



Journal of Enterprise Strategy & Management Innovation

Volume I, Issue 3, August 2026

ISSN: 3116-4277 (Online)

<https://journal.ijhba.com/index.php/jesmi>

<https://slsiipress.com>

From Credentials to Capabilities: Marketing Strategy and Value-Proposition Redesign in the Skills-Based MOOC Economy

Journal of Entrepreneurial Strategy and Management Innovation (JESMI)

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Received: May 14, 2026 • Revised: June 30, 2026 • Accepted: July 12, 2026

Abstract

As global labor markets shift from degree-based to skills-based signaling, skills-driven massive online course (MOOC) platforms face a second, less examined pressure: employers increasingly expect credentials to signal global competency alongside technical proficiency. This paper undertakes a conceptual and strategic analytical review to examine how skills-driven platforms might credibly design and market a dual-signal value proposition — skill mastery combined with demonstrated global competency — treating this repositioning as a problem of business-model innovation and strategic marketing rather than promotional messaging. Drawing on entrepreneurship, marketing-strategy, labor-signaling, and global-competency literatures, alongside Southeast Asian and Philippine higher-education marketing evidence, the paper finds that neither skills-based nor competency-based signaling alone has proven sufficient to displace traditional degree credentials, positioning a credible combined signal as an unexplored strategic opportunity. The analysis further shows that the credibility of any such signal rests on verification infrastructure rather than message reach, that trust-centered and evidence-resonant marketing consistently outperforms prestige-oriented positioning, and that Southeast Asian platforms face a market-building task — establishing baseline credibility for competency-oriented digital credentials — that precedes competitive differentiation. The paper contributes a theoretical integration currently absent from the literature, extending business-model-innovation and marketing-positioning scholarship into an unexamined dual-signal space, while offering platform strategists a disciplined, verification-first framework for pursuing this repositioning without reproducing the credibility gaps already documented in single-signal credentialing.

Keywords: Skills-based credentialing; global competence; MOOC platforms; business-model innovation; value-proposition design; entrepreneurial marketing strategy; Southeast Asia

1. Introduction

The global labor market is undergoing a signaling crisis. For much of the twentieth century, formal academic credentials functioned as a reasonably reliable proxy for employability: a degree signaled not only subject knowledge but discipline, cognitive capacity, and institutional vetting. That proxy has weakened considerably. Employers across technology, services, and increasingly manufacturing sectors report growing skepticism toward degree-based hiring filters, favoring instead direct, verifiable evidence of applied competence. This shift has fueled the rapid expansion of massive online course (MOOC) platforms and skills-driven credentialing programs, which promise a faster, more targeted, and more

transparent alternative to traditional higher education: prove the skill, skip the four-year proxy. Yet this transition, while widely discussed as a labor-market phenomenon, has produced a second and less examined pressure that sits squarely within strategic management and entrepreneurship rather than labor economics: platforms that market themselves purely on narrow technical skill acquisition are increasingly out of step with what employers, particularly multinational and cross-border employers, actually seek. Technical skill alone is necessary but no longer sufficient. Employers operating across borders, supply chains, and distributed teams are signaling demand for something broader — the capacity to work across cultural and linguistic difference, to collaborate in globally distributed teams, to reason about issues that do not respect national boundaries. This broader capacity is increasingly captured under the umbrella of global competency, a construct with growing currency in international education policy circles and gradually migrating into corporate hiring language.

This creates a strategic problem for skills-driven MOOC providers that has not been adequately theorized. Platforms built their original value proposition around a relatively simple promise: acquire a marketable skill, faster and cheaper than a traditional degree. That promise was sufficient when the competing signal was the degree itself. It is no longer sufficient when the competing signal is a dual claim — skill plus global competency — that neither the traditional university nor the first generation of skills-based platforms was designed to make credibly. The managerial and entrepreneurial question this raises is not pedagogical (how should global competency be taught) but strategic: how should a skills-driven platform design, verify, and market a value proposition that credibly signals both dimensions at once, without diluting the speed and specificity advantage that differentiated it from traditional credentialing in the first place. This is a business-model and positioning problem before it is an instructional one, and it sits at the intersection of entrepreneurial strategy, management innovation, and marketing theory — precisely the terrain this paper is concerned with.

The problem carries particular weight in Southeast Asian and other emerging-market contexts, where the stakes of getting this positioning right are not abstract. Regional economies are simultaneously investing heavily in digital-economy participation and confronting persistent workforce readiness gaps, with young professionals increasingly seeking employability that extends beyond domestic labor markets into regional and international ones. For learners in these contexts, a credential that signals only local technical competence carries less strategic value than one that credibly signals readiness to operate in cross-border, multicultural professional environments. Platforms serving these markets are therefore under particular pressure to resolve the dual-signal problem, yet the strategic literature on how they might do so credibly, and without collapsing into unsubstantiated marketing claims, remains thin and fragmented. Existing scholarship tends to treat skills-based credentialing and global-competency frameworks as separate literatures — one situated in labor economics and human capital theory, the other in comparative and international education policy — with comparatively little work examining how entrepreneurial platforms might integrate both into a coherent, defensible marketing and business-model strategy.

This gap is precisely why the present paper adopts a conceptual and strategic analytical review design rather than an empirical one. The phenomenon under examination — dual-signal credentialing as a deliberate marketing and business-model strategy — is emergent enough that no consolidated body of primary data yet exists to test hypotheses about its effectiveness, and any attempt to generate such data at this stage would risk mistaking isolated platform tactics for generalizable strategic patterns. What the field needs first is theoretical integration: a synthesis that draws together the skills-signaling literature, the global-competency literature, platform entrepreneurship and business-model-innovation scholarship, and strategic marketing theory into a single analytical frame capable of explaining what credible dual-signal positioning would actually require, and what risks attend platforms that pursue it carelessly. That synthesis is this paper's central task.

Accordingly, this paper undertakes three interlocking objectives. It examines how the shift from degree-based to skills-based labor-market signaling has created an opening, and simultaneously a limitation, for MOOC and skills-driven platforms as competitive actors. It investigates how global-competency constructs, still largely confined to education-policy discourse, might be theoretically and strategically integrated into platform value propositions without becoming unsubstantiated marketing rhetoric. And it develops, through analytical synthesis rather than primary data collection, a set of strategic implications for how skills-driven platforms — particularly those operating in or serving Southeast Asian and other emerging-market learner populations — might credibly reposition their marketing and business-model strategy around a dual skill-plus-competency signal.

