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MANUFACTURING THE ANIMAL: AI-GENERATED ANIMAL REELS, THE DIGITAL HUMANIMAL, AND THE POLITICS OF HUMAN–ANIMAL BOUNDARIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

Rakeshwar Sarkar¹, Mounika. C² & Dr. K. Vijayakumar³

¹Ph.D Scholar, Dept. of Management & Humanities, NIT Arunachal Pradesh.

²Ph.D Scholar, Dept. of Management & Humanities, NIT Arunachal Pradesh.

³Assistant Professor & HoD, Dept. of Management & Humanities, NIT Arunachal Pradesh.

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Keywords	Abstract
Artificial Intelligence, AI-Generated Animals, Digital Humanimal, Humanimality, Animal Studies, Posthumanism, Critical Animal Studies, Anthropomorphism, Non-Normality, Power, Social Media, Human–Animal Relations.	As AI generated short-form digital media spreads, it has revolutionized the ways in which production and circulation happen. Amongst new synthetic video forms are the AI-produced animal reels, which "show" cats and dogs, elephants and monkeys, bears and rabbits, and other non-human animals speaking working dining in restaurants traveling fighting, establishing families, participating in human social institutions, or engaging in other human terms of activity. While these types of short-form videos are popular as humorous jokes, they simultaneously present pressing challenges related to the cultural construction of the animal as other, as well as the ways in which anthropocentrism persists in technologically mediated environments. This paper explores these challenges by drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of posthumanism, critical animal studies, and Michel Foucault's notion of normalization and power; it argues that AI animal reels both place the human and the animal in continual



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tension and transform the human more into the animal. While on one side, anthropomorphic visualizations destabilize the humananimal divide by rendering non-human animals emotional linguistic dressed up, socially identifiable, and agentic; simultaneously, by turning animals into human-like agents, AI animals may reproduce anthropocentrism when the animal is only found to be culturally valuable when it resembles the human.

The paper then introduces the notion of the digital humanimal, a digital wildlife hybrid created by AI & shared online, whose animal body is humanised through language, cognition and affect, but remains at the same time visibly sonically Avely animal. The paper also develops the notion of 'algorithmic non-normality' on the digital animal, delineating how AI images of animal body, mind and emotion construct, overstate and circulate new modes of differentiating normal from abnormal animal behaviour. Lastly, the paper concludes that power is exercised on many levels: humans craft the prompts & narratives, machines 'produce' the images, platforms police accessibility and audiences produce circulation. Digital animal reels because of this become a site of new cultural import, in which the interplay of human animal machine, normal & artificial categories is negotiated.

1. Introduction

The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed the relationship between technology, representation, and visual culture. Previously dominant digital technologies mostly provided a means to reproduce, manipulate, or reconfigure existing images and videos. Generative AI proposes a different approach: the creation of seemingly real visual events that did not actually happen. The current text-to-image and text-to-video systems can generate humans animals landscapes discussions activities, and entire stories from words alone. As a result, the question of representation shifts from how reality is represented to what artificially created worlds are possible to produce without any physical referent. This is in particular apparent on social-media networks through the proliferation of short-form video and reels. The short-form video ecology now encompasses a sub-genre: AI-generated Reels in which animals speak, think, and have emotions like humans. These are not fantastical animals from children's books but rather AI-made audiovisual entities, written by human authors and distributed to viewers via recommendation algorithm platforms, thematically rooted in anthropomorphic narratives. In these videos, animals are often shown in human-like roles: cats may be portrayed as workers parents students, soldiers celebrities cooks, or lovers. Same here dogs elephants monkeys rabbits, and other creatures may appear within human-centered institutions and relationships.

