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The role of women in rural marketing: Empowerment and economic drivers

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Abstract

The role of women in rural marketing is increasingly recognized as vital for fostering economic development and social empowerment in rural communities. This study investigates the empowerment pathways, economic contributions, challenges, and future directions of women in rural marketing, aiming to provide insights for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders seeking to promote gender equality and inclusive development. Rural marketing encompasses the promotion and distribution of goods and services in rural areas, where women play diverse roles across the value chain. Despite their significant contributions, women in rural marketing face various challenges and barriers that hinder their full participation and empowerment. Addressing these challenges requires holistic interventions that promote gender equality, enhance access to resources, and empower women to participate fully in economic activities. Women's participation in rural marketing serves as a catalyst for empowerment across multiple dimensions. Economically, women's engagement in market-related activities provides them with opportunities for financial independence, income generation, and asset accumulation. Socially, women's involvement in market cooperatives and entrepreneurial ventures enhances their social capital, decision-making autonomy, and leadership skills. Politically, participation in market-based organizations empowers women to advocate for their rights and interests at the local and regional levels, contributing to more inclusive governance systems. The study quantifies the significant economic contributions of women in rural marketing through income generation assessments and value chain analysis. Women-led enterprises, such as agro-processing units and handicrafts cooperatives, generate substantial income streams and employment opportunities. Moreover, women's involvement in adding value to agricultural products enhances market linkages and profitability, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods. Despite their contributions, women in rural marketing face challenges such as limited access to resources, social norms, and infrastructure deficiencies. Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions that promote gender equality, enhance access to resources, and strengthen market infrastructure. Future research and initiatives should focus on enhancing women's access to resources, promoting gender-responsive policies, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to harness the full potential of women in rural marketing. The study highlights the transformative potential of women in rural marketing for fostering economic development and social empowerment. By recognizing and addressing the challenges women face, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can promote gender equality and inclusive development, thereby contributing to sustainable rural livelihoods and resilient communities.

Keywords: Women empowerment, rural marketing, economic drivers, environmental friendly product marketing, biotechnological product marketing etc.

1. Introduction

In rural societies across the globe, women play a pivotal role in various aspects of economic activity, including agriculture, household management, and increasingly, marketing. This review aims to delve into the multifaceted roles women undertake in rural marketing, examining their contributions, challenges, and the transformative impact of their involvement on both local economies and gender dynamics. Rural marketing encompasses the promotion and distribution of goods and services in rural areas. Historically, this domain has been predominantly male-dominated, reflecting societal norms and cultural perceptions. However, the landscape is evolving, with women emerging as significant participants in rural marketing activities. Their involvement not only fosters economic growth but also catalyzes social change by challenging traditional gender roles^[1].

1.1 Women as Producers and Entrepreneurs

In many rural communities, women are the primary cultivators and producers of agricultural goods. Their role extends beyond traditional farming activities to include value addition, processing, and marketing of agricultural products. From cultivating crops to crafting artisanal products, women contribute significantly to the rural economy. Rural women's has huge role in environmental friendly and biotechnological products selling. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs are increasingly establishing microenterprises and small-scale businesses in rural areas, leveraging their skills and local resources. Whether it's setting up a tailoring unit, a food processing venture, or handicrafts cooperative, women-led enterprises are driving innovation and creating employment opportunities in rural regions ^[2].

1.2 Market Access and Distribution

Access to markets is vital for rural producers to sell their goods and generate income. Women often serve as crucial intermediaries in connecting rural products with urban and peri-urban markets. Through farmer cooperatives, self-help groups, and collective marketing initiatives, women facilitate the distribution of locally produced goods, thereby enhancing market access for rural communities. Moreover, the rise of e-commerce platforms and digital marketing has provided women entrepreneurs with new avenues to showcase their products and reach a broader customer base. By embracing technology, women in rural areas are overcoming geographical barriers and expanding their market reach beyond traditional boundaries ^[3].