The contribution is intended to serve two audiences simultaneously. For the scholarly community, the paper offers a theoretical integration currently missing from the literature, connecting entrepreneurship, management innovation, and marketing strategy scholarship to a labor-market and credentialing phenomenon usually analyzed through an economics or education-policy lens alone. For practitioners — platform strategists, EdTech marketers, and workforce-development stakeholders — the paper offers an analytically grounded, non-promotional framework for thinking through a positioning decision that many platforms are currently making tactically, without the benefit of a coherent strategic rationale. The sections that follow build this synthesis theme by theme before turning to its strategic and managerial implications.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 From Degree-Based to Skills-Based Signaling in Global Labor Markets

The literature converges on a genuine, if partial, shift away from degree-based hiring filters toward skills-based evidence, though the strength of that shift varies considerably by data source and sector. Large-scale job-advertisement analyses provide the strongest evidence: across twenty-one million UK postings, fewer than one in five specified a minimum educational requirement, with social skills and job-specific competencies weighted more heavily than academic qualifications (Brown & Souto-Otero, 2020), while demand for AI roles rose even as explicit university-education requirements fell by fifteen percent over a comparable period (Ehlinger & Stephany, 2023). This revealed-preference evidence — what employers actually write into hiring criteria — points toward a meaningful erosion of the degree as gatekeeping proxy.

Stated-preference evidence, by contrast, tells a more conservative story. Employer surveys in India show that while the large majority have introduced skills assessments in recent years, most still prefer a blended degree-plus-skills evaluation rather than a full substitution (Patil et al., 2026), and a synthesis of 167 studies attributes the skills-first movement to a combination of technological change, talent shortages, and inclusion goals rather than a wholesale rejection of credentials (Matimbwa & Jaffu, 2026). This divergence between what job postings reveal and what employers report when surveyed is itself analytically significant: it suggests that skills-based signaling is advancing faster in employer practice than in employer stated policy, a gap platforms should treat as an opportunity rather than a settled market condition. The shift is also uneven across sectors — recruiters in scientific, technical, and numerically intensive fields continue to treat degrees as load-bearing signals (Tholen, 2022), and Indian IT hiring remains anchored to degree filtering by legacy systems and risk aversion rather than confidence in the credential itself (Mp, 2025).

Signaling theory supplies the mechanism connecting these observations to platform strategy: credentials exist because employers cannot directly observe productivity or trainability, so any instrument that supplies credible, verifiable information about tested competence should, in principle, reduce that information asymmetry (Aerne & Bonoli, 2025; Tholen, 2022). Employer-facing evidence supports this in practice — employers in environmental science report that micro-credentials make otherwise-tacit skills explicit and easier to evaluate objectively (Miller & De St Jorre, 2022), and systematic review evidence confirms that employers value the specificity micro-credentials provide over generic transcripts (Varadarajan et al., 2023). Yet this signaling value is bounded, not absolute. Experimental hiring evidence finds that MOOC credentials outperform having no credential at all but still underperform traditional degrees head-to-head (Rivas et al., 2020), and the strength of any alternative credential's signal depends heavily on its perceived rigor, standardization, and institutional trust (Varadarajan et al., 2023; Miller & De St Jorre, 2022). For the present paper, this body of evidence establishes a precise strategic boundary condition: skills-based signaling is real and growing, but it functions today as a supplement to, not a replacement for, traditional credentialing. A platform marketing itself purely on skill acquisition is therefore positioning itself against a signal that is still, on the whole, the weaker of the two available to employers — which is precisely the strategic opening that a second, complementary signal (global competency) is positioned to fill.

2.2 Global Competency Frameworks as an Emerging Anchor for Credentialing and Value Proposition

Global competence is not a marketing invention; it is an academically established, if still contested, construct with a scholarly lineage extending back to the 1980s through the work of Hunter, Reimers, and subsequently the OECD, UNESCO, and Asia Society (Ying & Duo, 2025; Colvin & Edwards, 2018; Andrews, 2021; Simpson & Dervin, 2019). The OECD's framework — organized around local-global analysis, perspective-taking, intercultural interaction, and action — functions

as the field's most widely used reference point (Guo et al., 2024; Ortiz-Marcos et al., 2020; Colvin & Edwards, 2018), and the construct is consistently treated across the literature as multidimensional, spanning cognitive, socioemotional, behavioral, and civic domains rather than a single soft skill (Ortiz-Marcos et al., 2020; Idrissi et al., 2020). The principal scholarly caveat is conceptual heterogeneity and a documented Western-centrism critique embedded in the dominant frameworks (Guo et al., 2024; Andrews, 2021) — a caution this paper must carry forward carefully, since a construct built on OECD/Western assumptions cannot be marketed to Southeast Asian learners as though it were culturally neutral.

Employer valuation of global-competency components is real but structurally diffuse: rather than commanding a standalone premium, these capabilities are typically absorbed into broader "transversal" or "cross-cutting" skill labels — communication, collaboration, adaptability — that employers already recognize (Andrade et al., 2024; Rios et al., 2020; Kamaruzaman et al., 2025). Some evidence shows genuine differentiated value: cross-cultural collaboration was found to strongly predict team-performance ratings independent of leadership indicators in a Mexican employer sample (Hruby & Canfield Rivera, 2026), and engineering employers identified communicating across diverse groups as one of the largest importance-proficiency gaps they observe in new hires (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). Other evidence complicates this picture: broader graduate-employability reviews find multicultural competencies ranking below communication and self-management in general hiring priority (García-Álvarez et al., 2022; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). This unevenness matters directly for platform positioning — it suggests global competency is not yet a credential employers ask for by name, but it is a cluster of capabilities they recognize and reward once demonstrated through familiar proxies like communication and collaboration.

More encouraging for the paper's central thesis is evidence that competency frameworks are already migrating from academic discourse into practical workforce infrastructure. International competency frameworks are being used to shape curricula, job descriptions, and even performance-review criteria in sector-specific workforce contexts (Barracough et al., 2024), and engineering and global-leadership education programs are explicitly redesigning curricula around global-competence frameworks to match international labor-market expectations (Ortiz-Marcos et al., 2020; Bilderback & Thompson, 2025). This confirms that global competency is credentialing-compatible in principle. The clearest limitation in the evidence base, however, is that direct proof of a hiring premium for named global-competency credentials remains considerably thinner than the evidence for valuing the adjacent skills that compose it (Hruby & Canfield Rivera, 2026) — a gap that should discipline how any platform markets this dimension: as demonstrated capability rather than as a branded credential claiming independent market value.

