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Psychology into  
Consumer Research**

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## The Journey of Archetypes from Psychology into Consumer Research

Saloni Gandhi\* and Mala Srivastav\*\*

### Abstract:

In an era of product clutter, marketers are trying to find out ways to differentiate their offerings from the rest. Technological advantage is increasingly temporary and hence a key way to capture the consumer's attention is by creating an emotional connection with them and building strong brands. The consumer is at their most loyal when they buy the story of the brand and what better story to tell them than ones that they are already familiar with and have a strong emotional connect with.

Based on this premise, marketers today are revisiting the concept of archetypes, which was popularized by Carl G. Jung. The concept however, existed much before his time by his own admission.

The current paper tries to create a trail that maps the journey of archetypes as a concept with its origin in psychology, and how the concept has now started being used as a marketing theory. Major complementing theories are presented and interesting research findings using archetypes in marketing are discussed.

It has been studied and found that archetypes when used as a brand building tool has a strong direct as well as indirect effect on the consumers conscious as well as unconscious mind thus producing a strong impact. Past research as well as practical industry applications of the same have been presented.

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Although archetypes as a brand building tool is being increasingly studied and applied, a huge gap exists especially with respect to quantitative research. Archetype based research in developing markets like India are even fewer and future researchers might use this study as a crash course and proceed in filling this gap.

**Keywords:**

Archetypes, Advertising, Consumer Psychology, Brand Management, Marketing

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## **The Origin of Archetypes as a Psychology Concept**

Carl Jung proposed that there are unmistakable parallels in the themes that thread through the mythologies of otherwise diverse cultures (Lawson, 2008).

A common theme suggests a common source and it is just such a source that Jung supplies through the concept of collective unconscious (Lawson, 2008). The collective unconscious involves content and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals (Jung, 1965). The collective unconscious can be characterized as a “psychic inheritance” or the kind of knowledge with which all human beings are born (Klein, et al., 2006).

### **Archetypes Defined**

The content of the collective unconscious involves mythical motifs known as archetypes. Archetypes are timeless forms that find psychic expression in images. They are components of the collective unconscious -- deeply embedded personality patterns that resonate within us and serve to organize and give direction to human thought and action (Jung, 1965). Moore (c.f. Els, 2004) defined archetypes as instinctual patterns and energy configurations probably inherited genetically from the generations of our species. Archetypes have been compared to a blueprint or a genetic code, which presents predetermined plans for the structure, function and development of each aspect of human life (Els, 2004). Jung said that the archetypes are present in the germplasm, that is, genes.

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## Origin of Archetypes

The term archetype, though popularized by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1919) is by his own confession in no means his own invention. Compare the Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin's concept of noosphere which composed of particles of the human consciousness formed by the inner experiences of mankind; or Adolf Bastian's theory of ethnic *Elementargedane*, "Elementary ideas" wherein he spoke of the psychic unity of mankind (Geldem, 1964) or the reference made as early as Philo Judaeus, with reference to the Imago Dei (God Image) (Read, et al., 1953). Irenaeus once said "The creator of the world did not fashion these things directly from himself but copied them from the archetypes outside himself" (Read, et al., 1953). Franz Boas spoke about certain patterns of associated ideas that are recognized in all types of culture (Campbell, 2008). Jung admitted in borrowing his term archetype from classic sources including Cicero Pliny, the Corpus Hermeticum, and St. Augustine (Campbell, 2008).

In *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975) Hillman sketches a brief lineage of archetypal psychology; "By calling upon Jung to begin with, I am partly acknowledging the fundamental debt that archetypal psychology owes him. He is the immediate ancestor in a long line that stretches back through Freud, Dilthey, Coleridge, Schelling, Vico, Ficino, Plotinus, and Plato to Heraclitus - and with even more branches yet to be traced" (p. xvii)."

