



## POETRY AS A CHANNEL FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AMONG YOUTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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### Abstract

*This study titled, “Poetry as a Channel for Effective Communication and Creativity among Youth in the Contemporary Nigerian Society” investigated the extent youth still use poetry for communication and how effective poetry is as a means of communication and creativity among youth in the contemporary Nigerian society. Emotional communication theory serves the theoretical foothold. The study adopts pragmatic research design which informs the use of mixed research method with focus group discussion (FGD) and social survey as instruments for data collection. A total of 400 undergraduate students in Caleb University, Lagos took part in the study. Findings indicated that most Nigerian youth in the contemporary society failed to engage with poetry regularly in their daily lives because they feel it does not worth the stress. Rather, the youth prefer to express themselves with emojis and other already made digital and AI generated signs and symbols. The study also established that most of the understudied youth think that not all messages can be communicated through poems. The study concludes that although contemporary Nigerian youth know that poetry can help young people develop creativity and confidence, some factors prevented them from either composing their own poems or engaging with that of others including negative comments from social media, complex nature of poems, poor language development, mental laziness, creative blockage between them and their audience, environmental stress and misinterpretations from their audience.*

**Keywords:** Contemporary, Effective Communication, Nigerian Society, Poetry and Youth

### Introduction

Poetry is a significant and powerful tool for communication. It was one of the forms of communication that was used in the traditional African societies. Linguistic resources like riddles, proverbs, folksongs, idioms, wise saying, folktale, myths, legends, oral history, chants, incantations, superstitious beliefs and much more are all forms of poetry that was used in the traditional African societies to preserve the cultural heritage and social cohesion. Akporherhe and Oghenerioborune (2021) state that folktale, a form of oral poetry was a unique medium for transmitting African cultures verbally or non-verbally by performers from one generation to another using the indigenous languages of the society that produced them. Similarly, Odueme (2019) describes African spoken words as a lively art genre that is ingrained in the everyday experiences of the African people. Speaking of the central role of poetry in the African traditional communication, Essien (2014) as cited in Olusola (2015), disclose that Africans never passed sensitive information in a straight forward manner but through poems and other forms of arts which were handed down through the ages. Since, many African societies had no written traditions then, this form of documentation facilitated easy retrieval of facts for the enlightenment of future generations. Hence, African history, culture and tradition are closely intertwined with oral poetry and other forms of arts.



This implies that in the traditional African communication system, poetry is a clever and unique medium that was efficiently employed to communicate and preserve knowledge, information, thoughts and evoke the right emotions or to create the ideal environment in any given context. As a specialized art form and unique channel of communication, the ability to compose and perform poetry was a mark of wisdom, a source of pride for the performers in traditional African societies. Hence, poetry was a cultural heritage and source of communication that was mostly linked with royalties. Court poetry flourished in the ancient African kingdoms. Poets were often associated with nobles, the greats and other groups that had honor and prestige in the society. Hence, praise words performance or ‘drum poems’, forms of oral poetry was used during great cultural festivals or functions like enthronement of a new a king or similar functions, or even to signal the presence of a king in a palace by some African societies including Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Zulu, Sotho, Bornu and many others (Finnegan, 2012). In other words, poetry was used and is still use on special occasions to honor royalties and to commemorate significant events.

It further indicates that the objective of composing and performing spoken poetry is functionality. Odueme (2019) captures this fact vividly where he defines African oral art as exclusive collection of oral or spoken expressions which is created in order to reconstruct the past and is made up of opinions, images, ideas, views, assumptions and reactions of people. In essence, African poetry was intended for the entire community. This view reechoes with those of Obaje and Yakubu, (2012) as cited in Obaje (2022), who disclose that African poetry was intended for the entire community, not just a few individual entertainers or persons. Hence, as a mass medium of communication, poetry was used to pass down African history orally.

Unlike in the pre-colonial and colonial Nigerian society where poetry was usually performed at the community level, in the post-colonial cum post-independence era, sizeable amounts of individual notable poets arose including Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Tanure Ojaide, Clark and many others (Falade, 2013). This shows that communication keeps evolving according to the experiences and advancement of a generation. With the advancement in communication and media technologies, today, poetry is used by individuals in the comfort of their homes to express themselves, to vent their emotions. With the increasing desire for individuality, to be locked up with one’s cell phone and other mobile communication devices, some individuals still use words and other symbols to express their emotions in non-prose manner. But a good poet is one that can stimulate the audience’s sentiments and curiosity in their identity on a deep personal level and fosters a relationship (Fisher, 2012 as cited in Paglinawan, 2023).