2.3 Platform Entrepreneurship and Business-Model Innovation in the MOOC/EdTech Sector

Entrepreneurship scholarship consistently frames digital education platforms as entrepreneurial actors engaged in deliberate, ongoing business-model innovation rather than static content distributors. Platform business-model architecture is itself identified as a determinant of firm performance (Zhao et al., 2020), and continuous business-model innovation is characterized as the critical mechanism by which platforms sustain competitive advantage amid intensifying competition and shortened innovation cycles (Jia et al., 2023). This pattern holds specifically for education: EdTech ventures enter established education markets with data-driven teaching and learning solutions that permanently reshape competitive dynamics (Renz & Hilbig, 2020), and even legacy education businesses — Pearson is the documented case — have pivoted toward online program management and intensive data analytics as a strategic response to platform-based disruption (Williamson, 2020). Growing demand for accessible, lower-cost education is simultaneously forcing traditional universities to reconsider foundational assumptions about their own model, opening space for organizational forms that compete directly with incumbents (Hanna, 2019).

A useful nuance emerges here that tempers any assumption of pure disruption: MOOC platforms, having originated largely from elite higher-education institutions, are better characterized in the literature as sustaining innovations that improve and extend the existing education market rather than as disruptive innovations that displace universities outright (Al-Imarah & Shields, 2019). This matters for the paper's framing — the dual-signal repositioning under examination should be understood as incremental strategic adaptation within an evolving competitive field, not as a radical break from established educational logic. Digital transformation more broadly is treated as requiring platforms to draw on diverse and evolving knowledge bases to sustain business-model evolution (Bouncken et al., 2019; Wang, 2024), with digital-platform capability shown to mediate innovation performance gains in higher-education institutions specifically (Du et al., 2023).

Most directly relevant to this paper's argument, business-model innovation in this literature is explicitly and repeatedly tied to value-proposition redesign as its central competitive mechanism. Business-model innovation is defined as the systematic reconfiguration of value proposition, market segmentation, and profit potential in response to disruptive change (Wang, 2024), and EdTech companies specifically structure their innovation efforts around three linked dimensions — value proposition, value delivery, and value capture (Renz & Hilbig, 2020). Successful platform business-model innovation is associated with novel value propositions and revenue architectures built on network effects and value co-creation (Jia et al., 2023), and digital SMEs more broadly innovate their value propositions to build more profitable customer relationships (Teoh et al., 2023). This literature therefore supports the paper's foundational claim that a dual-signal repositioning — skill plus global competency — is not merely a promotional adjustment but an act of business-model innovation properly understood, situating the paper's problem inside entrepreneurship theory rather than communications or advertising practice.

2.4 Marketing Strategy and Value-Proposition Design for Skills- and Competency-Based Online Education

Strategic marketing scholarship treats value-proposition design as the central lever by which online education providers differentiate themselves, and — critically for this paper — treats digital marketing itself as a strategic competency rather than a downstream promotional function. Educational certification marketing requires sophisticated audience segmentation by career goal and technological readiness, with digital marketing functioning as a link between market intelligence and educational design decisions (Dutta et al., 2025). Institutions that build integrated digital marketing strategies addressing the full, extended decision process professional learners go through achieve more durable market advantages than those relying on one-off promotional campaigns (Dutta et al., 2025).

The literature also identifies a common strategic failure mode directly relevant to this paper's cautions: many institutions converge on similar, prestige-oriented positioning strategies rather than differentiating on demonstrable outcomes such as course quality or employment results (Dennis et al., 2016). Institutions that instead differentiate through substantive stakeholder engagement — rather than prestige signaling alone — gain clearer competitive advantage (Dennis et al., 2016). This is a meaningful warning for skills-driven platforms attempting a dual-signal repositioning: simply layering "global competency" language onto existing prestige-style marketing copy would reproduce the exact positioning failure this literature documents, rather than resolve it.

Perhaps the most strategically consequential finding in this theme concerns how credential source shapes the positioning options available to a provider at all. Employers assess micro-credential value partly by issuer identity, valuing university-transcribed credentials more highly than industry-sponsored ones, and industry-sponsored credentials more highly than purely commercial-platform credentials (Narayanaswamy et al., 2024). Experimental evidence confirms that MOOC credentials specifically are not perceived by employers as equivalent to traditional credentials, requiring providers to actively work with employers to demonstrate that their skills claims translate into productivity (Rivas et al., 2020). This constraint is compounded by an emerging credibility pressure: the growing use of AI tools increases the risk that credentials can be obtained without corresponding learning actually occurring, straining the trustworthiness of credentials broadly and pushing providers toward stronger verification mechanisms (Alexander & Belloni, 2024). Institutional positioning literature also shows that how a provider frames a credential — as a safe supplement to a degree versus a disruptive alternative to one — is itself a strategic choice with real market consequences, and the literature notes that few providers currently attempt the more ambitious disruptive framing (Brown et al., 2023). Taken together, this theme establishes that dual-signal marketing cannot rest on promotional language alone; it must be paired with verification infrastructure and employer-facing proof mechanisms, or it risks the same credibility gap that already constrains single-signal (skills-only) MOOC marketing today.

2.5 Southeast Asian and Emerging-Market Workforce Readiness and Cross-Border Employability Positioning

Southeast Asian labor-market scholarship treats cross-border workforce readiness as a strategic priority with substantial policy backing, principally through the ASEAN Free Flow of Skilled Labor framework, yet the evidence base reveals a wide gap between policy ambition and implementation reality. A confirmatory factor analysis of Thai engineers found that fewer than one percent held the ASEAN engineer certification required for cross-border registration, with cultural readiness identified as the weakest component (Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak, 2018) — a finding with direct relevance to the global-competency dimension of this paper's thesis, since cultural readiness is precisely the component that credential

frameworks alone have struggled to certify convincingly. Most ASEAN economies report ongoing skilled-labor shortages that make cross-border mobility a stated strategic necessity (Taron, 2020), yet skilled ASEAN workers frequently prefer migrating outside the region entirely in search of higher returns, which limits the practical payoff of intra-ASEAN credential recognition efforts (Taron, 2020).

