



Semantic Analysis of Slang Expressions Among Medanese Generation Z on Instagram

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the semantic characteristics of slang words used by Generation Z in Medan during communication on Instagram. The objectives are to identify and classify the types of slang vocabulary, analyze their semantic meanings, and examine the forms of slang commonly used by Medanese youth. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a digital etnography approach, focusing on observations of Instagram accounts belonging to teenagers and young adults from Medan. The findings reveal that the slang used falls into several categories: acronyms, clipped words, blended words, local dialect slang, and figurative or metaphorical slang. Many of these expressions are influenced by local culture, national trends, and global digital communication. The meanings of slang words are not only literal but also contextual and symbolic, shaped by the social interactions and cultural background of the users. The study concludes that slang serves as a tool for self-expression, group identity, and creative linguistic innovation among Medanese Generation Z. It reflects how youth navigate their cultural identity while engaging in informal communication through social media. This research contributes to the understanding of how language evolves in digital spaces and how regional identity influences online discourse.

Keywords: *Slang Words; Gen Z; Medanese; Instagram*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi karakteristik semantik dari kata-kata gaul yang digunakan oleh Generasi Z di Medan selama berkomunikasi di Instagram. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengklasifikasikan jenis-jenis kosakata bahasa gaul, menganalisis makna semantiknya, dan mengkaji bentuk-bentuk bahasa gaul yang biasa digunakan oleh anak muda Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi digital, dengan fokus pada pengamatan terhadap akun Instagram milik remaja dan dewasa muda Medan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa gaul yang digunakan terbagi dalam beberapa kategori: akronim, kata yang dipenggal, kata campuran, bahasa gaul dialek lokal, dan bahasa gaul kiasan atau metafora. Banyak dari ungkapan-ungkapan ini dipengaruhi oleh budaya lokal, tren nasional, dan komunikasi digital global. Makna dari kata-kata gaul tidak hanya harfiah tetapi juga kontekstual dan simbolis, dibentuk oleh interaksi sosial dan latar belakang budaya para penggunanya. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bahasa gaul berfungsi

sebagai alat untuk mengekspresikan diri, identitas kelompok, dan inovasi linguistik kreatif di kalangan Generasi Z Medan. Bahasa gaul mencerminkan bagaimana generasi muda menavigasi identitas budaya mereka saat terlibat dalam komunikasi informal melalui media sosial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang bagaimana bahasa berkembang di ruang digital dan bagaimana identitas daerah mempengaruhi wacana online.

Kata Kunci: *Kata-kata Gaul; Gen Z; Orang Medan; Instagram*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes to how people communicate, particularly among the younger generation. As stated by Nursalam, (2015) communication is a process through which a person's thoughts can influence others. It serves as a medium for transferring meaning and knowledge from one individual to another with specific goals in mind. This shift in communication patterns also affects the way language is used, especially by youth who are actively engaged in digital environments such as social media platforms. (Eckert, 1997) suggests that language change occurs in line with the stages of human development childhood, adolescence, and adulthood rather than randomly. Each stage reflects distinctive linguistic features shaped by emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Adolescents, for instance, often experiment with language to assert their identity, while adults typically use more stable, socially accepted forms, and children mostly imitate the speech patterns of those around them. Understanding these developmental stages helps explain how language evolves over time in relation to individual growth. Instagram, as one of the most widely used social networking platforms, has become a central space for Generation Z to express themselves, share ideas, and form social identity. Among the most prominent linguistic features found on Instagram is the use of *slang* an informal language variety that is expressive, creative, and often rich in figurative or contextual meaning. For Medanese youth, *slang* is not merely a tool for communication but also a means of expressing local identity and cultural belonging. However, despite its widespread use, little academic attention has been given to the semantic aspects of *slang* used by Medanese Generation Z on Instagram. *Semantics*, as a branch of linguistics, focuses on the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences in language. According to (Yule, 1996), it encompasses both lexical and sentence-level meaning within social contexts. (Cruse, 1986) adds that semantics explores the relationship between linguistic signs and the meanings they convey, which may shift depending on context. Similarly, (Lyons, 1977) explains that meaning can be both *denotative* (literal) and *connotative* (contextual or pragmatic). In the case of *slang*, many expressions hold layered meanings shaped by speaker intent, tone, and social setting. A semantic approach, therefore, offers a useful framework for examining how

these expressions are understood and function in digital interactions among youth.