This means that in the contemporary society, poetry is still an effective means of communication as it enhances literacy, builds community and emotional resilience. Poetry will help young people to develop language skills, promote creativity, and express themselves in new and innovative ways. This is what effective communication, the transfer of information with understandable codes and symbols effortlessly is all about. This thought resounds with that of Srisermbhok (2017) who avers that poetry can aid teens and children express themselves through metaphor, imagery and symbolic language, including devastating events or portions of themselves that are not yet suitable for the public to be aware of. As citizens of a world that has become a digitalized global sitting room, young people produce



diverse multimodal creative media contents including digital poems which can be share with wide audience across the globe.

Hence, these advancements in media technologies could increase exposure, appreciation and relevance of poetry among the youth today (Curwood, 2019). Yet the reverse seems to be the case as there seems to be lack of appreciation of and exposure to poetry among youth today. Naklen (2023) attributes the lack of exposure to the versatility of poetry among young people today to their vulnerability to such publicize display of deep emotions. In other words, display of emotions via poetry in the cyber space can expose them to both praise and attack depending on the angle the audience receives the poems. Besides, the advancement in digital communication technologies, artificial intelligence machines and other sophisticated technologies also came with its own challenges including lack of creativity, mental laziness, lack of transparency, bias, unfair and erroneous evaluations and much more (Obasi, Aonover & Abdullahi, 2024). Against this backdrop, the study set out to examine the extent youth in the contemporary Nigerian society still use poetry to communicate their ideas, feelings and to enhance their creativity and personal growths.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. Examine the extent to which youth in the contemporary Nigerian society still use poetry for communication
2. Examine the extent to which poetry is an effective means of communication among youth in the contemporary Nigerian society.
3. Identify the challenges of using poetry as a means of communication among youth in the contemporary Nigerian society.

### **Empirical study on poetry as an effective means of communication**

Poetry like other oral communication is passed down through generations by word of mouth (Darah, 2021). As an art form, poetry is a creative narrative that is skillful delivered to the audience. Like a form of expression, poetry is a kind of solution to individuals' ability to represent or express their thoughts, ideas, emotions and experiences (Gintsburg 2019). Poetry as a channel for effective communication sheds light on how poetry serves as a powerful tool for critical thinking, self-expression and social change across various fields of life. Against this backdrop, the following studies were reviewed.

As a form of artistic expression, the influence of poetry in many disciplines has also been recorded. In the field of education, the transformative power of poetry as a communication aid has been documented. A study by Kilag et al (2023) that explored the effect of poetry integration on language acquisition, cultural appreciation, cognitive and emotional engagement, as well as the overall language learning experience revealed that poetry integration positively influences language acquisition, as learners showed improved vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and language proficiency. The rhythmic patterns and emotional appeal of poems also improved learners' phonological awareness, pronunciation, and language fluency. Moreover, poetry exposed learners to varied cultural perspectives, fostering cultural appreciation and intercultural communicative competence. The study also found that the emotional engagement with poetry enhanced positive affective environment by lessening anxiety and boosting motivation in language learning. Poetry equally improved cognitive abilities of the learners as indicated in the improved critical thinking skills and a more comprehensive understanding of language structures and usage.



Effective integration of poetry brought about a dynamic and inclusive learning environment and empowered learners to connect deeply with the language and their own linguistic identities (Kilag et al, 2023). These findings confirm assertions by Turco (2020) who states that just as language is the medium for expression, poetry is "the art of language." In essence, as a form of artistic expression, poetry is a valuable tool for effective communication.