Consistent with the paper's earlier caution against treating Southeast Asia as homogeneous, the readiness literature documents markedly different national conditions: Thailand seeks high-skilled immigrants under its "Thailand 4.0" strategy but receives predominantly low-skilled ASEAN labor (Tipayalai, 2020); Indonesia records the region's second-highest youth unemployment rate, attributed to skills mismatch compounded by foreign-worker competition (Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023); Malaysian graduates show measurable digital-skill gaps specifically in communication and problem-solving (Tee et al., 2024); and in Cambodia, language barriers function as a structural filter that excludes lower-resourced households from primary-sector cross-border jobs entirely (Finlayson et al., 2025). These differences reinforce that any platform strategy targeting "Southeast Asian workforce readiness" as a single market segment would misread a genuinely fragmented regional landscape.

On the credentialing side, competency-based micro-credentialing is linked in adjacent emerging-market contexts to tangible employability gains: in East African universities, a competency-based micro-credentialing methodology helped students make implicit skills explicit, closing what the literature terms a "skills-articulation gap" and improving workplace readiness (Maina et al., 2022), while Singapore's Competency-Based Stackable Micro-credential program demonstrated measurable improvements in employee competency and workplace engagement through modular, industry-aligned learning (Lim et al., 2025). It is worth noting analytically that the strongest micro-credentialing outcome evidence available here comes from East Africa rather than Southeast Asia directly — a geographically adjacent rather than regionally specific evidence base, which this paper should treat as suggestive rather than conclusive for ASEAN contexts. Finally, the literature introduces an important boundary condition for the entire paper's argument: skill recognition across borders is not a purely technical matter but a socially constructed process frequently distorted by nationality and other ascriptive characteristics of the worker, independent of the credential's actual content (Liu-Farrer et al., 2020). This means that even a well-designed, well-verified dual-signal credential faces a recognition environment that marketing and positioning strategy alone cannot fully control — a limitation the paper's later synthesis and discussion sections address rather than market around.

2.6 Synthesis of Literature

Read together, the five thematic strands converge on a coherent picture that both supports and constrains the paper's central thesis. The skills-signaling and global-competency literatures (Themes 1 and 2) independently establish the same structural pattern: each signal is real, employer-recognized, and academically grounded, yet each functions as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, the traditional degree. Skills-based credentials outperform having no credential but still underperform degrees in direct comparison (Rivas et al., 2020); global-competency components are valued by employers but almost always absorbed into familiar adjacent labels — communication, collaboration, adaptability — rather than recognized as an independently branded, premium-commanding credential (Andrade et al., 2024; Hruby & Canfield Rivera, 2026). Neither signal alone has proven sufficient to displace the degree's gatekeeping function. This is the empirical soil from which the paper's dual-signal thesis grows: if neither signal is independently sufficient, a credibly combined signal represents an unexplored strategic space rather than a redundant one.

The entrepreneurship and marketing literatures (Themes 3 and 4) converge on the mechanism by which such a combined signal would need to be operationalized. Business-model-innovation scholarship identifies value-proposition redesign as the substantive core of platform competitive adaptation (Wang, 2024; Jia et al., 2023), while strategic marketing scholarship identifies value-proposition design as the primary lever of provider differentiation (Dutta et al., 2025). These are, in effect, two disciplinary vocabularies converging on one claim: repositioning around a dual skill-plus-competency signal is a business-model decision expressed through marketing strategy, not a promotional decision layered atop an unchanged offering. A third recurring thread cuts across Themes 1, 2, and 4 and functions as a load-bearing constraint on the entire argument: signaling value depends on trust, standardization, and issuer credibility (Varadarajan et al., 2023; Narayanaswamy et al., 2024), and this dependency intensifies rather than relaxes as AI-era concerns about credential authenticity grow (Alexander & Belloni, 2024). A dual-signal claim without verification infrastructure would not resolve the credibility gap documented for single-signal MOOCs — it would compound it.

The Southeast Asian evidence (Theme 5) sharpens this synthesis rather than complicating it. The one available regional data point on cultural or global-competency readiness — Thai engineers' near-absent ASEAN certification, with cultural awareness identified as the weakest component (Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak, 2018) — suggests the global-competency gap this paper addresses is not a theoretical abstraction imported from OECD policy discourse but a documented regional deficit. At the same time, the region's substantial heterogeneity (Tipayalai, 2020; Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023; Tee et al., 2024; Finlayson et al., 2025) and the socially constructed, nationality-inflected nature of cross-border skill recognition (Liu-Farrer et al., 2020) together establish that marketing strategy, however well designed, operates within recognition constraints it cannot fully engineer away.

2.7 Gaps in the Literature

The most significant gap is structural: no study reviewed here examines skills-based signaling and global-competency signaling as a combined, deliberately integrated credentialing and positioning strategy. Themes 1 and 2 are investigated as parallel, largely non-intersecting literatures — one rooted in labor economics and signaling theory, the other in comparative and international education policy — and no cited work brings them together as a single entrepreneurial value-proposition problem. This is the specific gap the present paper is positioned to fill.

A second gap is evidentiary and geographic. The strongest micro-credentialing outcome evidence available in the reviewed literature comes from East Africa (Maina et al., 2022) and a single Singaporean pilot (Lim et al., 2025), not from a Southeast Asian regional evidence base proper. Claims about ASEAN-specific credentialing effectiveness must therefore be treated as suggestive extrapolation rather than established regional finding — a limitation this paper carries forward explicitly rather than smooths over.

A third gap concerns credential branding: while adjacent competency-linked skills (communication, collaboration) carry demonstrated employer value, no study provides direct evidence of a hiring premium for a named, freestanding global-competency credential (Hruby & Canfield Rivera, 2026). The literature therefore does not license any claim that branding global competency as a distinct credential category would, by itself, generate market value — only that the underlying capabilities are valued when demonstrated.

A fourth and more conceptual gap is the unresolved tension between the OECD-anchored global-competency framework's documented Western-centrism (Guo et al., 2024; Andrews, 2021) and its application to Southeast Asian and other emerging-market learner populations. No source reviewed here reconciles this critique with practical platform positioning strategy in non-Western markets — a tension the present paper addresses rather than inherits uncritically.