Sigmund Freud, the mentor of Carl Jung, recognized the presence of symbolism in the dreams from the very beginning of his career. He spoke about the symbols as a characteristic of

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unconscious ideation. Symbols were present to a more complete extent in folklore and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, than in dreams (Strachey, 2010).

### **Emergence of Freudians and Jungians**

“Jung had never been entirely sold on Freud’s theory” (Boeree, 1997). Freud focused exclusively on the personal unconscious, although he was aware of its archaic and mythological thought forms (Read, et al., 1953). Freud’s 1933 therapy objective was to render the personal unconscious conscious. According to Freud, repressed personal experiences are fueled by primitive, pleasure-seeking and destructive emotions that must be controlled (Enns, 1994). Freud was convinced that his theory about the relevance of unconscious instincts would one day be confirmed by modern neurological techniques of brain imaging (Klein, et al., 2006). Freud stresses in his writings the difficulties of the first half of the human cycle of life- those of our infancy and adolescence, when our sun is mounting toward its zenith while C.G. Jung on the other hand has emphasized the crisis of the second portion- when in order to advance, the shining sphere must submit to descend and disappear into the night womb of the grave (Campbell, 2008).

Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myths and fairytales (e.g. Coupe, 1997; Ulanov and Ulanov, 2007). The tradition of the “subjectively known forms” (Sanskrit: *antarjneya-rupa*) is, in fact, coextensive with the tradition of myth, and is the key to the understanding and the use of mythological images (Campbell, 2008).

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Plato, Confucius, the Buddha, Goethe, and others speak of the eternal values that have to do with the centering of our lives (Campbell, 2008). Campbell, inspired by the works of Freud, Jung and many other predecessors, used their teachings to explain various myths. Campbell spoke of myths as clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life. He spoke of how the unstated mythology helps us by showing the way to deal with people, reach our unconsciousness, and attain wholeness. He also spoke of the universal themes that existed in these myths and how they apply differently in different cultures (Campbell & Moyers, 2011).

James Hillman, an American psychologist is a complex figure in the post-Jungian world. He was instrumental in creating a new vision of psychology, one in which psychology becomes a “supreme discipline” concerned not only with the psyche of humanity but the “soul” which is the heart of the world (Drob, 1999). Hillman emerged as the leading spokesperson and polemicist of a self-consciously styled ‘post-Jungian’ movement known as ‘archetypal psychology’ (Hillman 1972, 1975a, 1975b, 1979, 1983a, 1983b). He went on to revise the Jungian thought to fit in with the tastes and fashions of postmodern intellectual tradition. In Hillman’s post-Jungian world, diversity replaced unity, phenomenology replaced metaphysics, imagination replaced the unconscious, and uncertainty and openness (‘not knowing’ or *via negativa*) replaced knowing. However, Hillman in 1989, was soon reaching out again for Plato and Jung again. Suddenly, archetypes were back, further highlighting the importance of and the working of the collective unconscious (Tacey, 1998).

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### **Journey from the conscious to the unconscious**

Campbell talks about Jung's concept of self and how the self is made up of our ego (consciousness), personal unconscious and its complexes and the collective unconscious and its archetypes and writes about the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero; separation—initiation—return and connects it to the journey of an individual from their conscious to their unconscious to attain elixir, aka, wholeness. Campbell talks about how an adventure can begin with a blunder, which according to Freud is a result of suppressed desires and conflicts. The blunder may show the opening to the person's destiny. Once the blunder happens he or she is guided by some benign power for adventure. The unconscious is already familiar with certain figures, symbols, images that appear as guides but they are unknown to our conscious personality.

The hero (ego) returns to his familiar setting due to the consciousness pulling him back but finds it unfruitful and hears the call for adventure again each time certain images are seen and the person transports from his usual social space to a zone unknown. These images are not archetypes. Archetypes provide a framework for such images to be formed. More like the software of the mind (Thompson, 2004). Whenever one views an archetypal image in the outside world, he or she revisits his or her unconscious mind, which has proved to be the basis for one's actions, inspirations and revelations. Moore (2004) argued that archetypes provide the very foundations of our behaviour- our thinking, our feeling, and our characteristic human reactions (c.f. Els, 2004).