For instance, a 2025 report by The Guardian discovered that YouTube channels run exclusively on AI-animated footage are experiencing rapid growth. Its report analyzed July 2025 data to find that nine of the 100 fastest-growing YouTube channels in the world consisted solely of AI-generated



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material. One of these channels, Super Cat League, had roughly 3.9 million subscribers and displayed cats with human features in surrealist tales. The same report also observed that Instagram and TikTok were experiencing similar increases in the popularity of AI-produced animal videos. This genre embodies a broader truth: anthropomorphic AI is not only prevalent in our depiction and use of computing, but researchers argue it is crucial for understanding technology's impact on individuals and society. His genre exists at the intersection of two trends described by this author. One is the prolific use of artificial agents in social roles formerly occupied solely by humans, and the second is the successful popularization of AI virtual characters embodied agents in other words with emotion design strategies that foster an "emotional bond" with spectators. The talking animal reel extends these two logics to a new object: an artificial nonhuman animal a "thinking" talking animal.

Its importance should not be solely reduced to the innovation of AI technology. Animal videos were already hugely shared on social media long before the emergence of generative AI. A 2024 study of 3,246 social-media users found that 98.5% of participants who used social media had already encountered animal videos. 98.5% of them had the animal videos viewed. 52.9% of them watched more informative/educational videos and 41.8% watched more funny/entertaining videos. This current fascination with animal videos because of this brings a cultural context for popular animal reels post AI. For the rise of AI-generated animal reels, AI did not bring in new interests for the animals, but rather received participation in a pre-existing digital ecology. This involves the embracing of animal visibility, entertainment, and emotional experiences as well as the circulation of videos. The rising importance of synthetic animal content can also be seen in the narration of social media platforms. YouTube's new inquiry now requests creators to disclose their content if it has been realistically AI-generated or AI- by a lot modified, and its expanded its AI reporting system. In 2026, YouTube announced that it would use further internal indicators to identify extremely-realistic AI-generated content and automatically display labels in some circumstances.

Meta introduced" AI info" labels for content on Facebook, Instagram, and Threads that is AI-generated or AI-altered by AI. These step show us the appearance of the issue of how to tell the utilizable animal AI art versus the synthetic one in current digital age. Though, we must begin to be aware of this distinction between the animal I.e. the one displayed by the AI and the actual one. A typical animal video shows an animal that is independent of the camera. The AI-derived animal is the constructed of the technological assembly. It may resemble a form of known species, but it does not necessarily mirror a real animal or event. The animal is now a visual object that is formed through prompts models datasets, aesthetic criteria and algorithmic procedures. This presents us with a fundamental inquiry: what is the transformation in the cultural meaning of an animal if it can be artificially assembled to operate per human would-be? This question is in particular useful as many AI form animals are depicted with animals in a human light. Artists/animators might show animals communicating using human languages, wearing clothing, preparing meals, going to schools, working with technology, having romantic relationships, feeling human happiness and participating in family structures. One might wonder whether such images burn up the distinctions between man



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and animal. They might equally seem to reproduce the anthropocentrism that post-anthropocentric directions in posthumanist and critical animal studies seek to leave behind. This paper contends that the genre cannot be fully grasped by focusing solely on the psychology of anthropomorphism. It is both a cultural and political phenomenon that requires a theoretical framework able to engage with species, power, and normativity. The paper constructs such a framework by integrating posthumanism, critical animal studies, and Foucauldian theories of normalization and power, centered on the concept of digital humanimality. It analyzes AI-generated animal reels as a site that blurs the boundaries between humanization and animality, agency and control, reality and simulation, normality and abnormality, and entertainment and commodification, and questions whether these representations truly challenge human exceptionalism or simply produce a new technological expression of anthropocentrism.

2. Background: From Animal Videos to AI-Generated Animal Reels.

Since the world before social media and the artificial intelligence there has been animals in the mass media. They have been very central to the art of literature film animation advertising TV, folklore and children's culture through long time. The animals have become a proxy for human nature through anthropomorphism. Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, The Jungle Book, The Lion King, etc...are items of culture showing them. The social media has changed this representational politics; real animals could be the source of images and videos again on a never ending basis via the user-generated content in the single second they are posted. The users as the ordinary ones could produce the images and videos of animals and they realized it all over the world in a single second.