2.8 Contribution of the Present Paper

This paper's contribution is theoretical integration rather than new empirical discovery. It is the first synthesis, within the literature examined, to connect skills-signaling theory, global-competency scholarship, platform business-model-innovation theory, and strategic marketing positioning into a single analytical frame capable of explaining what a credible dual-signal value proposition would require and where its limits lie. In doing so, it extends business-model-innovation and marketing-positioning scholarship — currently focused on single-signal credentialing — into an unexamined combined-signal space, while extending global-competency scholarship beyond its predominantly education-policy orientation into entrepreneurial strategy terms. Regionally, the paper offers a Southeast Asian-contextualized reading of this problem that neither treats global competency as a neutral import nor dismisses it as inapplicable, instead using the region's own sparse but suggestive evidence (Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak, 2018) to ground the argument. For practitioners, the contribution is a disciplined alternative to prestige-only positioning (Dennis et al., 2016): a framework for pursuing dual-signal differentiation that is explicit about the verification burden it carries, rather than one more promotional claim added to an already crowded field.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual and strategic analytical review design. It does not collect primary data, survey employers or learners, or generate a proprietary dataset. This design choice follows directly from the nature of the problem under examination: dual-signal credentialing — the deliberate combination of skills-based and global-competency signaling

within a single platform value proposition — is an emergent strategic phenomenon for which no consolidated body of primary evidence yet exists. Attempting to generate primary data at this stage would risk mistaking isolated, unrepresentative platform tactics for generalizable strategic patterns. What the problem requires first is theoretical integration across literatures that have so far developed independently, and a conceptual and strategic analytical review is the design suited to that task. Consistent with this design, Section 4 of the paper presents an analytical synthesis derived from the literature reviewed in Sections 2.1–2.5, not empirical findings derived from an original study.

Source orientation. The literature underlying this paper was retrieved using the Consensus academic search platform, with searches structured around five guide questions per literature theme, each phrased as a yes/no proposition suitable for evidence-based retrieval rather than as an open-ended topic search. This approach was chosen because it forces each search to test a specific, falsifiable claim — for example, whether employers value cross-cultural capability distinctly from technical skill — rather than returning a loosely related topical survey. Search queries were also deliberately framed at the intersection of the paper's constituent disciplines (entrepreneurship, strategic marketing, labor economics, comparative education policy) using discipline-appropriate academic phrasing, since single-discipline or generic search terms were found to return less precise and less current results. All sources retrieved were peer-reviewed journal articles; preprints were excluded from consideration, and retrieval was weighted toward literature published from approximately 2018 onward to ensure the review reflects the current, post-pandemic acceleration of digital credentialing and platform-based education rather than an earlier phase of MOOC development. This core literature base was subsequently supplemented by a small set of directly applicable studies drawn from the authors' maintained citation inventory of prior JESMI- and AFEP-adjacent research, selected because they provided Philippine and Southeast Asian empirical evidence on higher-education marketing, value-proposition design, and entrepreneurial skills that the Consensus-retrieved literature did not itself supply.

Inclusion logic. A source was included in the review only if it addressed one of the paper's five literature themes directly and could be traced to a verifiable digital object identifier. No citation appearing in this manuscript was fabricated, assumed, or reconstructed from partial memory of a source; every claim attributed to a source in this paper is drawn from the Consensus-retrieved documents provided during the literature-framework phase of this project, or from the supplementary citation-inventory sources introduced during the analytical synthesis phase. Where a source's evidence was described by Consensus's own synthesis as strong, moderate, or contested, that qualification has been preserved in the review rather than smoothed into uniform certainty, since overstating the strength of contested evidence would violate this paper's evidentiary standards.

Thematic grouping logic. The five themes were sequenced deliberately from foundational to applied. Themes 1 and 2 establish, respectively, that skills-based signaling and global-competency signaling are each independently real and academically grounded phenomena; Themes 3 and 4 establish the entrepreneurial and marketing mechanisms through which a platform could act on that dual signal; and Theme 5 grounds the argument in the Southeast Asian regional context that motivates the paper's practical relevance. This sequencing allows the synthesis in Section 2.6 to build cumulatively rather than treating each theme as a self-contained silo, and it mirrors the logical structure the paper's analytical synthesis and discussion sections follow.

Evaluative and analytical criteria. Sources were evaluated and synthesized against three criteria. First, relevance: whether the source spoke directly to signaling, credentialing, platform strategy, marketing positioning, or Southeast Asian workforce readiness, rather than to adjacent but distinct concerns such as pedagogy or curriculum design. Second, evidentiary weight: findings drawn from large-scale job-advertisement data or systematic reviews are treated as carrying more weight than single-context employer interviews or single-country pilot studies, and this distinction is made explicit in the review rather than left implicit. Third, geographic proximity to the paper's regional focus: where Southeast Asian evidence was unavailable or thin, geographically or structurally adjacent evidence (for example, East African micro-credentialing outcomes) was used but explicitly flagged as suggestive rather than regionally conclusive, a distinction carried forward into the paper's stated limitations and gaps.

Geographic and sectoral focus. The paper's geographic focus is Southeast Asia, examined comparatively rather than as a homogeneous bloc, consistent with the documented structural differences across Thai, Indonesian, Malaysian, and Cambodian labor-market conditions identified in the literature. Sectorally, the paper focuses on skills-driven massive online

course and micro-credentialing platforms as a class of entrepreneurial venture, rather than on any single named provider, institution, or brand.

Strategic and managerial framing. The paper is framed throughout as a contribution to entrepreneurial strategy and management innovation scholarship rather than to education policy or instructional-design scholarship. Analytical synthesis in Section 4 and the discussion in Section 5 are organized around business-model and marketing-positioning implications — value-proposition design, competitive differentiation, verification infrastructure — rather than around curriculum or learning-outcome design, which falls outside this paper's intended contribution.

Limitations of the approach. This design has three limitations that should be stated plainly rather than minimized. First, as a literature-based synthesis, the paper cannot test whether dual-signal positioning actually improves platform performance, learner outcomes, or employer perception in practice; its claims are theoretical and strategic, not causal or predictive. Second, the evidence base for Southeast Asia specifically is thinner than the evidence base for skills-signaling and global-competency constructs generally, requiring the paper to reason by adjacent-context inference in places, a limitation flagged explicitly in Section 2.7 and revisited in Section 5. Third, the review synthesizes literature current as of the search date; given how rapidly AI-related credentialing and verification concerns are evolving, some claims about credential trust and authenticity may require revisiting as that literature matures further.