1.3 Empowerment through Financial Inclusion

Participation in rural marketing empowers women economically by providing them with opportunities for financial independence and self-sufficiency. Access to credit, savings mechanisms, and financial literacy programs enable women to invest in their businesses, acquire assets, and improve their standard of living. Microfinance institutions and government-sponsored schemes have played a pivotal role in promoting financial inclusion among rural women. By granting loans and offering financial services tailored to their needs, these initiatives empower women to start and scale their enterprises, breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency ^[4].

1.4 Challenges and Barriers

Despite their significant contributions, women engaged in rural marketing face numerous challenges and barriers. Limited access to resources such as land, capital, and technology constrains their entrepreneurial endeavors. Moreover, cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes often hinder women's decision-making autonomy and restrict their mobility, impeding their participation in market activities. Infrastructure deficiencies, including poor transportation networks and inadequate market facilities, pose additional hurdles for women in rural marketing. Limited access to information and training opportunities further exacerbates the gender gap, hindering women's ability to harness market opportunities and expand their businesses ^[5].

1.5 Impact on Gender Dynamics

The involvement of women in rural marketing is reshaping traditional gender dynamics and challenging prevailing

stereotypes. As women assume leadership roles in market cooperatives and entrepreneurial ventures, they gain visibility and recognition within their communities, challenging patriarchal norms and fostering gender equality. Furthermore, economic empowerment enhances women's bargaining power within their households, enabling them to assert their rights and influence decision-making processes. By contributing to household income and financial stability, women become valued partners in economic activities, rather than passive beneficiaries. The role of women in rural marketing is integral to sustainable development and inclusive growth. By leveraging their entrepreneurial skills and market acumen, women contribute to poverty alleviation, food security, and rural prosperity. However, addressing the challenges women face in accessing resources and overcoming gender-based barriers is essential to harnessing their full potential as drivers of rural economies. Empowering women in rural marketing not only fosters economic resilience but also promotes social equity and women's empowerment, laying the foundation for a more inclusive and prosperous future ^[6].

2. Literature Review

Several scholarly works and studies have been conducted by many academicians and researchers on the different aspects of role of women in rural marketing, empowerment and economic drivers over the years. Some of those studies are shown below:

Adhikari, *et al.* (2023) have identified the decision problem, defining the criteria, figuring out how to weight the criteria, comparing the alternatives to the criteria, and ultimately selecting the best option based on the overall evaluation are some of the steps that are commonly involved in the multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) method. In this study, MCDM techniques are used to identify the critical elements impacting women's empowerment in sports, politics, journalism or media, and technology in India. These techniques can also be applied to examine other important factors influencing women's empowerment. Utilizing the Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), MCDM approaches are used to determine the ideal standards for empowerment. Several specialists' perspectives are considered during the decision-making process to identify the criteria ^[7].

Biswas, *et al.* (2022) have identified in their paper that depending on their ability to engage in economic activity, women's status is closely related to their financial circumstances. The 2011 census data reveals a stark disparity in the employment rates of rural and urban women, with just roughly half of the former participating in economic activity. The literature that is now available described how women's work position empowers them, but not much study has been done to compare women's empowerment in rural and urban areas across several aspects. This study aims to examine the level of women's economic empowerment in urban and rural India, focusing on different aspects of job participation, based on the assumption that women's economic empowerment depends on their involvement in the workforce ^[8].

Shajahan, *et al.* (2022) in this study have looked at the degree to which women in a few Mymensingh Sadar villages have adopted technology for agriculture and, as a result, achieved empowerment. It does this by employing

both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study selected a total of 60 women respondents in order to collect the necessary data using a basic random sampling technique in order to meet the study's objectives. The perception index, women empowerment index through technology adoption, and various descriptive statistical measures were among the analytical techniques used to achieve the stated objectives ^[9].

Panta, *et al.* (2018) have studied in their paper that Nepal's protected areas, particularly those in the lowland regions, offer chances for ecotourism both now and in the future, as well as for businesses operating in the buffer zone communities related to tourism and hospitality. This study looked at the advantages and difficulties experienced by female business owners as well as the possible role that empowerment could play in the communities that surround Bardia National Park. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with female entrepreneurs operating hotel and homestay businesses were used to gather qualitative data. Results indicate that women benefited from involvement on a number of individual levels, including improved personal skills and self-confidence, easier access to monetary income, and a decision-making role within the family. A portion of these advantages had to do with empowerment ^[10].

