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A Study to Determine the Effect of Turkish Customers' Cultural Values on Restaurant Preferences **

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the effect of Turkish customers' cultural values on restaurant preferences. In the study that quantitative research design was used, data were collected by questionnaire technique. The sample group of the study consists of 384 Turkish customers living in New York City, United States of America. Factor, reliability, percentage, frequency, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. At the final stage of the data analysis, the distribution of the data was reviewed to determine which tests to be used to determine the differences. It was seen that the data used in the study did not exhibit normal distribution and Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, which are non-parametric tests, were applied for the difference analysis. It is found that the customers in the sample take their cultural values into consideration when making a restaurant choice according to the results of the study. On the other hand, it was determined that the personnel dimension was the most effective among the opinions about their cultural values which were determined to have an impact on the restaurant preferences of the customers. It was also concluded that the opinions about the impact of their cultural values on the restaurant preferences of the customers demonstrated a significant difference according to some demographic variables.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is one of the most basic physiological needs that people need to survive (Önçel, 2015, p.33). It is at the top of the hierarchy of the needs such as housing and dressing (Akarçay, 2016, p.213). Food has also been the simplest expression of people for expressing themselves, establishing communication and transferring culture to other communities throughout history. From religious rituals to celebrations (festivals), from politics (gastro-diplomacy) to economics (restaurants, cafes, fast food chains, etc.), eating has managed to gain a place in every area of life (Çaycı and Aktaş, 2018, p.710). Today, food has become a big industry rather than a physiological necessity due to the historical and social change (Akarçay, 2014, p.1). Many enterprises within this industrial structure are operating to meet the food and beverage needs of today's societies. Restaurant enterprises are one of the first thing that comes to mind when talking about food and beverage services.

Restaurant enterprises are the most important part of the food and beverage industry. In fact, some sources define food and beverage enterprises as restaurant enterprises. The most important feature that distinguishes restaurant enterprises from other food and beverage enterprises is that the final product does not only consist of food and beverage items but also offers service products such as welcoming, serving and entertaining (Kılınç, 2011, p.3). In this sense, restaurant enterprises are defined as places that allow people to sit and eat comfortably, where food is served and meet social needs (Dash, 2005, p.5). For today's consumers, restaurants have started to be considered as the means of meeting social needs, gaining prestige and status, improving mood and getting away from daily problems in addition to meeting the needs of eating (Özdemir, 2010, p.220; Şahin et al, 2014, p.685). However, more and more people prefer to eat out because of the increase in national and international travels, increased work intensity, time constraints, increase in income level (Bekar and Gümüş Dönmez, 2016, p.2), working of both couples, especially the active participation of women in working life (Akarçay and Suğur, 2015, p.5). In addition to widespread eating and drinking habits of people outside, the fact that eating and drinking turns into a pleasure-based consumption increases the competition among the restaurant enterprises (Bilgin, 2017, p.34). These enterprises have to take into account the preferences of the customers in order to maintain their existence and gain competitive advantage in an increasing competitive environment. And many factors can be effective in restaurant choices of customers (Albayrak, 2014, p.190). The main purpose of this study is to investigate cultural values which are thought to be one of these factors. Determining whether the cultural values of the customers affect restaurant preferences will contribute to the development of successful marketing strategies for business managers who are both newly established and want to increase their market share. Thanks to the research, it will be possible to better determine that target group considered the cultural values in restaurant preferences attaches importance which factors. This will make a significant contribution to achieving customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. Also, the limited study of the research topic in the relevant literature makes think that it may contribute to the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the relevant literature, factors such as variety of dishes/menu, quality of dishes, price, atmosphere, service speed (Lewis, 1981; Auty, 1992; Clark and Wood, 1998), location, working hours, facilities for children (Auty, 1992; Kara

et al, 1997), personnel behavior, cleanliness (Kara et al, 1997; Kivela, 1997), landscape, terrace, smoking area, allowance to alcohol, bar, wine list, vegetarian menu, ease of payment by credit card (Arıker, 2012), parking facilities, live music (Yüksekbilgili, 2014; Bekar and Sürücü, 2015) have been found to affect customers' restaurant choices. However, these factors, which are effective in customers' restaurant choices, may vary from person to person and may also vary according to the psychographic, social and cultural values of the customers (Arıker, 2012, p.11; Albayrak, 2014, p.192). Especially the cultural values of the society in which the individual lives have a positive or negative effect on their various tendencies starting from consumption habits to the brand they choose (Öncü et al, 2007, p.320).