The cuteness humor strange actions, emotional responses and anthropomorphism would be the best method to predict an animal video would go viral. On top of that, research indicates that viewers do not always interpret these representations critically. For instance, a 2024 study conducted by Stumpf et al. revealed that although animal videos attracted a high number of viewers, many users were unable to identify indications of animal pain and suffering, although most recognized... This point is significant for the present discussion because it reveals that the digital animal is never encountered raw, but always already shaped by human processes of interpretation. The viewer does not access the animal "in itself"; rather, what reaches them is a *mediated* animal — one that has been filmed, edited, captioned, narrated, and emotionally framed before it ever appears on screen. The introduction of generative AI has increased the intensity of this process, as creators no longer have to wait for an animal to spontaneously display a certain unusual behavior, they can instead directly ask an AI system to make one up. As a result, what was a straightforward depiction of a real animal through a camera to an edited video that ends up online can now become a depiction in the form of human prompt - AI model - fake animal - edited video - algorithmic circulation - audience engagement. The change is quite substantial in theoretical terms because in the former model, the animal actually does the act which is recorded afterward, while in the latter case, the act might be the human's assumption or expectation that the animal is supposed to do it. Recent anthropomorphism research using Chinese social media data illustrates how deeply this tendency is embedded in the culture. In her 2024 study



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of animal mukbang videos on Douyin and Xiaohongshu, Liu identifies a set of recurring anthropomorphic markers: clothing, facial expressions, communicative "manners," food preferences, tableware, dining settings, microphone use, and expressions of internal states and emotion. Although these videos feature real animals rather than AI-generated or animated ones, they reveal the persistence of an older representational pattern — one in which the animal is cast as an anthropomorphic social subject. So, AI-generated animal videos can be considered as an elaboration of the ongoing anthropomorphic media tradition, except that there is one important difference: AI is able to invent anthropomorphic behavior besides just capturing or editing it.

3. The Research Gap

Existing scholarship on animalization, social media, anthropomorphism and AI offers several useful ways to think about the relationship between animals and social media, but the literature on AI animal reels is essentially nonexistent. There is no corpus, content analysis or audience research on the genre; the closest existing work on AI-media characters is conceptual, relying on secondary sources, not user experiments. Typologies for how to recognize and classify anthropomorphic behaviour in AI are underdeveloped and underspecified; an AI animal that talks and emotes like a human has no clear definition or taxon. The research behind mind attribution and the uncanny valley comes from experiments with robot and chatbot, not synthetic animals in video. And most importantly, no one has examined the genre through posthumanism, critical animal studies or allopoiesis, this paper's conceptual approach to the digital humanimal. More exactly, research on animals on social-media platforms has largely focused on real animals, with animal welfare cruelty entertainment and audience perception being the main lines of inquiry. For instance, Stumpf et al. (2024) demonstrate that the suffering inflicted on animals remains invisible when content is presented as humour or entertainment. The most common way to study animal engagement with anthropomorphic representations social media has dealt with how animals have been depicted anthropomorphically using human attributes. The analysis of animal mukbang carried out by Liu (2024) illustrates how complicated this process can be. Research on generative AIs, then again, has directed more attention to disinformation authenticity disclosure, synthetic media and human-AI interaction. Recent experiments have shown that classifiers can have an effect on how human participants perceive generative AI media, but explicitly stating the content is AI-generated did not necessarily decrease their willingness to access it. What remains still unexamined is precisely the conjoining of this progression. The animal created by AI is no longer a real animal nor simply a fictional character. It is a technologically produced image of animality. It so takes a theoretical approach capable of examining the connective relations between man beast machine, algorithm, and viewer. In order to talk about this creature, which we might call the center figure of the event under discussion, the paper puts forward the term digital humanimal - a synthetic creature, produced by AI, running wild on digital platforms, whose body of animal is endowed with human language, cognition, and affect. Borrowing a concept called humanimity from philosophy, the paper develops the term humanimality, which denotes the relation between the human and the animal as



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neither/both, to the specific conditions of generative media. Unlike the humanimal, which is an interspecies relationality and hybridity, the digital humanimal is a technology-based, platform-delivered version of this condition: it is an animal body that speaks human voice, thinks with human cognition, feel in human way but at the same time looks and sounds quite like an animal. The rationale of introducing the term lies in the inadequacy of other terms to fully capture the essence of the figure. The use of the term precisely denotes the three characteristics that the creature combines species hybridity, synthetic production, and platform distribution. In short, there is still a big gap and a whole bunch of problems left to be tackled.