Functionally, *slang* serves various purposes, such as fostering closeness, attracting attention, adding humor, or concealing information from outsiders (Amrullah, 2018). It is often used to reinforce group identity and challenge formal language norms. (Wardhaugh, 2006)notes that language use is strongly influenced by social variables like age, region, class, and ethnicity. In line with this, (Holmes, 2013)highlights that age plays a critical role in language variation, with younger speakers often displaying more inventive and expressive language styles to reflect their social identity. The *slang* used by Medanese Generation Z, particularly in their online communication, demonstrates how language serves not only as a communication tool but also as a cultural expression.

While a number of studies have addressed youth language in digital communication, most have not focused specifically on the semantic dimension of *slang*. For example, (Putri & Rambe, 2019)explored youth language in Medan but did not delve into its semantic depth. (Hasan & Dewi, 2020)investigated slang in internet memes, emphasizing humor and sentence structure rather than meaning. (Nasution, 2021) examined language variation in WhatsApp conversations, but did not address regional *slang* or semantic meaning. (Siregar, 2022)focused on youth *slang* in Jakarta influenced by pop culture, with little attention to local dialects. Meanwhile, (Yusuf et al., 2023) discussed digital language creativity among youth but did not attempt semantic classification. These studies, while valuable, reveal a research gap: there has been limited investigation into how *slang* used by Medanese Generation Z functions semantically, particularly on Instagram. Given this gap, the present study seeks to analyze *slang* expressions used by Medanese Generation Z in their Instagram communication from a semantic perspective. The objectives of this research are to: (1) identify and classify the types of *slang* used; (2) analyze their semantic characteristics, including *denotative* and *connotative* meanings; and (3) explore the cultural influences embedded in these expressions. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the fields of semantics and sociolinguistics by providing insights into how meaning is constructed in digital and local cultural contexts. Practically, the findings may offer a better understanding of how young people use language online as a form of identity, creativity, and social interaction.

METHOD

This research adopts a digital ethnography approach, a method designed to study online phenomena in their natural settings using digital tools, without direct interaction with the subjects (Pink et al., 2015)This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, aiming to explore

and understand in depth the meanings and usage of slang words by Medanese Generation Z on Instagram, rather than measuring or quantifying them. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating the language practices of Instagram users, specifically Medanese Generation Z. Digital ethnography allows for unobtrusive observation of how young people use language on social media, providing deeper insights into the use of slang in everyday digital interactions. Data for this study were collected from public Instagram accounts belonging to Generation Z users in Medan, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was applied, meaning the researchers specifically selected accounts of young people aged 16–24 from Medan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A glimpse of Medanese slang

Slang language, according to (Aswin, 2015), is a non-standard variant of language commonly used in everyday communication, especially by adolescent groups or specific social communities. In the context of this study, the use of slang by Generation Z in Medan reflects their social identity and the dynamics of their digital communication. Therefore, understanding the definition of slang is essential for analyzing how Medanese youth use this language in their Instagram communication, both in terms of meaning and its social functions. Slang is a category of informal language that is typically short-lived and specific to certain social groups. Saputra and (Saputra & Marlina, 2019) describe slang as a seasonal linguistic phenomenon words or phrases that emerge, spread, and sometimes fade rapidly. Slang is a potent indication of contemporary social trends, group identification, and cultural shifts because of its dynamic nature, particularly among young people.

