

# Marketing and Exchange of Farm Products in Facebook Groups : A Case Study

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## Abstract

The emergence of social networking sites has gained popularity among people of different strata. Communication channels and modes faced a rapid change with the introduction of the World Wide Web in 1991. The review of literature rendered insights on communication as well as the role of trust in light of social exchange theory and social networking. The case study focused on the interaction among members in case of five Facebook groups during November - December 2017. Facebook groups like Karshika Vipani and Jaivakarshaka Kootayma established markets to sell organic products of small scale farmers. Facebook groups like Yuvakarshaka Kootayma, Krishi, and Jaivakeralam Karshika Group frequently shared information regarding their farming methods and tricks, farm products, and new methodologies of farming. All these gave a feeling of belongingness and strengthened the relationship among the members. Apart from sharing information, the members also formed seed banks to store and exchange seeds among the members of the groups. Moderators and active members interacted to conduct group meets in which the group members met physically. Constant communication and solid trust between the group members led to the formation of online offers and trades. Small farmers got a place to sell their products for a reasonable price at Sunday markets. Many of the farmers sold their products after value additions. The exchange of seeds and plants promoted agriculture and allied sectors. Constant demand and support encouraged a few members to become entrepreneurs. Frequent information transfer and trust contributed to the social exchange through Facebook groups.

**Keywords:** Facebook groups, social exchange theory, trust, information, entrepreneurship, supply chain

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Data innovation has caused exceptional changes on the planet. Web-based social networking is an accumulation of web-based applications that assist its clients to collaborate. Introduction of the World Wide Web in 1991 provoked expeditious changes amidst communication channels and modes. The website, SixDegrees.com advanced informal communication among web clients in 1997. Facebook, one the most significant person to person communication site, launched in 2004, affects people's everyday lives. About 2.3 billion Facebook clients, with half of them dynamic, consistently make it a stage to share critical data. Numerous business visionaries make utilization of Facebook to exchange data. This case study is particularly about Facebook groups that encourage horticulture among its member individuals. This investigation is to analyze some of these Facebook gatherings and judge their viability to advance agribusiness.

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## Marketing and Exchange on the Internet

Social exchange theory mediates marketing techniques employed in promotional strategies (Bagozzi, 1975 ; Emerson, 1976). Relational exchange is demonstrated using social exchange theory and provides numerous research opportunities (Lambe, Wittmann, & Spekman, 2001).

The social networking sites used by people are found to reflect their ethnic backgrounds, social status, educational preferences, etc. (Hargittai, 2007). The advent of Web 2.0, the second phase of online marketing, was the reason for significant developments in marketing techniques in use (Meadows - Klue, 2008). College students use social networking sites to find new friends and to reach old friends (Raacke & Bonds - Raacke, 2008) and family members (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Social networking behaviour of people was found to be influenced by their cultural preferences (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008), personality (Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009), and traits (Orr, Sisic, Ross, Simmering, Arseneault, & Orr, 2009). In social networking sites, individuals with an optimal number of friends were found to be socially attractive than those at both extremes (Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). Social network users frequently communicate with their physical acquaintances (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009 ; Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012). Playfulness and usage intention were found to have a direct effect on the adoption of social networking culture (Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009). A research conducted by the Pew Research Center, 2010 found that Facebook customers had in-house, reliable, and socially helpful links (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Personality traits, extroversion, and openness intensified Facebook usage, while the impact on emotional stability (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zyniga, 2010) and conscientiousness (Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010) was negative. College students perceive to avail social support and thus experience a high level of satisfaction while using social networking sites (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). Impression of Facebook profile was found to be a combined outcome of cues shared online (by self, system, or those generated by friends) (Chou & Edge 2012 ; Utz, 2010). Facebook users' thought process of utilizing the social networking site was found to be influenced by discrete and social elements (Hollenbaug & Feris, 2014). Social cohesion and self-esteem were observed to have a crucial role in the adoption of Facebook among students (Sanchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014).