The main archetypes uncovered by Jung were the ego, the shadow, anima/animus and the persona or self. However, Jung mentioned that there are as many archetypes present as the

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number of experiences and situations one faces in life (Lawson, 2008). Contemporary archetypal scholars have pointed out many more archetypes.

### **Contemporary Theorists on Archetypes**

Klapp (1962) focuses on the archetypes of heroes, villains, and fools and how they represent a specific patterned and stylized form of behaviour (c.f. Coleman, 1984).

Inspired by the works of Carl Jung, James Hillman and Joseph Campbell; a contemporary scholar, Carol Pearson (1991; 1997) identified twelve archetypes: The innocent, orphan, warrior, caregiver, seeker, destroyer, lover, creator, ruler, magician, sage, and jester, as the potential inner psychic guides. Collingwood (1997) defines archetypes as templates that a culture creates in order to shape the world into a recognizable and meaningful reality (Patton, &Doniger, 1996). He said that it is archetypes that ring out the music and tune into the flow of life, giving us inspiration and our passion, connecting us to the life force which moves us. Collingwood shared a similar idea to Pearson that opposite archetypal forces strive toward balance. He speaks of the archetypes Magician, Mother Earth, Jester and Enchantress as the primary group which connects people to their mind, body, spirit and soul and helps them to begin their journey during which eight more archetypes come alive and help the person become the best that they can be (c.f. Els, 2004).

Welch's (2000) work is similar to Pearson's in identifying a few archetypes such as the child, anima and animus (masculine and feminine archetypes), the artist, communicator, healer, hero/heroine and warrior lover and community, magician, mystic, ruler (King/queen), Teacher, as the provider of a basic understanding that facilitate the process of personal growth and

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spiritual development. Moore (2004) spoke about the four eternal archetypes of the king/queen, warrior, magician and lover as the four developmental lines in the journey to the centre.

### **Commonalities in Research**

Studying the work done on archetypes by various researchers, many commonalities can be seen in the categorization of archetypes. Much similarity can be found in the contemporary works by Pearson and the development stages of Erikson (1950), and also the theories of Rollo May.

Pearson's (1991) archetypal pairings that push to attain a balance are similar to May's who points out that when the balance among daimons is disrupted, the daimon could possess one and should be considered "evil" (May, 1968). May (1968), inspired by Freud, focused on the basic motivational construct, which he termed "the daimonic". He spoke of the daimonic as the entire system of motives, different for each individual, and composed of a collection of specific motives called the daimons. He said that each person has his own personal daimonic system. This idea corresponded to Jung's idea of an activated archetype system that possesses the consciousness.

Erikson's first four stages focus on the childhood years, which are analogous to Pearson's Innocent/Orphan duality. The final four stages of Erikson's model (adolescence; adulthood; adult years; and old age) are analogous to Pearson's Seeker; Lover; Caregiver, ruler and magician; and Sage and Jester respectively.

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## Archetypes Foray into Marketing

In 1983, Paul Hawken identified a big change in the relative importance of product “mass” versus product “meaning” that required a corresponding shift in their business model (Hawken, 1983). Wall Street, soon after, made a comparable discovery, whereupon whole corporations were acquired simply to obtain their powerhouse brands— even though other brands offered virtually identical products.

Given the prevalence of product and advertising clutter, it has become more and more difficult to differentiate one offering from another. “Consumers’ most potent needs are often emotional rather than functional. It is the intangible that provides differentiation in today’s world with an overload of similar utility products. Hence brands are built” (Jon- Howard Spink 2002).

Brands are metamorphic stories that connect with something very deep -- a fundamental human appreciation of mythology (Bedbury, 1997). They are the intangible yet visceral impact of a person's subjective experience with the product -- the personal memories and cultural associations that orbit around it (Hawley, 2000). Companies that adopt this sensibility invoke something very powerful. These stories help create meaning for the brand and give it an appealing identity and personality.