Culture is a set of behaviors, habits and values transferred from the past to the present, reflecting the material and spiritual characteristics of the societies and the structures of emotions and thoughts (Şahin and Özer, 2006, p.128). Values, on the other hand, are the most important cultural elements that hold the members of society together and shape the way individuals view their environment (Sığrı et al, 2009, p.2). Culture, which is an integral part of society's value system, also plays an important role to determine food and beverage preferences (Rozin, 1996; Finkelstein, 1998; Chang et al, 2010). As a matter of fact, the different food and beverage preferences of societies with different cultural structures are closely related to this situation. Some studies suggest that cultural values that support this idea have an effect on food preferences (Pizam and Sussmann, 1995; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Dziadkowiec and Rood, 2015; Bekar and Belpınar, 2015; Karki and Panthi, 2018). Thus, in a study conducted by Pizam and Sussmann (1995), it has been found that Japanese, French and Italian tourists stayed away from the local foods of the host countries they visited but American tourists were more moderate against these foods. Although this finding is based on the perceptions of a group of British guides rather than direct tourists, it provides conclusive evidence of how the culture of tourists influences food preferences (Chang et al, 2010, p.991). Based on the study conducted by Cohen and Avieli (2004), it has been found that Asians living abroad prefer to eat the foods of other countries more rarely than western societies. In another study conducted for cultural comparison (Dziadkowiec and Rood, 2015), it was found that the preferences of American and Polish student groups for restaurants were shaped culture-specific and there were differences between the two cultures investigated. However, in a study (Bekar and Belpınar, 2015) conducted with tourists coming to Cappadocia from Asian, American and European continents for touristic purpose, it has been determined that culinary culture was more important for the people coming from the American continent than the ones coming from other continents. In addition, it has been found that those coming from the European continent mostly prefer the luxury or fast food restaurants, and the tourists from three continents have a low rate of tasting local food and beverages. Likewise, the study of Karki and Panthi (2018) suggested that people living abroad tend to prefer the kitchen of their country. When the studies related to the subject are evaluated in general, a limited number of studies have been conducted to determine the relationship between culture and restaurant selection, although it has been supported by many studies that there is a close relationship between culture and food choice. In order to contribute to the relevant literature, the objective of this study is to determine whether the cultural values of Turkish customers living in New York City of the United States have an effect on restaurant selection. In addition, it is another

objective of the study to determine whether customers' opinions about the impacts of their cultural values on restaurant choices differ depending on demographic variables.

