

Determination of the Mediating Role of Social Media Marketing Activities in the Effect of Brand Trust on Perception Towards Medical Tourism

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Abstract

Aim: This study aims to determine the mediating role of social media marketing activities in the perceptual effect of brand trust on medical tourism.

Method: In this study, where a survey was applied as one of the quantitative methods, the survey created in the form of a five-point likert scale in the scale ranges was applied on Google Forms to obtain data. Data were obtained from 390 people consisting of customers who benefit from medical tourism and use social media in Istanbul. The hypotheses created based on the model were tested using the SPSS statistical system. Data were analyzed with ANOVA and t-tests.

Results: As a result of the lean analyses, the direct effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential was calculated as 0.246. The indirect effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential due to social media marketing activities was calculated as 0.118. As a result of the first two effects, the total effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential was calculated as 0.364.

Conclusion: The effect of customers' trust in the brand on the perception value shown in medical tourism is also desired to be known by businesses. In this context, customers using social media platforms are informed using this channel to get information about their previous experiences in health tourism. As a result of the analysis of the study data, it was revealed that trust in the brand would be strong, especially on the part of consumers, due to their use of medical tourism. In this process, it was concluded that there was a mediating role in influencing the structures related to the subject in social media, depending on the reasons for their creation and explanation.

Keywords: Medical tourism, brand trust, social media, marketing activity, perception.

Marka Güveninin Medikal Turizme Yönelik Algıya Etkisinde Sosyal Medya Pazarlama Aktivitelerinin Aracılık Rolünün Belirlenmesi

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışma ile marka güveninin medikal turizme yönelik yaptığı algısal etkisinde sosyal medya pazarlama faaliyetlerinin aracılık rolünün belirlenmesi amaçlanmaktadır.

Yöntem: Nicel yöntemlerden anket uygulanan bu çalışma kapsamında ölçek aralıklarında beşli Likert şeklinde oluşturulan anket Google Form üzerinde uygulanarak verilere ulaşılmıştır. Buna bağlı olarak İstanbul ilindeki medikal turizmden faydalanan ve sosyal medya kullanan müşterilerden oluşan 390 kişi ile veri elde edilmiştir. Modele bağlı olarak oluşturulan hipotezler SPSS istatistik sistemi kullanılarak test edilmiştir. Yapılan ANOVA ve t-testleri ile veriler analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Yapılan analizler sonucunda marka güveninin tıbbi turizm potansiyeli üzerindeki doğrudan etkisi 0,246 olarak hesaplanmıştır. Marka güveninin sosyal medya pazarlama faaliyetleri nedeniyle tıbbi

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turizm potansiyeli üzerindeki dolaylı etkisi 0,118 olarak hesaplanmıştır. İlk iki etki sonucunda marka güveninin tıbbi turizm potansiyeli üzerindeki toplam etkisi 0,364 olarak hesaplanmıştır.

Sonuç: Müşterilerin markaya olan güveninin medikal turizmde gösterilen algı değerine olan etkisi işletmeler tarafından bilinmek istenmektedir. Bu bağlamda sosyal medya platformlarını kullanan müşterilerin sağlık turizmindeki deneyimleri hakkında bilgi almak için bu kanalı kullanarak bilgilendirilmektedir. Çalışma verilerinin analizi sonucunda özellikle tüketiciler tarafında medikal turizmi kullanmaları nedeniyle markaya olan güvenin güçlü olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu süreçte sosyal medyada konu ile ilgili yapıların oluşturulma ve açıklama nedenine bağlı olarak etkilemede aracılık rolü olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Medikal turizm, marka güveni, sosyal medya, pazarlama aktivitesi, algı.