Slang frequently changes in the Medanese Generation Z community as a result of online communication and cross-cultural exchanges on social media sites like Instagram. This study aims to understand how linguistic inventiveness and group belonging are negotiated through informal digital communication by looking at the emergence and usage of these phrases. (Brown et al., 2020) emphasize that slang is often used within closed communities or in-group interactions, sometimes to deliberately exclude outsiders from understanding the conversation. While concurrently establishing linguistic limits, this deliberate exclusivity fosters social ties and community solidarity. Such usage is indicative of Medanese Generation Z's rejection to formal or mainstream language conventions as well as their quest for group identity. Therefore, in their digital connections, the selected character of slang serves as a marker of inclusivity, innovation, and shared cultural understanding in addition to influencing communication patterns.

To analyze slang more effectively, several scholars have proposed classifications of slang types, based on their form and function. The following are some commonly recognized types of slang:

1. Acronyms and Initialisms

According to (Eble, 1996), acronyms and initialisms are types of slang formed by abbreviating phrases into initial letters. *Acronyms* are read as single words (e.g., *FOMO* – Fear of Missing Out), while *initialisms* are pronounced letter by letter (e.g., *LOL* – Laugh Out Loud). These forms are common in digital communication due to their brevity and social resonance. They allow users, particularly youth, to convey emotions or reactions quickly in online interactions, such as chats or social media comments.

2. Clipped Words

(Mattiello, 2008) defines clipped words as shortened forms of standard vocabulary, where parts of the original word are removed without altering its meaning. Examples include *info* (information), *exam* (examination), and *ad* (advertisement). Clipping reflects a linguistic trend toward simplicity and informality. It is particularly prevalent among youth as a means of casual, efficient communication and is often found in spoken and written slang.

3. Blended Words

(Crystal, 2003) describes blended words as combinations of two words to form a new one with a merged meaning. Common examples include *brunch* (breakfast + lunch) and *smog* (smoke + fog). This form of slang highlights the creativity of speakers in fusing concepts to generate concise and expressive vocabulary. Among Gen Z, such blends are often coined to describe modern experiences or trends.

4. Local Dialect Slang

(Wardhaugh, 2006) explains that regional and cultural factors influence language use, including slang. Local dialect slang consists of vocabulary that is unique to a specific area or community, such as regional slang used in Medan. This type of slang serves as a marker of cultural identity and belonging. For Gen Z in Medan, incorporating local expressions in their Instagram communication reflects both their cultural roots and their social solidarity.

5. Figurative or Metaphorical Slang

(Coleman, 2012) notes that figurative slang uses metaphorical language to convey indirect or symbolic meanings. Phrases like *spill the tea* (to gossip) or *throwing shade* (to subtly criticize) are examples. This type of slang relies heavily on shared cultural knowledge and contextual understanding. It allows users to be expressive and nuanced, often using witty or indirect speech to communicate deeper social meanings.

6. Slang Studies

Slang is often defined as informal, nonstandard language used by specific social groups. According to (Eble, 1996), slang is “an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group.” Slang serves multiple functions it may be used to express identity, creativity, rebellion,

humor, or solidarity. Slang is typically dynamic, local, and reflective of youth culture. It challenges formal norms and adapts rapidly to the needs of its speakers. (Holmes, 2013)explains that slang can signal in-group membership and help young people create a sense of belonging.

Social Media and Semantic

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that specifically deals with the study of meaning in language, covering words, phrases, and sentence structures. According to (Lyons, 1977)semantics is concerned with the systematic analysis of meaning in language, which includes two key aspects: lexical meaning, referring to the literal or dictionary definitions of words, and contextual (or pragmatic) meaning, which is shaped by the social or situational context in which language is used. (Yule, 1996)expands on this by stating that semantics does not only focus on the isolated meaning of individual words but also explores how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and conveyed within communication both in face-to-face interaction and broader discourse settings. This highlights that meaning in language is not static; rather, it is dynamic and influenced by various external factors.

Furthermore, (Cruse, 1986)emphasizes that semantics examines the relationship between linguistic signs and the meanings they represent. This suggests that the interpretation of meaning cannot be separated from context. A word may carry different implications depending on the social or cultural setting, the speaker's background, or the nature of the relationship between interlocutors. In this way, meaning extends beyond the literal to include connotative, figurative, and even implicit interpretations, depending on how language is used in real-life communication.