Speaking of the communicative effect of poetry in the nursing profession, and its use in education, patient care, and research, Hunter (2002) states that poetry is a rich textual medium that can assist in illuminating nursing's core belief about the uniqueness of the nurse–patient relationship, and enhance the ‘art’ of nursing and ‘ways of knowing’. Moreover, the use of poetry in the nursing profession gives insight, new meaning and understanding about the profession and the patients served. This idea finds bearing with that of Chavis (2011) who describes poetry as powerful springboards for growth, self-enhancement and healing. This indicates that as a unique medium for human expression, poetry enables human thoughts and feelings as well as daily human experiences to escape from the unconscious state of the mind to the conscious state.

Weingartner (2023) describes poetry as a form of free expression that can be limited only by the imagination of the author. Poetry can be used to reflect the author’s humorous and serious side because it is quiet, meditative and private. Moreover, it amazes and deepens people’s understanding of human realities. In other words, poetry enables people to connect with their inner and exterior experiences of life. This could be the reason why a writer can express his feeling in five lines, while another can do the same in five stanzas.

Ollila and Jantas (2006) defines poetry as any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is intended to tell a story or convey any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. This indicates that poetry is the most vivid form of expression that can give life to human perception of ideas emotions or anything (Burchell, 2010). Hence, as a form of an artistic expression, poetry has the ability to turn every form of human perception into life because it is that form of life that can turn everything into language. It follows that since poetry makes language to become a form of life, every good poems can unquiet the readers.

### **Theoretical framework**

In their work, "Towards a Theory of Emotional Communication," Bartsch and Hübner (2005) proposed a model of emotional communication. Although, they rightly observed that: “There is no single communication theory that covers the entire bandwidth of emotional communication” (p.6), they failed to propound a theory because according to them, emotional communication is complex and cannot be treated within a single theory of communication. However, in 2022, Rachmad, Yoesoep Edhie propounded emotional communication theory to address the importance of emotions in communication. The theory underscores the crucial role of emotions in effective communication especially in this digital era, where interactions often occur indirectly and through various media (Rachmad, 2022).

The central idea of this theory is that emotions influence how human communicate and how well or poor messages are received. It follows that if emotions are well managed, they can either reinforce messages or build deeper connections; but if not, they can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts (Rachmad, 2022). This fact reechoes with those of Bartsch



and Hübner (2005) who disclose that the expression of emotion during the communication process enhances cognitive assessment and acquisition of detailed information. Similarly, Kallio (2018) avers that non-verbal communication element including speaker's emotions and much more enhance the understanding of a spoken message. This indicates that poetry is an indirect expression in rhythmic words of several emotions that dominate the author's central feeling or feelings that proceeds directly from that (Siregar, 2020). This may explain why poems are usually short because they condense the expression of emotions into concise form (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2022). The theory is relevant to the study as it indicates that poetry can be an effective communication tool for youth to express themselves. Since poetry evokes emotions (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 2022), it can be a powerful communication tool for young people to express themselves in more authentic and meaningful ways, which can lead to increased motivation, confidence in their learning process (Hsiao-Chien, 2014).

### **Methodology**

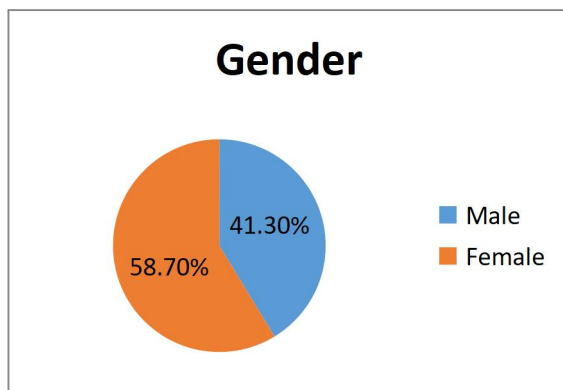
The research employs the pragmatic approach of research design, which informs the choice of mixed method research design. Questionnaire, a quantitative research method was used to get numerical data on how often youth use poetry to communicate effectively and the challenges they faced in using poetry as a means of communication. While focus group discussion (FGD), a qualitative research method was used to delve into the experiences and perceptions of youth that engage with poetry and the challenges they faced in that regard.