Introduction

Brand trust, which refers to the bond that a customer establishes with a brand while shopping, is the result of the consumer's long-term experience. In order to remain more effective than its competitors in the sector for a long time, the experience and impressions of the shopping customer are important for brand trust¹. Unlike health tourism, the tourism activity carried out for individuals to go to another country from their country to receive services for treatment purposes only is known as medical tourism. The brand, which expresses the perception desired to be created in the mind of the consumer, begins to have a value according to the fulfillment of the desire and need². Trust, which will strengthen the recall of the brand, should be taken into consideration by companies in the field of medical tourism³. Social media platforms, which are important virtual spaces where consumers increase their mutual interaction after digitalization and the spread of the internet, are valuable areas to show consumer impressions about brands⁴. In line with all these, this study is carried out with the aim of determining the extent to which the trust in the brands of the conductors has an impact on the perception towards medical tourism and that social media activities also have a mediating effect in this process. In this context, the data collected from the questionnaire form and Google Form were tested and analyzed with the SPSS statistical program. The data collected in May-2024 were reached by social media users in Istanbul via the internet Istanbul because there is one of the most important centers in Turkey in the medical tourism sector. The city is a frequently preferred destination by international patients for areas such as aesthetic surgery, hair transplantation, dental treatments and general health services. This allows the study to provide strong and representative data on the perception of medical tourism. After the data of 390 people were obtained, the application of the questionnaire was finalized in the study. As a result of the study, it was concluded that there is a positive relationship between brand trust and perception towards medical tourism. The study also concluded that social media marketing activities have a mediating effect on this positive relationship.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the confidence and belief consumers have in a brand's reliability, integrity, and ability to deliver on its promises. It encompasses the trustworthiness of a brand, including its products, services, and communications⁵. Trust encourages repeat purchases and long-term customer loyalty. Satisfied, trusting customers are more likely to recommend a brand to others, contributing to positive word-of-mouth marketing⁶.

High levels of brand trust contribute to overall brand equity, enhancing the brand's market value and competitive position. Customers are more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt during challenging times⁷.

Factors Influencing Brand Trust

Reliable performance and consistent delivery on promises build trust over time. Openness about business practices, product ingredients, sourcing, and corporate values⁸.

High-quality products and services that meet or exceed customer expectations⁹. Ethical Fair treatment of employees, responsible sourcing, sustainability efforts, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Communication: Honest, clear, and respectful communication with customers fosters trust¹⁰. Engage with customers authentically and address their concerns promptly and genuinely¹¹. Be open about business practices, including challenges and setbacks¹². Continuously improve product and service quality¹³. Uphold ethical standards and demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility¹⁴. Use customer surveys and feedback tools to gauge trust levels. Monitor online reviews and ratings as Higher retention rates often correlate with higher trust levels¹⁵. Failing to deliver consistent quality and service¹⁶. Being secretive or deceptive about business practices. Neglecting customer complaints or providing inadequate support¹⁷. Involvement in scandals or unethical behavior. Overpromising and under delivering on marketing claims¹⁸. In summary, brand trust is a critical asset that requires ongoing effort to build and maintain¹⁹. It is achieved through consistent quality, transparent practices, ethical behavior, and strong customer relationships²⁰. Brands that successfully cultivate trust can enjoy greater loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and a robust market position²¹

Perception of Medical Tourism Potential

Medical tourism involves traveling to another country to receive medical care. It combines healthcare services with the opportunity to visit another country²². High-quality medical procedures at significantly lower costs than in the patient's home country²³. Availability of treatments and procedures not offered or restricted in the home country²⁴.

High standards of medical care and state-of-the-art facilities in certain destinations²². Shorter waiting periods for medical procedures compared to those in the home country²⁵.

Popular Medical Tourism Destinations

Asia: India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore are known for advanced medical facilities and affordable treatment options²⁶.

Latin America: Mexico, Costa Rica, and Brazil offer affordable healthcare services and are popular among North American patients²⁷.

Europe: Hungary, Poland, and Turkey are favored for dental procedures and cosmetic surgery.

Middle East: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan are emerging destinations for medical tourists due to their advanced healthcare infrastructure.

Social Media Marketing Activities

Define clear objectives: Establish what you want to achieve with your social media marketing activities. Common goals include increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, generating leads, and boosting sales.