Adoption of fresh advertising tactics on social media platforms was perceived as inevitable (Curran, Graham, & Temple, 2011). Social media promoted the creation of networks - unique platforms with convenient gadgets to enhance cooperation with society (Casemore, 2012). Facebook provides client reach at low cost, which should be properly maintained to avoid unnecessary issues (Champoux, Durgee, & McGlynn, 2012). Organizations gather helpful information on the electronic interactions of their clients (Markova & Petkovska - Mirčevska, 2013). Empirical work to comprehend the adequacy of Facebook promotions found that friend's suggestions draw in more consideration than online ads given on social network sites (Barreto, 2013). Facebook advertising has a significant effect on brand promotion, creating awareness among the customers (Duffett, 2015), and thereby influences purchase intention (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015). Promotions in Facebook pages, their content, frequency of posts, etc. had a significant impact in marketing services of theme based restaurants (Chandel, Sethi, & Mishra, 2017). Social media interactions, images in social networks, etc. were found to influence branding (Shimpi, 2018). Successful marketing strategies were framed considering the social media preferences and demography of target customers (Arora, Agarwal, & Kumar, 2018).

Facebook being an open platform is used to share knowledge and find solution to various issues. Pi, Chou, and Liao (2013) reported that self worthiness, reputation, openness, etc. of Facebook users affected their knowledge sharing behaviour. Farm products that have a short shelf life demand effective supply chain strategies. Farming being a continuous process, it needs continuous support, encouragement, and motivation. Online social networking sites provide recognition to farmers.

## Research Problem and Methodology

A properly built-up network to supply agriculture products is yet to be established in Kerala. Data concerning this is not available to farmers and end-users. Thus, both farmers and consumers are equally exploited by intermediaries. Proper communication throughout the supply chain can prevent the surplus and profit accumulation in specific places in the supply chain. Since the communication technology has flourished, a couple of people have put in efforts to pull in individuals and support them towards different cultivating strategies. They have utilized the web as media. Very few studies have been carried out to examine the use of information technology to improve the structure of agriculture markets, and hence, this case study was conducted.

The case study method is applied to investigate the practical application of social exchange theory. The objectives of this case include :

- (i) To distinguish the characteristics of the buyer - seller relationship emerging out of online agri-related supply chains, and
- (ii) To comprehend the utilization of social networks that helps to maintain a strategic distance from the exploitation of intermediaries.

This paper scrutinizes five Facebook groups, to be specific Karshika Vipani, Jaivakarshakakootayma Ernakulam, Yuvakarshakakootayma, Krishi, and Jaivakeralam Karshika Group. Every one of these online gatherings has a sole intention to advance agribusiness for its individuals who are Keralites. The language of correspondence is vernacular in every one of these groups, which makes it simple for the individuals to impart and comprehend information in their mother tongue. Individuals from these gatherings share data, for example, tips to develop certain yields, the uniqueness of certain items, their own encounters in agribusiness, and so forth with others. The common members in these gatherings are keen on advancing agribusiness and the related data with their companions. Aside from sharing of learning, they share seeds, plants, formulas, and so forth. Despite the fact that they have certain similitudes, every one of these gatherings are diverse, which makes it important to watch everyone independently. Posts (an online statement by persons/people/representatives) made in November - December 2017 on these online Facebook groups were considered to make sense of the viability of each Facebook group.

### Karshika Vipani : Online Organic Agricultural Market (Thrissur)

Purchase and sell online among a gathering of 1, 36,868 individuals was framed with an ulterior rationale to give unhindered trade for the surplus products of organic farming. In this manner, farmers are given a platform where they get incentives for their items, and the customers receive great items with a proper origin. This gathering was an outcome of few online/offline discourses to discover a market free of exploitation to encourage those involved in organic cultivation. Apart from the different deals and offers on the web, this gathering is observed to manage a physical place at Thrissur town where the individuals of the group sell their items and customers avail them directly from farmers. This gathering gained popularity among individuals. The temporary sales platform is set on each Sunday at Thrissur beginning from 9 a.m., which gets sold out by 11 a.m. despite the fact that the deals are scheduled up to 12 noon. Inspired by the achievements of this platform, individuals started similar Facebook groups at Ernakulam followed by Thiruvananthapuram etc., which got great help from the online members. A seller can specifically sell the items through messenger or home conveyance or according to the accommodation of the purchaser and seller himself. The Facebook group with four administrators/moderators screens each post

and affirms only the posts fulfilling the guidelines of the gathering. This, likewise, encourages farmers to create value-added items and sell on the web.