Accordingly, brands have helped create myths about their creation and heritage (e.g., Kniazeva and Belk 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Lloyd and Woodside 2013; Thompson 2004). They have created or enlisted anthropomorphic characters as bearers of these myths (e.g., Aggarwal and McGill 2007; Belk forthcoming; Brown 2010, 2011; Brown and Posonby-McCabe forthcoming; Delbaere, McQuarrie, and Phillips 2011; Stern 1988).

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Walle (1984) using non-quantitative technique explored the impact of universal innate human thought upon consumer behaviour. Although serious methodological problems exist in Jungian analysis, techniques that explore the impact of universal innate human thought upon consumer behaviour was said to be useful.

John Berger (1972) in his book *Ways of Seeing*, speaks of an image as something that could outlast what it represented, and how it represents how something or somebody had once looked and how the subject had once be seen by other people. If the new language of images were used differently, it would through its use confer a new kind of power. It would define one's experiences more precisely.

Stern (1990) explains how superimposing a surface story on a positively valued core story encourages consumers to draw on feelings relating to the core and transfer them to the present experience. This is why many successful brands such as Nike, Coke, McDonalds, Harley Davidson, Victoria's Secret, Disney to name a few, advertise by superimposing a surface story on a core story leading to instant positive feelings and stronger responses.

Attempts to develop a conceptual understanding of brand archetypes, its role and relevance as a strategic tool in building powerful brand was made by Siraj and Kumari (2011).The research emphasized that to provide a characteristic, consequential and emotionally persuasive dimension and meaning to a brand, archotyping can act as a potent tool to move beyond the conscious and rational into the subconscious, thereby providing a missing link between the brand and the consumer.

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Studies have also stressed on the importance of a match between the archetypal representation of the brand created and the consumer's expectations of a brand icon. Tsai (2006) finds that the total experience is organized and integrated by the consumer imaginations to create an archetypal representation of the brand.

### **Uncovering the Brand Stories**

Researchers are applying various qualitative tools to uncover the underlying stories that the brands tell, reflecting one or more archetype. By creating Visual Narrative Art (VNA) of stories that consumers and brands tell helped Megeghee and Woodside (2010) bring to surface the unconscious thinking of the protagonist and other actors in the story as well as the storyteller. Megeghee and Spake (2012) also used the VNA related to luxury brands to attain deepening understanding of consumer reports of their enactments of brand myths. However, limitations to creating VNA as a research method is that such creations usually require more than one session (few days to a week) to create a complete VNA representation and there are issues of validity, reliability and generalizability that are relevant for research using VNA.

Grutzner (2011) through a series of focus group discussions involving consumers associated a brand with an archetypal image or stories. He also found that these stories bring understanding and meaning to consumers' lives and developed a Brand Strategy Iceberg based on the idea that the consumer never sees a large part of the brand.

Another conceptual framework is that developed by Tsai (2006). Tsai (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with customers of Nike Air Jordan brand and employed a conceptual framework based on the imagination theory proposed by Jung and later developed by Jungian

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school. A brand archetype-icon transformation model emerged from the analysis, which included the mediated experience and lived experience of the brand archetype.

Rapeille (2007) uses about 30 volunteers for a three-hour session divided into three one-hour periods designed to appeal to each part of the brain—from reason (the cortex), through emotion (the limbic), and finally to the primal core (reptilian). He ignores the responses of the first two sessions. It's during the third session, when people relate their first impressions to a given topic, that he learns the "code".

Most work on brand and archetypes has been carried out using qualitative tools. An exception would be Mark and Pearson along with Young & Rubicam who conducted an objective, quantitative test to determine the extent to which consumers' perceptions of brands are aligned with archetypal identity. Analysis showed that brands associated with archetypal identities positively and profoundly influences the real asset valuation of their company's capital.