SMART Goals: Ensure your goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. For example, "Increase Instagram followers by 20% in the next three months"²⁸.

Use tools like Google Analytics, social media insights, and surveys to understand your audience's demographics, interests, and online behavior. Social media marketing also allows businesses to conduct market research and access important data to support business decisions²⁹.

Social media marketing is therefore seen as a central element in the digital transformation strategies of retail businesses³⁰.

Choose social media platforms that align with your target audience and business objectives. Common platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and TikTok³¹.

Diversify your content types to keep your audience engaged. This can include blog posts, videos, infographics, podcasts, webinars, and user-generated content³². Schedule posts to ensure consistent and timely publishing. Focus on creating high-quality, valuable content that resonates with your audience³⁰. Aim to educate, entertain, or inspire.

Encourage your audience to create and share content related to your brand. This can enhance credibility and engagement³³. Invest in social media advertising. Utilize various ad formats such as image ads, video ads, carousel ads, and sponsored posts³⁴. Leverage advanced targeting options to reach your ideal audience based on demographics, interests, behavior, and location. Monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rate, reach, impressions, click-through rate (CTR), and conversion rate. Use social media analytics tools like Facebook Insights, Instagram Analytics, Twitter Analytics, and third-party platforms like Hootsuite and Sprout Social³⁵. Regularly review your performance data to identify what's working and what's not. Adjust your strategies accordingly to optimize results³⁶. Find influencers who align with your brand values and have a significant following among your target audience. Collaborate with influencers to create authentic content that promotes your brand³⁷. This can include sponsored posts, product reviews, and giveaways³⁸. Track the performance of influencer campaigns to assess their impact on your brand awareness and engagement. Keep an eye on social media trends and emerging platforms to stay relevant and innovative³⁹. Be open to experimenting with new content formats and features to see what resonates best with your audience⁴⁰. Encourage feedback from your audience and use it to refine your social media strategies⁴¹.

In summary, developing effective social media marketing activities requires a strategic⁴² approach that involves setting clear goals⁴³, understanding your audience, choosing the right platforms⁴⁴, creating diverse and engaging content, and continuously monitoring and optimizing your efforts⁴⁵. By following these steps, you can build a strong social media presence that drives meaningful results for brands⁴⁶.

Material and Methods

Objective

It is aimed to determine the effect of brand trust, which expresses the value of businesses in the eyes of customers, on the perceptions of customers in the field of media tourism and the mediating role of the studies to be carried out on social media.