METHOD

For this study, where quantitative research method was used, a questionnaire was used to determine the impact of cultural values of customers on restaurant preferences. Accordingly, the questionnaire used as a data collection tool in the study consists of two parts. Questions to determine the demographic characteristics of customers are included in the first section. In the second part, the scale developed by Cömert and Özata (2016) by benefiting from the study of Kelemci Schneider and Ceritoğlu (2010) in order to determine customers' opinions about the impacts of their cultural values on restaurant choices. However, some expressions were removed from this scale, which was determined by taking into consideration expert opinions regarding the subject, and a scale containing 15 expressions was created by adding new expressions. However, the expressions of *"The use of tools and devices peculiar to my own culinary culture is effective in my choice of restaurant"*, *"Quality and affordable cultural dishes are effective in my choice of restaurant"* and *"A hospitable and friendly environment is effective in my choice of restaurant"* were removed form the scale as they have low factor loads in the confirmatory factor analysis results. Thus, a scale consisting of four dimensions (personnel, food/menu variety, atmosphere, different culture) and 12 expressions was obtained. As the scales used within the scope of the research were not dimensioned, the names of the dimensions were determined in accordance with the expert views. In addition, the names of the dimensions determined correspond to the names of the sub-factors identified in the related literature. *The personnel sub-dimension* is related to the behavior, attitudes and characteristics of the personnel working in the enterprise (Kara et al, 1997; Kivela, 1997). *Food/menu variety sub-dimension* includes the products and services offered by the enterprise. *The atmosphere sub-dimension* is related to the physical elements that have the internal and external features of the enterprise such as decor, music, tools and equipment used (Lewis, 1981; Auty, 1992; Clark ve Wood, 1998). Finally, *the different cultural sub-dimension* include how interest in different cultures can affect food choice (Pizam and Sussmann, 1995; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Dziadkowiec and Rood, 2015; Bekar and Belpınar, 2015; Karki and Panthi, 2018). All these sub-dimensions have been associated with culture in line with expert views. In addition, this scale used within the scope of the study, was subjected to a 5-point Likert type rating (1: Strongly Disagree, 5: I Strongly Agree).

The population of the study consists of Turkish customers living in New York City, one of the most populous cities in the USA. The selection of this city as the population of the study was influenced by the fact that New York a place populous for Turks. According to data released by the US Census (Kamiloğlu, 2016), it is estimated that around 25,000 Turkish citizens live in New York City. This number represents the population of the study. However, because of the reasons such as time and cost, it was difficult to reach the whole population and convenience sampling method was used in the study. When calculating the number of samples that could represent the population, 0.05 sampling error was taken into account at the 0.05 significance level. Accordingly, number 381 is sufficient for the sample in the populations of 25 thousand to 50 thousand (Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan, 2004, p.50). In line with this information, a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed between February and March 2019 and 405 of them were

answered. As a result of review of the questionnaires, 21 of them were found to be incomplete and incorrectly filled and 384 questionnaires were analyzed.

A factor analysis was performed first for the analysis of the data obtained from the study. Cronbach's Alpa coefficient was then calculated to determine reliability. However, percentage and frequency analyzes were performed to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants included in the sample and arithmetic mean and standard deviation analyzes were used to determine the level of agreement with the expressions included in the scale. At the final stage of the data analysis, the distribution of the data was reviewed to determine which tests to be used to determine the differences. It was seen that the data used in the study did not exhibit normal distribution and Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, which are non-parametric tests, were applied for the difference analysis.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The scale used for the study, which was determined for the effect of cultural values on restaurant preferences, was found to be suitable for factor analysis in this section first, and the findings were presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor and Reliability Analyses of the Scale Determined for the Effect of Cultural Values on Restaurant Preferences

Factors and Expressions	Factor Load	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Personnel (P)		**3.739**	**31.158**	**0.783**
P1) The fact that the staff wears traditional clothing is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.781			
P1) The fact that the staff knows their cultural values is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.820			
P3) The fact that the staff speaks the same language I speak is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.738			
Factor 2: Food/Menu Variety (FMV)		**1.674**	**13.951**	**0.715**
FMV1) Having dishes peculiar to my own culinary culture is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.643			
FMV2) The more variety of dishes peculiar to my culture is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.876			
FMV3) Food elements peculiar to my culinary culture is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.765			
Factor 3: Atmosphere (A)		**1.016**	**8.463**	**0.636**
A1) The presence of handicrafts is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.768			
A2) An interior decoration peculiar to my cultural values is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.761			
A3) Playing music, that appeal to my music culture is effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.596			
Factor 4: Different Culture (DC)		**1.403**	**11.693**	**0.648**
DC1) I prefer restaurants with different cultures to try different dishes.	0.783			
DC2) My entourage is effective when I choose restaurants with different culinary culture.	0.826			
DC3) Cost effective dishes peculiar to different culture are effective in my choice of restaurant.	0.674			
Kaiser-Meyer Olkin Sample Competence (KMO)	**0.752**			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Chi Square Value (χ^2)	**1205.687**			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Significance Level	**0.000**			
Total Variance Description Rate (%)	**65.264**			
General (Cronbach's Alpha)	**0.785**			