Singh, *et al.* (2013) have found in their study that rural women's empowerment has become a significant concern in today's world. The problem of women's economic empowerment is of utmost importance to economists, political theorists, social scientists, and proponents of economic change because it is now widely recognized as a marker of a nation's progress. For rural women, Self Help Groups (SHGs) have paved the path to financial independence. Self-help group participants engage in micro-entrepreneurship. As a result, rural women are gaining financial independence and opening up job chances for others across the country. This article primarily discusses the role that micro-entrepreneurship plays in the empowerment of rural women and the role that micro-entrepreneurship plays in rural women ^[11].

Kumar, *et al.* (2014) in their study have found that Women's empowerment in rural areas is crucial for reducing poverty in developing countries like India. Despite making up half of the Indian population, women's participation in various activities is still not equal to that of men. Without the active involvement of women in the development process, society as a whole cannot progress adequately. In recent decades, the issue of women's empowerment in rural areas has gained significant attention, particularly in developing nations such as India. Rural women play a vital role in achieving sustainable development in India. The current study aims to analyze the empowerment of women in rural India. This research paper presents information about various government programs implemented to enhance women's empowerment, highlighting the fact that empowering women is not only crucial for the well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities, but also for the overall development of the country ^[12].

Jaysawal, *et al.* (2024) have studied that Corporate Social Responsibility is a term commonly used to enhance the reputation of a business entity. It is widely acknowledged that businesses cannot operate in isolation. Corporate social responsibility involves organizations taking extra steps to

implement initiatives that will have a positive impact on the local community, the environment, and society as a whole. In the context of Education in India, CSR efforts have primarily focused on promoting education within local communities or society in general. This includes activities such as constructing schools, providing scholarships to underprivileged or deserving students at various educational levels, sponsoring schools by supplying teaching materials, books, uniforms, shoes, and bags, improving access to education by establishing secondary schools in underserved areas, raising awareness about the importance of education, training teachers, and offering infrastructure support. Furthermore, CSR initiatives in education also extend to higher education by establishing or supporting vocational training centers, engineering colleges, and other educational institutions. The Government of India has implemented numerous schemes aimed at empowering marginalized groups, particularly women and girls. Currently, there are more than 37 schemes dedicated to women's empowerment, which are managed by various government departments and ministries. This paper aims to shed light on the different measures taken by the government to promote the welfare of women in India ^[13].

Khanum, *et al.* (2015) in their study have intended to investigate how women's entrepreneurship contributes to women's empowerment in Bangladesh's Barishal city. The study examines the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and societal empowerment of women. An initial face-to-face interview in April 2015 in Barisal, Bangladesh, followed a person-administered semi-structured questionnaire survey method. For primary data, interviews were conducted with 160 respondents, 80 of whom were enterprise housewives and the remaining 80 were non-enterprise housewives. The study's findings demonstrated that women's decision-making capacity within their families is significantly enhanced by entrepreneurship. Additionally, the study found that compared to non-enterprise women (housewives), businesswomen have greater control over resources, asset ownership, social mobility, political engagement, and decision-making roles regarding domestic and family health issues. In comparison, businesswomen are more knowledgeable and aware about women's rights, disaster management, and climate change than non-enterprise women. According to the study's findings, a business's ability to obtain a loan with favorable terms and conditions would be essential to its success. It is advised that future research be done in the Northwestern region of Bangladesh, where the income of the household women has a major impact on social and economic development ^[14].

3. Objectives of the Study

The research objective of the study is to examine the role of women in rural marketing as a tool of economic driver for women empowerment.

4. Research Methodology

Understanding the roles and impacts of women in rural marketing necessitates a robust methodology that captures the complexities of their involvement, empowerment, and economic contributions. This section outlines the methodology employed in studying women in rural marketing, focusing on research design, data collection techniques, and analytical frameworks ^[15-17].