Using Taro Yamane's formula, sample size of 400 was drawn from unknown target population of youth in Nigeria. Purposive and convenient sampling strategies were used to select young people between 18 to 26 years in the Faculties of College of Arts, Social and Management Sciences (CASMAS), College of Pure and Applied Sciences (COPAS) and College of Environmental Sciences and Management (COLESMA), Caleb University, Lagos. Out of the 400 questionnaires that were distributed to respondents, 378 (i.e. 95% feedback rate) was completed and collected in the March 2024. For the FGD, one FGD was held in each of the three selected faculties in the understudied university. One FGD had 8 participants while two had 7 participants each. Thus, a total of 22 participants took part in the one-time FGD in the month of March 2024. The same questions were used in all FGD.

### **Data presentation and analysis**

Demographic data of respondents

Fig 1: Gender distribution of respondents





*Source: (Field Survey 2024)*

Data in the Figure 1 above indicates that 41.3% (165) of the respondents were males, while 58.7% (225) were females.

**Table 1: Extent youth in the contemporary society use poetry to communicate**

S/N	Statement	Very well	Well	Not well	Very poor
1.	I understand what poetry is all about	19.3% (73)	35.5% (134)	30.7% (116)	14.5% (55)
2.	I engage with poetry as a form of expression in my daily life	11.4% (43)	24.1% (91)	29% (110)	35.5% (134)
3.	I enjoy receiving information or messages through poetry	13.5% (51)	23.3% (88)	33% (125)	30.2% (114)

*Source: (Field Survey 2024)*

Data in table 1 above indicate that 19.3% (73) of the respondents understand very well what poetry is, while 35.5% (134) of them understand it well. 30.7% (116) do not understand it well, and 14.5% (55) have very poor understanding. It also shows that 11.4% (43) of the respondents have very high engagement with poetry, while 24.1% (91) of them have high engagement. 29% (110) have moderate engagement with poetry, and 35.5% (134) of them have low engagement. The table equally shows that 13.5% (51) of the respondents enjoy receiving information and messages through poetry very well, while 23.3% (88) of them do so well. 33% (125) of them rarely enjoy receiving information and messages through poetry and 30.2% (114) of them do not.

**Table 2: Effectiveness of poetry as a channel of communication among present day youth**

S/N	Statement	Very well	Well	Not well	Very poor
1.	I use poetry to express personal experiences	22.2% (84)	22% (83)	23.3% (88)	32.5% (123)
2.	Poetry can be used to raise awareness about social issues	19.6% (74)	32.3% (122)	36.2% (137)	11.9% (45)
3.	I use poetry to raise awareness about social issues	0%(0)	0%(0)	0%(0)	0%(0)

*Source: (Field Survey 2024)*

Figures in table 2 above show that 22.2% (84) of the respondents use poetry to express themselves very well; 22% (83) of them do so well; 23.3% (88) of them rarely do so while 32.5% (123) of them do not use poetry for expression. It equally shows that 19.6% (74) of respondents feel poetry can be used to raise awareness for social issues very well; 32.3% (122) of them believe it can be used to do so well, while 36.2% (137) respondents feel it cannot be used to do so well, then 11.9% (45) of them feel it cannot be used to do so at all. It also indicates that 0%(0) of the respondents use poetry to raise awareness about social issues.

**Table 3: Challenges youth face when using poetry**



S/N	Statement	Very high extent	High extent	Some extent	Low extent
1	I find it challenging to express my thoughts through poems	29.1% (110)	28.6% (108)	25.1% (95)	17.2% (65)
2.	I encounter difficulties to connect with the themes and messages in poems	16.9% (64)	32.5% (123)	33.1% (125)	17.5% (66)
3.	I find it challenging to relate with the messages passed through poetry	17.2% (65)	29.1% (110)	33.9% (128)	19.8% (75)

*Source: (Field Survey 2024)*

Data in table 3 above show that 29.1% (110) of the respondents find it challenging to express their thoughts through poetry to a very high extent, 28.6% (108) of them finds it challenge to high extent, 25.1% (95) of them finds it challenge to some extent while 17.2% (65) of them finds it challenge to do so to low extent. It also indicate that 16.9% (64) of the respondents encounter difficulties in connecting the themes and messages in poems very high extent, 32.5% (123) of them do so high extent, 33.1% (125) of them also find it difficult to do so some extent and the remaining 17.5% (66) of them connect with the themes and messages in poems to low extent. The table equally shows that 17.2% (65) of the respondents find it challenging to relate or resonate with the messages passed through poetry very high extent, while 29.1% (110) of them find it challenging to high extent 33.9% (128) of them find it challenging to some extent and 19.8% (75) of them find it challenging to low extent.