The general reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the scale regarding the effect of cultural values on restaurant preferences was calculated as α = 0.785 in Table 1, KMO value was found to be 0.775 and Bartlett Sphericity test was found significant (χ^2=1205,687; p<0,001). The results of the analysis show that the scale used in the study is very reliable and it is appropriate to carry out factor analysis (Kayış, 2010, p.405). As a result of the factor analysis, it was found that all the items met the prerequisites, and included in 4 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and explaining 65,264% of the total variance. Accordingly, while the personnel factor included in the scale has a variance explanation ratio of 31,158%, the dish/menu variety factor has a variance ratio of 13,951%, the different culture factor of 11,693% and the atmosphere factor of 8,463%.

Table 2 shows the percentage and frequency distributions of customers regarding their demographic characteristics.

Table 2: Findings Regarding Demographic Characteristics of Customers

Individual Characteristics		**f**	**%**
Gender	Female	185	48.2
	Male	199	51.8
Age	25 years and below	34	8.9
	between 26-36 years	104	27.1
	between 37-46 years	127	33.1
	between 47-55 years	82	21.4
	56 years and above	30	7.8
Marital Status	Married	127	33.1
	Single	254	66.1
Educational Background	High school and below	129	33.6
	Associate degree	157	40.9
	Undergraduate	49	12.8
	Graduate/PhD	49	12.8
Frequency of Going to Restaurant	Several times a week	190	49.5
	Once a week	147	38.3
	Every 15 days/Once a month	43	11.2
Total (f) = 384 customers			

When the findings of Table 2 are reviewed, it is seen that the customers included in the sample of the study have a balanced distribution according to their gender, 51.8% of the customers are male and 48.2% are female. When their age and marital status are reviewed, it is seen that the majority of customers consists of the middle age group at 37-46 of ages (33.1%) and single (66.1%). The fact that customers with this age range usually spend time outside due to the increasing workload, and the fact that single customers are often unable to cook at home may have caused such a distribution within the sample. However, it is seen that most of the customers in the sample have associate degree (40.9%), high school and below (33.6%) educational backgrounds. Finally, when the frequency of going to restaurant

was reviewed, it was found that the majority of customers (87.8%) went to the restaurant at least once a week. Such a result is crucial to better identifying customers' views on the issue.

The findings regarding the evaluation of the customers' views on the impact of cultural values on restaurant preferences are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluations of the Customers' Views

Dimensions	$\bar{x}$	s.s.	Expressions	$\bar{x}$	s.s.
Personnel (P)	4.23	0.81	P1	4.34	0.99
			P2	4.30	0.89
			P3	4.06	1.05
Food/Menu Variety (FMV)	3.87	0.79	FMV1	3.99	0.97
			FMV2	3.88	1.01
			FMV3	3.74	1.01
Atmosphere (A)	3.83	0.79	A1	3.76	1.03
			A2	3.88	1.03
			A3	3.85	1.08
Different Culture (DC)	4.13	0.68	DC1	4.10	0.94
			DC2	4.14	0.84
			DC3	4.16	0.88
GENERAL	**4.02**	**0.54**			

When the findings of Table 3 are reviewed, it is seen that the general views ($\bar{x}$ = 4.02) of the customers regarding the impact of cultural values on restaurant preferences are positive and correspond to the "4" value which means "agree". According to this finding, it can be said that customers take cultural values into consideration while making restaurant preferences and these values have an effect on their preferences. In the study conducted by Dziadkowiec and Rood (2015), which supports this finding, it has been determined that the preferences of students with different cultures regarding restaurants were shaped according to their culture. In a study conducted by Batman (2013), it has been found that the familiarity to culture had a significant effect on the holiday preferences of Turkish citizens living in Germany. In a different study (Belber, 2009), significant relationships were found between the culture of tourists and the type of travel and preferences of the accommodation enterprise. Accordingly, it has been determined that the culture, which has been found to play an important role in the preferences of people regarding holiday, travel type and accommodation enterprise, has a similar effect on restaurant preferences.