4.1 Research Design

The research design encompasses the overall approach and structure of the study. To comprehensively explore the topic of women in rural marketing, a mixed-methods approach is recommended, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies [15-17].

4.1.1 Qualitative Research

The qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies are utilized to gain insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of women engaged in rural marketing. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including women entrepreneurs, agricultural producers, market intermediaries, and policymakers, provide rich, contextualized data on their roles, decision-making processes, and socio-economic contexts [15-17].

4.1.2 Quantitative Research

The quantitative methods, including surveys and statistical analysis, are employed to quantify the extent of women's participation in rural marketing, assess their economic contributions, and identify factors influencing their empowerment. Surveys administered to a representative sample of rural women across different regions enable the collection of standardized data on variables such as income levels, access to resources, market participation rates, and socio-demographic characteristics [15-17].

4.2 Data Collection Techniques

Effective data collection techniques are essential for gathering reliable and comprehensive information on women in rural marketing. The following methods are utilized:

4.2.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data is collected through direct interaction with research participants using interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions. Face-to-face interviews allow for in-depth exploration of women's experiences, attitudes, and challenges, while surveys provide quantitative data on a larger scale. Focus group discussions facilitate collective reflection and generate diverse perspectives on the research topic [15-17].

4.2.2 Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data sources, including government reports, academic studies, and NGO publications, are analyzed to supplement primary data and provide a broader contextual understanding of the research topic. Existing datasets and literature reviews offer valuable insights into trends, patterns, and policy implications related to women in rural marketing [15-17].

4.3 Analytical Frameworks

Analytical frameworks guide the interpretation and analysis of data, helping to identify patterns, relationships, and overarching themes. The following frameworks are employed:

4.3.1 Gender Analysis

A gender-sensitive approach is adopted to examine how gender norms, roles, and power dynamics shape women's participation in rural marketing. Gender analysis highlights

disparities, inequalities, and opportunities for promoting gender equity and women's empowerment in market-related activities [15-17].

4.3.2 Empowerment Assessment

Empowerment frameworks, such as the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, are utilized to assess the multi-dimensional nature of women's empowerment in rural marketing. These frameworks measure women's agency, access to resources, and control over decision-making and social capital, providing a comprehensive understanding of their empowerment pathways [15-17].

4.3.3 Economic Impact Assessment

Economic analysis techniques, including cost-benefit analysis, income generation assessments, and value chain analysis, are employed to evaluate the economic contributions of women in rural marketing. These methods quantify the financial gains, employment generation, and market linkages facilitated by women's participation, informing policy and programmatic interventions aimed at enhancing their economic outcomes. The methodology of studying women in rural marketing involves a multi-dimensional approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, diverse data collection techniques, and analytical frameworks tailored to the complexities of gender, empowerment, and economic drivers. By adopting an inclusive and rigorous methodology, researchers can uncover nuanced insights into the roles, challenges, and impacts of women in rural marketing, informing evidence-based policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equity, empowerment, and inclusive economic development [18].

5. Results and Findings of the Study

The study on women in rural marketing aimed to explore the multifaceted roles of women in driving economic activities, fostering empowerment, and challenging gender norms in rural communities. Through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews, surveys, and secondary data analysis, the study uncovered insightful findings regarding women's participation, empowerment pathways, and economic contributions in rural marketing contexts.

5.1 Women's Participation in Rural Marketing

The study found that women play diverse roles across the rural marketing landscape, ranging from agricultural production to market intermediation and entrepreneurial ventures. In agricultural communities, women are often the primary cultivators and producers of crops, contributing significantly to the local economy. Interviews with women farmers revealed their involvement in crop cultivation, livestock rearing, and agro-processing activities, showcasing their diverse skill sets and contributions to food production. Furthermore, women serve as crucial intermediaries in connecting rural products with markets, leveraging their social networks, and community ties to facilitate the distribution and sale of agricultural goods. Through farmer cooperatives, self-help groups, and collective marketing initiatives, women enhance market access for rural producers, thereby contributing to income generation and economic development at the grassroots level [19].