### **Focus group discussion (FGD)**

On the question, how often do you engage in composing or reciting poetry to express thoughts and emotions, 42% of participants said they engage in poetry either by writing, performing or by reading, while 58% of them did not. For instance, Participant 1 said: “I engage with poetry when I am happy, sad or moody”. However, Participant 2 said: “I rarely engage with poetry. It is not just my thing to see a poem and listen to it and understand it”. Also, Participant 3 said: “I rarely use poetry to express my thoughts. I just feel it doesn’t worth that stress. Like sometimes, after posting, you may just feel worse than you were feeling before because of other people’s comments on it”.

On the question, do you think that poetry is an effective tool for expressing social issues? 30% of the respondents it is, 50% of them said it is not while then the remaining 20% was indecisive. For instance, Participant 4 said: “Yes, poetry is an effective tool for expressing social issues especially in olden days where there were wars. Poetry was written about the soldiers and cultural clashes between villages”. However, Participant 5 stated: “I feel poetry can best convey emotions rather than social issues. I just feel poems have limited effects, not all messages can be communicated through poems”. Similarly, Participant 6 said: “I don’t believe it can be an effective tool because all the poems I have seen were about war, vanity of people, and such messages didn’t result to any progress in the society as far as I am concerned”. Also, Participant 7 said: “Poets have different ways they convey their messages and that limit the ways poetry can be an effective communication tool. If a poet decides to use metaphor or personification throughout his poem, what happens to those that can’t comprehend what he is talking about? So, I just believe that poetry can’t be effectiveness tool to communicate social issues”.



On the fourth question, do you believe that poetry can help young people to develop creativity and confidence? 83% of the respondents said yes, while 17% of them said no. For instance, Participant 8 said: “Speaking from experience, writing poetry has enhanced my creativity and confidence because I am able to let my emotions out and not box them in. The more I write, the more I discover my writing abilities. Now I am happily share my experiences with others on social media platforms”. Also, Participant 9 said: “Yes, because when you engage with poems of others on social media platforms, you get the inspiration and confidence to want to write yours. For example, I like Ibquake, a spoken word poet. Listening to her give me confidence and make me want to try writing mine”. However, Participant 10 said: “I don’t think poetry can help boost one’s creativity or confidence. What if the people around you don’t appreciate your writings or see it as a sign of weakness? Many negative comments on social media can stop someone from writing”. Similarly, Participant 11 said: “I totally disagree, poetry can’t help to boost one’s creativity or confidence; in fact, it weakens them. Many people out there aren’t ready to understand you, so what’s the point of writing or sharing it with people that thinks you have lost it”.

Due to the pessimistic attitude of most of them, the researcher asked them if negative comments has ever discouraged them from engaging with poetry? 50% of the respondents said yes, 42% of them said they have no idea since they don’t write or recite poetry, while the remaining 8% of them said negative comments did not discouraged them from engaging with poetry. For instance, Participant 12 said: ‘Yes, I feel discouraged when people can’t see things from my own view and then it is always difficult for me to explain to them what I am trying to say through my write- ups and it is like a mental gap comes between me and them”. Likewise, Participant 13 said: “Yes, I have received discouraging responses about my poems from people that don’t understand. It made it hard for me to keeping writing and sharing”. However, Participant 14 said: “I don’t write poems, so I don’t feel discouraged by anyone”. Participant 15 said: “No, I don’t allow people’s negative comments to discourage me because I believe everyone writing is unique. So, I have found a way to navigate through it and just express my emotions through my writings”. The participants identified other challenges to using poetry for communication as, creative blockage between them and their audience, school stress and misinterpretations from their audience.