This paper sets out to explore the four questions:

1. How are the lines between humans and animals being re-drawn, if at all, through AI-generated animal content?
2. Does an AI-generated content that endows animal a human-like character undermine or just reaffirm the idea of a uniquely human species?
3. In that case, how will AI-generated animal videos shape or define animal norm and deviation for behavior?
4. Who gains control and who loses in the creation, dissemination, and use of AI-generated animal animals?

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Posthumanism: Destabilizing the Human

Posthumanism is the prevailing theoretical approach for the study presented here, as it questions the very humanist conviction that humans are a separate entity occupying a superior place on the planet. This interdisciplinary movement seeks to reconceptualize the human's relationship with the world by undermining the concept of the "human" turning it into a construct of history rather than some type of ultimate authority. It is at this very level of deconstructing "ultimate authority" that posthumanism in general and posthumanist way in particular operates by questioning the boundaries the definitions of the human, the animal, and the technological in ways that are as traditionally fixed as is human exceptionalism in the anthropocentric setup. Posthumanist ways incorporate these ideology critiquing values by emphasizing relationality and interconnectedness, rather than separating humans from animals machines technologies, and the environment.

What is in particular significant in the work of Cary Wolfe is how it disrupts the humanist distinction of human and nonhuman. Wolfe makes clear that the posthuman is not a claim that we have somehow overcome embodiment, but rather a critique of the humanist fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy. It is a way of naming the embodiment and embeddedness of the human in both the biological and technological realms. Posthumanism is Yes not just an admission to the force of technology or even the posthuman possibility of technologically enhancing human beings.



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What it is rather is a way of questioning the philosophical assumptions by which the human has tended to be constructed as an exceptional being. A consequence of this, because of this, has been in the way that Wolfe's intervention has been useful to think about the posthuman and animal studies. Posthumanism is explicitly political as well. Rosi Braidotti defines a posthumanism as a politics that move beyond anthropocentrism; her critical posthumanities pursue a neo-Spinozist, monistic ontology in which the knowing subject is relational, local and accountable rather than the universalist human of liberal humanism. One of the motivating reasons for this shift is that Western humanism was historically an enabling ideology for the massive violence of colonialism, slavery and the objectification of women besides the massacres of nonhuman animals. Contemporary scholarship suggests that posthumanist approaches unsettle species hierarchy, seeking to relocate the human within broader networks of human and nonhuman relation. Donna Haraway's work on companion species and "becoming with" extends this claim further: humans, she argues, are not self-contained or prior to relation but are *produced* through mediated, co-constitutive entanglements with other species, landscapes, and technologies — a position explicitly opposed to the myth of human exceptionalism (Haraway, 2008). Read through this lens, AI-generated animal reels take on theoretical significance precisely because they destabilize the boundary separating human, animal, and machine. The traditional binary can be represented as: Human $\neq$ Animal. AI introduces another category: Human $\rightarrow$ AI $\rightarrow$ Animal. The animal image is generated by a technological system created by humans, yet it can produce outputs that humans might not have fully foreseen. Thus, the AI-generated creature this digital humanimal enters into a network rather than existing as a mere object: the reel functions as a posthumanist artifact because it reveals the artificial nature of the species boundary.

However, posthumanism should not cause us to assume that every technological representation is inherently post-anthropocentric. An animal created through technology can still be deeply human-centered if its main purpose is to fulfill human fantasies regarding animal behavior. Therefore, the key issue is not merely whether AI makes animals appear more human-like. It's about whether AI enables us to reconsider animality beyond the human.