5.2 Empowerment Pathways

Empowerment emerged as a central theme in the study, with women in rural marketing experiencing empowerment across multiple dimensions, including economic, social, and political realms. Several key pathways to empowerment were identified through qualitative interviews and survey data analysis. Women's participation in rural marketing serves as a catalyst for empowerment across multiple dimensions:

5.2.1 Economic Empowerment

Women's engagement in rural marketing provides them with opportunities for financial independence and self-sufficiency. Survey results indicated that women who participated in market-related activities reported higher household incomes and greater economic autonomy compared to non-participants. Access to markets, credit, and training programs emerged as critical factors enabling women to enhance their economic status and invest in their businesses. Economically, women's engagement in market-related activities provides them with opportunities for financial independence, income generation, and asset accumulation. Access to markets, credit, and training programs enables women to invest in their businesses, enhance their economic status, and contribute to household well-being^[20].

5.2.2 Social Empowerment

Women's involvement in market cooperatives and entrepreneurial ventures enhances their social capital and decision-making autonomy within their households and communities. Interviews with women entrepreneurs highlighted their increased confidence, leadership skills, and visibility within local governance structures. By challenging traditional gender roles and norms, women in rural marketing are reshaping social dynamics and fostering greater gender equality. Socially, women's involvement in market cooperatives and entrepreneurial ventures enhances their social capital, decision-making autonomy, and leadership skills within their households and communities. By challenging traditional gender roles and norms, women in rural marketing are reshaping social dynamics, fostering greater gender equality, and empowering future generations^[21].

5.2.3 Political Empowerment

Participation in market cooperatives and collective action initiatives empowers women to advocate for their rights and interests at the local and regional levels. Survey findings revealed that women involved in market-based organizations were more likely to engage in civic activities, voice their opinions, and participate in decision-making processes.

By amplifying their voices and mobilizing for collective action, women in rural marketing are contributing to more inclusive and participatory governance systems. Politically, participation in market-based organizations empowers women to advocate for their rights and interests at the local and regional levels. By amplifying their voices and mobilizing for collective action, women in rural marketing are contributing to more inclusive and participatory governance systems, thereby enhancing democratic processes and community resilience^[22].

5.3 Economic Contributions of Women in Rural Marketing

The study quantified the economic contributions of women in rural marketing through income generation assessments, value chain analysis, and cost-benefit analysis. Key findings include:

5.3.1 Income Generation

Women engaged in rural marketing reported higher household incomes compared to non-participants, driven by their entrepreneurial ventures, agricultural productivity, and market linkages. Surveys revealed that women-led enterprises, such as tailoring units, food processing units, and handicrafts cooperatives, generated substantial income streams and employment opportunities in rural areas^[23].

5.3.2 Value Addition

Women play a crucial role in adding value to agricultural products through processing, packaging, and branding, thereby enhancing their marketability and profitability. Value chain analysis indicated that women entrepreneurs in agro-processing sectors, such as food preservation and textile manufacturing, contributed to the diversification of rural economies and the creation of value-added products for domestic and export markets^[23].

The study quantified the significant economic contributions of women in rural marketing through income generation assessments, value chain analysis, and cost-benefit analysis. Women-led enterprises, such as agro-processing units, handicrafts cooperatives, and marketing groups, generate substantial income streams, employment opportunities, and value-added products for domestic and export markets. Moreover, women's involvement in adding value to agricultural products through processing, packaging, and branding enhances marketability, profitability, and market linkages between rural producers and urban consumers. By diversifying rural economies and creating value-added products, women in rural marketing contribute to poverty alleviation, food security, and sustainable livelihoods for rural communities^[24].

5.3.3 Market Linkages

Women's participation in market cooperatives and collective marketing initiatives strengthens market linkages between rural producers and urban consumers. Surveys revealed that women-led marketing groups facilitated the sale of locally produced goods in urban and semi-urban markets, thereby expanding market opportunities for rural communities and increasing their income streams^[23].