4. Analytical Synthesis

4.1 The Dual-Signal Value Proposition as an Act of Business-Model Innovation

The literature reviewed in Sections 2.1 through 2.5 supports a specific analytical claim: a skills-driven platform that repositions its marketing around a combined skill-plus-global-competency signal is not merely refreshing its promotional copy but undertaking business-model innovation in the sense established by entrepreneurship scholarship — a systematic reconfiguration of value proposition, market segmentation, and profit potential (Wang, 2024). This distinction matters analytically because it changes what counts as evidence of success or failure. A promotional reframing can be evaluated by message recall or click-through; a business-model reconfiguration must be evaluated by whether the new value proposition is credible, verifiable, and defensible against competitors making similar claims. EdTech ventures that have already undergone this kind of reconfiguration structured it around three linked dimensions — value proposition, value delivery, and value capture (Renz & Hilbig, 2020) — and this three-part structure is a useful diagnostic for the present analysis. A platform can claim a dual signal (value proposition) without having built the assessment infrastructure to deliver it credibly (value delivery) or the pricing and partnership model to capture returns from it (value capture). Much of the risk this paper identifies lives in the gap between the first dimension and the other two.

A parallel domestic case illustrates the same dynamic outside the EdTech sector specifically. National Book Store's omnichannel transition under digital-platform competition shows a legacy Philippine retailer treating trust and authenticity — not simply digital presence — as the strategic asset requiring active construction, since counterfeit risk and platform-based price competition had eroded the value of visibility alone (Atento & Atento, 2026). The parallel to skills-driven MOOC platforms is direct: visibility and content availability are increasingly commoditized across providers, and the analytical implication is the same in both sectors — trust, not access, is the scarcer resource, and marketing strategy that treats trust as a byproduct of exposure rather than as something requiring deliberate construction is likely to underperform.

4.2 From Prestige Positioning to Trust-Centered and Value-Resonant Marketing

Section 2.4 established that a common failure mode in education marketing is convergence on similar, prestige-oriented positioning rather than differentiation on demonstrable outcomes (Dennis et al., 2016). Philippine higher-education marketing scholarship provides a more granular account of what an alternative to prestige positioning actually looks like in practice. The Consumer-Centered Marketing Framework, developed from thematic analysis of feeder-school community discourse in Laguna, identifies five value domains — belonging and safety, creativity and expression, academic excellence, leadership and civic responsibility, and integrity and partnership — that function as an implicit "value vocabulary" families apply when evaluating institutions, and argues that effective positioning depends on an institution's capacity to echo and extend these community-held values rather than issue generic quality claims (Atento & Espelita, 2025). This is analytically

significant for the present paper because it demonstrates, in a directly comparable Southeast Asian higher-education context, that the alternative to prestige marketing is not abandoning persuasion altogether but relocating it: from institutional self-description toward evidence the audience already trusts. Applied to dual-signal MOOC marketing, the implication is that "global competency" cannot be marketed as an institutional claim about the platform — it must be marketed as a demonstrated, third-party-legible outcome, in the same way the feeder-school framework treats community-sourced values as more persuasive than institutional messaging.

Empirical evidence from a Region IV-A private HEI reinforces this at the level of a measurable predictor rather than a qualitative theme. In a survey of 822 Senior High School learners, brand trust was the strongest predictor of enrollment intention, outperforming social media usage itself, while a substantial gap was observed between passive awareness of institutional digital channels (over 80%) and active advocacy such as sharing institutional content (23%) (Espelita, Atento, & Atento, 2026). Read alongside the global literature on credential signaling strength (Narayanaswamy et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2023), this local finding sharpens the paper's argument considerably: awareness of a platform's dual-signal claim is not the binding constraint on its marketing effectiveness — trust in the claim is. A skills-driven MOOC platform could achieve high visibility for its global-competency positioning and still fail to convert that visibility into enrollment or employer recognition if the underlying trust infrastructure is absent, exactly as the awareness-advocacy gap documents for a conventional HEI in the same regional context.

4.3 Verification Infrastructure as the Binding Constraint on Dual-Signal Credibility

The literature converges on a specific mechanism that determines whether any credential signal — single or dual — succeeds or fails as a market differentiator: credibility, standardization, and issuer trust (Varadarajan et al., 2023; Miller & De St Jorre, 2022). This mechanism becomes more, not less, demanding when a platform claims two signals simultaneously. A platform asserting only a skills claim must demonstrate that the skill was actually acquired; a platform asserting skills plus global competency must demonstrate both, and must further demonstrate that the two were not conflated or diluted in the process of claiming both. The literature on AI-era credential authenticity concerns (Alexander & Belloni, 2024) suggests this verification burden is intensifying rather than easing, which means a dual-signal strategy pursued without a corresponding investment in verification infrastructure does not merely fail to add value — it actively imports the credibility risk documented for single-signal MOOCs into a second, less mature claim.

Blue Ocean Strategy's value-innovation framework, developed and applied to a Philippine family-owned SME's repositioning from commodity retail toward a differentiated "solutions hub" model, offers a useful structural tool for reasoning about this trade-off analytically. Using the Eliminate–Reduce–Raise–Create grid alongside a strategy canvas benchmarking value factors against competitors, the analysis showed that credible differentiation requires the enterprise to consciously eliminate or reduce factors the industry over-invests in while raising and creating factors competitors neglect, rather than simply adding new claims on top of an unchanged offering (Teodosio et al., 2025). Applied here, the ERRC logic clarifies what a credible dual-signal repositioning must actually do: platforms should reduce undifferentiated prestige-style claims (which the industry already over-supplies, per Dennis et al., 2016), and raise and create verification-backed evidence of both skill mastery and competency demonstration — employer-facing proof mechanisms, third-party assessment, portfolio-based evidence — rather than simply layering a new marketing claim onto an unchanged value-delivery architecture. A platform that adds a "globally competent" tagline without a corresponding Create-level investment in verification is, in Blue Ocean terms, still competing in the red ocean of undifferentiated credential marketing; it has changed its language, not its value curve.