4.2 Critical Animal Studies

Critical Animal Studies (CAS) provides a second major framework. CAS is concerned not merely with representing animals but with the structures of power that produce animal marginalization and exploitation. Scholarship connecting CAS with posthumanism emphasizes themes such as the human–animal binary, the marginalization of animal subjects, Othering, and relations of domination. (Animal Law) From this perspective, the animal is not simply an innocent object of representation. The question becomes: Who has the power to represent the animal? In AI-generated animal reels, the animal itself has no immediate power that it exercises over one's image. First there is a human who gives the prompts, then the AI algorithm creates the visual form, the creator picks the image that is best, the platform makes it public, and people watch and interact. So, the visibility of the animal is being controlled through various human and technological actors within a multifaceted



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representational economy. Paradoxically, these AI-generated animal depictions can seem like they have given the animals more power because the animals can do many typical human-like activities like speaking, making choices, and playing human roles. Yet, the so-called agency of these animals is essentially a human creation and, because of this, quite a deceptive agency. On the surface the animal "speaks" but it is the human who controls it. The animal "chooses a behaviour" but it is the model that delivers the action. The animal acts on its own will but is only doing so because a human has created a story to suit their liking. Ultimately, the use of anthropomorphic representations can cause an even greater technological control.

5. The Human Animal Gap

In history, a separation has been drawn between humans and animals along the lines of reason language consciousness culture morality, technology and civilization. Historically, we have identified ourselves as what animals do not do. It may because of this be argued that such differentiation is actually a ranking: Human= rational/cultural/technological/ autonomous, whereas Animal= instinctive/natural/non-rational/dependent; and, this way, that this hierarchy generates what can be called the humanimal divide. The anthropomorphizing and the apparent eradication of the animal in the AI generated animal reels, strategically work to obscure such a hegemonic dichotomy. For here a cat can be a businessman; a dog, a father; an elephant, a worker; a rabbit, a sportsperson. In such a way, we seem to have overcome the gap. Even so, the very seeming diminishment of the chasm produces another: why does the animal have to be human to be culturally compelling? Ordinary animal behavior is unremarkable. Behavior that borrows human qualities is mildly notable. Behavior that is fully, extravagantly anthropomorphized — the cat that drives, cooks, or speaks — is what circulates: it is this last register, exceeding the animal's "nature," that proves most entertaining, shareable, and monetizable. The animal becomes culturally valuable because it is not an animal. This paradox illustrates how anthropomorphism both subverts and recuperates the human-animal boundary. The boundary is crossed, but it is crossed on the human side creating, in effect, a digital humanimal rather than an actual non-anthropocentric animal.

6. Non-Normality and the Construction of the "Abnormal Animal"

The concept of non-normality offers a especially productive way for analyzing AI-generated animal reels. "Normal" behavior should not be understood only as a natural fact; it is called also a cultural category. It is generally understood as a normal that a dog walking, barking, sleeping, or eating. A dog can speak human language, using a computer, driving a car, or participating in a corporate meeting is constructed as abnormal or impossible. AI transforms this impossibility into a form of entertainment, making the abnormal animal desirable precisely because it challenges conventional expectations.

This can also connect to Michel Foucault's theory of normalization. Foucault interprets that modern disciplinary power leads not only through direct prohibition but through the establishment of rules against which behavior is evaluated. Normalization operates by drawing a line between behaviors



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deemed acceptable and those positioned outside recognized social norms. Applied to AI-generated animal reels, this concept lets us ask a more specific question: how do these representations themselves work to establish — and police — the boundaries of "acceptable" animality?

The AI-generated animal sometimes remains within a paradox: as an animal it must be recognizable, but it must simultaneously behave unlike an animal. If the animal becomes completely human, its animal identity totally demonized. If the animal remains completely animal-like, it may lose the witty novelty that makes the content attractive. The successful AI animal therefore occupies an intermediate condition: animal body + human behaviour + artificial production. This hybrid figure may term the “algorithmic animal” or, in the terminology adopted in this paper, the “digital humanimal.” The digital humanimal is neither simply real nor fictional. It is an artificial construction that depends upon the viewer's recognition of an animal species while simultaneously violating the behavioural expectations attached to that species. Non-normality thus becomes a source of entertainment and economic value.