(Boyd & Ellison, 2007)as pioneers in the study of social media, define a social network as a web-based service that enables users to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections. This form of digital interaction has ushered in a new era of mobility, interconnectivity, and personal expression in online spaces.

Social media is continuously evolving as new technologies emerge, and it increasingly plays a vital role in the everyday communication of younger generations. Among various platforms, Instagram stands out as one of the most popular social media applications used by Indonesian youth (Purwaningtyas & Alicya, 2020)With its emphasis on visual content and short, expressive textual forms, Instagram becomes a fertile ground for the emergence and usage of informal language, particularly slang. For this reason, this study focuses on analyzing slang expressions used by Generation Z in Medan within the context of Instagram communication.

Several studies have explored the relationship between slang and social media usage. (Androutsopoulos, 2006)highlights how online platforms

serve as arenas for linguistic innovation, especially among youth. Social media encourages creative forms of expression, and slang is often used to signal identity, irony, or emotion in a space where visual and textual elements merge.

In Indonesia, studies such as by (Sari, 2020) show how youth adapt and create localized slang in response to global influences. Social media platforms like Instagram provide a real-time stage for the invention and spread of new terms. However, few studies have focused specifically on regional or city-based slang usage particularly in Medan making this research a unique contribution.

Types of Slang Word Frequency

Based on the data gathered, the researchers categorized the slang terms used by Medanese Generation Z in their Instagram interactions. The slang words were identified and grouped following the classification system proposed by Allan and Burridge. Slang is one of the most prominent examples of the new language that has developed during this digital connection. Slang is an informal linguistic style that is frequently expressive, imaginative, and has connotations beyond its literal meaning. Generation Z's primary instruments for self-expression, information sharing, and social identity construction are social networking sites like Instagram.

In the digital age, language continues to evolve rapidly, especially among younger generations who are active users of social media. One striking example of this linguistic transformation can be observed on platforms like Instagram, where Generation Z users express themselves using a dynamic range of informal expressions. In particular, youth from Medan often referred to as Medanese Gen Z have developed and popularized their own distinctive set of slang terms. These expressions are not only creative and playful but also deeply rooted in their local culture, reflecting the unique identity and social bonds of Medanese youth. Words like *gaskeun*, *makz*, and *gak ngotak* are frequently used in captions, comments, and stories to convey emotions, jokes, sarcasm, or solidarity. This phenomenon highlights the importance of exploring slang as a meaningful part of digital communication, especially within specific regional communities like Medan. Explanation of the types of slang expressions found on Instagram social media accounts of young people in Medan along with examples found, their meanings, and variations classified based on their language of origin:

As previously mentioned, the slang words used by Medanese Generation Z in this study are classified into six categories: Acronyms and Initialisms, Clipped Words, Blended Words, Local Dialect Slang, Figurative/Metaphorical Slang. This classification is adapted and expanded

from theory of slang typology, which includes morphological and semantic processes. Additionally, the inclusion of *local dialect* and *invented/creative* slang reflects the unique linguistic features and cultural creativity observed in the Medanese context.

Table 1. Frequency of Each Type of Slang Word Used by Medanese Generation Z

Type of Slang	Examples	Frequency
Acronyms and Initialisms	OTW, BTW, LOL	12
Clipped Words	Bro, Ngab, Cekrek	20
Blended Words	Gabut, Japri	10
Local Dialect Slang	Bah, Kelen, Cok	22
Figurative/Metaphorical Slang	Gas, Ngebet	8

Language of the Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

The slang words used by Medanese Generation Z on Instagram reflect a dynamic blend of linguistic influences, including Indonesian, local Medanese dialects, and English. This multilingual mixture showcases how youth creatively navigate and combine different languages to express identity, humor, and social belonging in digital communication. Many slang terms derive directly from English, especially acronyms and internet shorthand, demonstrating the global impact of online culture. At the same time, local dialect slang remains prominent, preserving cultural uniqueness and regional pride. Additionally, some slang words are the product of language innovation, where existing words are shortened, blended, or creatively altered to form new expressions understood within the peer group. This linguistic diversity highlights the complex nature of language use among Medanese Generation Z, where the interplay between global and local languages produces a rich slang repertoire that enhances communication on social media platforms like Instagram.