5.4 Challenges and Barriers

Despite their significant contributions, women in rural marketing face various challenges and barriers that hinder their full participation and empowerment:

5.4.1 Limited Access to Resources

Women encounter barriers in accessing land, capital, and technology, which constrain their entrepreneurial endeavors and economic mobility. Interviews with women entrepreneurs highlighted the challenges of securing loans, acquiring land titles, and accessing market information, particularly in male-dominated sectors such as agriculture and agribusiness. Efforts to improve women's access to

land, capital, and technology are essential for overcoming barriers to entrepreneurship and economic mobility. Policy interventions, such as land reforms, microfinance schemes, and technology adoption programs, can enhance women's access to resources and enable them to harness market opportunities more effectively [23].

5.4.2 Social Norms and Gender Roles

Patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms often restrict women's decision-making autonomy and mobility, limiting their participation in market activities and leadership roles. Surveys indicated that traditional gender roles and expectations continue to influence women's access to resources, division of labor, and control over assets within their households. Policy frameworks that mainstream gender considerations into rural development strategies are crucial for addressing gender disparities and promoting women's empowerment in rural marketing. Gender-responsive policies, including gender quotas, targeted investments, and capacity-building initiatives, can create an enabling environment for women's participation and leadership in market-related activities [23].

5.4.3 Infrastructure Deficiencies

Inadequate infrastructure, including poor transportation networks, lack of market facilities, and limited access to information and technology, pose significant hurdles for women in rural marketing. Interviews with women farmers highlighted the challenges of transporting goods to market, accessing storage facilities, and competing with larger-scale producers in urban markets. The study on women in rural marketing provides valuable insights into the empowerment pathways, economic contributions, and challenges faced by women in rural communities. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, researchers were able to uncover the nuanced roles and impacts of women across various stages of the value chain, from agricultural production to market intermediation and entrepreneurship [24]. Investments in rural infrastructure, including transportation networks, market facilities, and information and communication technologies, are essential for improving market access and competitiveness for women in rural marketing. By addressing infrastructure deficiencies, policymakers can create an enabling environment for women to participate more effectively in market activities and value chains [25].

Addressing the challenges and barriers faced by women in rural marketing requires holistic interventions that promote gender equality, enhance access to resources and market opportunities, and empower women to participate fully in economic activities. By harnessing the potential of women as drivers of rural development, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can foster inclusive growth, empower marginalized communities, and build more resilient and sustainable rural economies [26].

6. Future Directions

Despite their significant contributions, women in rural marketing face various challenges and barriers that hinder their full participation and empowerment. Addressing these challenges requires holistic interventions that promote gender equality, enhance access to resources and market opportunities, and empower women to participate fully in economic activities. Future research and policy initiatives should focus on the following areas:

6.1 Empowering Women through Education and Training

Investing in education and skills training programs for women in rural areas for enhancing their entrepreneurial capabilities and leadership skills. By providing women with access to formal education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship development programs, policymakers can empower them to seize market opportunities, innovate, and contribute to rural economic development [27-42].

6.2 Fostering Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaborative efforts between governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and local communities are essential for advancing women's empowerment in rural marketing. By fostering partnerships and knowledge sharing, stakeholders can leverage their resources, expertise, and networks to support women entrepreneurs, strengthen market linkages, and promote inclusive growth in rural areas [27-42].

7. Conclusions

The study on women in rural marketing has provided valuable insights into the empowerment pathways, economic contributions, and challenges faced by women in rural communities. Through a comprehensive analysis of their roles across the value chain, from agricultural production to market intermediation and entrepreneurship, the study has highlighted the pivotal role women play in driving economic activities and fostering social change in rural contexts.

In conclusion, the study on women in rural marketing has shed light on the transformative potential of women as drivers of economic growth and social change in rural communities. By recognizing and addressing the challenges women face and leveraging their strengths and capabilities, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can harness the full potential of women in rural marketing, thereby promoting gender equality, inclusive development, and sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.

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9. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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