## **Discussion of findings**

### **Research objective I: The extent youth still use poetry for communication**

Figures in tables 1 revealed that less than 50% of the respondents truly understand what poetry is. Data in the table also indicate that less than 50% of them engage with poetry regularly in their daily lives. It equally shows that the same less than 50% of them truly enjoy receiving information and messages through poetry. This finding corresponds with evidence in FGD where one participant said: “I rarely engage with poetry. It is not just my thing to see a poem and listen to it and understand it”. Similarly, another participant also expresses dislike for poetry by stating: “I rarely use poetry to express my thoughts. I just feel it doesn’t worth it that stress”. This finding corresponds with that of McKenzie (2023) who discloses that poetry can be too wordy and complex for youth and that writing is something that young people dread. In other words, in this era of artificial intelligence and other advanced digital media technologies, most young people may prefer to express themselves with emojis and other



many easy and already made AI generated signs and symbols than compose their own poems or words.

### **Research objective 2: The extent poetry is still effective means of communication and creativity among present day youth**

Data in tables 2 show that about 45% of the respondents use poetry to express themselves well. Figures in the table also reveal that over 51% of the respondents feel poetry can be used to raise awareness for social issues. Data in the table equally reveal that 0% (0) of the respondents has ever used poetry to raise awareness about social issues. This finding corresponds with evidence in FDG where 30% of the respondents think that poetry is an effective tool for expressing social issues. When asked to explain how poetry can be used to express social issues, one of the participants said: “Yes, poetry is an effective tool for expressing social issues especially in olden days where there were wars. Poetry was written about the soldiers and cultural clashes between villages”. No other social issues were identified by the participants except use of poetry to communicate wars and clashes in the olden days and such communication according to them cannot bring progress in a society. Hence, most of the respondents felt poetry can best be used to convey emotions because not all messages can be communicated through poems. Although evidence from FGD reveal that majority of the respondents agreed that poetry can help young people to develop creativity and confidence, some of them disclosed that negative comments from the audience on social media actually weakened their creativity and confidence and discouraged them from writing. Naklen (2023) states that attacks in the cyber space on young people are behind the decrease in display of emotions via poetry among present-day youth.

### **Research objective 3: The challenges of using poetry as a means of communication among youth**

Figures in tables 3 reveal that over 50% of the respondents find it very challenging to express themselves through poetry, difficulty to understand themes and messages in poems and hard to relate with the messages passed through poetry. In other words, they found it difficult to either compose or encode their own poems or to decode poems written by others. This finding corresponds with evidence in FDG where about 42% of the respondents said that they do not write their own poems or recite those written by others and 50% of them said negative comments from the audience discouraged them from engaging with poetry. However, only 8% of the respondents said negative comments did not discouraged them from engaging with poetry from people did not discouraged them from engaging with poetry. The participants identified other challenges to using poetry for communication as, creative blockage between them and their audience, school stress and misinterpretations from their audience. This finding reechoes with that of McKenzie (2023) who states that most youth struggle with language development and that misinterpretation can become barrier for them to voice out their feeling effectively through poetry. Similarly, Herbet (2022) disclose that because most young people find it uneasy to express their feelings, sometimes they struggle to express themselves in ways that they would not. Hence, instead of using words to express themselves, some may prefer to use signs and symbols like emojis, drawing or paintings to bring out their inner thoughts. No wonder, the emotional communication theory posits that emotions can drive young people to communicate in certain ways and that the environment has a big part to play as it can influence the type of emotions they feel (Hsiao-Chien, 2014).



## Conclusion

The study discovered that although poetry is a tool for effective communication and boosting creativity, most Nigerian youth in the contemporary society fail to engage with poetry regularly in their daily lives because they feel it does not worth the stress. Most young people would prefer to express themselves with emojis and other easy and already made digital and AI generated signs and symbols, than compose their own poems or words which they see as too wordy and complex. The study also established that none of the understudied youth has ever used poetry to raise awareness about social issues because to them, poetry can best be used to convey emotions and not all messages can be communicated through poems. The study identified that the only social issues the youth feel that can be communicated through poetry was wars and clashes and that such communication cannot bring progress in a society. The study also found that majority of the respondents agreed that poetry can help young people to develop creativity and confidence, some of them disclosed that negative comments from the audience on social media weakened their creativity and confidence and discouraged them from writing. Besides negative comments, the study identified other factors that prevent contemporary youth from either composing their own poems or engaging with poems written by others as complex nature of poems, poor language development, mental laziness, creative blockage between them and their audience, environmental stress and misinterpretations from their audience.

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