First Acronyms and Initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are slang words formed from the initial letters of a phrase or a group of words. These types of slang are often borrowed from English and widely used in digital communication due to their efficiency and brevity. Medanese Generation Z frequently uses acronyms like LOL (Laugh Out Loud) and OTW (On The Way) to express emotions or actions quickly and effectively in Instagram posts and comments. This category reflects the influence of global internet culture on local youth language.

Table 2. Acronyms and Initialisms Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

Slang word	Origin Form	Meaning	Variation
LOL	Laugh Out Loud	Expression of laughter.	-

OTW	On The Way	Indicates someone is on their way.	Otewe
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Second Clipped Words

Clipped words are shortened forms of longer words that make communication faster and more casual. This type of slang is common among youth as it creates a friendly, informal tone. In Medanese Instagram interactions, words like bro (brother), ngab (abbreviation of bang), and cekrek (sound of a camera shutter) are examples of clipped words that are widely understood and frequently used. These slangs often originate from everyday speech but become more prominent through social media.

Table 3. Clipped Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

Slang Word	Origin Word	Meaning	Variation
Bro	Brother	A close male friend or sibling	Used to show closeness
Ngab	Bang	A reverse form of "bang", meaning bro	Popular among Gen Z as a greeting
Cekrek	Sound Imitation	To take a picture (onomatopoeia)	Mimics camera shutter
Cok	Janjok(Softened)	An expression of surprise or emotion (local)	Adapted from Javanese slang
Japri	Jalur Pribadi	To message privately	Often used in DMs
Nongki	Nongkrong	To hang out / socialize	Youth and informal term
Mager	Males gerak	Feeling too lazy to move	Used in casual conversations
Kepo	Knowing Every Particular Object (backronym)	Being overly curious	Widely used nationally
Panik	Panik (full word, but casual tone)	To feel anxious or rushed	Used dramatically
Lebay	Berlebihan	Overacting / exaggerated	Very common in digital slang

Third Blended Words

Blended words are formed by combining parts of two or more words to create a new term with a merged meaning. This type of slang is highly creative and reflects the linguistic innovation of Medanese Generation Z. The resulting words are often catchy, easy to use, and loaded with cultural or contextual meaning relevant to daily life and online interaction. Blended words result from combining parts of two or more words to create a new slang term with a specific meaning. This process reflects creativity and linguistic innovation. Examples such as gabut (from gaji buta meaning

“getting paid without working”) and japri (from jalur pribadi meaning “private message”) demonstrate how Medanese Generation Z blends existing words to convey particular social or behavioral meanings efficiently in online contexts.

Table 4. Blended Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

Slang Word	Blended From	Meaning	Variation
Gabut	Gaji + Buta	Feeling bored or having nothing to do	Originally means “getting paid without working”
Woles	Selow(reversed)	Chill/ relaxed/ no worries	Wordplay of “slow” in Indonesian accent
Kamseupay	Kampungan + Sekali + Udik + Payah	Outdated or not stylish	Humorous combination, often teasing
Modus	Modal + Urusan	Pretending to care to get something	Implies hidden intentions in flirting
Rempong	Repot + Kampungan	Complicated / chaotic	Common to describe a hassle
Menfess	Mention + Confess	Message confession through anon platform	Popular in anonymous Twitter/IG posts
Halu	Halusinasi	Hallucinating, delusional (esp. in romance)	Used humorously or to mock
Baper	Bawa + Perasaan	Easily offended or too emotional	Describes emotional sensitivity
Canspel	Can’t + Spell	Can’t spell (used to joke about errors)	Rare, more used in memes/comments

Fourth Local Dialect Slang

Local Dialect Slang refers to slang words derived from the Medanese dialect or local expressions specific to the culture, humor, and social dynamics of the people in Medan, North Sumatra. Among Generation Z, these terms are often used to affirm regional identity, strengthen in-group bonds, and distinguish themselves from other Indonesian youth. Local dialect slang includes slang terms derived from the Medanese or regional language, reflecting cultural identity and local expressions. Words like bah, kelen, and cok are often used by Medanese youth to emphasize solidarity and cultural pride when interacting on Instagram. This type of slang highlights the persistence of local language within digital communication, serving as a marker of group identity.

