on its own as a marketing tool. Being a part of a wider digital ecology of political information makes this politically significant. Networked communication, algorithmic visibility, targeted messaging, political narratives, misinformation, and selective exposure characterize this ecosystem. By looking at platform dynamics, political communication processes, and the institutional frameworks that produce political support from a broader viewpoint, this study differs from previous descriptive interpretations.

Method of Review

The study adopted an integrative literature review strategy to synthesize scholarly work on Facebook, Artificial Intelligence (AI), political communication, voter engagement, disinformation, political polarization and digital platform governance. Identification of Relevant Literature AI search was conducted in academic databases and scholarly search platforms to identify relevant literature. The focus was on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, academic books, working papers, and credible institutional publications published mainly between 2015 and 2026. However, selected foundational theoretical works were maintained to underpin Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Spiral of Silence Theory. Search phrases were combinations of “Facebook,” “Artificial Intelligence,” “political communication,” “political support,” “voter mobilization,” “political campaigning,” “misinformation,” “political polarization,” “algorithmic communication,” and “digital political information ecosystem.” Studies were considered if they directly examined political communication and/or election and/or social media use and/or other aspects of digital governance in Malaysia or relevant international settings, including the United States, India and the Philippines. Sources were omitted if they were not clearly relevant

to the study focus, if they duplicated previously discovered evidence or if they could not be reliably verified. The selected literature was further evaluated comparably and thematically to uncover recurring themes of voter mobilization, political perception, misinformation, polarization, algorithmic communication and AI-assisted verification in contemporary digital political communication.

Findings and Discussion

Four broad patterns emerge from the literature examined in this review. Facebook is repeatedly associated with greater opportunities for political engagement, the circulation of campaign narratives, exposure to misinformation, and increasingly segmented political discussion. These patterns are closely connected. What users encounter on Facebook depends partly on how content is distributed, who they interact with, and which political messages receive greater visibility. Facebook's political role therefore cannot be reduced to a single effect on voters; it develops through the interaction between platform systems, political actors, and user behaviour.

Voter Mobilization and Increased Political Participation Through Facebook's Algorithm

Political campaigning on Facebook has widened the range of ways in which citizens can encounter and participate in election-related communication. Candidates and political organisations are able to distribute campaign information directly to users, while citizens can respond, share material, join discussions, or follow campaign developments without relying entirely on conventional campaign channels.

This development is particularly relevant to younger Malaysians. Abdullah et al. (2021) associate social media with greater opportunities for youth political participation by improving access to political information and spaces for political discussion. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that seeing political content on Facebook automatically causes someone to vote. Rather, the platform creates conditions in which political information is easier to access, and political participation can be maintained over time.

What users actually see is also influenced by platform-based content selection. Previous interactions, interests, and network connections affect the visibility of information in users' feeds. Consequently, two Facebook users may encounter quite different political environments during the same election campaign. Repeated exposure may encourage further discussion or sharing, although political interest and individual media habits remain important in determining whether such exposure develops into active participation.

A Malaysian example is provided by Watimin et al. (2023), who analysed reactions and comments surrounding a politically sensitive issue on Facebook. Their work was not designed to measure voter turnout in GE14 or GE15. It nevertheless shows that the framing of political content can be examined alongside observable patterns of public reaction and sentiment. In this sense, Facebook's relevance to mobilization lies less in determining voting behaviour directly and more in sustaining access, interaction, and engagement around political information.

Shaping Political Perceptions Through the Dissemination of Campaign Messages on Facebook

Political perceptions can also develop through the way campaign narratives are presented and repeatedly circulated online. Facebook allows political actors to foreground selected policies, achievements, controversies, or candidate characteristics and to communicate these interpretations to different groups of users.

This process differs from conventional one-way campaign communication. A message posted on Facebook may subsequently be shared, commented on, challenged, or reframed by other users. Political narratives therefore do not remain entirely under the control of their original sender. Their meaning develops as they move through different networks and become part of wider political discussion.

The growing importance of this process can be seen in the Philippines. Arugay (2022) describes social media as an increasingly important component of electoral strategy, particularly as candidates expanded their reliance on digital campaigning. At the same time, the Philippine experience demonstrates that the expansion of online campaigning has been accompanied by concerns over disinformation and regulation.

Facebook has played a comparable communicative role in Malaysia, where campaign messages and political commentary circulate intensively during elections. Its significance is therefore better understood in terms of visibility and narrative circulation than as a direct mechanism that produces political support. By allowing selected narratives to be repeated, debated, and redistributed, Facebook becomes part of the environment through which political perceptions are formed and negotiated.

The Spread of Misinformation and Its Negative Impact on Electoral Outcomes

The speed at which information travels through social media also creates conditions in which inaccurate political claims can circulate widely before their reliability is established. This becomes particularly consequential during election periods, when citizens are exposed to large amounts of campaign information within a relatively short period.