Research Data Collection Tool and Sample

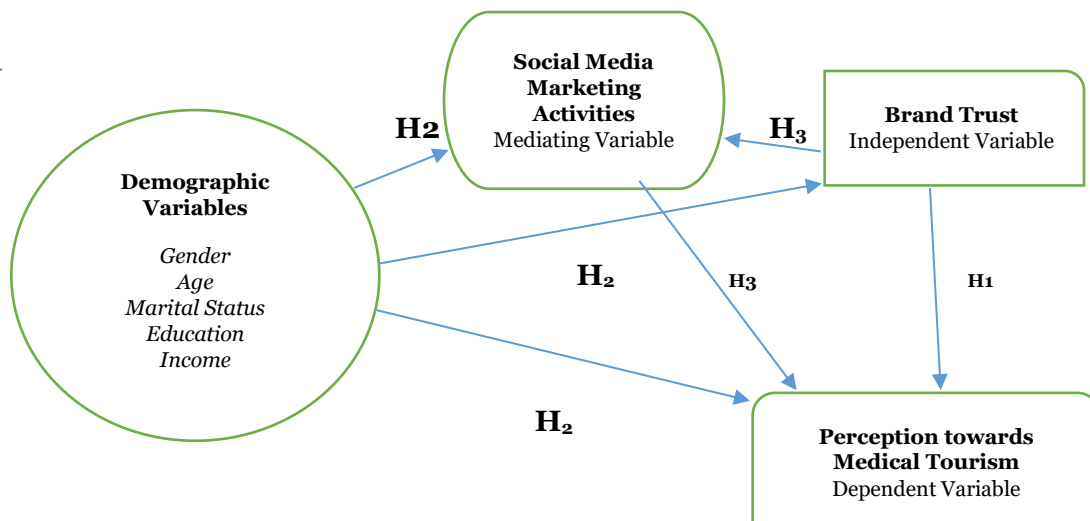
A questionnaire form was developed to collect the necessary data for this study. A questionnaire form was created in order to obtain these data of the study. The questionnaire form consists of two areas. In the first part, gender, age, marital status as demographic variables, education, and income. In the second part, there is a questionnaire section with scale statements. The data were collected by applying the questionnaire form on Google Form. The main population of the study is social media users who benefit from medical tourism in Istanbul. It was applied over the internet using convenience sampling method. The study was conducted within a one-month period between May 01-31, 2024. As a result of reaching the targeted 390 people, the data collection study was completed. The scale expressions in the second part of the survey were used by Bardakçı and Gürbüz⁴⁷ Adaptation of Brand Trust Scale to Turkish Culture: Medical Tourism Potential Perception Scale developed by Karaca⁴⁸ et al., Social Media Marketing Activities scales were used by Yüksekbilgili⁴⁹. It was created by taking it in his study. Necessary permissions were obtained from the authors. In the study, a 5-point Likert-type assessment was used to determine the distinctive feature. SPSS statistical program was used to analyze the data. T-test and ANOVA tests were utilized for testing the study and reliability.

Ethical Statement

Ethical approval for the study was gathered from Istanbul Gelisim University Ethical Committee (form number: 2024/11; Date: 29.07.2024).

Research Model and Hypotheses

Figure 1. Research model



Hypotheses formulated in line with the research problem

H₁: Brand trust positively affects the perception towards medical tourism.

H₂: Brand trust and Medical Tourism perception have a positive effect in terms of demographic variables.

H₃: Social media marketing activities positively mediate the effect of brand trust on perceptions towards medical tourism.

Results

Reliability and validity analysis results for research variables

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis fit values for the measurement model

	CMIN/DF	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	NFI	AGFI
Model result	2,872	0,927	0,933	0,069	0,921	0,904
Acceptable compliance	≤3	≥0,90	≥0,90	≤0,080	≥0,90	≥0,85

Goodness of fit criterion values for confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model of the research variables are given in Table 1 together with acceptable fit values. According to the results obtained, it is seen that the fit criterion values of the scales are within the range of acceptable values⁵⁰.

The construct reliability for the scales used in the study was examined with in smartpls software. According to the results, Cronbach's alpha coefficient shows that the reliability of the scales is at a high level. CR (combined reliability) and AVE (average variance explained) values are the criteria for measuring combination and decomposition reliability. In order for the scale to provide combined and discriminant reliability, the CR criterion should be greater than 0.70 and the AVE criterion should be greater than 0.50. According to the results obtained, it is seen that the scale dimensions have sufficient level of convergent (CR>.70; AVE>.50; CR>AVE) and discriminant validity⁵¹.

Table 2. Construct and discriminant validity results

Scales	Fornell-Larcker Criterion			Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)		
	MG	MTP	SMP	MG	MTP	SMP
Brand trust (MG)	0.741					
Medical tourism potential (MTP)	0.406	0.743		0.524		
Social media marketing activities (SMP)	0.239	0.736	0.773	0.355	0.743	

The construct and discriminant validity of the research scales were examined with Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) in smartpls software. For construct and discriminant validity, the HTMT value should be below 0.90⁵². As seen in Table 2, all three HTMT ratios are below 0.90. In addition, according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the square root of the AVE value being greater than the corresponding correlation coefficient⁵³ is another criterion for construct and discriminant validity. The values on the diagonal in the table are the square root of the

AVE criterion value. As can be seen, the square root of the AVE value for each variable is greater than the corresponding correlation coefficient.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for research variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand trust (MG)	3,53	0,534	0,19	0,244
Medical tourism potential (MTP)	3,30	0,513	-0,17	-0,869
Social media marketing activities (SMP)	3,59	0,495	0,36	0,901

(**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).)