### **Jaivakarshaka Koottayma Ernakulam (Online Agricultural Market : Ernakulam)**

The accomplishments of Karshika Vipani and consistent interest of purchaser individuals in Ernakulam led to the development of Ernakulam Nattuchanda where individuals from Ernakulam are benefited to purchase directly from organic farmers. The deals are controlled by the administrators, with distributing counters for every farmer or group. Here, the rural form of branding was observed, and buyers recognized particular products from specific farmers and began to demand those items. The idea of a physical stage was an extraordinary achievement. Change in the source and cost of everything was one of the claims to fame where all the basic things like cowpeas, coconuts, and so forth had fixed rates, giving flexibility of equal price, thereby enabling the clients to pick items by concentrating on their quality and source. The group administrator posts the price-list of almost all items by the previous day evening. The physical market operates just on Sundays at Kakkanad from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. The vast majority of the day's deals get over by 10 a.m. Interest for natural items has prompted the development of one increasingly online market at Thrikkakara, which is also working effectively.

### **Yuvakarshaka Koottayma (Group of Young Farmers)**

Yuvakarshaka Koottayma, a group of young farmers consisting of 17,320 members with four administrators and four moderators, is enlisted under the Beneficent Society Act Reg. No. TCR/TC/538/2016. This group shares information about their cultivations and harvests. Data with respect to certain agri-items additionally is being shared over the group. Reactions as preferences are more for harvest/cultivating posts than for deals, which determines the motivation behind the group to go about and provide an impetus for advancing cultivating and related exercises. The group gives equal opportunities to every one of its individuals, and as of late, it has started its ladies forum in order to support women keen on agribusiness. Individuals joining this group demonstrate the increasing popularity of this group.

### **Krishi (Facebook Group to Promote Agriculture)**

The main role of this group is to urge individuals to cultivate. This group, with 2,68,723 individuals, 12 administrators, and 6 moderators, is one of the biggest online groups supporting farming and allied sectors. Individuals are permitted to ask questions, post photographs, and have dialogues about different cultivating strategies and seeds in the group. The group has an online bank to distribute seeds among its members. Group individuals also cooperate and distribute seeds among themselves. The seed bank is situated at Kottayam where every one of the individuals shares their seeds that are rare or new to other people. Individuals share their surplus seeds with the bank in order to reach to other people who are in need. A member who needs seeds contacts the bank at its postal address with the list of seeds and a self-addressed stamped envelope. The bank manager returns the addressed envelope with seeds through postal service. Members also use this method to share seeds among themselves. Information regarding the availability and quantity of seeds is shared through Facebook. This guarantees the dissemination of various seeds, keeping the quality and diversity intact. The group individuals conduct annual meets for which the dialogues happen online to choose an advisory group, which coordinates with volunteers. 5000+ likes for a post revealed the prominence of the group as well as the eagerness of the group individuals to disseminate information.

## Jaivakeralamkarshika Group (Group of Organic Products from Kerala)

It is a small group of organic farmers with 15,972 individuals and two administrators. This group has individuals who have a distinct fascination for agri-business, which can be uncovered from the number of responses in this group. Individuals in this group post information and conduct online discussions regarding different issues identified with farming. They share news regarding training programs, annual meets, and in this way communicate online as well. Motivated by the posts in the group, many of the individuals working in the technology sector began cultivating. There are a couple of individuals who normally post about their cultivating techniques and gather online. The dynamic response rate of other members to these posts reveals their excitement to take an interest in farming and allied activities.