Evidence from the 2016 United States presidential election illustrates the scale of this problem. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) reported that 14% of respondents regarded social media as their most important source of election news. They also documented approximately 30 million Facebook shares of known false stories favouring Donald Trump and around 8 million shares of false stories favouring Hillary Clinton. Among respondents who recalled encountering false political stories, slightly more than half believed them.

These figures do not demonstrate that misinformation directly determined the election result. They do, however, show that false information was capable of achieving substantial circulation and credibility among some users. This distinction is important because the democratic concern is not limited to whether misinformation changes a vote. Misleading information can also alter perceptions of candidates and issues, generate uncertainty, and weaken confidence in the information environment itself. Similar concerns are relevant in Malaysia, particularly during election campaigns when political claims can move rapidly between social media users. Information that is repeated widely may acquire apparent credibility even when its factual basis

remains uncertain. The problem is further complicated by partisan interpretation. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) found that respondents were more receptive to false stories that favoured their preferred candidate. Misinformation therefore presents two related difficulties: the circulation of inaccurate content and the tendency for political predispositions to influence how that content is evaluated.

Political Polarization Resulting from Facebook Use

Political polarization represents another concern, although the relationship between Facebook use and ideological division is not straightforward. Personalised information environments may repeatedly expose users to material that corresponds with their existing political preferences, while opposing perspectives receive less attention.

The concepts of echo chambers and filter bubbles are often used to describe this pattern. Repeated interaction with politically compatible information can reinforce prior attitudes, particularly when users' online networks are themselves ideologically similar. Yet it would be too simplistic to attribute political polarization to Facebook alone.

Polarization develops within a larger combination of technological and social influences. Recommendation systems matter, but so do political identity, individual preferences, social networks, and deliberate choices about what information to consume. The evidence reported by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) is useful here: belief in false political stories was associated with whether those stories favoured respondents' preferred candidates and with the ideological composition of their networks.

Viewed together, the findings from these four areas point to a more complex interpretation of Facebook's political role. The platform can widen access to political communication and create new opportunities for engagement. The same environment, however, can also support the repeated circulation of selective narratives, misleading information, and ideologically compatible content. Facebook therefore contributes to political communication through a combination of technological affordances and human choices rather than through a single, uniform effect.

Recommendations

The findings point towards several areas where the quality of digital political communication can be improved. One concerns political advertising. Users should be able to determine who funded an advertisement, why they may have been targeted by it, and whether the content is part of an organised political campaign. Greater disclosure, supported where appropriate by independent auditing, would make targeted advertising easier to scrutinise and could reduce opportunities for misleading campaign practices (Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2022).

Misinformation requires a broader response. Responsibility cannot rest with regulators or social media companies alone. Government agencies, universities, civil society organisations, platform operators, and fact-checking initiatives all have roles to play. In Malaysia, institutions such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and the Department of Community Communications (JKOM) can contribute through public awareness and information-verification initiatives. Such institutional measures are likely to be more effective when accompanied by greater transparency from digital platforms.

Citizens themselves also need stronger capacities for evaluating online political information. Digital media literacy should therefore extend beyond basic technical skills to include source evaluation, verification, awareness of manipulated content, and critical consideration before information is shared. Boulianne (2020) demonstrates the wider importance of digital media within civic and political participation, making these competencies increasingly relevant to democratic engagement. Exposure to a wider range of credible political perspectives may likewise help reduce ideological isolation and encourage more constructive political expression (Lee et al., 2020).

AI can contribute to this process, particularly in verification. Automated systems may assist in identifying manipulated or synthetically generated images and videos, after which users can be given contextual information or warnings before deciding whether to redistribute the content. Jahanbakhsh et al. (2021) show that relatively small interface interventions can encourage users to reconsider questionable information at the point of sharing. Such technology should complement rather than displace human judgement, professional fact-checking, and digital literacy.

No single intervention is likely to resolve the challenges identified in this review. More credible digital political communication depends on the interaction of transparent advertising, accountable institutions, informed users, diverse political discussion, and appropriately governed technological tools.

Conclusion

This review considered Facebook and Artificial Intelligence within a wider political information environment rather than treating them simply as communication technologies. Across the literature, Facebook appears to provide new opportunities for political engagement and campaign communication, while its networked and algorithmically organised environment also creates conditions in which misinformation, selective exposure, and ideological division can develop.

This wider perspective helps connect issues that are sometimes considered separately. Political narratives, platform design, digital literacy, governance, and AI-assisted verification all influence the conditions under which citizens encounter political information. Understanding their interaction provides a more realistic account of contemporary digital political communication than attributing political outcomes to Facebook or AI alone. The discussion also opens a further line of inquiry. Political narratives do not end when they leave social media platforms. They can subsequently be selected, interpreted, framed, and represented within other media environments. Examining that process is particularly relevant to mainstream journalism, where editorial judgement and professional practice continue to influence how politically sensitive issues are presented to the public.

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