Descriptive statistics for the research variables are given in Table 3. When the skewness and kurtosis values are examined, it is seen that all three variables are within the range of normal distribution values^{54,55}.

The frequency distribution of the respondents according to their demographic variables the results, 48.5% of the participants are female, 51.5% are male; 55.6% are married, 44.4% are single; 20.5% are in the 18-22 age group, 41.8% in the 23-32 age group, 28.2% in the 33-42 age group and 9.5% in the 43-49 age group; 0.5% had primary education, 14.9% high school, 4.4% associate's degree, 36.7% bachelor's degree and 43.6% graduate degree; 16.9% had 0-17.002 TL, 25.1% 17.003-18.003 TL, 21.8% 18.004-28.004 TL, 12.6% 28.005-38.005 TL and 23.6% 38.0006 TL. 5.4% were workers, 34.1% were civil servants, 8.7% were housewives, 11.0% were students, 20.8% were retired and 20.0% had other occupations.

Table 4. Examining the brand trust scale in the research by demographic variables

	Brand Trust Scale	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	t/F	p
Gender	Woman	189	3,47	0,513	-2,171	0,031
Marital Status	Married	217	3,54	0,524	0,136	0,892
Age Group	18-22 Years	80	3,55	0,588	0,346	0,792
Education	High School	58	3,46	0,472	1,186	0,306
Monthly Income	0-17.002 TL	66	3,52	0,521	0,568	0,686
Profession	Officer	133	3,54	0,537	0,116	0,950

Whether there is a difference in terms of demographic variables in the Brand Trust Scale used in the research was analyzed by t test and ANOVA test. According to the results obtained, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of demographic variables in the Brand Trust Scale used in the survey.

Whether there is a difference in terms of demographic variables in the Medical Tourism Potential Scale used in the research was analyzed by t-test and ANOVA test. According to the results obtained, no statistically significant difference was found in the Medical Tourism Potential Scale used in the questionnaire in terms of demographic variables except for the Monthly Income variable. The groups that are the source of the difference were determined by Tukey test. According to the test results, the source of the difference in the monthly income variable is that the perception of Medical Tourism Potential of the

participants with a monthly income of 18.004-28.004 TL is higher than the participants with a monthly income of 18.004-28.004 TL and 28.005-38.005 TL.

Table 5. Examination of the social media marketing activities scale used in the research in terms of demographic variables

	Social Media Marketing Activities Scale	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	t/F	p
Gender	Woman	189	3,58	0,475	-0,629	0,529
Marital Status	Married	217	3,59	0,489	0,045	0,965
Age Group	18-22 Years	80	3,60	0,497	0,086	0,967
Education	High School	58	3,54	0,508	0,570	0,566
Monthly Income	0-17.002 TL	66	3,65	0,398	1,186	0,316
Profession	Officer	133	3,57	0,517	0,766	0,514

Whether there is a difference in terms of demographic variables in the Social Media Marketing Activities Scale used in the research was analyzed by t-test and ANOVA test. According to the results obtained, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of demographic variables in the Social Media Marketing Activities Scale used in the survey.

Table 6. Research model analysis results

OUTCOME VARIABLE: SMP						
R	R-sq	F	p			
0,212	0,045	18,234	0,000			
	coeff	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,899	0,164	17,639	0,000	2,576	3,223
MG	0,197	0,046	4,270	0,000	0,106	0,287
OUTCOME VARIABLE: MTP						
R	R-sq	F	p			
0,653	0,426	143,833	0,000			
	coeff	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	0,393	0,178	2,214	0,027	0,044	0,743
MG	0,237	0,038	6,244	0,000	0,162	0,311
SMP	0,576	0,041	14,089	0,000	0,496	0,656
OUTCOME VARIABLE: MTP (Total effect model)				Test of MG by MTP interaction:		
R	R-sq	F	p	F	p	
0,364	0,132	59,090		10,564	0,001	
	coeff	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2,063	0,163	12,689	0,000	1,743	2,383
MG	0,350	0,046	7,687	0,000	0,260	0,439