## Observations and Discussion

The above mentioned Facebook groups were observed during November - December 2017 and 100 posts each from Karshika Vipani, Yuvakarshakakootayma, and Krishi ; while 102 posts were selected from Jaivakeralam Karshika group. Only 50 posts from Jaivakarshakakootayma Ernakulam were observed. The statements were monitored for their purpose and classified based on the same with an objective to understand the basic intention of the members belonging to each group. The Table 1 represents the classification of the posts in the respective groups according to their purpose.

**Table 1 . Classification of Posts in the Respective Groups**

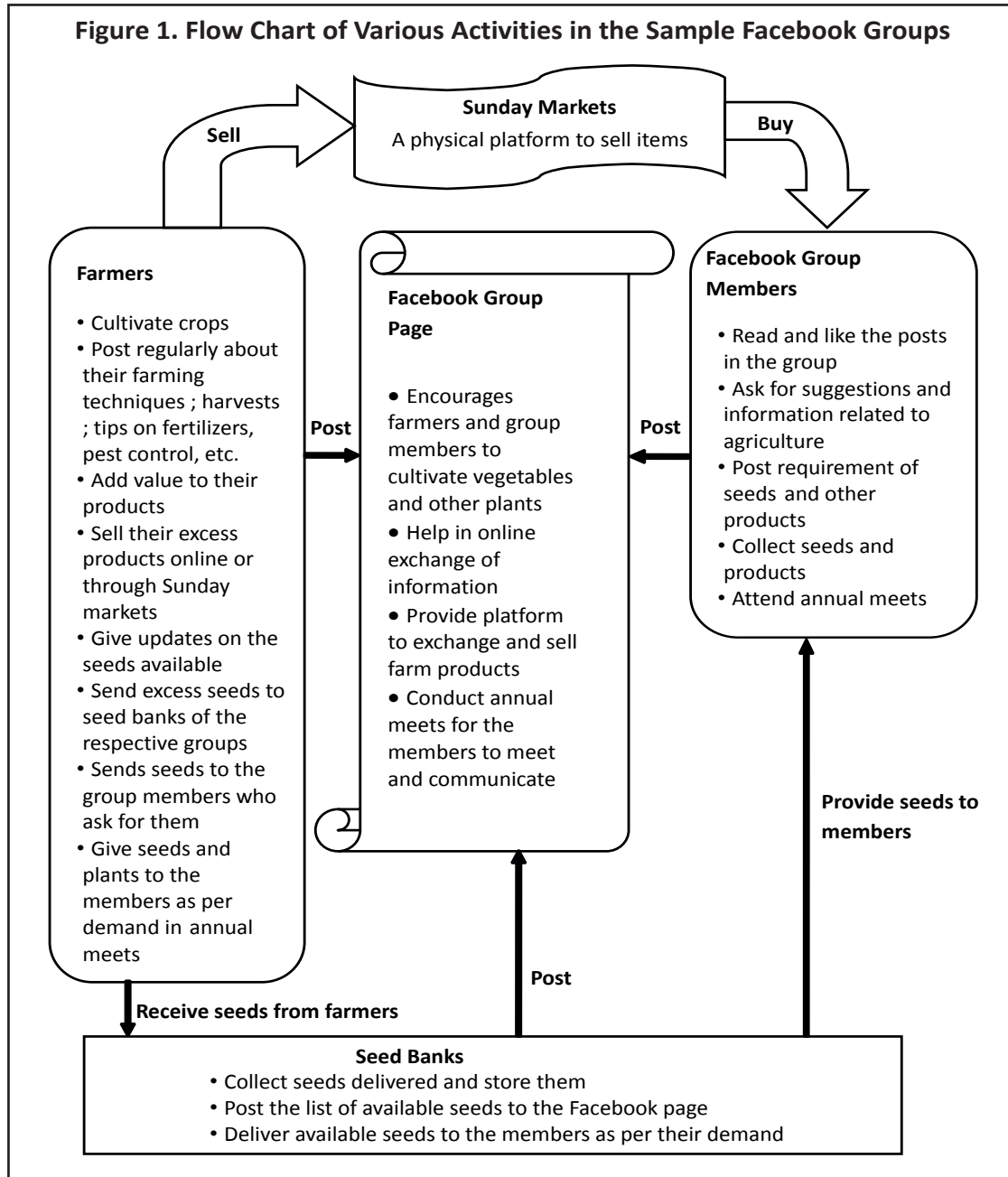
Group Name	Buy/Sell/Information				Total
	Buy	Sell	Information	Wanted	
Karshikavipani	6	51	41	2	100
Jaivakarshakakootayma Ernakulam	0	2	45	3	50
Yuvakarshakakootayma	1	12	87	0	100
Krishi	0	0	98	2	100
Jaivakeralam Karshika Group	0	1	101	0	102
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>452</b>