7. Power Dynamics and the Algorithmic Animal

Power plays the major issue of AI-generated animal representation. The first level is human representational power. Humans determine what animals should do. A creator may direct an AI system to illustrate a tiger acting as a businessman or a cat performing the role of a mother. As a result, the animal becomes adorned within a narrative shaped by human experiences and social meanings.

The second step concerns what might be called technological power. The AI system — not the human prompter — determines the visual specifics of the output, through mechanisms of training, model architecture, probabilistic generation, and the constraints of its underlying dataset. The human supplies the prompt, but authorship, in any traditional sense, is displaced: the image is the product of computational processes irreducible to conscious, intentional human authorship.

Platform is the third level power. Social-media platforms decide what becomes visible through recommendation systems, ranking mechanisms moderation protocols, monetization frameworks,, and audience engagement.

The fourth level concerns the power exercised by audiences. Audience can engage through views, likes, shares, comments, and follows acts a significant role in determining which representations become successful.

The production for the AI animal can be represented as: Human prompt → AI generation → creator selection → platform recommendation → audience engagement → algorithmic manifestation. Therefore, Power becomes distributed across a network. The creator is not the only agent involved therefore it is very important. The algorithm of the platform may reward particular types of content because they create higher engagement. Thus, creators may produce increasingly exaggerated,



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emotional, bizarre, or anthropomorphic animal narratives that's why these characteristics are more likely to attract attention.

Consequently, the animal becomes part of what may be called the attention economy of animality. The animal becomes more unusual, and the more attention it can potentially receive. Like this the greater attention it receives, the greater valuable the representation becomes. As a representation achieves popularity, the likelihood of creating similar content increases. Consequently: Non-normality → entertainment → engagement → visibility → reproduction. The algorithm can therefore play an important role in determining which forms of animality get cultural visibility

8. Conclusion

AI-generated animal reels are a new cultural event to study in the way they bring together technology animality entertainment and power. Their initial popularity gained popularity from both a long history of representations of anthropomorphic animals, and from the attention economy of social medias. But generative AI is a fundamental change in that animality no longer relies on the animal being present: such transformation challenges the relationship with animals. Animal reels created with the help of AI may be posthuman as they blend at the same time the human, animal and machine categories. They may allow audiences to imagine animals as beings with feelings, identities and social roles. But the same images may also reinforce anthropocentrism as animals attain cultural significance only if they subscribe to us.

Another point about non-normality further complicates this process. what makes AI generated animals so often amusing is that they are so abnormal; their mistaken-normality becomes a culturally and economically valuable form of its own. By way of certain cultural-social-media algorithms, false-normal animals can be rapidly, widely, and orbitally distributed. Power operates throughout the process. Users design prompts and narratives; machines generate images; artists select and modify robots; distribution platforms package for visibility; consumers determine value through use.

The animal plays its role in this network as a technologized creature the digital humanimal, delineating hybridity of species through machine, of art fact through artificial animality and of platform through dissemination. Because of this, the question is not whether the machine created animal videos are real or simulated; rather, what kind of animalier machine really result when technology is able to machine generate animals. But the question remains: the question is what kind of animal will appear in a world where technology is able to render the animality itself

AI filmed animals will mainly prove the umbilical relationship of human and animal is neither effectively biological nor universally genetic, but culturally linguallly technologically, and politically embedded. Generative AI foregrounds this border because it allows human beings to construct animals to their own liking and popularize their creations at an unprecedented scale.

The challenge for posthumanism and critical animal studies is not "can animals be imagined as human, " but "can animals exist without their value determined by human metrics? While a "talking



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clothing laboring loving suffering, acting human "AI animal" enjoys bigger thought than an "inanimate" one, the dream of where the human-animal border has disappeared might just be retaining ongoing power. Proliferating in the AI era is about fewer imagining animals as if humans, but embodying uniquely animal bodies. Making the AI animals a topic of sustainability means moving away from recognizing something similar to human animals, instead imaging a different world that bestows animals what belongs to them and that animals belong to. To do so, AI animal research will elevate the discussion from digital escapism to truly critiquing anthropocentric nationalistic commercial, and technical structures.

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