When the sub-dimensions of cultural values in Table 3 are reviewed, it is seen that feeling the employees in restaurant enterprises more close to the customers' own culture ($\bar{x}$ = 4.23) is more effective in restaurant preferences than other dimensions. The personnel sub-dimension is followed by the different culture ($\bar{x}$=4.13), dish/menu variety ($\bar{x}$=3.87) and atmosphere ($\bar{x}$=3.83) dimensions respectively. In the study conducted by Ertürk (2018), it has been emphasized that the personnel factor is much more important than the landscape of the enterprise and its decoration for the preferences of customers in food and beverage enterprises. In Table 3, however, the averages, which have the highest impact on customers' restaurant preferences, were found for *"The fact that the staff wears traditional clothing is effective in my choice of restaurant"* and "*The fact that the staff knows their cultural value is effective in my choice*

of restaurant". On the other hand, it was found that the average with the lowest impact in the scale was for the expression of *"Food elements peculiar to my culinary culture is effective in my choice of restaurant"*.

The Mann-Whitney U Test Test was applied to determine whether the opinions of the customers have a significant difference according to their gender and marital status after evaluating their opinions about the impact of cultural values on restaurant preferences and the findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis Results Regarding the Impact of Cultural Values on Restaurant Preferences

Variables	Groups	n	Rank Average (RA)	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z value	Sig.
GENDER	Female	185	192.02	18318	35523	-0.082	0.934
	Male	199	192.95				
MARITAL STATUS	Married	127	190.20	16028	24156	-0.100	0.921
	Single	254	191.40				
Sig.: significance level (p), * if p<0.05, differences are significant.							

According to the findings in Table 4, it was found that the opinions of the customers on the subject did not differ significantly according to gender (p=0.934) and marital status (p=0.921). According to this finding, it can be stated that male or female customers included in the sample have similar opinions about taking cultural values into consideration when choosing a restaurant. The same is true whether customers are single or married. Similarly, in the study of Cevizkaya (2015), it has been concluded that consumers' gender and marital status are not a determining factor in choosing of restaurants that give importance to cultural values. In another study (Albayrak, 2014), it has been found that there was no significant difference between gender and the factors affecting customers' restaurant choices.

Finally, in Table 5, Kruskal-Wallis H Test was applied to determine whether customers' opinions about the impact of cultural values on restaurant preferences differ significantly according to variables such as age, education background and frequency of going to restaurant, and the findings are presented in the relevant table.

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis H Test Analysis Results Regarding the Impact of Cultural Values on Restaurant Preferences

Variables	Groups	n	Rank Average (RA)	χ^2 Value	Degree of Freedom	Sig.
AGE	25 years and below	34	162.85	10.478	4	**0.033***
	Between 26-36 years	104	175.59			
	Between 37-46 years	127	212.59			
	Between 47-55 years	82	185.80			
	56 years and above	30	214.24			
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	High school and below	129	200.74	7.150	3	0.067
	Associate degree	157	198.90			
	Undergraduate	49	188.58			
	Graduate/PhD	49	154.19			
FREQUENCY OF GOING TO RESTAURANT	Several times a week	190	194.80	7.161	2	**0.028***
	Once a week	147	197.24			
	Every 15 days/Once a month	43	148.47			
Sig.: significance level (p), * if p<0.05, differences are significant.						