The results obtained by examining whether brand trust has an impact on medical tourism potential social media marketing activities using regression models with process macro extension are given in Table 6. In the first model, the effect of social media marketing on social media marketing activities was analyzed. According to the regression coefficient estimate, it is seen that brand trust has a statistically significant and positive effect on social media marketing activities. In the second model, the impact of brand trust and social media marketing activities on medical tourism potential is analyzed. According to the regression coefficient estimates, both effects are statistically significant and positive, and according to the t statistic value, the effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential is higher. In the third model, the total effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential was analyzed. According to the results, the mediating role of both brand trust and social media marketing activities was found to be statistically significant.

Table 7. Impact analysis results by model

Total effect of MG on MTP						
Effect	Se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
0.350	0.046	7.687	0.000	0.260	0.439	0.364
Direct effect of MG on MTP						
Effect	Se	T	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_cs
0.237	0.038	6.244	0.000	0.162	0.311	0.246
Indirect effect(s) of MG on MTP:						
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
SMP	0.113	0.027	0.057	0.163		
Completely standardized indirect effect of MG on MTP:						
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
SMP	0.118	0.029	0.058	0.172		

After the research hypothesis was supported, in the second step, the impact of Brand Trust and Social Media Marketing Activities on Medical Tourism Potential was analyzed. According to the results given in Table 7;

- The direct effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential is calculated as 0.246.
- The indirect effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential due to social media marketing activities is calculated as 0.118.
- As a result of the first two effects, the total effect of brand trust on medical tourism potential is calculated as 0.364.

The significance of the direct effect was tested by t-test and the significance of the indirect effect was tested by the bootstrap resampling method, and it was decided that the effect was significant.

Discussion

The trust that a customer develops in a product or service that he/she buys from a company leads to loyalty. The customer feels the need to recommend this sense of trust in the brand to other similar consumers. In order to meet this need of patients who

cannot heal in the area where they live, the travels they make in order to benefit from similar services in other countries are perceived as medical tourism. For this medical tourism, there is a perception process that changes over time. In a 2024 study by Utkutug and Ermeç, it was concluded that depending on the level of relationship between the satisfaction felt due to the compensation of the service and the trust in the brand, it did not cause the customer to turn into behaviors that would support the business based on brand trust compared to the customer who did not experience this situation⁴⁵. In a 2018 study by Altundal Biyan et al., there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity⁵⁰. In a 2023 study by Saygın and Kuzucanlı, a positive result was obtained perceptually as a result of the study because the target audience of the brand was women⁵².

Conclusion

The impact of customers' trust in the brand on the perception value shown in medical tourism is also wanted to be known by businesses. Customers want to share all their positive or negative thoughts about a brand with consumers who experience the same feelings. In this context, customers using social media platforms are informed by using this channel to get information about previous experiences in health tourism. As a result of the analysis of the study data, the study shows that the trust in the brand will be strong, especially on the consumers' side, due to their use of medical tourism. In this process, it has been concluded that the structures related to the subject in social media have a mediating role in influencing depending on the reason for the creation and explanation.

Recommendations

The sense of brand trust of customers traveling for medical treatment and the impact value of social media marketing activities that mediate this is constantly increasing for businesses. The quality of medical tourism will create a reason to be preferred after the businesses. The positive work they do on social media platforms, such as having foreign language speaking staff, having experienced doctors, and statements that will increase the trust in the international arena should be included. In addition to this, it will be meaningful to ensure that those who come along with the hospitals leave similar positive impressions in order to impress potential customers.

Ethical Statement

Ethical approval for the study was gathered from İstanbul Gelisim University Ethical Committee (form number: 2024/11; Date: 29.07.2024).

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