Tabel 5. Local Dialect Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

Slang Word	Origin / Root		Meaning	Variation
Bah	Medanese particle		Expression of emphasis, annoyance, surprise	Often used to end a sentence: <i>"Sakit kalipun bah!"</i>
Kelen	Derived from "kalian"		You all / you guys	Unique second-person plural form
Kali	Intensifier in Medan dialect		Very / extremely	<i>"Lucu kalilah itu!"</i>
Bodo kali	Bodoh + Kali		Very stupid expression of annoyance	Common insult/joke between friends
Capek mental	Local phrase		Emotionally exhausted / mentally tired	Often used jokingly or seriously
Naik darah	Idiomatic Medanese phrase		Extremely angry	Often used jokingly or seriously
Tengoklah	From "lihatlah"		Look! / check it out!	Command, often with urgency
Sekalipun	Local emphasis		Even at all/really	<i>"Gak enak sekalipun makanannya."</i>
Tak sanggup aku	Literal translation		I can't take it anymore	Used dramatically in complaints or jokes

Fifth Figurative / Metaphorical Slang

Figurative or metaphorical slang involves expressions that convey implied or symbolic meanings, often used to describe emotions, behaviors, or social situations in a more creative or exaggerated way. These expressions are not meant to be understood literally, but rather rely on context and shared understanding among users especially within Medanese Generation Z's online circles. Figurative or metaphorical slang conveys meanings beyond the literal sense, often used to express emotions, social situations, or attitudes through imagery or symbolic language. Medanese Gen Z uses figurative slangs such as *gas* (to go ahead or get excited) and *makan hati* (literally "eat heart," meaning feeling emotionally hurt) to communicate nuanced feelings creatively and expressively in online interactions. This category adds color and humor to everyday communication.

Tabel 6. Figurative or Metaphorical Slang Words Used by Medanese Generation Z

Slang Word	Figurative Origin	Meaning	Variation
Gas	Like stepping on gas pedal	Let's go / Go ahead / Do it	Used to show excitement or

				motivation: "Gaskeun bro!"
Ngebet	From "terbakar" (figuratively)	Being overly eager, especially in romance or desires		"Ngebet kali dia pengen punya pacar."
Meledak	Imagery of explosion	Overly shocked / surprised / overwhelmed		"Pas tau harganya, aku meledak sih."
Terbang	As if "floating" in the air	Feeling flattered or overly happy		"Dibilang cantik, langsung terbang aku."
Makan hati	"Eating the heart" (metaphor for suffering)	Deeply hurt emotionally		"Dikata teman, tapi makan hati."
Buaya	Metaphor of crocodile (predator)	A womanizer / playboy		"Jangan percaya, dia buaya darat."
Darah tinggi	"High blood pressure" metaphor	Easily triggered / easily angered		"Dikit-dikit marah, darah tinggi dia."
Cuci mata	"Washing the eyes"	Refresh by looking at attractive people/things		"Ke mall ah, cuci mata."
Bakar uang	"Burning money" metaphor	Spending too much / being wasteful		"Beli itu? Bakar uang kali."

CONCLUSIONS

Medanese Generation Z communicates on Instagram using a broad range of slang terms. Abbreviations and initialisms, clipped words, blended words, local dialect slang, figurative/metaphorical slang, and invented/creative slang are the six primary categories into which these slang terms fall. Slang has three linguistic origins: English, Indonesian, and regional Medanese dialects. English and Indonesian-based slang are more common. While the persistence of Medanese dialect slang reveals strong local identity, the ubiquitous use of English-based slang demonstrates the influence of global digital culture. However, more research is required to examine the motivations for the adoption of particular slang phrases, particularly those

that are adapted from English, as this study primarily focuses on detecting slang forms and their frequency.

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