When the findings in Table 5 are reviewed according to age groups, it was determined that the opinions of the customers about the effect of cultural values on restaurant preferences differ significantly according to age groups (p=0.033). When the rank averages of the age groups are reviewed, it is seen that the customers who have the age range of 56 and over have a higher ratio to prefer the restaurants that give importance to the cultural values (RA: 214.24), while the cultural values of the ones in in the younger group have cultural values with less effect than others on choosing restaurant (RA: 162.85). The desire of those who are older to experience their cultural values in other countries because of their longing for homeland more than the others may have resulted in such a result in restaurant preferences. However, it was found that there was no statistically significant difference between the educational backgrounds of the customers and their opinions about cultural values affecting restaurant preferences (p=0.067). In this case, it can be said that the differences in the education level of the customers included in the sample are not reflected in their views on the subject and their views on cultural values are similar. In a study conducted by Batman (2013), it has been determined that there was no a significant difference between the familiarity to their cultures that have impact on the holiday preferences of the participants and the educational background. Finally, when the findings related to the frequency of going to restaurant were reviewed, it was found that the opinions of the customers about the effect of cultural values for restaurant choices showed not a significant difference compared to the frequency of going to restaurant (p=0.028). According to this, it can be said that customers who go to restaurant enterprises at least once a week give more importance to cultural values than those in the other group when choosing a restaurant.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's competitive environment, restaurant enterprises have to know their customer preferences, needs and desires in order to maintain their own current status and come to the forefront and continue to offer goods and services based on these preferences. In order to develop successful marketing strategies, it is important for restaurant enterprises to be aware of the factors that affect customers' restaurant preferences (Albayrak, 2014, p.197-198). The results of this study conducted to determine whether the cultural values considered as one of these factors have an impact on the restaurant preferences of the customers can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, it was found that the general opinions of the participants included in the sample about the effect of cultural values on the restaurant preferences had a value corresponding to the “agree” ($\bar{x}$=4.02). Accordingly, it can be said that the cultural values have a positive effect on customers' restaurant preferences. On the other hand, it was determined that the personnel dimension was the most effective among the opinions about their cultural values which were determined to have an impact on the restaurant preferences of the customers. This sub-dimension is followed by the different culture, dish/menu variety and atmosphere dimensions respectively. These results indicate that, while choosing a restaurant, customers pay attention to the familiarity of the personnel working in the enterprise to their own culture first, then to the desire to experience different cultures, to the variety of dishes/menus of their cultures and finally to the atmosphere peculiar to the culture created in the enterprise. Based on these, it can be suggested to the organizations in the sector to consider that customers also want to buy products and services appeal to their cultural values while they are choosing restaurant, and if they provide these products and services, their customers

will be more satisfied and this satisfaction will give them a competitive advantage. In addition, the personnel working in the restaurant wear traditional clothing, knowledge of cultural values and knowledge of different foreign languages are among the issues that customers pay attention to. In this regard, practitioners in the sector may be advised to pay attention to the issues mentioned in the selection and recruitment of personnel. In addition to, the restaurant enterprises use the culture-specific dishes in the menu and they are more varieties, they have crafts-specific works, the decor and music peculiar to the cultural values are also among the attention paid. In this regard, both business owners and managers may be advised to take into account the issues mentioned when decorating the internal and external physical characteristics of the business and designing and planning the menu.

After evaluating customers' opinions on the impact of cultural values on restaurant preferences, it was determined whether these opinions differed depending on demographic characteristics. Based on the results of the analysis conducted to determine the differences, it was found that the opinions of the customers on the subject did not differ significantly according to gender, marital and educational status, and showed a significant difference according to variables such as age and frequency of going to restaurants. In this context, it can be suggested to the organizations in the sector that both newly established and those who want to increase their share in the market, that customers with a age of 56 and over are more likely to prefer restaurants that care about cultural values. In addition, the fact that those who go to the restaurant at least once a week gives more importance to cultural values than those in the other group while choosing a restaurant can be considered among other results of the study.

Due to the limited number of studies conducted on cultural values, which are among the factors affecting the restaurant preferences of the customers, it is believed that the study will contribute to the related literature besides the contributions to the sector. Nevertheless, this study is limited to the opinions of Turkish customers living in New York City. In this respect, the results obtained within the scope of the research are valid only for the selected universe and there is no generalization for other application areas. The impact of cultural values of Turkish customers living in Turkey and in other countries on restaurant preferences can be investigated again in later times and compared with the results of this study. In addition, an intercultural comparison can be made by taking the opinions of both Turkish customers and customers from different countries' cultures and the differences/similarities between them can be determined.

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