The Young & Rubicam analysis explored changes in EVA (Economic Value Added) and MVA (Market Value Added) (MVA) from 1993 to 1999 for a set of 50 well-known and highly regarded brands. The analysis showed that the MVA of those brands strongly aligned with a single archetype rose by 97% more than the MVA of confused brands. Also, over the six-year period under study, the EVA of strongly aligned brands grew at a rate 66% greater than that of the EVA of weakly aligned brands.

Mark and Pearson (2001) researched archetypes in brands and developed a system that offers a structure for describing the archetypes that have already provided powerful identities for numerous winning brands.

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However, contradicting the claim of a single brand personality is another view that does not support the notion of one brand/one personality. In depth interviews have led to findings that reveal multiple brand personalities peacefully cohabiting in the same brand as seen by different consumers, despite marketer attempts to create more singular brand personalities (Kniazeva& Belk, 2010). This too needs further attention and should be further studied.

### **Archetypal Advertising**

Advertising practitioners and theorists have been particularly attuned to the importance of myth making in constructing competitively advantageous brand images (Randazzo 1993; Johar, Holbrook. and Stern 2001; Mark and Pearson 2001; Holt 2003). Advertising always has used archetypal imagery to market products. Understanding and leveraging archetypal meaning, which was once said to be an interesting concept to effective marketing, is now a prerequisite.

Most qualitative studies pertaining to archetypes have mainly focused on identifying the presence of archetypes in advertising messages and have managed digging deeper into the advertising content to understand that the stories aren't purely commercial but can be interpreted with other meanings.

Stern (1995) demonstrated that four universal mythic plots- tragedy, irony, comedy, romance- structure advertisements for holiday products and stories consumers tell about their thanksgiving festivities.

Hirschman (2000) through a series of in-depth interviews found that consumers readily draw archetypal icons from mass media texts such as motion pictures and television shows.

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Thompson (2004) builds a case that mythic constructions of the nature-technology relationships have been incorporated into distinctive marketplace mythology tailored to specific competitive conditions and a collective viewpoint shared by its core consumer segment.

Garcia et al (2011), following a hermeneutic model of analysis studied the references contained in modern commercials that come from classical mythological Greek culture. Goodman et al (2002) conducted a qualitative content analysis and semiological analysis of the hero archetypes in ads featuring Olympic athletes and illustrated how advertisers deployed the gendered concept of heroism. Mark and Pearson, 2001 researched archetypes in ads and brands and developed a system that offers a structure for describing the archetypes that have already provided powerful identities for numerous winning brands. The above emphasizes the presence of archetypes in stories that are told and received.

Fewer studies have gone beyond the logic of structural mapping; i.e. demonstrating that a given marketing communication manifests a particular archetype or mythic form.

### **Decoding the Effect of Archetypes**

Maso-Fleischman (1997) through ethnographic interviews with Spanish consumers found that when faced with an archetypal image, one responds emotionally. Also, archetypal images were found to be motivating and invited viewers to act. Archetypal images brought to consciousness dormant yearnings and put viewers in touch with their culture (Maso-Fleischman, 1997; Hieschman, 2000).

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Some conceptual understanding has been attained when it comes to understanding the effect of archetypes in marketing communication. The use of animal symbolism in ads, which serves to activate archetypal associations automatically in consumers' minds, has contributed to brand engagement and brand equity (Llyod and Woodside, 2013).

Much has been done lately involving anthropomorphic brand representations. Empirical research shows that anthropomorphized brands may influence consumer behaviour outside the brand context, affecting decisions about fitness, risk taking, and performance on an examination (Aggarwal&Mcgill, 2011). Also, along with anthropomorphizing brands, consumers also objectify themselves and look at themselves as brands (Belk, 2014).

Brands such as Cartier, Coca-cola, PepsiCo Mountain Dew, Guinness, Burger King, and Nestle have successfully made use of animal symbolism as a tool to activate archetypal association in the consumers mind.