4.4 Southeast Asian and Philippine Boundary Conditions

The regional literature reviewed in Section 2.5 establishes that cross-border workforce readiness is a genuine strategic concern in Southeast Asia, but one where implementation consistently lags policy ambition — fewer than one percent of Thai engineers hold the certification required for cross-border registration, with cultural readiness identified as the weakest component (Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak, 2018). This finding is the closest available regional evidence that the global-competency gap this paper addresses is a documented deficit rather than an imported policy abstraction, and it strengthens rather than merely illustrates the paper's central claim. At the same time, the Philippine higher-education literature surveyed here adds an important qualifying pattern that the ASEAN-level evidence alone does not surface: even within a single

country, MOOCs and advanced digital-education models remain sparsely adopted and largely individual-driven rather than institutionalized, and sustainability- and competency-related dimensions of digital curricula are unevenly represented compared to more conventional employability-linked goals (Atento, 2025). This suggests that the infrastructure gap for dual-signal credentialing in the Philippine context is not confined to assessment and verification, as Section 4.3 emphasizes globally, but extends further back to the institutionalization of skills- and competency-oriented digital learning itself. A platform marketing dual-signal credentials into this environment is therefore not simply competing against other providers' claims; it is partly building the market's baseline expectation of what a credible digital credential looks like.

Entrepreneurship-education evidence from a Manila state university adds a further, more specific boundary condition. Among entrepreneurship students, marketing skills proficiency was rated moderately developed but consistently trailed management skills, and financial management skills lagged furthest behind, with funding support identified as the weakest component of the surrounding entrepreneurial ecosystem (Delmonte & Mendoza, 2026). Read as a proxy for the broader Philippine entrepreneurial talent pipeline that skills-driven platforms both serve and draw upon, this finding introduces a caution the paper's discussion section carries forward: marketing-skills development itself, not only the "global competency" construct examined in Section 2.2, may be an underdeveloped capability among the very population a Philippine-oriented platform seeks to certify as globally competent, and a dual-signal strategy premised on employer-recognized marketing competence should not assume that competence is already evenly distributed.

4.5 Synthesis: What Credible Dual-Signal Positioning Requires

Integrating these strands yields a structural pattern rather than a checklist. First, the dual signal must be treated as a business-model commitment spanning value proposition, delivery, and capture (Renz & Hilbig, 2020), not a marketing-layer addition — the National Book Store case shows what happens when trust is assumed rather than actively built into the model (Atento & Atento, 2026). Second, the marketing register best suited to this commitment is trust-centered and evidence-resonant rather than prestige-oriented, following both the general education-marketing literature (Dennis et al., 2016) and the Philippine-specific evidence that trust, not visibility, predicts enrollment behavior (Espelita, Atento, & Atento, 2026) and that community-sourced value signals outperform institutional self-description (Atento & Espelita, 2025). Third, the credibility of the claim rests on verification infrastructure whose absence is analytically equivalent to red-ocean competition under a changed vocabulary (Teodosio et al., 2025), a burden that compounds across two signals rather than one (Alexander & Belloni, 2024). Fourth, in Southeast Asian and specifically Philippine contexts, this strategy operates against a backdrop of thin institutionalization of digital, competency-oriented learning (Atento, 2025) and an entrepreneurial talent pipeline in which marketing competence itself is still developing (Delmonte & Mendoza, 2026) — conditions that shape not just how the dual signal should be marketed, but how much foundational market-building work precedes any marketing effort at all. These four elements form the analytical basis for the strategic and managerial implications developed in the discussion that follows.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Theoretical Implications for Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship

The preceding synthesis carries a theoretical implication that extends beyond the specific case of skills-driven MOOC platforms: it suggests that credential-signal design is itself a legitimate object of business-model innovation theory, not merely an output of marketing execution downstream of a fixed product. Existing business-model-innovation scholarship treats value-proposition redesign as a general mechanism of competitive adaptation (Wang, 2024; Jia et al., 2023) but has not, within the literature reviewed here, examined signal composition — the deliberate combination of two previously separate signaling regimes — as a distinct innovation type. This paper's synthesis suggests that composite signaling deserves recognition as its own category within business-model-innovation theory, characterized by a specific risk profile: the credibility burden does not average across the component signals, it compounds, because failure to substantiate either component undermines confidence in both. This has a natural extension to entrepreneurship theory more broadly. Where signaling theory traditionally treats the credential as a single instrument reducing one dimension of information asymmetry, this paper's synthesis implies that entrepreneurial ventures increasingly compete by bundling multiple, previously distinct

instruments — and that the strategic skill lies less in acquiring the underlying capability than in architecting verification systems robust enough to carry a compound claim.

5.2 Relevance for Southeast Asian and Philippine Business Contexts

For Southeast Asian markets specifically, the discussion in Section 4.4 points toward a conclusion with real strategic weight: the region's low certification rates for cross-border readiness (Kraisuth & Panjakajornsak, 2018) and the Philippine evidence of sparse, individually-driven rather than institutionalized digital-competency learning (Atento, 2025) together suggest that platforms operating here face a market-building task before they face a market-capturing task. This reframes what "competitive advantage" should mean for a first-moving platform in this space. In markets where the baseline credibility of any digital, competency-oriented credential is still being established, an early entrant's most valuable strategic asset may not be its specific value proposition but its role in shaping employer and learner expectations of what a credible dual-signal credential looks like at all — a market-infrastructure advantage rather than a product-differentiation advantage. This is consistent with, but analytically distinct from, the standard first-mover-advantage literature: the advantage being built is trust in a category, not preference for a brand. The regional heterogeneity documented throughout Section 2.5 — Thailand's mismatch between desired and available skilled labor (Tipayalai, 2020), Indonesia's youth-unemployment pressure (Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023), Malaysia's specific digital-skill gaps (Tee et al., 2024), Cambodia's language-based exclusion from cross-border work (Finlayson et al., 2025) — further implies that this market-building task cannot be executed uniformly across the region; category-credibility for a dual-signal credential would need to be established separately in each national labor-market context, since the specific readiness gap the credential is meant to close differs by country.