From the Table 1, it can be inferred that over 80% of the posts were connected to different information on agri-related issues. KarshikaVipani group is the only group where posts related to transactions were posted. Not many posts were there on issues as to buy, wanted, and so forth, which summed just 3% of the Facebook posts in consideration. It could be deciphered that all five groups offer significance to communication rather than any other purpose. These frequent posts and responses happen consistently, and this, in turn, reinforces the connection between the group members.

After observing different activities supporting the agri-supply chain using technological advances, an attempt has been made to prepare a depiction to synchronize the various activities in the groups. Practical application of social exchange theory benefiting both buyers and sellers is represented as a Figure. The Figure 1 depicts an illustration of happenings in the Facebook groups of concern, the interaction between members about different activities in the groups, and so on.

The five Facebook groups of concern were launched with comparative objectives of promoting agriculture among its members. The Figure 1 displays the exercises that happen in each group. In these groups, the farmers post about their daily gather and their methods identified with cultivating to which different individuals respond as





likes, comments, and shares. These Facebook gatherings give a stage to the farmers to offer their items to the individuals with or without citing the prices. The individuals who wish to buy the items comment underneath the post or contact the farmers through Facebook messenger. The buyer and seller either meet to trade the item or the item is sent to the purchaser through courier or postal service upon transfer of money.

In the early days, many farmers complained that they were not able to sell their excess products to the markets. This occurred as most of them grew vegetables for their own utilization, and yield was small when compared to the general market purchase. The issue was paid attention to as wholesalers and retailers refused to purchase these products. Following quite a while of online discussions, a physical market was set up at Thrissur on Sundays from

9.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., which guarantees to be a market of "Vegetables and agri-items with an identity." This rose to be a colossal achievement and encouragement to members who grew their own vegetables. Many of the members who were in need of safe vegetables became the regular customers, and this prompted value addition in the items. Several farmers transformed into business visionaries, created pickles, papads, and numerous different things and brought to the market. Products from specific farmers got popularized and even led to the establishment of local brands. Members from Ernakulam got inspired of the same, and they too started the agri markets. This got acknowledged to such a great amount that by 2019, there are roughly three such markets of online farmers in Ernakulam. Different regions, for example, Kozhikode, Palakkad, and Thiruvananthapuram, and so on, additionally began their physical selling markets for online agri-groups. The interest is high to the point that all the produce brought to the market is sold out before the market shuts. This provides earnings to numerous housewives and retired people who are engaged in agri-business.

Gathering good seeds was an issue for certain members. Few of them needed certain rare seeds. This issue got solved by providing online information followed by access to seeds through postal service. The farmers post about the seeds available with them, and other members get in touch with them through Facebook messenger or through remarks to the posts to know the address of the farmers and get the seeds through postal service. Numerous farmers who wish to promote agriculture among the members send seeds to people and asked them to return after their harvest. Thus, in this way, many of the interested members were inspired to take up farming and agriculture.