Randazzo (2006) claimed that the mytho-symbolic worlds created through advertising work to give brands their unique identity and personality. Brands such as McDonald's, Marlboro and Subaru, have used the power of archetypal storytelling and created an emotional connection with the consumer. This has helped the consumer get psychologically comfortable with the brand.

Though the above is a good step towards understanding the presence and effect of archetypes in advertising, empirical studies validating the same are essential and the current focus of researchers.

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Balaban (2010) used content analysis to analyze the audio-visual ads and empirically identified the characteristic elements of the hero myth.

The effect of archetypal ads on the conscious assessment of commercials, brands, and movies and on the unconscious approach reactions is empirically tested by Klein et al.(2006). It was found that fairy tale archetypes have a positive impact on consumer arousal reactions and conscious evaluations of commercials and movies. Also, archetypal ads led to higher total arousal amplitude than informational spot of the same brand.

The relationship of various archetypal media on affective reactions and character preferences was proven to be significant in the study by Faber & Mayer (2009).

Kalnova (2011) studied the effects of archetypes in print ads and developed an ad response framework used by consumers in processing such ads. The symbolic content activated the archetypal structures which emerged as two factors, event and spatial each following its own path of persuasion.

Visual personification—pictures in an ad that metaphorically represent a product as engaged in some kind of human behaviour—can trigger anthropomorphism. Such personification, when embedded in an ad, appears to lead to more positive emotions, more positive attributions of brand personality, and greater brand liking (Delbaere, McQuarrie& Philips, 2011). The researchers mention that it is likely that personification will be effective in some but not all situations. These situations need to be further explored.

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## **The Moderators of the Effect of Archetypes**

Research has found that individual differences influence the effect of archetypes. Different personality types vary in degree to which they are attracted by advertising, movies and other cultural media which use typical archetypes (Klein et al, 2006; Faber & Mayer, 2009).

Also, self-esteem and self-concept clarity moderate the effect of archetypes on consumer response (Klein et al, 2006).

No study as yet has combined a qualitative and quantitative approach to attain a deeper and clearer understanding of the effect of archetypes.

Although archetypes are universal, the images and representations may be different in different cultures. Though archetype is a universal concept, the neo-archetypal theory, views archetypes generally as learned conceptualizations as opposed to being predisposed through evolutionary history. Today, most mental models, such as personality prototypes and scripts, are viewed as being acquired through learning (e.g., Anderson, 1980; Mayer & Bower, 1986; Schank & Abelson, 1977), thus suggesting that the frequency with which we employ such models may speak to their cultural importance (Faber & Mayer, 2009). The level of sophistication of the culture, however, affects the interpretation of the archetypal image/story (Mark, Pearson & Pearson, 2001). Hence culture dependent studies to understand the understanding, interpretation and effect of archetypes becomes essential.

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## **Road Ahead**

Marketing agencies in India have leveraged archetypes as an effective marketing tool to build strong brands such as Reliance, Tata, Kingfisher, Thums Up, Amul, Royal Enfield, Micromax, Airtel, Raymonds to name a few. However, research empirically studying the use and effect of archetypes in marketing communication in the Indian context is limited.

Although concepts like brand archotyping and cult brands are popular in the developed economies, not much work has been done in this area in developing economies like India (Barring few conceptual studies, e.g. Siraj and Kumari, 2011; Dave 2013).

The current paper aims to motivate researchers to work in this area by providing a clear understanding of the progress of the concept and the current work in the area

Future researchers should try and uncover the archetypes of the consumers region-wise since the representation and understanding of archetypes vary according to the maturity of the culture. Also, differences in response across archetypes should also be studied. The archetype/myth/story fit with the product/brand/consumer group is also critical and needs to be further studied

It is important however; to keep in mind the ethical issues that come with use of any form of subliminal embeds which researchers should be wary of.

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