5.3 Practical Meaning for Platform Strategists and Marketers

For practitioners, the paper's synthesis yields a specific and actionable reframing: dual-signal marketing should not be conceived, planned, or resourced as a communications initiative but as a joint product-and-marketing investment, with the marketing function's primary job being to make verification visible rather than to make claims persuasive. The Philippine evidence that brand trust outpredicts channel usage in enrollment decisions (Espelita, Atento, & Atento, 2026), and that community-sourced value signals outperform institutional self-description (Atento & Espelita, 2025), together imply a concrete practitioner heuristic: resources currently allocated to expanding message reach would, on this evidence, be better allocated to building externally legible proof — employer partnerships, third-party assessment integration, alumni or employer testimony — before expanding audience size. The Blue Ocean value-innovation lens (Teodosio et al., 2025) offers a second practical heuristic worth stating plainly: platform strategists evaluating a dual-signal repositioning should be able to identify what they are eliminating or reducing (typically, generic prestige-style claims) as clearly as what they are raising or creating (typically, verification infrastructure); a repositioning that only adds claims without subtracting anything from the existing marketing architecture has not actually changed its competitive position, regardless of how the new language reads.

5.4 Boundaries of the Analysis

Several limits on what this synthesis can support should be stated without hedging. First, and most fundamentally, this paper cannot demonstrate that dual-signal marketing increases enrollment, employer recognition, or graduate employability outcomes; no primary or platform-performance data was collected, and none of the secondary sources synthesized here tested a dual-signal intervention directly — the closest available evidence (Espelita, Atento, & Atento, 2026) concerns a single signal (brand trust) in a single-signal (traditional-degree) HEI context, and its extension to a dual-signal MOOC context here is an analytical inference, not an empirical finding. Second, the Southeast Asian evidence base for competency-based credentialing outcomes specifically remains thin and geographically uneven, drawing partly on adjacent contexts such as East Africa (Maina et al., 2022) rather than the region itself, which means the paper's regional claims should be read as informed extrapolation rather than established regional fact. Third, this paper does not — and by design cannot — resolve the documented Western-centrism embedded in OECD-anchored global-competency frameworks (Guo et al., 2024; Andrews, 2021); it treats this critique as an active constraint on how such frameworks should be marketed in Southeast Asian contexts, not as a problem this synthesis has solved. Finally, cross-border skill recognition remains, per the literature, a socially constructed process shaped by nationality and other ascriptive factors independent of credential content (Liu-

Farrer et al., 2020); no marketing or verification strategy examined in this paper can fully overcome that structural constraint, and the paper's recommendations should be read as improving the credibility of a signal within an imperfect recognition environment, not as a solution to that environment itself.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper set out to address a strategic problem that has, until now, sat at the seam of two literatures that rarely speak to one another: how skills-driven online learning platforms should design and market a value proposition that credibly signals both technical skill and global competency, in a labor market where neither signal alone has proven sufficient to displace traditional credentials. The synthesis developed here supports a central conclusion — that dual-signal positioning is best understood, and best pursued, as an act of business-model innovation rather than a promotional adjustment. Platforms that treat it as the latter risk reproducing, at greater cost and with compounded credibility exposure, the same prestige-oriented positioning failure already well documented in conventional education marketing.

Three insights carry the most weight from this analysis. First, both component signals — skills-based credentialing and global-competency demonstration — are academically grounded and employer-recognized in isolation, but each functions today as a supplement to the degree rather than a replacement for it; a combined signal represents a genuinely unexplored strategic space precisely because neither signal alone has closed that gap. Second, the credibility of any such signal, and doubly so a compound one, rests on verification infrastructure rather than on message reach or claim confidence; the regional and Philippine evidence reviewed here indicates that trust, not visibility, is the binding constraint on conversion, and that community-sourced or third-party-legible proof consistently outperforms institutional self-description. Third, in Southeast Asian and Philippine contexts specifically, platforms pursuing this strategy face a market-building task that precedes market capture — the baseline institutionalization of competency-oriented digital learning remains thin, and cross-border credential recognition remains shaped by structural and social factors that marketing strategy alone cannot resolve.

These conclusions should not be overstated. This paper has not tested whether dual-signal marketing improves enrollment, employer recognition, or graduate outcomes, and nothing in the literature synthesized here licenses a claim that it does; what has been established is a theoretically coherent account of what credible dual-signal positioning would require and where its risks concentrate, derived from literatures that have so far developed independently of one another.

For platform strategists, the paper's clearest practical recommendation is sequencing: verification infrastructure — employer partnerships, third-party assessment, portfolio-based or performance-based evidence — should precede or accompany any expansion of dual-signal messaging, not follow it. A marketing claim that outpaces its supporting infrastructure imports the credibility risk already documented for single-signal MOOC credentials into a second, less mature claim, compounding rather than diversifying that risk. Strategists should also treat the Blue Ocean logic surfaced in this synthesis as a practical discipline: a credible repositioning should be able to name what it is eliminating or reducing (generic prestige-style claims chief among them) as clearly as what it is raising or creating, since claims layered onto an unchanged value-delivery architecture do not constitute genuine differentiation.

For institutional and policy stakeholders in Southeast Asia, the recommendation is different in kind. Given the region's documented gap between cross-border credentialing policy and actual certification uptake, and the Philippine-specific evidence of sparse institutionalization of competency-oriented digital learning, the more consequential intervention may lie upstream of any individual platform's marketing strategy — in building the shared assessment and recognition infrastructure that would allow any credible dual-signal credential, regardless of provider, to be trusted across borders. Platforms and policymakers have, on this reading, a shared interest that runs counter to pure competitive positioning: category credibility benefits every credible provider, while its absence constrains all of them equally.

For future research, this paper's most direct extension would be empirical: testing whether learners or employers who encounter a genuinely verified dual-signal credential respond differently than they do to single-signal or unverified claims, ideally within a Southeast Asian sample where the regional evidence base remains thinnest. A second extension worth pursuing is the Western-centrism critique of dominant global-competency frameworks identified but not resolved here; a competency construct built for Southeast Asian labor-market realities, rather than adapted from an OECD framework, may prove both more credible to regional employers and more marketable on its own terms.

The broader claim this paper makes is a modest but, it argues, an overdue one: as the degree's signaling monopoly continues to erode, the platforms best positioned to compete will not be those that claim the most, but those that can verify the most — and marketing strategy in this sector is, in the end, a question of what an institution is willing and able to prove, not merely what it is willing to say.

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