## Conclusion

The paper delineates the exercises in five Facebook groups to make sense of the role of Facebook in promoting agriculture among Keralites. The Facebook groups considered have dynamic member individuals keen on encouraging farming among other members. Discourses, talks, and posts in groups aim to draw individuals towards cultivating vegetables for their very own utilization. This further prompted the arrangement of markets where farmers directly sell their excess products to buyers. A portion of the individuals went on to be entrepreneurs, and few items acquired brand esteem. Exchange of seeds among group members happens due to the availability of a platform with online communication. Online offers of agribusiness items and value-added items are another contribution of these Facebook groups. The purpose of the accomplishment of all these groups is the strong trust and constant communication among the members of each group. Apart from all these online gatherings, annual meets are also conducted for the members to physically meet each other. Trust and frequent communication among the members of each group are observed to be the pillars that help the social exchange to continue.

## Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This case discusses the activities of five Facebook groups during a specific time period. Members of these groups started different activities in the last few years, which may change with time and preferences of group members. The group activities, being at the nascent stage, may improve with time. A longitudinal study of the activities can report the progress of the above mentioned programs conducted in the groups. Knowledge management studies in these groups can also be subjected to future research.

## Teaching Notes

**(1) Synopsis :** Social networking sites (SNS) provide platforms to users to collaborate and share information at low costs. Facebook, one the most significant person - to - person communication site, is used frequently to exchange

information. In the present case study, the perception about the nature of the relationships emerging out of social interactions through Facebook is analyzed, and the case study method is applied to investigate the practical applications of the social exchange theory. This paper scrutinizes five Facebook groups for a period of about two months. The sample Facebook groups considered have dynamic individuals keen on encouraging farming among other members. Discourses and posts in the groups draw individuals towards cultivating vegetables for their very own utilization. Few members became entrepreneurs and some of the items acquired brand esteem.

**(2) Teaching Objectives :** The participants should have an understanding of the following issues at the end of the exercise :

- ↳ The characteristics of the buyer - seller relationship emerging out of online agri-related supply chains.
- ↳ Comprehend the utilization of social networks that helps to maintain a strategic distance from the exploitation of intermediaries.

**(3) Potential Audience :** MBA students, entrepreneurs, farmers, stakeholders interested in agri entrepreneurship development.

**(4) Number of Teaching Sessions Required :** Two sessions.

**(5) Questions and Authors' Analysis of Each Question :**

**Q - 1) What are the characteristics of the buyer - seller relationship emerging out of online agri - related supply chains ?**

**Answer :** The buyer - seller relationship within the online agri - related supply chain is discovered to be characterized by trust and immense information transfer. Sensible customer feedback in the groups paved way for evolution of brands among the group members. Constant communication created a rapport among individuals with entrepreneurship ideas. Mutual trust among the group members broadened demands for products.

**Q-2) What is the utilization of social networks that helps to maintain a strategic distance from the exploitation of intermediaries?**

**Answer :** Small scale farmers and agri-entrepreneurs strive to contact their buyers. Buyers are also not able to identify the origin and quality of the fruits and vegetables they use. The flow of information, as well as money in the system, is controlled by intermediaries. Social networks provide an online platform for farmers with less products to offer their merchandise directly to the customers. Discussions in the Facebook groups led to the proposal of setting up the Sunday markets. These markets offer a place for the buyer - seller direct interaction. The group administrators also ensure the quality and origin of the merchandise by conducting field visits to the farms. Buyers identify products from a specific producer and demand the same. Communication through the online mode strengthens customer relations.

**Q - 3) How anonymity of using an online platform was another problem addressed by the groups ?**

**Answer :** Many members hesitated to buy and sell products online due to the anonymity of the online platforms. Annual meets are conducted for members to meet, reduce anonymity, and strengthen friendships. This enhanced trust and in turn amplified marketing of farm products among the groups. Members also promoted agricultural



practices and sharing habits by sharing seeds with their friends/group members. Seed banks were also formed to inspire members towards creating their kitchen gardens. It thereby catalyzed the evolution of new entrepreneurs who assist with gardening and related tasks.

## **(6) Suggested Readings**

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